

Minutes of the Statistics Board Meeting 2nd February 2008

Present

Statistics Board - Non-Executive Members

Sir Michael Scholar (Chair-designate)
Professor Adrian Smith (Deputy Chair-designate - UK Statistical System)
Ms Moira Gibb
Sir Alan Langlands
Professor Steve Nickell
Professor David Rhind

Statistics Board - Executive Members

Ms Karen Dunnell (National Statistician)

ONS Executive observers

Ms Rolande Anderson
Ms Jil Matheson

Interim Secretariat

Mr Dennis Roberts
Mr Robert Bumpstead
Mr Allan Smith

Apologies

Lord Rowe-Beddoe (Deputy Chair-designate - ONS)
Mr Partha Dasgupta

Introduction

1. The Chair welcomed members to the important and historic first meeting of the Statistics Board.

Administrative Arrangements

2. Two Deputy chair-designates have been appointed to oversee the two distinct facets of the Board's operations: Lord Rowe-Beddoe, who will oversee the management of the Office for National Statistics; and Professor Smith who will oversee the wider UK Statistical System.

3. The Chair stated that his office would be at Government Buildings, Newport. The Board would also have a presence in Myddelton Street, London and, if arrangements for affordable accommodation can be made, Edinburgh. The accommodation will be physically separated within the hosting premises.

4. In discussing the arrangements for the management of risk, the Board agreed that an analysis of risk exposure will be an important tool in prioritising its agenda. A paper should be produced describing the key risks associated with the overall official statistics system for discussion at the meeting on 18th March.

Action: Secretariat

5. The Board agreed to the principle of full transparency in their operations, including the publication of minutes of meetings and the declaration of members' interests. The members of the Board should provide a letter detailing their interests to the Secretariat.

Action: Board Members

6. A paper describing best practice in transparency for analogous Boards should be produced for discussion at the meeting on 21st February.

Action: Secretariat

7. The Board agreed that meetings should take place monthly on the third Friday of every month. These meetings will take place predominantly in Newport, but also in locations throughout the UK. A list of dates and venues of meetings for the first year will be circulated as soon as possible.

Action: Secretariat

8. The Board agreed that the recruitment process would now begin in order to recruit key posts. The Head of Assessment post will be advertised on 10th February as a four year fixed-term appointment. A copy of the draft advertisement and job specification for the post will be circulated to Board members for comment.

Action: Secretariat

Launch Arrangements

9. In discussion of the launch arrangements, the Board noted that the launch should be seen as subset of an overall communication strategy. Such a strategy should address how the Board will engage with a broad range of stakeholders and across the whole spectrum of the media. A draft communication strategy should be produced for discussion at the meeting on 21st February. The strategy and launch arrangements should also reflect any advice given by Howell James, Head of Government Communications.

Action: Sir Michael Scholar and Secretariat

10. The launch arrangements were endorsed in principle, but further suggestions should be made about the means of engaging the popular press and a revised schema of the launch activity should be developed.

Action: Secretariat

Branding

11. The Board agreed that it would operate under the name the *United Kingdom Statistics Authority*, and retain *Office for National Statistics* as the name for the Executive Office. A press release should be released during the week commencing 4th February, removing the paragraphs in brackets in the main body of the draft.

Action: Secretariat

12. A series of logos were agreed in concept. Further drafts of these logos should be produced for agreement by the Chair. These drafts should reflect "Statistics" (plural) in the National Statistics Quality Mark and build a more explicit link between the tick design in the Quality Mark and the logo for the UK Statistics Authority.

Action: Secretariat

13. The Board agreed that communicating the precise status of existing, but not yet been assessed, National Statistics would be of paramount importance at the time of the launch.

14. The Board agreed to retain the '.gov' suffix in electronic addresses, but attempts should be made to secure the additional URLs (such as '.org') to prevent competing websites appearing.

Action: Secretariat

Publication Hub and Website

15. The Board approved plans for 'About the Statistics Board' and 'About ONS' to be implemented from 1st April. In addition, the Board approved proposals for direct access to National Statistics via the Board's website from 1st April, but noted the risks associated with the achievement of complete coverage from this date. These plans would mark an immediate and visible improvement from current practice and as such should be highlighted during the launch. The Board also agreed a preferred set of URLs for use in electronic communications.

Scope of Official Statistics

16. During the discussion of the letter from Ed Miliband, consulting on a list of non-crown bodies, Board members noted apparent omissions from the list. A draft response should be prepared by 4th February seeking assurances that the list contained all existing National Statistics producers and that the list could be readily revised by Order when the Board return to this issue in more detail.

Action: Secretariat

Pre-release access to Statistics

17. The Board strongly endorsed the public statements made by the Chair in relation to the Government's proposals for pre-release access to statistics. Board members expressed the view that pre-release policy is central to the improvement of public confidence in statistics and as such should be within the Board's powers. A draft response should be produced for further discussion at the next meeting on 21st February, and detailed comments for inclusion should be provided to the Secretariat during the week commencing 4th February.

Action: Secretariat and Board Members

Any Other Business

18. The Board's position on ONS' location strategy will need to be clarified at the earliest opportunity, to avoid further uncertainty for staff. A paper should be produced to allow the Board to agree their position at the meeting on 21st February.

Action: Secretariat

Agenda

Chair: Sir Michael Scholar
Apologies: Lord Rowe-Beddoe, Mr Dasgupta.

