

Official Statistics in the UK

Present and Future

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Outline

- **Background to present system**
- **National Statistics**
- **Legislation - the New Vision**

History

- **1941 - Central Statistical Office (CSO)**
- **1968 - Government Statistical Service (GSS)**
 - **Business Statistics Office (1969)**
 - **Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) (1970)**
- **1996 - Office for National Statistics**
(merger of CSO and OPCS + Labour Market statistics)
- **2000 - Launch of current 'National Statistics' system**
- **2008 – Enactment of Statistics and Registration Service Act**

Current Characteristics - 'Statistics UK'

Advantages and Disadvantages

- **Decentralised (GSS = 30+ statistical offices)**
- **Coordinated – through National Statistician**
- **Devolved (4 'UK' Nations)**
- **Integrated – Economics, Research, OR**
- **Europeanised (27 'Other' Nations)**
- **Globalised (UN, IMF, World Bank)**
- **Largely non-statutory**

Role of ONS in the UK System

ONS carries out a number of roles on behalf of the GSS.....

- **Governance, Policy and Planning**
- **Methodology**
- **Survey Control**
- **International relations and co-ordination**
- **Dissemination (Website)**
- **Recruitment of professional staff**
- **Statistical training and development**

Genesis of Reforms

Statistics - part of the Political Process ?

- **Counting 'problems' ?**
 - **Unemployment**
 - **Crime**
 - **Asylum Seekers**
- **Release 'problems' ?**
 - **Pre-release 'Spin'**
 - **'Burying' bad news**

Political statements

- **Labour Party Manifesto (1997)**
An independent national statistical service
- **Green Paper on Statistics Reform (1998)**
Tony Blair (the then PM).....
 - Government is pledged to clean up and modernise politics. We want a new relationship between Government and citizens, based on openness and trust

National Statistics June 2000

- **Framework Document**
- **New post- National Statistician**
- **New body - Statistics Commission**
- **New Logo**
- **New Code of Practice**
- **New emphasis on Quality (Quality Review Programme)**
- **Greater accountability (NS Work Programme and NS Annual Report)**
- **New beginning ?**

The phrase 'National Statistics'

- Not an organisation
- Not a group of people

A designated set of statistical products which:-

- are produced in accordance with *Framework for National Statistics*
- meet standards set in *National Statistics Code of Practice*
- are subject to regular *Quality Reviews*

