



**Statistics Commission**

**A CODE OF PRACTICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS  
INTERIM REPORT FOR CONSULTATION**

Statistics Commission Report No 31  
December 2006

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**A report by the Statistics Commission**

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1. This report sets out initial proposals from the Statistics Commission for a revised Code of Practice to apply to all government bodies that produce National Statistics. Under the terms of the *Statistics and Registration Service Bill*<sup>1</sup>, introduced in the House of Commons in November 2006, it will be for a new and independent Statistics Board to determine the content of the Code. The Statistics Commission is therefore developing proposals that can be put forward to that new Board when it is established – we assume this will be during 2007-08.

2. Our aim is to help the Board become operational and effective at the earliest possible moment. These proposals reflect the experience of the Commission over the past six years. With a view to establishing as much consensus as possible, we are issuing this interim report as a consultation document, and inviting comments from interested parties by the end of February 2007. Details of how to respond to the consultation are at the end of the report.

## **Background**

3. A National Statistics Code of Practice was heralded in the June 2000 *Framework for National Statistics*<sup>2</sup> and finalised in stages from 2002<sup>3</sup>. In the introduction to the Code, the Prime Minister stated that

“It is important for our statistics to be good. But it is just as important for the statistics to be trusted by all those – Government, the Opposition parties, pressure groups, citizens – involved in debating policy”.

The Code was intended to set high standards “both for improving the quality of, and strengthening public confidence in, UK statistics”<sup>4</sup>.

4. Over the six years since it was set up, the Statistics Commission has frequently drawn on the Code, and the associated Protocols, when examining the statistical activities and policies of government departments and agencies. In doing so, it became apparent that ambiguities exist within the Code as it is currently drafted. In the Commission’s 2005-06 Annual Report<sup>5</sup>, we said for instance that

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<sup>1</sup> *Statistics and Registration Service Bill* (Bill 8), House of Commons, November 2006, TSO

<sup>2</sup> *Framework for National Statistics*, First Edition, ONS

<sup>3</sup> *National Statistics Code of Practice: Statement of Principles*, 2002, TSO. In addition, a number of more detailed Protocols were published between 2002 and 2005, expanding on the principles and giving examples of their application. For simplicity we refer to all the guidance in these documents as ‘the Code’.

<sup>4</sup> *National Statistics Code of Practice: Statement of Principles* – page 6.

<sup>5</sup> *Statistics Commission Annual Report 2005-06*, July 2006, TSO

“..only a few parts of the present Code are of a kind that readily allow an independent judgement to be made about compliance. Much of the Code is non-prescriptive and requires no specific evidence ... Thus the evidence that does exist often relates only to the more detailed aspects, particularly those dealing with the public release of statistical information.”

5. As a result, the Commission’s interpretation of its provisions has not always been the same as that of government departments, leading to differences of view on questions of compliance. The Commission has no specific authority to impose its interpretation and some differences of view remain unresolved. Parliament and the press have noted these differences and the consequent problems of assessing departmental actions against the Code. This all led the Commission to make proposals<sup>6</sup> on the need for a statutory basis for UK statistics; we are pleased that the Government is now addressing this matter.

### **Evolution of the legislative proposals**

6. In March 2006, following an earlier announcement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer<sup>7</sup>, the Government published a consultation paper, *Independence for statistics*<sup>8</sup>, setting out proposals to establish, through legislation, an independent Statistics Board with oversight of official statistics and to make the Office for National Statistics accountable to that Board. Among the proposals was “the continuation of the National Statistics system with a set of highest quality statistics produced in line with the published code”. It was also proposed to give the code statutory backing “by legislating to make the development and maintenance of the code the specific responsibility of the board”<sup>9</sup>.

7. In July 2006 the House of Commons Treasury Committee published a report *Independence for Statistics*<sup>10</sup>, in response to the Government consultation. The Treasury Committee called on the Government to extend the scope of the proposed legislation and to separate more clearly the roles of the National Statistician for the delivery of statistics and the Board’s responsibilities for the oversight and scrutiny of the statistical system as a whole.