1	Introduction	
2	Statistics Board administrative arrangements	Verbal report from the Chair
3	Issues and Priorities for the Statistics Board	Paper: SB(08)01
4	Launch	Paper: SB(08)02
5	Branding	Paper: SB(08)03
6	Publication Hub	Paper: SB(08)04
7	Scope of Official Statistics	Paper: SB(08)05
8	Pre-release access to statistics	Paper: SB(08)06
9	Any other business	

Next Meeting: Thursday 21st February, 11.30am to 4.00pm
Boardroom, ONS, 1 Drummond Gate, London, SW1V 2QQ

Overview: Issues and Priorities for the Statistics Board

Purpose

1. This paper presents a set of priority issues for the attention of the Statistics Board.

Timing

2. The particular time constraints applicable to each item are indicated below. All are urgent. Items described at paragraphs seven to fifteen have been identified as top priorities by the Chair. They will be tabled at the first Board meeting on 2 February, 2008.

Recommendations

3. Members of the Statistics Board are asked to comment on the issues identified and consider agendas for the subsequent Board meetings of 21 February and 18 March.

Discussion

4. For the past year the preparatory work for Independence has been coordinated by the ONS Independence Programme led by the Programme Director Dennis Roberts, and overseen by a high-level Government Statistical Society (GSS) Steering Committee chaired by the National Statistician. The Programme has been guided by a network of GSS advisory groups and informed by discussion and debate at conferences, meetings and other events. The Programme has focussed on the professional statistical aspects of Independence.
5. The Statistical Reform Team at HM Treasury have continued to lead on legislative issues, overseen by a high-level steering committee chaired by Dave Ramsden (Director MacroEconomic and Fiscal Policy) and also comprising senior GSS representation. As legislative issues have been resolved they have passed over to the Programme for implementation. (A residual element of the Statistics Reform Team has now moved to the Cabinet Office.)
6. The culmination of this work is a series of policies, positions and options for the Board to consider. What follows is a concise summary of those issues which the Programme, in consultation with the Chair-designate of the Statistics Board, Sir Michael Scholar, have identified as immediate priorities. Papers can be provided on all topics.

Issues for consideration at the first meeting of the Board

7. Administrative arrangements for the Board. Board members will wish to consider when and where the Board will meet and how the Board will report its deliberations, with particular regard to transparency. The Board should also consider which committees it wishes to form immediately (including audit and remuneration) and assign lead responsibility for these and other roles as appropriate.
8. Launch arrangements The Statistics Board will formally assume its powers on 1 April, 2008. To mark the biggest change to the statistical system for 60 years a series of launch events are proposed. The main events take place on 31 March including a press conference, media interviews with Board members and a stakeholder reception. Events in departments for staff would be held the following day, with later launches taking place in

the Devolved Administrations.

9. Branding Although the Statistics Act establishes the 'Statistics Board' it does not have to operate under that name. Similarly there is no requirement for the Board's executive office to be called the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Options for names and logos have been researched with focus groups. It is recommended that the Board operate as the 'UK Statistics Authority' (UKSA) and retain the name Office for National Statistics for its executive office. The names for public use must be determined at the first Board meeting if they are to be in place on the new website and on communications from 1 April.

10. Central Publication Hub and Website The 'Hub' is an electronic platform through which all National Statistics will be released. The aim is to separate statistical release from policy comment. A programme has been established to deliver the Statistics Board's website, including the Hub, alongside a new ONS website.

11. An 'About the Board' website is scheduled for delivery in April 2008 with a full Hub available by April 2009. However, it may be possible to deliver an interim Hub much sooner, using links from the Statistics Board site to the Departmental statistics themselves, branded with the National Statistics logo. A degree of risk is associated. The Board must determine whether to pursue this proposal in time for an April launch.

12. Scope of Official Statistics. The Act gives the Board the duty to monitor, promote and safeguard the production and publication of 'official statistics'. It defines official statistics as those produced by the Board, Departments, Devolved Administrations and other crown bodies. Cabinet Office are required to compile a list of non-Crown bodies who may produce official statistics and consult the Board on that list.

13. The Board's primary interest in definitional matters will be to ensure it is enabled to comment publicly on issues related to official statistics, and to undertake Assessments. Cabinet Office need to place this list before Parliament by mid-February so it may pass into secondary legislation before enactment of the Statistics Act on 1 April. The secondary legislation can be reviewed and updated in future as required.

14. Pre-Release. The Statistics Act gives Government the power to determine the rules on privileged pre-release access to statistics in their final form. The Prime Minister announced last July a reduction in the maximum time allowed for pre-release access to 24 hours. Cabinet Office are in public consultation on this proposal.

15. The Chair issued an interim statement in December. This stated that the time should be further reduced in line with international best practice, and, that the issue should be a decision for the Board not ministers. The Board is required to issue a formal response by 3 March when the consultation closes. The rules concerning pre-release will then be laid before Parliament and passed into secondary legislation, taking effect from late April or May, and reviewed after one year.

Issues for consideration at the subsequent two meetings of the Board

16. Terms of Reference The Board will wish to adopt terms of reference and formally agree membership. The Statistics Act specifies the Board will include three executive members:- the National Statistician and two other employees of the Board appointed by

the non-executive members.

17. Funding and Remit In his 2007 Budget the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced the funding to be provided to ONS, and subsequently the Statistics Board. The settlement is for £1.2 billion over the five years from 2007/08 to 2011/12. This is the settlement the Board inherits. HMT have further stated that £30 million has been earmarked for new functions specific to Independence. This is for the period for 2008/09 to 2011/12.

