

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Committee for Official Statistics

Draft Minutes

Tuesday 19 May 2009

Present

Members

Professor Sir Roger Jowell (Chair)
Mr. Richard Aldritt
Ms. Karen Dunnell
Ms. Moira Gibb
Ms. Jil Matheson
Sir Michael Scholar

Other Attendees

Ms. Jill Barelli (for item 8)
Mr. Mike Hughes
Mr. Graham Jenkinson (for item 6)
Mr. Richard Laux

Secretariat

Mr. Rob Bumpstead
Mr. Ross Young

Apologies

Professor David Rhind
Professor Paul Wiles

Declarations of Interest

None

1 Minutes and Matters Arising

- 1.1 The minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 10 March 2009 were agreed as a true and accurate record.
- 1.2 There were no matters arising.

2 Report from the Head of the Government Statistical Service (GSS)

- 2.1 Ms Dunnell provided an oral report in her capacity as Head of the GSS.
- 2.2 The Committee noted that the GSS senior staff conference was held in Bristol on 20 and 21 April with over 300 delegates attending.
- 2.3 Recent departmental visits by Sir Michael Scholar accompanied by the National Statistician had included a visit to the Ministry of Defence/Defence Analytical Services and the Department for Energy and Climate Change, and other visits were scheduled. The National Statistician recently met statisticians working in the Scottish Government and, accompanied by Ms Matheson, met statisticians working at the Department for International Development in East Kilbride.
- 2.4 A report of the Frazer working group on management information and administrative data had been received by the Authority at its meeting on 15 May. A report of the group including Professor Wiles regarding guidance on social research and Official Statistics remained outstanding.

Action 1 - National Statistician to provide draft Wiles report for Secretariat to circulate as soon as possible.

- 2.5 The Committee noted that a recent meeting was held at the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) to discuss the *Office for National Statistics (ONS)'s Beyond 2011 Census* project.
- 2.6 It was further noted that the UK Census Committee (UKCC) had met recently in Scotland. The UKCC agreed to ensure that an identical population base and definition of 'usual resident' would be used in all Census 2011 outputs to maximise UK geographical consistency. The General Register Office for Scotland were also undertaking a review of lessons learned following the Census Rehearsal in Scotland in March.

3 Report from the Head of Assessment

- 3.1 Mr Alldritt provided an oral report in his capacity as Head of Assessment.
- 3.2 The Committee noted that there continued to be a significant amount of casework and formal correspondence raising issues with the Authority. Casework and related correspondence continue to be dealt with by the Secretariat, involving input from the Monitoring and Assessment Team and National Statistician's office as required. A review of procedures for handling casework was ongoing. The potential of a future General Election in respect of the volume of issues likely to be raised with the Authority over the forthcoming year was also discussed.
- 3.3 Progress on three Authority Monitoring Reports was reviewed - *Strengthening and Identifying the User Voice* and an accompanying survey of opinion formers, *Improving Migration Statistics*, and *Barriers to trust in relation to Crime Statistics*.
- 3.4 The Committee noted that a successful open meeting on the interim report on migration statistics, organised by the Monitoring and Assessment Team, had been held on 22 April at the RSS. The interim recommendations were currently being revised in

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light of discussions with a view to the publication of the final report in July 2009. The relationship between the monitoring report and the statutory assessment of migration statistics was also discussed.

3.5 The Committee heard that good progress was being made in the preparation of an interim monitoring report on crime statistics, and the possibility of holding an open meeting was being considered. The User Voice report project board had recently met for an inaugural meeting, and plans for a tender for contracts to support a survey of opinion formers and a survey of public confidence in Official Statistics, were being prepared.

3.7 Planned arrangements for framework consultancy contracts to assist the Authority in its independent scrutiny work were also noted.

3.8 The meeting discussed progress in the recruitment of a secondee from the Statistics Authority to the RSS to provide administrative support to the Statistics User Forum (SUF).

4 Streamlining the Assessment Process [SA(COS)(09)12]

4.1 Mr Alldritt introduced a paper about proposals for streamlining the process for statutory assessment of National and Official Statistics.

4.2 The Committee noted the proposals for changing the assessment process for the next tranche of assessments by using largely single-site teams, to segment the Written Evidence for Assessment form into two parts, to make further use of template reporting, and to conduct assessments through grouping National Statistics products together.

4.3 The Monitoring and Assessment Team would maintain contact with Heads of Profession (HoPS) for Statistics to ensure they become familiar with the new process and related documentation. The merits of including an element of peer review, both in the preparation of assessment reports and as part of the written evidence process, were also discussed.

4.4 The Written Evidence for Assessment form would be the core documentary base for assessments. A summary report of the points raised in written evidence would be provided to a new Committee convened specifically to consider assessment reports in detail. Assessment reports would require communication between the Monitoring and Assessment Team and the relevant HoPS, and they would be structured so as to answer specific questions.

4.5 The Committee remained mindful of the inevitable burden of assessments on HoPS and the need to minimise the burden in so far as it was possible to do so. It was agreed that, in certain circumstances and where appropriate, HoPS could be permitted to provide written evidence covering multiple sets of statistics for which they were responsible.

4.6 An existing target to complete assessments within five years was reviewed, and the Committee discussed the related risks that delays may be encountered. It was agreed to further consider the possibility of completing all assessments within a target time of four years and to retain a risk-based approach in determining the future assessment programme for the remainder of the cycle. The meeting noted that the exact process for assessment may vary depending on the nature of the individual sets of statistics being assessed at any one time.

- 4.7 Members of the Committee heard that early estimates suggested that each assessment would require resourcing of 10 Authority staff days to review the written evidence and other material supplied, and to compile an assessment report. It was agreed that the Committee would continue to monitor this, particularly to ensure that sufficient staffing capacity was maintained to take account of additional assessments necessary as a result of the section 16 procedure.

5 Protocol on the production of Monitoring and Assessment Notes [SA(COS)(09)13]

- 5.1 Mr Laux introduced a paper that set out the procedures which the Monitoring and Assessment Team would follow upon being commissioned to produce a Monitoring and Assessment Note published by the Authority.
- 5.2 It was agreed that the Protocol would be followed as internal guidance until the appointment of the National Statistician was finalised. The Committee would review the Protocol when the appointee had taken up post.