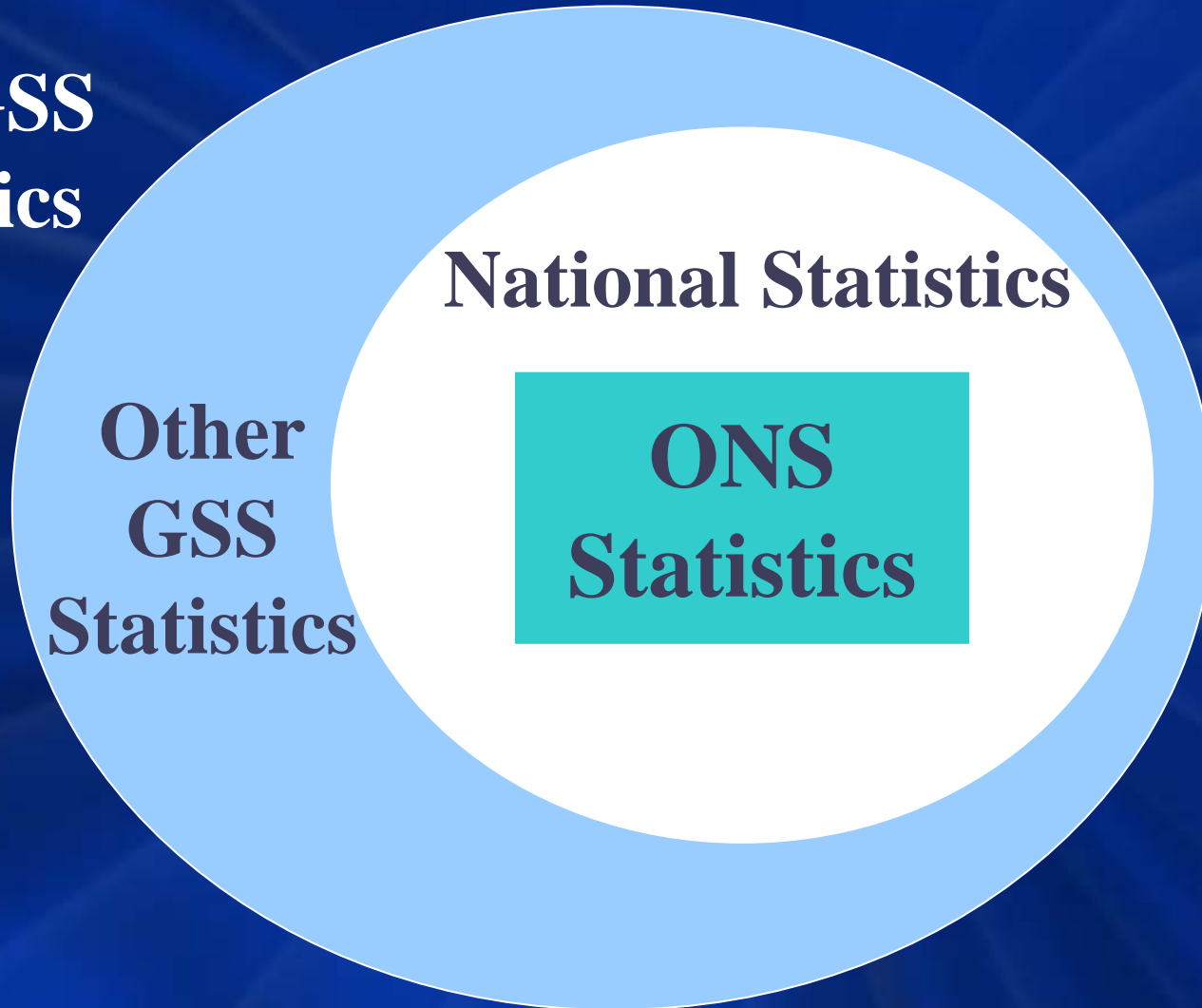
UK Official Statistics - 4 Types

**Non-GSS
Statistics**

National Statistics

**Other
GSS
Statistics**

**ONS
Statistics**



Role of National Statistician

- **Head of - National Statistics system**
 - **ONS**
 - **GSS**
- **Registrar General**
- **Government's Chief Professional Adviser**
- **Professional responsibility for quality of official statistics**
- **Owner and Arbiter of Code of Practice**

Role of Statistics Commission

- **Independent 'Watchdog'**
- **Represents suppliers and users**
- **Advises Ministers of concerns about quality**
- **Comments on NS Work Programme, Code of Practice, Quality Reviews**
- **Operates with total transparency**
- **One-off Task - Review need for statistical legislation**

Strengths of current system

- **More rigorous external oversight (via Statistics Commission) and greater internal focus on:**
 - Professional standards
 - Quality Management
 - Relevance and Customer Service
 - Confidentiality
 - Joined-up Government
 - Transparency and Consultation

Fault Lines in current system

- **Ministerial control of 'Scope'**
- **Confusion between 'National Statistics' and 'Other Statistics'**
- **Pre-release Access**
- **Lack of funding and commitment**
- **Lack of accountability to National Statistician**
- **Lack of enforcement powers**
- **Inconsistent compliance with Code**
- **Low impact on public trust + confidence**

Statistical Legislation

Provides the answer ?