18. The money is not ring-fenced. It will be for the Board to decide on spending allocations for the Board's functions and the activities of the Board's executive office. In the interim, costed options for delivery of the Independence agenda from within this indicative allocation of £30 million have been developed for the Board's consideration. The Board will also wish to consider their remit from Government, an annual document outlining the Department's new and on-going tasks.

19. Staffing Strategy The Board will require staff to enable it to discharge its responsibilities and function effectively. The key appointment is the Head of Assessment. This a statutory post to be appointed by the non-executive members of the Board. The job specification has been approved by the Chair and the post is due to be advertised shortly. Plans are also in hand to recruit a small, initial cadre of support staff. The Board may wish to consider further how staff will be recruited and organised.

20. Assessment and Designation The Statistics Act requires the Board to publish a Code of Practice against which statistics will be assessed and either designated as National Statistics or not. All existing National Statistics must be assessed, together with any candidate National Statistics. Decisions to approve or deny designation are likely to attract considerable interest from Ministers, Parliament and the media. Users and producers will follow developments closely.

21. The Board will need to consider any action it may wish to take (in advance of the appointment of the Head of Assessment) with respect to: (i) preparation, consultation and publication of a Code of Practice; (ii) an interim strategy for Assessment pending adoption of that Code; (iii) the remit and work programme of the Assessment function.

22. Statistical System The Board both replaces Ministers as the top-level of governance of ONS, and, becomes responsible for promoting and safeguarding the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. New arrangements are required to enable the Board to perform these functions.

23. Models of a high-level committee structure have been developed for the Board's consideration. These reflect the role of the Board and the National Statistician, the decentralised nature of the GSS and the wider official statistical system. In conjunction with this, a programme of work to revitalise the GSS is being led by the National Statistician.

24. Devolved Administrations. The Board's remit extends across the UK. However, under the 1998 devolution settlement the Devolved Administrations (DAs) retain authority for statistics on devolved matters. As such, it was for the DAs to elect to participate in the UK Government's statistical reforms and the Board is accountable to each legislature for

its work on devolved statistics. It would be desirable to establish at an early stage appropriate arrangements for the Board and DAs to best work together.

25. Census 2011* The Statistics Board will be responsible for the 2011 Census in England and Wales, taking over the role from the Registrar General. The Census is the largest statistical operation of Government, constitutes by far the largest item of Board expense, and, will be critical to the Board's reputation.

26. The Census is taken under the Census Act 1920 but requires additional secondary legislation. This is usually preceded by a White Paper, the vehicle by which Parliament are formally advised of plans for the Census. A White Paper will be laid before Parliament in October 2008. Before then it is proposed to give Ministers the opportunity to comment. To meet this timetable a draft white paper is required by mid-April to enable Cabinet Office to formally consult Ministers.

27. ONS work programme 2008/09* ONS is currently engaged in a process of public consultation on its statistical work programme over the period 2008/09 to 2011/12. The consultation will conclude in February. Detailed plans for 2008/09 will be ready for the Board's consideration.

28. Board work programme 2008/09* The Board will wish to consider its own work programme for the coming year.

*The Board may consider these issues too large to be effectively tackled in a Board meeting and/or may wish to take them in another forum/workshop/committee.

Rob Bumpstead, Interim Secretariat, January 2008

STATISTICS BOARD

SB(08)02

Launch

Purpose

1. This paper suggests a programme of events for the launch of the Statistics Board.

Timing

2. Urgent. Arrangements need to be put in place for end March.

Recommendations

3. The Board should:
 - i. agree public facing arrangements for launching the Statistics Board (paragraph 5);
 - ii. agree the arrangements for highlighting the launch in the Devolved Administrations (paragraph 6);
 - iii. note the arrangements for staff to celebrate the launch (paragraph 7).

Discussion

4. The arrangements for a Statistics Board will formally come into effect on 1 April, 2008. This is the biggest change to the governance of statistics in the UK for at least 60 years and deserves to be marked by a series of events for staff, statistics users and the media.
5. The main events are planned for 31 March. Key features proposed are:
 - A press notice launching the new, independent Board, explaining the reasons behind the changes and the Board's role and strategic aims, with quotes from the Chair and National Statistician.
 - Media launch with Sir Michael, Board members and the National Statistician at the Houses of Parliament, 10.45am (press conference format).
 - An evening reception for stakeholders, 6-8pm, Lancaster House. Three or four key speakers followed by an opportunity to network over drinks and canapes. Approximately 200 guests to include users, leading players (including Statistics Board members, ONS former non-executives etc.) Heads of Professions, staff and media representatives.
 - Programme of pre-arranged radio and TV interviews during the afternoon of 31 March and throughout 1 April to highlight the value of official statistics to society, importance of trust in government statistics and the role of the new Board.
 - Option of a photo call, 10am Abdingdon Green (grassed area in front of House of Commons), depicting the launch with the Chair and National Statistician, to interest the tabloids and TV.
6. The Devolved Administrations (DAs) have expressed interest in events in their areas to highlight and celebrate the changes. The proposal is to have informal gatherings with members of the Statistics Board and local key stakeholders (politicians, users and staff). The DA's preferred timing is early May.
7. Staff have a keen interest in the new arrangements and are a key element in making a success of them. It is proposed to have celebratory cakes for staff on each ONS site with

other light refreshments on 1 April. Similarly, Heads of Profession in other government departments will be offered celebratory cakes and invited to roll out the launch to their own staff on 1 April. Attendance by members of the Statistics Board at these events would be particularly welcomed.

