



The Office for National Statistics and the UK Statistical System

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Mission of the ONS

'To advance understanding of life in the United Kingdom through trusted official statistics that serve the public good'

Status of the ONS in the UK's administration system

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is currently a department of the Chancellor of the Exchequer (who is the UK Cabinet Minister responsible for Her Majesty's Treasury) as well as an Executive Agency. However, when the Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007) comes into force in April 2008, the ONS will be abolished and become, instead, the executive office of 'The Statistics Board'. The Statistics Board will be a Non-Ministerial Department headed by Sir Michael Scholar, the recently appointed non-executive Chair, and will lie outside the control of Ministers and be directly accountable to Parliament. Karen Dunnell is the current Director of the ONS and she is expected to remain as National Statistician by Royal appointment and, hence, the Chief Executive of the Board, the Head of the Executive Office (ONS-as-is) and also the Head of the Government Statistical Service (GSS). The statistical responsibilities of the Registrar-General will be transferred to the Board. The remit of both the Statistics Board and the National Statistician extends to all of the Departments and Agencies in the GSS (which includes those in Scotland and Wales) as well as to the Statistics Agency in Northern Ireland.

Procedure of appointment of Director of the ONS

The post of Director of the ONS was created by the *ONS Framework* published in 1996 and was combined with two other posts - that of Head of the Government Statistical Service, and Registrar-General for England and Wales. A fourth role - that of National Statistician - was added with the publication of the *Framework for National Statistics* in June 2000. Currently, the National Statistician/Director of the ONS is appointed by the Minister for National Statistics (the Chancellor of the Exchequer) with the agreement of the Prime Minister, normally following open competition. He or she holds office as a civil servant under such terms and conditions as are determined by the Head of the Home Civil Service. Under the provisions of the Statistics and Registration Service Act, the National Statistician will remain as a civil servant but be appointed by Her Majesty the Queen. In making this appointment the Queen will be advised by the Prime Minister who will be advised, in turn, by the Minister for Statistics - currently the Chancellor but, from April 2008, the relevant Minister in the Cabinet Office.

Location of the ONS

From April 2008, the Board will employ approximately 4,000 people (including Field Staff but excluding General Register Office staff who, under the Statistics Act, will be transferring to a separate body) and will operate on three main sites - in Newport (South Wales) - ONS's corporate HQ - London and Titchfield (Hampshire). There will be a very small ONS/GSS presence in each the Regions.

Organisational structure of the ONS

Currently, governance of the ONS is effected through the following boards and committees:

The ONS Board is the senior committee of the Office providing oversight of strategic direction, leadership and a policy framework. Meeting quarterly, it is comprised of the Executive and Corporate directors plus three non-Executive directors: Alex Jablonowski (High Performance Leadership Ltd),

Professor Janet Finch (Vice Chancellor, Keele University) and Sir Robert Culpin (ex-Second Permanent Secretary, HM Treasury). The Executive Management Group is responsible for the overall senior management of the office. It is comprised of the Executive and Corporate Directors and meets on a monthly basis.

The Statistics and Registration Service Act comes into force in April 2008. The Act creates an independent Statistics Board outside the control of Ministers and accountable to Parliament whose objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. The Board's members comprise the Chair, at least five other non-executive members, the National Statistician and two other executive members.

Main UK Legal Acts (in relation to data collection)

The ONS currently operates in accordance with the following main statutes which impact on statistics (in chronological order):

- Census Act 1920
- Petroleum (Production) Act 1934
- Population Statistics Act 1938
- Statistics of Trade Act 1947
- Marriage Act 1949
- Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953
- Registration Service Act 1953
- Population Statistics Act 1960
- Census (Confidentiality) Act 1991

The Statistics and Registration Service Act which was enacted in July 2007 will come into force in April 2008.

Statistical programme

The ONS work programme is set out in the [ONS Corporate Business Plan](#) and in the [ONS Work Programme](#). The [ONS Annual Report and Accounts](#) reviews progress against plans. In addition, and on behalf of the whole of the Government Statistical Service, ONS publishes the [National Statistics Work Programme](#) (three-yearly) and [National Statistics Annual Report](#).

II. SYSTEM OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS IN THE COUNTRY

The National Statistics system was launched in June 2000 with the publication of the [Framework for National Statistics](#). This document describes the basic governance arrangements and the roles and responsibilities of each of the key players. It also introduced a number of major innovations, namely: a new post, the National Statistician; a new monitoring body, the Statistics Commission; a new Code, the National Statistics Code of Practice; and a new concept, that of 'National Statistics' - defined as statistics produced in accordance with the governance arrangements set out in the Framework document, and in conformance with the principles and procedures set out in the Code of Practice. The system also placed a greater emphasis on reporting accountability and quality assurance.

The UK Statistical system can be defined as the people, posts, processes and products which fall within the remit of the Government Statistical Service (GSS). The GSS comprises the ONS and each of the statistical Divisions operating under the ambit of the 35 other UK Government Departments and Agencies responsible for producing government statistics, and the two Devolved Administrations affiliated to the GSS (Scotland and Wales). The UK system also embraces the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency which works closely with, but is not affiliated to, the GSS.

