
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Michael Scholar KCB

Rt. Hon. Eric Pickles MP
Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government
Department for Communities and Local Government
Eland House
Bressenden Place
LONDON
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8 April 2011

Dear Secretary of State

THE CITIZENSHIP SURVEY

I am writing about your recent decision to discontinue the Citizenship Survey, whose statistics the UK Statistics Authority thinks too valuable to be lost.

May I draw your attention to the enclosed report by the Authority, and ask you to look again at the case for the collection of statistical information which has been available from the Citizenship Survey for the last ten years?

The Authority fully recognises the severe pressures on Departments' budgets at this time of fiscal deficit reduction. But, for the reasons explained in the report, we believe that insufficient account has been taken of the effect of discontinuing the Citizenship Survey, both on the Government's own requirement for statistical data with which to monitor its policies, and on the statistical requirements of other bodies that cannot meet their needs by conducting their own surveys.

Your Department's summary report of the consultation it carried out said that the "vast majority" of current users of the statistics expressed concerns about the Survey's discontinuation, noting that these concerns were particularly strongly articulated by other government Departments, voluntary organisations and academics; and noting the use of the Survey's data in providing evidence on the Big Society, extremism, cohesion and integration, fairness in the criminal justice system, discrimination, the impact of immigration, volunteering, well-being, and many other issues.

In her response to your Department's consultation the National Statistician drew attention to the widespread use of the Survey data in government, and noted in particular the Survey's relevance to the major work programme to measure national well-being announced on 25 November 2010; and to helping the public to assess what the Big Society means.

In our view, these requirements need to be addressed afresh, whether by a decision to retain the Citizenship Survey in some form, or by other, cheaper, options which may be available.

May I suggest that you invite Jil Matheson, the National Statistician, who is the Government's and the Authority's chief adviser on all statistical matters, in consultation with your

Department's own statisticians, to advise you on the most effective and cost efficient way of meeting the statistical requirements which your consultation revealed?

The Authority's report on the Citizenship Survey will be published on our website. The Authority is also producing a report on the cancellation of the Place Survey and I will write to you again when that report is complete.

I am copying this letter to the Minister for the Cabinet Office and to Jil Matheson.

Yours sincerely

Michael Scholar

Sir Michael Scholar KCB

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Statistical Expenditure Report 1: The Citizenship Survey

Statistical Expenditure Reports review substantive cuts and changes to UK official statistics. This report has been prepared and issued independently by the UK Statistics Authority.

The Citizenship Survey was first conducted in 2001. It was originally biennial but moved to a continuous design in 2007, allowing data to be published on a quarterly basis from April 2007. The Survey was first carried out by the Home Office but transferred to the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) from 2005, from which point its coverage was restricted to England only.

The Survey seeks the views of the public on a number of topics relating to local areas including community cohesion; racial and religious prejudice and discrimination; identity; values; interaction and mixing; attitudes to violent extremism; civic engagement; volunteering and charitable giving. The Department acknowledges that the Survey results are used for purposes including:

...monitoring the impact of policies and events such as the Olympics, public accountability, exploring the impacts of the recession, developing and evaluating strategies, planning services, responding to enquiries from MPs, as evidence for funding, targeting polices, ...equality impact assessments...and...understanding the complex interplay between various social attitudes and demographic characteristics.¹

In 2009-10 the Survey had a budget of approximately £3.6 million. The Survey is estimated to account for just under one-third of DCLG's statistical expenditure².

The Survey fieldwork is contracted to private sector survey companies. The results are included within the scope of National Statistics³, and were due to have been formally assessed by the Authority for compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics in December 2010. However, because of uncertainties about the future of the Survey, this planned assessment was deferred.

At the end of November 2010, DCLG completed a public consultation on the Survey. This presented a number of options including, as the preferred option, ceasing the Survey

¹ Taken from DCLG's summary of responses to its consultation:
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/communities/csconsultresponses>

² DCLG does not have a central dedicated budget for statistical work because much of that work is carried out in a number of different Policy Directorates.

³ National Statistics are defined under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* which requires that they be produced and published in accordance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

completely. On 25 January 2011, the Department announced that the Citizenship Survey was to be cancelled at the end of March 2011⁴. The summary of consultation responses was not published until 17 March 2011, notwithstanding the requirement of the Government Code of Practice on Consultation, that the results of the consultation should be published before or alongside any further action. This summary was accompanied by a further statement confirming that the Citizenship Survey was to be cancelled. It said:

As part of the current drive to deliver cost savings across government and to reduce the fiscal deficit, research budgets are being closely scrutinised to identify where savings can be made. For this reason, and the belief that priority data from this survey can either be dropped; collected less frequently; or collected via other means, the intention is for future Citizenship Surveys to be cancelled.⁵

The UK Statistics Authority has reviewed the 61 individual responses⁶ to the consultation exercise and DCLG's own summary⁷, and notes the following:

- The response from the National Statistician drew attention to the widespread use of the Survey data in government and noted in particular the Survey's relevance to: the major work programme to measure national well-being announced on 25 November 2010; helping the public to assess what the Big Society means and how things are changing; and to the production of indicators in the Equality Measurement Framework.⁸
- The response from the House of Commons Library noted the use of the Survey data in responding to MP's enquiries on numbers of people volunteering, civic participation, community cohesion, and the voluntary sector more generally, and pointed to the Survey's relevance to two of the three main strands of the Big Society programme.
- DCLG's own summary of responses contains the following statement: "...the vast majority of current users expressed concerns about its discontinuation. This view was particularly strongly articulated by other government departments, voluntary organisations and academics." It also noted the use of the Survey data in providing evidence on the Big Society; cohesion and integration; extremism; equalities; localism; fairness in the criminal justice system; the impact of immigration; identity; discrimination; understanding neighbourhoods and communities, and well-being. In respect of several of these headings it gives more detail on the use made of the results.
- In response to these points, the summary comments: "The Department is moving away from costly top-down monitoring and measurement of policies and does not believe that the costs of the survey can be justified for these purposes." It adds that it would "expect other providers who have a priority need for data of this type to take steps to provide it themselves, in the academic or external market".

