UK Statistics Authority

Strengthening User Engagement

June 2010

Monitoring Report 7

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About the UK Statistics Authority
The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body operating at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament. It was established on 1 April 2008 by the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*.

The Authority's overall objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. The Authority is accordingly required to promote and safeguard the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics, and good practice in relation to official statistics.

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

1. oversight of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – the executive office of the Authority;
2. independent scrutiny (monitoring and assessment) of all official statistics produced in the UK.

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Foreword

Sir Michael Scholar, Chair of the UK Statistics Authority

Government statisticians do a most important job. Historically it has focused on the production, management and dissemination of official statistics. And indeed the Code of Practice, which guides their work, lays great store by the professional standards expected in these activities.

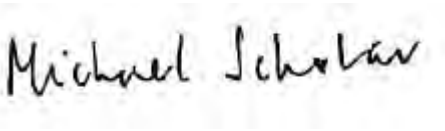
However, the value of the statistics produced lies in their usefulness, and in their eventual use. It is only when they are used in ways that promote the public good – by Parliament, government, public services, business, or the citizen – that we can truly say that their production at public expense is fully justified.

Such considerations of utility have too often been seen as a luxury to be addressed where resources permit. It is however essential, both to the reputation of the statistical service and to the beneficial impact of the statistics, that the use and utility of statistics should drive the development of the service. It must be the basis for all decisions about which statistical outputs to produce, the form they should take, and the balance between the resources devoted to their collection and the resources given to supporting their use.

One conclusion implicit in this report is that the balance needs to change and to lean more towards helping the user to get full value from the statistical product. At a time when public expenditure is under exceptional pressure, it is all the more important to get this balance right, and thus to get the greatest overall value for the investment made.

The conclusions and recommendations in this report set the world of official statistics on a course to ensure the user voice is more clearly heard and that its influence on the work of the statistical service is progressively enhanced.

The preparation of this report was overseen by a project board chaired by Sir Roger Jowell, deputy chair of the Statistics Authority. I would like to thank him and the other members of the project board, and all who contributed to the consultation on the interim report.



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Summary and conclusions

1. In February 2009[1] the UK Statistics Authority announced its intention of carrying out a monitoring review to look at ways of enhancing communication between the producers of official statistics and the users – those organisations and individuals whose decisions and actions are influenced by statistics. The aim was both to guide the future development of the statistical service and to help users to engage with it and make the maximum possible use of it.

2. The review concludes that while there is already a lot of user engagement of one sort or another, there needs to be:

- better understanding of the use currently made of official statistics and the value to society that flows from that use;
- better communication with a wider range of users; and
- better exploitation of the existing consultation structures and technologies to ensure that user engagement is effective.

3. Historically, the costs and burdens of the statistical service have received the same close scrutiny as other publicly funded services. But the value derived from having the service – essentially the benefit to government and different sectors of society from having access to official statistics – has been studied less closely. The question of how best to enhance the value for money of official statistics has not been addressed directly.

4. Enhancing value requires a good understanding of both the use and the potential use of the outputs of the statistical service. That information needs to be documented and used to further develop the service provided. This emphasis on understanding uses and engaging with users is one of the main features of the new Code of Practice for Official Statistics[2] introduced in January 2009. The Statistics Authority's initial assessments of compliance with the Code indicate that many of the bodies that produce official statistics need to do more in order to comply fully with the new Code in this respect[3].

1 http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/reports-from-the-authority-s-monitoring---assessment-team---update-no--2.pdf
2 http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html
3 http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring-and-assessment-notes/published-notes.html

5. Once producer bodies have identified the uses and potential uses of statistical outputs, and the associated communities of organisations and individuals who use the statistics, they need to establish an ongoing dialogue with those communities. It is not sufficient to 'consult', in the sense of making plans available on a website for public comment. The dialogue needs to have substance, helping producers to inform users about the availability of new statistics; to tailor the advice which accompanies the statistics to take account of the likely uses; and to present the statistics in ways that capture interest and can be readily understood. The dialogue should also enable users to provide feedback on the range and quality of the statistics available.

6. Increasingly, access to statistics, and to statistical releases and reports, is via the web. It seems likely therefore that a web-based approach to communication between different users of statistics, and between users and producers, will offer the most viable and effective way forward, making the dialogue openly accessible and transparent. At present a relatively small number of dedicated individuals support a number of statistical 'user groups' which work to lobby government departments for action on their priorities. These user groups, and the Statistics User Forum (SUF)[4] that brings them together, have played an important and beneficial part in the evolution of UK official statistics. However there is a need to engage more directly and effectively with a broader base of organisations and individuals, including the many users of statistics within government, who depend on statistical information.

7. There are clearly challenges for statistics producers in adopting a new approach to user engagement. It is not just a matter of asking more people what statistics they would like to see collected. Input from users is important at all stages in the statistical value chain – from planning which statistics to collect; deciding how they should best be produced and disseminated; deciding how the statistics (and the messages from them) should be communicated to the outside world; and directly helping decision-makers, outside government as well as inside, use the statistics in ways that deliver benefit to the public.

8. Achieving this level of engagement, which in many cases amounts to a substantial change from current practice, has implications for statistical resources. More communication may mean less resources for producing statistical outputs. However the Statistics Authority believes that the benefits of increased dialogue with users justify some rebalancing in resource use. Given the power of statistics to influence actions and decisions in all sectors of society, and the relative paucity of current knowledge and documentation about those aspects, the case for such re-balancing is strong. Indeed without a clear understanding of the needs of users of statistics, a question hangs over the business case for the resources currently employed.

4 http://www.rss.org.uk/main.asp?page=1612

9. In times of pressure on public expenditure, it can be even more important that statistical information about the impact of policy, and effectiveness of public services, is available to inform public debate. But it is equally important that the statistical information is well communicated, explained and understood. Pressure on statistical resources does not therefore justify a retrenchment into simply producing and publishing sets of data.

10. Government statisticians who work in the policy departments of government – and that is the majority – work very closely with their policy colleagues to explain the statistics and guide their use and interpretation. That is one important form of user engagement and one that must be preserved and recognised for its importance and value. However, it has also, over time, given rise to a culture in which that form of user engagement is seen as being the primary responsibility of many government statisticians. The recommendations in this report necessitate a change in that attitude and culture and, in particular, a recognition among individual government statisticians that supporting the beneficial use of official statistics outside government, whether by Parliament, business, local services or the general public, is just as important as supporting the use within government. The Statistics Authority will be working with the statistical service to bring about that change in attitude.

11. The Statistics Authority recognises that positive steps have been taken in recent years, including better dialogue with the various user groups that are represented on SUF (which is itself supported by the Royal Statistical Society, the Economic and Social Research Council and the Statistics Authority) and other initiatives such as ScotStat. There have also been some real improvements in online access to official statistics. But there is evidence from the Authority's assessments of statistics against the Code, and from discussions with users and opinion formers as part of this review, to suggest that there is still some way to go. The statistical service needs, for example, to further support the work of the current user groups to ensure that the benefits of these networks are fully realised.

12. One essential step in improving both the service and user engagement will be to enhance the accessibility of official statistics – including promoting awareness that they are available. Users and potential users need to know what statistics are available on the topics of interest to them and how to set about finding the figures and advice relating to them. The vast range of statistical information now available means that this is becoming increasingly challenging but it is clear that the answer has to lie with well designed websites and close co-operation between producer bodies to adopt a shared approach to the design of products for those websites.

13. The context in which the statistical service is operating is important in considering the steps to take. Public confidence in official statistics continues to be low. The latest figures[5] are no better than when measurement started in 2004. We believe that public attitudes are strongly influenced by wider attitudes to government and public institutions and that there is no easy route to solving the problem of confidence in the statistical service, in isolation from those wider issues. However, steps which help to ensure that statistics are presented correctly in the news media could improve the general public's understanding and use of those figures. Producer bodies need to work to improve relations with the media in a number of ways outlined in this report.

14. The best approach is likely to lie not in one or two big changes in current practice but in a combination of many measures tailored to different circumstances. The common thread to these measures should be the added value that can be derived from supporting the use of statistics. Any measure that supports the beneficial use of official statistics should be regarded as an integral part of the service. We consider that the implementation of our recommendations will improve the value – and thus the trustworthiness – of the official statistics system, and will over time reinforce confidence in that system.

15. The collection and publication of official statistics has to be managed as a service, with all that that implies, and we think it should be managed more as other services are managed. The commercial world operates on the basis of identifying and meeting the needs of its customers; and businesses put considerable resource into ensuring that they know what their customers, and potential customers, think about the service they receive. The UK statistical service must do the same.

5 see Annex A; also http://www.natcen.ac.uk/study/public-confidence-in-official-statistics

Recommendations

16. An interim version of this report was published in March 2010. Following consultations, and an open meeting, to consider the interim recommendations[6], a number of amendments have now been incorporated into this final report. Our recommendations are that:

1. All the bodies that produce official statistics should take steps to enhance their compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics[7], particularly in three areas:

   a. those aspects of the Code that relate to understanding the use and potential use of official statistics (para 60);

   b. the publication of the documentation required by the Code (para 61);

   c. ensuring that the commentary that accompanies official statistics helps the users understand and make effective use of the statistics (para 68).

   The Statistics Authority will consider with the National Statistician whether further guidance is needed on how to meet these requirements.

2. The Office for National Statistics should give priority to improving the navigability and accessibility of its website, and should publish its plans for doing so (para 73).

3. The National Statistician should lead consultations with appropriate experts on how best to use web technology, and innovative ways of exploiting digitised statistical data, to enhance the accessibility of official statistics and related advice (para 75).

4. Government statisticians should work together, and with the Royal Statistical Society (RSS), to improve communication between statistical experts and journalists. This might include supporting statistical training for student journalists; supporting courses or events and visits for journalists to statistical offices or departments; and increasing opportunities for journalists to talk directly to statisticians in government (para 81).

6 See Annex J
7 See Annex G

5. Given the great diversity of users of statistics, a high profile web-based forum (supported by an appropriate structure of meetings between users and producers) should be developed which would enable users of statistics to communicate more easily and openly with each other and with the producers of official statistics. While the lead on these developments should rest with the Statistics User Forum and the RSS, bodies producing official statistics should actively support this initiative, coordinated by the National Statistician (para 89).

6. All government departments and other producer bodies should work actively with SUF (and other user group structures), to help user groups represent the interests and priorities of their members (para 95).

17. In addition, the Statistics Authority will support the RSS's initiatives in seeking to develop new user-designed, user-managed websites that will provide direct access to statistical material, including official statistics, in an easily accessible, user-friendly way. The Authority will also support any equivalent initiative from other respected bodies or consortia (para 76).

Introduction

18. Government invests hundreds of millions of pounds each year in the collection and publication of official statistics. It does so on the understanding that the statistics are of real and immediate value, both to government itself and to other sectors of society. While the costs and burdens of this activity have long been the subject of close scrutiny, less attention has been paid to maximising the value of the service. To do this requires investigation, and documentation, of the realised and potential value of official statistics and how that value can be enhanced by helping organisations and individuals use the statistical service in ways that benefit society.

19. The many government departments and other bodies that produce official statistics need to identify and support, as far as they can, all the uses that deliver public value – that is to say, that offer some social or economic benefit. They must find ways to do this efficiently and without imposing excessive burdens on themselves, data suppliers or the users.

20. The first step on this path must be to support all current and potential users in communicating their needs to the statistical service. We recognise that the uses of statistics are diffuse and sometimes difficult to capture and document. Statistics sometimes paint the background against which decisions are made, or actions taken, rather than playing a specific role in such processes. For example, macro-economic statistics may influence the plans of commercial organisations without it necessarily being possible to point to exactly when, where or how that influence took place; or indeed to identify any person who was demonstrably influenced. The influence may be incremental and cumulative rather than an event in itself. The 'user' may be largely unaware of being a user; and the use will often remain undocumented. But it is still a use and a contribution to the value of the service.

21. Despite the difficulties, it is often possible to trace, or at least make reasonable assumptions about, the influence of statistics and their value. It is, for example, clear that statistics on the treatment of patients by the NHS influence many things including government policy, the day-to-day management of the NHS, investment decisions of private healthcare companies, and the attitudes and actions of individual NHS patients. In aggregate, that is a powerful case for producing such statistics. More generally, transparently identifying the use of statistics and responding to the user, and potential user, is a vital step in ensuring that official statistics are seen to be of value, and that the case for continued funding from the public purse is made.

22. The Statistics Authority recognises that the statistical service is already shaped by specific user requirements. The decision to collect statistics on a subject is made – usually by government ministers rather than government statisticians – after careful consideration of requirements for that information, often including wider consultation. The case for a 2011 Census, the largest statistical exercise ever undertaken in the UK, is currently being considered in depth by statisticians, ministers and parliamentarians in all four UK administrations[8]. But for the majority of statistical work, once the collection is established, it tends to be only the best-placed users inside government who have much say in matters such as the detailed structure of the statistics, the form of their presentation, their frequency and accessibility and the way that they are explained. Government statisticians often focus on major government needs and concentrate on achieving the best quality in that context.

23. It is sometimes said that users of statistics, while diverse in their applications, differ little in their core statistical needs – that they all want the same figures. It is thus seen to be sufficient to establish what government itself wants and then just to make those statistics more widely available. Indeed, this seems to have been an accepted principle in some areas of official statistics. However, this view misses an important consideration: the needs of users may differ, not in terms of data as such, but more in terms of the way the statistics are packaged, presented and communicated. So for example, economists who analyse macro-economic statistics may want detailed tables of national data in a particular format; whereas a charity dealing with the elderly may just need a few headline points about the implications of, say, price inflation for the living costs of older people. These requirements may relate to the same data but require a different service from statisticians. In practice, user requirements can impact on all stages in the design and delivery of the service.

24. The production of official statistics has been, and to a large extent remains, a monopoly and, as such, not subject to consumer choices. But that is starting to change; statistical information is produced and disseminated via the web by ever more organisations, and this information, sometimes of unknown origin and quality, competes for the attention of decision makers. It is important therefore that producers explain their statistics (including strengths and limitations in relation to major uses) sufficiently clearly to ensure that those whose actions are influenced by them are told everything they need to know. This may include, for example, which of the different sources are most appropriate in a particular context and any cautionary points on the interpretation of trends or of estimates of the characteristics of small population sub-groups.

8 http://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011-census/2011-census-project/case-for-2011-census/index.html

25. This emphasis on understanding uses and users is one of the main features of the Code, published in January 2009. Annex G presents the key practices of the Code that relate to user engagement. The Code reflects the intent behind the phrasing in the *Statistics and Registration Act 2007*[9] that refers to 'official statistics that serve the public good'.

26. The Code requires producers to identify the users and what use they do, or might, make of the statistics. The Authority believes that in many cases it may be simplest and most productive to concentrate initially on identifying uses – the nature of the decisions and actions that are influenced by the statistics; and then focus on producing advice that supports those uses. For example, it would be unrealistic to try to draw up a list of *users* of crime statistics but it is not so difficult to identify the broad types of use and the related communities of users. The police use crime statistics mainly in the management of their resources; the public use crime statistics to assess the risk of becoming victims, and perhaps also to assess the performance of the police; local authorities often use crime statistics as a deprivation measure, and so on.

27. Once producers have identified uses and communities of users, they should seek to develop a relationship with them that enables them to:

- Make users aware of the statistics produced. Ideally the statistics should be accessible to all, via easy to use websites and a 'single entry point' for all statistics, for example, regardless of the identity of the producer. Additionally, many users may not go to the producers' websites or statistical releases to access their statistics but use other channels, such as the media. It is therefore important for producers to improve the quality of media coverage by treating journalists as major users. More open communication with journalists would seem to be a precursor to this.
- Present statistics in ways that capture interest and that are likely to be understandable to users. This may be achieved by improved websites, more dynamic presentations of data, greater use of over-arching frameworks that show relationships between relevant statistics and data sources, more insightful analysis of the statistical data, and better commentary about them.

9 http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2007/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf

- Seek informed views from users on the range and quality of existing and future statistics – using any of a variety of mechanisms, including formal consultations, approaches that exploit the web, and different types of meetings. A clear structure for user engagement, in terms of governance and coordination, will make it easier for users to know how to ensure that their voice is heard. And feedback from producers on ways that users' views have been taken into account, and the way that competing priorities have been reconciled, will assure users that their views do influence the service and bolster confidence in it more generally.

28. It is clear that there are resource implications for producers in carrying out all the steps laid out above. Consolidating a potentially unlimited range of views and needs could consume substantial resources that might otherwise be devoted to producing statistical outputs. However, the Statistics Authority is confident that the benefits of securing user input at all stages in the statistical process will outweigh the associated costs. It will deliver evidence of the relevance of the statistics being produced, help in prioritising what statistics should be produced in future, provide evidence of the value of the statistics and, not least, support the business case to continue the work. In an era of cuts in government spending, government statisticians need to consider that if they are not able to demonstrate how the statistics are used, it may also be difficult to argue for continued funding.

29. There are few tangible measures by which progress in user engagement can be judged. However, there are some areas in which the Authority hopes to see significant improvement. These include improvements to the range and quality of advice in statistical releases; an increase in positive feedback from users of statistics; evidence of more coherent user engagement when statutory assessments against the Code are undertaken; and evidence of better informed use of official statistics in the news media and elsewhere.

30. The remaining sections of this report look at:

- the context in which user engagement takes place;
- user engagement in the new structure of the UK statistical system;
- the nature of use and users, how producers of statistics can best engage with users; and
- some ideas as to how to improve user engagement, notably by increasing awareness among users, communicating with the media, using technology as a tool and supporting the emerging structure for engagement.

Context

'Statistics are produced to be used. Consultation and dialogue with users brings benefits to producers that are much wider than simply enabling producers to better assess their customer needs.'

Statistics User Forum briefing note to Public Administration Select Committee, July 2008[10]

31. For the purposes of this review, we have adopted a broad interpretation of the term 'user of statistics'. This is discussed in more detail later in the report. In short we consider a user to be any organisation or person whose decisions, actions or work are influenced by official statistics or by messages derived from the statistics; even if the user is not fully aware that the influence derives from statistical data. Potential users are taken to be any body or person who might be influenced by the statistics. It is sometimes suggested that the main users of statistics are analysts and others who work with the detailed data. We view such people as being an important part of the 'production chain', adding their own analyses to the product, rather than being end-users of the service themselves. These distinctions become important when looking at which mechanisms for user engagement are most likely to be effective.

32. Other terms used in this report include:

- 'engagement' – activities which allow statistical producers to provide information and to seek views and feedback from the users of their statistics;
- 'consultation' – one form of engagement with users, generally relating to a formal process of gathering views;
- 'statistical value chain' – a conceptual model of the way in which statistical services are provided: identifying needs; collecting or compiling data; converting data into statistics; describing what the statistics show; publishing this commentary and the underlying statistics; and helping users understand, and make use of, the statistics and the messages they contain.

33. This section presents an historical perspective on user engagement in the UK statistical system, including recent developments. It then looks at the producer-user relationship in terms of the statistical value chain.

10 http://www.rss.org.uk/pdf/PASC%20-%20SUF%20final%20evidence%20July%202008.pdf

Historical perspective

34. Annex B – a paper presented to the October 2008 meeting of the International Association of Official Statisticians – offers some thoughts on why the statistical system has, historically, been shaped by a relatively narrow producer-perspective rather than by a systematic review of the needs of a broad community of users. A consequence of this has been that statistical priorities have been driven largely by the needs of central government. Indeed, the Rayner review[11] of the early 1980s formalised this thinking, with its recommendation that 'information should not be collected primarily for publication (but) primarily because government needs it for its own business'.

35. However, by the end of the 1990s there were calls for a stronger acknowledgement that official statistics should serve the whole of society, taking into account the needs of users outside government. Incorporating the views of users was a cornerstone of the 1999 White Paper, *Building trust in statistics*[12] which revised the administrative arrangements for official statistics.

36. The White Paper signalled a new era in the production of official statistics. It established an independent Statistics Commission, with a role in ensuring that official statistics were responsive to public needs. It also introduced a new post, that of the National Statistician, who was given overall responsibility for all official statistics. These changes were intended to address the relatively low levels of public confidence in official statistics, which could at least in part be attributed to users feeling that their views were not being heard and their needs were not being taken into account.

37. The decentralised nature of the UK's statistical system, which was unchanged by the White Paper, has undoubtedly contributed to the focus on government users of statistics, and remains a strong driver for this focus. Ministerial government departments produce the majority of official statistics in the UK. Government statisticians working in close proximity to policy colleagues have inevitably and naturally been influenced by their needs and priorities. Consultation with users outside central government is more difficult and, particularly when resources are limited, those internal users with most direct influence over statisticians are most likely to see their needs listened to, and met.

11 Great Britain, Privy Council Office (1981) Government Statistical Services, Report of the Rayner Review, London: HMSO

12 http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/about-the-authority/uk-statistical-system/history/key-historical-documents/index.html

38. A continuing recognition that user engagement needs to be more effective has been the basis for many recent discussions, conferences and papers. These include the National Statistics Open Day in 2005: *Addressing User Needs in the 21st Century*[13]; a Statistics Commission report in 2007, *The Use of Official Statistics*[14]; and the SUF Annual Conference in 2008, *Transforming Official Statistics to Serve Society*[15].

A new emphasis

39. The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* noted that official statistics should be produced '*to serve the public good*' (although the Act did not explicitly mention the role of users). This formal acknowledgement of the public good, which is also to be found in the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics[16], gave added impetus to the new focus on addressing users' needs in the Code – the preparation of which was required of the Authority, under the Act. The Code challenges producers to identify their users, to document their needs and experiences, to take account of their views in terms of presentation, quality, accessibility, data formats, to consult users before making changes to the statistics, and to seek feedback. The Code is, by international standards, notably user-centric.

40. The Authority's assessments of the extent to which sets of statistics comply with the Code, discussions with producers and users, and the results of interviews with opinion-formers[17] have all shown that external user engagement is still neither as coordinated nor as coherent as it needs to be if the value of official statistics is to be maximised. The initial assessment reports have tended to find evidence of good consultation with government users but less awareness of, and dialogue with, a wider user base[18]. Engagement is also generally sporadic and piecemeal, which often makes it difficult for users to know how to get their views across. The lack of clear processes for user engagement across and within government departments has also become apparent.

13 http://www.statistics.gov.uk/events/nsopenday2005/default.asp
14 http://www.statscom.org.uk/C_1145.aspx
15 http://www.rss.org.uk/main.asp?page=3013
16 http://unstats.un.org/unsd/dnss/gp/fundprinciples.aspx
17 See Annex C; also http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/poll.aspx?oItemId=2576
18 See assessment reports 1, 3, 5, 6, 9, 13, 14, 18, 20, 23, 30 in particular at http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html

41. The Authority takes the view that whilst improvements to internal processes and structures will be important, a more fundamental change in attitude is required to bring about lasting change in terms of user engagement. Government statisticians will only engage effectively with a wide range of users, and continue to do so, if they really believe it is the right thing to do. Such a change in the prevailing culture in statistical offices in government will need to be addressed directly, not just assumed to flow from a change in processes. We make no specific recommendations in this report on this aspect as responsibility for the culture of the statistical service is widely distributed among organisations and officials. However, the Authority will be looking for ways to help stimulate that change.

42. Some of the new governance arrangements established in recent years have the potential to be quite powerful in supporting a shift in focus and attitude – the independence of the Statistics Authority; the enhanced role of the National Statistician in leading the statistical service; the revised Code enforced through formal Assessment; a stronger user forum; and technology that allows faster and more open dialogue than ever before. There are thus grounds to be optimistic that change can be achieved.

The statistical value chain

43. Official statistics only justify the costs and burdens associated with collecting them when they are used in a beneficial way. That may be self-evident but it has an important implication. The steps in the value chain start with planning what statistics will be beneficial in the future and do not stop until the statistics, or perhaps advice based on them, are used to some beneficial effect. Historically, the beginning and end of this chain have received rather less attention than the processes of collecting and disseminating statistics, which lie in the middle.

44. At the planning stage, documentation on the expected, or intended, uses of the statistics should be at the heart of priority-setting. There is little such documentation in the public domain and we suspect that discussion of why certain statistics should be collected has tended to be driven by a narrow range of user interests. To increase the value of the planning process, producers should identify both the expected uses of the statistics and the communities of users associated with each use. Involving those communities in an active dialogue at that stage will help ensure not just that the right statistical products are produced but that the ground is laid for effective user engagement later on.

45. User engagement is also important during the collection of data and the production of the statistics. This more micro-level engagement may concern aspects of methodology, classifications, definitions, coverage, timing and so on. These detailed issues can be very important to users – an apparently small change in a definition underpinning a statistic may be important in the context of certain uses. Producers need an awareness of their users, and the uses made of the statistics, to ensure that any such changes are made in the light of their implications for the value to be derived from the statistics.