Dennis Roberts, Interim Secretariat, January 2008

STATISTICS BOARD

SB(08)03

Branding

Purpose

1. This paper suggests a package of brands for adoption by the Board.

Timing

2. Urgent. The names for public use must be determined at the first Board meeting if they are to be in place on the new website and on communications from 1 April, 2008.

Recommendations

3. The Board should:
 - i. operate as the UK Statistics Authority;
 - ii. issue a press notice (see Annex A) to this effect immediately following the Board meeting. This will ensure the Board's launch and not its name change is the key message when the Board takes office on 1 April;
 - iii. retain the name Office for National Statistics for its Executive Office but with a new logo;
 - iv. retain the '.gov' suffix in the electronic addresses of both;
 - v. adopt a Quality Mark to signify 'National Statistics' status.

Discussion

4. Although the Statistics Act establishes the 'Statistics Board' it does not have to operate under that name. Other organisations that have adopted a different public name from their legislative name include the Patent Office (now the UK Intellectual Property Office) and the Commission for Equalities and Human Rights (now Equality and Human Rights Commission). Similarly there is no requirement for the new executive office of the SB to be called the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

5. Options for names and logos have been researched with focus groups representing the general public, users within and outside government, the Government Statistical Service and ONS staff.

6. Statistics Board: 'Board', 'Council', 'Commission' and 'Authority' were considered. 'Board' was considered to be the most accurate description but with negative connotations suggesting an autocratic body of highly-paid members who would not necessarily have the best interests of the public at heart. 'Authority' was felt to portray a more detached and intangible body with the will, the means and the power to exercise control. Including 'independent' in the title was considered counter-productive (if you need to assert your independence that forcefully it probably means you aren't) and confusing (what was the Board was independent of).

7. Respondents who felt the organisation should have a geographical reference were positively disposed toward use of the prefix UK. Including the Board's geographical designation would also demonstrate its remit runs across the whole of the UK and avoid confusion in international fora.

8. Executive Office: Office for National Statistics has some, generally positive, public

recognition but 'ONS' is not well understood. Office of the National Statistician (favoured by some departments as a more accurate description of the role of the office) was disliked as it suggested a single office staffed by a lone individual.

9. Adopting a new logo for the ONS would signify change and remove the difficulties with the present logo. The National Statistics map logo has been used as both the logo for the ONS and the quality kitemark for code-complaint National Statistics, causing confusion for users.

10. Quality Mark and Logo The double-ringed quality mark with a tick in the middle worked well, clearly communicating the idea of a stamp of approval.

11. Designs of all the preferred names and logos are shown at Annex A.

12. The electronic address (url) of the Board and the ONS is an additional issue. These should be '.gov' domains as they are a non-ministerial department that is independent of Ministers but not independent of government. Discussions on urls are underway with the controlling authority. Current options are:

- National Statistics website to remain **www.statistics.gov.uk**
- e-mail address for Statistics Board and Assessment staff to be eg **michael.scholar@statistics.gsi.gov.uk**
- e-mail address for ONS staff to remain as eg **karen.dunnell@ons.gsi.gov.uk**
- Options for the About Statistics Board website are **www.statistics.gov.uk/uksa**, **www.statistics.gov.uk/statisticsauthority**, and **www.statistics.authority.gov.uk**
- Options for the About ONS website are **www.ons.gov.uk** and **www.statistics.gov.uk/ons**

13. The position is changing daily and we will provide an update on 2 February.

Dennis Roberts, Interim Secretariat, January 2008

United Kingdom Statistics Authority

New UK Statistics Authority meets for the first time

The new Statistics Board set up by Parliament in 2007 met today for the first time.

The new body will be known as the United Kingdom Statistics Authority (UKSA) and will answer directly to Parliament without Ministerial oversight. It will also govern the operations of the Office for National Statistics. It takes up its powers in April.

Chair of the Statistics Authority, Sir Michael Scholar said: "Today is a turning-point for UK Statistics. The new UK Statistics Authority met today for the first time, and began its task of building public trust in UK Statistics. Good statistics are the foundation of good decision-making, and of the proper understanding of our society and economy. We aim to ensure that UK Statistics are of the highest quality, and to earn the confidence and trust of the public, in particular that UK Statistics are free from any political spin."

The Authority is empowered by the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and its members have recently been appointed.

(In the Act, the Authority is referred to as the Statistics Board but it was agreed to operate under the title UK Statistics Authority. Research showed that this title was preferred by users and the public.

"Authority conveys command and control of our subject area and reflects the vigour and dynamism with which we intend to operate, while it was felt Board seemed static and reactionary," said Sir Michael.

"There is much important work for us to do before April not the least of which is the appointment of a Head of Assessment whose role will be to assure the quality of statistics being produced from across government.")

Background Notes:

1. The Statistics and Registration Service Act gained Royal Assent in 2007:
http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2007/ukpga_20070018_en_1

2. Sir Michael Scholar KCB was appointed Chair of the new Authority by Her Majesty The Queen in September 2007. He is President of St John's College, Oxford. He has been a governor of the National Institute for Economic and Social Research since 2001. Previously he was Permanent Secretary to the Department of Trade and Industry (1996 to 2001), Permanent Secretary to the Welsh Office (1993 to 1996) and Private Secretary to the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1981 to 1983).