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<sup>6</sup> *Legislation to Build Trust in Statistics*, Statistics Commission report No 18, May 2004

<sup>7</sup> On 28 November 2005, the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced plans to introduce legislation to create a more independent statistical service.

<sup>8</sup> *Independence for statistics: A consultation document*, March 2006, HMSO

<sup>9</sup> *Independence for statistics: A consultation document*, March 2006, HMSO, p.21

<sup>10</sup> *Independence for Statistics*, 26 July 2006, House of Commons Paper No. 1111, Treasury Committee’s Tenth Report of Session 2005-06

8. Referring to the Code of Practice, the Select Committee concluded as follows: “We note the Statistics Commission’s concerns regarding the clarity and enforceability of the existing Code of Practice. We therefore welcome the Government’s proposal to establish a statutory code of practice, and its assurance that drafting the code would be a matter for the independent board without involvement from ministers. The introduction of a new statutory code of practice would offer the opportunity to establish a code which is unambiguous, able to be understood by a wide range of readers and sufficiently precise as to be readily enforceable. We are pleased to hear that the Statistics Commission intends to put forward proposals for a new statutory code of practice in the next few months.”

9. The Government’s response to the Treasury Select Committee report<sup>11</sup>, published in October 2006, stated that the “Government expects that any changes to the code made by the Board will be based on the advice of the National Statistician, following consultation with key stakeholders” and that “The Government welcomes the announcement by the Statistics Commission that it will consider bringing forward proposals on how the Code of Practice might be developed for the new system”. The Commission agrees that amendments to the Code should be subject to endorsement by the National Statistician following wide consultations with stakeholders.

10. In November 2006, the Government published both a response to the earlier consultation<sup>12</sup>, setting out the proposals on which the Government planned to legislate, and the proposed legislation itself, the *Statistics and Registration Service Bill*<sup>13</sup>. The Bill contains provisions to establish the Statistics Board and, among other things, requires it to ‘prepare, adopt and publish a Code of Practice for National Statistics’ where National Statistics are defined as those statistics that Ministers wish to be compliant with the Code and which the Board determines are compliant. The Bill explicitly prevents the Code from dealing with ‘any matter relating to the granting of pre-release access to official statistics’, which will instead be decided by Government. ‘Pre-release access’ is defined as “access to the statistics in their final form prior to publication”. With this exception, there are no specific constraints on the content of Code.

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<sup>11</sup> *Independence for statistics: Seventh Special Report of Session 2005-06*. Government Response to the Committee’s Tenth Report of Session 2005-06.

<sup>12</sup> *Independence for statistics – The Government response*, November 2006, HMSO

<sup>13</sup> *Statistics and Registration Service Bill* (Bill 8), Parliamentary copyright, House of Commons, November 2006, TSO

### **Two kinds of statistics**

11. The definition of 'National Statistics' adopted in the Bill creates, in effect, two classes of statistics – National Statistics and a 'remainder' class of official statistics (those not labelled National Statistics) to which the Code does not apparently apply. There are said to be some 1200<sup>14</sup> sets of National Statistics but many more sets of non-National (but official) statistics. In practice, the Statistics Commission believes that the principles of the Code should apply in much the same way to all official statistics. It will however be for the Statistics Board itself to determine whether to follow this convention in carrying out its duties and how it will assess the 'remainder class' of non-National Statistics in pursuit of its objectives.

### **Assessment against the Code**

12. Although the Bill refers to the Board's assessment functions as being to assess 'statistics' against the Code, the Statistics Commission interprets the Bill to mean that the Board will assess against the Code all the relevant activities of government bodies that produce National Statistics. The importance of this distinction lies in the fact that both the current and draft Codes of Practice deal with matters beyond the statistics themselves. For example, under Principle 2 in the draft, there is a requirement to "...adopt systematic ..planning arrangements, including transparent priority setting". This is not a requirement that can be applied to an individual set of figures.