46. Users also need to be involved in shaping the dissemination and communication of statistics. Producers should make users aware of the statistics being released; they should capture and retain users' interest; they should try to ensure that the statistics are understood at the time that they are released and subsequently.

47. Engagement with users after the statistics are published, the equivalent of commercial after-care, is one of the less developed aspects of the statistical service. However, it may be the key to ensuring that the utility of the statistics is understood and that decisions and actions are influenced in beneficial ways.

48. Despite the commitment in the Act to promoting statistics that serve the public good, many users outside government have told us that they feel that their needs have been given low priority – impacting directly on their work, and indirectly on their perception of the responsiveness and trustworthiness of the statistical system as a whole. One of the changes that the Authority would like to see is for statistical producer bodies to make more effort to reflect back to those users that their needs have been identified and understood, even if it is not currently practicable to meet them (which would obviously need to be explained). This would help to establish mutual trust and encourage a dialogue that may in time lead to fresh insights for both producers and users.

Identifying uses and users

'Our primary task must be to find out who the users, actual and potential, of official statistics are, and what use they could or should make of them.'

Sir Michael Scholar, Chair, UK Statistics Authority

49. In order to be able to tailor their services to their users' needs, producers must first be able to identify who their users are and must know how to make contact with them. Indeed the first practice in Protocol 1 in the Code requires producers to 'Identify users. Document their statistical needs, and their wishes in terms of engagement'.

50. The Authority believes that there is considerable potential to improve decision making and influence action by the greater, or more informed, use of official statistics; also, that relatively small enhancements to the range and presentation of official statistics could deliver significant additional benefits, and hence improve the value for money of the investment that government makes in statistics.

51. The Code states, among other relevant points, that:

- The production, management and dissemination of official statistics should meet the requirements of informed decision making by government, public services, business, researchers and the public *(Principle 1: Meeting user needs)*; and
- Effective user engagement is fundamental both to trust in statistics and securing maximum public value *(Protocol 1: User engagement).*

Implicit here is that the requirements of informed decision making in all sectors of society need to be investigated and supported by a dialogue with users that builds trust and secures maximum value. Thus the thrust of this report and the thrust of the Code of Practice are, in essence, the same. The Authority is committed to promoting this agenda across all the bodies that produce official statistics.

Uses, users and value

52. To quote the Statistics Commission report from 2007, *The Use Made of Official Statistics*: 'Were a balance sheet for official statistics to be prepared, the costs would be clear enough. The benefit, or value, would however be much more diffuse … it is possible that the vital asset that official statistics represent is undervalued …'. The value of official statistics results from 'the value to society of the decisions that are, or might in future be, informed by official statistics … the sorts of decisions in question might range from allocating resources within a local authority, changing bank interest rates, deciding on the location of a supermarket, setting premiums in the insurance industry, or choosing a school for a child'.

53. It is widely understood that official statistics are produced to help inform government's decisions, for example about policy, public services and resource allocation. In addition statistics are used by organisations in marketing, resource allocation, monitoring, policy development, benchmarking, targeting, lobbying, bidding, planning services and for internal research purposes. The media use statistics to measure the performance of government and public bodies. The citizen user is a consumer of the messages of these commentators, including making choices about hospitals or schools on the basis of the messages, and is known to make use of statistics about their own local area in particular.

54. We would not suggest that this is an exhaustive list of the uses of official statistics. But it is illustrative, and reinforces the importance of the producer community engaging effectively with users in local government and the health sector, with business analysts, researchers and academics, voluntary organisations, and with the media and (as far as is practicable) with the general public, as a precursor to maximising public value from statistical activity.

55. We also need to take into account the unrealised value of statistics, or the potential uses to which statistics could be put if they were presented or explained well. For example, presenting a set of statistics by a specific regional breakdown may allow local authorities to use the figures for a new purpose. If the only figures that are published are at the national level, however, the value of the regional figures remains unrealised. Only by talking to users about the figures can these potential uses be brought to light.

56. The Monitoring and Assessment Note[19] outlining the findings of the 2009 Assessment Programme identified that the first assessments found considerable evidence of producers engaging effectively with users within government. However, they often knew less about the users and uses made of their statistics beyond their own organisation.

Release of survey microdata for research purposes

The importance of understanding what use is being made of data and the value of the statistics was illustrated in the long-running debate about the release of survey microdata for research purposes. The Sample of Anonymised Records (SARs) was commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) as a 'statistical abstract' from the Population Census. ONS proposed to reduce the amount of detailed data in the 2001 SARs, in comparison with the 1991 SARs, reflecting concerns about the risk of disclosing the identity of individuals. However, ONS was not fully aware of the importance of certain key variables to users, particularly from academia, and the loss of these significantly reduced the usability and value of the data. For example, ONS proposed to remove 'month of birth' from the file, but this was of crucial importance to users wishing to analyse data by school year.

A project board and user group were convened to respond to the issue. The project board was particularly valuable in allowing engagement by all parties with a concern in the form and content of the 2001 SARs. The end result was the release of one version of the 2001 SARs which did not provide users with as much detail as 1991 and a fuller version, giving more information than in 1991, being made available in the ONS's Virtual Laboratory. However, the process of discussion, and the research needed to inform decisions, delayed the production of the SARs considerably and the 2001 SARs were much less extensively used than the 1991 SARs.

19 http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring-and-assessment-notes/published-notes.html

Documentation of uses and users

57. One of the pieces of evidence requested in formal assessments of statistics is a list of the main users of the statistics in question. The assessments carried out so far have indicated that many producers do not have such information to hand. Producers are also required to document the ways that their statistics are used – partly to be able to make informed and transparent decisions about the quality of the statistics they produce, and partly to help advise users and potential users how to use the statistics appropriately. The documentation that *is* available tends to focus on the uses made by the producer body itself.

58. The research on opinion formers' perceptions of official statistics[20] highlighted a view that producers needed to be more proactive in making contact with users. We support this view, which is consistent with the Code.

59. But what does the Code mean when it talks about documentation of users' needs? Such a document should include the types of uses being made of the statistics, in particular in relation to the types of decisions being made; who is making these decisions; and at what level. This should then be related to the statistical information that is needed to support these uses, and the quality dimensions associated with the statistics in the context of these uses. Producers should also document the unmet needs of users, either in terms of the statistical information itself or of aspects of quality, and either provide plans to meet these needs or the reasons why they remain unmet. Such information should also be reinforced by case studies of actual use to illustrate the value of the statistics in a concrete way.

60. While it may take some time for statistical offices to become fully engaged with a wide range of users, and to identify previously unknown uses of statistics, the Authority encourages producers to make, and publish, their best assumptions about uses and potential uses. We believe that being explicit about the assumptions being made will soon flush out any need to amend those assumptions and will lead to rapid clarification. We **recommend** that all government departments and other bodies that produce official statistics should take steps to enhance their compliance with those aspects of the Code that relate to understanding the use, and users, of official statistics [Recommendation 1a]. The Statistics Authority will also consider with the National Statistician whether further guidance on how to meet such requirements is needed. Two examples[21] of requirements in the Code that need to be met are:

20 See report in Annex C
21 See also Annex G

- 'Investigate and document the needs of users of official statistics, the use made of existing statistics and the types of decisions they inform.'
- 'Publish information about users' experiences of statistical services, data quality, and the format and timing of reports'.

61. The Code requires producers of statistics to publish a range of background documents about different aspects of their statistics, and the statistical service they provide. Publishing such documents makes a wide range of information readily available, thereby increasing transparency and demonstrating the openness, integrity and trustworthiness of those aspects of the statistics production process. As outlined in the report on the findings of the 2009 Assessment Programme, bodies producing official statistics should publish the documentation required by the Code of Practice ahead of formal Assessment reports [Recommendation 1b].

Categorising users

62. The Authority recognises that it can be difficult to know who all users of a certain set of statistics are, in particular those accessing statistics via the media or websites without making any direct contact with the producers. However, the documentation of use and users referred to earlier should provide an indication of the types of users of the data in question. For the purposes of Code compliance, producers are not necessarily expected to have a comprehensive list of named users; it may instead be useful to think in terms of categories of users, particularly when planning how to engage with them.

63. Many statistical offices in other countries successfully use some variation on the theme of categorisation in their approach to users[22]. In the UK context categorisation could be based on one or more of the following:

- sector – central government, local government, private sector, research community, business, and so on;
- type of use or decision made on the basis of the statistics;
- level of interest in the statistical product – perhaps informed by the uses made and the nature of the contact with the producer; and
- value to society of the decisions made or potentially made on the basis of the statistics.

22 See a summary of the findings from international evidence gathered in Annex D

Improving engagement with users

'Statistical priorities sometimes appear to be driven solely by the needs of government departments. They must be seen to be driven by the needs of society as a whole.'

Official Statistics: Value and Trust, Statistics Commission[23]

64. Paragraphs 43 to 48 outline the importance of user engagement at distinct stages of the statistical value chain. This section explores the underlying issues in more detail, and makes some recommendations intended to increase the value of official statistics by improving the effectiveness of user engagement.

Increasing awareness and understanding of statistics

65. It (almost) goes without saying that users and potential users need to know, or be able to discover readily, what statistics are available on topics of interest to them. The Code requires producers to 'publicise official statistics in ways that enable users to identify and access information relevant to their needs. Make access to official statistics as straightforward as possible by providing easy to use entry points'[24].

66. In the past the decentralised nature of the UK statistical system has been an obstacle to users seeking to access official statistics. For example, it is unhelpful for users to have to know which department produces statistics on a particular issue – a user wanting to find data on migration may go to ONS's website to find these data, not realising that both the Home Office and the Department for Work and Pensions also produce migration-related statistics. Developments such as the Migration Statistics Quarterly Report[25], incorporating migration-related data from all these departments, are an improvement in this respect.

67. The Authority believes that producers should understand the needs of users, and is committed to statistics being made available in ways that maximise users' ability to exploit them in making decisions. In our view this requires professional explanation of the characteristics and accuracy of different sets of statistics. Many of the topics that official statistics describe are complicated, especially to the non-expert, and this complexity can make it difficult to understand the relationships between the different statistics available about a topic. Any misunderstandings risk inappropriate conclusions being drawn from the statistics, with a consequent adverse impact on the quality of the decisions being made on the basis of the statistics.

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23 http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/archive/statistics-commission-archive/research/report-38--official-statistics---value-and-trust--january-2008-.pdf

24 Principle 8, Practice 4 in the Code of Practice

25 http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=15230

68. The Code requires that "commentary and analysis that aid interpretation" be prepared and disseminated. That commentary needs to include appropriate details about the context within which the statistics are produced, the main features, and their known limitations. Bearing in mind the broad audience for the messages contained in official statistics, we **recommend** that statistical Heads of Profession in government should ensure that the commentary that accompanies official statistics helps the users understand and make effective use of the data [Recommendation 1c]. In many cases it would also be helpful for statisticians to work with subject matter experts, such as criminologists in the field of crime statistics, to ensure that the statistical commentary remains relevant and insightful.

69. Descriptive frameworks that place a set of statistics in context can be used to help less expert users to find the figures they need and to understand them. We are aware that such a framework has been developed in relation to labour market statistics[26] (though we are not sure of the extent to which it is fully exploited), and we understand that corresponding frameworks are being developed in relation to migration statistics and crime statistics[27]. This work may help other producers in their own fields.

70. Another way of increasing awareness and understanding of statistics is by targeting teachers and pupils/students. Encouraging the use of statistics in the school curriculum would equip young people with statistical skills that can be used later in life. There are already some initiatives in this direction, such as the *stats4schools*[28] website and the RSS's Centre for Statistical Education[29]. Other efforts could include developing statistical information in a way to suit teachers and librarians, and developing links between students and statisticians.

26 http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/quality/nat-stats-qual-revs/qual-revs-by-theme/labour-market/nsqr-11-rev-of-labour-stats.doc

27 See Migration Statistics: the Way Ahead? and Overcoming barriers to trust in crime ctatistics – England and Wales: Interim report at http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring-reports/index.html

28 http://www.stats4schools.gov.uk/

29 http://www.rsscse.org.uk/

Exploiting the web

71. Technological developments have radically changed the way in which statistics are produced and used and statisticians have adopted the web as the primary means of statistical dissemination. The National Statistics Publication Hub[30] represents a substantial step forward in providing users with more easily accessible statistics. Cross-cutting theme pages on the Publication Hub have made it easier for users to find the data they need on their terms – that is, related to a specific topic rather than a specific statistical release.

72. However the Publication Hub only provides links to producers' websites – users must then find the data and supporting information on these websites and this can often be a challenging task. ONS's website in particular consistently received negative feedback in the qualitative interviews with opinion formers. Although users appreciate the range of data available, they encounter problems when trying to navigate around the website to find the information required. Indeed, users noted that they often rely on search engines such as Google to find data instead, and they felt that the lack of usability of the website was a key barrier to engagement with producers and realising the value of the statistical product.

73. ONS's website is currently being re-developed and we support decisions to make such developments a higher priority. We **recommend** that ONS should give priority to improving the navigability and accessibility of its website, and should publish plans for doing so as soon as possible [Recommendation 2].

74. Improvements in analytical tools, visualisation software and database design, supported by increasingly fast internet connections, facilitate the presentation of statistics in ways that were once unimaginable and that offer the potential to extract additional value from them. For example, interactive population pyramids[31] enable users to understand readily the changing population structure of the UK. And the Neighbourhood Statistics[32] website, pulling together detailed statistics on a variety of topics within specific geographical areas, has added to the value of each of these sources when considered in isolation. A new website in New Zealand provides businesses with tools specifically designed for them, mapping different markets and industries[33].

30 www.statistics.gov.uk
31 http://www.statistics.gov.uk/populationestimates/flash_pyramid/default.htm
32 http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/
33 http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/corporate/corporate/corporatecommunications_mrbusiness-toolboxbusiness-toolbox.aspx

75. But such developments seem to be the exception rather than the norm. Indeed, many of the people interviewed as part of the research among opinion formers felt that statisticians did not succeed in providing engaging, interesting and contextual statistical information, even in statistical bulletins. Producer bodies need to present statistics in ways that capture users' interest and improve their understanding. Web-based sources of official statistics, designed and managed from a user perspective, seem to offer great potential to present data in an easily accessible way and in a format that the public could readily absorb. To complement Recommendations 1, 2 and 5, we recommend that the National Statistician should lead consultations with appropriate experts on how best to use web technology, and innovative ways of exploiting digitised statistical data, to enhance the accessibility of official statistics and related advice [Recommendation 3]. We believe that there might be merit in research, building on work reported by the Statistics Commission in 2007[34], to identify further ways of improving the accessibility of official statistics and supporting information.

76. Users may be best placed to define how they would like to see statistics presented. The Statistics Authority will support the RSS's initiatives in seeking to develop new user-designed, user-managed websites that will provide direct access to statistical material, including official statistics, in an easily accessible, user-friendly way. The Authority will also support any equivalent initiative from other respected bodies or consortia.

77. Finally it is worth highlighting the fact that the possibilities afforded by the web are constantly changing. The development of the semantic web, or the web of linked data, is moving us from a web of managing documents and files to a web of managing data and information. The Government has adopted this new approach to information dissemination through the Making Public Data Public Initiative[35]. The resulting *data.gov.uk* website[36] provides access from one place to many thousands of sets of information from many organisations across government – text, statistics and other data. It will be important to get the most value from such initiatives while also keeping in sight the fact that many users of statistics do not want to search super-databases but rather to be told the main messages from the statistics. As such, initiatives to make raw data available are likely to be appreciated by researchers and more frequent and in-depth users of the data in question. They do not replace the need for insightful commentary on, and explanations of, the statistics for less expert users. There is a need for both types of service in order to meet the needs of the widest possible range of users.

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34 Statistics Commission Report 34, Data on Demand: Access to Official Statistics, June 2007 http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/archive/statistics-commission-archive/research/index.html

35 http://blogs.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/digitalengagement/post/2010/01/21/Government-launches-one-stop-shop-for-data.aspx

36 www.data.gov.uk

The role of the media

78. Many people obtain official statistics from the news media rather than from statistical releases or producers' websites. The survey of Public Confidence in Official Statistics[37] carried out by the National Centre for Social Research on behalf of the Authority showed that television and newspapers remain the most common sources of information used to form opinions. So the presentation of statistical information by the media is important in determining the final value that is realised.

79. The recent research carried out with opinion formers indicated that they felt that the media have a key role to play, but thought that statistics were often misrepresented. While there are a number of reasons for this misrepresentation, not all of which can be addressed by government statisticians, we think that producers should make sustained efforts to improve the presentation and communication of statistics to the media. This is a necessary, although not sufficient, condition to encourage the media to improve the communication of statistical messages to the general public, and hence to enhancing the value of the statistics.

80. Annex E summarises a review of statistical releases and the media coverage they generated. The review concluded that:

- statisticians should develop a better understanding of the media and the circumstances in which journalists work (through media training, for example);
- statistical releases should contain clear and engaging messages;
- statisticians should be available and able to comment on the statistics; and
- press offices and/or statisticians should monitor the media coverage generated by statistical releases in order to understand better what 'works' and what does not.

37 See Annex A

81. More generally we see scope to improve relationships between statisticians and journalists, founded on better understanding and better dialogue. There are a number of ways in which the GSS might engage more effectively and more systematically with journalists. We **recommend** that government statisticians should work together, and with the RSS, to improve communication between statistical experts and journalists. This might include supporting statistical training for student journalists; supporting courses or events and visits for journalists to statistical offices or departments; and increasing opportunities for journalists to talk directly to statisticians in government [Recommendation 4]. This last measure in particular could underline the independence of statistical activity from the policy making process.

82. We note that the RSS already runs statistical courses for journalists. There are also international examples[38] of some of these recommended measures. For example, Statistics Canada holds a number of workshops and training courses for a variety of groups, including journalists, in order to improve statistical literacy[39]. In addition, a number of journalists sit on the Canadian National Statistical Council. And ISTAT, the Italian statistical office, also has a specific enquiry point for journalists on its website[40].

Seeking views on statistics

83. Discussions with producers and users, and evidence from assessments, have confirmed that while much user engagement does take place, its effectiveness from a user perspective varies greatly. In many cases there is a gap between the nature of the engagement that users want and what producers are currently offering. An effective approach to user engagement rests on its transparency and acceptability to users. If it is not understood, or if it is not regarded by users as effective, then there is a risk that this will become a self-fulfilling prophesy, and that users will 'switch off'.

38 see Annex D

39 Statistical literacy is a term used to describe an individual's ability to understand statistics, i.e. basic concepts, graphs, tables, etc.

40 https://contact.istat.it/richiesta_press.php

84. Contacts with international statistical offices[41] and discussions with producers suggest that there is a fairly well-defined range of mechanisms available, although the format and structure of these may differ. Annex F outlines some of the most common mechanisms of user engagement, each of which has potential to help users articulate their views. These include:

- formal written consultations;
- official user councils or advisory bodies;
- informal user groups;
- personal contact and meetings with users;
- market research;
- web tools and solutions;
- newsletters; and
- general enquiry lines, customer relationship management.

85. Not all of these methods are applicable in all circumstances – some will be more appropriate to engagement at different points of the statistical value chain; some will be more useful in gaining an in-depth understanding of users' needs about particular issues; while others will have more value in simply updating users about developments.

86. Methods of engagement need to be fit-for-purpose – to be adapted for different circumstances (as noted above), and different types of users. There are many different user communities, for example, and not all of them have the capacity to organise themselves effectively and to respond to formal consultations, or to attend meetings.

87. The publication by producers of an annual draft statistical plan will typically involve a written document and a formal consultation[42]. If appropriate this might be followed up with a public meeting or, for larger projects, such as the 2011 Population Census described below, a series of roadshows to allow users to provide feedback and to discuss issues directly with producers. Ongoing changes to existing statistical series may be more ad hoc and the web could be used to notify users and to obtain feedback.

41 See summary in Annex D

42 See for example the recent consultation on the Ministry of Justice's statistical work programme for 2010 http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/statistics-comment.htm

88. Web-based communication is usually open, transparent and accessible to all, and offers producer organisations the means to reach a wide range of users and, in particular, those who are not involved in the structure of formal user groups or who are not able to attend meetings. The development of a web-based user-producer interface would enable users to propose ideas to improve the statistics and the service they experience, and to see what others are requesting – potentially including those in central government – and would enable producers to explain publicly the decisions that have been taken, in the context of user requirements. The structure of the interface could be flexible and include various sub-fora for different themes or user groups.

ScotStat

The Scottish Government hosts a user engagement website called ScotStat. The website brings together data producers, suppliers and users and is used as an information dissemination tool, a consultation forum and a resource to support the meetings of committees in a number of topic areas. The website can also be used to track users of statistics and to identify gaps in engagement. Scottish statisticians are currently working to increase membership and activity among the research and academic communities.

89. The development of a user-producer interface could draw on experiences of social networking websites and other Web 2.0 initiatives. It might need to be overseen centrally, to moderate comment, and to identify any recurring or larger cross-cutting issues, which could be discussed at meetings between representatives of users and producers. Users are only likely to engage in communications via such a website if it can be seen to produce results, either in the form of a response from the relevant producer body or a serious debate among engaged users. Given the great diversity of users of statistics, we **recommend** that a high profile web-based forum (supported by an appropriate structure of meetings between users and producers) should be developed which would enable users of statistics to communicate more easily and openly with each other and with the producer bodies. While the lead on this should rest with SUF and the RSS, bodies producing official statistics should actively support this initiative, coordinated by the National Statistician [Recommendation 5].

90. In some cases no single mechanism of user engagement used in isolation will provide the required intensity of user engagement, particularly as the user base for any one set of statistics may be quite diverse and widespread. The case study of the 2011 Census user engagement below illustrates the range of mechanisms used and the different stages in the process.

91. The publication, by producers, of user engagement plans could bridge the gap between expectations and actions. Such plans could outline the different methods of engagement proposed by the producer in relation to each user, or category of user, and provide a clear description of the ways in which users can approach the producers with their views. We suggest that the National Statistician incorporate the idea of user engagement plans in producing guidance for producers to improve their compliance with the relevant sections of the Code (see Recommendation 1). Further, we believe that it is important to seek users' views on the development of user engagement plans.

User engagement for the 2011 Population Census

The Census has a widespread and diverse user base and this has been reflected in the structure of ONS' engagement with users about the 2011 Census.

The engagement carried out by ONS was largely defined by the nature of work being carried out during the development of the Census. Where greater input from users was sought, such as in the development of questions and decisions about outputs, more intensive user consultation and discussion took place. In the more technical and operational phases of the census development, engagement has tended to take the form of information-sharing.

The Census user engagement has demonstrated that different consultation methods have their own strengths: formal consultation provided a solid basis for (accountable) decision-making, while roadshows provided an opportunity for interested parties to hear others' perspectives. The Census team then used advisory groups and other communication networks to probe further on particular issues to ensure that they understood the evidence. Used in combination, these methods were considered very effective in highlighting and acting on issues of concern.

The Census team also experimented with 'newer' forms of engagement such as via web questionnaires, online discussion forums and a wiki-style website which enabled interested parties to add their own comments and thoughts.

Governance and structure

92. The decentralised nature of statistics production in the UK, with a large number of producer bodies each engaging with users in their own way, and the different levels of interest amongst different groups of users in influencing statistical production, has resulted in a relatively uncoordinated approach to user engagement.

93. In the 1980s a Statistics Advisory Committee, including user representation, played this role but it was discontinued because it was not perceived to be effective. More recently, an informal Producers and Users Group provided opportunities for representatives of the user community to discuss their priorities with senior management in ONS, but this group, by common consent, was not particularly influential. The National Statistician has recently established a Statistics Supplier and User Group (StatSUG), jointly chaired by the National Statistician and the chair of SUF, and with a remit to provide a forum for engagement at a strategic level between producers and non-government users of official statistics. And the Statistics Authority is currently considering how best to formally involve user representatives, perhaps by extending the membership of its Committee for Official Statistics.

94. A structure of 'theme groups' was established in 2000, to increase coordination across cross-cutting themes, and to provide an opportunity for producers to seek the views of users at the planning stage. The effectiveness of theme groups has recently been reviewed, and we understand that newly appointed topic leaders are being invited by the National Statistician to produce a user engagement strategy for all statistics within their topic. This has the primary intention of improving statistical planning across the GSS and providing a more coherent user engagement structure.

95. Some users – those who might be characterised as professional, or 'heavy' users – are organised into a network of User Groups, and represented by SUF (which is affiliated to the RSS, through its 'User Theme') and other initiatives such as ScotStat[43]. The Authority supports the RSS's focus on users, and indeed has seconded a member of staff to the RSS to support it. As noted in the box below, SUF's priorities include encouraging departments to develop access teams to help users and to support non-experts. We **recommend** that all government departments and other producer bodies should work actively with SUF (and other user group structures), to help user groups represent the interests and priorities of their members [Recommendation 6]. This could for example involve facilitating meetings, offering speakers, being proactive in building networks and supplying information to members.