Public Trust in Official Statistics

- Only 17 percent (1 person in 5) believe that UK official statistics are produced without political interference
- 60 percent (3 persons in 5) think that the government uses official statistics dishonestly
- Most common reasons for not trusting official statistics are:
 - They contradict people's personal experience
 - They are perceived to be open to manipulation

Confidence in Official Statistics

However.....

More confidence in:

- Quality / Methodology of official statistics
- The Office for National Statistics itself

Conclusion.....

- Production/Outputs = Good quality
- Delivery and Presentation = Untrustworthy

Public Trust – A general problem

Average Level of Trust in:

- **Journalists – 15%**
- **Politicians – 18%**
- **Judges – 72%**
- **Doctors – 90%**

**Hostile Media provokes ‘News Management’
Result - Cynicism / Alienation ?**

Participation Rate in Elections – Less than 50% ?

CONTENTS OF ACT : MAIN FEATURES

- Creates a new body - The Statistics Board – independent of Ministers – directly accountable to Parliament as ‘Non-Ministerial Department’
- Replaces oversight role Treasury Ministers have over ONS
- Creates new Executive Office of Board (= ONS)
- Abolishes the Statistics Commission – functions subsumed within the new Board
- Statutory Code of Practice and new Assessment function
- Covers United Kingdom

THE STATISTICS BOARD

- Board will be majority Non-executive with a Non-executive Chair
- Executives on the Board comprise the National Statistician and two others
- Staff within the Board and 'Executive Office' to be civil servants
- Special funding arrangements – 5 year budget

THE STATISTICS BOARD - OBJECTIVES

Statutory objective

To promote and safeguard the production of statistics that serve the public good.

By promoting and safeguarding:

- the quality of official statistics
- good statistical practice
- the comprehensiveness of official statistics

THE STATISTICS BOARD - OBJECTIVES

Objectives are delivered through three main functions:

- monitoring and reporting on official statistics across the system, wherever produced (as the Statistics Commission does now)
- independent standard setting and quality assurance of National Statistics
- independent oversight of Executive Office

ASSESSMENT FUNCTION

Board has particular legal duties to:

- independently set professional standards in a new Code of Practice
- ‘assess’ all National Statistics against those standards (both current NS and additional statistics nominated by Ministers)
- prepare and publish a work programme for the re-assessment of National Statistics
- prepare and publish a Statement of Principles of Assessment

THE NATIONAL STATISTICIAN

- The National Statistician's statutory role comprises advisory and executive functions
- the Government's (Board's) Chief Advisor on statistical matters
 - the Chief Executive of the Board
 - the establishment of an Executive Office (i.e. the ONS-as-is).
 - may not exercise the Board's functions relating to Assessment and the Code of Practice

INFORMATION SHARING

- Existing gateways for sharing of data preserved
- Order-making powers will allow two-way sharing of data between Statistics Board and public authorities/Devolved Administrations for statistical purposes, subject to the following safeguards ...
 - Only possible where otherwise prohibited by law or public authority/DA has no power
 - Subject to bilateral Ministerial agreement and Parliamentary scrutiny
 - Disclosure only for specific purposes and subject to public interest test
 - Criminal penalties for unlawful disclosure

PRE-RELEASE ACCESS

To be excluded from Code of Practice

- “Appropriate authority” will consult and agree rules and principles relating to the granting of pre-release access
- “Appropriate authority” means HMT, Scottish or Welsh Ministers or NI Dept
- Rules and principles include circumstances, persons, period and conditions
- Order to be laid before Parliament for scrutiny

Non-Legislative Provision

A 'Publication Hub'

Government is committed to the principle of creating a central 'Publication Hub' –through which all National Statistics would be published under the new system, thereby separating statistical release from policy comment

STRENGTHS OF LEGISLATION

- **2000 Reforms embedded in Legislation**
- **Ministerial Role transferred to Board**
- **Board's UK-wide remit**
- **Statutory Code**
- **Statutory accreditation of statistics**
- **Opportunities for Data Sharing**