

# PRESS RELEASE

## Statistics Commission

11-19 Artillery Row  
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### STATISTICS COMMISSION SAYS LEGISLATION MUST TRANSFORM PUBLIC TRUST IN OFFICIAL STATISTICS

The Statistics Commission welcomed the announcement today in the Queen's Speech of plans for legislation governing UK official statistics but highlighted some areas which will require close consideration by Parliament.

In a report on earlier consultation published today<sup>1</sup>, the Government indicates that the legislation will establish a new Board with statutory powers and turn the Office for National Statistics into a non-ministerial department. In effect the new Board will replace both:

- the current top-level oversight of ONS by Ministers and Treasury officials, and
- the independent Statistics Commission, which comments on the quality and fitness for purpose of all the statistical outputs of government bodies.

Commission Chairman Professor David Rhind commented that,

"Genuinely independent oversight of the statistical service is essential to securing public trust. I and my fellow Commission members will support the development of a statutory framework that is robust and effective.

"We welcome the statement (paragraph 2.46) in the Government response that 'the Board will have a statutory responsibility to assure the quality and comprehensiveness of all official statistics...'.<sup>1</sup>

"There are however some aspects that will require close consideration. We will be working over the remaining life of the Commission to advise on these once we have seen the detailed text of the Bill, which we understand will be introduced in the Commons in December. In particular, we want to be sure that the proposed Board will, in practice, have the **necessary authority and the political and financial independence** to:

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<sup>1</sup> *Independence for Statistics. The Government Response*  
[http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/EB1/CD/ons\\_government\\_response.pdf](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/EB1/CD/ons_government_response.pdf)

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*The Statistics Commission is independent both of Ministers and of the producers of National Statistics. It operates openly and transparently, making its correspondence open to public scrutiny.*

- ensure that a revised Code of Practice<sup>2</sup> adequately covers all aspects of the production, management and publication of *all* official statistics and related advice;
- ensure that all appropriate departmental statistics are treated as ‘National Statistics’. The arrangements here must be seen to serve the public interest, not just the convenience of government departments;
- scrutinise the *planning* of statistical services across all government bodies to ensure maximum utility and value for money. We believe there is a need for more effective planning, led by the National Statistician, across the various departments and administrations to address the statistical requirements of society as well as government;
- strengthen co-ordination between the statistical activities of the four UK administrations. We want to see transparent decision-making on questions of harmonisation; and assurance on the long term availability of consistent UK-wide statistics where these are needed;
- enhance ONS’s access to administrative data from across the public sector for valid statistical purposes;
- strictly limit pre-release access to statistical outputs. We want to be sure that the arrangements will be sufficiently tight to prevent any inappropriate influence or exploitation, or the perception of either of those things.”

/...ENDS.../

## NOTES TO EDITORS

1. The Queen’s Speech contained the statement that “legislation will be introduced to create an independent board to enhance confidence in Government statistics”.
2. ‘Independence for statistics, the Government response’, November 2006 is at [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/EB1/CD/ons\\_government\\_response.pdf](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/EB1/CD/ons_government_response.pdf)
3. The Statistics Commission was set up in June 2000 to advise on the quality, quality assurance and priority setting for official statistics, and on the procedures designed to deliver statistical integrity, to help ensure official statistics are trustworthy and responsive to public needs. It is independent both of Ministers and of the producers of official statistics. More information about the Commission’s role and work is on its website [www.statscom.org.uk](http://www.statscom.org.uk).
4. Contact number for further information: Richard Alldritt, chief executive, 020 7273 8008

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<sup>2</sup> See The Government response, paragraph 2.49 at [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/EB1/CD/ons\\_government\\_response.pdf](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/media/EB1/CD/ons_government_response.pdf)

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