43 http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/scotstat

Statistics User Forum (SUF)

The RSS established the SUF as the successor to the long-established Statistics User Council. It was set up to make sure that the needs and views of the statistical user community are properly taken into account. The Forum comprises 38 member organisations and is recognised as representative of the diversity of the user community, and as a source of informed opinion. It has provided responses to a number of consultations and parliamentary enquiries on the UK statistical system. SUF annual conferences generally attract a wide range of users (and producers) and have discussed issues such as regional statistics, statistics from administrative sources, and transforming official statistics to match society.

Under the existing structure, individual user groups cover a particular area of user interest (some sectoral, some cross-cutting) with SUF operating as an umbrella body. There are also a number of co-opted and observer bodies under SUF, who have shared interests (such as the Bank of England, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations and the Confederation of British Industries). SUF is currently seeking to expand its coverage in statistical areas, such as education, energy and the environment, where user groups have not yet been established. It is also focusing its work programme to improve the experience for the citizen user of statistics.

SUF's current priorities are as follows:

- Dissemination of official statistics: Improvements to official statistics websites and enhanced use of technology, focused around an increased understanding of the range of user needs for statistics.
- UK-wide data: The main government departments should address the need for UK-wide consistent statistics, starting with an assessment of the need for UK consistent data in each subject area.
- Geographic coding: Identify an approach to geographic coding which overcomes data confidentiality concerns, and code all records accordingly. Accelerate development of Neighbourhood Statistics in consultation with users.
- Income statistics and improved access to administrative data: Seek improvements to statistics on income, in particular at smaller geographic levels, through improving the access to administrative data for the wider user community. Explore and prioritise the areas where access to administrative data would most benefit the wider user community.
- Confidentiality/disclosure: Ensure sensible restrictions that protect confidentiality, but that allow information to be used appropriately. This includes sharing data across different agencies. Updating of the Statistics of Trade Act 1947 should be considered in this context.

Annex A: Report from NatCen on Public Confidence in Official Statistics

Public Confidence in Official Statistics 2009

March 2010

Prepared for: UK Statistics Authority

Authors: Rossy Bailey, Jose Rofique and Alun Humphrey

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Executive summary

This report examines people's confidence in official statistics. It is based on a module of questions run on the NatCen Omnibus on behalf of the *UK Statistics Authority*. The research was geared toward understanding the extent of public trust in official statistics and the reasons that underpin this. The research followed up previous surveys undertaken in 2004, 2005 and 2007 enabling comparisons with the earlier waves to be made.

Attitudes to official statistics

In terms of how much attention people pay to official statistics, respondents can be broadly spilt into three groups; those who say they pay either a great deal or quite a lot of attention (29 per cent in total), 42 per cent who pay some attention and 29 per cent who pay not much or no attention.

Respondents were also asked to rate their understanding of official statistics when they are presented by the government or in the media. Two-thirds (64 per cent) rated themselves as having a fairly good understanding of official statistics while a further eight per cent felt they had a very good understanding. A fifth (21 per cent) felt they had a fairly bad understanding and six per cent felt they had a very bad understanding of official statistics.

Respondents generally thought that official statistics were an important basis for decision making; 22 per cent said they were very important and almost half (48 per cent) said they were fairly important. Only 12 per cent thought official statistics were fairly or very unimportant. Responses to this question have shown little change since 2005.

Accuracy of official statistics

A key factor in people's confidence in official statistics is whether or not they think that the statistics presented are accurate or not and the survey found a weakening of public perceptions in this area. About a third (32 per cent) of people agreed that official statistics were accurate while 40 per cent disagreed. This level of disagreement is the highest since the question was first asked and a marked increase on the 33 per cent recorded when it was most recently asked in 2007. A quarter (26 per cent) neither agreed nor disagreed.

The survey found that three factors were independently associated with perceptions of the accuracy of official figures; age, levels of understanding of official statistics and levels of trust in the UK government. Those who were aged above 35, with a poorer understanding of official statistics and with lower levels of trust in the UK government were the most likely to disagree that official figures were generally accurate. For example, among those with high levels of trust in government, only 15 per cent disagreed that official statistics were accurate. However, among those with the lowest levels of trust, this rose to 60 per cent.

The association with trust in government is notable. The survey found that trust in government fell markedly between 2007 and 2009, no doubt at least partly reflecting the furore surrounding MPs' expenses. This change may well help explain some of the public's increased suspicion in the accuracy of official statistics, although our data cannot prove any causal link.

Although in general, younger people were less likely to disagree that official statistics were accurate, the increase between 2007 and 2009 in the proportion who disagreed was more marked among this age group.

Misrepresentation or manipulation of official figures

When asked whether they thought official figures are produced without political interference, the majority (59 per cent) disagreed; a similar proportion (60 per cent) disagreed that the government presents official figures honestly when they talk about their policies. It is interesting that views about the government and the media were very similar with the same proportion (61 per cent) disagreeing that newspapers present official figures honestly.

This belief that official figures are subject to manipulation or misrepresentation is particularly common among those who do not think official figures are accurate, the two main reasons for this mistrust being that the figures were manipulated or adjusted for political purposes (52 per cent) or that figures were misrepresented or spun by politicians or the media (41 per cent).

Pre-release of official statistics

A new question was included to gauge people's views in relation to early-release of official statistics to government ministers. Most people (59 per cent) felt that ministers should not be given early access to official statistics while 38 per cent felt that it was right they were given early access.

Trust in official statistics

Trust in institutions

The questionnaire included a series of questions regarding the levels of trust for a range of institutions. Of all the institutions asked about, trust was highest for the NHS with respondents giving a mean score of 7.14 (on a scale of 0 to ten where 0 was 'do not trust at all' and 10 was 'trust completely'). This represents an improvement from the 6.49 recorded when it was previously asked in 2007. The police (mean score 6.33) and courts (6.04) were the next most trusted institutions and showed little change since 2007. The mean score for trust in the civil service was 5.48 and also showed little change from 2007.

Trust was lowest for the UK government at a mean score of 4.04. Furthermore, this represented a significant decrease from the level found in 2007 (4.45) and it is now at a similar level to that found in 2004.

Trust in official statistics

Respondents were also asked the extent to which they trusted different statistical series. Levels of trust were highest for population figures with an average trust rating of 5.7 compared with 5.2 for domestic burglary and unemployment figures which received the lowest ratings. However, trust in population figures had fallen compared with 2007 when it was 6.05; this continued a downward trend from 2005 (when trust was as high as 6.91).

Compared with 2007, trust in statistics about the cost of living had significantly decreased (from 5.8 to 5.3). However, trust in hospital waiting figures showed a different picture having significantly increased from 4.9 in 2007 to 5.5 in 2009 and are now the highest they have been since 2004.

Reasons for distrust

The survey asked people why they either trusted or mistrusted particular statistical series. Those with low levels of trust tended to base this partly on their own personal experience; as in 2007 this was the main reason given for distrusting cost of living figures (36 per cent) and hospital waiting figures (40 per cent). At 27 per cent, this reason had also overtaken figures being "difficult to count" to become the main reason given for distrusting domestic burglary figures. This suggests that people's individual experiences in relation to official statistics are a powerful factor in terms of their trust in figures at a national level, which therefore presents a particular challenge for efforts to improve the public's confidence in official statistics. It is also notable that the politically disinterested and those with a poor understanding of official statistics are the most likely to cite their own personal experience as underpinning their lack of trust in particular statistical series. It is therefore clear that there is a sub-group of people whose low levels of trust are driven by personal experiences and who tend to be less engaged with politics and official statistics. This group is likely to represent a particular challenge to reach and educate.

The belief that government has a vested interest in the results of statistics, and that politicians and the media misrepresent the findings, were also common reasons for distrusting official statistics, with the government having a vested interest being the most common reason given for distrusting unemployment figures (26 per cent). On the whole the proportion of respondents giving these reasons in 2009 was similar to 2007. However significantly more people thought that government had a vested interest in population figures in 2009 (16 per cent) than in 2007 (nine per cent). There were also significant increases in the proportion of people who thought that politicians or the media misrepresented domestic burglary figures (eight per cent in 2007, 17 per cent in 2009) and hospital waiting figures (seven per cent in 2007, 20 per cent in 2009). This echoes findings in the previous section about misrepresentation or manipulation of official figures.

Figures being difficult to count remained the main reason for distrusting population figures in 2009 at 27 per cent, although the proportion of respondents giving this reason had dropped significantly from 38 per cent in 2007.

The belief that the figures "do not tell the whole story" became a more common reason for distrusting official statistics in 2009 than it had been in 2007, increasing for cost of living figures (12 per cent in 2007, 19 per cent in 2009), hospital waiting figures (five per cent up to 12 per cent) and domestic burglary figures (ten per cent up to 18 per cent).

Having heard or read something bad about the statistics was seldom given as a reason for distrusting official statistics. However, the media is likely to play an important part in influencing people's attitudes towards different statistical series, as some of the changes we have seen over time no doubt reflect changing debates within the media about the accuracy of particular figures.

Reasons for trust

Personal experience also emerged as an important factor among those with higher levels of trust, with this being the main reason for trusting cost of living figures, hospital waiting figures and unemployment figures. Compared with 2007, the proportion of people basing their trust on personal experience had significantly increased for cost of living figures (19 per cent in 2007, 37 per cent in 2009), hospital waiting figures (40 per cent in 2007, 50 per cent in 2009) and domestic burglary figures (14 per cent in 2007, 25 per cent in 2009).

Trust was also based on the belief that the figures are "easy to count"; as in 2007, this was the main reason for trusting domestic burglary figures (28 per cent) and population figures (33 per cent). However this had become a less common reason for trusting domestic burglary figures, decreasing significantly from 39 percent in 2007 to 28 per cent in 2009.

Having heard or read something good about the statistics remained a fairly common basis for trusting each of the statistical series, with little change from 2007 in the proportions giving this reason.

1. Introduction

Previous surveys have indicated that levels of trust in official statistics in the UK have been low, with many people believing that they are manipulated or misrepresented by both politicians and the media. Perceptions of the accuracy of official statistics have been varied.

The UK Statistics Authority commissioned NatCen to conduct a survey to update its understanding of public confidence in official statistics. A module of questions was therefore run on the NatCen Omnibus and this report details the findings from this survey.

1.1 Objectives

Surveys of public confidence in official statistics were conducted in 2004, 2005 and 2007 on the ONS Omnibus. The 2009 survey was conducted using the NatCen Omnibus. The survey was designed to address the following objectives.

- Establish whether people feel able to trust official statistics, and why they feel as they do;
- Measure the extent to which people use official statistics;
- The perception of Government institutions in general.

The questionnaire was based on that used in the 2007 survey. This was to ensure consistency with the previous measures to allow meaningful analysis of any change over time. A number of new measures were added to the questionnaire to further enhance understanding of confidence in official statistics. The questionnaire was structured as follows.

- Sources of information, interest in politics and general levels of trust
- Trust in institutions
- Trust in official statistical series
- Attitudes toward official statistics
- Pre-release of official figures

1.2 Methodology

A module of questions was run on the NatCen Omnibus Survey. The NatCen Omnibus is run at regular intervals and allows clients to buy their own questionnaire space. It is based on a stratified random probability sample design which is intended to deliver a nationally representative sample of adults in Great Britain. Addresses are selected from the Post Office Address File (PAF) and interviewers can interview *only* at these selected addresses, helping avoid the biases that can result from interviewers being given more freedom about where and when they interview. Interviews are conducted using Computer Assisted Interviewing (CAI).

The questions were designed by researchers at NatCen in collaboration with the UK Statistics Authority. Fieldwork took place from 12th October until 28th November 2009. A total of 1,333 interviews were undertaken with adults aged 16 or more. The response rate was 48 per cent. More information on the survey methodology can be found in Appendix C. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix D.

1.3 Changes since 2007

A significant step aimed at addressing the low levels of confidence was the implementation of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007. Two particular initiatives set out in the Act were the establishment of the UK Statistics Authority in April 2008 and the publication of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics[1], which aims to improve the dialogue between statistics producers and users, and to enhance the quality and integrity of official statistics. The underlying objective of these changes was to bring about an improvement of public confidence and trust in official statistics. However, awareness of such events is likely to be low among the general public and any improvements which result might be expected to be observed over the longer-term.

Other factors might also be expected to influence the public's perceptions. The first is the economic downturn during 2008 and 2009. This has clearly had a large impact on many official statistics, such as cost of living, unemployment and house price statistics and has brought them into the spotlight.

1 http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html

There have also been several occasions where particular statistical series have been openly debated in the media. These include the Chair of the UK Statistics Authority publicly criticising the government's use of unchecked knife crime statistics, criticism of road casualties figures and ongoing discussion over the number of foreign workers in the UK.

Finally, the controversy over MPs' expenses has been a long-running and major media story and has evoked very strong feelings toward MPs and the political system in general.

1.4 Report structure

The report starts by looking at people's interest in and attitudes toward official statistics, including perceptions of their accuracy. The chapter also presents findings of people's opinions in relation to the early release of official statistics to government ministers. Chapter 2 looks in more detail at people's trust in a series of institutions and statistical series, including the reasons for trust and distrust.

The following conventions have been used in the tables.

* to indicate a percentage of less than 0.5%

0 to indicate a percentage of 0

- figure not shown because the unweighted sample size is too small

2. Interest and Attitudes in Official Statistics

2.1 Engagement and interest in politics and official statistics

This chapter starts by describing where people get the information they use to inform their opinions and people's reported interest in and understanding of official statistics, which provides a useful context in which to view the results of the remaining report.

The sources of information that people use to form their opinions could influence the opinions people form about official statistics. Respondents were presented with a list and asked to pick which sources they used to form their opinions on current issues. The two most popular sources used to obtain information to inform opinions were both forms of media; 70 per cent reported gaining information from television and 56 per cent got information from newspapers (Table 2.1). Just under a half (47 per cent) of respondents said they got information that helped form their opinions from their friends and family. The growing importance on the internet is illustrated by the increase in the proportion mentioning it as a source of opinions from 15 per cent in 2005 to 30 per cent.

Table 2.1: Sources of information used to form opinions

Base: All adults aged 16+ — *ONS Omnibus/ NatCen Omnibus Survey*

Sources of information	**Year**		
	2005 %	2007 %	2009 %
Television	71	74	70
Newspapers	59	60	56
Family or friends	43	44	47
The Internet	15	24	30
Radio	29	28	28
School / College / Work	11	13	16
Other	2	2	2
Bases	*1,703*	*1,112*	*1,333*

Note: percentages add to more than 100 as people could mention more than one reason

Younger people were more likely to mention friends or family, school, college or work and the internet, whereas older people were more likely to mention the television, newspapers and the radio.

The questionnaire also included a question on general interest in politics. Overall, six per cent claimed to have a great deal of interest and 18 per cent said quite a lot of interest. Eighteen per cent had no interest at all. These figures had changed little since 2005. Indeed, data from the *British Social Attitudes* Survey series shows that interest in politics has been relatively stable since the mid-1980s (Butt and Curtice, 2010).

Table 2.2: Level of interest in politics

Base: All adults aged 16+ — *ONS Omnibus/ NatCen Omnibus Survey*

Interest in politics	**Year**		
	2005 %	2007 %	2009 %
A great deal	5	6	6
Quite a lot	17	18	18
Some	34	36	34
Not much	30	26	25
None at all	14	13	18
Bases	*1,703*	*1,112*	*1,333*

Men had slightly more interest in politics than women; 26 per cent said that they had either quite a lot or a great deal of interest compared with 20 per cent of women. Furthermore, interest in politics tended to increase with age; the proportion in the top two categories rising from 17 per cent of 16 to 24 year olds up to 31 per cent of those aged 75 or more. Again, this confirms evidence from the British Social Attitudes survey.

Two new questions were added to the 2009 survey to gauge people's engagement with official statistics, to see how these relate to levels of trust and confidence. The first question asked respondents to rate the amount of attention they paid to official statistics on a scale which ranged from 'a great deal' to 'none at all'. As is shown in Table 2.3, respondents can be broadly spilt into three groups; those who say they pay either a great deal or quite a lot of attention (29 per cent in total), 42 per cent who pay some attention and 29 per cent who paid not much or no attention.

Men were slightly more likely to say they either paid 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of attention to official statistics (33 per cent compared with 25 per cent among women) and those in the youngest age group were more likely to say they paid no attention at all (16 per cent amongst those aged 16 to 24).

Table 2.3: Level of attention paid to official statistics, 2009	
Base: Adults aged 16+	*ONS Omnibus/ NatCen Omnibus Survey*
	%
A great deal	5
Quite a lot	23
Some	42
Not much	21
None at all	8
Don't know	*
Bases	*1,332*

The second new question was related to understanding of official statistics when they are presented by the government or in the media. Two-thirds of respondents (64 per cent) rated themselves as having a fairly good understanding of official statistics while a further eight per cent felt they had a very good understanding. A fifth (21 per cent) felt they had a fairly bad understanding and six per cent felt they had a very bad understanding of official statistics.

Men were more likely to say that they had a good understanding of statistics with 80 per cent saying they had either a very good or fairly good understanding compared with 65 per cent of women.

Table 2.3: Level of understanding of official statistics when presented in the media, 2009	
Base: Adults aged 16+	*NatCen Omnibus Survey*
	Total %
Very good	8
Fairly good	64
Fairly bad	21
Very bad	6
Don't know	1
Bases	*1332*

2.2 Attitudes to official statistics

Importance of official statistics

Respondents were asked to say how important they considered official statistics to be as a basis for decision making in society. Respondents generally thought that official statistics were an important basis for decision making; 22 per cent said they were very important and almost half (48 per cent) said they were fairly important (Table 2.4). Only 14 per cent thought official statistics were fairly or very unimportant. Responses to this question have shown little change since 2005.

Table 2.4: Importance of official statistics, 2005 to 2009

Base: Adults aged 16+			*ONS Omnibus/ NatCen Omnibus Survey*
	Year		
	2005 %	2007 %	2009 %
Very important	21	23	22
Fairly important	49	51	48
Neither important nor unimportant	18	17	16
Fairly unimportant	9	8	10
Very unimportant	3	2	3
Bases	*1703*	*1112*	*1309*

Men were slightly more likely to say that they felt official statistics were unimportant (16 per cent saying fairly or very unimportant compared with 11 per cent of women). There was little difference between those in different age groups.

Accuracy of official figures

A key factor in people's confidence in official statistics is whether or not they think that the statistics presented are accurate or not. Previous research indicates that the term 'official statistics' was not commonly understood by people. The term 'official figures' was therefore used in the question wording. Previous qualitative development research (Simmons & Betts, 2006) identified that people perceived figures to come from statistics as opposed to being the same thing. They tended to define 'official figures' in terms of the subject areas about which the statistics refer, such as the Census, deaths, unemployment, waiting lists, population, immigration, house prices, household debt and economic performance.

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statement:

Official figures are generally accurate.

The results are presented in table 2.5. In 2009 about a third (32 per cent) of people agreed that official statistics were accurate while 40 per cent disagreed with this view – the highest level since the question was first asked and a marked increase on the 33 per cent recorded when it was most recently asked in 2007. This increase was mainly accounted for by a rise in the proportion saying they "tend to disagree" (from 25 per cent to 32 per cent) with the proportion strongly disagreeing remaining unchanged at eight per cent. However, this suggests that perceptions of the accuracy of statistics are weakening. A quarter (26 per cent) neither agreed nor disagreed.

Table 2.5: Official figures are generally accurate, 2004 to 2009				
Base: Adults aged 16+				*ONS Omnibus/ NatCen Omnibus Survey*
	Survey year			
	2004 %	2005 %	2007 %	2009 %
Strongly agree	2	2	2	1
Tend to agree	32	35	34	31
Neither agree nor disagree	27	28	27	26
Tend to disagree	28	25	25	32
Strongly disagree	7	6	8	8
Don't know	3	4	4	1
Agree	34	37	36	32
Neither agree nor disagree (incl. don't know)	30	32	31	27
Disagree	36	31	33	40**
Base	*1703*	*1699*	*1112*	*1332*
** statistically significant difference compared with 2007				

Older respondents tended to show lower levels of trust in the accuracy of official statistics than their younger counterparts. The proportion disagreeing with the statement increased from 34 per cent of those aged 16 to 34 to 47 per cent among those aged 55 or more. There was little difference between men and women. Those not educated to degree level and those who felt they had a bad understanding of official statistics were more likely to disagree that official figures were accurate.

In order to examine these interrelationships further, multivariate analysis techniques were used to identify whether perceptions of the accuracy of official figures tended to be more common among certain groups of people than others, even when the interaction between these different groups has been controlled for. It is likely that many of the different factors associated with perceptions of accuracy are themselves inter-related – for example, those who have a higher income, who may think that figures are generally accurate, are more likely to be older and have a higher level of education. Multivariate analysis isolates the independent effect of each individual type of characteristics, controlling for its interaction with other relevant factors.

This analysis shows that certain groups of people are more likely than others to disagree with the view that official figures are generally accurate. Three factors were associated with lower perceptions of the accuracy of official figures; age, levels of understanding of official statistics and levels of trust in the UK government. Older respondents (those aged 35 years and over) were more likely to be less trusting of official statistics than younger respondents (aged 16 to 34 years). The poorer the level of understanding of official statistics people claimed to have, the worse their perceptions of accuracy were likely to be. Trust in the UK government was also associated with perceptions of accuracy; the lower the level of trust in the UK government, the more likely people were to disagree that official figures are accurate.

Table 2.6: Regression of whether official figures are generally accurate

Base: Adults aged 16+ *NatCen Omnibus Survey*

	co-efficient	standard error	p value
Age group (16 to 34 yrs)			
35 to 54 yrs	0.16*	0.07	0.021
55 yrs or more	0.20*	0.08	0.015
Level of understanding of official statistics			
Decrease in level of understanding	0.12**	0.04	0.008
Level of trust in the UK government			
Increase in trust in UK government	-0.18**	0.01	0.000

R^2=0.2078
Unweighted base: 1,277
Weighted base: 1,274
*=significant at 95% level **=significant at 99% level

The strength of relationship between people's perceptions of the accuracy of official statistics and their trust of the UK government is illustrated further in Figure 2.1. Among those with high levels of trust in government, only 15 per cent disagreed that official statistics were accurate. However, among those with the lowest levels of trust, this rose to 60 per cent.

As shown in section 3.1, levels of trust in the UK government have decreased since 2007, making it possible that declining trust in the accuracy of official statistics reflects a wider issue of political mistrust. This might perhaps be related to the negative coverage surrounding MPs' expenses, although our data cannot prove any causal link. However, were this the case, it is worth noting that trust in government is sensitive to the political cycle, and consistently increases in the period immediately after a general election (Butt and Curtice, 2010).

