UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Committee for Official Statistics

Minutes

Tuesday 9 March 2010

Present

Members
Professor Sir Roger Jowell (Chair)
Mr Richard Alldritt
Ms Moira Gibb
Ms Jil Matheson
Professor David Rhind
Sir Michael Scholar
Professor Paul Wiles

Other Attendees
Mr Richard Laux
Ms Kate Chamberlain (for item 5)
Mr Neil Jackson (for item 6)
Mr Ross Young (for item 6)

Secretariat
Mr Rob Bumpstead
Ms Amanda Charles

Apologies
Ms Colette Bowe

Declarations of Interest
None

1 Minutes and Matters Arising

1.1 The minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 12 January 2010 were agreed as a correct record.

1.2 There were no matters arising.

2 Revised Terms of Reference [SA(COS)(10)05]

2.1 The Terms of Reference (TOR) had been revised to reflect discussion at the meeting in January on the role and functions of the Committee.

2.2 The TOR were agreed subject to paragraph 5(i) being revised to read 'advise the Authority Board on the coverage, comprehensiveness, quality and availability of Official Statistics' and paragraph 6 being revised to read 'The Committee would usually meet at least quarterly'.

2.3 It was agreed to submit the revised TOR for approval to the next Authority meeting. **Action: Secretariat to revise and submit TOR to Authority Board.**

3 Report from the National Statistician

3.1 Ms Matheson provided an oral report in her capacity as National Statistician.

3.2 Following on from the workshop held between producers and assessors to discuss the assessment process and emerging findings, the Note prepared by the Monitoring and Assessment Team for discussion at the workshop had been published and circulated to statistical Heads of Profession (HoPs). HoPs have committed to work on areas of perceived weakness, including identifying and engaging with users, improving the presentation of statistics and publishing the required organisational documentation. It was agreed that another workshop would be held in due course. **Action: Secretariat to arrange second producer/assessor workshop later in the year.**

3.3 The National Statistician recently attended the week-long annual meeting of the United Nations Statistical Commission (UNSC) in New York. This formal gathering of heads of statistical offices and international statistical organisations has responsibility for agreeing changes to international guidelines, such as the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the System of National Accounts. A notable achievement of this year's UNSC was the agreement of a framework for environment statistics.

3.4 The Committee heard that the National Statistician had been elected to the Bureau of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Committee on Statistics, which had a role in developing the OECD's statistical work programme. A particular aim of this work programme would be to benchmark good practice across countries' statistical systems and measure effectiveness. There was also an EU-OECD sponsorship group being set up to take forward work on measuring well-being which the UK would participate in.

3.5 Many of the issues faced by the UK statistical system were also faced by other countries (resource pressures, governance issues) and keeping pace with international developments would be beneficial.

3.6 The National Statistician's statement *Statistics Matter* had been published and circulated to statistical HoPs and Permanent Secretaries. This meeting heard that the statement had been received positively.

3.7 The National Statistician had been invited to contribute to the annual performance reviews of all HoPs in UK government departments, signalling acknowledgement of the

importance of her role in the professional accountability of government statisticians.

4 Report from the Head of Assessment

4.1 Mr Alldritt provided an oral report in his capacity as Head of Assessment.

4.2 To date 30 Assessment Reports had been published, a further seven were tabled for consideration by the Assessment Committee and eleven more were in advanced draft. The assessment process was now fairly mature, although some assessments were taking slightly longer than was optimal. A new short form report was being trialed and it was hoped that this would reduce the time taken for the internal quality assurance process.

4.3 With similar messages arising from the Assessments conducted to date the need was now to move from diagnosis to prescription. To complement the work of the National Statistician, the Head of Assessment had also been engaging with HoPs to discuss the necessary improvements. This included taking forward the development of a best practice statistical release in partnership with the HoP from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

4.4 Three Monitoring Reviews were at an advanced stage:

- the review of pre-release access would be published the week beginning 15 March;
- the review of barriers to trust in crime statistics could be published soon too, but could be delayed until after the election when it may have more impact (it was noted that there is already a draft version in the public domain), and;
- the interim Report for the review of strengthening the user voice would be discussed at item 7 on this agenda.

4.5 Recent correspondence between the Authority Chair and the Shadow Home Secretary was noted. The Committee concurred with the view that interventions should be judged according to whether the use of statistics was likely to seriously mislead the public or damage trust in, or the integrity of, Official Statistics.

5 Presentation of Statistics [SA(COS)(10)06]

5.1 Ms Chamberlain introduced a paper which outlined the work of a Government Statistical Service (GSS) taskforce to improve the presentation of statistics. The paper covered issues identified in the assessment process and in previous reviews by the Statistics Commission, as well as looking to the future and how to best embrace new technologies such as visualisation tools. It was noted that the communication courses for statisticians (described in Annex C of the paper) were in development and not yet widely available.

5.2 It was recognised that a significant culture-change across the GSS was needed. Statisticians needed to think beyond the treadmill approach to statistical production in order to reflect on the methods and presentation of the statistics. It was important that statisticians understood why impartial statistical story-telling was essential.

5.3 The meeting considered the *Code of Practice* in relation to the presentation of statistics, and discussed whether references to the '*Authority's Code*' by statisticians could imply a degree of a separation from its aims which was unhelpful.

5.4 The Committee agreed that minimum standards of presentation were needed, citing the example of the Child Tax Credits release which did not contain commentary about the figures. All statistical releases should, at the very least, be accompanied by a description of what the statistics are about and what they mean, a description of their limitations - what they can and can't be used for - and signpost users to other complementary

sources of data.

6 Authority Engagement on Devolved Statistics [SA(COS)(10)07]

6.1 Mr Jackson introduced a paper which provided the Committee with information on the work of the Edinburgh-based Monitoring and Assessment Team with the devolved administrations and users of their statistics. It also described various meetings held between Authority staff and officials in the devolved legislatures.

6.2 It was noted that unless a particular driver existed (such as an international requirement) the approach to producing comparable UK figures was variable. The stronger, and more consistent the voices asking for comparable data, the less difficult it would be to meet such needs.

6.3 The issue of whether public trust in statistics was less of a concern in Scotland was discussed. It was felt that there was in fact no evidence to support such an assertion but that given the issues of scale involved the nature of the relationship between user and producer was likely to be qualitatively different to that in England.

6.4 The Committee agreed that Authority staff should continue to engage directly with users of statistics in the devolved administrations and that the Board should hold a meeting annually in the Edinburgh office, as they did in 2009. **Action: Secretariat to schedule Authority Board meeting in Edinburgh in 2010.**

7 Draft Interim Monitoring Report 7: Strengthening the User Voice [SA(COS)(10)08]

7.1 Mr Alldritt introduced a draft interim Report for the Monitoring Review *Strengthening the User Voice*. This version of the Report was the same as that which had been presented to the Monitoring Review's Project Board two weeks previously. The Project Board comments were being taken on board in parallel to the Committee's discussion of the draft Report.

7.2 The Committee considered the Report and the following points were made in discussion:

i. the Report was excellent in its intentions;
ii. the recommendations in the Report could be further improved by being made more specific, for example, by providing clarity about what was expected and from whom;
iii. the Report could recognise more explicitly that it was not possible to meet all user needs. While decisions would always have to made about priorities, users should be a part of the decision-making process;
iv. government should be referred to as *a* user - it was important to send a message that government was not *the* user, and;
v. it was acknowledged that effective user engagement required striking a balance between views and ensuring that the totality of user views were not eclipsed by a small number of the most vocal views.

7.3 It was agreed that a conclusions section would be added to the Report, drawing together some of the points discussed. The link with serving the public good would also be made more explicit. The recommendation for a dedicated media telephone service maintained by the National Statistician (recommendation 4) was seen as potentially contrary to the aim of increasing direct contact with statisticians, and would be reviewed with a view to its omission.

7.4 The Report would be re-drafted, taking on board the comments of the Committee and the Project Board, and it would be presented to the Authority Board later in the month. At the same time as the interim Report was published, the survey contractors the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) and MORI would publish the findings of the Public

Confidence in Official Statistics Survey and the Opinion Formers Survey separately.

8 Public Confidence in Official Statistics [SA(COS)(10)09]

8.1 The Committee noted the findings of the survey of Public Confidence in Official Statistics conducted by NatCen in 2009.

8.2 The causes of distrust in statistics were discussed. The most common reason given for both trust and mistrust in statistics was personal experience. This was thought likely to be due to different experiences between different demographic groups and geographic regions compared to the national average. It was also noted that respondents who trusted (or mistrusted) the Government were more likely to trust (or mistrust) statistics.

8.3 Caution should be exercised in interpreting some of the percentages given for the perceptions among those who do not trust particular series. The actual numbers of respondents involved were likely to be quite small and the results may not be statistically significant.

9 Any Other Business

9.1 There was no other business. The Committee would meet next on Thursday 6 May at 13:00 in London.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Committee for Official Statistics

Agenda

Tuesday, 9 March, 2010
Board Room, Statistics House, London, 10:30 - 13:00

Chair: **Professor Sir Roger Jowell**
Apologies:

1	Apologies, Minutes and Matters Arising Declarations of interest	Meeting of 120110
2	Revised Terms of Reference	SA(COS)(10)05
3	Report from the National Statistician	Oral Report Ms Jil Matheson
4	Report from the Head of Assessment	Oral Report Mr Richard Alldritt
5	Presentation of Statistics (GSS Presentation and Dissemination Committee)	SA(COS)(10)06 Ms Kate Chamberlain
6	Authority Engagement on Devolved Statistics	SA(COS)(10)07 Secretariat
7	Draft Interim Monitoring Report 7: Strengthening the User Voice	SA(COS)(10)08 Mr Richard Alldritt
8	Public Confidence in Official Statistics	SA(COS)(10)09 Mr Richard Laux
9	Any other business	

Next Meeting: **Thursday, 6 May, 2010**
Statistics House, London, 13:00 - 15:00

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

SA(COS)(10)05

Revised Terms of Reference

Purpose

1. This note covers revised Terms of Reference for the Committee for Official Statistics (COS) which reflect the role of COS that was agreed at the previous meeting.

Recommendation

2. The Committee are invited to approve the Terms of Reference attached at **Annex A**.

UK Statistics Authority Secretariat, March 2010

List of Annexes

Annex A **Draft Terms of Reference for the Committee for Official Committee**

UK Statistics Authority Committee for Official Statistics

Terms of Reference

Introduction

1. On 1 April, 2008, the UK Statistics Authority formally assumed its powers under the Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007). The Authority was given the high level objective of "promoting and safeguarding the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good".

2. At its meeting of 21 February [SA(08)06] the Authority agreed to constitute a sub-committee for Official Statistics, to charge this committee with responsibility for oversight of the statistical system and to report back to the Authority on its work.

Role and responsibilities

3. The role of the Committee for Official Statistics is to provide strategic oversight of the official statistics system and advise the Authority Board on these matters. It will consider the *Statistical Service* in its entirety. That is to say, the allocation of resource to statistical work by government departments etc., the production of official statistics and the dissemination of those statistics.

4. The Committee will seek to ensure that official statistics are planned and produced in order to serve the public good. The Committee's remit therefore includes:

   - promoting the impartiality, relevance, coherence and comprehensiveness of official statistics;
   - promoting good practice in relation to official statistics in accordance with the Code of Practice;
   - supporting the National Statistician and the staff of the Authority in developing and implementing policies in pursuit of these objectives.

5. Specific responsibilities of the Committee include, to:

   i. advise the Authority Board on the coverage and comprehensiveness of official statistics, including the scope of official statistics and the capacity of the statistical system;

   ii. advise the Authority Board on engagement between users and producers of official statistics to ensure that official statistics are of maximum public value;

   iii. advise the Authority Board on matters related to public confidence in official statistics, including measurement and monitoring;

   iv. promote the Authority's messages to producers and the implementation of actions, including those arising from Assessment and Monitoring Reports, that strengthen Code compliance and enhance the official statistics system;

Meetings

6. The Committee will meet at least quarterly.

Interaction with other committees

7. The Committee will:

   - provide reports to the Authority Board following each meeting of the Committee;
   - provide other reports and proposals to the Authority Board, as agreed with the Authority Chair;
   - co-ordinate its work with the Authority Board and other Board sub-committees.

8. The Committee will receive:

   - progress reports from the National Statistician and from the Head of Assessment for each committee meeting;
   - other briefing from the National Statistician or Head of Assessment on ad hoc or emerging issues with official statistics such as the committee requires.

Membership

9. The members of the Committee as agreed by the Authority Board are:

   - the Deputy Chair of the UK Statistics Authority with responsibility for official statistics (Chair);
   - three or more other non-executive Authority Members;
   - the National Statistician;
   - the Head of Assessment;
   - two other persons who are neither Members nor employees of the Authority

10. Secretariat will be provided by the staff of the UK Statistics Authority.

Quorum

11. Committee meetings will be considered quorate when four members are present including the Chair or the Chair's delegated nominee and one other non-executive member.

12. Substitutes will not be permitted to attend Committee meetings unless with express invitation from the Chair.

Secretariat, March 2010

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

SA(COS)(10)06

Presentation of Statistics

Purpose

1. This paper outlines the current and planned work being undertaken to enhance the presentation of statistics by the Government Statistical Service (GSS) Presentation and Dissemination Committee (PDC).

Recommendations

2. Members of the Committee for Official Statistics are invited to note and comment on the information provided.

Discussion

3. The UK Statistics Authority *Code of Practice for Official Statistics* and the *National Statistician's Guidance on the Presentation and Publication of Official Statistics* both promote best practice for the presentation and dissemination of statistics.

4. The GSS PDC was established in July 2009 to develop, promote and maintain policies, standards and practices relating to the presentation and dissemination of official statistics (including hard copy, electronic and face to face) and users' access to, and use of, official statistics. GSS PDC is a sub-committee of the GSS Statistical Policies and Standards Committee (SPSC).

5. As part of its terms of reference, GSS PDC has agreed to promote best practice and innovation in presentation and dissemination activities through promoting and facilitating the adoption of professional standards through staff support and engagement and addressing user feedback on statistical outputs.

6. In September 2009 GSS SPSC commissioned GSS PDC to set up a taskforce to produce best practice guidance for statistical first releases. A report on the current progress of the taskforce is attached at **Annex A**.

7. GSS PDC has recognised that there are many issues around presentation and dissemination across the GSS. It has set up a log to capture these issues as they arise, although an immediate response will not always be possible. The log will be reviewed at each committee meeting and more regularly by the GSS PDC secretariat. The future plan is to share this information and its outcomes across the GSS and to use it as a basis for frequently asked questions, identification of experts/innovators etc. A current update on the issues to-date is attached at **Annex B**.

8. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) Statistical Training Unit offers a series of Methodology Workshops advertised to the GSS through the ONS website and StatNet. A selection of the workshops are recommended for statistical development in the GSS Framework for Statistical Training. These include a *Data Dissemination in the 21st Century* workshop which covers the functions of the web and is recommended under competence level 3 of the Framework (Data Dissemination).

9. Building on this training, a *Data Visualisation* workshop is being developed by Methodology Directorate's Data Visualisation Centre, which looks at how to present data on the web. This course will be included in the next version of the GSS Framework.

10. ONS Communication Division are also in the early stages of developing a *Writing for the Web* course which will complete a full range of training available for staff who, directly or indirectly, put information on the web. The courses will provide training for staff who are directly or indirectly involved in putting information on the web. More detail is provided at **Annex C**.

Kate Chamberlain, Welsh Assembly Government, February 2010

List of Annexes

Annex A The Statistical First Release Taskforce
Annex B GSS Presentation and Dissemination Issues Review
Annex C Training for Web Dissemination

Annex A The Statistical First Release Taskforce

Background

1. In September 2009, the Government Statistical Service (GSS) Statistical Policy and Standards Committee (SPSC) working party identified a need to look at the presentation and format of statistical releases. This review is to include commentary, improvements to websites and provision of links. It will focus on improving statistical releases and be widened to improving commentary and standardising physical release formats where appropriate. The review will consider what the standards are and propose improved reporting at the GSS level. It was agreed that this work will be taken forward by a Statistical First Release Taskforce, which will initially report back to the GSS Presentation and Dissemination Committee (PDC).

2. A bid to support this work was submitted to the Quality Improvement Fund (QIF). This bid was successful and ONS Methodology Consultancy Service (MCS) is to provide a resource for 14 days between mid-February 2010 and the end of March 2010.

3. The taskforce is being chaired by James Tucker of the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and task force members come from many GSS departments, including the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the Home Office, the NHS Information Centre, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Department for Children, Schools and Families. The National Statistician's Office is providing the secretariat support.

4. The aim of the taskforce is to consider existing guidance and make recommendations:

   i. to make statistical first releases more relevant and useful;
   ii. to ensure the content is focussed on what is best for the reader;
   iii. to clearly identify the statistics that are being released, and;
   iv. that commentary is helpful and presents the key messages.

5. The outcome will be a guidance document that provides clear advice and easy to follow examples.

Current Progress

6. An initial meeting was held on 1 February 2010 between the taskforce chair and the MCS resource. It was confirmed that the resource equated to 14 days, from mid-February to the end of March.

7. The first full meeting of the taskforce was held on 22 February 2010 and members discussed how the taskforce could maximise the use of the MSC resource during the timescale available. The meeting then took the form of an open discussion with members providing examples of good and bad practice, predominantly on presentation and dissemination issues of their publications, in particular, reflecting on their own knowledge and experiences.

8. It was recognised that this taskforce would need to work closely with the quality taskforce, due to cross-cutting links to metadata. It was also recognised that to avoid duplication of effort and to ensure consistency, there would need to be wide consultation regarding other reviews that have recently been undertaken. A representative from ONS Economic and Labour Analysis Directorate joined the meeting and provided valuable input on work recently undertaken to review statistical first releases related to the economy, labour market and social welfare, in particular, work on content and presentation. The taskforce agreed to seek advice and learn from this work already undertaken.

9. The Statistics Commission Report No 39 - *Releasing Official Statistics - A Review of Statistical First Releases*, published in March 2008 was discussed by the members. The Commission's suggested '*criteria for good practice for statistical first releases*' was identified as a good tool for identifying current examples of good and bad practice that exist in publications produced by government departments.

10. The meeting concluded that the MCS resource would set about identifying examples of good and bad practice and link these to the extensive sub-criteria of recommendations listed in the Commission's six categories of good practice. A report will be presented at the next taskforce meeting in March 2010.

Annex B Current Issues being considered by GSS Presentation and Dissemination Committee

Background

1. The Government Statistics Service (GSS) Presentation and Dissemination Committee (PDC) was established in April 2009, holding its first meeting in July 2009. The purpose of the committee is to develop, promote and maintain policies, standards and practices relating to, presentation and dissemination of Official Statistics and users' access to, and use of, Official Statistics.

2. In October 2009, the Head of Profession from the NHS Information Centre raised a number of GSS presentation and dissemination issues. GSS PDC recognised the need to set up an issues log to capture points from across the GSS as they arose. It was noted that the committee may not be able to respond or do anything immediately. It was felt that in the future the issues and how they were resolved could be used to develop a frequently asked questions document for dissemination across the GSS. It may also be able to assist in identifying areas of expertise and innovation. The current issues are set out below along with any current plans to resolve them.

Current PDC Issues

3. *The publication of secondary analysis* – the question of what do colleagues do with the publication of secondary analysis was raised. Do colleagues feel that putting it through full pre-announcement, pre-release access controls, briefing is too much. This issue is on the issue log for the next GSS PDC meeting on 3 March 2010, where it will be discussed further and a mechanism for progress established.

4. *Unusual release methods* – the question of what others do in terms of innovative release methods and are there best practices that can be shared across the GSS. The Statistical First Release Taskforce has been tasked to produce guidance on best practices for statistical releases and will include this in its work programme.

5. *The content of press notices* – there have been many debates about the content of press notices. Sometimes interesting and engaging text can be interpreted as sensationalist or unjustified by people who don't like what the figures show. How can the GSS overcome this issue? This issue is on the issue log for the next GSS PDC meeting on 3 March 2010, where it will be discussed further and a mechanism for progress established.

6. *Listing all National Statistics via the Publication Hub* – The UK Statistics Authority are required by statutory duty to publish, once a year, a complete list of all 'National Statistics'. Currently this is done by running a dedicated census but in the future this could be done via the Publication Hub. For this to be achieved, members of the GSS would need to be encouraged to take a more consistent approach to the 'Content Management Policy' for the Publication Hub and to engage with and commit themselves more to the Release Calendar. Could GSS PDC circulate a GSS wide drive on this issue? This issue is on the issue log for the next GSS PDC meeting on 3 March 2010, where it will be discussed further and a mechanism for progress established.

7. *Use of new visualisation techniques* – ONS has been working on the development of new visualisation techniques, the *Change Over Time* viewer, the *Population Pyramids*, the *Ageing* tool by local authority and the mapping approaches. An issue raised at the Four Nations meeting asked that as these tools are being developed in Adobe Flash, can they be re-used and under what conditions and charging regime. It was agreed that this is a GSS wide issue and should be considered by GSS PDC. This issue is on the issue log for the next GSS PDC meeting on 3 March 2010, where it will be discussed further and a mechanism for progress established.

Annex C Training for Web Dissemination

About the Courses

1. Detailed below are the aims and objectives of each course.

2. *Writing for the Web* course - ONS Communications Division - new guidance has been developed to improve publishing on the ONS website. It defines the quality standards for web content and provides hands-on practical advice on getting information onto the web. After clearance by the ONS Publishing Strategy and Standards Committee, it will be rolled out to ONS staff early in 2010. The guidance will be implemented through a new *Writing for the Web* course, which will also cover more generic techniques aimed specifically at those who author on-line content. This initiative will ensure that consistent quality standards are embedded through training. The course was initially intended to be ONS specific but, recognising the need to raise the quality of statistical dissemination across the wider GSS, the course development will take into account GSS requirements.

3. *Data Dissemination in 21st Century* course - ONS Web Development Team - the *Data Dissemination in the 21st Century* course provides the latest information on change within the internet and government that will effect business areas and their data. It consists of presentations and topical worked examples. The course aims to:

    i. demonstrate that data that is used, is better data, especially when you can use it with other data and this is illustrated by the use of house pricing data and what would happen if statistics stopped;
    ii. explain that understanding users makes the dissemination of data easier, cheaper and better through presentation, interactive session and worked examples. The course will look at other websites and work through the difference between appearing impressive and delivering functionality that is needed by the end user;
    iii. demonstrate how to ensure your data is found by looking at presentation, good titling, metadata and how trying to boost visibility can be counter productive, and;
    iv. explain the ONS Web Development Programme's framework and what the benefits and opportunities are through presentation and some worked examples.

4. *Data Visualisation* course - Methodology Directorate Data Visualisation Centre - good data presentation is a basic expectation of GSS outputs, acting as a primary interface between data and meaningful information. As GSS outputs move from print to web, it is increasingly important for content authors to be able to understand and implement best practice in the design of tables and graphs. The course aims to provide a basic introduction to data visualisation techniques. Through classroom lecture and practical Excel-based exercises. This course is pitched at an introductory level. We aim to introduce intermediate and advanced courses at a later date - these will include maps and interactive graphics.

Plans for the Future

5. The presenters of the three courses will form a working group to ensure they cover all elements of working on the web and that the course materials do not overlap. Although the courses are primarily designed for the ONS, the presenters will ensure they are suitable for a wider GSS audience. All three courses will be available through the Methodology Workshop Programme which is advertised twice a year on the ONS website and StatNet. The courses will also be added to the GSS Framework for Statistical Training.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Committee for Official Statistics

SA(COS)(10)07

Authority Engagement on Devolved Statistics

Purpose

1. To summarise the work that the UK Statistics Authority has been doing in relation to statistics produced by the devolved administrations and to outline further activities that are planned for 2010/11.

Recommendation

2. The Members of the Committee for Official Statistics are invited to note:

   - the official contacts that have been established with the devolved legislatures (paragraphs 8 to 11);
   - the summary of Authority engagement in 2009 with producers and users of devolved statistics (paragraphs 12 to 14), and;
   - progress in assessing devolved statistics and emerging findings.

3. The Committee is also invited to note the planned activities in 2010 for the Edinburgh Monitoring and Assessment Team (paragraphs 21 and 22)

Discussion

4. *The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* establishes that the remit of the Authority, to promote and safeguard the production and publication of Official Statistics, applies to Official Statistics across the UK. The Authority is accountable to the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly. The central pieces of the legislation that relate to devolution are summarised in **Annex A**.