### **The review**

13. In the summer of 2006, the Statistics Commission established an internal working group<sup>15</sup> to consider the Code and the Protocols in the context of the forthcoming legislation and concluded that the proposed statutory arrangements would require a Code that, whilst covering much the same ground as the existing one, would be different in some significant respects:

- a) It should be shorter, simpler and more imperative in style – partly in order that individuals might find it easier to understand and remember

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<sup>14</sup> This estimate should be regarded only as a very rough indication as there is no clear definition of a 'set' of statistics. The source for the estimate is *Independence for statistics – The Government response*, November 2006, paragraph 2.41

<sup>15</sup> The Commission's working group comprises Professor David Rhind, Sir Derek Wanless, Joly Dixon, Richard Alldritt and Jenny Church (consultant).

and partly so that government departments and agencies would more readily be able to tell if their practices were consistent with it.

- b) As far as possible, it should provide an unambiguous and structured basis for independent assessment and audit.
- c) It would benefit from being closer in style and structure to the European Statistics Code of Practice<sup>16</sup>, introduced in 2005, compliance with which is expected of all EU member states. That Code seemed to us both easier to interpret and easier to make assessments against than the existing UK one.
- d) It should be reconciled explicitly with the revised Civil Service Code<sup>17</sup> introduced in June 2006.
- e) It should be drafted to apply to the whole of departments and other bodies that produce official statistics - including their ministers and senior managers - not just to statistical staff or to the statistics themselves. That is, it should apply to the body that is publicly accountable for the actions of staff and for the adequacy of the statistics it produces. In this respect, we see the Code as being more akin to the European one - which applies to statistical authorities - and unlike the Civil Service Code which applies to individual civil servants (though see paragraph 20 below).
- f) In view of the point above, it should contain a statement indicating that the Code assumes that “within those government bodies that produce National Statistics there will be sufficient managerial separation, between those staff engaged in the production and publication of statistics and those who use the statistics for policy and management purposes, to ensure transparency of the statistical process and clear

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<sup>16</sup> *European Statistics Code of Practice: For the national and community statistical authorities*, Eurostat, adopted by the statistical programme committee on 24 February 2005. The European Statistics Code is based on 15 principles. Governance authorities and statistical authorities in the European Union commit themselves to adhering to the principles in this code covering the institutional environment, statistical processes and outputs.

<sup>17</sup> *The Civil Service Code*, 6 June 2006, Cabinet Office

professional accountability”. This appears in the introduction to the draft Code.

- g) Unlike the current Code, it should not set out exceptions and exemptions to the Code in the text itself. Instead, another mechanism should be adopted for agreeing and documenting necessary exceptions and special cases in order to avoid cluttering and overburdening the text. This change substantially shortens the Code and removes the need for separate Protocols.
- h) It should be drafted so that its principles are applicable to all official statistics whether branded as ‘National Statistics’ or not.

14. With these aims in mind, each part of the current Code and the Protocols was closely studied and its essential requirements identified. Thus, the Commission’s revised draft flows directly out of the existing Code and is a clarification of it, rather than something fundamentally different. In some cases, however, additional principles and practices have been introduced, mostly based on concepts in the European Code or in other models such as the UN Fundamental Principles for Official Statistics<sup>18</sup>. And in some cases the requirements of the current Code have been eased where they seemed overly burdensome.

15. A full mapping of the provisions of the proposed Code against the current one is not practicable. However, some key differences are:

- The adoption of a principle (Principle 9) on resources. This broadly follows the model of the European code and is appropriate for one that will apply to a number of largely autonomous organisations.
- The requirement under Principle 1 that statistics should be issued before Ministerial comment on them. At present Ministerial statements are often issued simultaneously. We have not proposed a specific period of time that should elapse before ministerial comment but would be glad to hear views on this from respondents to the consultation.

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<sup>18</sup> *Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics*, UN Statistics Division, United Nations 2006

- The requirement on producer bodies under Principle 2 to investigate and document the use made of existing statistics and the types of decisions they inform, and the key areas of emerging demand and unmet need. We see investigation of these things as fundamental to effective planning and quality assurance.
- Under Principle 6, the practices in relation to pre-release access are likely to be constrained by the forthcoming legislation. The Code will need to conform to any new statutory rights to pre-release access for Ministers or officials.
- The substantial shortening of the text and the assumption that exceptions and exemptions to the application of the Code will be by agreement with the Statistics Board.

