

PRESS RELEASE

Statistics Commission

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STATISTICS COMMISSION PUBLISHES ASSESSMENT OF GOVERNMENT TARGETS

The Statistics Commission today publishes its assessment of the adequacy of the statistical evidence underpinning top level targets set by government.

The Commission has reviewed over 100 targets associated with existing Public Service Agreements and has made a number of broad recommendations as well as commenting on individual targets.

Commission chairman Professor David Rhind said: "The report was initially issued in draft form late last year and this prompted a number of detailed comments and observations from government departments. We have worked through these systematically, taking on board valid observations whilst maintaining our independent perspective. We are now publishing the report in final form and are very grateful to all those who offered advice.

"As the report itself makes clear, the Statistics Commission is not seeking to comment on the desirability or effectiveness of setting these targets. That is a matter for others. Our concern is with the statistical robustness of the targets that *have been set.*"

"One of our recommendations is topical in view of the Chancellor's announcement in November 2005 of the Government's plans to introduce legislation to help build trust in official statistics. We argue in this report that what is needed is a robust *cross-government* planning system for official statistics that can pick up future data requirements as early as possible and support target-setting. That is a goal that we would be happy to see the Government incorporate into its plans for the future of the statistical service."

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NOTES TO EDITORS

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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.

1. 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.
2. This report by the Statistics Commission was initially issued in draft form as a consultation document in October 2005. We reviewed each of the individual targets associated with the allocation of resources from the 2004 Spending Review and recommended that government departments follow up issues we identified for specific targets.
3. We also made a number of high-level recommendations:
 - 'Technical Notes' should be developed into more comprehensive Target Protocols which would also cover broader issues, including the rationale for the target, an indication of data quality, historical data for key measures, and details of how performance will be evaluated.
 - A brief record should be kept by departments of the more substantive decisions (on policy, resources, structures, management) that have been influenced by the monitoring of each quantified PSA target.
 - More consideration should be given to the adequacy of the statistical infrastructure. A robust cross-government planning system for official statistics is needed so that future data requirements (to support the setting of targets) can be picked up at the earliest possible stage and fed effectively into the allocation of departmental resources.
 - Government departments should pay more attention to data quality issues.
4. Contact numbers:
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 - b. printed copies of the report are available from Emmy Mulla, team secretary, 020 7273 8004.

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