5. Since its launch in 2008, the Authority has sought to establish good lines of communication with each of the devolved administrations. The Authority Board attended a launch event hosted by the Scottish Parliament in June 2008. It organised further top-level meetings and visits to Edinburgh and Belfast in 2009 to demonstrate its commitment to a UK-wide agenda. The Chair of the Authority has met on several occasions with Ministers from the devolved administrations and senior officials from the devolved legislatures.

6. The Authority's commitment to a UK-wide agenda was reinforced by the decision to establish a Team based in Edinburgh. In February 2009 Neil Jackson was appointed to head up this Team. By the end of 2009 the Team reached its full complement of five members of staff through a mixture of fixed term appointments and secondments from other public bodies. The Team is based in premises leased from the Scottish Government.

7. The Edinburgh Team operates as an integral part of the Authority's Monitoring and Assessment Team. Its core responsibility is to undertake assessments. It also takes a wider interest in statistical matters concerning the devolved administrations.

Official-Level Engagement with the Devolved Legislatures

8. In July 2009 the Authority laid its first annual report, for 2008/09 before the Westminster Parliament and each of the devolved legislatures. In Westminster, the Authority has established arrangements whereby it will report to Parliament through the House of

Commons Public Administration Select Committee (PASC). PASC has already held oral evidence sessions to scrutinise the work of the Authority. The Authority stands ready to report to committees in the devolved legislatures, although to date it has not been asked to do so.

9. Neil Jackson and Ross Young have visited officials in the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly to discuss the work of the Authority and to explore options for strengthening and deepening the Authority's accountability to the devolved legislatures. A summary of these meetings is attached at **Annex B**.

10. In Northern Ireland, the Finance and Personnel Committee takes responsibility for scrutinising the work of the Authority. The Committee has held hearings on statistical matters in the recent past. It may wish to hold a scrutiny session on the Authority's annual report at some point in the future should a report raise matters that are of particular interest. In Scotland and Wales, there is no committee that has a standing responsibility to review the work of the Authority and there seems little prospect for a committee hearing on the Authority's annual report.

11. In all three devolved legislatures, there may be interest in convening a hearing on a specific Assessment Report or on an Authority Monitoring Report where these raise issues that are of particular interest. Neil Jackson and Ross Young will liaise with officials in the devolved legislatures, keeping them informed of the Authority's activities and drawing attention to any developments that may be of wider interest to Members of the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Engagement with Producers and Users of Devolved Statistics

12. During 2009 Neil Jackson and Richard Laux met with producers of statistics in the devolved administrations through a series of bilateral statistics liaison meetings. These meetings were arranged in part to reinforce the message that the Authority is accountable to the devolved legislatures as well as the Westminster Parliament. The meetings provided an opportunity for the Monitoring and Assessment Team to explain its evolving approach to assessment and the processes that were being developed; and for producers to provide feedback on their experiences of being assessed. The meetings also discussed how certain practices in the *Code* were being interpreted.

13. A summary of the main points to emerge from these meetings is attached at **Annex C**. The main points to note from these meetings are as follows:

- the devolved administrations are generally positive about assessment and see it as providing an opportunity to improve the quality of their own statistical services;
- the meetings provided some positive feedback on how the assessment process has been working so far. The devolved administrations provided some constructive suggestions for how the process might be improved;
- devolved statistics are generally produced by small teams that are already fairly stretched. There is some concern about the additional burden that assessment will impose on these teams. The Authority is urged to take a proportionate approach to assessment, and;
- there is a cautious attitude towards improving the comparability of statistics across the UK, given the differences in legislation and in administrative processes (this is discussed further in paragraphs 19 to 20 below).

14. During 2009 Neil Jackson initiated direct engagement with users of devolved statistics. In part, this took the form of approaches to users for input to individual assessments. In

addition, the Monitoring and Assessment Team in Edinburgh undertook some wider activities to promote the work of the Authority to users of devolved statistics, primarily in Scotland. At the Scottish Government's Annual Statistics Stakeholder Conference in October 2009, Neil Jackson gave a presentation on the work of the Authority and the Team facilitated workshops on 'trust in statistics: listening to the users' voice'. Neil Jackson gave a presentation to the Edinburgh Group of the Royal Statistical Society on the work of the Authority. The Team also managed a stand at the annual conference of the Royal Statistics Society in Edinburgh, at which the chair of the Authority gave a speech.

Assessments of Devolved Statistics and Emerging Findings

15. The Monitoring and Assessment Team's top priority over the last year has been to develop and implement the Assessment Programme. Of the 27 Assessment Reports published to date, 10 have covered devolved statistics. A full analysis of the findings from the first 27 published Assessment Reports has been presented in a separate paper to the Authority Board [SA(10)12]. Although it is too early to draw any firm conclusions, there is nothing in these initial assessments to suggest devolved statistics differ in any significant respect from UK statistics in terms of *Code* compliance. For producers of devolved statistics, as for others:

    - more could be done to engage with users outside government;
    - there is scope to improve the commentary accompanying statistics, and;
    - more documents, for example, a Statement of Administrative Sources, need to be published to comply with the *Code*.

16. As part of the initial Programme of Assessments, the Authority assessed Children Looked After (CLA) statistics in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Originally, the intention had been to produce a single Assessment Report for all four sets of statistics. It quickly became apparent, however, that it would be more straightforward to produce a separate report for each administration.

17. Assessing these equivalent sets of statistics in parallel had a number of benefits:

    - it allowed some benchmarking of statistical practices across the different producers;
    - it helped to identify common issues facing each producer that might benefit from being addressed through a common approach, and;
    - it allowed examples of good practice to be highlighted for the benefit of other producers.

18. The final Assessment Reports for CLA statistics included an additional section on 'the UK position' that summarised these findings for all four UK administrations. The section included a UK-wide requirement for all four producers to document clearly the differences between each administration's CLA statistics and scope out the feasibility and need for a comparable data set.

19. As mentioned in paragraph 13 above, some of the devolved administrations have a cautious attitude towards improving the coherence and comparability of statistics across the UK. This is partly because differences in legislation and in administrative processes can make comparisons very difficult. There is also a concern that attempts to harmonise statistics across the four administrations assume that harmonisation should be based on the Westminster government's approach. The Scottish Government advocates a model that recognises the diversity of government statistics across the UK rather than one that prioritises the development of a UK statistical system.

20. It can sometimes be difficult for the Assessment Team to identify users with a particular interest in comparing statistics across the UK. Nevertheless, when a research

organisation publishes a report that uses Official Statistics to draw comparisons across the four administrations, this can attract considerable media attention and can spark a wider public debate on the merits of the different approaches across administrations For example, *Funding and Performance of Healthcare Systems in the Four Countries of the UK Before and After Devolution*, 2010, the Nuffield Trust [http://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/publications/detail.aspx?id=145&prID=675]. This suggests that for future Assessment Reports, the Assessment Team may need to consider issues of coherence and comparability across the four administrations in terms of the potential uses as well as actual uses.

Activities Planned for 2010

21. Assessment work will continue to be the top priority for the Team in 2010. The published Assessment Programme for 2010 identifies 81 groups of statistics to be assessed and 37 of these are for devolved statistics. The programme for 2010 continues the practice of assessing equivalent sets of statistics for the four UK administrations in parallel, although this is not possible in every case. We expect these parallel assessments will continue to identify findings that are relevant to all four administrations and there will be value in reporting these findings, either through an additional section on 'the UK position' in assessment reports themselves or in separate Monitoring and Assessment Notes.

22. Besides assessment, we see the Edinburgh Team as having an ongoing responsibility to promote a good understanding of the role of the Authority amongst producers and users of devolved statistics, through:

- engagement with each of the devolved administrations through statistics liaison meetings;
- direct engagement with users of devolved statistics in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, through the assessment process and other opportunities, including working with the Statistics Users Forum where appropriate, and;
- maintaining official links with the devolved legislatures, disseminating Authority reports and drawing attention to particular findings that may be of interest to assembly and parliamentary committees.

Other Issues

23. Other issues have also played a part in the wider dialogue between the Authority and the Devolved Administrations, most prominently the issue of pre-release access. (This is beyond the scope of this paper but is considered in detail in the Authority's forthcoming Monitoring Report on that subject.) Previous correspondence between the Authority and the Scottish Government in particular has tended to focus on this issue and is not reproduced here. However, the recent reply from John Swinney (Scottish Government Minister) to Authority Chair's letter to Alex Salmond (as leader of the Scottish National Party) is attached at **Annex D**.

Neil Jackson, Monitoring and Assessment and Ross Young, Secretariat, March 2010

List of Annexes

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Annex B Accountability to the Devolved Legislatures
Annex C Statistics Liaison Meetings
Annex D Letter from John Swinney MSP to Sir Michael Scholar, 22 February 2010

Annex A The Statistics and Registration Service Act and Devolution

The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 establishes that the remit of the Authority, to promote and safeguard the production and publication of Official Statistics, applies to Official Statistics across the UK. It also establishes that the Authority is accountable to the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Some of the central pieces of the legislation as they relate to devolution are:

- distinction between UK statistics and 'wholly devolved' statistics. Statistics about wholly devolved matters are the responsibility of the devolved administrations;
- the UK government and the devolved administrations retain explicit responsibility for certain statistical matters, rather than the Authority. In particular:
  - the arrangements for privileged access to statistics before publication (pre-release access), and;
  - responsibility for defining which non-Crown bodies may be considered producers of Official Statistics;
- obligations upon the UK Government and devolved administrations to consult the Statistics Authority on the formulation of policy on those statistical matters for which they are responsible;
- obligations upon the Cabinet Office to consult the devolved administrations on the appointment of non-executive members to the Board of the Statistics Authority;
- obligations upon the Statistics Authority to consult the UK Government and the devolved administrations on the conduct of certain of its functions, for example, in preparing and publishing a *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*, and;
- obligations upon the Statistics Authority to lay its Annual Report and Accounts before both the UK Parliament and the devolved legislatures.

Annex B Accountability to the devolved legislatures

Neil Jackson and Ross Young have visited officials in the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly to foster links between the Authority and the devolved legislatures. This annex summarises the main points to emerge from these meetings.

Scottish Parliament

Meeting with James Johnston (Clerk, Scottish Parliament Finance Committee), Simon Wakefield (Scottish Parliament Information Centre, SPICe) and Emma Macdonald (SPICe Document Supply Centre)

James Johnston advised that the Scottish Parliament does not have any committee with direct responsibility for the oversight of statistics or the work of the Statistics Authority. The Westminster Parliament was seen as having lead responsibility for scrutinising the activities of the Authority. The likelihood of the Scottish Parliament Finance Committee or any other committee holding a scrutiny session on the Authority's 2008/09 annual report was low.

The Scottish Parliament Finance Committee may still be interested in a small number of financial-related Assessment Reports, for example the Assessment of *Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland* statistics. Other committees may be interested in other Assessment Reports. It was agreed to circulate the 2010/12 work programme to James Johnston and he would bring this to the attention of Scottish Parliament committee clerks.

The Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe) provides research and briefing services to Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) and committees. SPICe researchers covered the statistical aspects of their portfolios, and had no dedicated statistician tea Reports as they are published. SPICe who would draw Reports to the attention of committees where there might be an interest.

National Assembly for Wales

Meeting with John Grimes (Finance Committee Clerk) and Martin Jennings (Finance and Statistics Team, Members' Research Service)

John Grimes explained that there is no committee with explicit responsibility for statistical matters. The committees have full programmes and it is unlikely that committee chairs would feel able to convene a hearing on the Authority's annual report. Committees may still be interested in specific Assessment Reports depending on the findings in a Report. John Grimes advised that as Assessment Reports are published, the Authority should send an email to the relevant assembly clerk to draw attention to the Report and any findings that will be of interest, along with a link to the Report itself.

The Members' Research Service (MRS) has its own team of statisticians who provide briefings for committees on statistical matters. It was agreed that the Authority should send Martin Jennings hard copies of Assessment Reports for display in the Members' Library.

Northern Ireland Assembly
Meeting with Shane MacAteer (Clerk to Northern Ireland Finance and Personnel Committee), John Power (Head of Research and Library Services, R&LS) and Robert Barry (Senior Statistician, R&LS)

The of the Finance and Personnel Committee' responsibilities include the scrutiny of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). The committee has held hearings on statistical matters in the recent past and Shane McAteer indicated that they may wish to hold a scrutiny session on the Authority's annual report at some point in the future should a Report raise matters that are of particular interest.

The Research and Library Services (R&LS) would be keen to provide the Authority with user views on Assessments of Northern Ireland statistics where they have particular views. The R&L Service will also bring to our attention any statistics issues affecting them in their work. Robert Barry and Ross Young agreed to keep in touch on such issues when they arise. The Monitoring and Assessment Team will alert R&LS to the publication of Assessment Reports, and Monitoring Reports where they may be of interest to a Northern Ireland audience.

Annex C Statistics Liaison Meetings

During 2009 Neil Jackson and Richard Laux met with producers of statistics in the devolved administrations through a series of bilateral statistics liaison meetings. This note summarises the main points to emerge from these discussions.

Scottish Government

The Scottish Government statistical service has grown significantly since devolution in 1999 and now has around [200] professional statisticians. It has a central team, the Office of the Chief Statistician, headed by Rob Wishart. Most statisticians are managed in policy directorates. The range of statistical outputs has also expanded over this period. The Scottish Government attaches considerable importance to developing the relevance of Official Statistics to the work of government.

Three statistics liaison meetings were held in 2009, in March, July and September. These were with Rob Wishart and colleagues from Scottish Government. The two other statistical heads of profession in Scotland have also been represented at these meetings, Susan Burney (Information Services Division, NHS Scotland) and Duncan Macniven (General Register Office for Scotland, GROS).

The main points to note from these discussions are:

- the Scottish Government is positive about assessment and sees it as providing an opportunity to improve its statistical service. It has taken active steps to learn the lessons from assessments and to prepare for future assessments.
- trust in statistics is considered to be less of a concern in Scotland than elsewhere;
- the Scottish Government's feedback on the assessment process so far is that it has been fair and the Assessment Team has shown flexibility in agreeing timescales. It would welcome further engagement from the Authority on the assessment of statistics that it uses but which are produced by others;
- the Scottish Government welcomes the Authority's accountability to the Scottish Parliament and is keen for it not to be too 'Westminster-centric';
- the Scottish Government acknowledges that there can be a need for comparable statistics across Scotland, England, Wales and Northern Ireland, provided the needs are clearly identified and work programmes take account of what opportunities actually exist, given the differences in legislation and administrative processes, and;
- the Scottish Government will keep a close eye on whether the Authority raises concerns on coherence and comparability on an equal basis with the different administrations.

Welsh Assembly Government

The statistics group in the Welsh Assembly has around 50 statisticians. Kate Chamberlain is the statistical head of profession. The statistics group has not experienced any significant growth since devolution in 1999. The service has recently been re-structured to bring together a range of different professional staff into a new Knowledge and Analytical Services Unit which reports to the Permanent Secretary. Kate Chamberlain heads up this new unit.

In 2009 there were two statistical liaison meetings, a meeting just with Kate Chamberlain in April 2010 and a larger meeting in November 2010 with additional colleagues. The main points to note from these discussions are:

- trust in Official Statistics is not seen not seen as being a major issue in Wales. There is some nervousness that a drip-feed of criticisms from the Authority may undermine public confidence in the published statistics;

- there are only limited resources available to produce statistics in WAG. There is concern that the assessment process may place an additional burden on statistical teams, and;
- WAG would welcome more information on how the Authority plans to restrict the burden that assessment imposes on producers and on the benefits that are being realised through the assessment process.

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) provides a range of statistics and research services which support government decision making and inform the wider community. It has grown significantly over the last 10 years from around 90 staff to 250 staff. Norman Caven is the Chief Executive of NISRA and the head of profession for Northern Ireland statistics. NISRA is responsible for recruiting all statisticians who work in Northern Ireland government departments and is responsible for their professional development.

The Monitoring and Assessment Team has met with Norman Caven, along with colleagues from NISRA and from two Northern Ireland Departments. The main points to note from the discussion are:

- NISRA is positive about the work of the Authority and sees the assessment process as an opportunity to identify ways of improving the statistical service provided in Northern Ireland;
- Northern Ireland statistics are produced by small teams that already have a very full programme of work. There is concern that the assessment process may impose an undue burden and they would like requirements to be proportionate to what can realistically be delivered;
- NISRA felt it important for Assessment Reports to recognise examples of good practice. They are concerned that disproportionate attention on shortcomings may demotivate staff;
- Producers had some concerns about the Written Evidence for Assessment (WEFA) which does not entirely relate to the highly decentralised arrangements for producing official statistics in Northern Ireland. The Monitoring and Assessment Team is in ongoing dialogue with NISRA on this, and;
- in Northern Ireland, there is interest in comparing Official Statistics with the Republic of Ireland as well as with England, Scotland and Wales. NISRA engages separately with its counterparts in the Republic of Ireland.

Annex D Letter from John Swinney MSP to Sir Michael Scholar, 22 February 2010

This letter has been published on the Authority's website.

To see a copy of this and other correspondence, please visit:

http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/correspondence/index.html

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

SA(COS)(10)08

Draft Interim Monitoring Report 7: Strengthening the User Voice

Purpose

1. This paper covers the draft interim Report for the Monitoring Review on Strengthening the User Voice (StUV) which is attached at **Annex A**.

Timing

2. A revised version of the draft interim Report will be presented to the Authority Board on 25 March 2010 and will be published shortly thereafter. A public meeting will be held in early June. A final Report will be published after Authority Board approval at the end of June.

Recommendation

3. Members of the Committee are invited to note the findings of the Report and consider the draft recommendations.

Discussion

4. The version of the draft interim Report attached at Annex A was presented to the StUV project board on 23 February 2010. The discussion centred on the recommendations of the Report and some changes will be made to theRreport, as follows:

   i. the issue of the resource implications of the recommendations will be addressed more explicitly in the Report;
   ii. the benefits of user engagement for the producer will be discussed in more detail;
   iii. all the elements of the *Code of Practice* relating to user engagement will be detailed in an Annex to the Report and referenced in the Report;
   iv. Recommendation 3 will outline more explicitly what improvements need to be made to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) website (focusing on navigability and accessibility);
   v. the Report will contain more specific reference to potential use and users, making the distinction between current and potential users;
   vi. more explicit reference will be made to the current priorities of the Statistics User Forum, and;
   vii. case studies will be sent for approval to the relevant experts. The case study on access to microdata in particular will be revised.

5. Project board members have been invited to send further comments by 10 March.

6. The annexes to the Report incorporating the final Reports from the research carried out by Ipsos Mori (qualitative research into views of opinion-formers about Official Statistics) and NatCen (Survey on Public Confidence in Official Statistics, see [SA(COS)(10)09]) are currently being prepared by the relevant contractors.

Richard Laux, Monitoring and Assessment Team, March 2010

List of Annexes

Annex A Draft Interim Monitoring Report 7 *Strengthening the User Voice*

DRAFT
16.02.2010

Monitoring Report 7

Strengthening the User Voice

February 2010

UK Statistics Authority

Monitoring review 7
Draft interim report

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Summary

1. In February 2009[1] the UK Statistics Authority announced its intention to carry out a monitoring review about ways to enhance communication between the producers of official statistics and those who use them. The Authority wanted both to guide the development of the statistical service and to help users make more effective use of it. The review, entitled Strengthening the User Voice, concludes that much user engagement already takes place but that it needs to be more structured, engage a wider range of users and be more transparent – there needs to be a better understanding of the use and value of official statistics; better communication with a wider range of users; and better use made of the existing structures and technologies to ensure that user engagement is effective.

2. Historically, much attention has been paid to analysing the costs and burdens of the statistical service, but less on the value that the service has to society. In an era of constraints on public expenditure, it is ever more important to focus on how the service is used and how to get the most value from it.

3. The impact and value of official statistics can be enhanced by finding out more about the use that is made, or might be made, of the statistical product, and using that information to further develop the service. This emphasis on understanding uses and users is one of the main features of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

4. There are clearly challenges for statistics producers in adopting a new approach to user engagement. In practice, input from users is important at all stages in the statistical production process - from planning what statistics to collect, how they should best be produced and disseminated, to how they (and the messages from them) should be communicated to the outside world, and helping decision-makers use the statistics in ways that deliver value.

5. Furthermore, once the bodies that produce official statistics have identified uses and the communities of users, they need to develop an ongoing dialogue with them. It is not enough to 'consult' them in the sense of making plans and information available for public comment. This dialogue should enable producers to make users aware of the statistics produced and their strengths and weaknesses; to tailor the advice which accompanies the statistics to take account of the likely uses; to present the statistics in ways that capture interest and can be understood by users; and then to seek informed views from users on the range and quality of existing and future statistics.

6. The best approach to user engagement is likely to lie not in one big change in current practice but in a combination of measures for different circumstances. And the common thread to these measures should be the value that can be derived from supporting the various uses of the statistics. This report highlights some of these issues and discusses some measures that can be taken to address them.

[1] http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/reports-from-the-authority-s-monitoring---assessment-team---update-no--2.pdf

Interim Recommendations

7. The Statistics Authority would welcome views on the following interim recommendations, which we will be discussing with user representatives and other interested parties before the completion of the final report.

    1. Bodies that produce official statistics should review and enhance their compliance with those aspects of the Code of Practice that relate to the understanding and use of official statistics by all sectors of society. In this context, the National Statistician may need to offer further guidance (paragraphs 53 and 78)

    2. Statistical Heads of Profession in government should work with subject matter experts to find ways to help the less-expert user understand how the statistics relate to the topic to which they refer. (paragraph 59)

    3. The Office for National Statistics should give priority to improving its website, and should publish plans for doing so as soon as possible. (paragraph 62)

    4. The National Statistician should take steps, possibly in conjunction with the Royal Statistical Society, to improve dialogue with journalists - including providing suitable statistical training for student journalists; arranging courses/events and visits for journalists to statistical offices or departments; and establishing a dedicated telephone service. (paragraph 66)

    5. The National Statistician should commission a review of the scope to use innovative technology, including latest web developments, to enhance the accessibility to, and understanding of, official statistics. (paragraph 69)

    6. The National Statistician should encourage producers to work actively with the Statistics Users Forum (and the user group structure), to help improve its user engagement role. (paragraph 82)

    7. Given the great diversity of users of statistics, a high profile web-based forum (supported by an appropriate structure of meetings between users and producers) should be developed which would enable users of statistics to communicate more easily and openly with each other and with the producer bodies. Whilst the lead on this should rest with the Statistics User Forum and the Royal Statistical Society bodies producing official statistics should actively support this initiative, coordinated by the National Statistician, (paragraph 84)

8. In addition, the Statistics Authority will support the Royal Statistical Society's initiatives in relation to the development of new user-designed, user-managed websites that will provide direct access to statistical material, including official statistics, in an easily accessible, user-friendly way. The Authority will also support any equivalent initiative from other respected bodies or consortia (paragraph 70).

Please email comments to: authority.consultations@statistics.gsi.gov.uk. A public meeting will be held at the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) in May 2010, at which any users of official statistics will be welcome. Further details can be obtained at http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/montioringreports/index.html The comments and feedback we receive will be taken into account in producing the final report.

Introduction

9. Government invests hundreds of millions of pounds each year in the collection and publication of official statistics. Whilst the costs and burdens of this activity have long been the subject of close scrutiny, less attention has been paid to maximising the value of the statistical service. There is a need to pay more attention to both the realised and potential value of official statistics and how that value can be enhanced by helping organisations and individuals to use the statistical service in ways that benefit society.

10. This report is about the need for the many official bodies that produce statistics to identify and support all the uses of official statistics that deliver public value; and how best to do so efficiently and without imposing excessive burdens on themselves, data suppliers or the user.

11. As a starting point, the Authority considers that the impact and value of official statistics can be enhanced by finding out more about the use that is made, or might be made, of the statistical product, and using that information to further develop the service. The first step on this path must be to support all current and potential users in communicating their needs to producer bodies. Investment in helping the users to explore and express their own needs must be assumed to be worthwhile. Given the power of statistics to influence actions and decisions in all sectors of society, and the relative paucity of current knowledge and documentation in this area, that is a reasonable assumption.

12. We recognise that the uses of statistics are diffuse and sometimes difficult to capture and document. Statistics sometimes paint in the background against which decisions are made, or actions taken, rather than playing any specified part in such processes. For example, macro-economic statistics on the state of the economy may influence business decisions without it necessarily being possible to point to exactly when, where or how that influence took place. The influence may be incremental and cumulative rather than an event in itself. The 'user' may be largely unaware of being a user; and the use may remain undocumented by anyone. But it is still a use and a contribution to the value of the service.

