

Public service values

Members of the Statistics Commission must at all times:

- observe the highest standards of impartiality, integrity and objectivity in relation to the advice they provide as members of this public body;
- be accountable to Parliament and the public more generally for its activities and for the standard of advice it provides; and
- in accordance with Government policy on openness, comply fully with the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

The Minister for National Statistics is answerable to Parliament for the policies and performance of this body, including the policy framework within which it operates.

Standards in Public Life

All members of the Statistics Commission must:

- follow the Seven Principles of Public Life set out by the Committee on Standards in Public Life;
- comply with this Code, ensure they understand their duties, rights and responsibilities, and that they are familiar with the function and the role of the Statistics Commission and any relevant statements of Government policy;
- not misuse information gained in the course of their public service for personal gain or for political purposes, nor seek to use the opportunity of public service to promote their private interests or those of connected persons, firms, businesses or other organisations; and
- not hold any paid or high-profile unpaid posts in a political party, and not engage in specific political activities on matters directly affecting the work of the Statistics Commission. When engaging in other political activities, Commission members should be conscious of their public role and exercise proper discretion. These restrictions do not apply to MPs, to local councillors, or to Peers in relation to their conduct in the House of Lords.

Role of Commission members

Members of the Commission have collective responsibility for the operation of the Statistics Commission. They must:

- engage fully in collective considerations of the issues, taking account of the full range of relevant factors, including any guidance issued by, or on behalf of, the Minister for National Statistics;
- ensure that the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (including prompt responses to public requests for information) is adhered to; agree an Annual Report; and, where practicable and appropriate, hold at least one meeting a year in public;
- respond appropriately to complaints, if necessary with reference to the Treasury as sponsor department; and
- ensure that the Commission does not exceed its powers or functions.

Communications between the Statistics Commission and the Minister for National Statistics will generally be through the Chair except where the Commission has agreed that an individual member should act on its behalf. Nevertheless, any Commission member has the right of access to the Minister for National Statistics on any matter which he or she believes raises important issues relating to his or her duties as a Commission member. In such cases the agreement of the rest of the Commission should normally be sought.

Individual Commission members can normally be removed from office by the Minister if they fail to perform the duties required of them in line with the standards expected in public office.

The role of the Chair

The Chair has particular responsibility for providing effective leadership on the issues above. In addition, the Chair is responsible for:

- ensuring that the Commission meets at appropriate intervals, and that the minutes of meetings and any reports to the Minister for National Statistics accurately record the decisions taken and, where appropriate, the views of individual Commission members;
- representing the views of the Commission to the general public; and
- ensuring that new Commission members are briefed on appointment (and their training needs are considered), and providing an assessment of their performance, on request, when members are considered for re-appointment to the Commission or for appointment to the Commission of some other public body.

Handling conflicts of interests

The purpose of these provisions is to avoid any danger of Commission members being influenced, or appearing to be influenced, by their private interests in the exercise of their public duties. All Commission members should therefore declare any personal or business interest which may, or may be perceived (by a reasonable member of the public) to influence their judgement. This should include, as a minimum, personal direct and indirect pecuniary interests, and should normally also include, such interests of those family members and of people living in the same household. The register of interests should be kept up-to-date and be open to the public.

A declaration of any interest should also be made at any Commission meeting if it relates specifically to a particular issue under consideration, for recording in the minutes (whether or not a Commission member also withdraws from the meeting).

Commission members should not participate in the discussion or determination of matters in which they have an interest, and should normally withdraw from the meeting (even if held in public) if:

- their interest is direct and pecuniary; or
- their interest is covered in specific guidance issued by the Statistics Commission or the Treasury, as sponsor department, which requires them not to participate and/or to withdraw from the meeting.

Personal liability of Commission members

Legal proceedings by a third party against individual Commission members of advisory bodies are very exceptional. A Commission member may be personally liable if he or she makes a fraudulent or negligent statement which results in a loss to a third party; or may commit a breach of confidence under common law or a criminal offence under insider dealing legislation, if he or she misuses information gained through their position. However, the Government has indicated that individual Commission members who have acted honestly, reasonably, in good faith and without negligence will not have to meet out of their own personal resources any personal civil liability which is incurred in execution or purported execution of their Commission functions. Commission members who need further advice should consult the Treasury.

ANNEX

THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF PUBLIC LIFE

Selflessness

Holders of public office should take decisions solely in terms of the public interest. They should not do so in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends.

Integrity

Holders of public office should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to outside individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties.

Objectivity

In carrying out public business, including making public appointments, awarding contracts, or recommending individuals for rewards and benefits, holders of public office should make choices on merit.

Accountability

Holders of public office are accountable for their decisions and actions to the public and must submit themselves to whatever scrutiny is appropriate to their office.

Openness

Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

Honesty

Holders of public office have a duty to declare any private interests relating to their public duties and to take steps to resolve any conflicts arising in a way that protects the public interests.

Leadership

Holders of public office should promote and support these principles by leadership and example.

Extract from *Framework for National Statistics* - published in June 2000

4.2 RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE STATISTICS COMMISSION

4.2.1 The Statistics Commission will play a key role in advising on the quality, quality assurance and priority setting for National Statistics, and on the procedures designed to deliver statistical integrity, to help ensure National Statistics are trustworthy and responsive to public needs. It will be independent of both Ministers and the producers of National Statistics. It will operate in a transparent way with the minutes of its meetings, correspondence and evidence it receives, and advice it gives, all normally being publicly available for scrutiny.

APPOINTMENT AND TERMS

4.2.2 Members will be appointed by the Chancellor, a Minister for National Statistics, in accordance with the Code of Practice published by the Commissioner for Public Appointments. Appointment will take into account the need for the Commission to be independent, command authority, reflect the views of users and information providers of National Statistics and demonstrate a good understanding of statistical issues and the value of trustworthy statistics in democratic debate. The members need not be professional statisticians. Initial appointments will usually be for three year although terms of different lengths may be offered to ensure continuity. Any subsequent re-appointments may be offered in line with prevailing guidance issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

FUNCTIONS

4.2.3 The main function of the Statistics Commission is to give independent, reliable and relevant advice on National Statistics to Ministers and, by so doing, to provide an additional safeguard on the quality and integrity of National Statistics. In discharging its responsibilities, a key requirement will be to establish itself as a source of high quality and independent advice on statistical issues. Its advice will be made available to the wider public who must be able to rely on it as both considered and impartial.

4.2.4 The Statistics Commission is independent and, as such, has freedom in the way it operates, subject to the requirements laid down in this Framework Document and any framework document specific to the Commission. This includes flexibility to determine how it spends its resources, and how it selects and deploys its secretariat.

4.2.5 The Statistics Commission will ensure that satisfactory systems are in place for the effective delivery of its role in monitoring and advising on the quality and integrity of National Statistics. It will operate in a transparent and open way - making its operations publicly available for scrutiny. It will be responsible for the use of its resources.