### **Making a difference**

16. The Code must also be realistic and achievable. Aspirational statements, for example that statistics should be of the 'highest quality', have little practical impact and have been avoided.

17. The draft seeks to draw a line between good practices and less good practices and to do so in a way that supports independent assessment. Bearing in mind that the future assessment process will be backed by statute, we expect the revised Code to make a practical difference in a number of ways. Amongst the areas in which we most want to see it have a positive influence are:

- Supporting coherent, systematic planning of statistical services across the different producer bodies to meet identified needs of users. At present, we do not think that user needs are addressed in a sufficiently systematic way, or that decisions about statistical priorities are taken in a sufficiently consistent and transparent way.
- Encouraging fuller, more helpful, written commentary to accompany the published statistics, informing users of the known strengths and weaknesses of the statistics in relation to the main uses to which they are likely to be put. At present, we regard some of the written commentary as overly cautious, modest in scope and/or inclined to disregard the likely uses of the statistics.

- Promoting more effective communication with users of statistics, helping them to find and understand the figures and related advice on interpretation. At present, users of statistics often express frustration at the difficulty of finding the statistics available and identifying the right source to use.

### **Building Trust**

18. Strengthening public confidence in UK official statistics is a stated aim of the current Code. It is clearly right that this should be a central consideration but the Code, on its own, is unlikely to deliver that goal. Public trust needs to be fostered in many different ways over the longer term. Key elements will be legislation that is seen to be clear and respected, a statutory code which again is seen to be respected and an authoritative and independent Statistics Board. Thus the Statistics Commission regards the future Code as being a necessary but not sufficient element in pursuit of a widely trusted statistical service.

### **The pursuit of quality**

19. The new Code should be seen as a key component of a more comprehensive framework of assessment and assurance that will maintain standards over time, not just a free-standing statement of good practice. We believe that adherence to the Code will help to ensure that statistics and related advice are produced and released in ways that are better attuned to the needs of users. In this sense, the Code will contribute to integrity and quality and also to public trust.

### **A Code for individuals**

20. The Civil Service Code<sup>19</sup> is a code for individual civil servants. The proposed National Statistics Code is, in contrast, a code for government departments and agencies. There is arguably a case for supplementing the National Statistics Code with additional guidance aimed at individual civil servants responsible for statistical work. This would serve to define the values and ethical standards that they, as individuals, are expected to respect. However, we believe that the value of having such a personal code for statistical staff, over and above the Civil Service Code and the National Statistics Code, is a matter that should properly be left to the National Statistician.

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<sup>19</sup> *The Civil Service Code*, 6 June 2006, Cabinet Office

### **The draft Code**

21. The Code consists of 9 **principles**, each of which is supported by a statement of **practices** that government bodies that produce National Statistics would be required to respect. We would expect the principles to remain stable over time but the statements of practices might evolve and be supplemented by additional explanatory material in some cases.

## Consultation

22. Key questions on which responses are sought by the **end of February 2007** are:

- i. Whether we have identified the principles and practices sufficiently clearly.
- ii. Whether any further principles and practices should be added or any of those suggested should be dropped.
- iii. Whether additional annexes – designed to expand on the short statement of practices – should be prepared, or whether to amend those that are suggested.
- iv. Whether the practices, as drafted, offer a suitable basis against which to make assessments of compliance.

23. Responses to the consultation should be sent to

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to arrive by 28 February 2007.

### **The Statistics Commission**

The Statistics Commission is an independent non-statutory public body. It was set up in June 2000 to help ensure National Statistics are trustworthy and responsive to public needs; and to give independent, reliable and relevant advice and by so doing to provide an additional safeguard on the quality and integrity of National Statistics. It operates openly and independently of both Ministers and the producers of statistics.

[www.statscom.org.uk](http://www.statscom.org.uk)

## THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS

National Statistics<sup>20</sup> are fundamental to good government and the delivery of public services. They are also essential to democracy, providing Parliament and public with a window on society and the economy, and on the work and performance of government itself.