13. Despite this, it is often possible to trace, or make sound assumptions about, the influence of statistics and their value. To take another example, it is clear that statistics on the National Health Service influence government policy, the day-to-day management of the NHS, investment decisions of private healthcare companies, and the attitudes and actions of individual users of NHS services. In aggregate, that is a powerful case for producing such statistics. More generally, transparently identifying and responding to the user is a vital step in ensuring that official statistics are *seen* to be of value, and that the case for continued funding from the public purse is made.

14. We are all users and potential users of at least some official statistics and our requirements need to be considered carefully if our use is to be beneficial. The collection and publication of official statistics is best seen and managed as a service to users (individual and institutional) and we think it should be managed more as other services are managed. The commercial world operates on the basis of identifying and meeting the needs of its customers; and businesses put considerable resource into ensuring that they know what

their customers, and potential customers, want. The UK statistical service needs to do the same.

15. The Authority recognises that the service is already largely shaped by specific user requirements. The decision to collect statistics on a subject is made - usually by government ministers rather than government statisticians - after careful consideration of requirements for that information, often including wider consultation. The requirement for a 2011 Census, the largest statistical exercise ever undertaken in the UK, has been, or will be, considered in depth by statisticians, ministers and Parliament in all four UK administrations. But for the majority of statistical work, once the collection is established, it tends to be only the best-placed users inside government who have much say in matters such as the detailed structure of the statistics, the form of their presentation, their frequency and accessibility and the way they are explained. The statisticians focus on major government needs and concentrate on achieving the best quality possible. The service ethic thus loses out to an emphasis on production.

16. We also think that users, whilst diverse in their application of statistics, differ little in their core statistical needs. They all want essentially the same crime statistics for example. It is thus seen by some as sufficient to establish what government itself wants in terms of official figures and simply make those more widely available to meet the needs of others. Indeed, this seems to have been a guiding principle in many areas of official statistics over many years.

17. However, this view misses an important consideration: the needs of users may differ, not in terms of data, but more in terms of the way the statistics are packaged, presented and communicated. So for example, economists who analyse macro-economic data may want detailed tables of national data in a particular format; whereas a charity dealing with the elderly may just need a few headline points about the implications of, say, price inflation for the living costs of older people. These requirements relate to the same data but require a different service from statisticians. In practice, user requirements can impact on all stages in the statistical production process - from planning what statistics to collect, how they should best be produced and disseminated, to how they (and the messages from them) should be communicated to the outside world, and helping decision-makers use the statistics in ways that deliver value.

18. The analogy with a commercial service supports a further perspective. The production of official statistics has been, and to a large extent remains, a monopoly. But that is starting to change; statistical information is produced and disseminated via the internet by ever more organisations, and this information, sometimes of unknown origin and quality, competes for the attention of decision makers. It is important therefore that official producers explain their statistics, including strengths and limitations in relation to major uses, sufficiently clearly to ensure that those whose actions are influenced by them are told everything they need to know; for example, which of different sources are most appropriate and any cautionary points on the interpretation of trends or of estimates of the characteristics of small population sub-groups.

19. This emphasis on understanding uses and users is one of the main features of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, published in January 2009. Principle 1 of the Code says: “The production, management and

dissemination of official statistics should meet the requirements of informed decision-making by government, public services, business, researchers and the public". This broad range of users of statistics reflects phrasing used in the *Statistics and Registration Act 2007*[2], that refers to "official statistics that serve the public good". In doing so, it effectively consigned to history the, so-called, Rayner doctrine of the 1980s ("information should not be collected primarily for publication (but) primarily because government needs it for its own business)".

20. Despite the commitment in the Act to recognising statistics as a public good, many users outside government have told us that they *feel* that their needs have been given low priority – impacting directly on their work, and indirectly on their perception of the responsiveness and trustworthiness of the statistical system as a whole. One of the changes that the Authority would like to see is for statistical producer bodies to make more effort to reflect back to those users that their needs have been *identified and understood*, even if it is not currently practicable to meet them all. The reasons why it is not practicable to meet them would, of course, also have to be explained. That would help to establish both mutual trust and a dialogue that may in time lead to fresh insights for both producers and users.

21. The Authority recognises that positive steps have been taken in recent years to improve engagement, including better dialogue with user groups that are represented on the Statistics User Forum (SUF) (which is itself supported by the Royal Statistical Society, the Economic and Social Research Council and the Statistics Authority). There have also been improvements in online access to the statistics themselves. But there is evidence from the Authority's assessments of statistics against the Code of Practice, and from discussions with users and opinion-formers as part of this review, to suggest that there is still some way to go to achieving a level of user engagement that will more fully realise the value of official statistics.

22. There are clearly challenges for statistics producers in adopting a new approach to user engagement. The Code requires producers to identify the users and what use they do, or might, make of the statistics. The Authority believes that in many cases it may be simpler and more productive to concentrate on identifying *uses* – the types of decisions and actions that are being influenced by official statistics and focus on producing advice that supports those uses. For example, it would be unrealistic to draw up a list of all the *users* of crime statistics but it is not so difficult to identify the broad types of use and the related communities of users. The police use crime statistics mainly in the management of their resources; the public use crime statistics to assess risk of victimisation; local authorities often use crime statistics as a deprivation measure, and so on.

23. Once producers have identified uses and communities of users, they should seek to develop a relationship with them that enables them to:

    - *Make users aware of the statistics produced*. Ideally the statistics should be accessible to all, via easy-to-use websites and a "single entry point" for all statistics, for example, regardless of the identity of the producer. Additionally, many users may not go to the producers' websites or statistical releases to access their statistics but use other

[2] http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2007/ukpga_20070018_en_1

channels, such as the media. It is therefore important to improve the quality of media coverage by treating journalists as major users, and more open communication with journalists would seem to be a precursor to this.

- *Present statistics in ways that capture interest and that are likely to be understandable to users*. This may be achieved by improved websites, more dynamic presentations of data, greater use of over-arching frameworks that show relationships between relevant statistics and data sources, more insightful analysis of the statistical data, and better commentary about them.

- *Seek informed views from users on the range and quality of existing and future statistics*. Producers have a variety of mechanisms at their disposal that can be used in combination, including formal consultations, approaches that exploit the internet, and different types of meetings. A clear structure for user engagement, in terms of governance and coordination, will make it easier for users to know how to ensure that their voice is heard. And feedback from producers on ways that users' views have been taken into account, and the way that competing priorities have been reconciled, will assure users that they views do influence the service and bolster confidence in it more generally.

24. The Authority believes that the best approach to user engagement is likely to lie not in one big change in current practice but in a combination of measures tailored to different circumstances. The common thread to these measures would be to give greater weight to the value to be derived from supporting diverse uses of the statistics. A number of levers that might support such a shift in focus are now in place - an independent Authority; the enhanced role of the National Statistician in leading all parts of the Government Statistical Service (GSS); the new Code of Practice, enforced through formal Assessment, a stronger Statistics User Forum (SUF); and technology that allows faster and more open dialogue than ever before.

25. Public confidence in official statistics is known to be low. The latest figures presented in this report are no better than when measurement started in 2004. We believe that public attitudes are strongly influenced by wider attitudes to government and public institutions[3] and that there is no easy route to solving the problem for statistics on their own. But we do consider that the implementation of our recommendations will improve the value – and thus the trustworthiness – of the official statistics system, and will over time reinforce confidence in that system.

[3] see annex A

Context

> *"Statistics are produced to be used. Consultation and dialogue with users brings benefits to producers that are much wider than simply enabling producers better to assess their customer needs."*
>
> Statistics User Forum briefing note to
> Public Administration Select Committee, July 2008[4]

26. For the purposes of this review, we have adopted a broad interpretation of the term "user of statistics". This is discussed in more detail in Section 4. In short we consider a user to be any body, organisation or person whose decisions or actions are influenced by official statistics or messages derived from official statistics; even if they are not fully aware that the influence derives from statistical data. *Potential* users are taken to be any body or person who *might* be influenced by the statistics. It is sometimes suggested that the main users of statistics are analysts and others who work with the detailed data. We view such people as being part of the 'information production' chain, adding their own analyses to the product, rather than being end-users of the service themselves – they are not decision makers in this regard. These distinctions become important when looking at which mechanisms for user engagement are most likely to be effective.

27. Other concepts used in this report include:
    a. the "user voice" - the user's articulation of their views, opinions, experiences, needs and preferences;
    b. "engagement" - activities which allow statistical producers to provide information and to seek views and feedback from the users of their statistics;
    c. "consultation" - one form of engagement with users, generally relating to a formal process of gathering views;
    d. the "statistical value chain" – a conceptual model of the way in which statistical services are provided: identifying needs; collecting or compiling data; converting data into statistics; describing what the statistics show; publishing this commentary and the underlying statistics; and helping users understand the statistics and the messages contained therein.

28. This section presents a brief outline of the reasons why the Authority emphasises the user perspective, in terms of *value*, and then presents an historical perspective of user engagement in the UK statistical system, including recent developments. It then analyses the producer-user relationship in terms of the statistical value chain.

Realising the value of official statistics

29. To quote an earlier report on the subject of the use of official statistics[5]: "Were a balance sheet for official statistics to be prepared, the costs would be clear enough. The benefit, or value, would however be much more diffuse …

[4] http://www.rss.org.uk/pdf/PASC%20-%20SUF%20final%20evidence%20July%202008.pdf
[5] Statistics Commission, report 33 'The Use Made of Official Statistics', March 2007 http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/archive/statistics-commission-archive/research/report-33--the-use-made-of-official-statistics--march-2007-.pdf

it is possible that the vital asset that official statistics represent is undervalued …". The value of official statistics results from "the value to society of the decisions that are, or might in future be, informed by official statistics … the sorts of decisions in question might range from allocating resources within a local authority, changing bank interest rates, deciding on the location of a supermarket, setting premiums in the insurance industry, or choosing a school for a child".

30. The Authority believes that there is considerable potential to improve decision making by the greater, or more informed, use of official statistics; also, that relatively small enhancements to the range and presentation of official statistics could deliver significant additional benefits for decision making, and hence improve the value of the investment that government makes in statistics.

31. It is producers who are in a position to enable the value of statistics to be improved, but to do so requires them to deliver more valuable statistics – and the Authority therefore emphasises the need for producers to engage more effectively with organisations and individuals whose decisions and actions are informed by official statistics. The Code of Practice for Official Statistics says that:
    a. The production, management and dissemination of official statistics should meet the requirements of informed decision making by government, public services, business, researchers and the public *(Principle 1: Meeting user needs)*; and
    b. Effective user engagement is fundamental both to trust in statistics and securing maximum public value *(Protocol 1: User engagement).*

Historical perspective

32. Annex B – a paper presented to the October 2008 meeting of the International Association of Official Statisticians – explains why the statistical system has, historically, been dominated by a relatively narrow producer perspective rather than on the basis of a systematic review of the needs of a broad community of users: statistical priorities have been driven largely by the needs of central government. Indeed, the Rayner review of the early 1980s formalised this thinking, with its recommendation that 'information should not be collected primarily for publication (but) primarily because government needs it for its own business[6].

33. However, by the end of the 1990s there were calls for a stronger acknowledgement that official statistics should serve the whole of society, taking into account the needs of users outside Government. Incorporating the views of users was a cornerstone of the 1999 White Paper, Building Trust in Statistics,[7] which revised the administrative arrangements for official statistics.

34. The White Paper signalled a new era in the production of official statistics. It established an independent Statistics Commission, with a role in ensuring

[6] Great Britain, Privy Council Office (1981) Government Statistical Services, *Report of the Rayner Review*, London: HMSO
[7] Building Trust in Statistics – White Paper, October 1999
http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/about-the-authority/uk-statistical-system/history/key-historical-documents/index.html

that official statistics were responsive to public needs. It also introduced a new post, that of the National Statistician, who was given overall responsibility for all official statistics. These changes were intended to address the relatively low levels of public confidence in official statistics[8], which could at least in part be attributed to users feeling that their views were not being heard and their needs were not being taken into account.

35. The decentralised nature of the UK's statistical system, which was unchanged by the White Paper, has undoubtedly contributed to the producers' focus on government users of statistics, and remains a strong driver for this focus. Ministerial departments themselves produce the majority of official statistics in the UK. Government statisticians working in close proximity to policy colleagues have inevitably and naturally been influenced by their needs and priorities. Consultation with users outside central government is more difficult and, particularly when resources are limited, those internal users with most direct influence over statisticians are most likely to see their needs listened to, and met.

36. A continuing recognition that user engagement needed to be more effective has been the basis for many recent discussions, conferences and papers. These included the National Statistics Open Day in 2005 (*Addressing User Needs in the 21st Century*)[9]; a Statistics Commission report in 2007 (*The Use of Official Statistics*)[10]; and the Statistics User Forum Annual Conference in 2008 (*Transforming Official Statistics to Serve Society*)[11].

A new emphasis

37. The idea that official statistics should be used in ways that benefit the citizen directly or indirectly was formalised in the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*[12], which noted that official statistics should be produced "*to serve the public good*" (although the Act did not explicitly mention the role of users). This was the basis for the focus in the Code of Practice – the preparation of which was a statutory obligation on the Authority, under the Act - on meeting users' needs. The Code challenges producers to identify their users, to document their needs and experiences, to take account of their views in terms of presentation, quality, accessibility, data formats, to consult users before making changes to the statistics, and to seek feedback. The Code is, by international standards, notably user-centric.

38. The Statistics Authority's assessments of the extent to which sets of statistics comply with the Code of Practice[13], discussions with producers and users, and the results of interviews with opinion-formers[14] have all shown that external user engagement is still neither as coordinated nor as coherent as it needs to be if the value of official statistics is to be maximised.

[8] Green Paper, A Matter of Trust, 1998
http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/ons/govstat/chap-1.htm
[9] http://www.statistics.gov.uk/events/nsopenday2005/default.asp
[10] http://www.statscom.org.uk/C_1145.aspx
[11] http://www.rss.org.uk/main.asp?page=3013
[12] http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2007/ukpga_20070018_en_1
[13] http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/index.html
[14] See annex C

39. The initial assessment reports published by the UK Statistics Authority have tended to find evidence of good consultation with users within government but less awareness of, and dialogue with, a wider user base[15]. Engagement is also generally sporadic and piecemeal, which often makes it difficult for users to know how to get their views across. The lack of clear processes for user engagement across and within government departments has also become apparent.

40. The post of National Statistician has recently been redefined; the postholder is no longer directly responsible for the day-to-day running of the ONS, but instead focuses on coordination across government on statistical issues.

The statistical value chain

41. The stages in producing statistics - the "statistical value chain" – were summarised earlier.

42. At the planning stage, input from users can often provide crucial support for priority-setting – indeed, if priorities are established without reference to users then they might result in statistics being produced without sufficient consideration of their potential public value, or statistics being produced but not being made sufficiently accessible – again, restricting their value.

43. To increase the value of the planning process, producers should identify what users are likely to be interested in, ideally in advance of these interests becoming urgent demands. This type of *macro-level* user engagement should involve discussions about over-arching issues, strategic priorities, emerging needs, and how more detailed planning should be shaped. Feedback and transparency about what statistics are to be produced, and how priorities are being determined, are important in ensuring "user buy-in" to statistical plans.

44. User engagement should also take place at the next stage in the value chain, during the collection of data and the production of the statistics themselves. This *micro-level* engagement may concern aspects of methodology, classifications, definitions, coverage, timing and so on. These detailed issues can be very important to users – an apparently small change in a definition underpinning a statistic may be the difference between a relevant and an irrelevant statistic. Producers need an awareness of their users, and the uses made of the statistics, to ensure that any such changes are made in the light of their implications for the value to be derived from the statistics.

45. Users also need to be involved in decision making about the dissemination and communication of statistics, if their value is to be maximised. Producers should make users aware of the statistics being released; they should capture and retain users' interest, and try to ensure their understanding of the statistics at the time that they are released and subsequently. Although not always considered part of the statistical value chain, there is a role for producers to provide ongoing support to help users understand the strengths and limitations of statistics in relation to different uses.

[15] See assessment reports 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, 13 in particular at http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html

46. Throughout the engagement that underpins the production and dissemination of statistics, producers should seek feedback from users, and ‘play back’ the messages they are hearing, to ensure that the dialogue is effective.

Identifying uses and users

> *"Our primary task must be to find out who the users, actual and potential, of official statistics are, and what use they could or should make of them."*
>
> Sir Michael Scholar

47. In order to be able to tailor their services to their users' needs, producers must first be able to identify *who* their users are and must know *how* to make contact with them. Indeed the first practice in Protocol 1 in the Code of Practice requires producers to "Identify users. Document their statistical needs, and their wishes in terms of engagement."

Uses, users and value

48. It is widely understood that official statistics are produced to help inform government's decisions, for example about policy, public services and resource allocation. In addition statistics are used by organisations in marketing, resource allocation, monitoring, policy development, benchmarking, targeting, lobbying, bidding, planning services and for internal research purposes. The media uses statistics to measure the performance of government and public bodies. The citizen user is a consumer of the messages of these commentators, including making choices about hospitals or schools on the basis of them and, is known to make use of statistics about their own local area in particular.

49. We would not suggest that this is an exhaustive list of the uses and potential uses of official statistics. But it is illustrative, and reinforces the importance of the producer community engaging effectively with users in local government and the health sector, with business analysts, researchers and academics, voluntary organisations, and with the media and (as far as is practicable) with the general public, as a precursor to maximising public value from statistical activity.

Case study: Release of survey microdata for research purposes

Results from statistical surveys and the census are usually published in the form of aggregate tables. These tables are good for presenting the key characteristics of the data and identifying trends, but academic researchers who wish to perform multivariate analysis need access to detailed microdata or individual records. However, there is a tension between the provision of detailed microdata for analysis, and the requirement to ensure that information about individuals data remains confidential. The provision of 'identifying' data has varied over the years, and it is a topic about which there has been considerable discussion between producers and users.

One example of this was the dialogue surrounding the content of the Sample of Anonymised Records (SARs) drawn from the 2001 census. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) proposed to reduce the amount of detail in the SARs, reflecting concerns about the risk of disclosing the identity of individuals. Academic users felt that their intended use of the SARs would be affected by the loss of key variables, and preferred the same level of detail that had been provided in the 1991 SARs. Three methods of engagement were employed to negotiate a solution: inviting user representatives to sit on the project board to improve understanding between producers and users at a strategic level; convening a SARs working group for detailed discussion; and

continuing the dialogue through regular user group meetings. This discussion was effective, as it led to decisions about SARs that both parties found acceptable.
In this example, the user voice was strong to start with, so it was relatively easy for the producers to identify and engage with them. However, ONS has also sought opportunities to identify less vocal users. The UK Data Archive passes on queries from users to ONS, and ONS reviews the profile of users who download their data to get an idea for who their users are. ONS has also engaged with groups like the Statistics User Forum and delivered training on microdata release to raise awareness and help build contacts.

Documentation of uses and users

50. One of the pieces of evidence requested in formal assessments of statistics is a list of the main users of the statistics in question. The assessments carried out so far[16] have indicated that many producers do not hold such lists. Producers are also required to document the ways that their statistics are used - partly to be able to make informed and transparent decisions about the quality of the statistics they produce, and partly to help advise users and potential users how to use the statistics appropriately. The documentation that *is* available tends to focus on the uses made by the producer body itself.

51. The research on opinion formers' perceptions of official statistics highlighted a view that producers needed to be more proactive in making contact with users.[17] We support this view, which is consistent with the Code of Practice.

52. But what does the Code mean when it talks about documentation of users' needs? Such a document should include the types of uses being made of the statistics, in particular in relation to the types of decisions being made, who is making these decisions and at what level. This should then be related to the statistical information that is needed to support these uses, and the quality dimensions associated with the statistics in the context of these uses. Producers should also document the unmet needs of users, either in terms of the statistical information itself or to aspects of quality, and either provide plans to meet these needs or the reasons why they remain unmet. Such information should also be reinforced by case studies of actual use to illustrate the value of the statistics in a concrete way.

53. We **recommend** that bodies that produce official statistics should review and enhance their compliance with those aspects of the Code of Practice that relate to the understanding and use of official statistics by all sectors of society. In this context, the National Statistician may need to offer further guidance[18] [Recommendation 1].

Categorising users

54. The Authority recognises that it can be difficult to know who all users of a certain set of statistics are, in particular those accessing statistics via the media or websites without making any direct contact with the producers. However, the documentation of use and user needs referred to earlier should

[16] http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html
[17] See report in annex C
[18] See also paragraph 69

provide an indication of the types of users of the data in question. For the purposes of Code-compliance producers are not necessarily expected to have a comprehensive list of named users; it may instead be useful to think in terms of categories of users, particularly when planning how to approach them.

55. Many statistical offices in other countries successfully use some variation on the theme of categorisation in their approach to users.[19] In the UK context categorisation could be based on one or more of the following:
    a. Sector, i.e. central government, local government, private sector, research community, business, and so on;
    b. Type of use or decision made on the basis of the statistics;
    c. Level of interest in the statistical product – perhaps informed by the uses made and the nature of the contact with the producer;
    d. Value to society of the decisions made or potentially made on the basis of the statistics.

[19] See a summary of the findings from international evidence gathered in Annex D

Improving engagement with users

> *"Statistical priorities sometimes appear to be driven solely by the needs of government departments. They must be seen to be driven by the needs of society as a whole"*
>
> Official Statistics: Value and Trust, Statistics Commission[20]

56. Section 3.4 of this report outlined the importance of user engagement at distinct stages of the statistical value chain. This section explores the underlying issues in more detail, and makes some recommendations intended to increase the value of official statistics by improving the effectiveness of user engagement.

Increasing awareness of statistics

57. It (almost) goes without saying that users and potential users need to know, or be able to discover readily, what statistics are available on topics of interest to them. The Code requires producers to "publicise official statistics in ways that enable users to identify and access information relevant to their needs. Make access to official statistics as straightforward as possible by providing easy-to-use entry points"[21].

58. In the past the decentralised nature of the UK statistical system has been an obstacle to users seeking to access official statistics. For example, it is unhelpful for users to have to know which department produces statistics on a particular issue – a user wanting to find data on migration may go to the ONS website to find these data, not realising that both the Home Office and the Department for Work and Pensions also produce migration-related statistics. Developments such as the quarterly combined migration report[22], incorporating migration-related data from all these departments, are an improvement in this respect.

59. Many of the topics that official statistics describe are complicated, especially to the non-expert, and this complexity can make it difficult to understand the relationships between the different statistics available about a topic. Any misunderstandings risk inappropriate conclusions being drawn from the statistics, with a consequent adverse impact on the quality of the decisions being made on the basis of the statistics. We **recommend** that statistical Heads of Profession in government should work with subject matter experts to find ways to help the less-expert user understand how the statistics relate to the topic to which they refer [Recommendation 2]. We are aware that such a framework has been developed in relation to labour market statistics[23] (though we are not sure of the extent to which it is fully exploited), and we understand that corresponding frameworks are being developed in relation to

[20] Report 38 Official Statistics: Value and Trust, Statistics Commission, January 2008 http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/archive/statistics-commission-archive/research/report-38--official-statistics---value-and-trust--january-2008-.pdf
[21] Principle 8, Practice 4 in the Code of Practice
[22] http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=15230
[23] http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/quality/nat-stats-qual-revs/qual-revs-by-theme/labour-market/nsqr-11-rev-of-labour-stats.doc

migration statistics and crime statistics[24]. This work may help other producers in their own fields.

60. The National Statistics Publication Hub[25] also represents a substantial step forward in providing users with more easily accessible statistics. Cross-cutting theme pages on the Publication Hub have made it easier for users to find the data they need on their terms – that is, related to a specific topic rather than a specific statistical release.

61. However the Publication Hub only provides links to producers' websites – users must then find the data on these websites and this can often be a challenging task. The ONS website in particular consistently received negative feedback in the qualitative interviews with opinion-formers[26]. Although users appreciate the range of data available, they encounter problems when trying to navigate around the website to find the information required. Indeed, users noted that they often rely on search engines such as Google to find data instead, and they felt that the lack of usability of the website was a key barrier to engagement with producers and realising the value of the statistical product.

62. The ONS website is currently being re-developed, although this appears to have been given a low priority in the light of resource limitations and the development of the Publication Hub. We **recommend** that the ONS should give priority to improving its website, and should publish plans for doing so as soon as possible [Recommendation 3].

The role of the media

63. Many people obtain official statistics from the news media rather than from statistical releases or producers' websites - so the presentation of statistical information by the media is important in determining the final value that is realised.

