

Statistics Commission

REVIEW OF STATISTICAL FIRST RELEASES (PROGRESS UPDATE)

ACTION FOR MEETING: To consider progress and plans for taking this project forward.

Introduction

1. The First Releases project has three stages: preliminary tasks to establish good practice criteria and decide on the sample; parallel evaluations of the content of statistical releases and the release practices associated with these; and finally, a report which will include suggestions about how to improve the communication of the main messages from statistical releases.
2. In September we reported on progress to date in the first stage. This note describes the completion of the first stage and progress so far on the second stage - the assessments of content being carried out on a sample of releases and the review of release arrangements for a sub-set of the sample.
3. The project is overseen by a project board led by Ian Beesley and Joly Dixon.

Completing the first stage: agreeing criteria for good practice

4. A set of criteria for evaluating the statistical first releases has now been agreed by the project board. Each criterion is supported by a number of sub-points. The full criteria are shown in **Annex 1**.
5. In October we showed the criteria to ONS and the Scottish Executive to alert them to the project and provide them with an opportunity to comment. To date we have not received any response.

Completing the first stage – selecting a sample for evaluation of content

6. A sample of releases for evaluation against our criteria has been selected from a list of National Statistics releases over the past year compiled for that purpose. In deciding on this sample, we aimed to select four to five releases

from each main department or administration - more from ONS. We also focussed on 'high profile' statistics.

7. The full list of release titles is attached at **Annex 2**. The table below shows the number of releases selected from each department or administration.

Department	Number sampled
Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (DBERR)	1
Communities and Local Government (DCLG)	4
Defence Analytical Services Agency (DASA)	2
Education, Children and Families:	(6)
Department for Children, Schools and Families	5
Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills	1
Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA)	3
Health:	(7)
Department for Health	2
Information Centre for Health and Social Care	5
Health and Safety Executive (HSE)	1
HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC)	5
Home Office:	(3)
Home Office	2
Ministry Of Justice	1
Office for National Statistics:	(12)
ONS	11
ONS with HMT	1
Transport (DfT)	3
Work and Pensions (DWP)	2
Scottish Government:	(8)
Scottish Government	5
General Register Office for Scotland (GROS)	1
Information & Statistics Division (part of NHS Scotland)	2
Northern Ireland:	(5)
Education	1
Enterprise, Trade and Investment	1
Health, Social Services and Public Safety	1
NI Statistics and Research Agency	1
Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)	1
Wales Assembly Government (WAG)	3
Grand Total	65

8. The parallel evaluation of release practices and arrangements will concentrate on a sub-set of 32 of these 65 releases. The releases selected are set out in Annex 2. In selecting releases for this sample, we have aimed to include those releases in the wider sample where we are aware of an accompanying ministerial statement: we have also aimed to include all the releases that we consider to be 'high profile'.

Second stage - progress in the parallel evaluations

9. Work on the evaluation of the content of selected first releases against our good practice criteria got underway in October. Each release is to be assessed against the criteria and rated according to a traffic lights scale of green, amber or red; this should provide a simple method of communicating our assessments. We intend to award a separate rating to each criterion for each release. Our rule of thumb is that if the release does not satisfy all sub-points it will not be awarded a “green” rating for that criterion.
10. There is a risk that the criteria with more sub-points to be fulfilled are less likely to be rated “green”. However, to date, the releases have shown sufficient consistency between sub-points for this not to be the case.
11. We had initially planned for work on carrying out the evaluation against the criteria to be completed by the end of October. However, this timetable has slipped due to resource demands for other work, and we now estimate that work on the evaluation will continue into December.
12. The parallel review of release arrangements, on a sub-set of the sample, is focussing on four aspects of release practices and arrangements: the timing and timetable for the release; pre-release access; press briefing arrangements; and parallel ministerial statements and/or non-statistical press releases.
13. **Annex 3** sets out the information we are seeking to obtain about the arrangements for each release, in the form of lists of questions that we will look for answers to. Some of this information will be accessible through departmental websites and from the releases themselves, but much of it will not be - we will need to seek it directly from departments.
14. Desk research for this part of the review started in October. The plan is, for each selected release, to start by pulling together as much as possible of the required information from the releases themselves and departmental websites. We will then contact departments, inviting them to check the information we have compiled from the websites, and seeking answers from them to the questions that we have not been able to answer from publicly available sources. (For example, on arrangements for briefing the press). On timing, the current expectation is that the initial desk research will be completed by the

end of November. This would allow us to then e-mail departments at the beginning of December, seeking replies before Christmas.

Conclusion

15. The second stage of this project – the parallel evaluations of the content of first releases and of the release arrangement for them - is now underway. However, the timetable has slipped due to resource demands for other work. We now aim to complete the research and information gathering for this project in December, which will mean that the third stage - writing a report - will not be completed until January.

Secretariat
Statistics Commission
November 2007

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