

# Better Statistics, Better Decisions

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Strategy for UK statistics,  
2015 to 2020



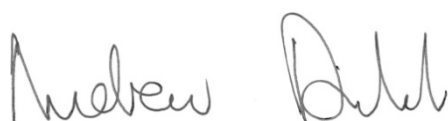
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# Foreword

I am pleased to introduce the UK Statistics Authority's strategy for official statistics. The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* established the Statistics Authority as an independent body which reports directly to the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly. The Authority has the statutory objective of promoting and safeguarding the production and publication of official statistics that 'serve the public good'.

Official statistics are for the benefit of our society and our economy as a whole; not only in government policy-making and the evaluation of government performance, but also in directing economic and commercial activities, providing valuable data and evidence for analysts, researchers, public and voluntary bodies to use, enabling the public to hold to account all organisations that spend public money, and informing wider public debate. We want to see official statistics, analysis and advice enabling sound policy decisions, and providing a firm evidence base for decision-making both inside and outside of government. A helpful, professional, innovative, efficient and capable statistical service will, we believe, serve the public good and help our nation take better decisions. This strategy is designed to make that happen.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Dilnot". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Sir Andrew Dilnot, Chair**

October 2014

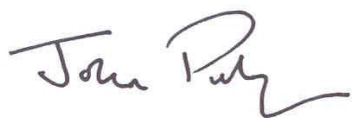
# Introduction

This is a five year strategy for the UK official statistics system. The first period in the life of the UK Statistics Authority, since it was established by statute in 2008, was a success. A clear identity was established which built trust in statistics. The timing for us in moving to a new phase in our development could not be better given the opportunity provided by the data revolution and the appetite that exists within the decision-making community for evidence, analysis and advice.

I fully expect that, in five years' time, what we will be doing will be radically different. More data will be real-time; our services will be digital by default; the quality of our advice and insight will have earned us a seat at the table where the most important decisions are made. Decision-makers across the spectrum – individuals, businesses and government – will value our services as being vital to them. Confusion about statistics will be much rarer as the information base delivered as National Statistics will be accepted and used with confidence. All those working as part of the statistical system will feel they are well led and able to make a special contribution to the public good.

Achieving this will not be easy. There are many obstacles to be overcome and many risks to be navigated. We will need to demonstrate our economic and social value in order to draw in the financial and human resources to invest and innovate. But those who use our statistics, analyses and advice are willing us to succeed. Our success matters to them.

Only we can make this happen. This strategy will be implemented by those working in the statistical system thinking about their own role and asking: how can I be more helpful to those I serve; how can I demonstrate professionalism by delivering a high quality service that will be trusted; how can I innovate and make things better; how can I be more efficient in my use of resources, money and time; and how can I develop my capability and learn new things? This document sets out how we will work together to help Britain make better decisions.



**John Pullinger, Chief Executive and National Statistician**

October 2014

# Who we are

The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body at arm's length from government, which reports directly to the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly. The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* established the Authority with the statutory objective of “promoting and safeguarding the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good”. The public good includes:

- informing the public about social and economic matters;
- assisting in the development and evaluation of public policy; and
- regulating quality and publicly challenging the misuse of statistics.

This strategy covers the three principal elements of the UK official statistics system for which the Authority has oversight. The Authority provides professional oversight of the Government Statistical Service (GSS), and has exclusive responsibility for the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and independent regulation.

## **The Government Statistical Service**

The GSS is a cross-government network, spread across a whole range of public bodies, including components of the devolved administrations and UK government departments. Led by the National Statistician, it includes statisticians, researchers, economists, analysts, operational delivery staff, IT specialists and other supporting roles. The GSS community works together to provide the statistical evidence base required by decision-makers, publishing around 2,000 sets of statistics each year, and providing professional advice and analysis to decision-makers. ONS has an important role at the heart of the GSS, providing guidance, support, standards and training.

## **The Office for National Statistics**

ONS is the executive office of the UK Statistics Authority. It is the UK's National Statistical Institute and largest producer of official statistics. ONS produces statistics on a range of key economic, social and demographic topics. Key services include measuring changes in the value of the UK economy (GDP), estimating the size, geographic distribution and characteristics of the population (including statistics from the Census), and providing indicators of price inflation (CPI), employment, earnings, crime and migration.

## **Independent regulation**

The Authority's independent regulatory function, based in offices in England, Scotland and Wales, ensures that statistics are produced and disseminated in the public interest. It acts as guardian of the integrity of the statistical system, watchdog against abuse, and advocate of the highest standards. It does so by assessing official statistics for compliance with the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*, monitoring and reporting publicly on statistical issues, and challenging the misuse of statistics. The legislation requires strict separation of the functions of production and regulation. In particular, those involved in the production of statistics are not involved in the assessment of statistics against the Code. The Director General for Regulation, who reports directly to the Chair of the Authority, draws attention to claims that are not supported by the statistics and recommends whether the National Statistics quality mark can be awarded to statistics which can be relied upon and meet the highest standards.