64. The opinion formers contacted in connection with this review noted that the media has a key role to play, but thought that statistics were often misrepresented. Whilst there are a number of reasons for this misrepresentation, not all of which can be addressed by government statisticians, we think that producers should make sustained efforts to improve the presentation and communication of statistics to the media – as a necessary, albeit not sufficient condition to encourage the media to improve the communication of statistical messages to the general public, and hence to enhancing the value of the statistics.

65. Annex E summarises a review of statistical releases and the media coverage they generated. The relevant messages include:
- statisticians should develop a better understanding of the media and the circumstances in which journalists work (through media training, for example);
- statistical releases should contain clear and engaging messages;

[24] See *Migration Statistics: The Way Ahead?* and *Overcoming Barriers to Trust in Crime Statistics – England and Wales: Interim Report* at http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring-reports/index.html
[25] www.statistics.gov.uk
[26] See Annex C

- statisticians should be available and able to comment on the statistics; and
- press offices and/or statisticians should monitor the media coverage generated by statistical releases in order to understand better what 'works' and what does not.

66. More generally we see scope to improve relationships between statisticians and journalists, founded on better understanding and better dialogue. There are a number of ways in which the GSS might engage more effectively and more systematically with journalists. We **recommend** that the National Statistician should take steps, possibly in conjunction with the Royal Statistical Society, to improve dialogue with journalists - including providing suitable statistical training for student journalists; arranging courses/events and visits for journalists to statistical offices or departments; and establishing a dedicated telephone service [Recommendation 4]. This last measure in particular could underline the independence of statistical activity from the policy making process.

67. We note that the RSS run statistical courses for journalists and support this work. There are also international examples[27] of some of these recommended measures. For example, Statistics Canada holds a number of workshops and training courses for a variety of groups, of which journalists are one, in order to improve statistical literacy. In addition, a number of journalists sit on the Canadian National Statistical Council. And ISTAT, the Italian statistical office, also has a specific enquiry point for journalists on its website.[28]

Exploiting the web

68. Improvements in analytical tools, visualisation software and database design, supported by increasingly fast internet connections, facilitate the presentation of statistics in ways that were once unimaginable and that offer the potential to extract additional value from them. For example, dynamic population pyramids[29] enable users to understand readily the changing population structure of the UK. And the Neighbourhood Statistics website[30], pulling together detailed statistics on a variety of topics within specific geographical areas, has added to the value of each of these sources when considered in isolation.

69. But such developments seem to be the exception rather than the norm. Indeed, many of the people interviewed as part of the research among opinion-formers[31] felt that statisticians did not succeed in providing engaging, interesting and contextual statistical information, even in statistical bulletins. Producer bodies need to present statistics in ways that capture users' interest and improve their understanding, something which is required in the Code of Practice. Web-based sources of official statistics, designed and managed from a user perspective, seem to offer great potential to present data in an easily accessible way and in a format that the public could readily absorb. To complement Recommendations 1, 2 and 5, we **recommend** that the National

[27] see annex D
[28] https://contact.istat.it/richiesta_press.php
[29] http://www.statistics.gov.uk/populationestimates/flash_pyramid/default.htm
[30] http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/
[31] See annex C

Statistician should commission a review of the scope to use innovative technology, including the latest web developments, to enhance the accessibility to, and understanding of, official statistics [Recommendation 5].

70. Additionally, users may be best placed to define how they would like to see statistics presented. We understand that the development of a new user-designed, user-managed website to provide direct access to statistical material is being explored by the Royal Statistical Society, and we will support this and any other such investigations.

Seeking views on statistics

71. Discussions with producers and users, and evidence from assessments, have confirmed that much user engagement does take place - but that the effectiveness of it, from a user perspective, varies greatly. In many cases there is a gap between the nature of the engagement that users want and what producers are currently offering. An effective approach to user engagement rests on its transparency and acceptability to users. If it is not understood, or if it is not regarded by users as effective, then there is a risk that this will become a self-fulfilling prophesy, and that users will 'switch off'.

72. Contacts with international statistical offices[32] and discussions with producers suggest that there is a fairly clear range of mechanisms available, although the format and structure of these may differ. Annex F outlines some of the most common mechanisms of user engagement, each of which has potential to help users articulate their views. These include
- formal written consultations
- official user councils or advisory bodies
- informal user groups
- personal contact and meetings with users
- market research
- internet tools and solutions
- newsletters
- general enquiry lines, customer relationship management.

73. Not all of these methods are applicable in all circumstances – some will be more appropriate to engagement at different points of the statistical value chain; some will be more useful in gaining an in depth understanding of users' needs about particular issues, whilst others will have more value in simply updating users about developments.

74. Methods of engagement need to be fit-for-purpose – to be adapted for different circumstances (as noted above), and different types of users. There are many different user communities, for example, and not all of them have the capacity to organise themselves effectively and to respond to formal consultations, or to attend meetings.

75. The publication by producers of an annual draft statistical plan will typically involve a written document and a formal consultation[33]. If appropriate this might be followed up with a public meeting or, for larger projects, such as

[32] See summary in annex D
[33] See for example the recent consultation on the Ministry of Justice's statistical work programme for 2010 http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/statistics-comment.htm

2011 Population Census described below, a series of roadshows to allow users to provide feedback and to discuss issues directly with producers.

76. Ongoing changes to existing statistical series may be more ad-hoc and the web could be used to notify users and obtain feedback.

77. In some cases no single mechanism of user engagement used in isolation will provide the required intensity of user engagement, particularly as the user base for any one set of statistics may be quite diverse and widespread. The case study of the 2011 Census user engagement below illustrates the range of mechanisms used and the different stages in the process.

78. The publication, by producers, of user engagement plans could bridge the gap between expectations and actions. Such plans could outline the different methods of engagement proposed by the producer in relation to each user, or type of user, and provide a clear explanation of the ways in which users can approach the producers with their views. The Authority suggests that the National Statistician incorporate the idea of user engagement plans in producing guidance for producers to improve their compliance with the relevant sections of the Code (see Recommendation 1). Further, we believe that it is important to seek users' views on the development of user engagement plans.

Case study – 2011 Population Census

The Census has a widespread and diverse user base and this has been reflected in the structure of ONS' engagement with users about the 2011 Census.

The engagement carried out by the ONS was largely defined by the nature of work being carried out during the development of the Census. Where greater input from users was sought, such as in the development of questions and decisions about outputs, more intensive user consultation and discussion took place. In the more technical and operational phases of the census development, engagement has tended to take the form of information-sharing.

The Census user engagement has demonstrated that different consultation methods have their own advantages: formal consultation provided a solid basis for (accountable) decision-making, while roadshows provided an opportunity for interested parties to hear others' perspectives. The Census team then used advisory groups and other communication networks to probe further on particular issues to ensure that they understood the evidence. Used in combination, these methods were considered very effective in highlighting and acting on issues of concern.

The Census team also experimented with "newer" forms of engagement such as via web questionnaires, online discussion forums and a wiki-style website which enabled interested parties to add their own comments and thoughts.

Governance and structure

79. The decentralised nature of statistics production in the UK, with a large number of producer bodies each engaging with users in their own way, and

the different levels of interest amongst different groups of users in influencing statistical production, has resulted in a relatively uncoordinated approach to user engagement.

80. In the 1980s a Statistical Advisory Committee, including user representation, played this role but it was discontinued because it was not perceived to be effective. More recently, an informal Producers and Users Group provided opportunities for representatives of the user community to discuss their priorities with senior management in ONS, but this group, by common consent, was not particularly influential. The National Statistician has recently established a Statistics Supplier and User Group (StatSUG), jointly chaired by the National Statistician and the chair of the Statistics User Forum (SUF), and with a remit to provide a forum for engagement at a strategic level between producers and non-government users of official statistics. And the Statistics Authority is currently considering how best to formally involve user representatives, perhaps by extending the membership of its Committee for Official Statistics.

81. A structure of 'theme groups' was established in 2000, to increase coordination across cross-cutting themes, and to provide an opportunity for producers to seek the views of users at the planning stage. The effectiveness of theme groups has recently been reviewed, and we understand that newly appointed theme leaders are being invited by the National Statistician to produce a user engagement strategy for all statistics within their theme. This has the primary intention of improving statistical planning across the GSS and providing a more coherent user engagement structure.

82. Some users – those who might be characterised as professional, or 'heavy' users – are organised into a network of User Groups, and represented by the Statistics User Forum (which is affiliated to the Royal Statistical Society, through its "User Theme"). The Authority supports the RSS's focus on users, and indeed has seconded a member of staff to the RSS to support it. We **recommend** that the National Statistician should encourage producers to work actively with SUF (and the user group structure), to help improve its user engagement role [Recommendation 6]. This could for example involve facilitating meetings, offering speakers, being proactive in building networks and supplying information to members.

Statistics User Forum (SUF)

The Royal Statistical Society (RSS) established the SUF to provide effective means by which users and producers of official statistics can engage. The Forum currently has 37 member organisations representing a very wide range of users. The Forum is recognised as representative of the diversity of the user community, and as a source of informed opinion. It has provided responses to a number of consultations and parliamentary enquiries on the UK statistical system. SUF annual conferences generally attract a wide range of users (and producers) and have discussed issues such as regional statistics, statistics from administrative sources, and transforming official statistics to match society.

Under the existing structure, there are individual user groups covering a particular area of user interest (some sectoral, some cross-cutting) with SUF operating as an umbrella body. SUF is currently seeking to expand its coverage amongst groups (such as the 'citizen' user) that are currently under-represented,

and in statistical areas, such as education, energy and the environment, where user groups have not yet been established.

83. The point was made earlier that it can be difficult for producers to engage with users given their diversity – and suggestions were made as to how this might be addressed. Web-based communication is usually open, transparent and accessible to all, and offers producer organisations the means to reach a wide range of users and, in particular, those who are not involved in the structure of formal user groups or who are not able to meetings. The development of a web-based user-producer forum would enable users to propose ideas to improve the statistics and the service they experience, and to see what others are requesting - potentially including those in central government - and would enable producers to explain publicly the decisions that have been taken, in the context of user requirements.

ScotStat

The Scottish Government hosts a user engagement website called ScotStat[1]. The website brings together data producers, suppliers and users and is used as an information dissemination tool, a consultation forum and a resource to support the meetings of committees in a number of topic areas. The website can also be used to track users of statistics and to identify gaps in engagement. Scottish statisticians are currently working to increase membership and activity among the research and academic communities.

84. Such a forum might need to be overseen centrally, to moderate comment, and to identify any recurring or larger cross-cutting issues, which could be discussed at meetings between representatives of users and producers. We **recommend** that bodies producing official statistics work together, coordinated by the National Statistician, and with the Royal Statistical Society, SUF and others to establish such a forum [Recommendation 7]. The Authority understands that SUF is also considering the development of a web-based approach to communication about statistical needs between users and producers, and it will support this proposal as it develops.

Annex A Report from NatCen on Public Confidence in Official Statistics

Annex B

Trends in User Needs[i]

Richard Laux and Richard Alldritt, UK Statistics Authority.

1. The changing nature of users and uses

1.1 From the time of the Domesday Book (compiled in England in 1086 to ensure the payment of taxes) through to the late 19th Century, the *users* of statistics tended to be people in positions of authority or influence. They often took it on themselves to collect as much statistical information as they thought they needed. Their needs were clear to them – whether it was to collect revenue or to bring about social change. In 2004, Len Cook, the then UK National Statistician, gave a lecture about the "extraordinary contribution to public life" of the Victorian statistical movement ad the important role played in this by the Royal Statistical Society.

1.2 Moving on to more recent times, the late twentieth century saw a massive expansion in the state's capacity to generate statistical data and a consequent, and progressive, focus among the producers of statistics on filling 'gaps' in the statistical tapestry.

1.3 Whilst this was indeed progress it can be argued that it led also to a loss of focus on what users of statistics really needed. If a subject could be identified on which statistics *might* be needed, the priority was to fill that gap regardless of whether doing so was driven by a balanced assessment of user requirements. The UK's decentralised statistical structure, with many separate funding streams and separate lines of accountability, undoubtedly contributed to this focus on production rather than service.

1.4 The growth in the supply of statistics also meant that the user was increasingly bombarded with statistical material from a multitude of sources. Where once there had been only one set of statistics on consumer prices, say, now there were more and more versions and variations. The statistical users of the 1980s and 1990s can have had little idea where some of the statistics came from; and the many producers of those statistics can have had little idea who was using their products or for what. Whilst this observation is made in relation to the United Kingdom, which may have been at one extreme in terms of lack of central control, we suspect some elements of this picture may have been true in many countries.

1.5 As with any service industry, a loss of focus on the user prompts criticism and the more recent history, at least in the UK, has been about trying to re-connect the producer and the user of official statistics and help the producers respond more systematically and effectively to changing user priorities.

1.6 Even where official statistics had been well-focused on the needs of major users, these needs were starting to evolve more rapidly and are now changing much faster than twenty years ago. The UK's membership of the European Union progressively re-defined the requirement for broad areas of our official statistical production. Domestically, there was also a major shift towards using official statistics to measure progress against performance indicators for all public services. And

[i] Paper presented at the 2008 Conference for International Association for Official Statistics in Shanghai

statistics were increasingly relied on, whether performance indicators had been defined or not, to identify the need for, and justify, government intervention (in terms of policy or resources) targeted at particular social or geographical groups - for example, the need for central government to make repeated interventions in the management of the National Health Service.

1.7 At the same time as the importance of statistics to this sort of national decision-making was recognised, an increasingly wide range of other user requirements were also seen to be valid and important. From the early 1990s, the UK government formally recognised that official statistics are used, not just by government to make policy and run local services, but also by the general public in holding government to account; by the private sector in building an efficient economy and by the voluntary sector in providing much needed services. *All* of these uses constituted a public good.

1.8 Various reports pointed to the use of official figures by business, pressure groups, the voluntary sector, and the individual person, for decision-making purposes that included planning, marketing, resource allocation, monitoring, policy making, benchmarking, targeting, and many other processes that benefited the citizen directly or indirectly. Among the wider uses of statistics there was growing recognition of their importance in evaluating and assessing the processes involved in implementing policy, providing a metric for the performance of government and public bodies, and for scientific, research and analytical work in many fields.

1.9 This very broad concept of the value of official statistics has now been formalised in the new UK Statistics and Registration Service Act, which talks about the obligation to produce official statistics that serve the 'public good'. This phrase embraces all the uses mentioned above.

1.10 There is a natural corollary to this focus on the public good. Official statisticians must now legitimise their role by demonstrating that they fulfil their part in the informal contract that governs their work – taxpayers support statisticians' activity and provide survey and administrative data; in return statisticians provide a service that is responsive to the needs of all parts of the society where there is benefit to the public.

2. The changing nature of society

2.1 The 19th Century saw fundamental change in almost every aspect of society which official statistics might be expected to measure. By way of examples, there were great changes in population and migration, international trade, national wealth, defence spending, construction, welfare investment, agricultural production, manufacturing, household income, crime, life expectancy and expectation of good health, education, borrowing, public investment, research and development, and the built environment.

2.2 Perhaps prompted by all this social upheaval, the foundations of the modern official statistics system were also laid in the 19th century. The statistical tools established at that time were designed to measure the substantial social and economic changes and many of these tools are still in use today. The UK's population estimates are still based on the system of registration of births and deaths established in 1836, and on census data obtained using the same basic methods as established in our first modern census of 1851.

2.3 The 21st century, so far, seems to have had a different dynamic to the 19th century. There is perhaps more social stability but some very important changes are happening nonetheless. Western nations have broadly stable population numbers, but with significant periods of economic migration and asylum seeking. Public sector expenditure hovers around 40 - 60% across Europe but there are significant relative changes in tax and spend through economic cycles. The UK economy is relatively stable (or at least has been), but with important relative changes in the role of the financial markets and other tertiary industries. Life expectancy growth has slowed, but there remain substantial differences in expectations of healthy life according to social class and place. Overall standards in education are reasonably stable, but substantial differences in schools' standards exist within small areas. National crime rates are stable, but policing and crime prevention are focussed on specific areas and narrow sub-sections of the population where worrying extremes are found. New concerns – about climate change, the cost and availability of transport, the credit crunch, and the risk of pandemic disease, among many others, have perhaps not yet usurped more established social and economic anxieties (crime, incomes or housing costs) but are steadily rising in the public consciousness.

2.4 It can be argued that economic statistics have adapted reasonably well to the different dynamics of the current century although some might note that the service sector, particularly the global financial sector, is not yet well enough measured; or that the measurement of public sector productivity is not yet sufficiently developed. But taking a broad sweep, economic statistics are founded on indicators of trends, rather than absolute measures. The error in the measure of, say, foreign direct investment, is recognised by users as less important than the direction of travel of the indicator. And different countries have achieved a good measure of common practice with most having National Accounts founded on the SNA, and also having associated economic indicators of relative change in key features of the economy.

2.5 In retrospect, social statistics may be seen not to have adapted or developed as well. It may now be time to think in terms of developing a framework for Social Accounts with key social indicators, as a tool-set more adapted to measuring relative, not net, social changes. However, the test will be one of utility. We must not produce a social accounting framework because we can, or because we would find it interesting. It must be because steps in that direction are seen to serve the user; and through helping the user to serve the public good.

3. Quality of the statistics

3.1 As statistics have become more used and more influential, so the demands to improve their quality have increased. Improvements have been achieved in terms of relevance, coherence, timeliness, and accessibility.

Relevance

3.2 As noted above, the trend during the 20th Century has been a shift from producing whatever statistics could be collected (on a broad subject), to products tailored to specific user interests. At the same time, in both the national and European contexts, there is an inevitable tension between making statistics relevant to government users and making them relevant to other users – this is all the more acute in an era of limited resources available (from government) for the production of statistics.

3.3 Of course, many developments do meet the needs of a broad range of users. A recent example of this is the Neighbourhood Statistics System, designed to bring

together a range of social and socio-economic data on different policy domains – education, health, welfare, crime etc - from a variety of sources. The intention was to provide an evidence base to inform decisions about policy interventions and resource allocation (under the generic heading of Neighbourhood Renewal), and also to provide the public with information to inform their own local (housing, schooling, voting) decisions.

3.4 And the UK's National Statistical Institute – the Office for National Statistics (ONS) - has established the UK Centre for the Measurement of Government Activity, to strengthen the capability of ONS to publish authoritative and coherent measures of change over time in the inputs, output and productivity of government funded services. Again, this serves the needs of both government and citizens.

Coherence

3.5 In recent years, users have demanded greater coherence in all aspects of official statistics – their planning, their collection and analysis, and their reporting. The official statistical community has initiated a number of innovations designed to improve coherence:

- collection: harmonisation of survey definitions and classifications; the new integrated household survey
- analysis and reporting: where a phenomenon is described by multiple sources, there are considerable opportunities to present rounded pictures of broad social and economic domains – ONS produces integrated labour market statistics publications, and integrated releases of migration and related statistics, for example

3.6 However it has made less progress on the development of coherent statistical planning, largely because of the decentralised and devolved organisation of statistics in the UK. Nevertheless this is a priority area for the new UK Statistics Authority. It is picked up below.

Timeliness

3.7 Economic competition has led to a demand for ever-quicker flows of information to support rapid decision-making. This has applied to economic statistics. To meet EU strategies there has been sustained effort to produce estimates of Principal European Economic Indicators (PEEIs) more quickly, benchmarked against competitors such as the USA. More generally, new IT and survey processing systems have led to the quicker production of estimates as the demand for 'timeliness' has become ingrained. For example, estimates from the UK's Labour Force Survey were produced 15 weeks after the survey reference period in 1993; today they are produced after only 6 weeks.

Accessibility

3.8 Major improvements in the accessibility of statistics have resulted from developments in ICT. The growth of the internet in particular has enabled users of statistics to access statistics more efficiently and effectively than ever before.

4. The suitability of the statistical service

4.1 In UK public services the trend is increasingly one of tailoring public services (the provision of social benefits, health services and so on) to be convenient to the customer/user rather than simply providing the service in a way that is convenient for the provider – sometimes called citizen-centric service provision. As identified in

section 1, in the world of official statistics a similar though perhaps less developed trend can also be seen. This has the potential to support us in legitimating our statistical activities by being seen to provide a statistical service that demonstrably serves the public good rather than (solely) the imperatives of the government of the day.

4.2 This has manifested itself in a number of ways; a few examples illustrate the point.

4.3 *Trust and confidence* – the debate in the 1980s about the appropriateness of measures of the out-of-work claiming unemployment benefit (the 'claimant count') – as a measure of unemployment did lasting damage to the confidence of the public in the integrity of UK official statistics. The introduction of National Statistics in 2000, and a new Code of Practice in 2002 were important developments, though the most high profile stage in addressing questions of trust was the Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007), which introduced an independent organisation – the UK Statistics Authority - to replace the role of Ministers in the running of ONS and the strategic oversight of the statistical production and dissemination across government.

4.4 *Information* - In the UK, users are not so much demanding new data now as better access and advice. In a busy world in which people are bombarded with information of varying degrees of quality, users want objective and clear communication of the key messages in official statistics, and better access to statistical products including by exploiting new technologies.

4.5 *New products and new methods* - Where users *do* want new data, it is often a matter of wanting the same *type* of information as before but smaller geographies, or longer time series, or more reliable estimates. And the growing diversity of user needs, especially from the research sector, has led to a demand for bespoke products which ONS has not been able to meet directly. Instead ONS has facilitated others' analysis of its microdata, by increasing access to microdata. This has had spin-off benefits for producers too – for example, by producing bespoke research datasets to enable methodologists to improve their understanding of the characteristics of survey non-respondents, in order to improve survey taking and processing techniques.

5. Implications of these trends

Identifying and engaging with users

5.1 The statistical system needs to take more active steps to understand who its users (and potential users) are, if it is to understand the uses to which they want to put official statistics and more generally give users the opportunity to influence the way the system develops. Relationships need to be close enough for users to accept that there are limitations on what producers can achieve in a given time, and that prioritisation inevitably means that some needs are not met – but that prioritisation nonetheless takes account of the full range of user needs.

5.2 This is not easy. ONS has a good understanding of its users in central and local government, and strong links with the academic and research communities, and the business sector. And the links between ONS and the Statistics User Forum – an umbrella organisation bringing together the existing sectoral user groups – provide an opportunity for users to influence the direction of official statistics.

5.3 However, it takes time and sustained effort to build an effective relationship with a broad community of users, and in an era of scarce resources it can be hard to convince budget holders that the investment is worthwhile given the intangible benefits that accrue. Nevertheless these arguments must be made because if producers lose contact with users they lose their support and without that support budget holders will be even less sympathetic to statistical investment.

5.4 The relationship between the business sector, and official statistics, is a case in point. Some business representatives consider surveys to be an administrative burden, and press for their reduction. Others, in contrast, regard the government's economic statistics as either directly important in running their own businesses, or indirectly recognise that their best interests are served by enabling the government to manage the economy informed by the statistics that result from the data they provide – and hence see survey completion as a price worth paying. Given the dependence on business surveys for the production of economic statistics it is vital that ONS engages with the business sector effectively.

5.5 The governance of an effective relationship with users is also difficult – issues include perceptions of the importance of different user communities, and the extent to which they are able to organise themselves effectively. It is all-too-easy for central government users to dominate the relationship with the NSI in a way that appears exclusive to other users.

5.6 The UK statistical community has addressed this primarily by working with representatives of the Statistics User Forum (SUF) to establish a Producers and Users Group (PUG). This provides an opportunity for users to discuss strategic developments in official statistics, and progress against users' priorities[i], with senior officials in ONS and from across the wider Government Statistical Service. PUG meets about three times a year and is still evolving, but it provides an infrastructure to ensure that (organised) users' views are heard.

5.7 Emphasising the importance of user focus, the chair of the UK Statistics Authority – Sir Michael Scholar – has talked about it being the Authority's role to encourage statistical planning with user engagement at its core, and about the need to engage with users in the Authority's scrutiny work, by establishing a systematic dialogue with the many user communities.

Disseminating statistics to meet the needs of users

5.8 It is well understood that users of official statistics place great emphasis on:

- ready access to statistics – requiring a well designed web presence
- descriptions of new statistical results that are clear, unambiguous, and objective – requiring standards for presentation, and a monitoring role
- rounded quality information – identifying the strengths and limitations of statistical series, written in ways that a wide range of users can understand, and including clear descriptions of the uses to which the statistics should (and should not) be put.
- understanding the environment in which the statistics are produced – requiring relevant Codes of Practice to be written in ways that users can readily understand, and ideally written with input from the user community.

