

Statement

14 February 2013

Statement of Strategy

Statutory Objective

1. The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* established the UK Statistics Authority as an independent body at arm's length from government with direct reporting to Parliament and the devolved legislatures, rather than through Ministers, and with the statutory objective of promoting and safeguarding the production and publication of official statistics that "serve the public good".
2. Official statistics are for the benefit of society and the economy generally; not just in the formulation and monitoring of government policy but also through assisting the direction of economic and commercial activities, by providing valuable information for analysts, researchers, public and voluntary bodies, enabling the public to hold to account all organisations that spend public money, and informing wider public debate.

Official Statistics

3. The great mass of quantified information about our country is recorded through the medium of official statistics whether in central government, across the devolved administrations, in non-departmental bodies or in other institutions such as the National Health Service. These statistics are fundamental to both efficient management and the democratic process. The Authority seeks to promote and safeguard official statistics so that they inform and enrich society.

Aims

4. From its inception the Authority has therefore aimed to ensure that: the right range of statistics is produced, high and consistent professional standards are maintained, and official statistics are well explained, leading to better decision-making in the public interest. This requires close working with users of statistics, horizon-scanning to anticipate new user needs, and opening up statistics to new users. In this way, the Authority seeks to understand and meet the expectations of Parliament and the public.
5. The Authority aims to enhance trust in the statistical system in terms of quality and impartiality. A system that works transparently with users, independently of politics and politicians and with clarity in its objectives is a prerequisite for the production of trustworthy statistics. In short, the UK statistical system must demonstrate high standards in respect of five principal aspects: quality; impact; efficiency; coverage; and trustworthiness.

Functions

6. The Authority's functions relate to its statutory areas of responsibility:
 - oversight of the UK official statistics system, which includes around 30 central government departments and the devolved administrations, and the promotion, safeguarding and monitoring of quality, comprehensiveness and good practice in relation to all official statistics, wherever produced;
 - production of a *Code of Practice for Statistics* and assessment of official statistics against the Code; and
 - governance of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) the UK's National Statistical Institute and the largest producer of official statistics.

Governance and Organisation

7. The Chair of the Authority is appointed by The Queen following an open competition and subject to a pre-appointment hearing by the Public Administration Select Committee and a formal debate on the floor of the House of Commons. The Board of the Authority is comprised of a majority of non-executive directors, also appointed through open competition, and three executive members: the National Statistician, and the Head of Assessment and the Director General of ONS
8. Pursuit of the Authority's aims requires separation of functions as consistent with the legislation. In particular, that those involved in the production of statistics are not involved in the statutory Assessment of those statistics against the Authority's *Code of Practice*.
9. Two non-executive members of the Authority are appointed as Deputy Chairs, one with responsibility for governance of the ONS as Chair of the Authority's ONS Board, a sub-committee of the Authority Board; and the second with responsibility for oversight of the wider statistical system as Chair of the Authority's Committee for Official Statistics and also statutory Assessment as Chair of the Authority's Assessment Committee. The committee to consider Assessment matters meets in the absence of statistical producers, consistent with the statutory requirement for the separation of statistical production and assessment.
10. In addressing any particular matter of strategic importance, these various parts of the Authority will have differing roles depending on the issue. It is a primary task of the Authority Board to make sure that the work falling to each part is co-ordinated while respecting and ensuring the separation of functions. The Authority has different powers to pursue its strategic aims in the different parts of the statistical system. For example, while the Authority has direct control in shaping ONS, its powers in respect of statistics produced in other government departments are limited to influencing and publicly reporting and commenting when appropriate.

Strategic priorities 2013/14 to 2015/16

11. This strategy covers a rolling three year period and will be subject to annual review. The Authority will report progress against achieving its strategic priorities each year in its Annual Report to the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly.
12. The Board of the Authority has reviewed its strategic priorities and identified the following as being the most important priorities at this time.

Strategic Priority 1: Quality

13. Ensure and demonstrate that official statistics are of high quality, produced to consistently high professional standards in accordance with international best practice, and meet the needs of those who wish to use them and are worthy of their trust. Judgements about quality and the future development of statistics should be firmly grounded in an understanding of the use and potential use of statistics, with strengths and weaknesses well understood and explained.

- Ensure that the macroeconomic statistics meet user need and best inform public debate and economic decision-making. *The Authority will independently review the governance and future development of inflation statistics in 2013. A review of economic statistics will also be carried out to ensure they best meet user needs in future.*
- Build capability at ONS and demonstrate that this has led to successful outcomes. *Capability building will be focussed on business critical areas including: use of administrative data; efficient modern electronic data collection; economic statistics; and communication and dissemination of statistics.*
- Scrutinise existing official statistics. *The Authority will: (i) assess the compliance of official statistics with the Code of Practice; and (ii) investigate and report on concerns, expressed externally or internally, about aspects of particular statistics including statistical methods.*

Strategic Priority 2: Impact

14. Ensure that official statistics are well communicated and make the right impact.

- Re-focus the balance of statistical activity with greater emphasis on the explanation and dissemination of the information contained in statistics compared with the collection and management of official data. *Ensure that these priorities are reflected in the 2013 ONS Business Plan and the strategy for the Government Statistical Service (GSS).*
- Increase the impact of statisticians in departments. *In support of the National Statistician's vision for the GSS, the Authority will support and champion the role of departmental statisticians in effectively communicating statistics and in providing statistical advice for users.*
- Ensure that the ONS website demonstrably meets the needs of those who use it or wish to use it and that, more broadly, ONS is an exemplar of good practice in communicating and explaining statistics. *Oversee delivery of enhanced ONS website capability and content which supports greater use and understanding of statistics and attracts new users.*

Strategic Priority 3: Efficiency

15. Demonstrate value for money in all that the Statistics Authority does in the context of scarce public resources. The contribution of particular sets of official statistics to the public good needs to be explored so that decisions about priorities can be made on a considered and coherent basis. Increased data sharing and use of administrative data has the potential to reduce costs, improve efficiency and increase the richness of the statistical information available.