3. The non-executive members of the authority were appointed in open competition and are:

- Lord Rowe-Beddoe of Kilgetty (David Rowe-Beddoe), who will occupy the Deputy Chair post with responsibility for the governance of the Office for National Statistics
- Professor Adrian Smith FRS, who will occupy the Deputy Chair post with responsibility for promoting and safeguarding the production and publication of all official statistics across the UK
- Professor David Rhind CBE, FRS, FBA who is Chairman of the Statistics Commission and was Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the City University in London until July 2007. He is a non-executive director of the Bank of England's Court of Directors, and until 1998 was Director-General of the Ordnance Survey
- Partha Dasgupta who is currently Chief Executive of the Pension Protection Fund and a former Managing Director at Barclays Global Investors
- Sir Alan Langlands FRSE who is Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Dundee. He was Chief Executive of the National Health Service in England 1994-2000
- Moira Gibb CBE who is Chief Executive Officer of Camden Borough Council
- Professor Steve Nickell CBE, FBA who is Warden of Nuffield College, Oxford. He was a member of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee from June 2000 to May 2006

4. The Authority will also include executive members from the Office for National Statistics. These will be the National Statistician, Karen Dunnell, and two other senior officials.

Annex B - Draft Logos/Headings



SB(08)03 Annex B.pr

STATISTICS BOARD

SB(08)04

Publication Hub

Purpose

1. This paper suggests initial development of the Statistics Board's website and new publication arrangements for National Statistics from 1 April, 2008.

Timing

2. Urgent. Arrangements need to be put in place for end March. Further discussions on plans to 1 April 2009 will be scheduled for a future Board meeting.

Recommendations

3. The Board should:
- i. approve plans for the development of 'About the Statistics Board' and 'About ONS' websites (paragraph 6);
 - ii. approve proposed changes to the National Statistics website from 1 April 2008 (paragraph 7) noting that further developments are planned to April 2009;
 - iii. approve arrangements for promoting ONS press briefing facilities for release of National Statistics produced by other departments (paragraph 8).

Discussion

4. In the course of Parliamentary debate on the Statistics Bill Ministers acknowledged arguments by the Royal Statistical Society and others for unified publication arrangements for all National Statistics. Ministers also agreed statistical releases should be clearly separate from any Ministerial comment. Subsequently the government made provision for the development of a 'publication Hub' in the ONS public expenditure settlement to 2012. The 'Hub' would be a separate statistics website for all National Statistics.

5. As ONS was already planning development of its own ONS/National Statistics website the two developments are being taken forward as a single programme under the auspices of a GSS-wide committee.

6. The target date for the new website pulling together release of statistics across government is April 2009. There would, however, be merit in introducing changes before then and preferably to coincide with the launch of new governance arrangements in April 2008.

7. The current National Statistics website (www.statistics.gov.uk) contains both statistics (new releases and old statistics) and details about ONS. Moving forward we propose to distinguish these two components to produce one website for statistics users containing all National Statistics and a related and linked website with details 'about ONS' (including how to apply for jobs etc).

8. In addition we would add an 'about the Statistics Board' website (holding similar material to the Statistics Commission website). These arrangements would be similar to websites of other National Statistical Institutes. Mock ups of the 'about ONS' and 'about

the Board' sites will be provided on 2 February. It is planned to introduce the about sites on 1 April, 2008.

9. It is not feasible to make major changes to the national statistics website by 1 April this year. But some small changes could usefully indicate the direction in which we are heading.

10. The main change proposed is to make the release of new National Statistics the most prominent part of the site and brand them under the Statistics Board. New releases would have direct links to the actual statistics on departmental sites - we would not allow links to other sections of departmental websites that might contain political comment on statistics. We are currently establishing with departments whether they can provide such deep links (i.e. to departments' statistical releases rather than policy pages). A mock up of the homepage will be provided on 2 February.

11. We are also exploring the scope to provide separate press briefing facilities for National Statistics releases. ONS currently has press briefing facilities at its Drummond Gate offices. Similar facilities will be provided at the new Myddelton Street offices. These facilities are used extensively for briefing journalists under lock up conditions in advance of release of major economic statistics, and for general briefing on new publications. In other departments any briefing on statistics is currently overseen by departmental press offices and often linked to Ministerial comment on the figures.

12. From 1 April, 2008 ONS will offer its press briefing facilities to other departments for releases of National Statistics. It is not yet clear to what extent departments will be willing to allow their statisticians to make use of the facility. It may to be a long haul to achieve widespread use of the facility.

Dennis Roberts, Interim Secretariat, January 2008

STATISTICS BOARD

SB(08)05

Scope of Official Statistics

Purpose

1. To agree a response to the Cabinet Office consultation on a proposed list of producers of Official Statistics. The list is still being compiled and will be supplied separately.

Timing

2. The Cabinet Office currently intends to place this list before Parliament in mid-February in time to allow the necessary secondary legislation Order to be made by 1 April, 2008.

Recommendations

3. The Board should:
- i. endorse the approach to be taken in response to the Cabinet Office [Paragraphs 4-8 and Annex A]
 - ii. consider the working definition of Official Statistics [Paragraphs 9-10 and Annex B]

Discussion

4. The Act places upon the Board a duty to monitor, promote and safeguard the production and publication of Official Statistics. The Board's primary interest in definitional matters will be to ensure that it is enabled to comment publicly on issues related to Official Statistics, and to undertake Assessments.
5. The Statistics Act defines Official Statistics in terms of the organisations producing statistics. Specifically it defines Official Statistics as those statistics produced by: the Board; a government department; the Scottish Administration; a Welsh ministerial authority; a Northern Ireland department; or any other person acting on behalf of the Crown.
6. In addition, the Act allows for other statistics produced by non-Crown bodies to be specified by Order. The Cabinet Office has recently trawled Departments to canvass views about which non-Crown bodies should be listed as producers of Official Statistics, with a view to seeking Parliamentary approval before 1 April, 2008. As required by the Act, the Cabinet Office will very shortly be seeking the Board's views.
7. The Board will wish to note that compilation of list has raised some sensitivities. For example, the Bank of England have indicated they wish to be excluded. In addition, many departments are still working to identify which of the bodies they sponsor should be included in the list. As such, Cabinet Office intend the list to be a first attempt at defining non-crown Official Statistics producers. It represents an initial, not final, position.
8. The Board does not, therefore, necessarily need to resolve any concerns it may have over exclusions at this stage. As the Act allows other Official Statistics to be specified by Order, the Board has the flexibility to explore the issues in greater detail with these producers and adapt its position over time. The outline response proposed in Annex A describes this approach.