5.9 The UK official statistics community has made a number of notable advances in its dissemination of statistics, including:

- a suite of re-designed websites which describe the UK Statistics Authority and the ONS, and the new Publication Hub (which acts as a single port-of-call for users wanting to access any statistical releases produced by any government department or agency; the commentary in these Releases will follow standards determined by the National Statistician)
- standards for the presentation of information about revisions in National Accounts First Releases – setting out when revisions are expected (and the rationale)[ii]
- enhanced personalisation of statistics – the Personal Inflation Calculator[iii], launched in 2007, enables individuals to approximate their own inflation rate based on their own spending patterns
- greatly enhanced visualisation of statistics – ONS has identified the need to bring statistical data to life by, for example, exploiting geographical information systems and producing dynamic population projections[iv].

5.10 Another major improvement occurred at the time of the introduction of the National Statistics Code of Practice (in 2002). A policy of free access to headline statistics via the internet was adopted (with charging restricted to situations in which additional processing was required, or to cover the printing costs of reference volumes).

5.11 But whilst ONS has a good story to tell, it cannot afford to rest on its laurels. Users' needs will develop both spontaneously and in response to technological developments – such as the development of 'web 2.0' which is likely to lead to even greater use of (official) statistics as part of everyday discussion and decision-making.

Planning and prioritising

5.12 The absence of a coherent planning system across UK official statistics was mentioned earlier. In recent years ONS has published National Statistics Work Programmes, which have set out the scale of activity in both cross-cutting terms, and for individual themes, and this activity has typically been cross-government (that is to say, inter-agency). However, these plans have been in large part the aggregation of Departments' existing plans, brigaded together for the convenience of users.

5.13 The UK Statistics Authority is currently considering an approach to statistical planning characterised by elements of top-down planning (at a strategic level by the Authority) and bottom-up planning (by producers, in consultation with users), with the whole process 'moderated' by a committee of senior managers across the Government Statistical Service.

5.14 Of course there is some good practice already. For example, there is a "4 Nations Working Group" which ensures that statisticians who support the UK government (represented by ONS), and the Devolved Administrations in each of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, are aware of each others' plans and developments, so that harmonisation and comparability can be 'designed in' to statistical activities as far as possible.

5.15 And ONS has invested significant effort over the last year in developing its own Work Programme for 2008-12, which required considerable prioritisation. The objectives were to develop a prioritised list of outputs that would be relevant to stakeholders and provide value for money. The first step towards prioritisation was to identify the costs of outputs. This required a new costing method, mapping the costs

of all the various dependencies across the organisation to the range of outputs, rather than the previous approach of allocating costs by organisational unit. Criteria were then developed to enable the scoring of outputs, with some weighting applied to certain criteria such as cost, benefits and known user needs. There then followed a multi-phased consultation exercise with all those with an interest in what ONS does and how it does it. ONS invited views on which of its products and services were most important, how they could be improved, which areas should (in their opinion) be given the highest priority for new investment, and on whether there were some areas where ONS could do less than it does now. ONS also welcomed views on innovative ways of funding its work. The results were then processed and a matrix of contributors, outputs and comments was compiled. This enabled decisions to be taken on producing a Work Programme reflecting an informed balance of priorities against available funding.

5.16 Finally, it is worth noting that ONS has actively chosen to extend its partnership working, not least as a response to its own resource limitations in terms of cash and expertise. So for example ONS works closely with academic experts[v] to help develop Samples of Anonymised Records (SARs) from the population censuses – using others' skills to help develop products that will benefit the research community, whilst ensuring that confidentiality is maintained.

Horizon scanning

5.17 To continue to provide relevant statistics, we need to know what users are likely to be interested in, preferably well before the demands emerge. Of course this is easier said than done, and it is hard to justify allocating scarce resources to topics which do not have a current user/sponsor. But it is important to look ahead, to ask what will be important in 10 years time, and how to consider the likely evidence base that will be needed. With this objective in mind the Statistics Authority has decided[vi] as a priority to undertake research into both the arrangements for longer-term planning, and the issues currently on the horizon.

5.18 ONS takes this type of activity seriously, recognising the need to be ahead of the game. The National Statistician has the rank of 'Permanent Secretary' (the highest level) in the UK Civil Service, and attends weekly meetings with her peers who lead policy ministries. This gives her a unique opportunity to hear about the issues that Government regards as future challenges for the country.

5.19 In addition, ONS conducts occasional horizon scanning exercises, as part of the UK public sector's wider activity. And staff of the UK Statistics Authority are encouraged to engage in public debate about the future of statistics.

5.20 Finally, the European Statistical System (ESS) has established a high level Task Force (TF) charged with considering statistical challenges facing the ESS as a whole. This TF is considering, in discussion with a range of stakeholders, the future needs for statistics in major domains such as migration, labour market, and the economy, for example in recognition of the actual and potential implications of globalisation. The TF is also looking at methodological developments needed to meet these needs most effectively, whilst corresponding groups are considering resource and organisational issues. Staff of the Statistics Authority are closely involved with this activity, party as a contribution to the ESS but also with a weather eye on demands for statistics at the national level.

5.21 ONS is aware that there are gaps in the evidence base needed to inform the debate around pensions and pension reform. Filling these gaps will require research

into some complex areas, such as the estimation of pension wealth, which will need to make use of expertise across the academic and government areas. ONS is exploring the idea for a virtual Wealth and Pensions Centre as a mechanism for taking forward a programme of work needed to provide the required evidence base. This approach would complement the establishment in 2007 of a Centre for Demography, the aims of which included improving estimates of migration, in response to strong user demands.

5.22 More generally, it is recognised that one of the most effective ways of preparing to meet future statistical needs is to ensure that producers have access to administrative data held across the public sector, and that they have suitable and flexible statistical infrastructures. The new Statistics Act should enable ONS to acquire administrative data held elsewhere, provided they can make convincing cases to Parliament about their needs. This is vitally important, although the climate of opinion in the UK about privacy may make it hard to convince Parliamentarians about the desirability of data sharing for statistical purposes.

5.23 In terms of a future statistical infrastructure, ONS is considering the linkage of 2011 Census data with administrative data in order to form the basis of a social statistics spine. This will need an organising framework, real access to data (political commitment), and investment in training and technology

6. Conclusions

6.1 Until the advent of advanced technology, users of statistics mostly just wanted statistics; and they would go out and collect the data themselves if they needed to. Now the world has changed: there has been an explosion in administrative data sources, and users often have access to more statistics than they can comprehend - and so they need help in navigating the sea of statistics of varying provenances that is available via the internet.

6.2 The role and culture of official statisticians has to change to match this changing requirement. Conducting sample surveys is no longer the primary activity, although we must not lose those skills. The first responsibility of an official statistician now must be to develop a deep understanding of all the statistical material relevant to a particular subject whether from official sources or not; be able to synthesise the data into the most useful estimates of particular quantities; and provide a trusted service – in the form of statistical products and advice - to a wide range of users.

6.3 Where there remains a mismatch between user needs (or anticipated needs) and the available statistical data, the statistician must look at a wide range of options for meeting the requirement. Traditional surveys remain an option but it may be more effective, and potentially less expensive, to adapt or develop the administrative sources managed by public services. But that often requires the close involvement of authorities that are not statistical authorities; and these people will have priorities other than the production of statistical information. So the planning of statistical services is becoming increasingly a matter for the whole of government rather than just the NSI.

6.4 Official statisticians are civil servants, and are used to discussing their statistics primarily with other civil servants who are familiar with operating in an environment in which different sources of information have different strengths and limitations. But this may well be less so for the wider user community – which puts the onus on official statisticians to understand that some users need practical, hands-

on support in making informed use of statistics. In turn it will be important for the statistical community to skill itself and organise itself to meet this imperative.

6.5 It will also be increasingly important for the user community to organise itself in order both to lobby official statisticians, and to provide direct support itself to users. But the user community is becoming increasingly diverse and fragmented, with web2.0 concepts (such as wikis) proving irresistible. Some users want to be engaged with directly by the producers, and mechanisms to enable this are vital. But other users want to operate more passively, so producers have to be more imaginative in catering for their needs.

6.6 It is traditional to define a national statistical system in terms of the organisations responsible for production and for oversight/regulation. In the 21st Century we need to put the user at the heart of the statistical system – and then work through the implications for planning, production, dissemination, and adding value.

Annex C Report from Ipsos Mori

Annex D Summary of user engagement activities in other countries

Introduction

1. In order to explore international experience of user engagement, the Authority's Monitoring & Assessment team sent a questionnaire to the National Statistical Institutes in 32 countries. The questionnaire aimed to gather evidence of other countries' approaches to, and experience of, user engagement and, in particular, to identify whether there were any particularly novel or innovative methods of user engagement that might be relevant in the UK.

2. The summary below highlights areas of commonality between approaches in different countries and focuses on examples of good practice where found. [We have arranged for the 32 questionnaires to be lodged on the website of the United Nations Statistical Division, in the interests of furthering international knowledge of national statistical practices].

3. The total number of responses was 22, spread across 17 countries. Responses were received from: Sweden; Denmark; Norway; Italy; Austria; ;Czech Republic; Slovak Republic; Hungary; Greece; Cyprus; Lithuania; Latvia; Romania; United States (individual responses received from six bureaux; - Energy, Economic Analysis, Census, Treasury, Agriculture and Justice); Canada; Australia; Mexico.

[Add text on the Authority's reaction/response to international experience]

Identifying users

4. The two most common methods used by countries to identify users of their statistics were (i) logging requests for information; and (ii) via events such as user councils, user groups or seminars. Almost all countries employed at least one of these methods. Different systems were used for logging requests for information. Some countries had central databases, allowing customer service staff to record user details or users themselves to register their details via the internet. In one country, registration was mandatory for users requesting information.

5. Roughly three quarters of the respondent organisations used some form of user survey. Most of these surveys were directed at users already known to the producer, and aimed to find out more about the needs and characteristics of users. Surveys that aimed to identify *unknown* users achieved this in one of two

ways; either by including a survey alongside statistical releases, or as a 'pop-up' website survey which users were asked to complete when accessing particular statistical releases online.

6. Other methods for identifying users included:
    - Monitoring the press, blogs and other media. The systematic monitoring of media outlets was common. One NSI mentioned that it uses the specialised software package *Vocus*[ii] to track and analyse the use of its statistics in the media.
    - Analysis of website statistics, drawn from digital tracks left by users accessing the website. This information is fairly broad – typically it is possible to identify only the country of origin and domain type (for example education or government) – but can serve as a general indicator of usage.
    - Facilities for users to register an interest and receive updates. Some countries maintained a series of mailing lists by subject theme, for example one list for press releases, 19 separate lists by topic area, and one general newsletter. This allows producers to keep their users informed of relevant developments while at the same time identifying who is interested in their statistics.
    - Subscriber lists for hard-copy publications. This was not a commonly cited method, perhaps due to increasing reliance on digital dissemination.
    - One country runs a series of outreach programmes in schools, businesses and various communities. This helped identify users who may not think of themselves as users of statistics.

User classification

7. All of the countries that responded used some method of classifying their users. This was usually an informal working classification, but seven organisations appeared to have some kind of formalised framework for classifying users. For example, one country's classification system included 14 categories of user ranging from local authorities to citizen users. Respondents also mentioned an ESDS[iii] (European Statistical Data Support) user classification. ESDS helps users

[ii] http://www.vocus.com/

[iii] The ESDS classification is shown below. Users are asked to choose one when they contact ESDS with a query.

Public User; Student or Academic; Commercial company/enterprise; EU Institution/agency; Public administration/Government; Press and other media; National

find European statistical information, and on the basis of user feedback, advises Eurostat about possible improvements in the way the statistics are supplied and published. Wider usage of the ESDS user classification has the benefit of international consistency.

8. Most classifications were based on sector, such as government, business, or academia. One NSI mentioned that it applied an extra layer to its classification, by distinguishing between ‘prominent/non-prominent users’ (the former being those who have regular contact with the producer), and ‘regular/irregular users’ (the former being those using the statistics more often). It is likely that other countries have similar ways of distinguishing between users, but the questionnaire did not ask specifically about this type of classification.

Formal user groups, councils and committees

9. Most countries had some form of formal user council or committee. These varied in size, remit and structure. For example, in one country there was a well established national statistics council, with 40 members drawn from a wide range of fields and organised into twelve sub-committees, and a statistical policy council with 13 sub-committees. This national statistics council and its sub-committees advise statistical producers on all statistical activities and priorities, and aim to ensure that statistical programs remain relevant to the country's needs. The statistical policy council and its sub-committees have a responsibility to achieve a more effective and co-ordinated statistical system by specifying actions, formulating guidelines and setting up work groups. Another country has established a single advisory council, with membership mainly limited to senior public servants with the addition of five representatives of the scientific community.

10. Statutory provisions for such councils were fairly common. Five countries mentioned that they had passed laws for statistical councils - for example one country has legislated for an executive committee for statistics and a number of topic groups to act as advisory bodies. Their mandate is to map the needs of different user groups and to participate in the preparation of the annual statistical work plan. A similar statutory user council from another country meets twice a

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statistical institute; International organisation; Political parties and political organisations; Other.

year and provides advice with regard to the preparation and implementation of the programme of statistical activities.

Taking part in user events

11. All but three NSIs said that they take part in user events. The most common type of event mentioned was conferences, followed by meetings with key users. Other events included user group meetings, training courses, workshops, steering groups, meetings with opinion-formers such as journalists, exhibitions, and lectures or visits for university students.

12. Meetings with users are established on both an ad hoc and a regular basis, at varying levels, both in respect of specific products and strategically to discuss statistical planning. For example, in one country a different statistical product is selected each month to act as a topic for a user discussion. Participants for this include senior statistical staff, subject experts and invited users, and the discussion is based on the standard documentation for the statistics. Another country organises seminars on an ad hoc basis when there are specific developments to be discussed. Their most recent was a seminar for representatives of banks, where the topics discussed included seasonal adjustment and statistics on wages and salaries.

User surveys

13. Most organisations carried out some kind of user survey. Surveys were used to identify users, to find out more about their characteristics, to understand how they use (or would like to use) statistics, and to measure user satisfaction. Some organisations use measures of user satisfaction as high-level performance indicators. The most common methods for user surveys were:
    - Questionnaires sent by email or post to known users
    - Paper questionnaires attached to statistical releases
    - Questionnaires completed online by users accessing the statistics website

14. Most countries used a combination of methods. Sending questionnaires to known users allows more technical questions to be targeted to specific users, but is only effective where the users are known to the producer. One country recently stopped sending questionnaires to known users because the majority of their statistics are accessed anonymously through the webpage and databases, so

most users were not identifiable. Other countries have introduced surveys that target users accessing certain areas of the website. For example, one website carries product-specific ‘pop-up’ questionnaires - when users access certain statistics via the website, a pop-up window is activated which displays a maximum of seven questions related to the product. Another website allows users to cast votes at given periods concerning various statistical issues.

15. Three countries mentioned that they also carry out general population surveys to canvass wider user opinion. For example, one country conducts public opinion research studies. These range from small research projects to determine data and information needs and the expectations of specific client groups, to national opinion surveys identifying perceptions, expectations and satisfaction with the national statistical service.

Email notifications

16. Some organisations allow users to register interest in topics in order to receive notification of the latest publications and announcements. One organisation maintains 40 subscriber lists with more than 330,000 subscriptions, which allows it to let users know when new reports or data are available. Another country uses email ‘pushes’, where interested users are notified by email that certain statistics have been released.

17. Email notifications were used primarily to enhance the dissemination of information to users. In addition, they were used to collect information about users through registration, and to notify users of upcoming user engagement activities.

Points of communication

18. There were two approaches to handling enquiries from users: (i) centralised, where organisations aim to concentrate user enquiries to a single contact centre; and (ii) decentralised, where users are encouraged to contact the appropriate staff member directly. In general organisations used a mixture of both approaches. For example, one organisation handled thousands of emails and calls per year through a central contact centre, while at the same time they encouraged users to contact subject matter experts directly by publishing experts’ details in an online directory.

Annex E Review of media coverage

1. This note is based on a review of the way in which the media covered the publication of a number of statistical first releases and news releases[iv] in 2009. The review was carried out over a period of three months and this note draws some general observations that may be of interest to statistical producers.

Reaching the audience

2. An article published in the Guardian in November 2007[v] said, "Journalists are not very good with figures…Basic statistical concepts – confidence intervals, standard deviation, probability and so on – are alien to them. Most journalism training courses do not have modules on how to handle numbers." Our own review suggests that statistical reports that use specialised terminology and jargon are often ignored by journalists, and hence may not be drawn to the attention of a wider public. This observation highlights the fact that the news media plays an important role in the dissemination of statistical information almost regardless of what is said about the statistics. The fact that the statistics are covered at all is often the key to ensuring that users of statistics are alerted to new data, and that potential users are made aware of their existence.

3. Clearly, it is also important in this context for statisticians writing such releases to ensure that technical terms are well explained, and that attention is drawn to any changes in methods which might affect the interpretation of the figures, and the reasons for those changes and the nature of their impact. As well as these self-evidently helpful steps, statisticians might also need to seek out opportunities to explain statistical concepts and issues to journalists at times other than when statistics are being released.

Packaging information

4. Authors of statistical releases do not always present enough description of the figures (commentary), to help users understand the statistics in context, and to ensure that the most important points are highlighted. We recognise that providing too many comments can be confusing. The aim must be to pick out the points that the reader is going to find of greatest interest rather than work through the content of the releases, commenting in a uniform way. There is an attendant risk of being seen to select points that favour a particular viewpoint

[iv] News releases were studied where available. Other statistical releases or bulletins were only studied where no other media briefing was found.

[v] http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2007/nov/05/mondaymediasection.pressandpublishing

but as long as the selection of points is professional and careful and not biased, it should be possible to rebut any such suggestion.

5. The ‘main messages’ need to be presented as clearly, and as near the beginning of the release, as possible. Our review suggests that the aspect of the data that is of most interest to the media often seems to differ from the messages emphasised by the statistics producer, either resulting in little coverage or requiring the journalists themselves to analyse the underlying data. Many of the messages in the releases we reviewed received no, or only one or two mentions in the media reporting, whilst other messages appeared in almost all coverage. While producers would not expect the media to pick up on every message in their releases, we think that it would be helpful to identify the messages that have gained the most coverage in order for producers to consider whether to package their information differently.

6. The non-expert user can most readily absorb statistical messages if these are presented in an appropriate framework (of concepts and contexts) that places the statistics in context, highlights inter-relationships, and so on. In doing this, authors of statistical releases could also help users more by providing links to associated data produced by other organisations, both within and outside government.

7. Illustrative tables and charts are help to capture media interest and present a variety of data in an easily accessible way. The Code of Practice underlines this, requiring producers to “ensure that official statistics are disseminated in forms that… are accessible to a range of different audiences”.

8. Whilst statisticians writing statistical releases are mostly wise not to speculate about the reasons for patterns and trends there are occasions where some balanced and cautious speculation about what lies behind a trend may be real assistance to the user. Such comments should be couched in appropriate terms; the authors should keep in mind that the aim is to help ensure that the statistics are used; not just to publish them.

9. Sometimes a particular issue is a matter of public (or at least media) concern but is only part of the story contained in the set of statistics being released. If statisticians know that one aspect of their figures is likely to be of particular

interest at the time of release, then we see real merit in it being highlighted and commented on, in the context of the broader picture.

10. It is common for the text and charts to be essentially the same in each successive statistical release in a series. We would question whether that is necessarily a good idea. As long as changes to the presentation can be defended on the basis of responding to the evolution of the statistical information itself over time, we would put less emphasis on sticking to a rigid format and more on helping the reader to understand the content of the release.

11. Our review suggests that it is not always clear where to find the statistical information being released. In some cases producer bodies publish a 'News Release' intended specifically for the media, whilst in others a First Release or Statistical Bulletin is published without a News Release. These often have different layouts, include different data and are found in different areas of websites.

Statistical experts to explain statistics

12. The news media obviously do not see the dissemination official statistics, as such, as one of their primary roles although, as noted earlier, they do in fact play an important part in drawing the existence of statistics to the attention of many people who may have an interest. The media focus is rather on stories and on comment from various kinds of experts. The news story will often quote the views of independent analysts, academics, lobbyists or industry representatives, especially when those views seem to challenge the official figures. This can lead on to a questioning of the figures and the statisticians' interpretation of them. This situation can be exacerbated if there is no visible, credible, expert spokesperson representing the producer body. We think that the media's coverage of statistics might be better informed if such experts - as happens currently from time to time - more regularly explained the statistics in an easily understandable way directly to the media. We understand that practices vary between producer bodies, and we think that an agreed policy across government would be helpful.

13. Quotable comment from statisticians in news releases may help the media in writing their story. We think that it would help the media if experts were available for further comment once a news release had been issued -

presenting a public face for official statistics is likely to help secure trust in the people who produce them. The requirement in the Code of Practice that producers should "include the name and contact details of the responsible statistician in statistical reports" is a step in this direction.

The nature of releases

14. Our review suggested that the media often identify specific groups – geographical or social - to help bring the messages in the statistics to life. If authors of statistical releases did the same, but in a more authoritative way, then journalists might be more likely to use the official release directly rather than necessarily having to get comment or find the information elsewhere. So for example, the media present some statistics in per capita or individual terms, with articles on unemployment headlining that 'two women are sacked for every man' and that there is 'only one job for every 13 unemployed'. Authors could use such techniques more to bring the statistical to life. It may not look very 'professional' but as long as the statements are statistically valid, they can be used to give a more immediate message.

Promote editorial guidelines

15. Editorial guidelines or codes of practice, such as those published by the Press Complaints Commission[vi] (especially section 1, on accuracy) and the BBC[vii] can effectively provide a standard for the reporting of official statistics. The BBC's editorial guidelines note that "we should report statistics and risks in context, taking care not to worry the audience unduly, especially about health or crime. It may also be appropriate to report the margin of error and the source of figures to enable people to judge their significance…If reporting a change, consideration should be given to making the baseline figure clear." We support these types of guidelines, and feel that they could be developed more consistently and more generally as a standard for all media organisations.

[vi] http://www.pcc.org.uk/cop/practice.html
[vii] http://www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/edguide/accuracy/reportingstatis.shtml

Annex F Mechanisms for user engagement

1. Some of the most common mechanisms of user engagement are presented in this note. It draws on evidence from assessments, discussions with users and producers and information gathered from international counterparts. It is not exhaustive, nor does it set out to be prescriptive about how producers should engage with users.

2. Not all of these methods are applicable in all circumstances – some are more appropriate to engagement at different points of the statistical value chain; some are more useful in gaining an in depth understanding of users' needs about particular issues, whilst others have more value in simply updating users about developments.

3. Mechanisms for engagement need to be fit-for-purpose – to be adapted for different circumstances, and to different types of users.

Formal consultations

4. Formal consultations normally involve the publication of a document seeking responses from the public on developments, specific issues or plans. They are typically conducted via the web, and follow the Cabinet Office's code of practice for public consultation[viii]. Formal consultations follow a standard format, allowing 12 weeks for responses, followed by the publication of a document containing the responses (or a summary), and the producer's reaction. These sorts of consultation are widely used across government and are a well-recognised way of gathering the views of stakeholders. Formal consultations provide documented evidence about proposed changes and can therefore be a sound basis for transparent decision-making.

5. By their very nature formal consultations are relatively inflexible and time-consuming, and are best suited to longer-term planning, and to issues on which the producer organisations is genuinely uncertain about how to proceed because it does not (yet) understand users' perspectives. They are less suitable in relation to ad hoc development issues or problems that occur in real time.

[viii] http://www.berr.gov.uk/whatwedo/bre/consultation-guidance/page44420.html

6. While formal consultations are open for all to respond, experience shows that frequently only larger organisations, established user groups, and particularly motivated individuals have the capacity and interest to respond. Interested parties can often sign up to receive notifications of new consultations from a particular department. The Royal Statistical Society plays a valuable role in drawing attention to statistical consultations that it becomes aware of. However less actively engaged users may not have the same level of awareness, so it is important for producers to consider carefully how they publicise their consultations, in order to reach a wide range of users and potential users.

Five-yearly reviews, Department for Transport

The Road Casualty Statistics team at the Department for Transport carries out a formal consultation every five years, to inform the Department's plans for the coming five year period. The formal consultation document[ix] is publicised on the internet and is sent to a wide email network. The document sets out plans and invites views from users. The most recent consultation led to responses from a wide variety of users - policy-makers, other government departments, local authorities, researchers, road safety organisations and businesses. A sub-group of the Standing Committee on Road Accident Statistics, made up of data suppliers and users, considers the responses and drafts recommendations. Workshops are also held with users, to follow-up the consultation.

