

Statement

2 December 2008

Assessment process

This note describes how the UK Statistics Authority will carry out the assessment of official statistics in accordance with section 12 and section 14 of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007. It complements the formal "Statement of Principles and Procedures for Assessment", which will be published alongside the Code of Practice in early 2009, and should be read alongside that document.

Following decision by the Authority to add an area of official statistics to the programme of assessment reviews, the Monitoring and Assessment (M&A) Team will write to the relevant producer body (usually a government department or related body) informing it accordingly.

Members of the M&A Team will meet the relevant managers of the statistical work to discuss the Assessment, and to agree the detailed schedule. The Team will also use this meeting to ensure that producers understand the assessment process, and to establish the working relationship.

The Team will ask the Statistical Head of Profession (or other senior manager as appropriate) to provide information about the statistics and the environment in which they are produced. Much of this information will be provided using self-assessment questionnaires, which will be available to download from the Authority's website. Different questionnaires will address organisational and product-specific issues. Producers will also be asked to supply certain additional documentary material.

The M&A Team will analyse the information it has assembled, and will decide the extent to which it needs to probe further. It will then meet the relevant managers again and also meet any external data suppliers, as it considers appropriate, to ensure a full understanding of the material provided, and to explore any aspects of Code compliance in more detail. Visits of a day or two will normally be by two or three people from the Team. This will maximise objectivity, minimise the chance of missing or misinterpreting important information, and enable comprehensive note-taking. We will aim to balance assessment teams, taking account of the background, skills and interests of individuals.

Producers will also be asked to provide details of users, potential users, media contacts and other stakeholders. Taking into account additional and potential users known to the Authority (from public enquiries etc), the M&A Team will invite a range of these people to share their experiences and views of the statistics in question. We will collect information from questionnaires, and will follow up as appropriate with individual meetings or collective "focus group" meetings, or by talking to users' representatives.

The Authority's website will also contain an open invitation for interested parties to express their views about the series under consideration, which the Authority will publicise.

The Team will then produce a brief report of findings and recommendations, using a standard template, presenting:

- a summary of what it identifies as good practice in relation to the set of statistics in question, and areas for improvement;
- a statement of the extent of compliance with the Code, and a recommendation in relation to continued, or new, designation as National Statistics;
- any improvement actions the Team considers necessary for the public good; and
- a brief account of the Team's assessment of practice against each of the Code's main principles and protocols.

The M&A Team will discuss this draft report with producers, to check for factual accuracy, before producing a final report for consideration by the Authority's Board. If the producer body wanted to make a statement relating to the assessment, we would offer to provide a link on our website alongside, but clearly separate from, our assessment report.