This Code is consistent with the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics<sup>21</sup> and the European Statistics Code of Practice<sup>22</sup>. It encapsulates how the civil service core values<sup>23</sup> of integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality will be interpreted in relation to the production of National Statistics:

- Integrity – putting the public interest above organisational or personal interests
- Honesty – being truthful and open about the statistics and their interpretation
- Objectivity – using scientific method to collect statistics and basing statistical advice on rigorous analysis of the evidence
- Impartiality – acting solely according to the merits of the statistical evidence, serving equally well all aspects of the public interest.

The Code sets out nine principles and, in relation to each, a statement of associated practices. It has been framed to support the assessment of compliance both by bodies producing National Statistics and independently under the auspices of the Statistics Board.

Within the United Kingdom, National Statistics are produced by a number of separate government bodies and observance of this Code by those bodies is central to maintaining a unified statistical service that meets the needs of government and the wider community and is both trustworthy and trusted.

Underpinning the Code is the assumption that within those government bodies that produce National Statistics there will be sufficient managerial separation, between those staff engaged in the production and publication of statistics and those who use the statistics for policy and management purposes, to ensure transparency of the statistical process and clear professional accountability.

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<sup>20</sup> National Statistics are those statistics and statistical reports etc that are so identified under the provisions of *[The Statistics and Registration Service Act]*

<sup>21</sup> <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/methods/statorg/FP-English.htm>

<sup>22</sup> [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/PGP\\_DS\\_QUALITY/TAB47141301/VERSIONE\\_INGLESE\\_WEB.PDF](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/pls/portal/docs/PAGE/PGP_DS_QUALITY/TAB47141301/VERSIONE_INGLESE_WEB.PDF)

<sup>23</sup> The Civil Service Code, 6 June 2006, Cabinet Office

## Principle 1: Integrity

**At all stages in the production and dissemination of National Statistics, the public interest should prevail over organisational, political or personal interests.**

### *Practices*

- Present National Statistics impartially.
- Provide full and helpful commentary on the reliability of the statistics in relation to the range of major potential uses.
- Prepare and publish analyses of the data which aid interpretation and provide context. Where it will help users, this may include factual information about the policy context of a set of statistics.
- Issue statistical releases separately from and before statements from Ministers about the figures.
- Release National Statistics in accordance with the practices set out in Annex A.
- Make and publish assessments of customer satisfaction in relation to key outputs and services.
- Keep records of feedback from customers, including complaints, and make these records available on request, together with what action was taken.
- Inform the National Statistician about complaints which relate to professional integrity, quality or standards whether or not they can be resolved directly.

## Principle 2: Relevance

**The production of National Statistics should be planned so as to inform decisions in government, public services, business and the wider community. As far as possible National Statistics should be internally consistent, consistent over time, and compatible between producers.**

### *Practices*

- Under the guidance of the National Statistician, adopt systematic National Statistics planning arrangements, including transparent priority-setting.
- Adopt common statistical sampling frames, questions, definitions, statistical units and classifications (including common geographic referencing and coding standards). Publish clear reasons for deviations from standard models.
- Adopt consistent formats for all National Statistics outputs, for example in the presentation of graphs, tables and maps.
- Where time series data are revised, or changes are made in methodology or coverage, consistent historical data should be produced wherever possible, taking into account user requirements.
- Adopt international standard concepts, definitions and classifications to promote international comparability wherever practicable and support the development of those standards through effective engagement with international organisations.
- Investigate and document the use made of existing statistics and the types of decision they inform, and the key areas of emerging demand and unmet need. Take these into account in the planning process and report the results.
- When changes are contemplated to National Statistics - for example in their collection, methodology, presentation or dissemination - allow time to consult users effectively. Such consultation should follow the guidance in Annex B.

## Principle 3: Sound methodology and assured quality

The methods for the collection, processing, storage and presentation of National Statistics should accord with scientific principles and internationally recognised best practice and agreements. Quality should be monitored and assured independently following centrally determined procedures.