Official user councils

7. The UK has recently established the Statistics Suppliers and Users Group (STATSUG) – see para X of the main report. Other countries, such as Canada, Sweden, and Australia, have long-established user councils to provide direct input into the decision-making process. Councils generally have a formal remit to represent users' views, often detailed in the country's statistical legislation. Some councils have specific decision-making responsibilities; others act more as advisory bodies, the recommendations of which are for consideration by producers.

8. Councils have proved very effective in discussing high-level or strategic statistical issues. However they are less well-suited to ad hoc and in-depth issues. Some countries therefore have developed a range of councils or boards for different

[ix] http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/committeesusergroups/scras/2008reviewstats19/

subject areas. For example, Canada has a National Statistical Council, 12 Advisory Committees and a regional council on statistical policy. Similarly, Sweden has 9 programme boards and 3 councils administered by the National Statistical Institute (NSI) covering issues such as labour market statistics, economic statistics and regional statistics.

Statistics Sweden[x], Programme board for labour market statistics

The Programme board for labour market statistics is one of nine programme boards in different statistical areas. The board was established by the Director General of Statistics Sweden, and has a mandate to represent stakeholders and customers in the area of labour market statistics. Its chair and members are external "users", such as from the Institute of Social Research, Sweden's Central Bank, the University of Umeå, the Association of Local Authorities and Regions, the Labour Ministry and the Ministry of Finance. The board met twice in 2009, and discussed issues such as seasonal adjustment and regional breakdowns within the Labour Market Surveys and a new gender-related database on business leaders. Board members presented the ways in which they use the statistics, and gave their views on needs and gaps in the data.

Statistics Sweden is currently reviewing the effectiveness of the programme boards.

9. The composition of councils is important. Councils need to be small enough to be effective, to include knowledgeable, engaged, independent people, whilst ensuring a wide enough representation to meet their terms of reference. In Sweden, the supervisory council includes representatives from trade unions, a national research institute, the Central Bank, the Ministry of Finance, the local authorities association and an opposition member of parliament. The Dutch Central Commission for Statistics includes economic advisors, representatives from the European Central Bank, business, academic institutions and former member of the European Parliament.

10. User councils can be difficult to coordinate in highly decentralised statistical systems, such as that in the UK.

[x] http://www.scb.se/default____2154.aspx

European Statistical Advisory Council (ESAC)[xi]

The European Statistical System has long been interested in capturing users' views and a wider perspective on the development of its statistics - especially to minimise the burden on respondents in the member states and to balance priorities and resources.

The first user committee at the EU level (European Advisory Committee on Statistical Information in the Economic and Social Spheres, or CEIES) was set up in 1991, with the aim of taking into account user requirements and the costs for information providers and producers. CEIES comprised two representatives from each member state, plus the National Statistical Institutes and representatives from other EU bodies. The committee met only once a year and, with over 100 members, was too unwieldy to be truly effective in relaying user and supplier views.

ESAC replaced CEIES in 2008. Its 24 members represent producers, users and suppliers and deliver a formal Opinion on Eurostat's Multi-annual Statistical Programme.

User groups

11. User groups provide a means for users to discuss their views on particular types of statistics. Such groups are usually not statutory. In the UK, many user groups are coordinated within the SUF structure, as discussed in Section [ ]. These groups vary greatly in terms of their activity, membership, and the nature of their relationship with producers.

12. User groups typically rely on a relatively small number of highly-engaged volunteers to organise meetings. A lack of resources and time constraints can affect groups' ability to achieve their full potential. Statistical producers often support user groups, in terms of offering experts, and providing papers and meeting facilities. This can be mutually beneficial: the more effective the group, the more members it is likely to attract, and hence the wider the range of users that the producers can reach.

Demographic Statistics User Group (DUG)[xii]

[xi] http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/about_eurostat/european_framework/statistical_committees

DUG represents the interests of a number of private companies, such as Boots and Tesco but, as a relatively active user group, its meetings and conferences also attract a wider audience. The most recent annual conference, for example, was attended by around 70 people from business, academia, local government and producer bodies.

DUG has been instrumental in articulating users' needs for Census data, and for population and migration statistics more generally. The group has given evidence to the Public Administration Select Committee on the 2011 Census and the creation of an address register[xiii].

DUG has supported producers by providing examples of how data are used in the business sector, for example in putting forward the case for access to microdata from census records[xiv]. Demonstrating ways in which businesses use statistics, or could use statistics, provides valuable evidence to inform decisions about funding and about priorities.

Transport Statistics User Group (TSUG)[xv]

This user group is run by a committee largely comprising external members, although statisticians at the Department for Transport (DfT) are active members. There are about 150 members of TSUG, including transport consultants, local authorities, researchers and journalists.

The committee canvasses group members for ideas for seminars. The seminars are usually held monthly, typically involving a DfT statistician making a presentation, complemented by others', and followed by a discussion. The seminars are used *inter alia* to initiate formal reviews, and to give feedback. The group's membership list is also used as the basis for formal consultations.

[xii] http://www.demographicsusergroup.co.uk/
[xiii] http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmtreasy/183/183.pdf
[xiv] http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/sars/2011/documents/businesscase.pdf
[xv] http://www.tsug.org.uk/

Listening events such as conferences, 'roadshows' and seminars

13. 'Listening' events allow producers to speak face-to-face with users. Producers often host or facilitate them, although other organisations, such as the Royal Statistical Society, also provide valuable fora for discussion.

14. Part of their value derives from the fact that they involve a number of users meeting to discuss their needs, and hearing about others' needs. Such meetings can highlight the range of user needs and help both producers and users understand these and how they might best be prioritised. They also provide producers with a cost-effective opportunity to present their work to a large number of users at one time.

15. Such events can be time-consuming. As noted in the context of the Census 2011 project, it is often appropriate for the experts themselves to present at events and talk to users – but experts are a scarce resource, with competing demands on their time. In order to ensure that such events realise their potential, they should ideally provide a forum for discussion and not just share to information (important though this is).

Census 2011 Roadshows

The Census has a widespread and diverse user base, which is reflected in the structure of the census offices' user engagement. It was not considered sufficient simply to have one user group or a focused formal consultation; instead a variety of different forms of engagement were needed in order to capture the wide-ranging views. Roadshows were one method used.

ONS' Census team organised a number of roadshows at different stages in the Census development, in 2005, 2008 and 2009. These roadshows provided an opportunity to discuss proposals and to test conclusions that had been drawn from the user and advisory groups and from formal consultations. For the consultation on outputs, for example, the Census team organised roadshow sessions in London, Leicester, Cardiff, Manchester, and Newcastle in October 2009.

Personal contact with users

16. Producers often hold meetings with users within government. Policy users are often based in the same building and are anyway easily accessible. Meetings

with individual users outside the producer organisation can be more problematic - it can be difficult to identify which users to meet, and very time-consuming if many users are to be approached. However meetings or visits can be very useful in improving understanding about a particular user's needs and perspectives in more depth than is possible at a more open forum. Internationally, the European Statistical System's Task Force on Statistical Challenges held a number of high level meetings with stakeholders during 2008, leading to agreement about the need to establish a structure for continuing dialogue between the top level of management of Eurostat and stakeholders.

Market research

17. Market research can provide valuable insights into how a particular set of statistics is used, and what users need from the statistics. It can also provide information about related services, such as the accessibility of information from websites. Because market research is not a form of two-way user engagement it is sometimes appropriate to follow up with those who responded, either individually or as a group, to ensure a rounded understanding of the findings.

Case study – Stakeholder Strategy project, ONS

In 2009 ONS commissioned market research experts to investigate the perceptions of ONS' stakeholders. The research yielded a number of positive messages about statistical quality and methodological integrity, and also highlighted a number of areas in which improvements might be made, such as relevance, transparency and user engagement.

In order to more fully understand the feedback received, ONS carried out a series of workshops with the respondents. These enabled ONS staff to investigate further the nature of the comments made, and to discuss ways forward.

The research led to the development and publication of a stakeholder strategy for ONS, which will be implemented in the coming year.[xvi]

[xvi] link to ONS stakeholder strategy when published…

Using the internet

18. The internet presents a wide range of possibilities for user engagement – its particular strength being the opportunity it provides to reach a wide range of users and potential users quickly, and its openness and accessibility[xvii].

19. Some users may not yet be keen to use the internet to engage with producers, preferring more traditional channels where these exist. Nevertheless, the internet offers the following possibilities:

- Email groups: these can be used for mailing out consultation documents, notifying users about changes or revisions, and as the basis for ad hoc consultations. Email group lists need to be reviewed regularly to ensure that they include the right people.
- Web surveys: used for example to gain initial input on Census 2011 outputs. These surveys can be an effective means of collecting views, although it can be difficult for producers to follow-up or to identify the background and context of the opinions being given.
- Network-building: to identify who is interested in different statistical areas – for example, the ScotStat network described below.
- Notification systems: to alert registered users to changes, consultation launches, new publications, and so on. Again, these systems do not permit a two-way dialogue but can be a useful tool for producers to share information.
- Blogs: as a consultation tool, blogs can be rather limited as they are generally a one-way form of dialogue, and are typically unstructured. However they are useful as a way of identifying users of (and commentators on) statistics and identifying issues of concern. One example is the Straight Statistics blog[xviii] run by a group of journalists and academics.
- Wiki-style websites: used as a trial by the Census. Wikis are websites that allow anyone to log in and offer views about a given topic (such as the outputs, commentary, use and analysis of census data). Although very little use was made of the ONS' wiki-style Census 2011 website[xix], such an approach seems most likely to become increasingly important.

[xvii] 70% of households had Internet access in 2009, according to information from the National Statistics Opinions Survey (http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/iahi0809.pdf)
[xviii] http://www.straightstatistics.org/blog
[xix] http://2011ukcensus.wikidot.com/

Case study – ScotStat[xx]

ScotStat is a consultation network hosted by the Scottish Government, linking data users, data providers and producers. It takes the form of a website, upon which users indicate their areas of interest. There are some 1,800 members of ScotStat and the registration system allows the hosts to identify the sector that these work in. The Scottish Government has recently begun a programme to attract more researchers and academics to use the website.

Regular (physical) meetings of ScotStat members are held, and papers from these meetings are available on the website.

Newsletters

20. Many statistical producers issue newsletters describing developments and ongoing work. Even if they are produced infrequently, they can be a useful way to spread information between meetings and between larger, more formal consultation exercises. Newsletters can be included on the relevant statistical pages on the producer's website, sent to an email mailing list, sent out via user groups; or linked to relevant statistical releases. Newsletters are primarily a means of sharing information, but the inclusion of the producer's contact details or an enquiry line can facilitate feedback.

General enquiry lines, customer relationship management

21. All government departments and other official bodies have some form of telephone enquiry line. Statistical enquiries, or comments about statistics, may be passed on to the statistical divisions within these organisations. Enquiry lines can provide a means of contact for less active users, even allowing them to speak directly to the statistical producer. There is some value in monitoring enquiries to identify any common issues that might be dealt with at a more general level.

22. However, this is not a transparent or active means for producers to communicate with users; other users have no way of knowing what enquiries are being received by producers or what response is being given.

[xx] http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/scotstat

Annex G Glossary of abbreviations

SUF	Statistics User Forum
RSS	Royal Statistical Society
GSS	Government Statistical Service
COS	Committee for Official Statistics
PUG	Producer-User Group (SUF)
ONS	Office for National Statistics
SARs	Sample of Anonymised Records
M&A	Monitoring and Assessment
NSI	National Statistical Institute
ESAC	European Statistics Advisory Council
EU	European Union
CEIES	European Advisory Committee on Statistical Information in the Economic and Social Spheres
DUG	Demographics User Group
TSUG	Transport Statistics User Group
DfT	Department for Transport
CRM	Customer Relationship Management

Annex H Project board members

Professor Sir Roger Jowell (Chair)	City University, London and Deputy Chair, UK Statistics Authority
Richard Alldritt	Head of Assessment, UK Statistics Authority
Robert Clements	Director of Research Services, House of Commons Library
Professor Angela Dale	Director of the Centre for Census and Survey Research, University of Manchester
Jane Lewis	Director, Research in Practice
Dr Martin Dougherty	Executive Director, Royal Statistical Society
Professor Andrew Dilnot	St Hugh's College, Oxford University and Chair, Statistics User Forum
Caron Walker	Office for National Statistics/UK Statistics Authority
Richard Laux	Director, Assessment Programme, UK Statistics Authority

Note: non-Statistics Authority/ONS members attend in a personal capacity as experts rather than as representatives of their organisations.

[i] SUF priorities - http://www.rss.org.uk/main.asp?page=2699
[ii] http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/methodology_by_theme/revisions_policies/default.asp
[iii] http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pic/
[iv] http://www.statistics.gov.uk/populationestimates/svg_pyramid/default.htm
[v] http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/sars/
[vi] http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/announcements/assessment-programme-and-authority-monitoring-reports.doc

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

SA(COS)(10)09

Public Confidence in Official Statistics

Purpose

1. This paper covers a set of Powerpoint slides summarising the results of the recent survey on Public Confidence in Official Statistics. The survey was carried out by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) on behalf of the Authority, as part of the Strengthening the User Voice (StUV) monitoring review.

Timing

2. The presentation at **Annex A** was given to the StUV project board on 23 February. NatCen are currently drafting a final Report, presenting the findings and further analysis. This Report will be published by NatCen and then annexed in the Authority's interim Report of the Strengthening the User Voice Monitoring Review. Publication is expected towards the end of March.

Recommendation

3. Members of the Committee are invited to note the findings of the survey and consider the implications of the findings.

Discussion

4. The Survey of Public Confidence in Official Statistics was conducted as part of the NatCen Omnibus in October and November 2009. A total of 1,337 interviews were conducted, with a response rate of 48 per cent.

5. The aim of the survey was to establish whether people trust Official Statistics and why they feel they do or do not, in the context of their perceptions of Government institutions in general. The survey included questions on:

   i. trust in Government bodies;
   ii. trust in official figures;
   iii. reasons for trust and distrust;
   iv. perception of accuracy of statistics;
   v. the importance of statistics in decision-making, and;
   vi. perception of use of figures by politicians and the media.

6. Similar surveys were carried out by Office for National Statistics (ONS) in 2004, 2005 and 2007. Some of the results in the presentation at Annex A are presented in comparison with these earlier surveys.

7. Some of the main findings are as follows below.

   i. Television and newspapers remain the main sources of information on which opinions are based, although the number of respondents naming the internet as a source has increased. Around 60 per cent of those interviewed felt that both the government and the media presented figures dishonestly. This is roughly the same as in previous years.

   ii. Trust in official institutions has remained roughly the same, apart from the NHS (in which trust has risen) and the UK government (in which trust has fallen). Trust in the UK government is back to the level measured in 2004.

iii. The proportion of respondents disagreeing with the statement that figures are generally accurate has risen compared with that in previous years, with 40 per cent saying they tend to disagree or strongly disagree compared with 33 per cent in 2007. This can perhaps be seen in the context of the Parliamentary expenses scandal and high profile debates about figures such as those on knife crime and road casualties.

iv. Respondents were asked whether they trust or distrust a number of individual statistical series (cost of living figures, hospital waiting times, domestic burglaries, population figures and unemployment figures) and the reasons for their trust or distrust. The main reason for trust and distrust in most cases was personal experience (i.e. the figures do or do not confirm what respondents see in their daily lives) although misrepresentation by politicians and the media also featured consistently as a reason for distrust. Allowance should be made for the effect of the interviewers coding responses to open-ended questions into pre-set response categories. The decrease in the number of people mentioning ONS could, for example, be due to the fact that ONS interviewers were no longer carrying out the survey.

v. A large number of those with a low level of trust in government also felt that statistics were not accurate whilst many of those with a high level of trust in government felt that statistics were accurate.

Richard Laux, Monitoring and Assessment Team, March 2010

List of Annexes

Annex A Presentation On Findings from the 2009 Survey of Public Confidence in Official Statistics

NatCen

National Centre *for* Social Research

Public Confidence in Official Statistics

23rd February 2010

Britain's leading independent social research institute

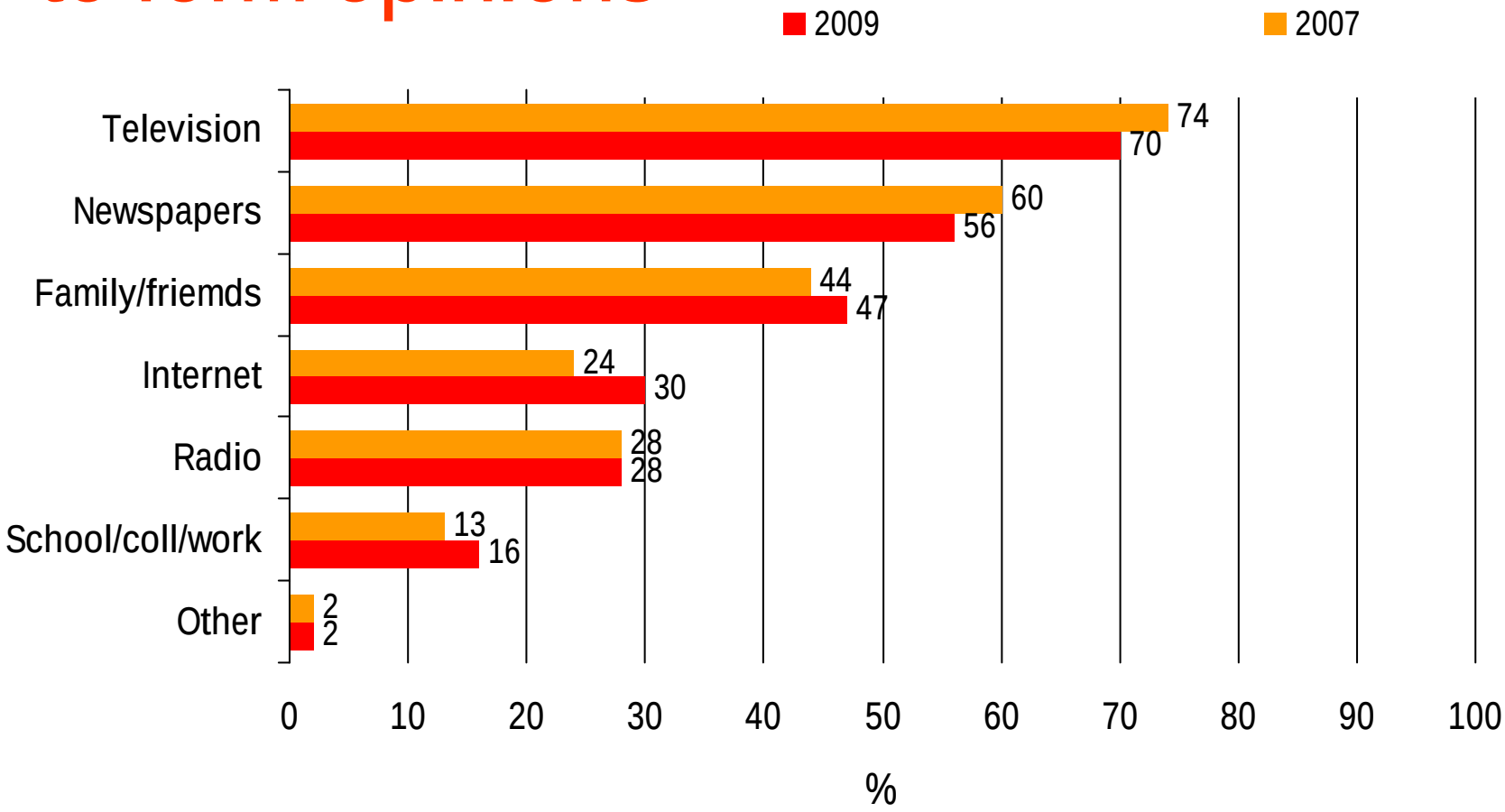
Key findings

- General attitudes towards statistics
- Trust/mistrust in specific statistical series
- Change over time

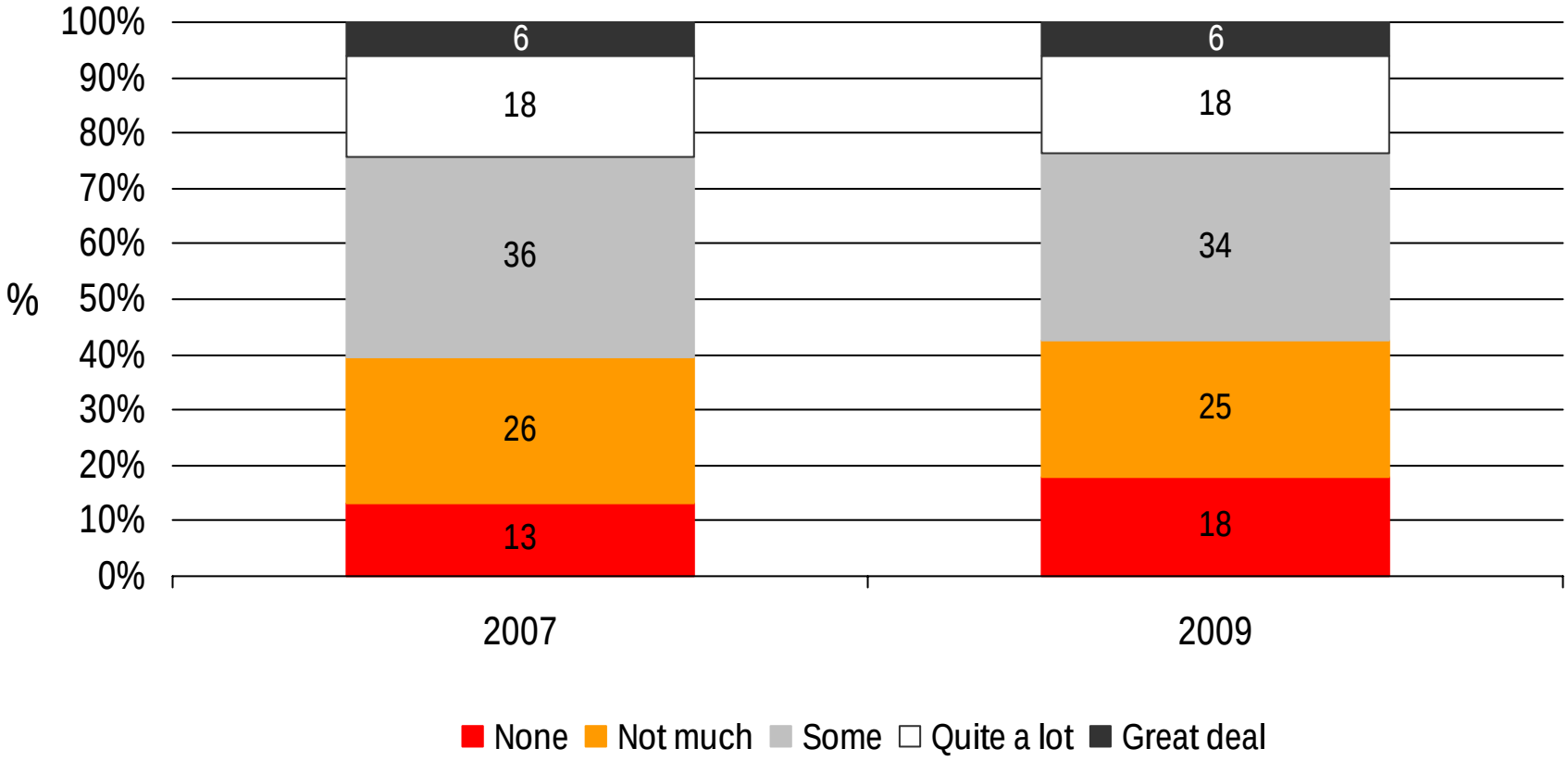
Context

- Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007
- Economic downturn
- MPs' expenses
- Publication of official statistics
  - Knife crime
  - Road casualties
  - Foreign workers