## Our mission

Official statistics are for the benefit of society and the economy generally. They allow the formulation of better public policy and the effective measurement of those policies; they inform the direction of economic and commercial activities; they provide valuable information for analysts, researchers, public and voluntary bodies; and they enable the public to hold to account all organisations that spend public money, thus informing democratic debate.

The collective mission of our official statistics system is:

**High quality statistics, analysis and advice to help Britain make better decisions.**

## Our values

We expect all those who work in official statistics to meet the highest possible standards in all that they do, and behave in ways that reflect the Civil Service core values of integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality.

**Integrity:** putting the obligations of public service above your own personal interests.

**Honesty:** being truthful and open.

**Objectivity:** basing your advice and decisions on rigorous analysis of the evidence.

**Impartiality:** acting solely according to the merits of the case and serving equally well Governments of different political persuasions.

# The context for our work

## **Demand for evidence**

Sound policy decisions matter for everyone. Statistics must provide a firm evidence base for these decisions, as well as for decision making and debate outside government. While downward pressure on public spending is likely to continue for the medium term, the demand for sound statistical information is growing. We need to become smarter and leaner to meet this demand, and we need to develop a fuller understanding of how we can be most helpful.

## **New opportunities with data**

Rapid changes in society and technology mean that more data, in richer and more complex forms, is available than ever before. In the commercial world the ability to mobilise the power of data is a key ingredient for success for many organisations. In this context it is more important than ever for official statistics to do the same for the most important decisions facing the country.

The data revolution presents radical opportunities which we must exploit – for analysis and public policy, and for increased efficiency. We must develop our capability to integrate administrative and commercial data sources, supported by appropriate methods and standards. We need to keep pace with advances in technology to achieve things that have previously been unachievable.

The growing data capability in other organisations presents us with new opportunities to collaborate. We must retain and develop the skills that are core to our business, while adopting creative solutions where it makes sense to do so – such as outsourcing and developing partnerships across the private and public sectors.

## **Consumer demand**

People expect a better customer experience online, having the service and advice they need at the click of a button. People also expect to be able to provide their data online. We need to improve our web and social media channels dramatically, and to find innovative ways of making our statistics more engaging, easier to understand and accessible. At the same time, consumers are increasingly sceptical, and willing to search out their own information from a wide variety of sources. We need to find ways to convey quality and trustworthiness to non-specialist audiences, and we must make more of our data available in open formats.

## **Changing economy, society and governance (including devolution)**

Statistics need to keep pace with a fast changing world. We need to be constantly attuned to developments and respond rapidly when new issues arise where the evidence base is absent or contested. If we don't, we will become irrelevant. As the pace of change quickens, the methods and systems we adopt may need to become more complex and timely.