### *Practices*

- Ensure that National Statistics are produced using sound, and published, statistical methods.
- Adopt a policy of continuous improvement for the processes underlying all key outputs, and reflect this in business plans.
- Adopt quality assurance procedures that assess each statistical source and product against user requirements, and in terms of how they harmonise with other sources and outputs.
- Identify any potential sources of statistical bias in estimates and provide an evaluation of the extent and level of bias; make this information available to users.
- Minimise the risk of loss or corruption of statistical resources and put in place back-up arrangements that are proportionate to the importance of the resource.
- Carry out, and co-operate with, reviews of statistical outputs in accordance with [*central guidance yet to be promulgated*]<sup>24</sup> including reviews of standards and classifications to ensure continued relevance.
- Use the Statistician Competence Framework<sup>25</sup> to set the requirements of a post and the development needs of staff to ensure they have the skills to deliver a quality service.
- Support staff in their continuing professional development to maintain and extend their knowledge and understanding.
- Support the mobility of statistical staff between producer organisations to assist the transfer of knowledge, expertise and good practice and the development of wider experience.

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<sup>24</sup> The Statistics Commission published a report, *No.27: Managing the Quality of Official Statistics*, in October 2005 which made recommendations in this context.

<sup>25</sup> *The GSS Statistician Competence Framework* appears in Annex A of the NS Code of Practice Protocol on Professional Competence, Crown Copyright 2004, TSO

## Principle 4: Value for money

**The resources allocated to statistical work should be used optimally to deliver outputs that meet the needs of users inside and outside government.**

### *Practices*

- Monitor expenditure against business plans and demonstrate effective stewardship of funds allocated to statistical work.
- Seek to balance output quality against costs (including both costs to government and providers), taking into account the uses of the statistics.
- Minimise duplication in data collection among public bodies and use existing sources, in combination where appropriate, to meet user needs.
- Plan new statistical collections in such a way that they add value to other parts of the statistical system where possible.
- Maximise opportunities for cross-analysis of sources and for the exchange and re-use of data. Where possible, use common information technology and information management systems that are 'inter-operable' i.e. which facilitate the flow of information between producers of statistics.
- Use formal project management techniques, risk management strategies and business continuity planning in ways that enhance value for money.
- Ensure that the balance of resources between a) the collection of data and b) their presentation, dissemination and communication, is such as to encourage best use of the statistics.

## Principle 5: Communication

**Statistics and information about statistical processes should be published in a form convenient to users and in as much detail as practicable.**

### *Practices*

- Make statistics available in as much detail as is reliable and practicable, subject to legal and confidentiality constraints, offering choice and flexibility in the format according to the level of detail required by the user.
- Release statistical work in progress, in whole or in part, where justified and approved by the National Statistician. For example, 'experimental statistics'<sup>26</sup> may be published in order to involve users and other stakeholders in their development. They must be clearly marked as such and explained in lay terms.
- Release statistics in formats and using presentational styles that are convenient to the widest range of users, and which promote informed debate.
- Maintain a **Statistical Publication Statement**, consistent with all the principles of this Code, covering presentation, dissemination (including a revisions policy<sup>27</sup>) and pricing of National Statistics outputs.
- Make public full documentation on procedures followed in the production and dissemination of National Statistics.
- Announce substantial methodological changes in advance of the release of statistics based on the new methods.
- Provide a statement explaining the nature and extent of revisions at the same time that they are released.

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<sup>26</sup> Experimental statistics are [explanation to be completed]

<sup>27</sup> National Statistics may be revised when additional information becomes available that impacts their quality. Revisions may be scheduled, where this information becomes available to a known timetable, or unscheduled, where it becomes unexpectedly available.