The Office for National Statistics is at the centre of the UK statistical system insofar as it is the UK Government's main statistical producer, and functions as (i) the National Statistician's Office; (ii) the UK's National Statistics Institute; and (iii) the 'Head Office' of the Government Statistical Service (GSS). More than 80% of all professional Statisticians in the GSS work alongside their policy colleagues in the other Government departments. The statistical system employs some 7,000 persons, the vast majority of whom are Civil Servants, who together manage a wide range of censuses, surveys and data sources from which they produce some 1,400 individual statistical products. About four fifths of all official statistics which are designated as 'National Statistics' are produced by statisticians working outside the ONS in a range of other departments (affiliated to the GSS). This statistical

community is managed by a network of Heads of Profession for Statistics (HoPs) in each department who are professionally accountable to the National Statistician acting in her capacity as the Head of the GSS.

The ONS sets statistical policy and professional standards for the GSS, co-ordinates statistical production across the UK system, and, itself, delivers the majority of the UK's key economic and social statistics.

III. STATISTICAL COUNCIL

There are currently three bodies which represent stakeholder interests in the UK and convey their view to the National Statistician:

The Statistics Commission

The Commission was set up in 2000 as an independent body to help ensure that official statistics are trustworthy and meet user needs. They carry out research and respond to public concerns. Their reports carry influence, and their function has been valued by Parliament and other opinion formers. Under the Statistics Act, the Commission's role will be subsumed within that of the Governing Board.

Royal Statistical Society (RSS)

The RSS is a professional society that seeks to promote the discipline of statistics within society. The RSS dates back to 1834 and its purpose is to develop, foster and disseminate statistical knowledge, methodology and good practice for the benefit of all society. It is the UK's only professional and learned society devoted to the interests of statistics and statisticians.

Statistics Users Forum (SUF)

The SUF was established in 2004 with funding from the Economic and Social Research Council. It represents a broad range of user groups and seeks to engage with, and influence statistics producers. Its aim is to ensure that there are appropriate mechanisms for consulting and taking into account the needs and views of the statistical user community. The SUF's aims are to build and maintain a dialogue with producers to ensure that users' views have influence. There are a number of topic specific user groups affiliated to SUF, on business, finance, gender, health etc that are largely organised and run by volunteers with a vested interest. SUF performs a valuable representative function for them.

IV. PUBLICATIONS

The titles of all of the ONS statistical releases, publications and products are catalogued on the [National Statistics Online website](#), along with the titles of all those statistical products produced by other government departments affiliated to the GSS.

V. KEY CORPORATE GOVERNANCE AND INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAMMES MANAGED BY ONS

Efficiency Programme (Sir Peter Gershon's Review)

Like other Government Departments ONS is expected to rise to the challenge set by the government-wide 'Gershon' Efficiency Review. For our part, ONS has promised to deliver efficiencies which will rise to £25m per year by 2007-08. ONS is currently on track to meet this target by achieving savings in our Statistical Modernisation and Civil Registration programmes, and through our Procurement, and Corporate Services - for example through business process re-engineering, and greater use of internet technology.

Relocation (Sir Michael Lyons' Review)

As part of the government-wide 'Lyons' plan to relocate 20,000 public servants out of London and the South East (L&SE), ONS has been set a target of relocating 850 full time equivalent (FTE) posts to Newport in South Wales by April 2010. ONS's HQ is now based in Newport and ONS' relocation strategy is to eventually relocate all statistical work out of London. By April 2010 between 50 and 100 posts will remain in London. During the first half of 2008, the remaining London work will be relocated from Drummond Gate in Pimlico to our Myddelton Street offices in Islington which are currently occupied by the Family Records Centre (FRC).

Odyssey (Technical and Statistical Modernisation)

The Odyssey Programme is an ongoing investment strategy which addresses an infrastructure issue which ONS inherited when it was formed in 1996 through the merger of three, hitherto separate, organisations. This merger meant that ONS inherited a wide range of legacy systems involving both IT platforms and different statistical practices. Recognising that the needs of users could not be met using current and future resources and systems, the ONS Modernisation Programme was put in place to ensure that statistics would better reflect changes in society and the needs of users and key stakeholders through the attainment of statistical systems that would match the best in the world in terms of the methods and processes used and the quality of statistics produced. The long term aim of the ONS Modernisation Programme is to enable an integrated public surveys operation within ONS. It is currently doing this through:

- the creation of a corporate database system, called the Central ONS Repository for Data (CORD), and the transfer of all ONS statistical sources into this common environment;
- the standardisation, where appropriate, of statistical systems, processes and technology solutions used to deliver ONS outputs;
- the introduction of a limited range of statistical tools that fully support the work of the office whilst keeping the number of tools available for use to the minimum;
- the provision of direct access to, links to, or direction to all UK official statistics via the National Statistics (NS) website.

i-Dissemination

This programme encompasses three separate but linked projects which have been informed by extensive customer research and which will utilise Content Management technology. Their aim is to deliver, in stages:

- a dedicated website for the new Statistics Board
- a new, more uniform, and more accessible corporate website to replace the existing National Statistics Online website which has been operational since September 2002
- a Publication Hub through which all National Statistics will be released and which will emphasise the separation of statistical from political releases

Statistical Legislation/Conversion to a Non-Ministerial Department

Following the Chancellor's announcement in November 2005 of his intention to legislate for the 'Independence of statistics', ONS and its parent Department, HM Treasury, have been jointly managing a Work Programme designed to both formulate the Statistics Act, and subsequent secondary legislation covering pre-release access, as well as plan for what needs to be done to ensure a smooth transition to the new arrangements

For more information:

www.statistics.gov.uk