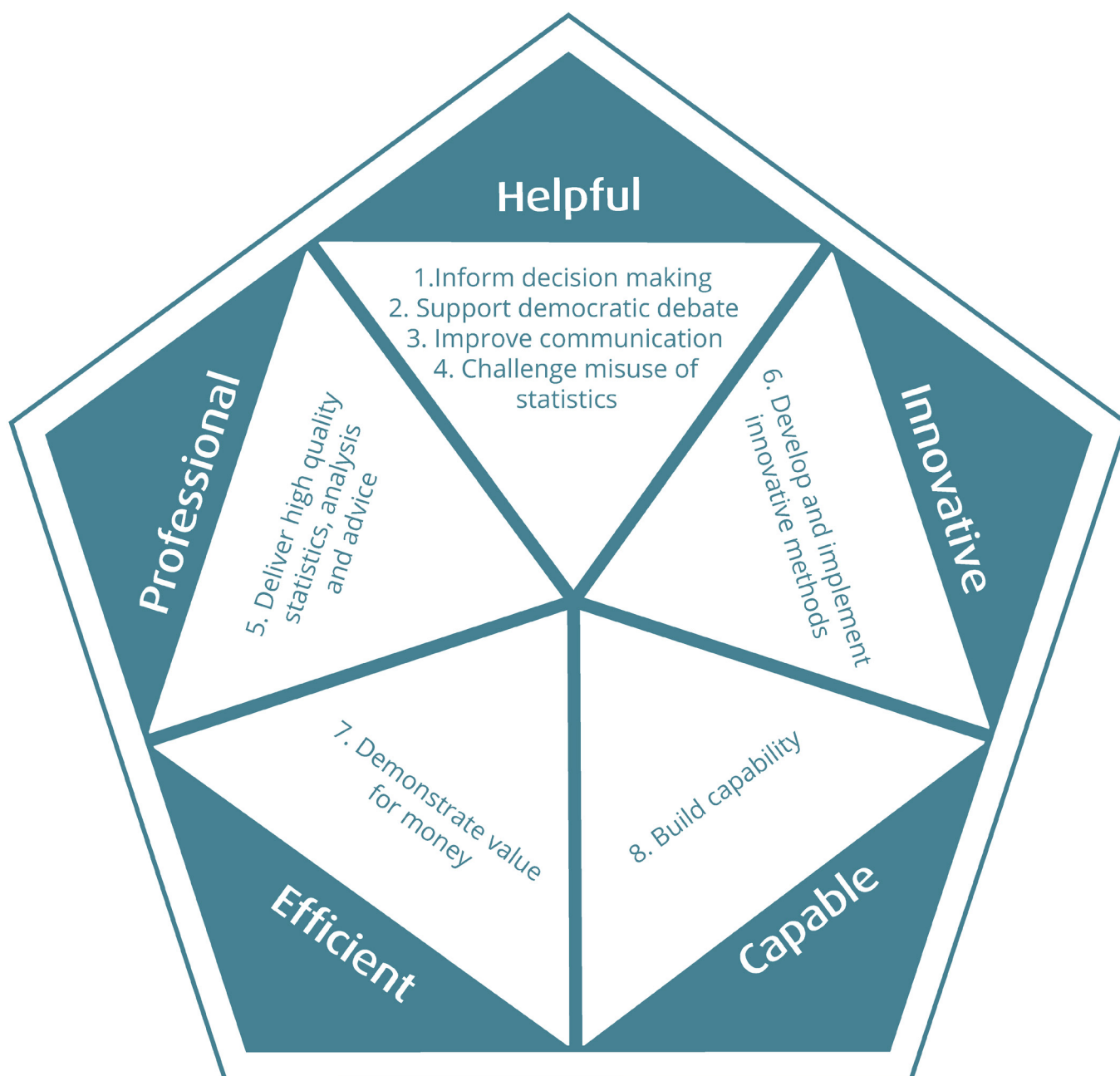
## **International**

The demand for internationally comparable statistics continues to increase. We will need to be active internationally, leading where it is in the UK's interests to do so, and building partnerships. This will enable us to guide agendas, improve quality and consistency, and influence international regulations so that they are developed in the UK's national interest.



## Making it happen

To achieve our mission, over the next five years we will focus on five perspectives. Together they describe the way we will work with others to provide a quality service, our ambition to be innovative, to deliver in a cost effective way and to ensure we optimise the capability of the statistical community. Building stronger relationships will enable us to be more helpful and intuitive in responding to the needs of our stakeholders. To explain how we intend to deliver within each perspective, we have identified eight strategic objectives. These are depicted in the model below and are explained more fully over the following pages.



# Helpful

The test of our success will be the ratings given to us by those who rely on our services.

## Objective 1: Inform decision making

We will provide a firm evidence base for sound decisions, supporting the formulation of effective government policies and the management of public service delivery, and informing the direction of economic and commercial activities.

- We will develop a fuller understanding of what statistics the nation needs for sound decision making. We will assess the statistical requirements of the UK and its constituent parts, compare that with the current position, and set out a plan to close gaps.
- We will raise awareness of the critical role of statistics in informing decisions, and advocate the advisory role of statisticians. To demonstrate what success looks like, we will showcase examples of where statistical and analytical work is already assisting decisions.
- We will champion the public interest, making sure that key data used for decision-making are available to all, subject to the protection of confidential personal data.

## Objective 2: Support democratic debate

We will develop the crucial role that official statistics play in informing democratic debate. Improving public understanding of statistics, and assuring the public that official statistics are trustworthy, is central to this.

- We will find ways for official statistics to better support democratic debate, and to provide clarity in a world of increasing information.
- We will respond rapidly to emerging issues, particularly when an issue arises where the information base is contested or absent.
- Our regulatory function will ensure that users of official statistics understand the value of the National Statistics quality mark and of the Authority's wider regulatory work.

## Objective 3: Improve communication

We will dramatically improve the communication of official statistics, ensuring that they make the right impact to serve the public good.

- We will make material improvements to the ONS website so that it demonstrably meets the needs of those who wish to use it, supports greater use and understanding of statistics and attracts new users.
- We will find innovative ways of making data, statistics and analysis more accessible, engaging and easier to understand, to support accurate and meaningful interpretation. Ensuring statistics are well explained so that they can be properly interpreted by those who use them is essential.
- Our regulatory function will ensure the application of the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics* remains flexible in light of new uses and channels for official statistics.
- We will work closely with the Government Digital Service to build on work already underway to embed the principles of open data and digital by default to official statistics, making more of our data available in open formats for re-use, while protecting the confidentiality of personal information and keeping data secure.