Figure 2.1: Accuracy of official figures by trust in UK government

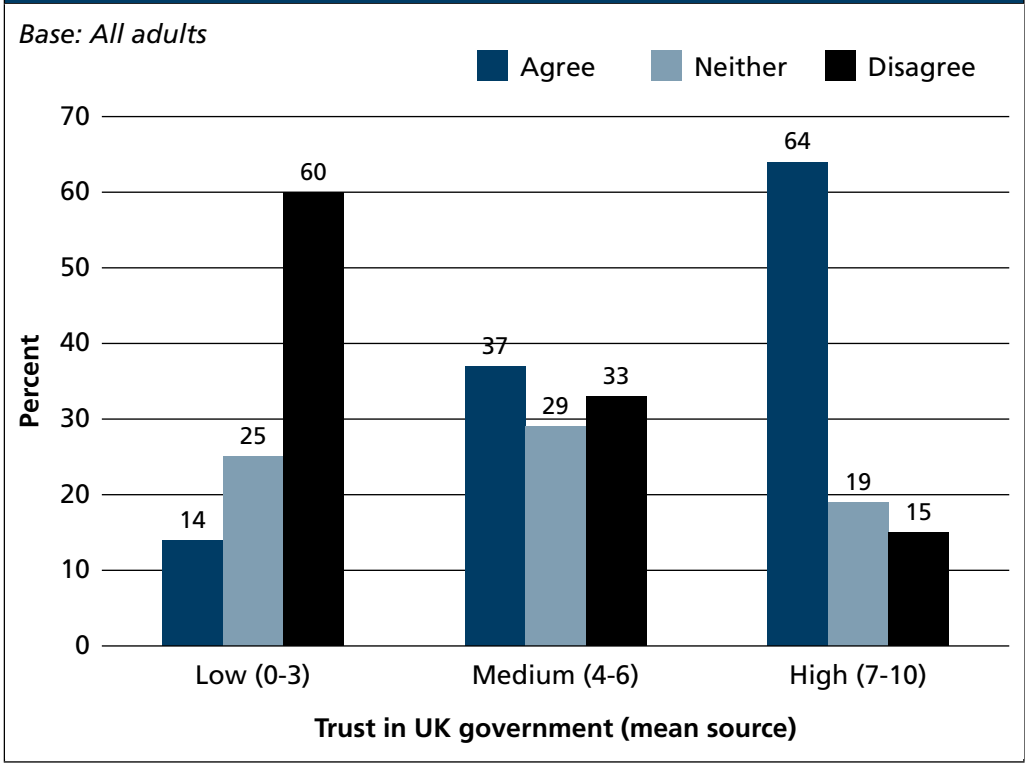
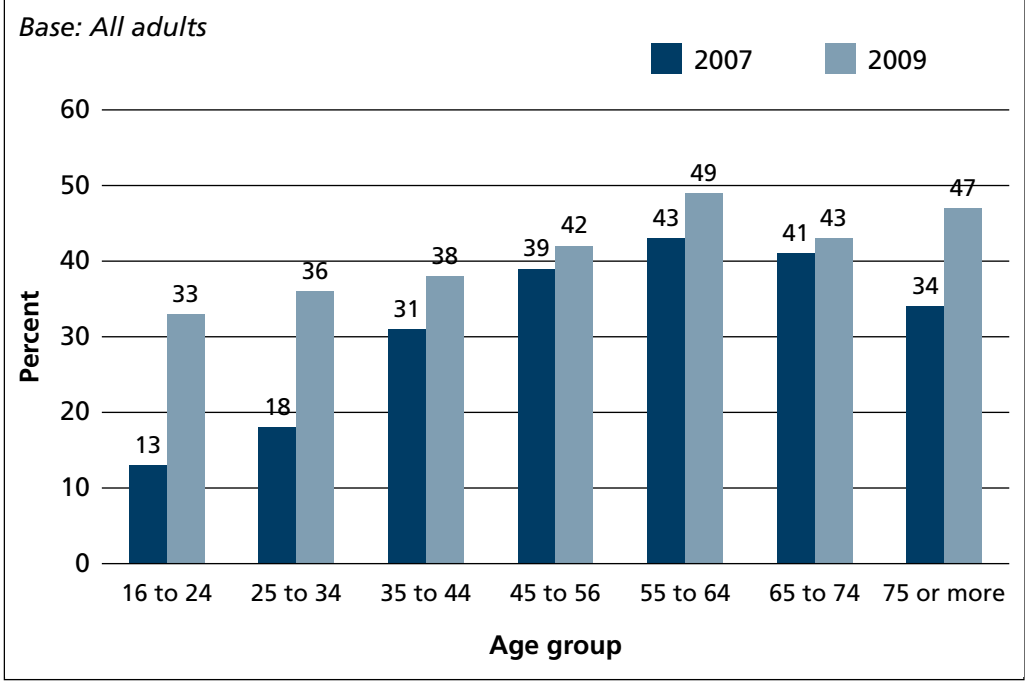


Figure 2.2 shows the proportion among different age groups who **disagreed** that official figures are accurate, for 2007 compared with 2009. In 2007, younger age groups were much less likely to disagree, with for example just 13 per cent of 16 to 24 year olds saying so. However, in 2009, while the general pattern of response across the age groups remained, it was less marked than was the case in 2007. Although the proportion who disagreed that official figures were accurate had increased for most groups, it had done so most steeply among younger respondents.

Figure 2.2: Proportion disagreeing that official figures are accurate by age (2007 & 2009)



In order to understand the reasons behind the low levels of trust, all those who had disagreed with the statement 'Official figures are generally accurate' were asked why. The results are shown in Table 2.7. The two main reasons given both reflected a belief that official statistics were manipulated or misrepresented in their presentation to the public. Over half (52 per cent) of respondents who did not agree that official statistics were accurate thought that the figures were manipulated or adjusted for political purposes. Around two-fifths (41 per cent) thought that figures were misrepresented or spun by politicians or the media. These two reasons were mentioned slightly more frequently than when previously asked in 2007.

Table 2.7: Why disagree with statement official figures are generally accurate, 2007 to 2009		
Base: Adults aged 16+ who disagreed with statement that official figures are generally accurate		*ONS Omnibus/ NatCen Omnibus Survey*
	Survey year	
	2007 %	2009 %
Figures are manipulated or adjusted for political purposes	47	52
Figures are misrepresented or spun by politicians or the media	36	41
Figures are contradicted or disputed by politicians, the media or other sources	17	19
Figures alone do not tell the whole story/there is more to it than just the figures	11	17
Figures are difficult to count or measure/ information is not always reported	17	16
Don't trust figures, from personal experience	17	15
Other answer	2	3
Don't understand figures or statistics	0	1
Bases	*367*	*557*
Note: percentages add to more than 100 as people could mention more than one reason		

Political and media interference

Official statistics are used, interpreted and communicated by both politicians and the media. Respondents were therefore asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements related to this process. The first related to whether there was any political interference in the production of statistics:

Official figures are produced without political interference.

Table 2.8 shows that most people believe that there is some political interference in the use of official statistics. The majority of people (59 per cent) disagree that official figures are produced without political interference. Only 17 per cent agreed that official figures were not influenced by political interference, a similar level to that seen in 2007 (when 20 per cent agreed). In general, there has been little change in this measure since 2004.

Table 2.8: Official figures are produced without political interference, 2004 to 2009				
Base: Adults aged 16+				*ONS Omnibus/ NatCen Omnibus Survey*
	Survey year			
	2004 %	2005 %	2007 %	2009 %
Strongly agree	2	2	3	1
Tend to agree	15	15	17	15
Neither agree nor disagree	19	21	18	22
Tend to disagree	40	39	40	39
Strongly disagree	18	15	17	19
Don't know	6	7	5	3
Agree	17	17	20	17
Neither agree nor disagree (incl. don't know)	25	29	23	23
Disagree	58	54	57	59
Base	1703	1699	1112	1332

The following two tables show the results of the following questions:

How much do you agree or disagree that...

…The Government presents official figures honestly when talking about its policies

…Newspapers present official figures honestly

The story is similar to the findings above; the majority of people (60 per cent) disagree that the government presents official figures honestly when they talk about their policies. Here, just 14 per cent agree that the government presents official figures honestly and 25 per cent neither agree nor disagree. Again, the responses to this issue have been fairly consistent since 2004 and show no significant change since last asked in 2007.

Table 2.9: Government presents official figures honestly when talking about its policies, 2004 to 2009				
Base: Adults aged 16+				*ONS Omnibus/ NatCen Omnibus Survey*
	Survey year			
	2004 %	2005 %	2007 %	2009 %
Strongly agree	2	1	2	1
Tend to agree	14	13	14	13
Neither agree nor disagree	21	22	23	25
Tend to disagree	42	43	38	41
Strongly disagree	18	17	20	19
Don't know	4	4	3	1
Agree	15	14	16	14
Neither agree nor disagree (incl. don't know)	25	26	26	26
Disagree	59	60	58	60
Base	1702	1699	1112	1332

The statement in relation to newspapers was added to the questionnaire in 2009. It is interesting that at an overall level, people's perceptions of the honesty of newspapers are almost the same as for the government. Table 2.10 shows almost identical figures to those above, the majority (61 per cent) disagree that the media presented official figures honestly while only 14 per cent agree and 25 per cent neither agree nor disagree.

Table 2.10: Newspapers present figures honestly, 2009	
Base: Adults aged 16+	*NatCen Omnibus Survey*
	Total %
Strongly agree	1
Tend to agree	13
Neither agree nor disagree	25
Tend to disagree	43
Strongly disagree	17
Don't know	1
Agree	14
Neither agree nor disagree (incl. don't know)	26
Disagree	61
Bases	*1332*

2.3 Early release of official statistics

Government ministers can be given early access to official figures before they are released to the public. Some new questions were asked in 2009 to understand people's views about this.

The following question was asked:

> *Government ministers can be shown official statistics the day before (in England)/ five days before (in Scotland and Wales) they are made public. Some say this is right because it gives ministers time to provide considered comment on the statistics when they are published, or to respond quickly to any questions. Other people disagree because they think it gives ministers a chance to influence how the statistics are presented to the public, or any unfair advantage over everyone else.*
>
> *Looking at this card, what do you think...*
>
> *…Government ministers should be given early access to official statistics or,*
>
> *…Government ministers should not be given early access to official statistics?*

Most people (59 per cent) felt that ministers should not be given early access to official statistics while 38 per cent felt that it was right they were given early access (Table 2.11). There was little difference in terms of age or sex, however, there were differences in terms of respondents' social economic classification. Those who worked (or had most recently worked) as managers or in professional occupations were more evenly spread on this issue with 53 per cent favouring early access and 46 per cent not doing so.

Table 2.11: Whether government ministers should be given early access to official statistics, 2009

Base: Adults aged 16+	*NatCen Omnibus Survey*
	Total %
Government ministers should be given early access to official statistics	38
Government ministers should not be given early access to official statistics	59
Don't know	3
Bases	*1331*

All those respondents who thought that government ministers should be given early access to official figures were then asked whether the amount of time they currently see figures before they are published is about right, should be shorter or should be longer. The amount of time differs between England where it is one day and Scotland and Wales where it is five days. This was included in the introductory question above. Around two-thirds (65 per cent) of respondents asked this question thought that the current length of time ministers saw official figures before release was about right. Slightly more people thought that the length of time should be longer (20 per cent) than those who thought it should be shorter (11 per cent). It is not possible to compare respondents in England with those in Scotland and Wales where pre-release notice differs due to small sample sizes.

Table 2.12: Whether length of time ministers see official statistics for is the right amount of time, 2009	
Base: Adults aged 16+ who think that ministers should be given early access to official statistics	*NatCen Omnibus Survey*
	Total %
About right	65
Shorter	11
Longer	20
Don't know	3
Bases	*519*

3. Trust

3.1 Trust in official institutions

The questionnaire included a series of questions to investigate levels of trust for a range of institutions. Respondents answered on a scale ranging from zero to ten where zero meant 'do not trust at all' and ten meant 'trust completely'. The mean scores for each of the institutions are shown in Table 3.1.

Of all the institutions asked about, trust was highest for the NHS. Respondents gave a mean score of 7.14. This represents an improvement from the 6.49 recorded when it was previously asked in 2007. The police (mean score 6.33) and courts (6.04) were the next most trusted institutions and showed little change since 2007. The mean score for trust in the civil service was 5.48 and also showed little change from 2007.

Trust was lowest for the UK government at a mean score of 4.04, a significant decrease from the level found in 2007 (4.45). As can be seen in Table 3.1, while trust in the UK government increased between 2004 and 2007, it is now at a similar level to that found in 2004. The decline in trust in the UK government is important because, as shown in section 2.2, there is a strong association between trust in the government and perceptions of the accuracy of official statistics (which has also declined since 2007).

Younger respondents displayed higher levels of trust in the UK government than older ones did. The mean trust score decreased from 4.43 among those aged 16 to 34 to 3.72 among those aged 55 or more. It also varied by educational attainment, ranging from 4.71 among those educated to degree level to 3.60 among those without qualifications.

Table 3.1: Average scores for trust in institutions, 2004 to 2009				
Base: Adults aged 16+				*ONS Omnibus/ NatCen Omnibus Survey*
Institution	**Survey year**			
	2004	2005	2007	2009
NHS				
mean	6.57	6.67	6.49	7.14*
standard deviation	2.29	2.31	2.32	2.04
Base	*1685*	*166*	*1093*	*1311*
Police				
mean	6.43	6.48	6.37	6.33
standard deviation	2.31	2.30	2.27	2.31
Base	*1669*	*1656*	*1092*	*1310*
Courts				
mean	5.88	6.24	6.11	6.04
standard deviation	2.35	2.37	2.28	2.30
Base	*1543*	*1498*	*1003*	*1214*
Civil Service				
mean	5.27	5.78	5.60	5.48
standard deviation	2.03	2.01	2.05	2.08
Base	*1499*	*1513*	*1036*	*1243*
UK Government				
mean	3.96	4.37	4.45	4.04*
standard deviation	2.39	2.41	2.36	2.37
Base	*1654*	*1639*	*1076*	*1300*
* statistically significant difference compared with 2007				

3.2 Trust in official statistics

Cross-national comparisons

Trust in official statistics in the UK is low compared with other European countries. A survey[2] conducted in 2007 across the European Union included a general question regarding trust in official statistics:

Personally, how much trust do you have in the official statistics in (…), for example the statistics on unemployment, inflation or economic growth? Would you say you tend to trust these official statistics or tend not to trust them?

In the UK, just a third (33 per cent) said that they tended to trust official statistics. The average across the European countries was 46 per cent and the UK percentage was the lowest out of all 27 countries included.

One possible explanation for this low level of trust might be that people in the UK are generally less trusting than their European counterparts. However, evidence from elsewhere suggest that this is not the case. The European Social Survey (ESS) includes a standard measure of social trust which finds that people in the UK are actually slightly more trusting than the European average. Consequently a lack of trust in official statistics is not a consequence of low levels of social trust more generally.

Trust in statistical series

Earlier surveys included a measure of overall trust in official statistics, deigned to provide a single measure of people's general perceptions of the trustworthiness of official statistics. However, this question was dropped as it was felt that the public's views in relation to trust were too complex to incorporate into one question. Instead, respondents were asked about a series of specific statistical series. For each one, respondents were asked to rate how much they felt each statistical series gives a true picture of what is happening using the same zero to ten scale as was used in the questions on trust in institutions. The questions related to the following five statistical series.

- the cost of living, sometimes referred to as the rate of inflation
- official figures about hospital waiting lists
- official figures on domestic burglaries
- official figures on the size of the population
- official figures on the number of people unemployed

2 EuroBarometer 67 http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/59/51/39562127.pdf

The results are summarised in Table 3.2. Comparing the five different types of official statistics, levels of trust were highest for population figures and lowest for domestic burglary and unemployment figures. Compared with 2007, trust in cost of living figures had significantly decreased (from 5.8 to 5.3), as had trust in population figures (from 6.91 in 2005 to 6.05 in 2007 to 5.68 in 2009).

However, trust in hospital waiting figures shows a different picture, having significantly increased from 4.9 in 2007 to 5.4 in 2009. Trust in these figures is now at the highest rate since the survey series began in 2004. This corresponds with the improvement in trust seen in the NHS generally described in section 3.1. Trust in domestic burglary figures was little altered at 5.21 in 2009.

Table 3.2: Average scores for trust in statistical series, 2004 to 2009

Base: Adults aged 16+ — *ONS Omnibus/ NatCen Omnibus Survey*

Official statistic	**Survey year**			
	2004	2005	2007	2009
Cost of living				
Mean	-	5.93	5.78	5.32
standard deviation	-	2.33	2.38	2.26
Base	-	*1519*	*997*	*1219*
Hospital waiting figures				
Mean	4.61	4.63	4.89	5.44
standard deviation	2.51	2.54	2.45	2.36
Base	*1590*	*1608*	*1027*	*1218*
Domestic burglaries				
Mean	5.33	5.50	5.33	5.21
standard deviation	2.34	02.38	2.39	2.26
Base	*1534*	*1538*	*982*	*1197*
Population figures				
Mean	-	6.91	6.05	5.68
standard deviation	-	2.32	2.61	2.67
Base	-	*1559*	*1030*	*1212*
Unemployment figures				
Mean	-	-	-	5.19
standard deviation	-	-	-	2.53
Base	-	-	-	*1247*

There were no significant differences between men and women in levels of trust in official statistics with the exception of unemployment figures where, at 5.4, women's average rating was significantly higher than men at 5.0.

There were differences in trust ratings between different age groups for all statistical series except domestic burglary figures. On the whole, higher ratings were associated with younger age groups, with 16 to 24 year olds having the highest average rating score for all statistical series except hospital waiting figures. Ratings of trust in hospital waiting figures, which were the only statistical series where trust increased between 2007 and 2009 showed the opposite pattern, with high ratings being associated with older age groups, with those aged 60 years or more giving the highest ratings. It is possible this reflects a general tendency for older groups to express high levels of satisfaction with the NHS (Appleby and Phillips, 2009).

Education level was significantly related to trust in official statistics for all series except hospital waiting figures. Trust ratings tended to be higher among those qualified to degree level or above and lowest among those without qualifications.

Household income was significantly related to levels of trust in cost of living figures, population figures and unemployment figures. High income is associated with high trust in cost of living and population figures whereas low income is associated with high levels of trust in unemployment figures.

Interest in politics was only related to trust in population figures where those with some interest in politics had the highest confidence and those with no interest at all had the lowest confidence.

There was a significant relationship for all statistical series between trust in official statistics and how important people thought statistics were as a basis for decision making. For all series, high trust ratings were associated with thinking official statistics were important in decision making, with the highest trust ratings being given by those who thought official statistics were very important or fairly important in decision making and the lowest trust ratings being given by those who thought official statistics were very unimportant in decision making.

Level of trust in official statistics was significantly related to understanding of official statistics for all statistical series except hospital waiting figures. For all series trust ratings were highest amongst those who reported having a fairly good understanding of statistics. Level of trust was also significantly related to how much attention respondents paid to official statistics for all statistical series. Higher levels of trust were associated with higher levels of attention being paid, with the highest trust ratings being given by those who paid a great deal or quite a lot of attention to official statistics, and the lowest trust ratings being given by those who paid no attention at all to official statistics.

3.3 Reasons for trusting/distrusting official statistics

Reasons for distrust

Respondents were asked to give the reasons why they did or did not trust each of the five statistical series rated. Table 3.3 shows the main reasons why people distrusted each of the measures. These are shown only among respondents who had given low trust ratings (defined as a score of 0 to 3).

People often cited personal experience as the reason for their distrust of official statistics; as in 2007 this was the main reason given for distrusting cost of living figures (36 per cent) and hospital waiting figures (40 per cent). At 27 per cent, this reason had also overtaken figures being difficult to count to become the main reason given for distrusting domestic burglary figures. So individual experience, when this does not chime with official statistics, seems to be an important factor underpinning a lack of trust in official statistics. This is particularly true of those with low levels of political interest and who did not have a good understanding of official statistics, who were among the most likely to cite personal experience as a reason for not trusting a range of different statistical series[3]. This will no doubt partly reflect 'real' differences between national statistics and what is going on within local areas, but is also likely to reflect the cognitive difficulty many will face when thinking of their own individual experiences and circumstances in comparison with figures for the country as a whole. However, it is clear that there is a sub-group of people whose low levels of trust are driven by personal experiences and who tend to be less engaged with politics and official statistics. This group is likely to represent a particular challenge to reach and educate.

The belief that government has a vested interest in the results of statistics and that politicians and the media misrepresent the findings were common reasons for distrusting official statistics, with the government having a vested interest being the most common reason given for distrusting unemployment figures (26 per cent). On the whole the proportion of respondents giving these reasons in 2009 was similar to 2007. However significantly more people thought that government had a vested interest in population figures in 2009 (16 per cent) than in 2007 (nine per cent). There were also significant increases in the proportion of people who thought that politicians or media misrepresented domestic burglary figures (eight per cent in 2007, 17 per cent in 2009) and hospital waiting figures (seven per cent in 2007, 20 per cent in 2009). This echoes findings in the previous section about misrepresentation or manipulation of official figures.

3 It is worth noting that it might be assumed that a key factor influencing the views of this group might be lower levels of education. However, although there were some differences by education levels, these tended to be small and not statistically significant.

Figures being difficult to count remained the main reason for distrusting population figures in 2009 at 27 percent, although the proportion of respondents giving this reason had dropped significantly from 38 per cent in 2007.

The belief that the figures do not tell the whole story became a more common reason for distrusting official statistics in 2009 than it had been in 2007. The proportion of people giving this reason significantly increased for cost of living figures (12 per cent in 2007, 19 per cent in 2009), hospital waiting figures (five per cent up to 12 per cent) and domestic burglary figures (10 per cent up to 18 per cent).

Having heard or read something bad about the statistics was seldom given as a reason for distrusting official statistics, and was the least common reason for distrusting hospital waiting figures. The proportion of people giving this reason decreased for all statistical series between 2007 and 2009, and significantly so for hospital waiting figures (eight per cent in 2007, two per cent in 2009) and domestic burglary figures (10 per cent in 2007, four per cent in 2009).

The fact that few directly attribute their mistrust to having read about the particular statistical series is noteworthy. Despite this, it is likely that people's perceptions of the accuracy of official statistics will often be indirectly or directly influenced by media reports. For example, the fact that mistrust in statistics relating to population figures has increased is likely to reflect recent debates about the inadequacies of the Census as regards local authority population figures, and the difficulties of measuring immigration. As we can see, however, few directly attribute their lack of trust to their having encountered specific stories. Moreover, as is clear elsewhere in this report, the media are not generally trusted to present official statistics honestly.

Few people based their distrust of official statistics on the belief that ONS has a vested interest in results; this was the least common reason for distrusting all statistical series except hospital waiting figures. Compared with 2007, the proportion giving this as the main reason in 2009 had significantly decreased for all statistical series except population figures where it had remained at zero per cent. These changes are likely to be due to the fact that ONS is no longer the data collection agency, this having inevitably affected the way interviewers interpreted and coded respondents' responses.

Table 3.3 Main reasons for low levels of trust, 2009					
Base: Respondents giving a trust score of 7 to 10 at trust questions					*ONS Omnibus/ NatCen Omnibus Survey*
	Cost of living	**Hospital waiting figures**	**Domestic Burglaries**	**Population figures**	**Unemployment figures**
Mean trust score	5.32	5.44	5.21	5.68	5.19
standard deviation	2.26	2.36	2.26	2.67	2.53
Base = those who gave an answer	*1219*	*1218*	*1197*	*1212*	*1247*
Main reason for low level of trust	%	%	%	%	%
Don't trust the figures, from personal experience	36	40	27	14	22
Heard/read something bad about the figures	3	2	4	7	3
The figures are difficult to count or measure	6	6	19	27	9
ONS has a vested interest in the results/ manipulates production or collection	1	3	*	*	2
Govt has a vested interest in the results/ interferes in production or collection	18	15	10	16	26
Figures are misrepresented/ spun by politicians or the media	11	20	17	19	23
Figures alone do not tell the whole story	19	12	18	16	12
Other answer	4	2	5	2	2
Bases = Those with trust scores 0 to 3	*264*	*260*	*267*	*276*	*327*

Some significant relationships were found between reasons for distrusting official statistics and respondent sex, age, level of education and household income. However these relationships did not show any consistent patterns across the statistical series and may be unreliable as the base sizes were small in many cases.

Reasons for trust

Table 3.4 shows the main reasons, of those respondents with high levels of trust, for trusting each of the statistical series.

Earlier we saw that personal experience was often cited as a reason for not trusting in different statistical series. This same reason is also important as an explanation behind why some people **do** trust official statistics. This was the main reason for trusting cost of living figures and hospital waiting figures. Compared with 2007, the proportion of people basing their trust on personal experience had significantly increased for cost of living figures (19 per cent in 2007, 37 per cent in 2009), hospital waiting figures (40 per cent in 2007, 50 per cent in 2009) and domestic burglary figures (14 per cent in 2007, 25 per cent in 2009).

Trust was also based on the belief that the figures are easy to count, and, as in 2007, this was the main reason for trusting domestic burglary figures (28 per cent) and population figures (33 per cent). However this had become a less common reason for trusting domestic burglary figures, decreasing significantly from 39 percent in 2007 to 28 per cent in 2009.

Having heard or read something good about the statistics remained a fairly common basis for trusting each of the statistical series, with little change from 2007 in the proportions giving this reason.

Trust in official statistics was based on the belief that the government does not have a vested interest in the results in quite a small number of cases, with this being the least common reason for trusting all statistical series except domestic burglary figures. Although this remained an uncommon reason, compared with 2007 it had significantly increased for hospital waiting figures (zero per cent in 2007, two per cent in 2009), domestic burglary figures (two per cent in 2007, seven per cent in 2009) and population figures (one per cent in 2007, nine per cent in 2009).

The belief that ONS does not have a vested interest in the results was also an uncommon reason for trusting official statistics and the least common reason for trusting domestic burglary figures (three per cent). The proportion of people giving this reason significantly decreased in 2009 compared with 2007 for all statistical series, however this is likely due, in part, to ONS no longer being the data collection agency.

Some significant relationships were found between reasons for trusting official statistics and respondent sex, age, level of education and household income. However, as with reasons for distrust, these relationships did not show any consistent patterns across the statistical series and were again based on small base sizes in many cases.

There is a significant relationship between respondents' level of interest in politics and trusting population, domestic burglary and unemployment figures based on hearing or reading something good about the statistics. For each of these statistical series basing distrust on something heard or read was associated with low levels of interest in politics, with people with no interest at all being most likely to give this reason and people with a great deal of interest in politics being least likely to give this reason. While some significant relationships were found, there were no consistent patterns between reasons for trust and perceived importance of statistics in decision making, understanding of official statistics or interest in official statistics.