## Principle 6: Accessibility

**National Statistics should be equally accessible to all users**

### *Practices*

- Make National Statistics equally available to all, at the same time subject to any rights to pre-release access established under the [Statistics and Registration Service Act].
- Make access to National Statistics as easy as possible for everyone by providing easy-to-use entry points and exploiting all appropriate means of dissemination, working with other producers and with organisations outside government as appropriate.
- Ensure that National Statistics are published in a form which enables those with disabilities to access them.
- Promote National Statistics outputs in comprehensive, freely available and up-to-date electronic and paper catalogues that enable users to identify and access information relevant to their needs.
- Release National Statistics in an orderly manner following the procedures set out in Annex A.
- Use the consultation arrangements at Annex B to assess user satisfaction with the form and timing of National Statistics outputs and the publicity provided for them.
- Publish all National Statistics outputs on the internet without charge to the user.
- For any supplementary statistical services for which a charge is made, adopt clear pricing policies that comply with legislation and government policy – such as HM Treasury guidelines on charging and central guidance on Crown Copyright.
- Deposit statistical resources worthy of permanent preservation with the relevant national archive and deposit all printed publications with the relevant legal deposit office within one month of publication.

## Principle 7: Confidentiality

**Confidential data collected or used for statistical purposes should be strictly protected and should not subsequently be used for non-statistical purposes.**

### *Practices*

- Make a firm commitment that no statistics will be produced that reveal personal information (unless specifically agreed with the individual), and notify all respondents to statistical surveys accordingly at the time of data collection.
- Take into account the potential for indirect disclosure<sup>28</sup> and the implications of that disclosure for the individuals concerned when deciding whether and how to release National Statistics.
- Inform respondents of the main intended uses and access limitations applying to the information they provide to statistical inquiries.
- Use statistical disclosure control methods that provide sufficient protection for confidential information whilst respecting also the needs of users of statistics.
- Keep those data collected for statistical purposes (that identify personal information) secure and ensure that they are used exclusively for statistical purposes as determined by the National Statistician.
- Restrict access to data identifying personal information to the minimum number of staff necessary to the production of National Statistics and ensure that they have been fully trained in their obligations to protect confidentiality. Maintain records that identify the individuals involved in such work and make these available to the Statistics Board on request.
- Give access to confidential data to a third party (a contractor for example) only after a direct written agreement has been signed that sets out how the data are to be processed and for what statistical purposes. Keep records of any such access provided.
- Should a situation arise in which the law requires information identifying an individual, which has been collected for statistical purposes, to be made available for other purposes – such as police enquiries where provided for by statute - the information may only be provided under the personal direction of the National Statistician. The Statistics Board must also be informed and will report the circumstances to Parliament.

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<sup>28</sup> In this context, 'indirect disclosure' refers to the possibility that otherwise non-disclosive material could reveal confidential information if subsequently put together with, as yet unpublished, information from another source. For example, local crime statistics might be put together with information subsequently disclosed in court.

## **Principle 8: Proportionate burden**

**The reporting burden should be proportionate to the value of the statistics to users and should not be excessive for respondents.**

### *Practices*

- Report annually the estimated costs (on businesses, the public etc) of responding to statistical surveys and strive to develop methods that will reduce the costs to individual organisations or people.
- Seek participation in surveys through informed consent wherever possible, and exercise statutory authority for data to be acquired by compulsion only when there are clear benefits in doing so and after making all reasonable attempts at obtaining data by consent.
- Promote statistical purposes in the design of administrative systems so that maximum use can be made of them for statistical purposes, thus reducing the need to carry out surveys.

## Principle 9: Adequate resources

The resources made available for statistical functions should be sufficient to meet the requirements of this Code.

### *Practices*

- Ensure that statistical functions have the financial and human resources to produce and disseminate National Statistics to the standards of this Code. The Statistics Board will look to the National Statistician for advice on whether the resources available are adequate.
- If changes in resource allocation to particular statistical functions are under consideration, ensure that users are consulted before decisions are made. Build specific resources for user consultation into budgets.
- Ensure that the allocation of resources matches the requirements of the work programme that emerges from the planning process, and that an adequate audit trail is maintained.
- Ensure posts that require professional skills (as set out in the Statistician Competence Framework<sup>29</sup>) are filled by individuals who have been appointed through external or internal schemes that specifically assess such skills to common standards.

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<sup>29</sup> *The GSS Statistician Competence Framework* is reproduced in Annex A of the NS Code of Practice Protocol on Professional Competence, 2004, TSO

## **ANNEX A: RELEASE PRACTICES**

The procedures set out below are designed to ensure that National Statistics are released into the public domain in an orderly manner that gives equal access to all, and promotes public confidence.