## Objective 4: Challenge misuse of statistics

Misuse of official statistics causes confusion in public debate, damages the integrity of statistics and obstructs good decision-making. We will speak out against the misuse of statistics, reporting publicly to Parliament.

- We will investigate all concerns raised with us about the way official statistics are used, giving priority to the most significant concerns, and reporting our findings publicly.
- The Authority believes that Government ministers and officials should not have privileged access to statistics before they are available to Parliament or the public. It will continue to argue against pre-release access and seek its abolition.

## Professional

The test of our success will be that our services, including our statistics, analysis and advice, are accepted and used with confidence. Equally, we will safeguard information relating to individuals and organisations in ways that they can trust.

## Objective 5: Deliver high quality statistics, analysis and advice

We will ensure and demonstrate that official statistics are of high quality, produced to consistently high professional standards in accordance with international best practice, meet the needs of those who wish to use them and are worthy of their trust. This is what the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics* exists to promote. Our analysis and advice will be responsive and timely, and our work conducted with integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality.

- Official statistics must meet user need and best inform public debate and decision-making. We will implement the findings of National Statistics Quality Reviews of economic statistics and build capability in this area as a priority.
- We will conduct regular quality reviews to challenge the underlying measurement concepts and the relevance of data sources and methods, drawing on the best national and international expertise. We will maintain high levels of quality assurance, develop standards for the use of administrative data, and communicate uncertainty clearly.
- Our independent regulation function will enhance the quality of official statistics and assure Parliament and the public of the quality of official statistics. We will: (i) assess the compliance of official statistics with the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*; and (ii) investigate and report on concerns, expressed internally or externally, about aspects of particular statistics including statistical methods.

## Innovative

The test of our success will be the measurable benefits that we deliver from continuous improvement and a spirit of curiosity.

### Objective 6: Develop and implement innovative methods

We will anticipate new opportunities and respond to unmet statistical needs using innovative, efficient and effective methods. We will be at the forefront of using new technology and identifying and exploiting new methods and data sources at ONS and across government.

- We will achieve a step-change in the sharing of data within, and beyond, government for statistical purposes, working across government to overcome legal and bureaucratic challenges. This presents an opportunity for radical benefits for public policy decisions. We will facilitate greater use and linkage of administrative data via the Administrative Data Research Network.
- We will deliver an online Census in 2021, making the best use of administrative data and surveys to deliver enhanced statistics from the Census and improved statistics between censuses.
- We will radically rethink our data collection methods, and develop the infrastructure to collect more data electronically. Business surveys will be digital by default and the public will have the option of providing data online.

## Efficient

The test of our success will be the improvement in performance and delivery which we achieve from better use of resources.

### Objective 7: Demonstrate value for money

We will demonstrate value for money in all that the statistical system does in the context of scarce public resources.

- We will demonstrate transparency, value for money and good stewardship of resources. We will deliver year-on-year efficiency gains and oversee strong financial management across the Authority and ONS. We will look for opportunities to generate income.
- We will explain and promote the value and importance of official statistics to society and government in the context of limited public resources, and make the case for the funds needed to maintain and develop a coherent national statistical system.
- Encouraging a system-wide view of prioritisation, we will identify where lower priority work can be stopped to enable higher priority user needs to be met elsewhere.

## Capable

The test of our success will be that those involved in public policy are equipped with the necessary skills and tools to tackle the challenges set out in this strategy.

### Objective 8: Build capability

We will build people and technological capability, developing a diverse, skilled and resilient workforce, ready for change, fully engaged in the business, and able to deliver innovative solutions and improvements.

- We will work across departments to provide leadership on data capability for the whole of government. We will drive the transformation of data services available to analysts, decision makers and the public to deliver a step change in the evidence base of the nation.
- Development of people capability will be addressed at the system level looking across the whole analytical community in government. We will create a coherent and cutting edge cadre of analytic staff to blend statistical methods with data science, empowering people to achieve high professional standards throughout their career.
- We will systematically remove barriers to performance and cooperation, and provide staff with the tools to do their jobs.

## Delivering the strategy

This strategy is a call to action. It sets out our aims, priorities, mission and values to make the case for change. It is not a detailed blueprint for everything that needs to be done. The different parts of the statistical system will contribute to delivery of the objectives set out in this document in different ways. They will develop their own business plans setting how their activities relate to the overall strategy.

We will ensure that all those involved in official statistics understand how they contribute to the collective mission and objectives. To align business activities to the strategy and to monitor delivery, we will develop a dashboard of performance measures.

We will provide quarterly reports on progress to the UK Statistics Authority Board, and we will report progress in our Annual Report to the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly.