

INTER ADMINISTRATION WORKING AGREEMENT ON STATISTICS

1. Purpose

1.1 This document sets out an agreed framework for co-operation between the four administrations, i.e. the Scottish Government, the Welsh Assembly Government, the Northern Ireland Government (from here on referred to as the Devolved Administrations)¹ and the UK Government (the UK statistics Authority and UK Government Departments and Agencies) in relation to the production of official statistics.

1.2 The framework includes

- the aims
- key principles which will underpin all work between the administrations
- roles and responsibilities
- working level arrangements including dispute resolution

1.3 The framework replaces the Concordat on Statistics which formed part of the 2001 Memorandum of Understanding.

2. Scope

2.1 The Framework is not intended to constitute a legally enforceable contract or to create any rights or obligations which are legally enforceable.

2.2 'Reserved' and 'devolved' are terms defined in the Devolution Acts² in the case of the former and in the latter case also in section 66 of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 (the 2007 Act). However the position with regard to statistics is not always clear as they may serve both reserved and devolved purposes. Likewise the definition of "wholly devolved" statistics used in the 2007 Act may not always be clear. Where it is necessary to determine into which category particular statistics fall, the emphasis will be on reaching agreement between the administrations though more formal resolution may be sought if necessary.

3. Aims

3.1 The aims of this Agreement are to:-

- ensure effective co-operation on statistical work within the United Kingdom in support of each administrations' policy and business objectives;

¹ The General Register Office for Scotland is part of the Scottish Government and is included in the scope of this agreement. Northern Ireland Departments are also included in the scope of this agreement and are represented by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

² The Scotland Act 1998, the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and the Government of Wales Act 1998

- support user needs across the four administrations; and,
- ensure efficiency, effectiveness and continuous improvement.

4. Principles

4.1 All arrangements will comply with the principles of the devolution settlements and the 2001 Memorandum of Understanding³, the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, the National Statistician's Code of Conduct and all relevant legislation.

4.2 The administrations will work together to ensure the provision of coherent, reliable, consistent and timely statistics about the UK and the four countries as far as possible where it is agreed it is appropriate to do so, and will ensure that collective needs are met in an efficient and effective way. They will agree mechanisms which ensure that these statistics are readily available to all four administrations, international organisations, users, and the public.

4.3 The administrations will work together to ensure that any collective arrangements do not hinder the meeting of the needs of other administrations. The need for different approaches and different responses will be fully recognised.

4.4 Where concordats, working arrangements or service level agreements exist between two or more administrations or their departments or agencies on statistical matters they must be consistent with this Agreement.

4.5 The administrations recognise that information they produce or hold may be required for statistical purposes by another administration. They will share this information with each other as far as possible subject to availability, agreements about cost sharing and relevant legislation. Administrations will not be required to provide information to each other about the statistical advice which has been given to policy makers or Ministers (although they may agree to do so).

4.6 Subject to the terms of the concordats on EU and international relations, the National Statistician, as head of the GSS will retain responsibility for the fulfilment of UK statistical obligations to the EU and international bodies and for EU/international liaisons and co-operation on statistical matters.

4.7 Whilst re-use of already published information is unrestricted, where a statistical product makes substantial or significant use of statistics that are the responsibility of another administration, agreement of that administration will be sought, if possible on an annual basis. The content of such products will be checked with the other administration for quality assurance purposes.

4.8 Permission for the Office for National Statistics (on behalf of the UK Statistics Authority) to publish devolved statistics is subject to section 20 of the 2007 Act.

4.9 The administrations will work together to reduce the total burden on data providers whilst seeking to ensure that each administration has access to the information that it needs.

4.10 The administrations will share statistical expertise and development to promote best practice. They will agree to share specific development tasks, both to maximise the use of available specialist expertise, and as a means of cost sharing.

³ Negotiations between the administrations about a replacement for the 2001 MOU are underway.

4.11 The administrations will work together to devise, develop and implement appropriate methods of planning that will support this Agreement. Each administration will produce its own statistical plan which will be shared in order to encourage cooperation and collaboration where possible.

4.12 In addition each administration will inform and seek comment from the others about any proposed significant changes to existing activity, or proposed release of statistical information, which might be considered relevant to other administrations.