6 A National Address Register [SA(COS)(09)14]

- 6.1 Mr Jenkinson introduced a paper that reviewed a proposal for the Authority to participate in ongoing consultations to stimulate Government action to resolve the long running issue regarding the absence of a single National Address Register. It was noted that the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) was the lead department in this area of policy.
- 6.2 The Committee discussed the two main sources of address information, the National Land and Property Gazetteer and the small-user Royal Mail Postal Address File, and the value of a national register of addresses for statistical purposes. The ONS Census Division was compiling a dedicated address register to assure the quality of 2011 Census results. The Committee heard that the National Statistician had recently made a presentation to Permanent Secretary colleagues regarding this matter.
- 6.3 The need for the ONS register to be kept up-to-date following the 2011 Census was discussed. The Committee reviewed previous discussions regarding a national address register involving DCLG ministers and the former Statistics Commission, and the recommendation of the House of Commons Treasury Committee in its report *Counting the Population*. The meeting discussed the importance of raising public awareness as to the exact purposes of a national address register, and the uses to which it would be put.
- 6.4 The Committee noted the need for a business case setting out the rationale for a National Address Register, and that a business case had been prepared on the basis of a previous set of proposals. It was agreed to circulate the previous business case to members of the Committee, inviting comments, and to prepare a revised business case which would be discussed at the next meeting.

Action 2: Secretariat to circulate previous business case to members of the Committee, inviting comments.

7 Authority Engagement with the Government Statistical Service [SA(COS)(09)15]

- 7.1 Mr Bumpstead presented a paper setting out proposals to support the development of a programme of Authority engagement with the GSS.
- 7.2 The Committee reviewed recent engagement activities, including the programme of visits by the Authority Chair and the National Statistician to meet statisticians working in the GSS. It was agreed that broader and deeper engagement with the GSS would

be useful.

- 7.3 An initial list of proposed engagement activities was discussed, and it was agreed to develop the programme further in consultation with the GSS through a working group chaired by Mike Hughes. The working group would comprise representatives of the Authority Secretariat, Monitoring and Assessment Team, GSS Statisticians in Government Team (SiGT), and other members of the GSS as nominated by the Head of the GSS.

Action 3: Secretariat to convene GSS engagement working group to be chaired by Mr. Mike Hughes.

- 7.4 The Committee further noted the value of engagement with the GSS in enabling the Authority to succeed in meeting its objectives, and to help facilitate new relationships with arms length producers of official statistics that are currently outside GSS structures.

8 The Statutory Listing of Official Statistics [SA(COS)(09)16]

- 8.1 Ms Barelli introduced a paper that made proposals as to how the Authority might meet its statutory obligations to produce an annual list of National Statistics and a list of Official Statistics that have been produced by organisations specified in the Official Statistics Orders.

- 8.2 The Committee heard that the ONS National Statistics Policy Directorate had agreed to assume responsibility for the collation of these lists, working on behalf of the Authority. It was agreed that the burden on HoPS in departments should be minimised in so far as it was possible to do so. Members of the Committee noted that the UK National Statistics Publication Hub would enable users to generate these lists on demand for themselves, and work was currently underway to deliver this functionality over the next year.

- 8.3 The proposals set out in the paper were agreed, and the Committee requested the ONS to prepare a short progress report at around half-way through the project.

9 Any other business

- 9.1 There was no other business. The Committee would meet next on Thursday 9 July at 2.30pm in London.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Committee for Official Statistics

Agenda

Tuesday, 19 May, 2009

Board Room, Statistics House, London, 14:00 - 16:00

Chair: Professor Sir Roger Jowell

Apologies:

1	Apologies, Minutes and Matters Arising	Meeting of 100309
2	Report from the Head of the Government Statistical Service	Oral Report Ms. Karen Dunnell
3	Report from the Head of Assessment	Oral Report Mr. Richard Alldritt
4	Streamlining the Assessment Process	SA(COS)(09)12 Mr. Richard Alldritt
5	Protocol on the Production of Monitoring and Assessment Notes	SA(COS)(09)13 Mr. Richard Laux
6	A National Address Register	SA(COS)(09)14 Mr. Graham Jenkinson
7	Authority Engagement with the Government Statistical Service	SA(COS)(09)15 Mr. Mike Hughes Mr. Rob Bumpstead
8	The Statutory Listing of Official Statistics	SA(COS)(09)16 Ms. Jill Barelli
9	Any other business	

**Next Meeting: Thursday, 9 July, 2009
Statistics House, London, 14:30 - 16:30**

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

SA(COS)(09)12

Streamlining the Assessment Process

Purpose

1. To present emerging proposals for streamlining the assessment process.

Recommendation

2. The Committee is invited to consider:
 - i. plans to change the assessment process for the next tranche of reviews: to use largely single-site teams, to split the Written Evidence for Assessment (WEfA) form into two parts, to use template reports and to group National Statistics (NS) products (paragraphs 13 to 19);
 - ii. initial thoughts on introducing a more streamlined assessment process for NS products that pose a low risk to the reputation of official statistics, possibly about three years into the programme (paragraphs 22 to 27), and;
 - iii. proposed immediate next steps (paragraphs 28 to 29).

Discussion

3. Section 14 of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* requires the Authority to assess whether statistics already designated as National Statistics comply with the new Code of Practice. Around 1,200 statistics fit into this category though that number is not necessarily an indication of the number of assessment reports needed. The scope to group sets of statistics together for Assessment purposes is considered below.
4. No formal date has been set for completing the designation of existing National Statistics, although the Authority has indicated that this might be done within three to five years. Any longer would reflect poorly on the Authority. Completing the assessment and re-designation of all 1,200 existing NS products even within five years (from publication of the Code) represents a major challenge but we believe it can be done if the latter phases of the cycle of Assessment reports contain a larger measure of self assessment and a relatively smaller central commitment.
5. In addition to the assessment and re-designation programme under section 14 of the Act, the Monitoring and Assessment team also needs to assess candidate statistics for first designation under section 12 of the Act. These will typically be high priority because they are new products, developed (we assume) to meet a significant user need. Such assessments might typically take longer than assessments under section 14 of the Act, especially in those areas where the concepts in the Code of Practice are unfamiliar.

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6. The Authority issued a Press Release in November 2008 announcing an initial programme of ten assessments to be completed by June 2009. This was to help inform the publication by Spring 2009 of an Assessment Work Programme for 2009-10. It has taken a little longer than expected to recruit staff and specify the written evidence required from producer bodies, and to specify all the procedural aspects. A paper setting out the planned approach in detail was agreed at the Authority Board meeting in February 2009 [SA(09)11]. We now aim to publish details of the next tranche of assessments in July 2009 and introduce streamlined procedures for that tranche onwards. This means that Assessment should reach full speed from about September 2009.
7. The initial programme of assessments was primarily designed to test our approach and to provide a basis for developing the future programme in more detail. As part of these arrangements we had been planning to carry out a review over the summer of 2009 to evaluate the initial assessment programme. The terms of reference for the 'pause and review' exercise have been published on the Authority's website and are attached at **Annex A** to this report. However, in view of early experience with the assessment process, we are now hoping to anticipate the key aspects of that review and present the Authority Board meeting in July 2009 with proposals for handling the next tranche of assessments so that we can take the development work forward over the summer and get the process running at full speed by September. The 'pause and review' exercise will still provide a check that we have taken on board all the messages from the first tranche. Work will be on-going through this period, so the exercise is best described as simply a 'review'.
8. While only one of the initial assessments is yet at the final report stage, we have learnt a lot about the process from this and the other reviews in hand, and this paper sets out our thoughts on how we expect to be able to complete the full assessment and re-designation programme within a five year period.
9. The remainder of this paper covers:
 - early proposals for speeding up the assessment process, taking account of what we have learned so far;
 - our thoughts on introducing a more streamlined assessment process for those NS products that pose a low risk to the reputation of official statistics, and;
 - immediate next steps.

Streamlining the Process

10. Some aspects of the initial programme are taking longer than we had initially expected and we must therefore find a response to compensate for that. It has taken longer than planned to build the team to full strength though that is no longer a major constraint. It has also taken longer than expected to arrange inception meetings with producers and for producers to provide us with completed written evidence. The process for approving the assessment reports once drafted may take up to two months in order to gain agreement from COS-A and the Authority Board. This process though will not necessarily reduce the throughput of reports once the flow of reports is established.

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11. We do not see these delays as representing an overwhelming obstacle - just a series of specific problems to which there are solutions. At this stage, our main priority is to get the assessments right. If we did the first reports too quickly and were seen to be in error, the reputation of the entire process could be damaged long term. Once the process is established, we can see fairly straightforward ways of speeding up each of the main tasks to allow much quicker turnaround for later assessments. We are conscious here that there is very little previous or international experience of reviews of this kind on which to draw, except perhaps the European Peer Review process, though this has some fundamental differences.
12. We also see it as essential that we learn the lessons from this initial programme. This will provide a sound basis for developing more detailed and realistic plans for implementing the full assessment and re-designation programme within an acceptable timeframe. The review exercise (see **Annex A**) which will be carried out in parallel to the next tranche of assessment activity will help to ensure we are on the right path.
13. We are confident that parts of the process will become quicker simply as the team becomes more experienced and elements of the process become more routinised. In addition, we can already identify a number of changes to introduce for the next tranche of assessment activity that will help to speed matters up. Some of these changes were seen as likely from the start but we were not ready to implement them for the initial assessments.
14. Single-site teams: Most of the initial assessments have been carried out by teams drawn from across the three sites in Newport, London and Edinburgh. The different team compositions were chosen partly to spread common practice across sites and also to identify what worked well and not so well. It is already clear that teams in single sites can work more efficiently. For example, discussions about the assessment can take place more readily 'across the desk', without the need for meetings. In future we will mainly draw assessment teams from single sites. Senior managers will review each assessment prior to follow-up with producers to maintain consistent standards.
15. Splitting the WEfA: Producer organisations (e.g. government departments) tend to adopt a similar approach to certain practices within the Code of Practice for all the National Statistics Products for which they are responsible. For example, confidentiality statements and high level engagement with users. We see value in streamlining the preparation of written evidence so that these common elements are assessed only once, avoiding unnecessary duplication. This also gives producer organisations the opportunity to publicly demonstrate compliance with organisational practices in the Code. This can be achieved by splitting the WEfA into two parts, one relating to organisations and one relating solely to individual (or groups of) statistical outputs. We are already developing more detailed proposals for splitting the WEfA in this way. It will speed up the individual assessment reports by obtaining some of the required material in advance and creating a smaller response burden at the time of the Assessment.
16. Template reports: The initial assessments are being used to help develop a standard template for assessment reports. Once this has been developed, subsequent reports will be quicker to write and will bear a strong family resemblance. We are also investigating alternative, shorter, forms of reports, although we need to ensure that this does not result in the issues being over-simplified. An example of a shorter format is being shared with COS-A.

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17. Grouping: Identifying coherent sets of National Statistics (NS) products to be grouped together into a collective assessment exercise will allow us to carry out assessments more efficiently. We expect to identify relatively small groups of NS products that use the same source material or adopt similar processes. Typically this will mean grouping together the outputs of statistical branches or groups of branches within organisations. For illustration, **Annex B** shows one possible way of grouping statistical products produced by the Department for Transport (DfT). We have not yet had an opportunity to discuss this with DfT but will do so. The National Drug Treatment Agency (NTA) assessment covered the designation as National Statistics of two separate outputs. We estimate that it would have saved very little time if we had addressed only one of the outputs. However, grouping National Statistics is not a trivial exercise and we may need to find a way to do this that does not, of itself, introduce a delay.
18. Grouping should result in efficiencies throughout the assessment process due to fewer meetings with producers, combined user consultation exercises and combined reporting. We see it as essential that we seek advice from producers within the Government Statistical Service (GSS) to identify the most sensible ways of grouping NS products.
19. The Committee is invited to consider our plans to change the assessment process for the next tranche of activity to use largely single-site teams, to split the WEfA, to use template reports and to group NS products

Timing

20. The above considerations suggest that there is significant scope to reduce the time it takes to complete an assessment, compared with the time required for the initial assessments. Initial indications are that the 1,200 NS products could be grouped into approximately 300 to 400 groups. If we assume the Monitoring and Assessment team of 13 Full Time Equivalent (FTEs) is at full strength throughout and staff devote around 70% of their working time to the assessment of National Statistics products, this would allow 24 staff days per grouped assessment exercise to complete the full assessment and re-designation programme within a five year period.
21. On the basis of what we know from our limited experience so far, we think it is reasonably likely that the proposed measures outlined above will be sufficient to achieve this. We fully recognise, however, that there remain significant risks. More detailed planning combined with the experience of completing a further tranche of assessment activity by the end of the current financial year will provide a much sounder basis for determining whether these proposals really will be sufficient to complete the assessment and re-designation programme within a five year period. In the meantime, we plan to develop further options for speeding up the process should we find in a year's time that these are needed.

A risk-based approach

22. The NTA assessment aimed to achieve a fairly high quality standard in terms of the thoroughness of the review and the rigour of the analysis. In developing measures for speeding up the process, we have taken as given that all assessments should aim to achieve the same level of thoroughness and rigour. However, one of our fundamental principles is that assessments should be risk-based. Major statistical outputs that are used to inform decisions of national importance such as Gross Domestic Product or the Retail Prices Index are likely to pose a greater risk to the reputation of official statistics than, say, statistics that are primarily of local interest, such as the Survey of Privately Owned Vans. On that basis, it is likely to make sense for the Authority to devote more resources to the assessment of the former than the latter.
23. The Authority adopted a similar approach in its first review of official statistics that have not yet been designated as 'National Statistics' (see Report 3, *Priorities for Designation as National Statistics*, January 2009). To help identify priorities for assessment, the Authority invited Heads of Profession to classify their own undesignated official statistics in terms of both importance (high, medium or low) and extent of concern about quality or other aspects (minimal, medium and serious). Eight out of 315 products (3%) were identified as being of high importance and of serious concern, including *Council Tax Levels Set by Local Authorities in England and Northern Ireland* and *Statistics on the Operation of the Terrorism Act 2000*. Some 62 products (20%) were classified as being of low importance and of minimal concern, including Output of Crushed Oilseeds and Nuts produced in the UK and Regional Personal Insolvency Information.
24. The published Principles for Assessment state that assessments will be risk-based and proportionate. At this stage, we see it as being too early to take a decision to employ lighter touch assessments, even for those NS products that we believe pose relatively small risks to the reputation of official statistics. Rather, for the first year or two the assessments should mainly concentrate on riskier NS products, setting the standard that all NS products should achieve and enforcing this standard. This will also help us to identify and understand the bigger issues that influence public trust in official statistics.
25. The assessments covered during the first two years will also be interspersed with some more straightforward, low-risk assessments to ensure a balanced programme and to inform our approach to how the assessment of low-risk products might be adapted in later years.
26. By years three and four, however, the assessment process should be well-embedded and the required standards widely understood by producers. At that stage, we see scope for the assessment team to adopt a somewhat less hands-on role in the assessment of low-risk NS products, while retaining the final say on designation. For these products, the assessment process could be streamlined to give producers more responsibility for carrying out the assessment. The Authority could provide guidance for how these self-assessments should be carried out and what report should be produced, perhaps emphasising specific issues of particular concern. These reports could provide a basis for a light-touch assessment of whether the statistics comply with the Code of Practice and deciding whether they should be designated as National Statistics.

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27. We see two main benefits from this approach. Firstly, it allows the Authority to concentrate its resources on those issues that can be expected to add most value in improving public trust in official statistics. Secondly, it will allow the Authority to complete the assessment and re-designation of all NS products within an acceptable timeframe. It may not however be appropriate to introduce this type of streamlining until at least the third year of the assessment and re-designation programme. Before that, it is unlikely that the process will be sufficiently familiar, and the standards sufficiently well understood. If years three to five do rely on reports largely written by Heads of Profession, with the central Assessment team overseeing and quality-assuring the process, we would expect to be able to ensure that the cycle was completed in the time suggested.

Next Steps

28. We see the immediate next steps are as follows:
- to complete the initial assessment programme by July 2009;
 - to present specific proposals for speeding up the process to the July meeting of the Authority Board, and carry out the planned review exercise over the summer of 2009, and;
 - to identify the next tranche of 'higher-risk' assessments, in NS groups, by July 2009 through dialogue with the GSS and take these forward on parallel to the review exercise.
29. We aim to bring a further paper on these issues to the July meeting of the Authority Board. We would welcome the Committees views on these proposed next steps.

Monitoring and Assessment Team, May 2009

List of Annexes

- Annex A Pause and Review**
Annex B Draft Illustrative Grouping of Department for Transport Statistics

Annex A Pause and Review

This document is published on the Authority's website:

<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/principles---procedures/pause-and-review-exercise.pdf>

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Annex B - Draft Illustrative Grouping of Department for Transport Statistics

Department for Transport (DfT)		Group
Transport Statistics Great Britain	Annual	1
Focus on Freight	Ad hoc	
Focus on Personal Travel	Ad hoc	
Focus on Ports	Ad hoc	
Focus on Public Transport	Ad hoc	
Focus on Roads	Ad hoc	
Compendium of Motorcycle Statistics	Ad hoc	
Transport Trends	Annual	
Regional Transport Statistics	Annual	2
Maritime Statistics	Annual	3
UK Seafarer Statistics	Annual	
Sea Passenger Bulletin	Annual	
Port Manpower and Accident Rates	Ad hoc	
Waterborne Freight in the United Kingdom	Annual	
Road Conditions in England	Annual	4
National Travel Survey	Annual	5
Personal Travel Factsheets	Annual	
Road Casualties in Great Britain - Annual Report	Annual	6
Road Casualties in Great Britain: Provisional Estimates	Quarterly	
Road Freight Statistics	Annual	7
Road Goods Vehicles Travelling to Mainland Europe	Quarterly	
Survey of Privately Owned Vans	Ad hoc	
Survey of Foreign Vehicle Activity	Ad hoc	
Road Statistics: Traffic, Speeds and Congestion	Annual	8
Inter-Urban Congestion Statistics	Monthly	
Traffic in Great Britain	Quarterly	
Vehicle Excise Duty Evasion	Annual	9
Vehicle Licensing Statistics	Annual	
Cars: Make and Model - the Risk of Driver Injury	Ad hoc	
Bus Punctuality Statistics	Ad hoc	10
Public Transport Statistics Great Britain	Annual	
Bus and Light Rail Statistics: Great Britain	Quarterly	

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

SA(COS)(09)13

Protocol on the Production of Monitoring and Assessment Notes

Purpose

1. This paper sets out the procedures which the Monitoring and Assessment Team will follow upon being commissioned to produce a Monitoring and Assessment Note.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Committee for Official Statistics are invited to endorse the attached protocol for the production of Monitoring and Assessment Notes (**Annex A**) and to approve its publication on the website.

Discussion

3. The protocol on the production of Monitoring and Assessment Notes has been developed in the interest of shared understanding of procedures between the Authority and statistical producers. Publication of this protocol on the Authority's website would fulfil the Authority's commitment to transparency.

Monitoring & Assessment Team, April 2009

List of Annexes

Annex A - Protocol on the Production of Monitoring and Assessment Notes

Annex A - Protocol on the Production of Monitoring and Assessment Notes

Monitoring and Assessment Notes are commissioned by the Chair of the Statistics Authority. The overall context for their production and approval is set out in this web statement:

“From time to time the Authority will commission its Monitoring and Assessment Team to produce brief notes in response to concerns raised publicly or privately in relation to a particular statistical series or issue. These notes will be discussed with producers of statistics to ensure factual correctness, and will then be published on the Authority’s website.”

Upon receipt of a commission, the designated Monitoring and Assessment Team Leader will:

1. Explore the available material on the issue, reviewing statistical reports or other publications as appropriate;
2. If necessary, discuss specific points of detail with experts from the organisation that produces the set of statistics in question;
3. Prepare a draft Note, and seek comments from others in the Team;
4. Ask the Chair of the Authority for his comments, including whether and when he wants to seek the views of other non-executive directors, of the Committee for Official Statistics, and of the National Statistician. (The Chair will be reminded at this stage that the draft Note has not been seen at this stage by the relevant producer);
5. Send the draft Note to the statistical Head of Profession (HoP) in the relevant producer organisation (or to the National Statistician, in the case of a Note addressing a general statistical topic as opposed to providing a critique of a particular event or release), asking for comments on the factual accuracy of the Note;
6. At the same time, send the draft Note to non-executive directors inviting comments;
7. Prepare a near final draft, and send it to the Chair and Deputy Chair (Official Statistics) seeking approval for publication. Any outstanding disagreements between the Monitoring and Assessment Team and the HoP will be flagged up;
8. Notify the relevant HoP (or another senior statistics professional) on the day of publication of the Note, giving a few hours advance notification, and;
9. Update Authority Board members on any subsequent developments, media coverage, or any reaction from the producer organisation.

At the request of the Chair, the process may be varied in some instances.

Finally, it is worth noting that this process is independent of the identity of the producer organisation – specifically, that Office for National Statistics and other producers are treated in the same way.

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COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

SA(COS)(09)14

A National Address Register

Purpose

1. The UK Statistics Authority has indicated that it wants to stimulate Government action to resolve the long running issue that there is no single definitive national address register. This paper raises issues about how the Authority might go about this and discusses what might be involved.

Timing

2. Decisions on a way forward are desirable at the May meeting of the Committee for Official Statistics (COS) so that the Authority and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) can contribute to ongoing consultation processes which are expected to be completed over the summer. It should be noted from the outset that the outcome of any action taken now will be too late for use in Census 2011.

Recommendations

3. The Committee for Official Statistics is invited to discuss the issues and decide how it wants to engage with ongoing consultations and other principal parties.

Discussion

4. The Authority has identified this as a key issue where they want to press for action to save public money and help improve the cost effectiveness of the service for users of official statistics.
5. This paper uses residential addresses as its focus and does not deal directly with communal establishments which, for some purposes, may also need to be covered.

Reminder of the need for a register for statistical purposes

6. In addition to administrative uses there are statistical needs for a good register, to:
 - underpin a high quality cost effective population census;
 - open up opportunities to replace future costly conventional censuses with other methodologies;
 - provide more accurate population estimates in non census years, and;
 - improve the accuracy of other household surveys.
7. These needs have been recognised in various reports. Two examples are the:
 - Treasury Select Committee report on the conduct of the 2001 census, and;
 - Power of Information Taskforce Report (2009) which recommended "Creation of a freely available single definitive address and postcode available for the UK for (re)use"
8. To be effective the register needs to have a number of properties. It should be:
 - comprehensive;
 - up-to-date and frequently up dated;
 - identifies properties in multiple occupation and other informal accommodation such as caravans and houseboats;

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- has accurate location of addresses, and;
- is consistent quality across the country.