9. The Act does not define what constitutes statistics. The Board may wish to consider whether it needs to adopt a working definition in order to discharge its duties. A new Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on European Statistics (currently going through co-decision), provides a definition which, once agreed, will be the most relevant legal understanding of the term.

10. A synthesis of the Act and the Regulation provides a practical working definition for the Board to consider [Annex B]. This definition is sufficiently broad to give the Board freedom to comment, if it chose to, on the production of a very wide range of material - a considerable amount of published output that the public might legitimately think of as 'statistical' emanates from outside the government statistical community – in policy documents, and in reports produced by other professional and analytical groups including social researchers and economists.

Richard Laux and Paul Jackson, Office for National Statistics, January 2008

Annex A

Draft response from the Chair-designate to the Cabinet Office for National Statistics

Key points to include:

- Proposals have been discussed by Board members, and seem adequate at this stage.
- Early days – indeed the Board does not begin its formal functioning for 2 months.
- The Board have noted certain bodies are excluded from the list which might be widely considered producers of official statistics.
- The Board understands that this is not a definitive list of producers of official statistics but an initial position which will be built upon.
- The Board will consider this issue again and will give a further view to the Cabinet Office.
- The Board are therefore content for Cabinet Office to proceed with Parliamentary arrangements.

Annex B

Proposed working definition of official statistics

‘Official statistics’ refers to:

- all the quantitative and qualitative, aggregated and representative information characterising a collective phenomenon in a considered population ...
- that have the value of informing the public about social, economic and environmental matters and/or that assist in the development and evaluation of public policy ...
- produced by the Board, a government department, the Scottish Administration, a Welsh ministerial authority, a Northern Ireland department, or any other person acting on behalf of the Crown, and such other statistics as specified by Order.

‘Official statistics’ therefore include:

- Analytical outputs which describe, interpret, visualise or contextualise quantitative, aggregated and representative information.
- Microdata – the observations, opinions, facts, or events relating to individual people, businesses or organisations – used for statistical purposes, that is released for example under the Approved Researcher arrangements

Official statistics should be accompanied by appropriate **contextual information**, to assist users, which include

- Associated metadata required to understand the nature of this aggregate information – including descriptions of ‘quality’
- Definitions, methods, classifications and standards, which together represent the statistical infrastructure.
- Methodological research intended to improve the estimation or presentation of statistics.

National Statistics are those official statistics that, in the Board’s view, comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

STATISTICS BOARD

Pre-release access to statistics

SB(08)06

Purpose

1. This paper outlines proposals for the Board's response to the Government consultation on this issue.

Timing

2. An agreed approach is needed on 2 February to enable the preparation of a draft response which the Board will consider on 21 February.

Recommendations

3. The Board should comment on the proposed basis for its response (annex A).

Discussion

4. The Government's public consultation on "Limiting pre-release access to statistics" closes on 3 March. Government is planning to introduce secondary legislation by May.

5. The consultation document includes a proposed Order by which the Government would "tighten the principles and rules under which pre-release access can be granted". Annex B is the Executive Summary of this document.

6. The Chair-designate has gone on record (December 2007) to say:

I have previously expressed the view that the responsibility for determining the pre-release arrangements should be handed over from Ministers to the new independent Statistics Board. I remain of that view. Moreover, I believe that the length of time for privileged pre-release access should be reduced still further, to bring it in line with best international practice.

The Government has proposed 24 hours advance notice. While this is better than 40 hours, if Ministers really want to rebuild public trust in official statistics they should hand over the responsibility for the decision to the new independent Board they have created.

7. The Statistics Commission responded to the consultation on 22 January (annex C). That letter contains a wealth of detail which the Board might - for the sake of brevity - wish to formally associate itself with.

Richard Laux, Office for National Statistics, January 2008

Form of the Board's proposed response to the consultation

1. The Board welcome this opportunity to comment formally, following the Chair-designate's earlier statement on this subject
2. Agrees that there *is* a case for allowing pre-release access in some circumstances
3. But does not consider that the Government's proposals are enough to have a positive impact on trust in official statistics
4. Instead the Board considers that public confidence would best be served by introducing a pre-release regime that was consistent with best international practice
5. The Board has looked at practices in a number of other countries, in particular the recent tightening of the pre-release regime in Australia, and accordingly considers that:
 - i. the range of outputs to which pre-release access might be granted should be reduced considerably
 - ii. the period of pre-release access should be reduced considerably more than Government has proposed - to a maximum of [3] hours - noting that this will necessitate some changes to the time at which statistics are released [from 9.30am to, say, 11.30 am]
 - iii. only relevant Ministers and, at most, one or two briefing officials should receive privileged pre-release access
 - iv. whilst there should be scope for consideration of special circumstances, these should be far more stringent than those proposed
6. The Board considers it important that release practices are consistent across the UK
7. The Board fully endorses the detailed comments set out in the Statistics Commission's reponse to this consultation
8. The Board supports and re-iterates the view expressed earlier by the Chair-designate that it rather than Ministers should be responsible for decisions associated with pre-release
9. Given the above, the Board notes that, notwithstanding the provisions of the Statistics Act, it would be straightforward for Government to say that it will implement the Board's recommendations in full - and that this would be a major step towards improving trust.