Table 3.4 Main reasons for high levels of trust, 2009

Base: Respondents giving a trust score of 7 to 10 at trust questions — *NatCen Omnibus Survey*

	Cost of living	Hospital waiting figures	Domestic Burglaries	Population figures	Unemployment figures
Mean trust score	5.32	5.44	5.21	5.68	5.19
standard deviation	2.26	2.36	2.26	2.67	2.53
Base = those who gave an answer	*1219*	*1218*	*1197*	*1212*	*1247*
Main reason for high level of trust	%	%	%	%	%
Trust the figures, from personal experience	37	50	25	16	24
Heard/read something good about the figures	8	14	14	12	17
The figures are easy to count or measure	25	16	28	33	26
ONS does not have a vested interest in the results/ does not manipulate production or collection	11	4	3	13	10
Govt does not have a vested interest in the results/ does not interfere in production or collection	4	2	7	9	3
Other answer	15	14	22	16	20
Bases= Those with trust scores 7 to 10	*374*	*428*	*358*	*476*	*393*

Appendix A: References

Appleby, S. and Curtice, J. (2010), 'The NHS: satisfied now?' in Park, A *et al* (eds), *British Social Attitudes: the 25th Report*, London: Sage.

Butt, S. and Curtice, J. (2009), 'Duty in decline? Trends in attitudes to voting' in Park, A *et al* (eds), *British Social Attitudes: the 26th Report*, London: Sage.

Simmons, E. and Betts, P. (2006), *Developing a Quantitative Measure of Public Confidence in Official Statistics*, London: ONS

Appendix B: Detailed survey tables

Sources used to inform opinions on current issues											
		Friends/ Family	School/ College/ Work	Newspapers	Television	Radio	Internet	Other	None of these	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	42	12	59	71	31	34	2	*	652	652
	Female	51	20	53	70	26	26	1	1	681	681
Age	16 to 24	56	34	43	51	16	44	0	0	200	96
	25 to 34	60	18	43	62	20	46	3	1	200	225
	35 to 44	48	18	50	72	35	35	4	*	247	265
	45 to 54	43	19	58	68	33	30	2	1	220	242
	55 to 64	41	8	70	83	32	21	2	0	197	206
	65 or more	36	1	71	84	31	6	0	1	256	299
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	46	21	58	69	38	35	4	1	427	442
	Intermediate occupations	46	13	60	78	28	30	1	*	273	278
	Routine and manual occupations	46	12	57	73	24	24	1	1	531	534
	Not classifiable	59	23	35	42	13	36	*	2	102	79
Income	Up to £9620	50	19	47	60	18	36	1	*	301	290
	£9621 – £19500	46	13	52	70	25	27	2	2	277	298
	£19500 – £37700	54	16	66	74	26	25	2	*	272	268
	£38220 and over	40	20	57	73	40	38	3	0	274	257
Education	Degree or higher	51	20	55	67	37	45	3	0	235	235
	Below degree	49	19	55	71	28	32	2	*	784	749
	No qualifications	40	6	59	72	23	13	0	3	313	348
Total		47	16	56	70	28	30	2	1	1,333	1,333
Base: Adults aged 16+ Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009											

Interest in politics

		A great deal	Quite a lot	Some	Not much	None at all	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	6	21	36	21	16	652	652
	Female	5	15	32	28	19	681	681
Age	16 to 24	2	15	26	27	29	200	96
	25 to 34	9	15	40	22	14	200	225
	35 to 44	4	15	36	27	18	247	265
	45 to 54	3	18	33	31	15	220	242
	55 to 64	7	20	39	20	13	197	206
	65 or more	7	23	32	21	18	256	299
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	10	25	39	19	7	427	442
	Intermediate occupations	6	20	35	26	13	273	278
	Routine and manual occupations	3	11	33	29	25	531	534
	Not classifiable	2	18	21	21	38	102	79
Income	Up to £9620	4	14	25	26	31	301	290
	£9621 – £19500	7	13	33	30	18	277	298
	£19500 – £37700	4	20	36	24	16	272	268
	£38220 and over	9	24	40	21	6	274	257
Education	Degree or higher	11	27	37	20	5	235	235
	Below degree	5	18	36	25	16	784	749
	No qualifications	3	10	28	28	31	313	348
Total		6	18	34	25	18	1,333	1,333

Base: Adults aged 16+ Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009

Trust in People

		Most people can be trusted	Can't be too careful in dealing with people	It depends on people/ circumstances	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		%	%	%	%	%
Sex	Male	34	53	14	652	652
	Female	30	59	11	681	681
Age	16 to 24	32	49	19	200	96
	25 to 34	28	58	15	200	225
	35 to 44	30	61	10	247	265
	45 to 54	34	56	10	220	242
	55 to 64	34	56	10	197	206
	65 or more	33	56	12	256	299
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	41	48	11	427	442
	Intermediate occupations	35	57	8	273	278
	Routine and manual occupations	24	63	13	531	534
	Not classifiable	25	47	28	102	79
Income	Up to £9620	29	56	15	301	290
	£9621 – £19500	27	64	9	277	298
	£19500 – £37700	27	61	12	272	268
	£38220 and over	42	49	9	274	257
Education	Degree or higher	46	39	15	235	235
	Below degree	31	58	11	784	749
	No qualifications	22	64	14	313	348
Total		32	56	12	1,333	1,333

Base: Adults aged 16+ Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009

Level of trust in the Civil Service

		mean	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	It depends	Don't know	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		n	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	5.46	4	1	2	6	8	27	12	19	11	2	1	1	5	652	591
	Female	5.50	3	1	3	7	7	28	13	15	11	2	2	1	8	681	742
Age	16 to 24	5.79	2	0	2	6	9	17	15	17	10	2	4	0	15	200	96
	25 to 34	5.53	3	1	2	7	8	28	15	16	11	2	1	*	4	213	225
	35 to 44	5.50	3	2	1	8	7	28	16	19	9	2	2	1	3	247	265
	45 to 54	5.52	3	1	5	6	5	29	9	21	13	2	*	1	5	220	242
	55 to 64	5.08	6	2	4	7	9	31	12	15	6	3	1	1	3	197	206
	65 or more	5.48	5	1	2	5	7	30	9	13	15	2	2	2	8	256	299
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	5.76	2	1	3	6	7	25	13	22	13	3	2	1	2	427	442
	Intermediate occupations	5.47	4	0	3	8	7	27	13	19	11	1	1	1	5	273	278
	Routine and manual occupations	5.23	5	2	3	6	8	31	12	13	8	3	2	1	8	531	534
	Not classifiable	5.55	4	1	0	8	10	19	11	10	16	1	2	1	17	102	79
Income	Up to £9620	5.28	4	1	3	7	9	25	14	11	8	2	2	1	14	301	290
	£9621 – £19500	5.40	6	0	2	6	7	32	13	15	9	2	3	1	4	277	298
	£19500 – £37700	5.32	5	2	1	7	10	28	12	21	9	1	1	2	1	272	268
	£38220 and over	5.82	0	1	4	7	6	24	14	24	13	4	1	0	1	274	257
Education	Degree or higher	6.05	1	1	2	5	5	23	12	28	15	3	1	2	1	235	235
	Below degree	5.51	3	1	3	7	9	25	14	17	11	2	2	1	5	784	749
	No qualifications	4.92	7	2	2	6	7	35	8	8	9	1	2	1	12	313	348
Total		5.48	4	1	3	6	8	27	12	17	11	2	2	1	6	1,333	1,333

Base: Adults aged 16+ Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009
Base sizes for means exclude those who said 'It depends' and 'Don't Know'

Level of trust in the UK Government

		mean	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	It depends	Don't know	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		n	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	4.03	12	5	8	15	13	19	9	9	5	1	1	*	1	652	591
	Female	4.06	11	5	9	11	14	24	7	11	3	1	1	1	3	681	742
Age	16 to 24	4.50	4	6	7	16	11	26	7	13	4	1	1	0	3	200	96
	25 to 34	4.36	7	4	8	13	16	22	9	11	4	2	1	0	3	213	225
	35 to 44	4.14	10	4	8	15	14	22	12	10	3	1	1	*	1	247	265
	45 to 54	3.88	12	6	10	14	12	23	4	9	6	1	*	1	2	220	242
	55 to 64	3.73	15	7	8	11	17	20	7	9	4	1	1	1	0	197	206
	65 or more	3.71	20	4	10	10	12	17	8	9	5	1	1	1	3	256	299
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	4.42	7	4	9	10	15	23	12	14	4	*	1	1	1	427	442
	Intermediate occupations	3.70	12	8	8	16	15	22	4	11	2	1	*	*	2	273	278
	Routine and manual occupations	3.87	16	4	9	13	12	22	6	8	5	2	2	*	2	531	534
	Not classifiable	4.26	5	7	5	19	13	16	13	7	6	1	1	1	6	102	79
Income	Up to £9620	4.11	11	5	9	13	14	19	7	10	5	2	2	*	3	301	290
	£9621 – £19500	3.70	18	5	9	12	9	24	5	9	5	1	*	*	2	277	298
	£19500 – £37700	4.05	10	6	6	16	15	23	8	9	3	1	2	1	*	272	268
	£38220 and over	4.46	6	3	11	10	15	21	14	14	5	*	0	0	*	274	257
Education	Degree or higher	4.71	4	5	8	10	16	22	11	16	6	1	*	1	*	235	235
	Below degree	4.02	11	5	8	15	13	22	9	9	4	1	1	*	2	784	749
	No qualifications	3.60	19	6	9	10	13	21	4	8	4	1	2	*	3	313	348
Total		4.04	12	5	8	13	14	22	8	10	4	1	1	1	2	1,333	1,333

Base: Adults aged 16+ Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009
Base sizes for means exclude those who said 'It depends' and 'Don't Know'

Level of trust in the Police

		mean	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	It depends	Don't know	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		n	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	6.26	4	1	4	4	6	13	12	19	22	10	3	*	2	652	591
	Female	6.40	2	1	3	4	5	20	9	16	22	8	7	1	2	681	742
Age	16 to 24	6.19	3	1	7	2	9	14	8	18	12	16	4	0	5	200	96
	25 to 34	6.27	4	1	3	7	4	10	15	19	23	7	4	2	1	213	225
	35 to 44	6.46	4	1	3	3	5	13	11	21	23	10	4	*	1	247	265
	45 to 54	6.11	2	2	4	6	6	18	12	18	19	8	4	*	*	220	242
	55 to 64	6.37	1	2	3	2	6	22	8	20	28	6	2	*	0	197	206
	65 or more	6.55	3	1	2	3	3	21	10	12	24	7	10	0	2	256	299
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	6.56	2	1	1	3	5	15	14	20	23	11	3	1	2	427	442
	Intermediate occupations	6.38	3	2	2	5	5	17	11	19	21	9	5	1	0	273	278
	Routine and manual occupations	6.10	4	1	6	4	6	17	9	15	22	7	7	*	1	531	534
	Not classifiable	6.51	1	3	2	6	4	15	7	17	17	14	7	0	7	102	79
Income	Up to £9620	6.24	4	1	5	3	8	15	9	13	20	11	6	1	4	301	290
	£9621 – £19500	6.20	5	2	5	3	5	16	10	17	20	8	8	0	2	277	298
	£19500 – £37700	6.23	3	1	3	6	5	17	10	24	21	5	5	*	0	272	268
	£38220 and over	6.50	1		3	3	5	15	16	21	25	9	2	0	0	274	257
Education	Degree or higher	6.56	*	*	2	5	5	15	15	25	20	12	1	1	*	235	235
	Below degree	6.28	3	1	4	4	6	15	11	18	21	10	4	*	2	784	749
	No qualifications	6.29	3	3	4	4	5	20	7	12	26	5	11	1	2	313	348
Total		6.33	3	1	3	4	5	16	11	18	22	9	5	1	2	1,333	1,333

Base: Adults aged 16+ Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009
Base sizes for means exclude those who said 'It depends' and 'Don't Know'

Level of trust in the courts

		mean	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	It depends	Don't know	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		n	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	6.07	3	2	4	6	5	16	12	17	19	7	4	1	6	652	591
	Female	6.00	2	2	3	5	6	16	13	17	16	6	3	1	10	681	741
Age	16 to 24	5.91	3	3	4	2	3	18	12	20	14	6	1	2	11	200	96
	25 to 34	6.24	3	1	2	6	4	12	14	20	16	8	5	1	8	213	225
	35 to 44	6.11	2	2	3	7	7	16	13	17	18	6	5	1	4	247	264
	45 to 54	6.10	3	3	3	7	6	15	10	18	20	9	2	1	4	220	242
	55 to 64	6.00	1	3	2	6	8	18	13	17	17	6	4	1	5	197	206
	65 or more	5.86	4	1	4	5	4	17	12	10	17	6	3	2	15	256	299
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	6.53	1	2	3	4	4	13	14	20	23	10	3	*	5	427	442
	Intermediate occupations	5.92	3	3	3	6	4	19	11	17	16	5	4	1	8	273	277
	Routine and manual occupations	5.64	4	2	5	7	7	16	12	15	13	5	3	2	10	531	534
	Not classifiable	6.28	2	3		3	3	23	8	12	19	7	5	4	13	102	79
Income	Up to £9620	5.73	4	3	5	4	5	18	10	14	14	6	3	2	13	300	289
	£9621 – £19500	5.76	4	1	4	7	5	13	15	22	11	5	2	1	9	277	298
	£19500 – £37700	6.18	2	2	3	5	4	18	16	16	17	7	5	*	4	272	268
	£38220 and over	6.57	*	*	2	7	4	14	10	20	26	8	4	*	3	274	257
Education	Degree or higher	6.93	0	*	2	2	3	15	11	24	24	11	4	*	4	235	235
	Below degree	6.00	3	2	3	6	6	16	13	17	18	7	3	1	6	784	748
	No qualifications	5.38	4	3	5	6	5	19	11	11	10	4	4	2	16	313	348
Total		6.04	3	2	3	6	5	16	12	17	17	7	3	1	8	1,333	1,332

Base: Adults aged 16+ Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009
Base sizes for means exclude those who said 'It depends' and 'Don't Know'

Level of trust in the NHS

		mean	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	It depends	Don't know	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		n	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	7.23	1	1	1	4	3	8	11	18	26	14	11	1	2	652	591
	Female	7.05	1	1	2	2	6	11	10	19	21	16	10	*	1	681	741
Age	16 to 24	6.79	0	1	3	5	8	7	9	21	16	14	8	0	9	200	96
	25 to 34	6.91	1	*	1	4	3	12	15	21	19	13	9	*	1	213	225
	35 to 44	6.94	2	1	1	2	6	9	11	21	29	13	6	*	*	247	265
	45 to 54	7.15	1	*	1	2	4	11	12	19	22	14	12	1	*	220	242
	55 to 64	7.06	1	1	2	3	4	11	13	18	24	13	11	0	0	197	206
	65 or more	7.83		*	*	2	2	8	4	14	30	21	16	1	1	255	298
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	7.04	1	1	1	2	3	11	14	21	23	16	6	*	*	427	442
	Intermediate occupations	7.08	*	*	1	4	7	10	8	19	27	12	10	1	1	272	277
	Routine and manual occupations	7.31	1	*	2	3	4	8	8	17	23	15	14	1	3	531	534
	Not classifiable	6.79	1	2	2	3	7	10	13	16	18	13	11	0	3	102	79
Income	Up to £9620	7.02	1	1	2	4	7	9	9	19	19	13	14	*	3	301	290
	£9621 – £19500	7.16	2	0	2	4	2	11	8	17	24	15	12	1	2	277	298
	£19500 – £37700	7.26	1	*	*	3	3	10	10	20	27	14	10	0	2	272	268
	£38220 and over	6.96	0	1	1	3	6	10	13	21	29	11	6	0	0	274	257
Education	Degree or higher	7.20	0	1	1	2	3	9	13	25	22	15	8	0	2	235	235
	Below degree	6.93	1	1	2	4	6	10	10	19	24	14	8	1	2	784	749
	No qualifications	7.61	1	*	1	2	2	9	8	12	24	17	20	1	1	312	347
Total		7.14	1	1	1	3	4	10	10	19	24	15	10	*	2	1,332	1,332

Base: Adults aged 16+ Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009
Base sizes for means exclude those who said 'It depends' and 'Don't Know'

Importance of official statistics in decision making

		A great deal	Quite a lot	Some	Not much	None at all	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	24	48	12	12	5	646	585
	Female	21	48	20	8	2	667	724
Age	16 to 24	20	54	16	8	2	197	94
	25 to 34	18	52	15	11	4	208	220
	35 to 44	20	54	15	9	2	245	262
	45 to 54	24	43	15	12	5	218	239
	55 to 64	25	40	19	12	4	195	204
	65 or more	26	44	18	8	3	250	290
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	23	47	15	12	3	421	435
	Intermediate occupations	22	48	14	11	5	271	275
	Routine and manual occupations	23	48	16	9	4	523	523
	Not classifiable	20	49	25	5	2	98	76
Income	Up to £9620	22	47	18	11	2	291	280
	£9621 – £19500	23	49	14	10	4	275	296
	£19500 – £37700	20	54	14	9	3	270	266
	£38220 and over	28	44	15	9	3	273	256
Education	Degree or higher	22	52	12	11	4	233	233
	Below degree	22	50	16	9	4	778	740
	No qualifications	24	41	20	12	3	300	335
Total		22	48	16	10	3	1,313	1,309

Base: Adults aged 16+ Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009

Level of trust in cost of living figures

		mean	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	It depends	Not heard of	Don't Know	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		n	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	5.39	5	2	4	8	11	16	14	14	13	4	1	*	1	6	652	591
	Female	5.25	4	1	6	7	11	19	13	14	10	3	1	1	1	10	681	742
Age	16 to 24	6.05	*	1	5	5	6	11	16	19	11	8	*	*	1	18	200	96
	25 to 34	5.36	4	2	2	11	11	17	12	17	11	3	2	1	1	9	213	225
	35 to 44	5.48	3	1	5	7	12	18	11	16	16	3	1	*	1	5	247	265
	45 to 54	5.10	5	*	8	8	14	18	16	10	9	4	1	1	1	4	220	242
	55 to 64	5.00	6	2	5	7	13	22	12	12	11	2	1	2	*	3	197	206
	65 or more	5.08	5	1	6	7	12	20	13	12	10	3	1	*	*	9	256	299
Income	Up to £9620	5.22	3	1	8	7	11	14	12	10	10	4	2	*	1	17	301	290
	£9621 – £19500	5.07	5	2	5	8	9	21	13	16	9	2	*	1	1	8	277	298
	£19500 – £37700	5.30	4	1	4	10	13	19	12	17	13	4	*	*	*	4	272	268
	£38220 and over	5.70	4	1	4	7	13	16	14	16	15	7	2	*	*	1	274	257
Education	Degree or higher	6.27	1	1	2	4	8	13	16	20	18	8	2	1	*	6	235	235
	Below degree	5.20	4	1	6	9	12	17	13	14	10	4	1	1	1	8	784	749
	No qualifications	4.89	6	2	7	6	10	24	11	10	11	1	1	*	1	9	313	348
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	5.61	4	1	4	7	11	15	15	18	13	5	1	*	*	5	427	442
	Intermediate occupations	5.23	3	2	7	7	13	17	13	17	11	2	*	1	*	6	273	278
	Routine and manual occupations	5.07	5	2	6	8	11	21	11	11	10	4	1	*	1	10	531	534
	Not classifiable	5.61	2	0	5	8	9	14	15	11	12	5	2	1	*	15	102	79
Interest in politics	A great deal	5.37	6	2	6	6	15	10	17	18	11	3	5	1	*	1	75	74
	Quite a lot	5.53	5	1	3	7	14	15	13	14	15	8	1	1	*	3	234	239
	Some	5.48	3	1	6	6	11	17	14	16	13	4	1	1	*	7	457	454
	Not much	5.20	2	1	5	10	10	20	16	14	8	2	*	*	1	10	330	340
	None at all	4.90	8	1	7	7	9	19	7	9	10	4	1	1	2	14	237	226
Importance of statistics in decisions	Very important	5.61	3	2	9	6	7	15	11	13	18	4	3	*	0	8	295	287
	Fairly important	5.67	2	1	3	8	12	17	14	18	12	5	1	*	1	6	629	624
	Neither important nor unimportant	4.87	5	1	5	8	12	26	15	11	4	2	0	2	0	10	211	225
	Very unimportant	4.51	7	3	7	9	18	13	18	9	6	2	0	0	*	6	132	126
	Fairly unimportant	3.28	29	5	9	5	5	15	1	1	12	3	1	0	3	9	46	47
Understanding of statistics	Very good	4.97	9	2	9	10	11	12	10	6	17	7	2	2	0	4	101	107
	Fairly good	5.64	2	1	4	6	12	17	15	18	13	4	1	*	*	6	858	847
	Fairly bad	4.63	8	1	6	12	10	21	10	10	6	2	1	*	*	12	274	282
	Very bad	4.53	7	2	5	7	10	27	9	3	4	3	1	1	3	17	80	79
Interest in statistics	A great deal	4.74	9	2	9	10	11	12	10	6	17	7	2	2	0	4	101	107
	Quite a lot	5.50	2	1	4	6	12	17	15	18	13	4	1	*	*	6	858	847
	Some	5.50	8	1	6	12	10	21	10	10	6	2	1	*	*	12	274	282
	Not much	5.14	7	2	5	7	10	27	9	3	4	3	1	1	3	17	80	79
	None at all	4.57	9	2	7	7	7	19	9	7	4	6		2	2	20	108	97
Total		5.32	4	1	5	7	11	18	13	14	11	4	1	1	1	8	1,333	1,333

Base: Adults aged 16+ Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009
Base sizes for means exclude those who said 'It depends' and 'Don't Know'

Main reason for distrusting cost of living figures

		Personal experience	heard / read something bad	figures difficult to count	ONS has vested interest	Gov't has vested interest	Figures mis-represented by media/ politicians	Figures don't tell whole story	Other	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	30	3	9	2	24	12	16	5	121	122
	Female	42	4	4	1	13	11	23	3	121	142
Age	16 to 24	26	0	0	0	23	0	31	21	22	12
	25 to 34	34	8	2	1	12	12	29	1	40	46
	35 to 44	38	0	16	4	24	10	9	0	42	46
	45 to 54	31	5	5	2	13	22	19	3	45	54
	55 to 64	44	3	4	0	23	8	17	1	43	46
	65 or more	39	3	8	1	18	11	18	3	51	60
Income	Up to £9620	43	1	5	0	22	9	14	7	59	65
	£9621 – £19500	35	3	7	2	18	14	17	4	57	72
	£19500 – £37700	41	4	9	1	18	5	20	1	51	49
	£38220 and over	22	5	7	4	12	19	31	0	42	40
Education	Degree or higher	15	0	3	0	12	13	55	3	20	24
	Below degree	36	4	8	2	19	10	18	4	156	160
	No qualifications	43	3	5	1	19	15	13	3	66	80
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	29	2	10	2	15	13	27	2	66	70
	Intermediate occupations	43	3	4	2	12	15	18	2	52	63
	Routine and manual occupations	40	5	5	*	24	8	15	2	109	118
	Not classifiable	13	0	12	0	13	10	25	26	16	13
Interest in politics	A great deal	33	0	5	0	14	17	31	0	15	18
	Quite a lot	22	8	5	2	16	13	32	1	39	44
	Some	26	5	15	2	18	9	18	8	73	72
	Not much	48	0	3	1	19	8	18	4	60	70
	None at all	48	2	1	1	21	16	11	0	55	60
Importance of statistics in decisions	Very important	37	4	2	3	20	12	22	1	58	58
	Fairly important	38	4	7	0	15	12	17	8	84	91
	Neither important nor unimportant	37	3	5	1	17	9	27	1	39	46
	Very unimportant	30	5	17	1	26	5	15	1	36	39
	Fairly unimportant	41	0	3	3	23	21	10	0	22	25
Under-standing of statistics	Very good	22	5	4	0	26	21	20	2	31	35
	Fairly good	33	5	9	2	15	9	21	5	117	129
	Fairly bad	41	2	1	1	23	11	17	3	73	80
	Very bad	61	0	0	3	8	12	17	0	17	16
Interest in statistics	A great deal	16	0	10	0	30	18	19	6	19	24
	Quite a lot	39	5	5	0	10	7	28	7	58	59
	Some	38	3	11	2	16	8	20	3	90	96
	Not much	30	5	3	1	29	19	10	2	49	58
	None at all	51	0	0	3	17	14	15	0	26	27
Total		36	3	6	1	18	11	19	4	242	264

Base: Adults aged 16+ giving low trust ratings (0-3) for cost of living figures Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009