Current products and an assessment of them

9. There are a mass of address sources but only two main ones:
 - the National Land and Property Gazetteer (NLPG) compiled from Local Land and Property Gazetteers (LLPG) and integrated into a National product, and;
 - the Royal Mail Postcode Address File (PAF) which is closely linked to the Ordnance Survey Master Map Address Layer 2.
10. Both products stem operationally from local authorities who are responsible for allocating official addresses to buildings. These allocated addresses feed through to Royal Mail for the PAF and through the LLPGs to the NLPG.
11. In theory the NLPG model should be a good one as addresses are used locally for operational reasons including the administration of Council Tax: thus if the LLPG is being used operationally it should be good quality. However in practice not all local authorities are fully joined up and some LLPGs are updated at irregular intervals and may not be consistent with other address lists used in the authority. Thus the quality of the NLPG is in practice patchy.
12. The PAF is initially reliant on local authorities for feeds of address information, with other checks in the system. The activity of delivering the post generates reports both of addresses which are no longer active and those which have become active but were not on the PAF. The latter is likely to include details of multi occupancy addresses where the same pattern of new address occurs frequently enough. An onward link with Ordnance Survey (OS) provides further quality assurance as OS send surveyors out to position addresses and they will report on problems they have in identifying addresses for follow up by Royal Mail.
13. Other organisations (the so called GB group represents them) face similar issues. They also need a very accurate address register and are also taking the same base products and manipulating them. The GB group represents, for example, TV Licensing and major utility companies. However they also have some potentially very useful additional information on demolitions and properties with meters which may be useful to ONS.
14. Having researched the above sources the ONS has been unable to select a single product for use in census 2011 as neither meets the basic requirements set out in the last section. For example:
 - addresses are missing;
 - multi occupied addresses are not identified accurately or comprehensively;
 - addresses are included which do not exist;
 - updating can be slow and is variable, and;
 - some addresses are in the wrong places.

Barriers to a solution

15. With clearly evident benefits from a solution together with inefficiencies, duplication, and loss of revenue from the current position one might have expected the parties to work together collaboratively to reach a solution. In practice this has not happened for

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three main linked reasons that ONS can see:

- complex IPR and licensing issues which impede collaborative working and sharing of information;
- funding models which generally require all bodies to cover their costs, including a return on capital employed, and;
- entrenched views in some of the bodies, reinforced by past clashes over IPR etc, deterring them from working with other bodies.

16. The traditional policy lead on addressing has rested with the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). ONS has been involved with writing business cases. The latest in a series of initiatives closed in June 2007, with a CLG announcement that it was not going to carry out any further work. Subsequently a Power of Information Taskforce report in February 2009 recommended the creation of a freely available address register. The Government has now said that it will consult over the coming months.

Recent ONS work

17. In ONS, Census Division identified that it needed to build a dedicated address register to assure the quality of census results. Issues with the quality of the address register had been identified by the Treasury Select Committee and others as contributing to the problems with the quality of results for Census 2001.
18. Preparing this address register is giving ONS a sound base for the conduct of the Census, which will also reduce the operational costs which would otherwise have arisen in correcting addresses during Census operations. In addition to the Census benefits the quality of the address products will also have been improved as the suppliers react to problems found with corrected information and improved processes for maintaining their registers.

The way forward?

19. Having got this far ONS suggests that a further initiative is needed to build on this work and embed the improvements so that wider benefits can be generated.
20. The recent work done by the ONS has demonstrated that a single address register can be produced for statistical use.
21. The process model built by ONS could be handed over to another body to develop and update on a regular basis. The IPR and licensing would be problematic as, under current arrangements, charges would be related to the uses to be made of the resulting register and the extent to which it is available to a wider set of users.
22. One final statistical point. ONS will be further improving the register during the Census itself. The information added will be Census information which cannot be shared with anyone else under Census legislation. The fundamental principle protecting the confidentiality of such Census data must be protected.

Graham Jenkinson, Deputy Director, Statistical Framework Division, ONS, May 2009

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

SA(COS)(09)15

Authority Engagement with the Government Statistical Service

Purpose

1. This note presents proposals to support the development of a programme of Authority engagement with the Government Statistical Service (GSS).
2. It starts from the premise that best way to devise a successful programme of engagement activity is to do so in concert with those the Authority wishes to engage with. Therefore this note is not prescriptive, but simply suggests that a working group of interested parties be convened to consider what the GSS would find most useful and how the Authority can best deliver that within limited resources. Some ideas for engagement activity following initial discussions are also presented.

Timing

3. The Board of the Authority discussed engagement with the GSS at its meetings in March and April and remitted consideration to the Committee for Official Statistics (COS).
4. The GSS *Leaders In Statistics* Conference was held in Bristol on April 20 and 21 and was addressed by the Chair of the Authority. The Head of Assessment and the Head of the Assessment Programme also conducted a parallel session about Monitoring and Assessment. The question and answer session clearly demonstrated a thirst for more information about the Authority and its work. An engagement programme to build on these developments would be timely.

Recommendations

5. Members of the Committee for Official Statistics are invited to:
 - i. agree that the a working-level group be convened to develop and implement an initial programme of engagement activities;
 - ii. that engagement should not be considered as a 'one-off' programme or a single set of activities, but rather a continuous process which is informed by feedback from GSS members, and;
 - iii. comment on the suitability of the list of suggested initial activities at paragraph 12 with a view to omissions or further suggestions.

Discussion

6. The relationship between the UK Statistics Authority and the GSS is central to achievement of the Authority's statutory objectives. In particular the Authority depends on the statistical Heads of Profession (HoPs) and professionals working in their departments to play their part in the Authority's assessment and monitoring work. HoPs have a particularly important task to communicate the role of the Authority and its work programme as it relates to and affects their own departments and the Authority in turn has a responsibility to enable them to help achieve this in whatever way it can.

