

Annex A – Office for Statistics Regulation, in response to the Bean Review

There were four recommendations in the final report of Professor Sir Charles Bean's [independent review of UK economic statistics](#) which related to the work of the UK Statistics Authority's Monitoring and Assessment team. This annex sets out how the Monitoring and Assessment team, now the Office for Statistics Regulation, has responded to these recommendations.

Bean Review recommendation 18: Determining that a piece of data should be classified as an official statistic

Recommended Action 18: The government should delegate to UKSA the power to decide that a piece of data be classified as an official statistic; high-profile releases of management information by departments should be treated as official statistics and be compliant with the Code; UKSA should decide whether official statistics should be assessed against the Code for the purposes of National Statistic status.

Key issues

The recommendation is designed to address concerns that:

- Departments may circumvent the obligation to meet the standards of the Code by publishing data in alternative ways, for example management information (as raised in the 2013 Public Administration Select Committee review)
- Some information may be released by Departments on an ad hoc basis to support positive news stories and withheld at other times when their release would be problematical

Implementation of the recommendation

Scoping of the implementation was carried out during the Code Stocktake programme and recommendation C5d) of the Code Stocktake Exposure Draft noted: "In some cases the flexible and voluntary approach [commenting on the public use of other numerical information] should be supplemented by the Authority formally recognising specific Government information released as official statistics, in line with the Bean Review recommendation. The Code should explain the criteria the Authority will adopt to determine when and how it will recognise Government outputs as official statistics, in line with the Bean Review and building on the existing [National Statistician's guidance](#)" (paragraph 3.53).

The criteria, and the regulatory process for applying them, have been developed following an internal workshop drawing on OSR's extensive experience of casework. They will form part of the regulatory approach detailed in the new Code of Practice for Statistics. It should be noted that OSR's approach will not supersede the Head of Profession's or Chief Statistician's responsibilities regarding the definition of numerical information that their organisation publishes.

Bean Review recommendation 19: Reinforcing the independence of departmental statistics Heads of Profession

Recommended Action 19: The independence of departmental statistics Heads of Profession should be reinforced, with any abuses highlighted by the Independent Regulation and Evaluation Office¹; there should be a formal role for the National Statistician in the appointment and performance management of the Head of Profession.

Key issues

The recommendation is designed to address concerns that:

- Heads of Profession manage tensions between departmental and ministerial priorities on the one hand and maintaining the integrity of official statistics on the other, generally successfully, but that further reinforcement of their role would be valuable

Implementation of the recommendation

The important role of Statistical Heads of Profession in navigating between departmental priorities and producing statistics that meet the public good was highlighted in the Code Stocktake programme, echoing the findings of the Bean Review. The Exposure Draft also noted the crucial role Heads of Profession within Departments play in supporting the publication of statistics of high public value by making final decisions on the content of statistical releases. This highlights how working with their Department's policy and analysis function, Heads of Profession can help to ensure that the wider body of information produced by Departments is released in a transparent and trustworthy manner.

The draft refreshed Code of Practice for Statistics emphasised a clearer responsibility for Heads of Profession when advising what and how statistics and data should be published. The draft Code also recognised the important role played by Heads of Profession in advising how Departments might publish a wider range of numerical outputs. We have received largely positive feedback about these changes through our

¹ Recommendation 24 recommended the creation of the 'Independent Regulation and Evaluation Office'. In November 2016, it was launched as the 'Office for Statistics Regulation'.

consultation and we will be clarifying and strengthening these responsibilities further in the final version.

Bean Review recommendation 21: Nuanced assessment of status of statistics

Recommended Action 21: UKSA should provide a more nuanced assessment of the status of a statistic than is conveyed by the binary National Statistic designation.

