

UK Statistics Authority
National Statistician's Data Ethics Advisory Committee

Terms of reference

Introduction

1. At the UK Statistics Authority Board meeting on 6 November 2014, the Authority Board agreed to establish the National Statistician's Data Ethics Advisory Committee (NSDEC), which would be advisory to the National Statistician.

Role and responsibilities

2. The role of the National Statistician's Data Ethics Advisory Committee (NSDEC) is to advise the National Statistician on the ethical considerations concerning the accessing, sharing and use of public data for research and statistical purposes.
3. Specific responsibilities of the NSDEC include to:
 - i. provide ethical consideration of proposals to access, share and use data;
 - ii. advise on individual policies and research projects against NSDEC's ethical principles;
 - iii. develop a consistent ethical framework for relevant projects related to official statistics;
 - iv. promote transparency around data shares;
 - v. provide ethical approval for government, and third sector researchers who wish to use government data for research and statistics that serves the public good; and,
 - vi. provide ethical advice on other data issues within the National Statistician's remit, which includes his role as head of the Government Statistical Service.
4. In reviewing proposals, NSDEC will provide advice by consensus.
5. To facilitate timely access to data, NSDEC can consider proposals via correspondence. Advice on these projects will be provided by consensus, once the stated period for consideration has expired.

Meetings

6. NSDEC will meet at least four times a year. The Chair of NSDEC may convene additional meetings as deemed necessary.
7. The Chair may invite other relevant experts as appropriate to advise the Committee.

Reporting

8. The NSDEC Secretariat will provide reports following each of its meetings to the National Statistician.
9. At least seven days prior to its meetings, NSDEC will receive reports on:
 - i. proposed new data shares;
 - ii. relevant projects and programmes and other information as it requires; and
 - iii. reports from any sub-committees.

10. NSDEC will operate transparently. Meeting minutes and a list of projects considered will be made publicly available on the UK Statistics Authority website.
11. Where expedited review is sought and NSDEC approve the proposal by correspondence, a minute of the discussion via correspondence will be presented at NSDEC's next meeting and published on the UK Statistics Authority website.
12. NSDEC will provide an annual report on its activities in the National Statistician's annual report on data access and sharing.

Membership and role of members

13. The members of NSDEC will include:
 - i. a representative of the National Statistician (Chair);
 - ii. at least five independent external members, including lay members; and
 - iii. no more than four members from government.

Quorum

14. NSDEC meetings will be considered quorate when four or more members are present including at least two independent external members as well as the Chair or the Chair's delegated nominee.
15. Substitutes will not be permitted to attend meetings, unless with the invitation of the Chair.
16. In order for a proposal to be formally approved by correspondence a sufficient number of members would need to respond in accordance with a quorate meeting.

Secretariat

17. Secretariat for the NSDEC will be provided by the staff from the Data Governance, Legislation and Policy within the UK Statistics Authority.

Review

18. NSDEC will review the effectiveness of its meetings and its terms of reference annually.

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