Main reason for trusting cost of living figures

		Personal experience	heard /read something good	figures easy to count	ONS does not have vested interest	Gov't does not have vested interest	Other	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	31	10	31	10	4	13	209	181
	Female	44	6	18	11	3	18	182	193
Age	16 to 24	45	4	31	14	0	7	74	32
	25 to 34	37	5	28	18	3	9	66	67
	35 to 44	36	10	26	8	4	16	82	86
	45 to 54	39	6	24	6	7	20	51	60
	55 to 64	32	8	25	11	0	24	52	52
	65 or more	30	17	18	6	8	20	66	77
Income	Up to £9620	52	5	22	15	1	5	74	62
	£9621 – £19500	25	13	27	8	8	18	71	71
	£19500 – £37700	34	5	28	8	5	21	86	87
	£38220 and over	35	8	28	12	1	16	109	103
Education	Degree or higher	27	2	37	14	2	19	110	103
	Below degree	41	8	22	10	4	14	217	202
	No qualifications	39	20	18	7	3	13	64	69
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	34	5	30	12	1	19	156	155
	Intermediate occupations	33	12	26	9	6	14	80	80
	Routine and manual occupations	42	12	22	7	5	13	126	116
	Not classifiable	44	1	13	28	4	9	28	23
Interest in politics	A great deal	34	3	16	24	5	17	27	24
	Quite a lot	28	8	30	11	3	21	84	80
	Some	36	8	30	8	5	14	149	145
	Not much	38	14	19	8	3	18	74	75
	None at all	53	6	20	16	2	5	57	50
Importance of statistics in decisions	Very important	32	10	20	16	4	20	110	105
	Fairly important	37	8	30	8	3	15	216	203
	Neither important nor unimportant	52	9	11	14	5	8	33	38
	Very unimportant	58	5	17	3	7	10	22	20
	Fairly unimportant		0	70	26	4	0	8	7
Understanding of statistics	Very good	35	8	32	14	1	10	31	32
	Fairly good	35	8	26	11	4	17	299	279
	Fairly bad	38	12	26	10	2	11	49	49
	Very bad	95	5	0	0	0	0	8	10
Interest in statistics	A great deal	40	7	10	11	20	11	18	18
	Quite a lot	29	16	30	9	3	14	109	106
	Some	40	5	24	11	3	18	182	180
	Not much	42	8	18	18	2	13	62	56
	None at all	38	2	53	0	0	7	19	14
Total		37	8	25	11	4	15	391	374

Base: Adults aged 16+ giving high trust ratings (7-10) for cost of living figures Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009

Level of trust in hospital waiting figures

		mean	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	It depends	Not heard of	Don't Know	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		n	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	5.52	4	2	4	7	9	18	11	15	12	5	3	2	1	9	652	591
	Female	5.37	3	3	7	7	9	18	13	12	14	4	2	2	1	6	681	742
Age	16 to 24	5.54	1	2	6	4	7	21	11	15	9	3	2	0	3	17	200	96
	25 to 34	5.26	3	3	6	8	11	20	11	12	13	3	2	1	2	6	213	225
	35 to 44	5.17	3	2	9	6	12	18	13	12	8	4	2	2	*	8	247	265
	45 to 54	5.22	6	4	5	8	11	15	13	15	13	4	2	1	0	4	220	242
	55 to 64	5.50	4	3	4	9	8	18	14	12	16	3	4	1	0	3	197	206
	65 or more	5.95	3	2	4	8	6	15	12	14	17	8	3	4	0	6	256	299
Income	Up to £9620	5.63	3	3	5	4	9	17	12	15	13	3	3	1	1	10	301	290
	£9621 – £19500	5.37	2	4	5	9	8	16	11	12	11	6	2	2	2	8	277	298
	£19500 – £37700	5.63	3	1	6	6	7	18	11	17	17	2	3	2	0	7	272	268
	£38220 and over	5.15	4	3	5	11	13	19	14	12	10	6	*	1	0	3	274	257
Education	Degree or higher	5.24	3	2	6	10	14	15	13	14	9	5	3	1	0	6	235	235
	Below degree	5.43	3	3	5	7	8	19	12	14	14	3	2	2	1	7	784	749
	No qualifications	5.65	3	3	7	5	7	15	12	11	14	7	4	2	1	8	313	348
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	5.27	3	3	5	9	12	17	13	14	13	4	1	1	0	5	427	442
	Intermediate occupations	5.55	4	2	6	6	7	20	14	14	11	5	3	2	1	5	273	278
	Routine and manual occupations	5.49	3	2	6	6	9	17	11	12	14	4	3	2	1	9	531	534
	Not classifiable	5.70	1	5	4	6	5	17	10	14	13	2	5	1	1	14	102	79
Interest in politics	A great deal	5.67	5	3	3	7	10	18	7	16	15	8	3	1	0	2	75	74
	Quite a lot	5.45	3	3	6	8	13	14	10	16	15	5	2	*	1	4	234	239
	Some	5.51	2	2	5	7	8	19	15	14	13	3	2	3	*	7	457	454
	Not much	5.30	3	3	6	7	9	18	13	12	11	4	2	1	*	9	330	340
	None at all	5.43	5	3	7	6	6	17	11	10	13	3	6	2	2	9	237	226
Importance of statistics in decisions	Very important	5.99	3	1	5	5	6	17	14	15	17	6	4	1	*	6	295	287
	Fairly important	5.67	1	2	4	8	10	19	14	14	13	4	2	2	1	7	629	624
	Neither important nor unimportant	4.97	4	6	4	5	13	21	8	13	7	4	1	2	1	9	211	225
	Very unimportant	4.82	7	2	9	13	11	10	10	10	14	4	1	*	1	8	132	126
	Fairly unimportant	2.93	17	12	26	2	1	17	2	4	3		3	3	3	4	46	47
Under-standing of statistics	Very good	5.52	3	4	5	5	13	16	11	11	14	7	3	2	0	5	101	107
	Fairly good	5.58	3	2	5	7	9	18	13	15	13	4	3	1	1	6	858	847
	Fairly bad	5.06	4	4	7	8	8	18	12	12	12	2	2	2	*	8	274	282
	Very bad	5.01	6	6	9	5	6	12	5	6	15	6	2	3	5	13	80	79
Interest in statistics	A great deal	5.23	2	10	4	7	8	15	14	7	11	7	3	1	3	8	69	74
	Quite a lot	5.62	3	2	7	10	9	13	11	15	17	6	2	1	0	6	312	315
	Some	5.59	2	2	4	6	10	20	14	16	12	3	2	2	*	5	565	564
	Not much	5.23	4	4	7	7	11	18	11	11	12	3	4	2	*	7	274	280
	None at all	4.70	8	3	11	5	1	19	6	8	10	4	1	3	4	19	108	97
Total		5.44	3	3	6	7	9	18	12	13	13	4	2	2	1	7	1,333	1,333

Base: Adults aged 16+ Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009
Base sizes for means exclude those who said 'It depends' and 'Don't Know'

Main reason for distrusting hospital waiting figures

		Personal experience	heard /read something bad	figures difficult to count	ONS has vested interest	Gov't has vested interest	Figures misrepresented by media/ politicians	Figures don't tell whole story	Other	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	40	*	5	4	16	25	6	3	111	106
	Female	41	3	6	2	15	17	17	1	135	154
Age	16 to 24	58	0	0	0	11	17	14	0	27	15
	25 to 34	39	0	4	3	19	20	14	0	42	46
	35 to 44	23	5	10	3	17	29	11	1	49	51
	45 to 54	47	1	7	0	12	20	8	5	49	60
	55 to 64	36	1	5	5	17	18	14	3	39	38
	65 or more	48	4	5	4	13	15	12	0	40	50
Income	Up to £9620	48	5	1	0	16	17	14	0	43	46
	£9621 – £19500	42	1	7	6	14	21	8	1	58	66
	£19500 – £37700	41	0	2	3	19	16	13	6	46	47
	£38220 and over	43	2	3	2	13	28	9	0	60	54
Education	Degree or higher	26	0	6	6	24	23	12	3	51	51
	Below degree	42	2	4	2	15	22	13	1	138	143
	No qualifications	50	5	10	1	8	14	10	2	57	66
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	30	1	8	5	17	28	9	2	89	98
	Intermediate occupations	52	3	3	0	11	17	13	0	46	46
	Routine and manual occupations	45	3	5	2	14	17	13	2	95	103
	Not classifiable	40	0	7	0	24	9	18	3	16	13
Interest in politics	A great deal	19	0	0	16	15	42	8	0	14	13
	Quite a lot	34	1	8	2	14	26	10	5	46	49
	Some	36	3	6	2	17	21	14	1	74	81
	Not much	41	0	8	2	17	20	11	1	64	69
	None at all	58	5	2	1	12	9	14	0	48	48
Importance of statistics in decisions	Very important	50	2	3	0	14	19	9	3	42	42
	Fairly important	43	1	9	3	15	17	9	2	88	93
	Neither important nor unimportant	33	2	3	0	12	24	26	0	42	49
	Very unimportant	38	1	5	5	26	16	7	1	41	41
	Fairly unimportant	32	5	4	0	10	40	9	0	27	27
Under-standing of statistics	Very good	42	0	6	0	17	22	8	6	18	22
	Fairly good	38	3	6	3	17	22	9	2	143	147
	Fairly bad	46	1	6	2	12	16	16	1	64	70
	Very bad	37	0	0	3	14	19	27	0	21	21
Interest in statistics	A great deal	54	8	0	0	5	23	7	4	15	18
	Quite a lot	39	1	8	5	17	21	10	0	65	63
	Some	32	3	5	3	17	20	16	3	79	87
	Not much	42	2	6	1	17	23	9	1	59	66
	None at all	56	0	4	2	11	14	13	0	28	26
Total		40	2	6	3	15	20	12	2	246	260

Base: Adults aged 16+ giving low trust ratings (0-3) for hospital waiting figures Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009

Main reason for trusting hospital waiting figures

		Personal experience	heard /read something good	figures easy to count	ONS does not have vested interest	Gov't does not have vested interest	Other	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	46	16	19	4	2	13	216	201
	Female	53	12	14	3	2	15	212	227
Age	16 to 24	40	21	18	10	0	11	58	25
	25 to 34	48	17	24	2	3	6	60	68
	35 to 44	42	9	17	7	5	19	63	69
	45 to 54	47	10	20	1	1	20	73	75
	55 to 64	55	13	12	2	4	14	67	71
	65 or more	59	16	11	2	1	11	108	120
Income	Up to £9620	46	17	17	9	3	9	105	99
	£9621 – £19500	57	11	18	1	3	11	82	92
	£19500 – £37700	56	11	10	4	3	16	102	98
	£38220 and over	40	15	22	1	3	19	74	70
Education	Degree or higher	32	11	23	4	3	27	67	70
	Below degree	50	14	18	5	2	11	250	238
	No qualifications	60	16	8	1	2	12	112	120
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	50	7	17	8	3	15	130	134
	Intermediate occupations	48	13	21	0	0	18	91	93
	Routine and manual occupations	52	21	11	2	3	11	172	173
	Not classifiable	44	9	25	4	2	15	36	28
Interest in politics	A great deal	40	7	23	13	5	12	31	29
	Quite a lot	56	12	13	5	0	15	82	80
	Some	44	20	16	2	2	17	145	147
	Not much	53	14	12	1	4	15	95	101
	None at all	53	11	23	5	2	5	76	71
Importance of statistics in decisions	Very important	53	10	15	3	3	15	120	116
	Fairly important	48	11	19	3	2	16	208	213
	Neither important nor unimportant	55	17	11	3	3	11	54	55
	Very unimportant	45	36	6	10	0	3	38	33
	Fairly unimportant	35	25	26	0	0	14	5	6
Understanding of statistics	Very good	39	18	18	3	3	18	33	33
	Fairly good	49	14	17	3	2	15	294	293
	Fairly bad	53	15	15	2	5	9	76	75
	Very bad	64	7	16	3	0	9	23	24
Interest in statistics	A great deal	59	11	28	3	0	0	19	20
	Quite a lot	52	18	13	3	2	13	122	124
	Some	50	11	17	3	3	16	183	181
	Not much	43	21	15	7	2	11	80	80
	None at all	52	3	21	3	6	15	24	23
Total		50	14	16	4	2	14	429	428

Base: Adults aged 16+ giving high trust ratings (7-10) for hospital waiting figures Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009

Level of trust in domestic burglary figures

		mean	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	It depends	Not heard of	Don't Know	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		n	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	5.09	5	1	6	10	12	18	8	14	12	4	1	1	1	7	652	591
	Female	5.33	3	2	5	7	11	19	12	13	11	4	1	1	1	11	680	741
Age	16 to 24	5.36	0	0	5	8	15	17	8	14	12	1	0	0	1	18	200	96
	25 to 34	5.37	4	1	5	9	9	21	10	14	11	5	1	1	2	7	213	225
	35 to 44	5.28	2	2	6	11	11	17	13	14	13	3	1	1	*	7	247	265
	45 to 54	5.00	7	2	5	7	12	17	14	15	10	3	*	1	0	6	220	242
	55 to 64	5.13	4	2	4	9	13	24	8	8	11	5	1	1	0	8	196	205
	65 or more	5.17	5	2	7	7	10	17	8	14	11	5	1	1	0	11	256	299
Income	Up to £9620	5.17	4	2	6	5	15	17	8	13	10	4	1	1	1	14	300	289
	£9621 – £19500	5.07	5	1	6	12	10	20	8	10	12	3	1	1	1	10	277	298
	£19500 – £37700	5.27	3	1	5	11	9	22	11	13	11	5	1	0	*	7	272	268
	£38220 and over	5.48	3	1	6	7	11	18	15	18	14	3	*	*	0	3	274	257
Education	Degree or higher	5.69	1	1	3	6	11	18	14	19	13	3	1	2	0	9	235	235
	Below degree	5.21	3	1	6	9	13	18	11	13	11	4	1	1	1	8	783	748
	No qualifications	4.86	7	2	6	9	10	21	6	10	10	3	1	1	1	12	313	348
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	5.42	2	2	4	7	10	19	15	17	12	2	*	1	0	7	427	442
	Intermediate occupations	5.07	4	1	4	12	15	18	9	14	7	5	0	1	1	8	272	277
	Routine and manual occupations	4.99	6	2	8	8	12	19	8	9	12	4	2	1	1	10	531	534
	Not classifiable	5.87	2	0	5	4	7	16	11	19	15	4	1	0	*	15	102	79
Interest in politics	A great deal	5.27	4	3	5	6	11	19	15	8	11	5	2	0	0	11	75	74
	Quite a lot	5.35	4	1	5	7	14	17	13	13	12	6	*	2	*	6	233	238
	Some	5.35	2	2	6	9	11	17	12	15	12	3	1	1	*	10	457	454
	Not much	5.15	4	1	6	10	12	20	7	14	11	4	1	1	*	9	330	340
	None at all	4.87	7	1	4	8	11	21	9	10	9	3	1	*	2	12	237	226
Importance of statistics in decisions	Very important	5.54	4	1	5	9	8	20	10	14	16	6	1	*	0	6	295	287
	Fairly important	5.56	1	1	4	7	13	19	12	15	12	4	1	1	1	9	629	624
	Neither important nor unimportant	4.88	5	2	6	8	13	18	9	14	8	2	1	1	*	13	210	224
	Very unimportant	4.10	8	3	10	15	14	19	9	6	6	2	0	1	1	7	132	126
	Fairly unimportant	2.84	26	4	11	11	8	14	6	7	0	0	1	0	3	9	46	47
Under-standing of statistics	Very good	4.80	3	3	9	14	16	19	8	8	12	2	2	1	0	4	101	107
	Fairly good	5.48	3	1	5	6	12	18	11	15	13	5	1	1	*	8	857	846
	Fairly bad	4.77	5	2	6	12	10	23	8	12	9	1	*	0	*	12	274	282
	Very bad	4.32	10	1	9	11	10	13	13	6	5	2	1	2	4	12	80	79
Interest in statistics	A great deal	4.85	4	4	5	11	20	14	8	14	8	5	0	0	0	9	69	74
	Quite a lot	5.52	3	1	5	8	10	19	14	13	13	6	1	1	0	7	311	314
	Some	5.41	2	1	5	7	14	21	10	16	12	3	1	1	*	8	565	564
	Not much	4.90	6	2	7	11	10	16	10	10	13	3	*	2	1	10	274	280
	None at all	4.13	10	*	8	11	7	18	9	10	3	0	0	2	3	18	108	97
Total		5.21	4	1	5	9	12	19	10	13	11	4	1	1	1	9	1,332	1,332

Base: Adults aged 16+ Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009
Base sizes for means exclude those who said 'It depends' and 'Don't Know'

Main reason for distrusting domestic burglary figures

		Personal experience	heard /read some-thing bad	figures difficult to count	ONS has vested interest	Gov't has vested interest	Figures misrepresented by media/ politicians	Figures don't tell whole story	Other	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	25	5	17	*	9	15	22	6	143	134
	Female	29	3	21	*	11	19	14	3	110	133
Age	16 to 24	39	7	15	0	0	9	14	16	27	14
	25 to 34	18	9	24	0	4	20	25	0	40	42
	35 to 44	29	0	19	0	13	21	17	2	48	52
	45 to 54	38	5	30	1	10	12	3	1	48	56
	55 to 64	17	0	9	0	15	23	27	8	37	40
	65 or more	23	4	12	1	14	15	24	6	54	63
Income	Up to £9620	36	4	10	1	10	12	19	9	51	55
	£9621 – £19500	22	3	15	1	11	23	18	7	63	72
	£19500 – £37700	29	3	21	0	5	18	19	4	53	53
	£38220 and over	23	6	35	0	8	13	15	0	46	42
Education	Degree or higher	19	4	17	1	12	37	7	2	27	30
	Below degree	26	3	22	0	9	13	22	4	154	151
	No qualifications	31	5	11	1	12	18	15	8	73	86
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	23	2	22	1	12	11	27	2	65	69
	Intermediate occupations	24	2	21	1	11	25	15	2	56	56
	Routine and manual occupations	30	6	17	0	9	16	17	5	121	132
	Not classifiable	31	0	7	0	6	17	7	32	11	10
Interest in politics	A great deal	25	0	21	0	15	32	6	0	13	16
	Quite a lot	13	6	19	0	10	20	27	4	40	45
	Some	18	3	21	*	9	19	21	8	82	84
	Not much	28	6	17	1	8	18	20	2	70	71
	None at all	51	0	17	0	13	6	8	6	48	51
Importance of statistics in decisions	Very important	20	3	21	0	8	23	21	4	55	59
	Fairly important	28	2	16	0	7	16	23	8	80	82
	Neither important nor unimportant	32	2	22	0	11	15	11	7	44	51
	Very unimportant	22	9	25	2	13	8	20	0	48	46
	Fairly unimportant	35	5	5	0	17	28	9	0	24	24
Under-standing of statistics	Very good	22	5	16	0	23	22	7	6	28	34
	Fairly good	17	4	21	0	11	18	23	6	131	139
	Fairly bad	39	4	17	1	5	16	15	2	66	68
	Very bad	56	0	14	0	5	10	10	5	25	24
Interest in statistics	A great deal	22	0	4	0	22	33	3	17	16	21
	Quite a lot	20	5	21	0	8	12	26	7	53	49
	Some	24	3	28	1	9	11	23	2	83	95
	Not much	27	5	12	0	15	25	11	4	69	71
	None at all	49	4	12	0	0	15	14	6	32	31
Total		27	4	19	*	10	17	18	5	253	267

Base: Adults aged 16+ giving low trust ratings (0-3) for domestic burglary figures Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009

Main reason for trusting domestic burglary figures

		Personal experience	heard /read something good	figures easy to count	ONS does not have vested interest	Gov't does not have vested interest	Other	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	27	10	34	2	9	19	183	165
	Female	24	18	22	4	6	26	170	193
Age	16 to 24	27	13	22	2	6	32	46	21
	25 to 34	31	12	26	2	8	21	63	67
	35 to 44	23	11	38	6	4	19	66	70
	45 to 54	18	17	27	2	9	27	60	70
	55 to 64	24	18	28	4	6	20	44	45
	65 or more	28	14	26	2	11	20	73	85
Income	Up to £9620	31	18	20	1	11	20	74	73
	£9621 – £19500	29	12	27	3	9	20	67	73
	£19500 – £37700	31	8	25	4	9	23	79	81
	£38220 and over	20	10	39	4	4	24	88	83
Education	Degree or higher	17	9	31	5	5	33	75	78
	Below degree	27	14	30	3	7	19	210	203
	No qualifications	29	18	18	1	11	23	67	77
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	23	9	35	4	5	24	126	134
	Intermediate occupations	22	15	32	3	5	23	65	67
	Routine and manual occupations	27	20	23	3	8	18	126	129
	Not classifiable	32	7	14	0	17	30	37	28
Interest in politics	A great deal	49	3	25	0	11	11	19	21
	Quite a lot	18	4	31	2	14	31	67	63
	Some	28	11	32	6	6	17	133	128
	Not much	22	20	26	1	7	24	87	94
	None at all	26	27	19	1	1	26	48	52
Importance of statistics in decisions	Very important	28	16	26	3	7	22	101	96
	Fairly important	27	15	25	3	7	23	183	187
	Neither important nor unimportant	9	12	40	4	4	31	46	50
	Very unimportant	27	0	30	0	31	12	15	18
	Fairly unimportant	62	0	38	0	0	0	3	3
Under-standing of statistics	Very good	34	10	28	0	3	25	20	22
	Fairly good	24	12	30	4	9	21	271	268
	Fairly bad	22	25	21	2	1	29	50	54
	Very bad	61	4	18	0	0	17	10	11
Interest in statistics	A great deal	13	26	20	0	19	21	18	17
	Quite a lot	28	17	30	2	6	18	99	106
	Some	26	11	27	5	9	23	166	164
	Not much	22	16	30	1	5	26	57	59
	None at all	32	0	30	0	0	38	13	12
Total		25	14	28	3	7	22	353	358

Base: Adults aged 16+ giving high trust ratings (7-10) for domestic burglary figures Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009

Level of trust in population figures

		mean	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	It depends	Not heard of	Don't Know	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		n	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	5.70	7	2	5	7	6	12	10	16	13	10	5	1	1	6	652	591
	Female	5.65	4	2	6	6	6	16	11	11	17	7	3	*	1	9	680	741
Age	16 to 24	6.29	5		*	5	5	17	9	13	18	9	5	0	2	11	200	96
	25 to 34	5.97	4	4	2	9	5	16	8	12	18	10	5	1	1	7	213	225
	35 to 44	5.76	5	2	8	5	5	10	11	17	12	12	3	*	1	8	247	265
	45 to 54	5.54	4	2	7	7	6	20	9	13	15	7	2	*	0	6	220	242
	55 to 64	5.34	8	4	7	7	6	10	13	12	15	7	4	1	*	5	196	205
	65 or more	5.27	8	1	7	7	8	13	12	12	13	5	4	*	1	7	256	299
Income	Up to £9620	5.85	7	2	3	5	7	14	9	13	15	10	4	*	2	10	300	289
	£9621 – £19500	5.27	7	2	6	7	8	17	11	13	12	4	4	*	1	7	277	298
	£19500 – £37700	5.63	5	3	4	9	5	16	12	12	14	8	4	1	*	6	272	268
	£38220 and over	6.15	5	2	6	5	4	9	11	19	19	13	4	0	*	3	274	257
Education	Degree or higher	6.71	3	1	2	3	5	12	12	14	23	15	6	1	*	3	235	235
	Below degree	5.50	6	3	5	9	6	14	10	14	15	8	2	*	1	7	783	748
	No qualifications	5.25	7	2	8	5	7	16	11	10	9	4	6	1	2	13	313	348
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	5.97	5	2	5	5	7	12	12	14	20	11	2	1	*	4	427	442
	Intermediate occupations	5.42	7	3	6	9	4	16	11	15	12	8	3	0	1	6	272	277
	Routine and manual occupations	5.40	6	2	6	8	7	14	10	12	11	6	6	1	1	10	531	534
	Not classifiable	6.51	2	1	2	4	5	18	4	13	22	9	5	0	3	13	102	79
Interest in politics	A great deal	5.61	10	3	7	7	6	10	5	19	14	17	2	0	0	1	75	74
	Quite a lot	5.77	8	2	5	5	6	13	14	10	18	10	6	*	*	2	233	238
	Some	6.02	3	2	4	7	6	13	10	16	18	9	4	*	1	6	457	454
	Not much	5.61	3	3	6	7	6	16	11	15	13	6	4	*	*	10	330	340
	None at all	4.92	10	2	7	6	6	16	8	9	9	5	3	2	3	14	237	226
Importance of statistics in decisions	Very important	6.21	6	1	5	5	4	15	9	13	16	15	6	0	1	4	295	287
	Fairly important	6.05	2	2	5	6	6	13	11	16	19	7	4	1	*	7	629	624
	Neither important nor unimportant	4.87	11	3	4	8	7	18	10	11	8	6	2	*	3	11	210	224
	Very unimportant	4.50	10	3	13	11	8	12	12	11	7	6	1	1	*	6	132	126
	Fairly unimportant	3.81	21	7	5	11	2	14	7	9	6		5	0	3	10	46	47
Under-standing of statistics	Very good	5.05	11	7	8	6	7	9	5	18	15	7	3	0	0	5	101	107
	Fairly good	5.95	5	2	4	6	6	15	11	15	17	10	5	*	1	4	857	846
	Fairly bad	5.30	4	3	8	11	6	15	10	11	11	7	3	1	1	11	274	282
	Very bad	4.39	13	3	4	4	6	15	9	1	8	4	2	0	6	24	80	79
Interest in statistics	A great deal	4.91	11	6	6	7	11	13	7	12	11	8	4	0	0	4	69	74
	Quite a lot	5.84	6	2	5	8	5	12	8	16	21	10	3	0	*	5	311	314
	Some	6.01	3	2	4	5	6	16	14	15	15	8	5	1	*	6	565	564
	Not much	5.42	6	2	7	9	6	16	8	12	13	9	4	1	1	7	274	280
	None at all	4.27	13	3	7	7	5	10	8	3	5	4	5	1	4	23	108	97
Total		5.68	6	2	5	7	6	14	10	13	15	8	4	*	1	8	1,332	1,332