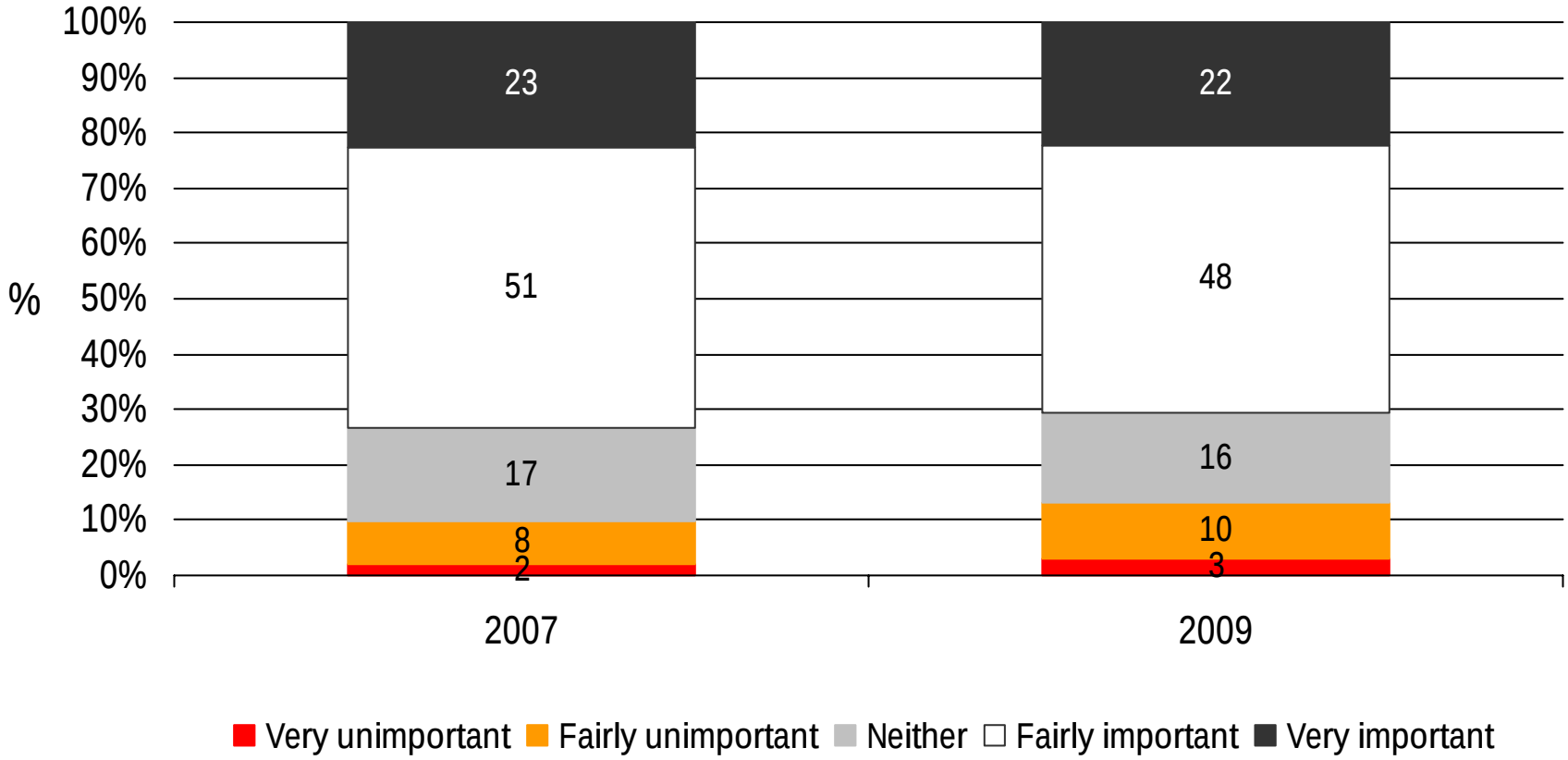
Sources of information used to form opinions



Interest in politics



Importance of statistics in decision making



Accuracy of figures

"Figures are generally accurate"

	2004	2005	2007	2009
	%	%	%	%
Strongly agree	2	2	2	1
Tend to agree	32	35	34	31
Neither agree/disagree	27	28	27	26
Tend to disagree	28	25	25	32
Strongly disagree	7	6	8	8
Don't know	3	4	4	1
Agree	34	37	36	32
Disagree	36	31	33	40

Political interference

"Figures are produced without political interference"

	2004	2005	2007	2009
	%	%	%	%
Strongly agree	2	2	3	1
Tend to agree	15	15	17	15
Neither agree/disagree	19	21	18	22
Tend to disagree	40	39	40	39
Strongly disagree	18	15	17	19
Don't know	6	7	5	3
Agree	17	17	20	17
Disagree	58	54	57	59

Honest use by government/ newspapers

"Government presents figures honestly when talking about policies"	2004	2005	2007	2009	*N'papers (2009)*
	%	*%*	*%*	*%*	*%*
Strongly agree	2	1	2	1	*1*
Tend to agree	14	13	14	13	*13*
Neither agree/disagree	21	22	23	25	*25*
Tend to disagree	42	43	38	41	*43*
Strongly disagree	18	17	20	19	*17*
Don't know	4	4	3	1	*1*
Agree	15	14	16	14	*14*
Disagree	59	60	58	60	*60*

Understanding of official statistics

"how would you describe your understanding of official statistics when they are presented by the government or in the media "

	%
Very good	8
Fairly good	66
Fairly bad	21
Very bad	6

Interest in official statistics

"how much attention do you pay to official statistics, such as unemployment, crime, when they are published, "

	%
A great deal	5
Quite a lot	24
Some	43
Not much	21
None at all	8

Pre-release of figures

"Looking at this card, what do you think , "

	%
Government ministers should be given early access to official statistics or,	*39*
Government ministers should not be given early access to official statistics?	*61*

Trust in official institutions

	2004	2005	2007	2009
	mean	*mean*	*mean*	*mean*
NHS	6.6	6.7	6.5	7.1
Police	6.4	6.5	6.4	6.3
Courts	5.9	6.2	6.1	6.0
Civil service	5.3	5.8	5.6	5.5
UK government	4.0	4.4	4.5	4.0

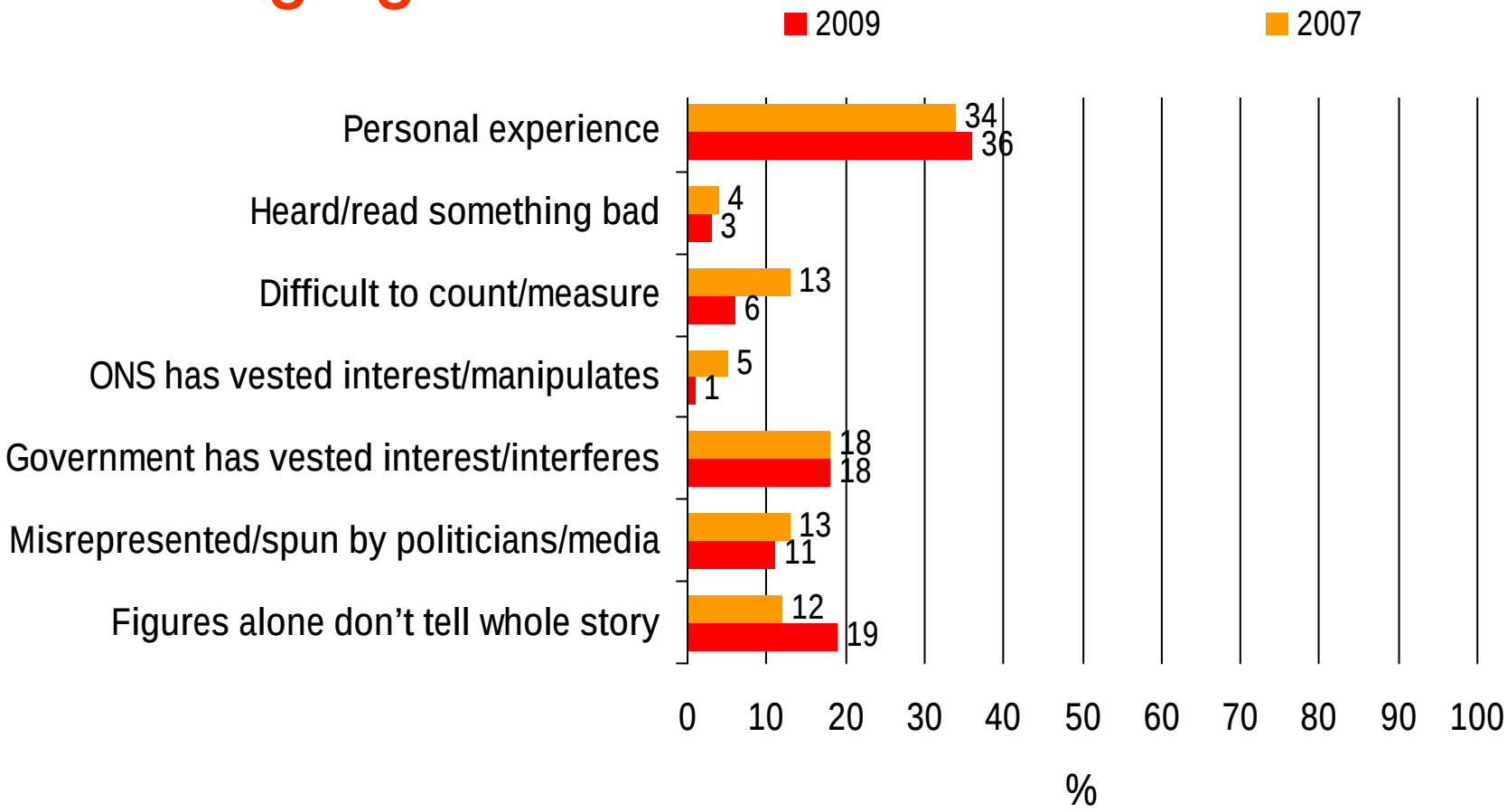
Mean score based on 11 point scale: 0 = do not trust at all; 10 = trust completely

Trust in statistical series

	2004	2005	2007	2009
	mean	*mean*	*mean*	*mean*
Cost of living	-	5.9	5.8	5.3
Hospital waiting figures	4.6	4.6	4.9	5.5
Domestic burglaries	5.3	5.5	5.3	5.2
Population figures	-	6.9	6.1	5.7
Unemployment figures	-	-	-	5.2

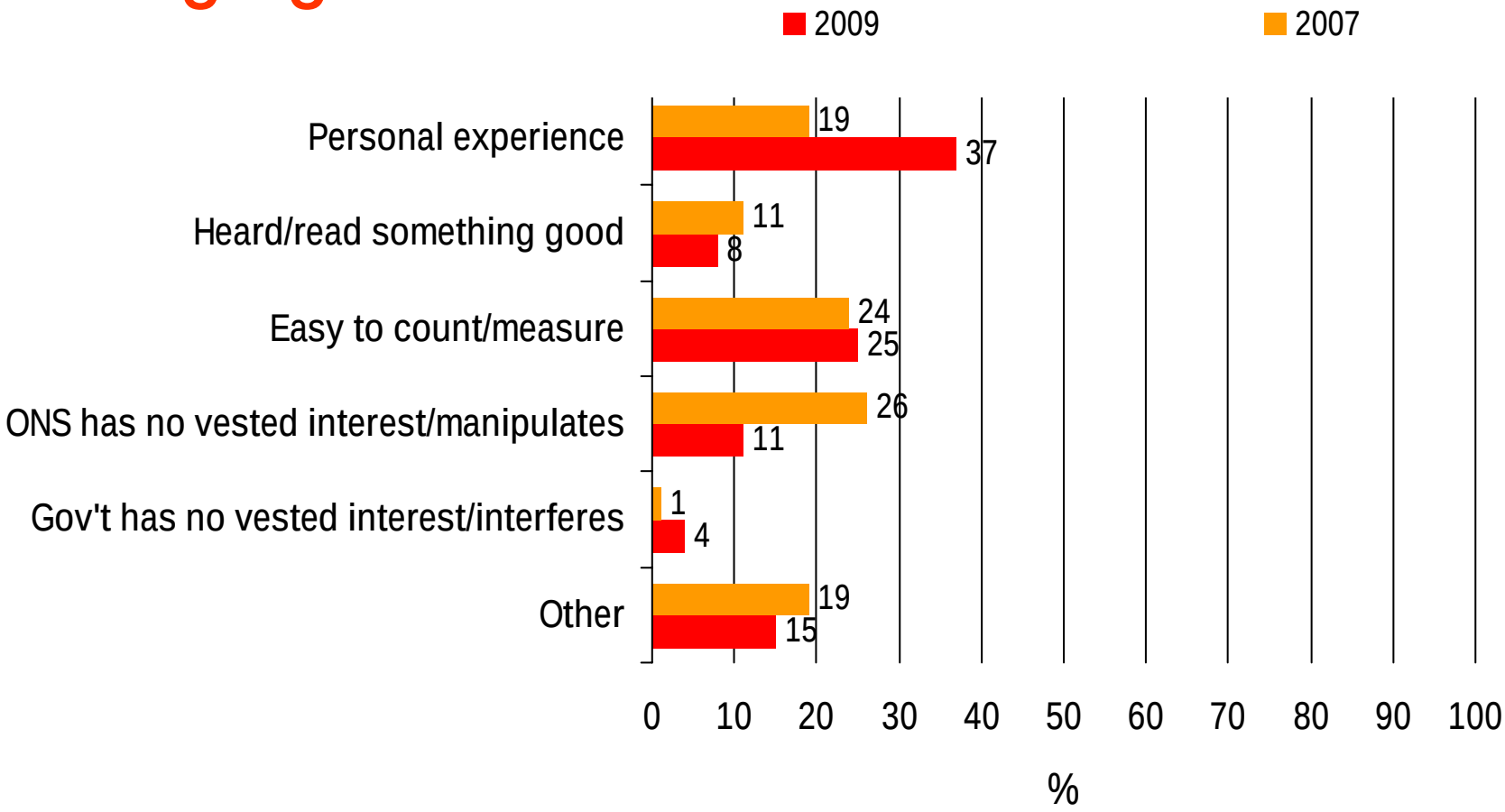
Mean score based on 11 point scale: 0 = do not trust at all; 10 = trust completely

Main reason for distrust in cost of living figures



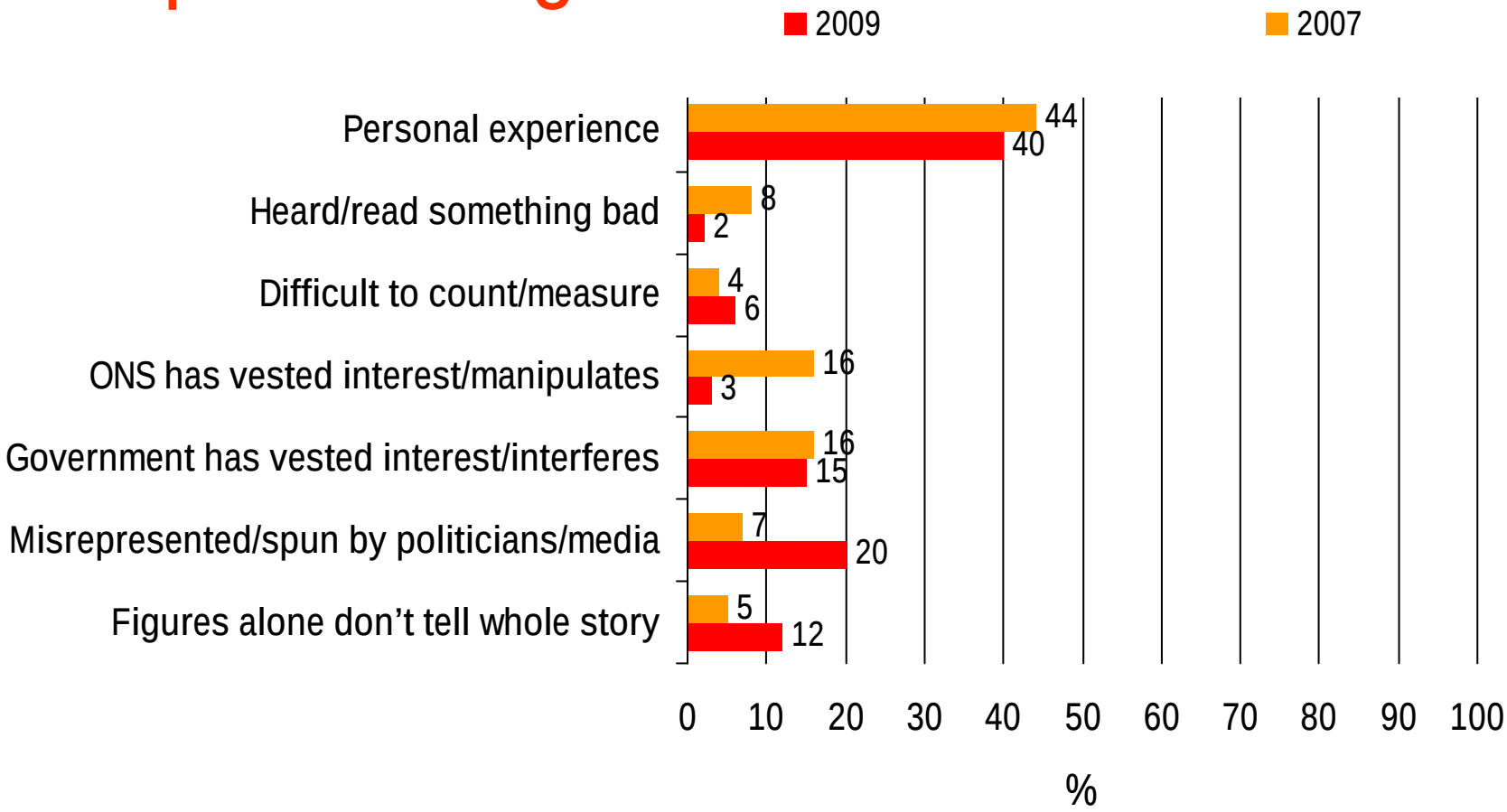
Based on all giving a score of 0 to 3 at trust question

Main reason for trust in cost of living figures



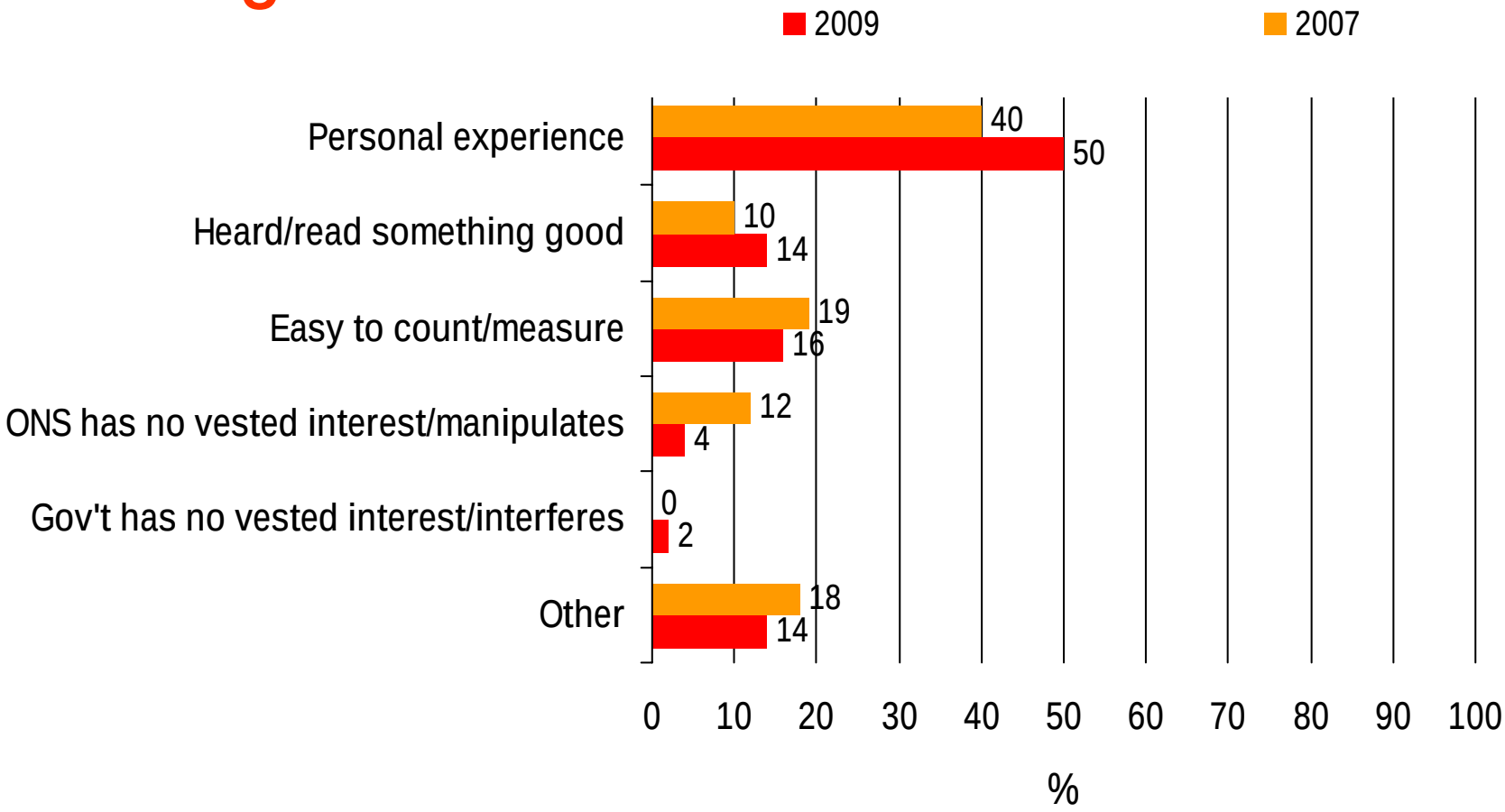
Based on all giving a score of 7 to 10 at trust question

Main reason for distrust in hospital waiting statistics



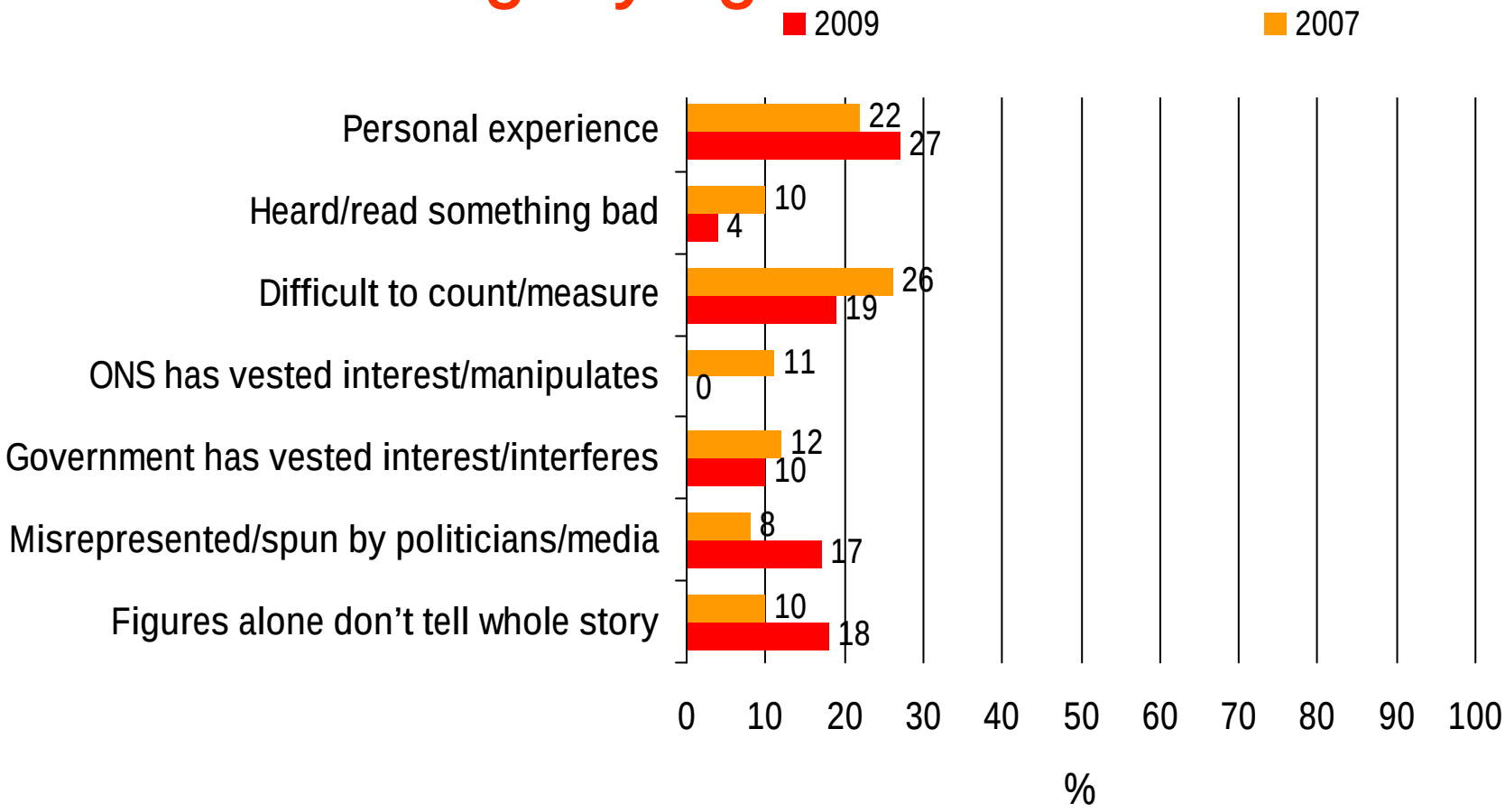
Based on all giving a score of 0 to 3 at trust question