4.13 The administrations will contribute to the work of the Governmental Statistical Service, promote its values, support its continuing development and ensure the full involvement of devolved administrations including NISRA on an appropriate basis.

4.14 The recruitment, development, movement and promotion of Government Statistical Service professional staff will be based on a common set of professional competences and in accordance with appropriate elements of the GSS Human Resource Strategy (though it does not extend to NISRA).

5. Roles and responsibilities

5.1 Overall responsibility for implementing and developing this Agreement will rest with the GSS Inter Administration Committee (IAC) chaired by the National Statistician and including the Chief Statisticians from the Devolved Administrations, the ONS Director General and the ONS key account holder for the Devolved Administrations. Representatives from other government departments will be invited to attend meetings as appropriate.

5.2 The National Statistician is the UK Statistics Authority's principal adviser on matters related to official statistics (excepting those where the 2007 Act places obligations on the Head of Assessment), their Chief Executive, a member of the Authority's Board and the Head of the GSS. The National Statistician is therefore well-placed to advise the Authority about matters affecting the administrations such as the development of statistics on a comparable or non-comparable basis, funding for such statistics and their place within the wider statistical system.

5.3 In its role of co-ordinating the work of the GSS, the National Statistician's Office will invite statistical staff from across the administrations (including those who are not members of the GSS) to participate in, and keep them informed about, GSS activities, and consult with them about issues of statistical policy and methodology.

5.4 The UK Statistics Authority's Statisticians in Government Team (SiGT) will provide the GB administrations with advice and support on a range of professional, technical and personnel services, including brokering transfers, recruitment of Fast Stream Assistants and advertisement of posts across the GSS.

5.5 To ensure that the administrations are fully aware of impending European and UK legislation and are able to assess the impact upon their budget allocations, for each IAC meeting, the National Statistician's Office will provide a report on the latest international developments impacting upon the UK and Devolved Administrations.

6. Specific arrangements and dispute resolution

6.1 Existing arrangements for cost sharing will continue until one or more parties propose a change. Any party may propose a change where new demands are made, where the costs to the providers change, or where circumstances change. Any new arrangements are expected to

comply with the Statement of Funding Policy found here http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/pbr_csr07_statement_of_funding_policy.htm.

6.2 Under the governance arrangements agreed by the Chief Statisticians and Heads of Profession, Theme Leaders will carry out work to identify and prioritise statistical requirements from a UK wide perspective. This work, with input from all administrations, will include identifying and prioritising inter administration issues and agreeing where it is desirable to produce harmonised data and where it is preferable to explain differences such that each administration's data relates to the relevant policy context. Additionally, Theme Leaders are expected to consider issues that are viewed as impacting upon data harmonisation, quality, reliability and comparability or are considered barriers to data sharing, comparison of GVA across administrations etc.

6.3 Subject to agreed arrangements regarding the quality assurance of statistical data, under section 20 arrangements, on an annual basis, each administration should produce a comprehensive list of all of its disaggregated statistics that should be circulated throughout the four nations. Production of this list should allow each administration to determine whether it requires pre-release access to any of the disaggregated data being published. Where such access is required, each year upon receipt of the list, each administration should first check whether pre-release access arrangements are already in place and, if not, submit a formal request to the relevant data producer for pre-release access to the data. All requests must comply with the secondary legislation relating to pre-release access in force within each administration.

6.4 Where requests for such access cannot be made on an annual basis, e.g. where new products have been developed and produced, the producer organisation must notify the other administrations of their intentions to publish new disaggregated data. When notifying other administrations, the producer department must allow sufficient time for submission and approval of any requests for pre-release access to new information.

6.5 In all cases where it is not possible for administration staff to reach agreement, the Inter Administration Committee will act as final arbiter. Where it is not possible for the IAC to reach agreement or it does not have the competency to do so, the matter may if the IAC so decides be referred to the Joint Ministerial Committee.

7. Arrangements for review

7.1 This agreement will be formally reviewed by the IAC after one year, and thereafter every five years or as requested by any party.

7.2 An assessment of the operation of the agreement will be conducted every year.

Inter Administration Committee Secretariat

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