⁴ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/research/citizenshipsurvey/surveycancellation/>

⁵ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/research/citizenshipsurvey/surveycancellation/>

⁶ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1866643.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/1866399.pdf>

⁸ <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/key-projects/equality-measurement-framework/>

In the light of these points, and the more detailed ones in the Annex, the Statistics Authority concludes that insufficient account has been taken of the consequences of discontinuing the Survey in relation to the Government's own requirement for statistical data with which to monitor its policies, and in relation to the data requirements of other bodies that cannot meet their own needs by conducting major surveys themselves. In our view these requirements now need to be addressed afresh by DCLG, whether by retaining in some form the Citizenship Survey or by one of the other, less costly, options available, including the use of alternative household surveys, or by commissioning ad hoc research on specific topics.

We **recommend** that DCLG examine all the options jointly with the National Statistician and present, in a new consultation document, costed proposals for meeting the various user requirements.

8 April 2011

ANNEX – FURTHER DETAILS

The Survey has a core sample of 10,000 adults and an ethnic minority boost of about 5,000 (and, in the latest year, a Muslim boost sample of 1,200). Data are collected through face-to-face interviews lasting some 60 minutes.

Between 2007 and 2011 DCLG published a quarterly statistical release⁹, presenting main results and tables, some diagrams, and commentary. The majority of the information related to England only. DCLG also published some topic reports, such as on volunteering and on community cohesion. The data are available via the UK Data Archive¹⁰.

The decision making process

We were told that, because of the profile of the Survey, its expense, and the procurement implications, it was considered appropriate within DCLG that Ministers should make the final decision about the future of the Survey, rather than the Head of Profession for Statistics.

A four-week¹¹ consultation was launched on 1 November 2010 on the uses of the Survey, the implications of stopping the Survey, and possible other data sources should the Survey be cancelled. The starting point for the consultation was that the Survey would be cancelled after the 2010-11 Survey unless "users indicate an overriding need to continue".

The consultation document was published on DCLG's website and was "targeted on users and stakeholders". DCLG told us that all known users of the Survey were notified of the consultation by e-mail and were also sent reminders before the deadline for responses expired. Our own research confirmed that a number of websites that had published information about the consultation. The consultation document said that "a summary of the consultation responses will be published on the Department's website". DCLG told us that an assessment of the impact on a) users and b) other statistical work in government would be part of the published response to the consultation. This summary of consultation responses was not published until 17 March 2011¹².

Uses of the statistics

DCLG itself has used the Survey results to monitor progress against targets relating to community cohesion. The Survey results are also used elsewhere in government, by the Ministry of Justice, Home Office, Department for Work and Pensions, Cabinet Office, Office for Civil Society, and the Government Equalities Office among others.

⁹ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/research/citizenshipsurvey/quarterlystatisticalreleases/>

¹⁰ <http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/>

¹¹ DCLG statisticians told us that because this was a technical consultation they did not run the consultation for the more normal 12 week duration.

¹² The Government's Code of Practice on Consultation says: "Following a consultation exercise, the Government should provide a summary of who responded to the consultation exercise and a summary of the views expressed to each question. A summary of any other significant comments should also be provided. This feedback should normally set out what decisions have been taken in light of what was learnt from the consultation exercise. This information should normally be published before or alongside any further action."

The results are, and would have continued to be, valuable to work planned by the Office for National Statistics on the measurement of national well-being, and of potential value in relation to 'Big Society' issues, as well as supporting the measurement of progress against indicators in the Equality Measurement Framework.

There are many non-government users, including academic researchers and organisations in the third sector.

Local authority use of the Survey was thought to be limited, because the Survey's sample size did not support the production of robust local authority level estimates.

A number of statistical time-series are available from the Survey including:

- Whether people feel able to influence decisions affecting their local area and Britain.
- Participation in civic engagement and voluntary activities.
- Participation in civic engagement and formal volunteering at least once in the last year, by ethnicity, religious affiliation, sex, age and disability.
- Whether people trust institutions.
- Community cohesion, by ethnicity, religious affiliation, Government Office Region, sex and age.
- Whether people feel that they belong strongly to their neighbourhood and Britain.
- Mixing with people from different ethnic or religious backgrounds by ethnicity, religious affiliation, age and sex (percentage mixing at least once a month).
- Satisfaction with local area.
- Whether the number of immigrants coming to Britain should be increased, reduced or remain the same.
- How worried are people about becoming the victim of crime.
- Whether people feel safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark.
- Whether racial or religious harassment is a problem in the local area, by ethnicity, religious affiliation, sex and age.
- Perceptions of racial and religious prejudice today compared with five years ago, by ethnicity.
- Whether people feel they would be treated worse than people of other races by public service organisations, by ethnicity.

Effect on statistical capacity in government

The DCLG Head of Profession has told us that it is not currently clear whether the discontinuation of the Citizenship Survey will lead directly to the loss of the professional staff.

DCLG, along with other government departments, has recently undertaken a Structural Review. Amongst other things, this built on the outcome of an internal review of users' future needs for the current portfolio of DCLG statistics¹³. The Structural Review could lead to either the redeployment, or re-assignment, of the Department's professional resources.

¹³ The outcome of DCLG's Statistics Review will be described in the Department's forthcoming 'Statistics Plan'. This will be published on the Department's website for public consultation.