Executive summary of "Limiting pre-release access to statistics"

The Statistics and Registration Act 2007 is the most substantial piece of statistics legislation for 60 years and establishes an independent Statistics Board to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics.

In order that Ministers can account immediately for the implications of statistics about policy areas for which they are democratically responsible, they are in certain circumstances given access to those statistics ahead of publication.

As a part of the Governance of Britain programme of constitutional renewal, the Government is proposing to tighten the principles and rules under which pre-release access can be granted:

- limiting pre-release access to a strict maximum of 24 hours, reduced from up to 5 working days for certain National Statistics at present;
- requiring that pre-release access be limited to the minimum necessary number of people and the minimum number of statistics, with decisions on pre-release access taking into account the need to reduce pre-release access to promote public trust;
- requiring that, where pre-release access is granted, it shall be done in an open and transparent manner, with details documented and published. The need for pre-release access to a publication, and the people granted access, will be reviewed ahead of release of the relevant statistics;
- access will also continue to be allowed in a limited number of special circumstances, reflecting current practice, for example to allow the Monetary Policy Committee of the Bank of England access to statistics relating to interest rates so that it can fulfil its remit efficiently; and
- once pre-release access to a statistic in final form has been granted, that statistic will be under embargo - meaning that its contents cannot be shared with others until the point of publication. As now those granted pre-release access to statistical releases must not alter or attempt to alter the content or timing of those releases, or the way in which they are presented; and obviously pre-release access must not be used for personal gain, or for political advantage.

The Act provides for these principles and rules for pre-release access to official statistics in their final form to be set out in secondary legislation. Only statistics that are deemed by the independent Statistics Board as complying with these principles and rules will be able to be badged as National Statistics.

We welcome views on these proposals by 3 March 2008. Responses will inform the principles and rules on pre-release, which will be put to Parliament for approval by the Minister for the Cabinet Office. The Government aims to have the principles and rules in place as soon as possible after the start of the new system in April 2008.

Statistics Commission's reponse to the Government consultation

22 January 2008

Statistical Reform Team
HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

LIMITING PRE-RELEASE ACCESS TO STATISTICS: A CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

1. I am writing on behalf of the Statistics Commission, in response to the consultation document issued in December 2007.
2. This letter does not comment on the context within which the Government proposals for secondary legislation are being made. We accept that the provisions of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 have been agreed by Parliament. However, the Statistics Commission continues to have reservations about the treatment of pre-release access within the Act.
3. The consultation document comprises a draft Order and explanatory material. Clearly the key part of this is the Order itself and we make specific suggestions for amendments below. However, we also have some broader comments on the consultation document as follows.
4. Paragraph 3.16 notes that whilst the formal position is that the Minister in charge of a department is the person responsible (in law) for decisions on pre-release access, "the Government proposes to undertake to give a formal role in applying the pre-release principles and rules to departmental Heads of Profession for Statistics". 3.17 further recognises the role of the Statistics Board in providing advice and guidance on these matters. A footnote elaborates that "It is fully intended...that Heads of Profession will play the central role in determining pre-release access in practice". Although these points are welcome, we do not think it is satisfactory for the explanatory material to make such important commitments whilst the Order itself makes no reference to them. We believe the Order could be crafted to make reference to the need to establish such arrangements. Also, the statement (in 3.16) that 'the Government proposes to undertake to give a formal role'... to Heads of Profession is not explained. Could the Government not give that undertaking now (rather than simply proposing to do so in the future) so that respondents to the consultation can see what form it takes and what force it has?
5. Similarly, the comment in paragraph 3.5 that 'where it is not possible to set out the Government's proposals in the secondary legislation,....,they will form part of wider guidelines for pre-release access to statistics in their final form' leaves the impression that something of substance is being left unsaid at this stage. It would be helpful if this could be clarified.
6. Failure to capture adequately the Government's intentions (those mentioned at 3.15 to 3.17 etc) in the Order itself risks doing lasting damage to public confidence. Without this, the Order appears to transfer responsibility for release arrangements from professional statisticians (whose role was set out in the June 2000 Framework for National Statistics) to Ministers. This risks harming the international reputation of the UK

Statistical System as well as fostering domestic suspicion of Ministers' intentions and actions. On the basis of discussion with international experts, we are concerned that it may well be seen internationally as making formal provision for political influence on matters such as which statistics are circulated ahead of publication and to whom. We believe that the damage that would thus be done to the UK's reputation abroad will exceed any practical benefit.

7. Neither the draft Order nor the explanatory material recognises that the phrase 'pre-release access to an official statistic' (eg in section 6 of the Schedule to the Order), has to be read as meaning much more than simply access to sets of numbers. In practice it refers to the entire text of a statistical release including the explanation of the statistics and any professional advice on their interpretation. Whilst access to the statistics themselves will, from time to time, be a sensitive matter, it is likely that political attention ahead of release will focus not so much on the figures as on what the statisticians are planning to say about them. For example, Ministers and their advisers will be looking to see which figures the statisticians intend to draw attention to and how they intend to describe changes in levels and trends. They want to know this so that they can position themselves with the news media and Parliament at the moment of release. That is understandable but it is not necessarily in the public interest.