Base: Adults aged 16+ Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009
Base sizes for means exclude those who said 'It depends' and 'Don't Know'

Main reason for distrusting population figures

		Personal experience	heard /read something bad	figures difficult to count	ONS has vested interest	Gov't has vested interest	Figures mis-represented by media/ politicians	Figures don't tell whole story	Other	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	13	6	32	0	15	15	18	2	135	132
	Female	15	7	21	1	16	23	15	3	124	144
Age	16 to 24	0	18	22	0	25	7	13	14	20	11
	25 to 34	21	7	25	0	20	6	21	0	36	39
	35 to 44	14	3	24	0	13	30	13	3	50	56
	45 to 54	24	2	25	1	9	16	23	0	44	49
	55 to 64	9	7	29	0	20	17	16	3	48	49
	65 or more	10	8	32	0	13	23	13	0	61	72
Income	Up to £9620	9	11	21	0	16	16	21	6	49	57
	£9621 – £19500	14	7	22	0	20	21	16	2	62	71
	£19500 – £37700	6	11	44	0	12	19	7	1	54	54
	£38220 and over	19	0	32	0	11	21	15	3	48	42
Education	Degree or higher	0	18	22	0	7	12	41		20	20
	Below degree	14	7	28	*	16	18	15	2	171	176
	No qualifications	17	3	26	0	18	22	12	2	67	80
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	10	0	44	1	9	14	20	2	68	73
	Intermediate occupations	14	14	14	0	20	21	12	4	62	64
	Routine and manual occupations	15	7	24	0	16	20	17	2	120	129
	Not classifiable	24	0	11	0	30	21	13	0	9	10
Interest in politics	A great deal	17	0	30	0	18	9	26	0	18	19
	Quite a lot	6	4	26	1	24	27	7	4	48	50
	Some	15	7	34	0	14	19	10	1	74	81
	Not much	10	7	18	0	11	18	33	2	62	66
	None at all	21	10	25	0	16	15	10	3	58	60
Importance of statistics in decisions	Very important	18	3	20	0	15	28	16	0	46	49
	Fairly important	16	10	30	0	13	13	13	5	93	97
	Neither important nor unimportant	6	10	33	0	15	16	20	0	53	60
	Very unimportant	13	1	24	0	23	19	19	0	45	44
	Fairly unimportant	18	0	18	3	12	29	19	0	20	23
Understanding of statistics	Very good	18	3	24	0	25	19	11	0	32	37
	Fairly good	10	7	26	0	18	19	17	3	138	147
	Fairly bad	17	7	32	1	10	15	17	1	67	71
	Very bad	14	7	18	0	3	34	20	4	19	18
Interest in statistics	A great deal	24	5	8	0	21	10	22	10	21	25
	Quite a lot	12	6	35	0	20	14	14	0	63	67
	Some	14	4	28	1	14	18	20	2	77	84
	Not much	10	12	27	0	12	22	14	2	64	69
	None at all	17	4	18	0	15	28	15	2	34	31
Total		14	7	27	*	16	19	16	2	259	276

Base: Adults aged 16+ giving low trust ratings (0-3) for population figures Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009

Main reason for trusting population figures

		Personal experience	heard /read something good	figures easy to count	ONS does not have vested interest	Gov't does not have vested interest	Other	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	17	12	29	14	10	18	267	230
	Female	15	12	39	12	8	15	229	246
Age	16 to 24	14	16	34	13	7	17	84	40
	25 to 34	24	9	41	12	10	4	91	90
	35 to 44	11	14	27	14	12	21	99	102
	45 to 54	17	8	31	19	11	14	77	84
	55 to 64	19	4	40	9	9	19	63	66
	65 or more	12	17	29	10	7	24	82	94
Income	Up to £9620	18	16	32	11	8	14	116	97
	£9621 – £19500	13	14	25	11	10	27	76	84
	£19500 – £37700	12	13	39	15	4	17	100	96
	£38220 and over	16	5	38	13	13	14	144	136
Education	Degree or higher	14	6	37	17	13	13	130	127
	Below degree	18	12	32	11	9	18	286	266
	No qualifications	11	21	30	12	7	18	79	82
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	15	10	38	15	9	14	191	195
	Intermediate occupations	14	11	35	10	11	19	95	98
	Routine and manual occupations	16	12	33	11	10	18	166	153
	Not classifiable	22	22	13	20	6	16	44	30
Interest in politics	A great deal	14	8	35	10	13	21	38	36
	Quite a lot	11	15	31	22	7	14	94	93
	Some	18	11	34	9	12	16	199	187
	Not much	14	12	33	13	7	20	110	113
	None at all	22	15	34	15	5	10	56	47
Importance of statistics in decisions	Very important	18	16	31	8	11	17	134	121
	Fairly important	16	10	33	15	7	18	263	254
	Neither important nor unimportant	13	9	37	20	7	13	54	60
	Very unimportant	16	16	41	9	13	5	32	28
	Fairly unimportant	0	12	18	0	50	19	9	8
Understanding of statistics	Very good	18	13	24	11	13	21	40	43
	Fairly good	16	12	32	13	10	16	365	338
	Fairly bad	9	15	45	15	3	13	78	79
	Very bad	51	0	30	0	0	19	10	12
Interest in statistics	A great deal	14	18	23	15	11	20	23	24
	Quite a lot	14	19	27	10	8	21	139	134
	Some	15	11	34	15	9	16	228	218
	Not much	22	4	37	14	12	11	89	86
	None at all	15	0	64	7	10	5	18	14
Total		16	12	33	13	9	16	496	476

Base: Adults aged 16+ giving high trust ratings (7-10) for population figures Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009

Level of trust in unemployment figures

		mean	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	It depends	Not heard of	Don't Know	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		n	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	5.03	8	3	6	9	11	17	11	13	10	5	3	1	1	5	652	591
	Female	5.36	4	2	7	8	9	18	11	13	13	4	3	1	*	7	681	742
Age	16 to 24	6.35	1	2	3	3	6	15	17	12	17	6	6	0	1	12	200	96
	25 to 34	5.61	3	3	4	8	5	19	14	16	14	5	2	1	1	5	213	225
	35 to 44	5.04	8	2	7	9	12	13	8	19	11	4	2	0	*	3	247	265
	45 to 54	4.67	8	3	7	12	12	19	10	11	7	4	1	1	*	4	220	242
	55 to 64	4.50	7	4	11	11	15	17	12	6	9	3	2	2	0	2	197	206
	65 or more	5.14	6	3	7	7	10	19	8	11	11	4	4	3	0	8	256	299
Income	Up to £9620	5.67	4	2	5	7	7	15	14	11	11	5	7	*	1	9	301	290
	£9621 – £19500	4.88	9	3	9	8	9	15	9	10	15	4	1	2	1	4	277	298
	£19500 – £37700	5.14	3	4	7	9	11	20	10	14	13	1	2	1	0	4	272	268
	£38220 and over	5.29	7	1	6	8	12	17	10	19	10	7	1	0	0	2	274	257
Education	Degree or higher	5.69	5	4	1	5	7	15	16	24	10	6	1	1	0	4	235	235
	Below degree	5.19	5	2	7	9	11	18	11	11	12	5	3	1	*	5	784	749
	No qualifications	4.80	9	2	9	10	10	17	8	7	10	3	5	2	1	8	313	348
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	5.28	6	3	5	8	10	18	12	17	11	4	2	1	0	3	427	442
	Intermediate occupations	5.05	6	3	7	8	13	16	13	9	14	5	1	1	0	3	273	278
	Routine and manual occupations	5.04	6	2	8	9	10	18	9	10	11	4	4	1	1	7	531	534
	Not classifiable	6.05	2	1	7	4	3	14	12	18	10	8	5	0	*	16	102	79
Interest in politics	A great deal	5.10	12	8	3	6	7	11	13	15	9	4	9	0	0	2	75	74
	Quite a lot	5.00	7	3	6	10	10	16	11	12	11	5	1	2	*	4	234	239
	Some	5.17	3	2	6	10	13	19	11	14	10	4	1	1	0	4	457	454
	Not much	5.40	5	2	7	8	8	16	12	11	15	5	3	1	0	7	330	340
	None at all	5.17	8	2	8	5	7	19	9	12	9	4	5	*	2	9	237	226
Importance of statistics in decisions	Very important	5.62	4	3	8	8	6	18	13	9	15	9	5	1	0	2	295	287
	Fairly important	5.64	3	1	4	8	10	16	13	17	14	4	3	1	*	6	629	624
	Neither important nor unimportant	4.73	4	3	10	9	13	23	7	11	6	4	2	2	0	8	211	225
	Very unimportant	3.53	15	7	10	13	13	17	8	7	3	1	0	1	*	5	132	126
	Fairly unimportant	2.87	28	12	6	8	8	13	7	6	5	0	0	2	5		46	47
Under-standing of statistics	Very good	4.38	15	6	3	18	5	9	13	7	12	4	3	2	0	2	101	107
	Fairly good	5.38	5	2	6	7	10	18	10	16	13	5	3	1	*	4	858	847
	Fairly bad	4.96	5	2	9	11	12	16	14	7	9	5	3	*	*	6	274	282
	Very bad	4.95	7	2	9	5	4	26	8	8	7	4	4	0	3	12	80	79
Interest in statistics	A great deal	4.54	15	9	4	4	10	20	7	4	16	5	3	1	0	3	69	74
	Quite a lot	5.17	6	2	7	11	9	18	12	11	12	6	2	1	0	4	312	315
	Some	5.58	4	2	5	6	11	16	11	18	13	5	3	1	0	4	565	564
	Not much	4.90	5	3	9	11	12	17	12	9	9	3	3	1	*	6	274	280
	None at all	4.23	11	3	14	8	2	16	7	6	3	4	4	2	3	17	108	97
Total		5.19	6	3	7	8	10	17	11	13	11	5	3	1	*	6	1,333	1,333

Base: Adults aged 16+ Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009
Base sizes for means exclude those who said 'It depends' and 'Don't Know'

Main reason for distrusting unemployment figures

		Personal experience	heard /read something bad	figures difficult to count	ONS has vested interest	Gov't has vested interest	Figures misrepresented by media/ politicians	Figures don't tell whole story	Other	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	19	3	8	1	31	23	12	2	165	158
	Female	26	3	10	3	21	22	11	3	142	169
Age	16 to 24	37	0	6	0	33	5	15	5	16	9
	25 to 34	23	6	8	0	30	23	11	0	39	40
	35 to 44	21	2	15	3	22	23	13	2	65	72
	45 to 54	31	2	6	0	22	31	6	2	65	72
	55 to 64	17	5	8	5	34	18	12	0	65	66
	65 or more	16	2	9	2	24	24	17	5	57	68
Income	Up to £9620	29	0	9	2	36	12	12	1	57	68
	£9621 – £19500	27	4	9	0	26	22	7	4	80	90
	£19500 – £37700	20	4	8	7	14	27	20	1	63	61
	£38220 and over	20	2	14	0	29	27	7	1	58	53
Education	Degree or higher	8	5	12	0	35	23	13	4	34	39
	Below degree	23	3	9	2	26	23	14	1	181	188
	No qualifications	27	3	9	3	25	23	8	3	92	100
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	14	3	14		32	21	13	3	92	100
	Intermediate occupations	26	2	7		23	28	14	0	65	69
	Routine and manual occupations	26	4	8	3	25	22	10	2	136	143
	Not classifiable	22	0	0	13	21	19	16	9	15	15
Interest in politics	A great deal	19	4	3	0	49	19	6	0	22	23
	Quite a lot	8	2	15	1	20	27	23	4	61	66
	Some	22	6	12	4	30	17	8	2	98	104
	Not much	24	1	7	2	23	27	15	2	72	76
	None at all	39	0	5	1	22	24	6	2	55	58
Importance of statistics in decisions	Very important	26	6	4	3	15	37	7	3	66	70
	Fairly important	24	3	12	1	28	18	14	1	100	109
	Neither important nor unimportant	12	1	10	2	32	16	22	4	54	63
	Very unimportant	22	2	9	4	35	17	9	2	60	56
	Fairly unimportant	31	0	13	0	16	36	4	0	25	25
Under-standing of statistics	Very good	23	1	7	0	41	17	7	3	42	45
	Fairly good	17	3	10	2	29	25	13	1	172	183
	Fairly bad	34	3	8	4	17	20	13	1	73	78
	Very bad	23	2	14	3	9	30	7	11	19	19
Interest in statistics	A great deal	37	5	11	3	22	19	0	3	21	25
	Quite a lot	20	2	7	3	28	24	15	2	78	82
	Some	20	4	10	0	28	16	20	3	97	105
	Not much	16	0	11	4	32	28	8	1	73	79
	None at all	39	8	9	1	10	29	0	3	38	36
Total		22	3	9	2	26	23	12	2	307	327

Base: Adults aged 16+ giving low trust ratings (0-3) for unemployment figures Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009

Main reason for trusting unemployment figures

		Personal experience	heard /read something good	figures easy to count	ONS does not have vested interest	Gov't does not have vested interest	Other	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	24	14	29	8	4	21	191	173
	Female	24	21	23	11	3	19	214	220
Age	16 to 24	40	26	15	10	0	9	77	36
	25 to 34	21	9	36	8	4	22	75	81
	35 to 44	19	14	24	13	3	27	87	88
	45 to 54	23	12	28	9	10	18	52	60
	55 to 64	20	11	34	12	4	18	38	38
	65 or more	19	28	23	5	2	23	75	90
Income	Up to £9620	40	20	18	6	2	14	100	84
	£9621 – £19500	16	28	32	7	4	13	81	85
	£19500 – £37700	18	14	21	17	3	27	80	86
	£38220 and over	18	9	31	8	5	29	102	94
Education	Degree or higher	17	8	26	17	4	29	96	94
	Below degree	25	19	28	8	2	17	237	218
	No qualifications	30	26	17	5	6	16	72	81
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	18	13	29	11	2	27	146	140
	Intermediate occupations	18	19	31	9	6	17	78	83
	Routine and manual occupations	29	23	22	7	3	17	141	143
	Not classifiable	39	10	19	16	4	11	40	27
Interest in politics	A great deal	26	4	41	10	0	19	28	23
	Quite a lot	17	6	24	14	8	30	67	66
	Some	23	16	28	9	4	20	132	137
	Not much	27	25	22	4	2	21	108	106
	None at all	27	25	23	15	1	9	70	61
Importance of statistics in decisions	Very important	26	15	27	7	4	21	107	103
	Fairly important	22	18	23	11	3	21	228	217
	Neither important nor unimportant	33	11	31	10	2	14	46	48
	Very unimportant	16	25	31	5	8	15	14	15
	Fairly unimportant	0	36	48	0	0	16	5	5
Understanding of statistics	Very good	22	4	34	16	0	24	26	28
	Fairly good	23	16	28	8	4	20	294	279
	Fairly bad	19	35	13	13	4	15	64	68
	Very bad	50	2	23	10	0	15	17	14
Interest in statistics	A great deal	36	20	24	3	4	11	19	17
	Quite a lot	26	15	31	7	2	18	96	102
	Some	24	18	23	12	3	20	210	199
	Not much	12	21	24	9	6	29	62	60
	None at all	38	10	35	10	0	7	18	15
Total		24	17	26	10	3	20	405	393

Base: Adults aged 16+ giving high trust ratings (7-10) for unemployment figures Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009

Agreement that official statistics are accurate									
		Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	2	32	25	32	9	1	650	590
	Female	1	30	27	33	8	2	681	742
Age	16 to 24	1	44	19	30	3	3	200	96
	25 to 34	2	33	29	31	5	*	211	224
	35 to 44	*	30	31	31	7	1	247	265
	45 to 54	2	30	26	30	12	*	220	242
	55 to 64	2	22	27	36	13	1	197	206
	65 or more	2	27	25	36	9	2	256	299
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	1	37	24	29	8	*	427	442
	Intermediate occupations	2	23	33	33	10	1	273	278
	Routine and manual occupations	1	28	25	35	9	2	530	533
	Not classifiable	2	38	26	28	2	4	102	79
Income	Up to £9620	1	37	22	29	8	2	301	290
	£9621 – £19500	1	24	26	37	10	2	276	297
	£19500 – £37700	1	31	26	34	8	1	272	268
	£38220 and over	1	36	27	30	5	0	274	257
Education	Degree or higher	3	41	28	23	4	0	235	235
	Below degree	1	31	24	34	8	1	783	748
	No qualifications	1	22	30	34	11	3	313	348
Total		1	31	26	32	8	1	1,332	1,332
Base: Adults aged 16+ Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009									

Reason for disagreeing that official figures are generally accurate

		Figures manipulated for political purposes	Figures misrepresented by media/ politicians	Figures contradicted by media/ politicians	Don't trust from personal experience	Figures difficult to count	Figures don't tell whole story	Other	Don't under-stand figures	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	57	42	19	13	17	17	3	2	260	243
	Female	48	40	18	17	15	18	3	*	272	314
Age	16 to 24	38	29	11	17	19	4	6	2	63	32
	25 to 34	54	45	23	17	22	31		4	76	78
	35 to 44	54	45	18	19	16	22	2	0	92	104
	45 to 54	56	50	12	18	13	17	5	0	93	104
	55 to 64	60	37	26	8	14	14	1	1	94	101
	65 or more	48	38	20	12	13	14	3	1	114	138
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	55	51	21	11	15	22	3	0	160	173
	Intermediate occupations	55	39	22	15	21	17	1	1	113	122
	Routine and manual occupations	51	37	16	17	15	16	2	1	229	237
	Not classifiable	37	26	15	18	4		12	10	30	25
Income	Up to £9620	42	36	12	18	16	15	5	3	109	116
	£9621 – £19500	52	38	22	12	14	14	3	0	128	145
	£19500 – £37700	61	40	21	17	21	14	1	2	112	110
	£38220 and over	62	48	22	12	15	29	2	0	96	91
Education	Degree or higher	55	45	13	7	24	26	1	0	64	69
	Below degree	54	42	21	16	16	19	3	1	330	324
	No qualifications	48	37	16	15	11	9	2	2	138	164
Total		52	41	19	15	16	17	3	1	532	557

Base: Adults aged 16+ who disagree that official figures are generally accurate Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009

Agreement that official figures are produced without political interference									
		Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	1	17	18	40	21	2	650	590
	Female	1	14	25	39	17	4	681	742
Age	16 to 24	3	20	24	27	17	9	200	96
	25 to 34	2	14	24	36	24	*	211	224
	35 to 44	*	13	20	47	17	3	247	265
	45 to 54	2	16	21	38	20	1	220	242
	55 to 64	2	10	19	44	25	1	197	206
	65 or more	*	18	23	41	15	3	256	299
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	2	16	17	42	21	1	427	442
	Intermediate occupations	1	17	22	41	19	1	273	278
	Routine and manual occupations	1	15	24	37	19	5	530	533
	Not classifiable	1	11	29	35	17	7	102	79
Income	Up to £9620	3	16	22	36	17	6	301	290
	£9621 – £19500	*	15	22	37	22	4	276	297
	£19500 – £37700	*	17	24	37	22	*	272	268
	£38220 and over	1	17	18	45	18	1	274	257
Education	Degree or higher	3	17	17	42	20	1	235	235
	Below degree	1	15	23	39	19	2	783	748
	No qualifications	*	14	23	38	19	6	313	348
Total		1	15	22	39	19	3	1,332	1,332
Base: Adults aged 16+ Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009									

Agreement that the Government present official figures honestly									
		Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	1	13	25	40	20	1	650	590
	Female	1	14	24	42	18	2	681	742
Age	16 to 24	2	20	31	31	9	7	200	96
	25 to 34	1	15	24	41	19	0	211	224
	35 to 44	0	13	22	45	18	1	247	265
	45 to 54	1	8	29	38	24	0	220	242
	55 to 64	*	11	21	42	25	0	197	206
	65 or more	1	13	20	47	19	*	256	299
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	0	14	23	43	19	*	427	442
	Intermediate occupations	1	12	23	42	23	0	273	278
	Routine and manual occupations	2	14	24	39	20	2	530	533
	Not classifiable	1	12	38	39	8	4	102	79
Income	Up to £9620	2	13	29	35	17	4	301	290
	£9621 – £19500	*	18	19	41	21	1	276	297
	£19500 – £37700	*	14	25	43	18	0	272	268
	£38220 and over	0	12	24	44	20	0	274	257
Education	Degree or higher	1	13	23	43	19	0	235	235
	Below degree	1	13	26	40	18	2	783	748
	No qualifications	1	13	22	42	21	1	313	348
Total		1	13	25	41	19	1	1,332	1,332
Base: Adults aged 16+ Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009									

Agreement that newspapers present official figures honestly

		Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't Know	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	*	15	24	42	17	1	650	590
	Female	1	11	25	45	17	1	681	742
Age	16 to 24	3	9	28	44	13	2	200	96
	25 to 34	*	10	24	48	18	0	211	224
	35 to 44	*	12	24	46	17	1	247	265
	45 to 54	0	14	26	40	18	1	220	242
	55 to 64	0	14	20	45	20	1	197	206
	65 or more	1	17	26	38	17	1	256	299
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	1	15	22	42	20	1	427	442
	Intermediate occupations	*	12	22	47	18	1	273	278
	Routine and manual occupations	1	13	26	43	16	1	530	533
	Not classifiable	1	4	39	42	12	2	102	79
Income	Up to £9620	3	11	26	41	18	1	301	290
	£9621 – £19500	*	13	25	40	19	2	276	297
	£19500 – £37700	0	16	24	49	11	0	272	268
	£38220 and over	0	12	21	47	19	0	274	257
Education	Degree or higher	*	12	30	42	15	*	235	235
	Below degree	1	13	22	43	19	1	783	748
	No qualifications	*	14	26	44	14	1	313	348
Total		1	13	25	43	17	1	1,332	1,332

Base: Adults aged 16+ Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009

Understanding of official statistics

		Very good	Fairly good	Fairly bad	Very Bad	Don't Know	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	11	69	15	5	1	650	590
	Female	5	60	26	7	2	681	742
Age	16 to 24	3	64	22	10	1	200	96
	25 to 34	7	68	20	5	*	211	224
	35 to 44	11	59	22	6	3	247	265
	45 to 54	12	65	17	5	1	220	242
	55 to 64	8	69	20	3	1	197	206
	65 or more	5	64	23	7	2	256	299
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	13	71	12	2	1	427	442
	Intermediate occupations	7	68	19	5	1	273	278
	Routine and manual occupations	4	59	27	9	1	530	533
	Not classifiable	4	56	24	13	4	102	79
Income	Up to £9620	5	60	23	10	2	301	290
	£9621 – £19500	7	61	24	8	*	276	297
	£19500 – £37700	5	68	23	4	0	272	268
	£38220 and over	14	73	10	2	0	274	257
Education	Degree or higher	15	75	7	1	1	235	235
	Below degree	6	66	21	5	1	783	748
	No qualifications	5	53	29	11	2	313	348
Total		8	64	21	6	1	1,332	1,332

Base: Adults aged 16+ Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009

Attention paid to in official statistics									
		A great deal	Quite a lot	Some	Not much	None at all	Don't Know	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		%	%	%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	5	28	40	20	8	0	650	590
	Female	5	19	45	21	8	1	681	742
Age	16 to 24	3	20	42	18	16	1	200	96
	25 to 34	4	23	46	22	4	0	211	224
	35 to 44	5	19	48	20	7	0	247	265
	45 to 54	5	22	45	20	8	0	220	242
	55 to 64	7	29	36	22	6	0	197	206
	65 or more	6	27	37	21	8	*	256	299
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	5	27	48	16	4	0	427	442
	Intermediate occupations	5	25	41	20	8	0	273	278
	Routine and manual occupations	6	19	40	24	10	0	530	533
	Not classifiable	2	25	32	24	13	4	102	79
Income	Up to £9620	4	21	44	19	11	1	301	290
	£9621 – £19500	9	23	35	24	10	0	276	297
	£19500 – £37700	4	20	46	22	7	0	272	268
	£38220 and over	4	29	48	16	3	0	274	257
Education	Degree or higher	6	21	50	19	4	0	235	235
	Below degree	4	25	43	19	8	*	783	748
	No qualifications	7	20	36	25	12	1	313	348
Total		5	23	42	21	8	*	1,332	1,332
Base: Adults aged 16+ Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009									

Whether Government ministers should be given early access to access to official statistics						
		Gov't ministers should be given early access	Gov't ministers should not be given early access	Don't Know	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	37	60	3	650	590
	Female	39	57	4	681	741
Age	16 to 24	33	57	10	200	96
	25 to 34	38	61	1	211	224
	35 to 44	42	56	2	247	265
	45 to 54	40	58	2	220	242
	55 to 64	37	61	1	197	206
	65 or more	37	59	4	255	298
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	53	46	1	427	442
	Intermediate occupations	34	64	2	273	278
	Routine and manual occupations	29	67	4	529	532
	Not classifiable	34	55	11	102	79
Income	Up to £9620	34	59	7	300	289
	£9621 – £19500	25	72	3	276	297
	£19500 – £37700	44	55	1	272	268
	£38220 and over	49	51	0	274	257
Education	Degree or higher	61	39	*	235	235
	Below degree	36	61	3	783	748
	No qualifications	27	68	5	312	347
Total		38	59	3	1,331	1,331
Base: Adults aged 16+ Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009						

Whether length of time ministers see official figures for is the right amount of time							
		About right	Shorter	Longer	Don't Know	Weighted base	Unweighted base
		%	%	%	%	*n*	*n*
Sex	Male	63	12	22	4	243	237
	Female	67	11	19	3	264	282
Age	16 to 24	53	30	17	0	66	31
	25 to 34	70	12	15	4	81	88
	35 to 44	69	10	19	1	103	110
	45 to 54	65	11	21	4	89	95
	55 to 64	62	4	30	3	73	76
	65 or more	68	4	21	7	95	119
NS-SEC	Managerial and professional occupations	69	7	20	4	225	227
	Intermediate occupations	67	12	18	4	93	97
	Routine and manual occupations	61	15	23	2	155	165
	Not classifiable	57	21	18	4	34	30
Income	Up to £9620	63	12	21	3	102	104
	£9621 – £19500	64	14	16	6	70	86
	£19500 – £37700	64	13	21	2	119	120
	£38220 and over	70	6	20	3	135	124
Education	Degree or higher	61	17	18	4	143	137
	Below degree	69	9	19	3	280	276
	No qualifications	58	8	30	3	84	106
Total		65	11	20	3	507	519
Base: Adults aged 16+ Source: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009							

Appendix C: NatCen Omnibus Quarter 4 2009 Technical Summary

The NatCen Omnibus has been designed to carry questions for government, charities, academic institutions and other non-profit organisations interested in producing high-quality data on a range of social topics. It employs a stratified random probability sample and is conducted using computer assisted personal interviewing. This summary contains further details of the sample design and methods used to conduct the survey.