Key issues

The Bean Review said: ‘a key obstacle lies in the multi-dimensional nature of the criteria relevant to whether or not an official statistic is deemed a National Statistic. The Code covers not only trustworthiness, but several aspects of quality, including accuracy, reliability and relevance to user needs. The weighting of these criteria in the decision as to whether or not a statistic is designated as a National Statistic is not made clear, although past practice suggests that a lot of weight has been placed on the underlying ‘associated practices’ for trustworthiness and rather less on the substantive factors such as accuracy and whether it meets user needs. While the binary nature of the classification – a statistic either warrants the National Statistic badge or not – may achieve clarity, the reality is more nuanced: there are fifty shades of grey twixt white and black. It would serve users better if that were reflected in the classification process. That could be through the use of a scorecard that rated a statistic on each of the several dimensions of the Code. Or it could be encapsulated in concise commentary accompanying the statistic. Either way, it could alert users when there were concerns about a statistic without having to resort to the rather blunt weapon of de-designation.’

Implementation of the recommendation

The Office for Statistics Regulation considers that, historically, our judgements have been weighted towards trustworthiness. However, as the regulatory function has matured, increasing weight has been given to quality and public value, and we could have communicated our judgements in a more nuanced way to reflect this. That said, we consider that the binary nature of the NS designation is one of its strengths, and that any complex weighted scoring system would detract from the value of the brand and the clear marker of the highest standards that it conveys. We have chosen instead to ensure that every designation decision is now supported by a clear narrative about our nuanced and transparent assessment of how well the statistics deliver on each of Trustworthiness, Quality and Public Value.

Over past 18 months, we have:

- Strongly promoted the message that National Statistics equates to the highest standards of Trustworthiness, Quality and Public Value
- Aligned the refreshed Code of Practice much more clearly with this messaging
- Clearly and consistently stated in our communications that we are placing increasing emphasis on quality and public value
- Evolved our Assessment reports so that they now carry chapters on each of Trustworthiness, Quality and Public Value – giving the primary slot to Public Value to demonstrate our focus
- Reshaped the executive summary of the Assessment reports to summarise our key judgements on Trustworthiness, Quality and Public Value that underpin the NS decision. In particular, where we decide to remove or not award NS status, we clearly set out which of the aspects of Trustworthiness, Quality and Public Value were most significant in that decision. We are developing our website to present these summaries more prominently for the audience that wants a succinct but nuanced sense of our judgement without reading the full report. We have also adopted a similar approach in letters to statistical Heads of Profession, particularly where they relate to the removal of NS status
- Changed the text that producer bodies should include alongside the statistics to better explain what National Statistics designation represents

Bean Review recommendation 24: The creation of a separate office

Recommended Action 24: The UKSA regulatory function should be subsumed within a new 'Independent Regulation and Evaluation Office' (IREO) charged with assessing the trustworthiness and quality of official statistics as well as ONS's effectiveness; the head of the IREO would report to the UKSA Board and publish an annual assessment of ONS performance and the whole statistical estate.

Key issues

The recommendation is designed to address concerns that:

- The regulatory function is insufficiently visible and has an unclear public identity
- Stakeholders may perceive that the function is not an effective source of challenge to ONS and other statistical producers

Implementation of the recommendation

The Office for Statistics Regulation was launched in November 2016, and our Director General, Ed Humpherson, reports to the UKSA Board. The public identity and visibility of the organisation has been enhanced via the relaunch of the website to reflect the new name and through an extensive programme of consultation around the draft refreshed

Code of Practice. The Office's work is now organised around subject themes, which has enabled regulatory staff to focus on developing wider networks of external contacts, raising awareness of our role and functions with new audiences. The Annual Review, to which this document is an annex, is both an opportunity to showcase our regulatory work and a pilot assessment of the state of the statistical estate.

To enhance our role in assessing both the trustworthiness and quality of official statistics, the refreshed Code of Practice has greater detail in these areas. It also contains more information about all aspects of quality and sound methods, to underscore the critical role these principles play in delivering statistics that can be used with confidence. It also emphasises the importance of independence and transparency in the production of statistics in the refreshed principles which demonstrate trusted people, systems and processes.