8. The document says (1.22) that 'there is no reason to believe there is a problem of substance'. We do not agree. The concerns that the Statistics Commission has identified over the years are matters of substance. They may not involve statistics themselves being influenced but they do involve influence over their public presentation.

9. Paragraph 3.9 says that the Government proposes that pre-release should only be granted to ensure that Ministers 'are able to respond – whether in words or in action – at the time of release'. 3.3 adds that 'the public and media often expect that Ministers are able to account immediately for the implications of statistics about policy areas for which they are democratically responsible'. In our view, however, it is not so much the public or the media who *expect* instant answers to complex questions of the policy implications of statistics; it is Ministers who want to be able to give instant answers. Ministers in some countries – those that do not allow pre-release access – sometimes have to say that they will comment when they have had a chance to take advice on the figures. That seems a perfectly proper and defensible position to us.

10. The Order as drafted contains weaknesses that would allow a political statement, containing or referring to the unpublished statistics, to be circulated to selected journalists before the statistics are published. Because of this, we believe the provisions for the embargoed release of 'statistics' – which could, as currently drafted, mean a political statement referring to the statistics as well as the statistical publication itself – need to be tightened. This would require changes to Section 13 of the Order as discussed below.

11. The comments above apply regardless of the length of the maximum period of pre-release access. However, we would prefer the upper limit specified in the Order to be 3 hours more in line with international comparators and as recommended by the Treasury Select Committee. 24 hours is long enough to take political advantage of advance sight; 3 hours is much less likely to be. Provisions for exceptions to a 3 hour limit could be made in exceptional circumstances as discussed in specific amendments below.

12. Underlying the arguments about the length of time of pre-release access is concern that political advantage may be being obtained one way or another. Most advanced countries, whilst allowing some measure of pre-release access in specific circumstances, accept that such access is not generally in the interests of either the administration or the

democratic system in the longer term. The draft Order does go some way to reflect this view (Section 3(1)c in particular) but, overall, leaves the impression that the Government regards 24 hours advance access as an acceptable level and one that should be extended (under the provisions of Section 5) where needed. Paragraphs 2.12 – 2.15 of the consultation document refer to international practice but do not explain that there is almost universal acceptance that pre-release access is undesirable. In quoting the European Statistics Code of Practice, paragraph 2.14 omits the key phrase “All users have equal access to statistical releases at the same time” which appears under Principle 6 of that Code. This is recognised by most countries as the fundamental principle; pre-release access is the undesirable exception to it.

13. Section 11(8) of the Statistics and Registration Service Act defines ‘pre-release access’ as meaning access to statistics in their final form prior to publication. This creates a logical hole as to the rules for pre-release access to statistics in their near-final form or in the form of ‘work in progress’. As these are not covered by the Order, they must, necessarily, be covered by the revised Code of Practice which will be the responsibility of the Statistics Board. The Statistics Commission has already published its recommendations on a revised Code of Practice but, in view of the potential for the Order to create more pressure for access to statistical products in their not-final form, the Government and the Statistics Board may need to agree very firm rules over access to not-final statistics. This will be complicated by the ongoing need to circulate some statistics in unfinished form within and between government departments for quality assurance purposes – essentially seeking the views of experts on the credibility of statistics before they are issued. Whilst we would not want to prevent such circulation, the Statistics Board will need to ensure that it is not exploited as a backdoor form of pre-release. The Government may also need to make a firm commitment on that score.

Amendments to the draft Order

14. Following from the points above, the draft Order could be amended in the following ways:

- Section 3: The person responsible (in a government department) should be required to publish a Pre-release Access Scheme after consultation with the Statistics Board; Section 3 should also describe the content of these Schemes. They would set out the details of the officials in the department (normally the Head of Profession for Statistics) who would have day to day authority for implementation of the Order, other arrangements made to ensure compliance with the Order, and all the standing arrangements relating to regular statistical publications made under the Order. They would also explain under what circumstances it might be considered appropriate for an exception to be made to the 3 hour limit (see below). In practice a document of this kind will be needed for internal guidance, so requiring it to be agreed with the Board and published would be little additional work. The documentation currently required by Section 10 of the Order would form a substantial part of the Scheme so there would not be much additional bureaucracy. And the greater formality associated with a published Scheme would give Heads of Profession a clearer role. There are precedents for such Schemes; for example, the Publication Schemes required under the Freedom of Information Act.
- Section 4: This should be expanded to make clear that the person responsible (or the person delegated that responsibility under the departmental Scheme) must base the decision about the length of time of pre-release access on a written assessment of the criteria in Section 3 and that this assessment should be available on request. In practice this will in any case be necessary to demonstrate compliance with the criteria in Section 3. And as discussed above, this section should make clear that the limit is 3 hours, rather than 24, and that exceptions are to be considered under the principles set out in the departmental Scheme.

- Section 10 could be deleted following the expansion of Section 3 suggested above.
- Section 13 needs to be amended to make clear that the only document to which journalists can be given embargoed access is the full text of the statistical publication. No other document or selective extract should be allowed to be released under this section. In particular, no political statement containing, or relating to, the statistics can be released (under embargo or otherwise) before the statistics themselves. And the selection of journalists to be given early access should be closely monitored by the Statistics Board to ensure that this is not being informed by the political sympathies of the press organisations. The departmental Scheme should further set out the form of pre-release access (eg use of lock-up arrangements) that will be offered. In general, we think the circulation to journalists of statistical releases in paper or electronic form before formal publication should be actively discouraged and subject to close scrutiny where departments use that method.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Rhind". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

[Chairman, Statistics Commission]