Main reason for trust in hospital waiting statistics



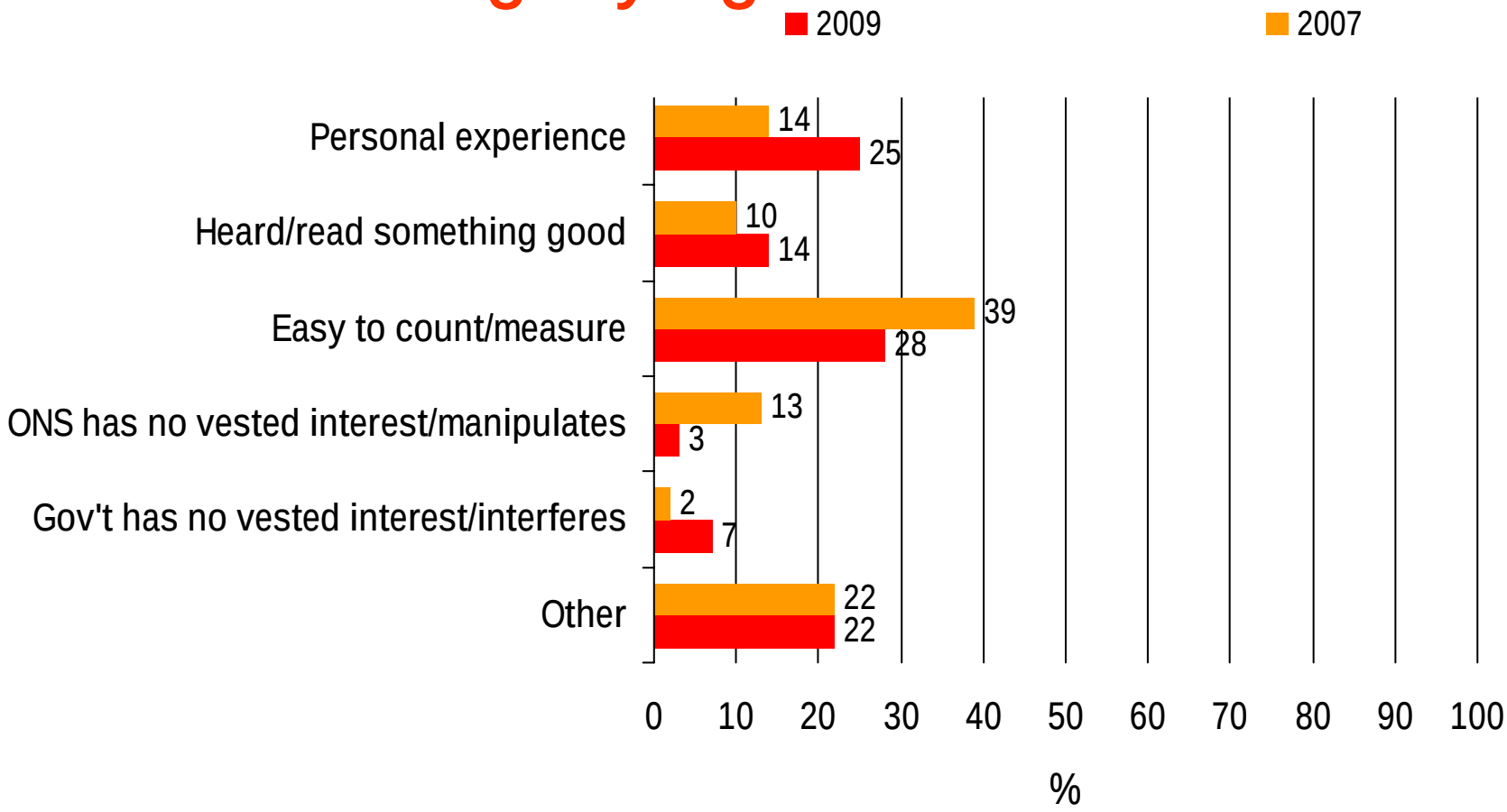
Based on all giving a score of 7 to 10 at trust question

Main reason for distrust in domestic burglary figures



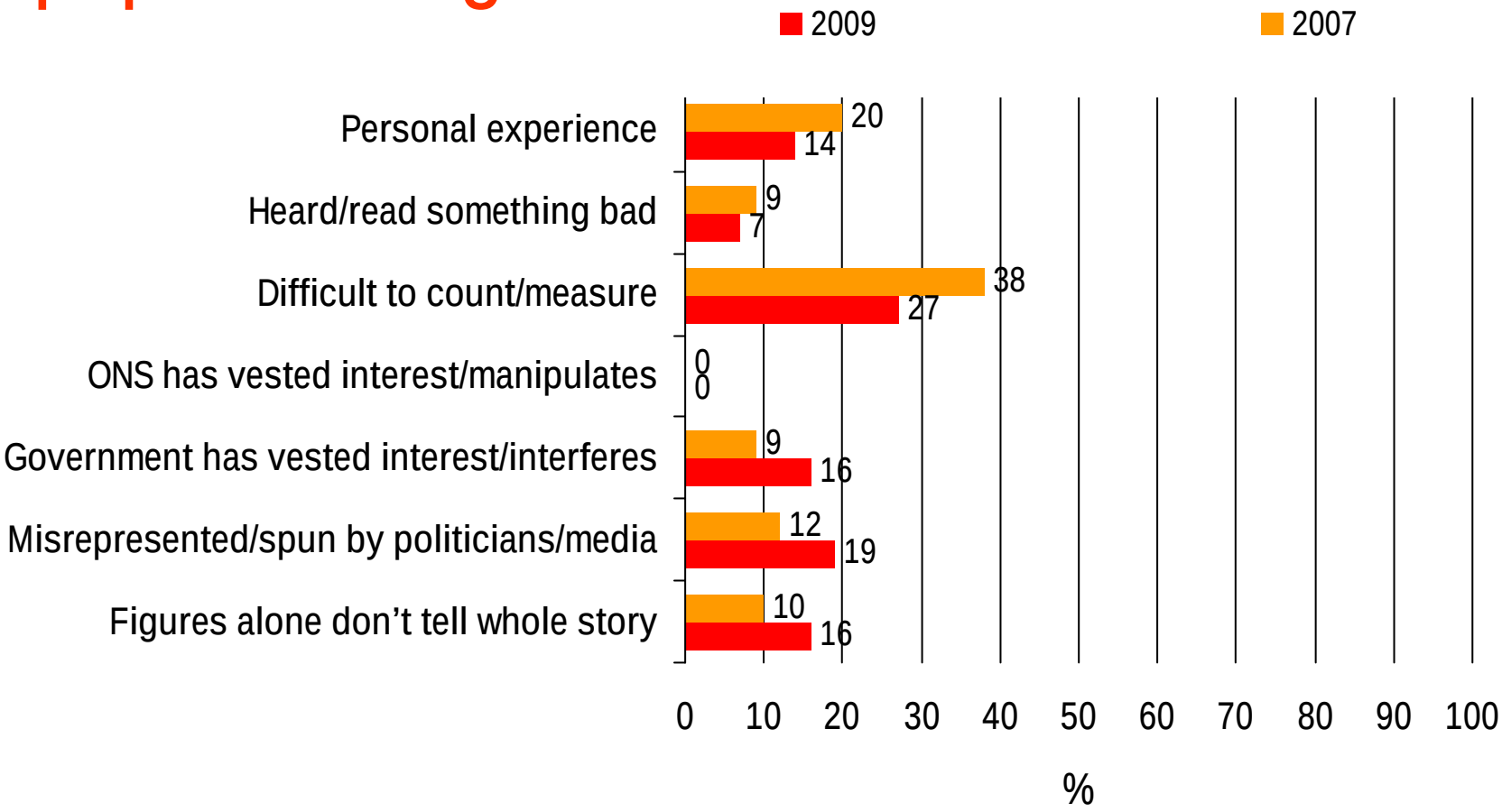
Based on all giving a score of 0 to 3 at trust question

Main reason for trust in domestic burglary figures



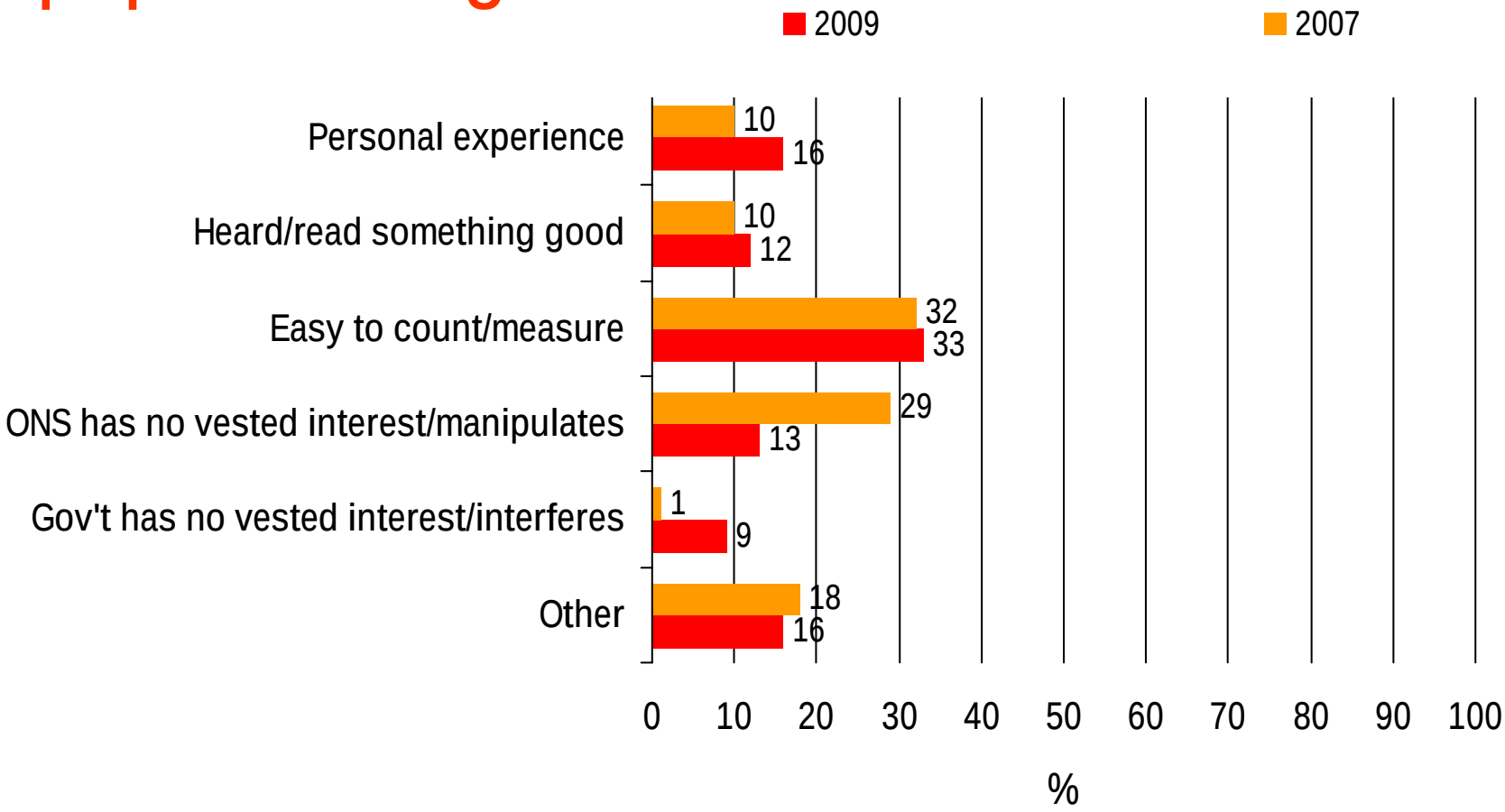
Based on all giving a score of 7 to 10 at trust question

Main reason for distrust in population figures



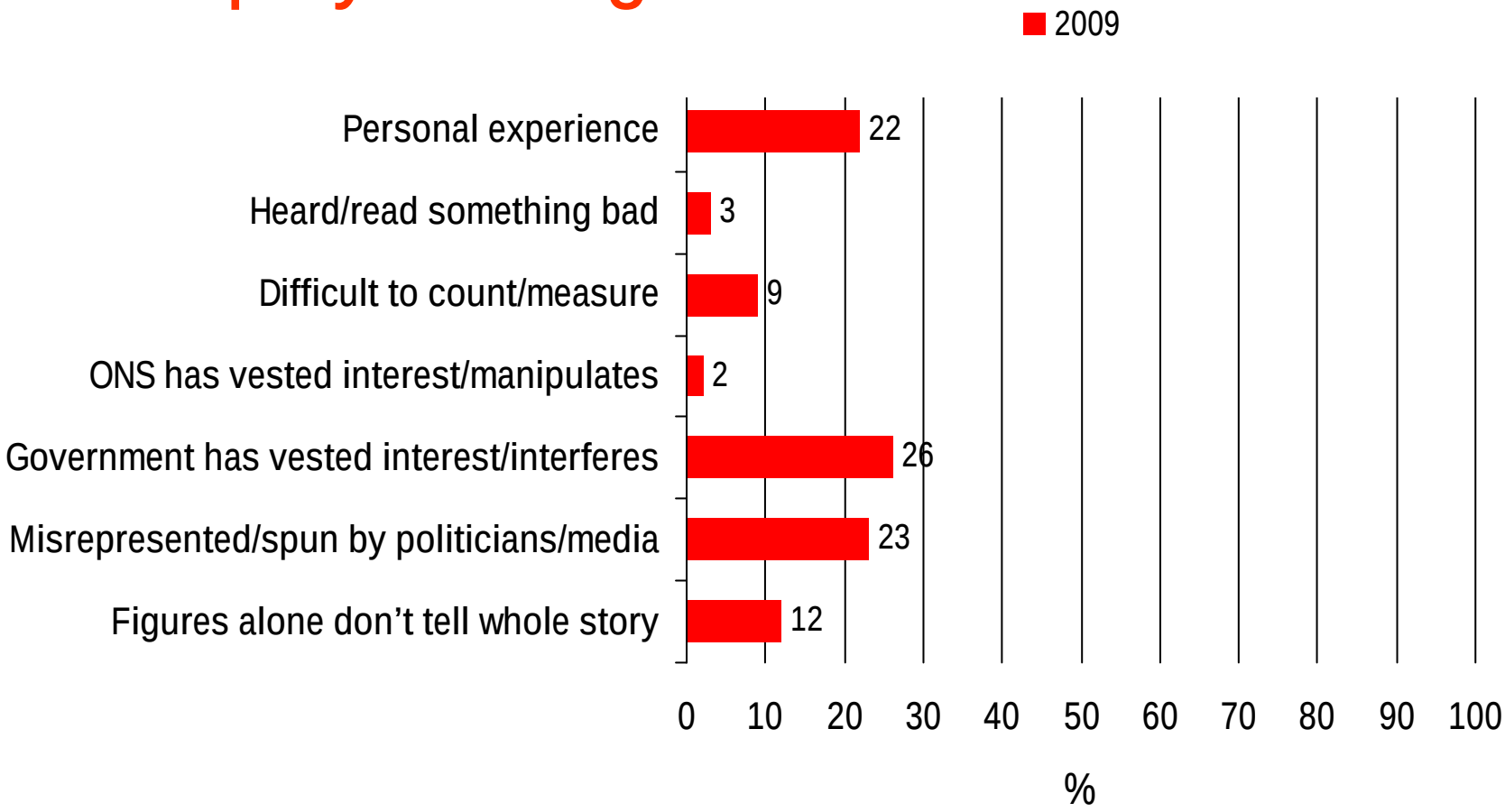
Based on all giving a score of 0 to 3 at trust question

Main reason for trust in population figures



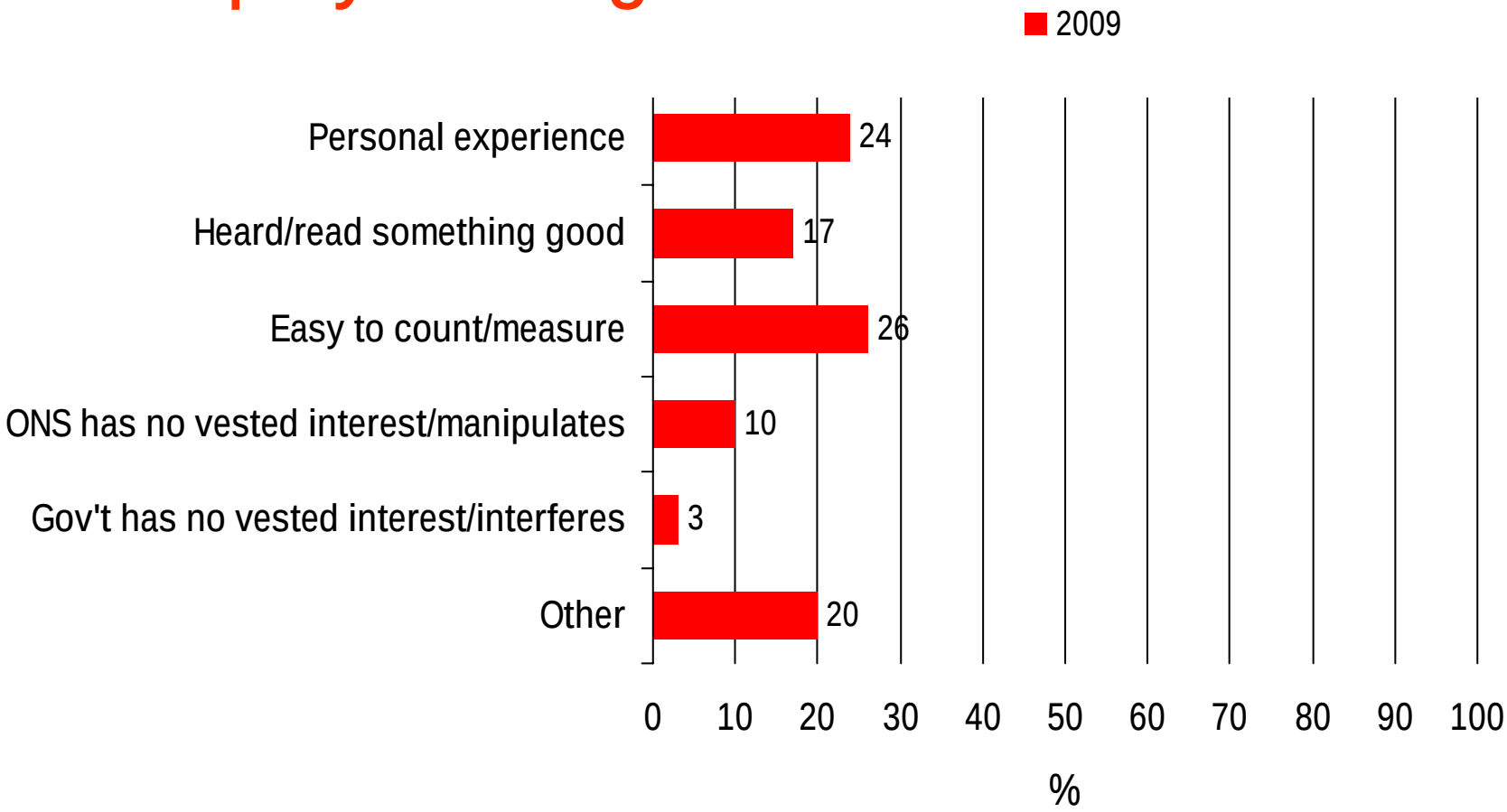
Based on all giving a score of 7 to 10 at trust question

Main reason for distrust in unemployment figures



Based on all giving a score of 0 to 3 at trust question

Main reason for trust in unemployment figures



Based on all giving a score of 7 to 10 at trust question

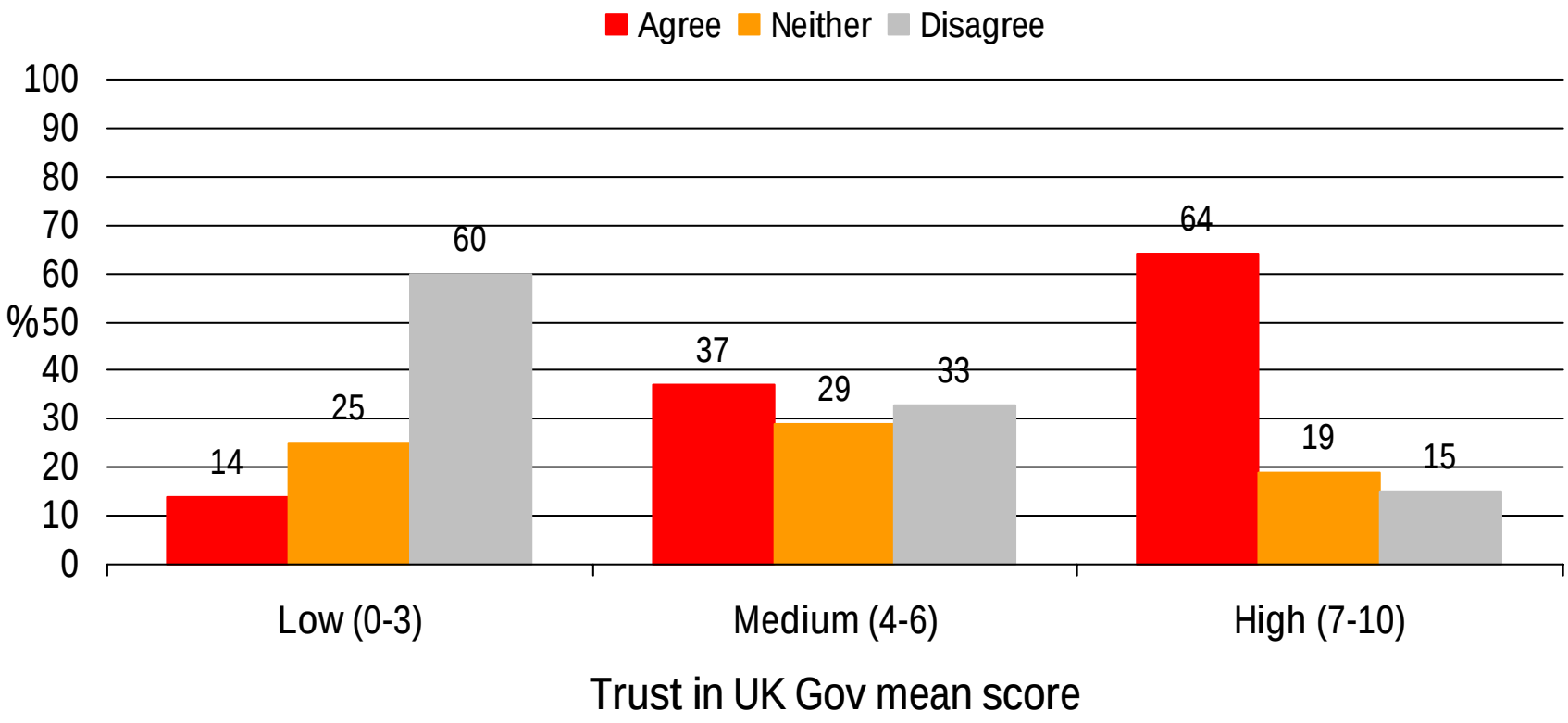
Most common reasons for trust and mistrust

	Trust	Mistrust
Cost of living	Personal exp.	Personal exp.
Waiting lists	Personal exp.	Personal exp.
Burglary	Easy/personal exp.	Personal exp.
Population	Easy	Difficult
Unemployment	Personal/Easy	Vested ins/spin

Perception of vested interests/ spin among those who do not trust particular series

Cost of living	30% (36% 2007)
Waiting lists	38% (39% 2007)
Burglary	27% (31% 2007)
Population	35% (21% 2007)
Unemployment	51% (no 2007 figure)

Accuracy of statistics by trust in UK Government



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