

12 June 2007

DATA ON DEMAND – ACCESS TO OFFICIAL STATISTICS

I am pleased to enclose a copy of the Statistics Commission's report *Data on Demand – Access to Official Statistics*. In this report we look at the ease with which both experienced researchers and novices can find and use UK official statistics through the Web. The report presents the results from two research projects that we commissioned - 'mystery shopper' research into finding statistics on topical issues and a survey of the policies of government departments in relation to the Web-publishing of official statistics.

We found that UK government statisticians have readily embraced the internet as a vehicle for publication of statistics but have been slower to adapt their presentation and publication policies to the new medium. Although much progress has been made on specific products, we conclude that there is still improvement to be made and our recommendations - which take the form of a set of principles that we believe should be adopted by producers of official statistics - are designed to help meet ever-rising user expectations.

Behind the principles is a vision of government statisticians acting not only as experts in the collection and guardianship of statistical data but also as advisers on the use of those statistics by a wide community - not just central government, important as that sector is. To achieve this vision and maximise the public benefit from the substantial investment in information, while continuing to keep statistics free of charge, will require some changes in priorities and possibly some reallocation of resources.

The proposed principles are:

Principle 1: Statistics are collected to be used and as wide a use of them as is possible should be encouraged, including the re-use of raw data for research outside government.

Principle 2: Since the most satisfactory forms of data provision are still evolving, UK government statisticians should adopt an explorative and experimental approach to dissemination and access to statistical data through the internet.

Principle 3: Government departments that publish official statistics should seek the full involvement of other web professionals in the presentation of statistical data on their websites.

Principle 4: Government departments that publish official statistics should recognise that web design and web culture are still developing and should set up an appropriate mechanism to keep accessibility issues under review.

Principle 5: User needs, interests and capabilities should determine the design and operation of statistical dissemination over the internet.

Principle 6: Statistical products should be specifically designed for the Web.

Principle 7: Data should be presented in a layered or hierarchical way to allow users to drill down to the level of detail they desire.

Principle 8: There should be one point of entry - a government statistics portal - giving access to official statistics across the UK government and those of the devolved authorities.

I hope you find the report of interest and would welcome any comments on it. You can find an electronic version on our website in the Research Reports section.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Rhind". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D' and 'R'.