- Support the Authority's Accounting Officers in demonstrating transparency, value for money and good stewardship of resources. *Deliver year on year efficiency gains and oversee strong financial management across the whole Authority.*
- Explain and promote the value and importance of official statistics to society and government in the context of scarce and limited public resources. *Make the case for the funds needed to maintain and develop a coherent and efficient national statistical infrastructure.*
- Support the application of open data principles to official statistics. *The Authority will support the National Statistician, ONS and the wider statistical service in (i) achieving a step-change in the sharing of data across, and beyond, government for statistical purposes; and (ii) making data available in the most disaggregated form possible, and as soon as possible, for re-use by others.*

Strategic Priority 4: Coverage

16. Anticipate new opportunities and respond to unmet statistical needs in innovative and effective ways. Not all demands for statistical information can be met by the statistical service. However, the Statistics Authority will ensure that it is aware of concerns about the adequacy of the statistical sources that support decision-making and support the public accountability of those who take the decisions.

- Provide leadership and vision for the official statistics system in the UK and assure Parliament and the public of the quality of official statistics. *In 2013 the Authority will lead a public debate on the long-term vision for official statistics in the UK and the statistical infrastructure that the nation needs.*
- Explore possible alternatives to the traditional Census of population and make rapid progress in this area. *The National Statistician will publicly consult in 2013.*
- Where necessary, lower priority work should be stopped to enable higher priority user needs to be met elsewhere. *Ensure that these priorities are reflected in the 2013 ONS Business Plan and acted upon. Work to promote these priorities in respect of other producers of official statistics.*

Strategic Priority 5: Trustworthiness

17. Continue to press for the highest standards of openness and integrity. The data from which official statistics are derived must be made as openly available as possible while protecting the confidentiality of personal information. The statistics themselves must be made equally available to everyone. All parties must have equal access to the same statistical information and must not seek to misrepresent it. Official statistics should inform and enrich the democratic process and be worthy of the trust of those who use them.

- The Statistics Authority will continue to argue against Government ministers and officials having privileged access to statistics before Parliament or the public. For as long as pre-release access persists, the Authority will publicise its extent and seek to reduce it. *The Authority will oversee and support the National Statistician's drive in 2013 to reduce the degree and incidence of pre-release access to the fullest extent possible under the law.*
- The Authority will speak on matters of statistical controversy, reporting publicly to Parliament, especially where there are concerns about political involvement in the production or publication of official statistics, or about damage to the integrity of official statistics through misrepresentation. *The Authority will continue to give priority to investigating any significant concerns in these areas and reporting those findings publicly to Parliament.*
- Official statistics have a crucial role to play in informing democratic debate and the Authority believes that role can be developed further. Assuring the public that official statistics are trustworthy is central to this. *The Authority will consider the ways in which official statistics can better support democratic debate in future, with particular reference to the forthcoming referendum on Scottish independence in 2014. The Authority will conduct an exercise to measure the confidence in official statistics and report publicly in 2014.*

18. The table overleaf summarises the action that the Authority will take in pursuit of its objectives.

Summary of UK Statistics Authority's Strategic Priorities, February 2013

Quality	
Macroeconomic statistics.	<i>Review the governance and future development of inflation statistics in 2013. Review of economic statistics to ensure they best meet future needs.</i>
Build capability at ONS.	<i>Focus on: use of administrative data; data collection; economic statistics; and dissemination.</i>
Scrutinise official statistics.	<i>Assess Code compliance and investigate and report on concerns.</i>
Impact	
More emphasis on explanation compared with data collection.	<i>Ensure these priorities are reflected in the 2013 ONS Business Plan and the strategy for the GSS.</i>
Increase the impact of statisticians in their departments.	<i>Support and champion the role of departmental statisticians in communicating and advising.</i>
ONS website meets user needs; ONS is an exemplar in communication and explanation.	<i>Oversee delivery of enhanced ONS website capability and content supporting greater use and understanding of statistics.</i>
Efficiency	
Value for money and good stewardship of resources.	<i>Deliver year on year efficiency gains; oversee strong financial management across the Authority.</i>
Explain the value of statistics in the context of scarce resources.	<i>Make the case for funds needed to maintain and develop the nation's statistical infrastructure.</i>
Support the application of open data principles to official statistics.	<i>Support the National Statistician in achieving a step-change in data sharing for statistical purposes and in making data available for re-use by others.</i>
Coverage	
Provide leadership and vision for the UK official statistics system.	<i>Lead a public debate in 2013 on official statistics and the statistical infrastructure the nation needs.</i>
Explore alternatives to the traditional Census of population.	<i>National Statistician to publicly consult in 2013.</i>
Lower priority work stopped so higher priority needs can be met.	<i>To be reflected in the 2013 ONS Business Plan, and promoted in respect of other producers.</i>
Trustworthiness	
Continue to argue against pre-release access, publicise its extent and seek to reduce it.	<i>Oversee the National Statistician's drive in 2013 to reduce pre-release access to the fullest extent possible under the law.</i>
Investigate and report on matters of statistical controversy.	<i>Continue to give priority to investigating significant concerns and reporting to Parliament.</i>
Further develop the crucial role that official statistics have in informing democratic debate.	<i>Consider how official statistics can better support democratic debate. Measure confidence in official statistics and report publicly in 2014.</i>