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7. Since the Authority's inception the Chair, accompanied by the National Statistician, has undertaken an extensive programme of visits to GSS departments, meeting Permanent Secretaries, HoPs and departmental statisticians. The meetings have provided an opportunity to discuss issues of common interest, explain the role of the Statistics Authority and learn about the work of the GSS. This programme of visits will be completed during the first part of 2009.
8. In addition, the Authority Chair has addressed GSS events including the November 2007 *Leaders in Statistics Conference* and a meeting of HoPs in 2008, as well as the recent Bristol conference.
9. This engagement could be broadened to include other members and staff of the Authority, and deepened so as to engage through the tiers of the GSS.
10. To take this forward it is proposed to set up a working group. The group would be chaired by Mike Hughes and comprise representatives of the Authority Secretariat, Monitoring and Assessment Team, GSS Statisticians in Government Team (SiGT), and other members of the GSS as nominated by the Head of the GSS.
11. The group would report back to the Committee for Official Statistics on its work. Its focus would be on practical, deliverable options, working within existing structures where ever possible.
12. An initial, straightforward set of activities could be to:
 - i. produce text and/or presentations which set out the aims and objectives of the Authority, describe these in relation to the GSS, and perhaps most importantly provide up to date summaries of its work so far - so that HoPs can use these within their departments for dissemination among professional statisticians and others involved in the production and publication of official statistics;
 - ii. develop more systematic and pro-active ways of disseminating information from the Authority's primary communication tool, its website, to GSS members;
 - iii. incorporate an Authority element to existing GSS events - for example the Head of Assessment might attend induction events periodically held for Assistant Statisticians at the invitation of the Head of the GSS;
 - iv. the Deputy Chair (Statistical System) or other non-executive members of the Committee for Official Statistics (COS) could attend a future HoPs meeting or other meetings of GSS committees to discuss the work of the Authority;
 - v. organise a limited number of seminars in different geographic locations for Authority staff/members to discuss the work of the Authority. These could be more informal events such as working lunches, and;
 - vi. look for opportunities to collaborate with the engagement activities of the ONS National Statistics and International Division (NSID) in respect of the GSS.
13. The primary aim of all these activities would be to hear and understand any concerns that professionals in the GSS may have so as to best address them.
14. A further question the Committee may wish to consider is what engagement it would be appropriate for the Authority to undertake in respect of other professional analytic groups and how it might accomplish this.

UK Statistics Authority Secretariat, May 2009

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

SA(COS)(09)16

The Statutory Listing of Official Statistics

Purpose

1. This paper discusses how the Authority could meet its statutory obligations to produce (i) an annual list of National Statistics and (ii) a list of official statistics that have been specified by Order.

Timing

2. Both lists are required by the end of the financial year. Given the need to collect information from statistical heads of profession, who will in turn need to collect information from arm's length bodies, it would be advisable to make an early start on the list of statistics that have been specified by Order.

Recommendations

3. The Committee for Official Statistics is invited to:
 - i. agree the proposals for updating the lists of National and other official statistics outlined in paragraphs 8 to 10, 13 to 14 and **Annex A**, and;
 - ii. request Office for National Statistics (ONS) to prepare a short progress report about half way through the project.
4. These proposals have been developed with ONS officials.

Discussion

5. The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* requires the Authority to publish, at least once every financial year:
 - a list of statistics which are at the time of publication designated as National Statistics (section 18), and;
 - a list of statistics which are official statistics by virtue of having been specified by Order (section 6(4)).
6. This information is clearly essential to the Authority in carrying out its functions, as well as being of wider use and interest.

National Statistics

7. An updated list of National Statistics was published in January 2009. This was produced from an earlier list by making additions, changes or deletions that had been notified to ONS or the Monitoring and Assessment Team.
8. The introduction of the publication hub means that it is now possible for users to produce their own lists, either by selecting themes from the catalogue or by selecting individual producer organisations. In theory, a complete list can be generated by clicking through each producer or theme in turn. Some producers also include details of undesignated official statistics, but National Statistics are clearly identified as such by the logo. At the time of writing, however, the coverage of National Statistics is not yet fully comprehensive.

9. In time, the hub should provide a continuously updated and user-friendly way of accessing a complete list of National Statistics. It is therefore suggested that ONS undertakes one more update (for publication in December 2009 or January 2010) and then reviews whether the information on the hub is sufficient to meet the section 18 requirement. The update could be done by carrying out an exercise to reconcile the January 2009 list with information currently on the hub and then asking statistical heads of profession to resolve queries.
10. At present, it is not possible to identify discontinued series by looking at the hub. It is recommended that Heads of Profession (HoPs) are asked to notify ONS about these in future and a way found to flag these products so that users can see when a statistic is no longer being produced. Similarly, with the assessment programme now underway, it would be helpful if the hub could show the date on which a statistic achieves designation, re-designation or is de-designated.

Other official statistics

11. The definition of 'official' statistics is included at **Annex B**. It covers all statistics produced by Crown bodies and such other statistics as may be specified by Order (i.e. secondary legislation). The Cabinet Office has been responsible for clarifying the legal status of 'arm's length' statistical producers and for managing the legislative process so that the products of non-Crown bodies can be designated 'official statistics' where this is deemed appropriate. However, we do not currently have a list of official statistics that have been specified by Order. This is because section 6(2) of the Act allows such Orders to bring in all the statistics produced by a particular person. The *Official Statistics Order 2009* thus lists over 50 producer bodies (as shown in **Annex B**) but not the individual statistics. Some of these bodies were producing National Statistics under the previous system, but we do not have a list of the undesignated official statistics for which they may also be responsible.
12. Furthermore, we do not have a complete list of undesignated statistics produced by Crown bodies. An initial list was produced for Monitoring Report 3 *Priorities for Designation as National Statistics* but was known to exclude many products that are not under the control of government statisticians - this particularly applies to some of the data collected from administrative systems, and to data produced by arm's length Crown bodies that are sponsored by government departments. Without a reasonably complete list, it is difficult for the Authority to comply with its duty under section 16 of the Act to notify Ministers about undesignated statistics that it considers should be assessed against the Code of Practice.
13. It is therefore recommended that the list of statistics that have been specified by Order is collected as part of a wider exercise to identify all undesignated official statistics. Some of these can be accessed via the publication hub, but only a small proportion are ever likely to be included there. The decision as to what to include on the hub rests with HoPs, based on their judgement about the quality and usefulness of the statistics concerned. Therefore, the only way of generating a reasonably comprehensive list of undesignated official statistics is to carry out a complete census. We suggest that this is done by ONS in conjunction with HoPs - identifying all producers of official statistics for which their departments are sponsors, listing the statistical outputs and indicating any that would, in the judgement of HoPs, be suitable for assessment (subject to the views of Ministers). Once this exercise is complete, consideration should be given as to whether it can be maintained on a continuous basis by asking producers or HoPs to notify ONS of changes.

14. ONS has been informed that some arm's length bodies are constitutionally independent of their sponsor departments. In some such cases ONS may need to liaise directly with the body concerned instead of going through the departmental Head of Profession.

Publication arrangements

15. It is suggested that both lists are initially published in Excel on the website, with filters so that users can select by producer organisation or catalogue theme. A further filter could be introduced to identify statistics that have been specified by Order. The list of undesignated statistics would continue to be updated in this format from time to time, while the list of National Statistics should in due course be fully accessible via the hub.

Monitoring and Assessment Team, UK Statistics Authority, May 2009

List of Annexes

Annex A: Further details of the process for collecting data

Annex B: Producers of official statistics in the UK

Annex A: Further details of the process for collecting data

National Statistics

Procedure

1. HoPs given advance notice of when their inputs will be required.
2. The list published in January 2009 is initially compared by ONS with the publication hub and reconciled where possible.
3. Updated list and queries sent to HoPs for checking (drawing attention to changes in title or frequency; items on the published list but not the hub, or vice versa).
4. HoPs to resolve queries.
5. Revised list to be published in Excel format on the Authority's website in December 2009 or January 2010.
6. ONS will review whether a further annual update is required, or whether the publication hub can be deemed to meet the statutory requirement from late 2010 onwards.
7. HoPs requested to notify ONS about discontinued products on an ongoing basis.

Information to be made available about each statistic

- Title.
- National Statistics catalogue theme.
- Producer or commissioning organisation.
- Sponsor department (if different).
- Frequency with which output is published (or a note to say it has been discontinued).
- Geographical coverage.
- Whether there are arrangements for pre-release access.

The category on the hub showing assessment status (currently 'awaiting assessment' or 'not subject to assessment') to be expanded as soon as feasible in order to show assessment outcomes as these emerge, along with the date of assessment/designation.

Other official statistics

Procedure

1. HoPs given advance notice of when their inputs will be required.
2. The list published in January 2009 is circulated for updates and corrections, with a request that it is expanded to cover statistics not under HoP control (e.g. administrative statistics and those produced or commissioned by arm's length bodies). ONS anticipates giving HoPs around two months to complete this process.
3. The request to HoPs to be accompanied by guidance on when a set of data should be considered a statistic as opposed to management information, research, etc., referring to the guidelines being developed (see paragraph 9).
4. HoPs also asked to identify which statistics should, in their judgement, be assessed against the Code of Practice with a view to designation as National Statistics (subject to Ministerial approval).
5. On return of the information under 2 above, ONS to check that all the bodies specified by Order have been covered.
6. Updated list published in Excel format on the website.
7. Review with HoPs whether list can be maintained on a continuous basis.

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Information to be collected about each statistic

- Title.
- Producer or commissioning organisation.
- Sponsor department (if different).
- Frequency with which output is published.
- Geographical coverage.
- Link to landing page on producer website.

Discontinued items would not be shown on this list. Statistics that have been added by Order will be flagged as such in order to meet the statutory obligation.

Annex B: Producers of official statistics in the UK

The legislation makes clear distinctions between National, official and other statistics but does not define what is meant by a statistic. The demarcation between statistics, management information and research is currently being considered by a GSS Task Force and a joint Government Statistical Service/Government Research Service working group (see item 12 of the supplementary information for this meeting).

Section 6 of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 defines official statistics in the following terms:

6 Official Statistics

- (1) *In this Part “official statistics” means-*
- (a) *statistics produced by –*
- (i) *the Board [the Statistics Authority],*
 - (ii) *a government department,*
 - (iii) *the Scottish Administration,*
 - (iv) *a Welsh ministerial authority,*
 - (v) *a Northern Ireland department, or*
 - (vi) *any other person acting on behalf of the Crown, and*
- (b) *such other statistics as may be specified by order by –*
- (i) *a Minister of the Crown,*
 - (ii) *the Scottish Ministers,*
 - (iii) *the Welsh Ministers, or*
 - (iv) *a Northern Ireland Department.*
- (2) *An order under subsection (1)(b) may in particular specify all, or a description of, the statistics produced or to be produced by a particular person or description of person.*

Section 6(1)(a)(vi) refers to organisations colloquially known as Crown bodies. There are over 100 such organisations. Although a definitive list is not readily available, a list of those whose material is subject to Crown Copyright protection is published by the Office for Public Sector Information¹ However, not all of these organisations produce statistics.

Section 6(b) refers to an 'order'. In the current context this is a piece of secondary legislation that lists a range of non-Crown bodies as producers of official statistics. The *Official Statistics Order 2009* includes 54 of these, as follows:

1. Arts Council of England
2. Audit Commission for Local Authorities and the National Health Service in England
3. Board of the Pension Protection Fund
4. British Tourist Authority
5. British Transport Police Authority
6. Care Quality Commission
7. Certification Officer
8. Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland
9. Coal Authority
10. Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment
11. Commission for Rural Communities
12. Competition Commission
13. Consumer Council for Water
14. Consumer Panel established under section 16 of the Communications Act 2003
15. Design Council

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16. English Sports Council
17. Environment Agency
18. Financial Services Authority
19. Gambling Commission
20. Gas and Electricity Consumer Council
21. Health and Social Care Information Centre
22. Health Protection Agency
23. Her Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary
24. Higher Education Statistics Agency
25. Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England
26. Homes and Communities Agency
27. Independent Police Complaints Commission
28. Joint Nature Conservation Committee
29. Judicial Appointments Commission
30. Learning and Skills Council for England
31. Museums, Libraries and Archives Council
32. National Consumer Council
33. National Lottery Commission
34. National Patient Safety Agency
35. National Policing Improvement Agency
36. National Treatment Agency
37. Natural England
38. Natural Environment Research Council
39. Northern Ireland Policing Board
40. Nuclear Decommissioning Authority
41. Office of Communications
42. Parole Board
43. Pensions Regulator
44. Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland
45. Probation Board for Northern Ireland
46. Rail Passengers Council
47. Regulator of Social Housing
48. School Food Trust
49. Student Loans Company
50. Sustainable Development Commission
51. Training and Development Agency for Schools
52. UK Film Council
53. United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority
54. Youth Justice Board for England and Wales

There is a corresponding Order in Scotland² which, in addition to listing the organisations at numbers 24 and 49 in the list above, includes the Common Services Agency for the Scottish Health Service.

¹ See <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/advice/crown-copyright/uk-crown-bodies.htm>

² See http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/ssi2008/ssi_20080131_en_1