In releasing National Statistics outputs, producer organisations will:

- Publish statistics as soon as they and any accompanying commentary and analysis are judged ready so that there is no opportunity, or perception of opportunity, for the release to be withheld or delayed.
- Maintain a rolling **Timetable of Statistical Releases** for a year ahead. This should state the month of release as early as practicable and the exact release date no less than two weeks in advance.
- Be consistent from one period to the next in release arrangements for recurring Releases.
- Make significant changes to the content or format of recurring Releases only on the basis of user needs and after consultation with users. Reasons for such changes must be publicly available and pre-announced.
- Recognise that responsibility for the format and content of Statistical Releases rests with the relevant statistical Head of Profession and require the name of that person to appear in each Release for which they are responsible.
- Draw public attention to any change to a pre-announced release date and explain fully the reasons for the change at the same time.
- Limit access before public release to those people essential to production and publication. Maintain records of all who are involved, and make these records available to the Statistics Board on request.
- Comply with the rules and principles on pre-release access made by Ministers under the [Statistics and Registration Service Act].
- Ensure that no indication of the content of the Release is made public, or given to the media or any other external party, before publication. Report to the National Statistician [and Board] immediately any accidental or wrongful release and initiate immediate investigation of the circumstances.
- Give journalists embargoed access to complex Statistical Releases only if this is seen as necessary for them to provide informed comment at the time of release. Such embargo arrangements must be approved by the National Statistician.

### ***Market sensitive statistics***

Special arrangements apply to market-sensitive National Statistics. For the purposes of the Code these are [*NOTE: subject to further consideration*]:

- Index of production
- Index of services
- Producer prices

- Consumer price indices
- Labour market statistics
- Retail sales
- Public sector finances
- Motor vehicle production
- UK trade
- National Accounts (all measures)
- Balance of payments

Any attempt to profit from pre-release access to these statistics is liable to criminal prosecution.

**In releasing market sensitive statistics**, producer organisations will:

- Give markets time to understand and respond to the information during normal working hours by issuing Statistical Releases at 9.30am on a weekday
- Provide the date of release at least six months in advance.
- Should the need arise, require anyone given pre-release access to make a signed declaration that they have only used the information for the specific purpose for which they were given such access, and that they have not passed it to anyone else.

## **ANNEX B: CONSULTATION**

### **Planning consultation**

- Unless a specific agreement already exists, contact user groups and discuss with them the best means of obtaining views before consultation starts.
- Alert users as information about consultations becomes available.
- Balance the importance of the issue and the likely impact of user views against the time and resources available so as to obtain good value for money from the consultation process.

### **Carrying out consultation**

- Inform the National Statistician about any formal consultations in order to avoid duplication and to make widest possible use of ideas, comments and other materials that are offered in responses.
- Work with other producers of National Statistics to co-ordinate consultations in order to give participants the best opportunity for effective input and to minimise the burden placed upon them.
- Make all consultation documents publicly available.
- Be clear in the documentation about who is being consulted, about what, and for what purpose.
- Express the issues as simply and concisely as possible.
- Make a timetable publicly available and ensure that each part of the process is given sufficient time for those interested to participate fully and properly
- Offer a variety of means of participation including, as appropriate, web sites, email, telephone, written submissions and face to face meetings.
- In formal consultations, follow Cabinet Office guidance on how these should be conducted.

### **Means of consultation**

There are many mechanisms available, including:

- Formal consultation documents (which should set out and summarise the key issues;
- Issuing a discussion paper to interested parties;
- Listening events such as conferences, roadshows and seminars. Events held by professional bodies, user groups and other organisations can provide valuable opportunities;
- Visits;

- Meetings with groups or individuals;
- Correspondence and phone calls with groups or individuals;
- Market research;
- Internet mailing groups;
- Complaints monitoring and suggestion schemes.

**After consultation**

- Put individual responses into the public domain unless anonymity requested.
- Make publicly available the records of decisions and actions following a consultation, together with explanations for them.