Sample

The sample was obtained using a multi-stage sampling design. First, 153 postcode sectors were selected from the small users Postcode Address File (PAF). All sectors in mainland Great Britain (England, Wales and Scotland), excluding the area of Scotland north of the Caledonian Canal were covered.

Prior to selection, the postcode sectors had been ordered by:

- GOR;
- percentage of households where the household reference person was in NS-SEC categories 1-2 with variable banding used to create three equal-sized strata per GOR; and
- ranking by percentage of homes that were owner-occupied.

The sample of 153 postcode sectors was systematically selected from this list, with probability proportional to size.

Next, either 20 addresses were sampled from the PAF from each selected postcode sector. This gave a total of 3,060 issued addresses, each selected with equal probability. A single adult (defined as anyone aged 16 or over) was then selected at random out of all adults residing at that address to take part in the survey.

Questionnaire development

All questions were reviewed by the research team and then developed in collaboration with the sponsor before being programmed. The survey program was tested by the research and operations teams. Checks were made to ensure the accuracy and sense of questionnaire wording and response options, as well as the accuracy of showcard references. Scenarios were tested to ensure that routing was correct and that respondents would not be asked inappropriate questions dependent on the circumstances. There were also checks for screen layout, spelling and the clarity of instructions to interviewers.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork began on Thursday 12th October and ended Sunday 28th November.

Interviews were carried out by NatCen interviewers using computer assisted personal interviewing techniques. Computer assisted interviewing improves data quality by including accurate routing to the relevant questions for a particular respondent and consistency checks on responses. All interviewers at NatCen receive extensive training in administering face-to-face surveys including training in converting refusals at each address and, once an interview has been secured, asking questions in a non-biased way.

Interviewers were also briefed on the project to inform them of the particular survey procedures and content of the questionnaire. New interviewers attended a briefing in person. More experienced interviewers received a home-briefing pack and were asked to complete an assignment to ensure they had taken the time to read their instructions and practice the questionnaire.

A letter was sent to each address in advance of the interviewer calling. The letter briefly described the purpose of the survey, the coverage of the questionnaire and reassured potential respondents that their answers would be treated in strict confidence. A £5 high street voucher was sent with every letter as an unconditional incentive to encourage participation in the survey. In this wave, a trial was conducted whereby half the sample received a £5 promissory note, redeemable on participating.

To improve response interviewers call at each address at least six times and up to a maximum of nine times, at different times of the day and at different times during the week. The first three calls must be made after 6pm Monday to Thursday or at the weekend when research has found that these are the optimum times for securing an interview. Interviewers recorded the time, date and outcome of all calls and checks were made by field management. Non-contacts were not accepted unless the pattern, as well as the number of calls conformed to the basic requirements that normally at least one call must be made at a weekend, and one on a weekday evening.

The average interview length was 27 minutes.

Response

Interviewer progress was recorded and monitored using NatCen's booking-in system.

The overall response rate was 48 per cent as shown in Table A1. The response rate is calculated as the number of achieved interviews as a percentage of the eligible sample.

Table A1: Response rate for Omnibus P2962 (Quarter 4 2009)

Outcome	*Number*	*%*	*%*
Issued addresses	3,060	100	
Ineligible addresses	277	9	
Eligible addresses	2,783	91	100
Non-contacts	150		5
Refusals	1,057		38
Other non-interview	164		6
Unknown eligibility (no contact)	62		2
Unknown eligibility (contact)	13		0
Productive interviews	1337*		48

* 4 interviews were subsequently deleted due to errors in selection

The response rate above is the lowest possible response rate, calculated by treating all cases where eligibility is unknown as eligible. The maximum response rate, calculated by treating all such cases as ineligible, would be 49%.

Coding and editing

Interviewer checks in the CAPI program allow interviewers to clarify and query any data discrepancies directly with the respondent. The CAPI program applies range and consistency error checks and both types of checks were used throughout the questionnaire. Where a check was triggered the interviewer often opened and recorded a note explaining the respondent's situation. These notes are recorded alongside the data and are reviewed by the project team in the operations department.

In-office coding and editing also took place on returned interviews. This involves a coder working through each interview in turn, using a modified version of the CAPI program. The coder reviewed all 'other' responses that had been entered to ensure that they couldn't be backcoded into any of the existing codes at that question.

In addition, there were open questions. The code frames used on this study were developed by the researchers from a listing of responses to the relevant questions from the first completed interviews.

In the course of the interview, where a respondent gave details of employment, this information was coded to the Standard Occupation classification – SOC (2000).

Weighting

The weighting for the Omnibus survey consisted of two components: selection weights to correct for individuals' differing probabilities of selection, and calibration weighting to adjust the weighted achieved sample to match population estimates.

Selection weights

Selection weights are calculated to correct for the unequal probability of selection. In England and Wales each address on the PAF was equally likely to be selected, so a selection weight for the addresses was not needed. However, we interviewed only one adult per address so individuals in multi-occupied and large households would be under-represented in the final sample if this was not taken into account. Individuals had been chosen by first choosing a dwelling unit out of all those in the address, and then choosing an adult at random from all those in the given dwelling unit. Thus, the correct selection weight is equal to the number of dwelling units at the chosen address multiplied by the number of adults identified at the dwelling unit.

A slightly different method was used for Scottish addresses, where the probability an address is chosen was proportional to the Multiple Occupancy Index (MOI). Here the correct selection weight is equal to the number of dwelling units at the chosen address multiplied by the number of adults identified at the dwelling unit divided by the MOI.

Calibration weights

The (weighted) achieved sample was then adjusted using calibration weighting so that the weighted distributions matched population totals. This reduces potential sample bias caused by any differential non-response between different groups and across regions. We calibrated to the marginal age/sex and GOR distribution, using the SAS macro CALMAR. In order to do this we needed to derive good estimates of the population size across region and age/sex group.

The study population

The study population used in the Omnibus survey consists of every adult resident in an address covered by the PAF. In order to calibrate to this we need to know the population totals broken down by age/sex and GOR. The population totals we used were taken from the mid-year 2006 population totals supplied by the ONS. The ONS totals refer to a slightly different population than the study population. For example, the study population excludes elderly people living in care homes (care homes are not included in the PAF) whereas the ONS estimated resident population of an area includes all people who usually live there. In order to obtain a good estimate for the population totals we subtracted the estimated number people living in care homes (based on 2005 estimates) from the ONS mid-year population estimates.

Age bands

The achieved sample size was 1,375 responses. With this size of sample, bands of ten-year intervals were deemed appropriate. As the Omnibus survey defines an adult to be anyone aged 16 or over, we used the age bands 16-24, 25-34, 35-44, …, 65-74, 75+.

The estimated population size is given in the tables below.

Table A2: Estimated mid-year 2008 household population size by GOR	
GOR	*Estimated population size*
North East	2,093,000
North West	5,521,000
Yorkshire and the Humber	4,202,000
East Midlands	3,582,000
West Midlands	4,316,000
East	4,595,000
London	6,104,000
South East	6,720,000
South West	4,237,000
Wales	2,414,000
Scotland	4,214,000
TOTAL	47,999,000

Table A3: Estimated mid-year 2008 household population size by age and sex		
Age group	*Estimated population size*	
	Male	Female
16 – 24	3,703,000	3,515,000
25 – 34	3,867,000	3,798,000
35 – 44	4,406,000	4,488,000
45 – 54	3,913,000	4,016,000
55 – 64	3,474,000	3,610,000
65 – 74	2,359,000	2,608,000
75 +	1,737,000	2,504,000
TOTAL	23,461,000	24,538,000

Final weights

The calibration weights were then scaled to give the final weight. We scaled so that the sum of the final weights equalled the achieved sample size [1]. These weights were checked for extreme values before being issued. A small number of large selection weights were trimmed. Trimming ensures that no individual has a disproportionately high influence on the survey estimates.

The weighting variable is called WT and should be used to run all analyses.

1 Other methods such as scaling so they sum to the population size are equally valid, but our method has the advantage that for any sub-group the size of the weighted base will be approximately equal to the size of the unweighted base.

Appendix D: Questionnaire

ASK ALL
Intro
We are interested in the sources of information you might use to form your opinions on current issues.
Press 1 and <Enter> to continue

ASK ALL
SRCOPN
SHOWCARD
Looking at this card, which of these sources do you mainly use to inform your opinions on current issues?
CODE UP TO THREE SOURCES.
SET [3] OF
Family or friends
School / College / Work
Newspapers
Television
Radio
The Internet
Other
None of these sources (Spontaneous only)

ASK ALL
POLINT
In general, how much interest do you have in politics. Would you say you have... READ OUT…
a great deal,
quite a lot,
some,
not much,
or none at all?

ASK ALL
Intro1
This next set of questions is about trust in society.
Press 1 and <Enter> to continue

ASK ALL
TRUST
In general, do you feel that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?
CODE ONE ONLY.
PROMPT WHERE NECESSARY.
Most people can be trusted
Can't be too careful in dealing with people
It depends on people / circumstances

ASK ALL
TRSTCIV
In general, on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely', how much do you trust...
…the Civil Service?
Code 95 for 'It depends' (spontaneous only).
Code 98 for 'Don't know / no opinion' (spontaneous only).
0…98

ASK IF IN WALES
TRSTWEL
(In general, on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely', how much do you trust...)
…The Welsh Assembly Government?
Answers as at TRSTCIV

ASK IF IN SCOTLAND
TRSTSCGV
(In general, on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely', how much do you trust...)
…the Scottish Government?
Answers as at TRSTCIV

ASK ALL
TRSTUKGV {M358_2E}
(In general, on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely', how much do you trust...)
…the UK Government?
Answers as at TRSTCIV

ASK ALL
TRSTPOL
(In general, on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely', how much do you trust...)
…the Police?
Answers as at TRSTCIV

ASK ALWAYS
TRSTCRT
(In general, on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely', how much do you trust...)
…the Courts?
Answers as at TRSTCIV

ASK ALL
TRSTNHS
(In general, on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely', how much do you trust...)
…the National Health Service?
Answers as at TRSTCIV

ASK ALL
Intro2
The rest of this set of questions is about official figures. By official figures I mean those produced by the government about the economy and the society we live in.
Press 1 and <Enter> to continue

ASK ALL
IMPDEC
SHOWCARD
Choosing your answer from this card, how important do you consider official statistics to be as a basis for decision making in society?
Very important
Fairly important
Neither important nor unimportant
Fairly unimportant
Very unimportant

THE FOLLOWING SET OF 4 QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED FOR EACH OF FIVE DIFFERENT OFFICIAL STATISTICS. THE ORDER IN WHICH EACH SET OF QUESTIONS (I.E. EACH SET OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS) IS TO BE RANDOMISED.

ASK ALL
TRSTRPI
The Office for National Statistics publishes official figures on changes in the cost of living, sometimes referred to as the rate of inflation.
On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely', how much do you trust that these figures give a true picture of what is happening to the cost of living?
Answers as at TRSTCIV but add:
97 Never heard of inflation figures (spontaneous only)

ASK IF TRSTRPI = 0 TO 10 OR 95
RPIRES
What are your main reasons for saying that?
RECORD UP TO 3 MAIN REASONS. PROBE WHERE NECESSARY
SET [3] OF
DISTRUST:
Don't trust figures, from personal experience
Heard / read something bad about the figures
Figures are difficult to count or measure; not always recorded; unclear or complex definitions
ONS has vested interest in results / manipulates production or collection
The Government has vested interest in the results / interferes in production or collection
The figures are misrepresented or spun by politicians or the media
Figures alone do not tell whole story / there is more to it than just the figures
TRUST:
Trust the figures, from personal experience
Heard / read something good about the figures
The figures are easy to count or measure; are always recorded; are based on clear definitions
ONS does not have vested interest in the results / does not manipulate production or collection
The Government does not have vested interest in the results / does not interfere in production
or collection
Other (please specify)
Don't understand figures or statistics

{INSERT SOFT CHECK IF 0 TO 2 CODED AT TRSTRPI AND TRUST REASON GIVEN AT RPIRES}
the respondent said they didn't trust the figures but you've selected an answer here which
indicates that they do trust the figures
{INSERT SOFT CHECK IF 8 TO 10 CODED AT TRSTRPI AND DISTRUST REASON GIVEN AT RPIRES}
the respondent said they do trust the figures but you've selected an answer here which
indicates that they don't trust the figures
INSERT CHECK IF CONTRADICTORY ANSWERS
You've chosen contradictory answers, please check

ASK IF Other IN RPIRES
RPIResO
Record other reason. Please recode to 1 to 12 at previous question, where possible.
STRING[250]

ASK IF MORE THAN ONE REASON GIVEN AT RPIRES
RPIRESM
And which of those is the most important reason?
IF NECESSARY, INFORM RESPONDENT OF THE CATEGORIES YOU RECORDED FOR THEIR PREVIOUS ANSWER, CONFIRM THAT THEY AGREE (OR CHANGE ACCORDINGLY), THEN ASK THEM TO CHOOSE WHICH REASON IS MOST IMPORTANT.
Answers as at RPIRES

ASK ALL
TRSTHOS
The ([England:]Department of Health/[Wales:]National Assembly for Wales/[Scotland:]NHS Scotland) publishes official figures about hospital waiting lists. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely', how much do you trust that these figures give a true picture of what is happening to hospital waiting lists?
Answers as at TRSTCIV but add:
97 Never heard of hospital waiting list figures (spontaneous only)

ASK IF TRSTHOS = 0 TO 10 OR 95
HOSRES
What are your main reasons for saying that?
RECORD UP TO 3 MAIN REASONS. PROBE WHERE NECESSARY
SET [3] OF
DISTRUST:
Don't trust figures, from personal experience
Heard / read something bad about the figures
Figures are difficult to count or measure; not always recorded; unclear or complex definitions
ONS has vested interest in results / manipulates production or collection
The Government has vested interest in the results / interferes in production or collection
The figures are misrepresented or spun by politicians or the media
Figures alone do not tell whole story / there is more to it than just the figures
TRUST:
Trust the figures, from personal experience
Heard / read something good about the figures
The figures are easy to count or measure; are always recorded; are based on clear definitions
ONS does not have vested interest in the results / does not manipulate

production or collection
The Government does not have vested interest in the results / does not interfere in production or collection
Other (please specify)
Don't understand figures or statistics

{INSERT SOFT CHECK IF 0 TO 2 CODED AT TRSTHOS AND TRUST REASON GIVEN AT HOSRES}
the respondent said they didn't trust the figures but you've selected an answer here which
indicates that they do trust the figures
{INSERT SOFT CHECK IF 8 TO 10 CODED AT TRSTHOS AND DISTRUST REASON GIVEN AT HOSRES}
the respondent said they do trust the figures but you've selected an answer here which
indicates that they don't trust the figures
INSERT CHECK IF CONTRADICTORY ANSWERS
You've chosen contradictory answers, please check
ASK IF Other IN HOSRES
HOSResO
Record other reason. Please recode to 1 to 12 at previous question, where possible.
STRING[250]

ASK IF MORE THAN ONE REASON GIVEN AT NHSRES
HOSRESM
And which of those is the most important reason?
IF NECESSARY, INFORM RESPONDENT OF THE CATEGORIES YOU RECORDED FOR THEIR PREVIOUS ANSWER, CONFIRM THAT THEY AGREE (OR CHANGE ACCORDINGLY), THEN ASK THEM TO CHOOSE WHICH REASON IS MOST IMPORTANT.
Answers as at NHSRES

ASK ALL
TRSTBRG
The (Home Office/Scottish Government – dependent text substitution) publishes official figures on domestic burglaries.
On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely', how much do you trust that these figures give a true picture of what is happening to the number of burglaries?
Answers as at TRSTCIV but add:
97 Never heard of domestic burglaries figures (spontaneous only)

ASK IF TRSTBRG = 0 TO 10 OR 95
BRGRES

What are your main reasons for saying that?
RECORD UP TO 3 MAIN REASONS. PROBE WHERE NECESSARY
SET [3] OF
DISTRUST:
Don't trust figures, from personal experience
Heard / read something bad about the figures
Figures are difficult to count or measure; not always recorded; unclear or complex definitions
ONS has vested interest in results / manipulates production or collection
The Government has vested interest in the results / interferes in production or collection
The figures are misrepresented or spun by politicians or the media
Figures alone do not tell whole story / there is more to it than just the figures
TRUST:
Trust the figures, from personal experience
Heard / read something good about the figures
The figures are easy to count or measure; are always recorded; are based on clear definitions
ONS does not have vested interest in the results / does not manipulate production or collection
The Government does not have vested interest in the results / does not interfere in production or collection
Other (please specify)
Don't understand figures or statistics

{INSERT SOFT CHECK IF 0 TO 2 CODED AT TRSTBRG AND TRUST REASON GIVEN AT BRGRES}
the respondent said they didn't trust the figures but you've selected an answer here which
indicates that they do trust the figures
{INSERT SOFT CHECK IF 8 TO 10 CODED AT TRSTBRG AND DISTRUST REASON GIVEN AT BRGRES}
the respondent said they do trust the figures but you've selected an answer here which
indicates that they don't trust the figures
INSERT CHECK IF CONTRADICTORY ANSWERS
You've chosen contradictory answers, please check

ASK IF Other IN BRGRES
BRGResO
Record other reason. Please recode to 1 to 12 at previous question, where possible.
STRING[250]

ASK IF MORE THAN ONE REASON GIVEN AT BRGRES
BRGSRESM
And which of those is the most important reason?
IF NECESSARY, INFORM RESPONDENT OF THE CATEGORIES YOU RECORDED FOR THEIR PREVIOUS ANSWER, CONFIRM THAT THEY AGREE (OR CHANGE ACCORDINGLY), THEN ASK THEM TO CHOOSE WHICH REASON IS MOST IMPORTANT.
Answers as at BRGRES

ASK ALL
TRSTPOP
The Office for National Statistics publishes official figures on the size of the population.
On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely', how much do you trust that these figures give a true picture of what is happening to the size of the population?
Answers as at TRSTCIV but add:
97 Never heard of population figures (spontaneous only)

ASK IF TRSTPOP = 0 TO 10 OR 95
POPRES
What are your main reasons for saying that?
RECORD UP TO 3 MAIN REASONS. PROBE WHERE NECESSARY
SET [3] OF
DISTRUST:
Don't trust figures, from personal experience
Heard / read something bad about the figures
Figures are difficult to count or measure; not always recorded; unclear or complex definitions
ONS has vested interest in results / manipulates production or collection
The Government has vested interest in the results / interferes in production or collection
The figures are misrepresented or spun by politicians or the media
Figures alone do not tell whole story / there is more to it than just the figures
TRUST:
Trust the figures, from personal experience
Heard / read something good about the figures
The figures are easy to count or measure; are always recorded; are based on clear definitions
ONS does not have vested interest in the results / does not manipulate production or collection
The Government does not have vested interest in the results / does not interfere in production or collection
Other (please specify)
Don't understand figures or statistics

{INSERT SOFT CHECK IF 0 TO 2 CODED AT TRSTPOP AND TRUST REASON GIVEN AT POPRES}
the respondent said they didn't trust the figures but you've selected an answer here which
indicates that they do trust the figures
{INSERT SOFT CHECK IF 8 TO 10 CODED AT TRSTPOP AND DISTRUST REASON GIVEN AT POPRES}
the respondent said they do trust the figures but you've selected an answer here which
indicates that they don't trust the figures
INSERT CHECK IF CONTRADICTORY ANSWERS
You've chosen contradictory answers, please check
ASK IF Other IN POPRES
POPResO
Record other reason. Please recode to 1 to 12 at previous question, where possible.
STRING[250]

ASK IF MORE THAN ONE REASON GIVEN AT POPRES
POPSRESM
And which of those is the most important reason?
IF NECESSARY, INFORM RESPONDENT OF THE CATEGORIES YOU RECORDED FOR THEIR PREVIOUS ANSWER, CONFIRM THAT THEY AGREE (OR CHANGE ACCORDINGLY), THEN ASK THEM TO CHOOSE WHICH REASON IS MOST IMPORTANT.
Answers as at POPRES

ASK ALL
TRSTUMP
The Office for National Statistics publishes official figures on the number of people unemployed.
On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is 'do not trust at all' and 10 is 'trust completely', how much do you trust that these figures give a true picture of what is happening with unemployment and peoples' jobs?
Answers as at TRSTCIV but add:
97 Never heard of unemployment figures (spontaneous only)

ASK IF TRSTUMP = 0 TO 10 OR 95
UMPRES
What are your main reasons for saying that?
RECORD UP TO 3 MAIN REASONS. PROBE WHERE NECESSARY
SET [3] OF
DISTRUST:
Don't trust figures, from personal experience
Heard / read something bad about the figures

Figures are difficult to count or measure; not always recorded; unclear or complex definitions
ONS has vested interest in results / manipulates production or collection
The Government has vested interest in the results / interferes in production or collection
The figures are misrepresented or spun by politicians or the media
Figures alone do not tell whole story / there is more to it than just the figures
TRUST:
Trust the figures, from personal experience
Heard / read something good about the figures
The figures are easy to count or measure; are always recorded; are based on clear definitions
ONS does not have vested interest in the results / does not manipulate production or collection
The Government does not have vested interest in the results / does not interfere in production or collection
Other (please specify)
Don't understand figures or statistics

{INSERT SOFT CHECK IF 0 TO 2 CODED AT TRSTUMP AND TRUST REASON GIVEN AT UMPRES}
the respondent said they didn't trust the figures but you've selected an answer here which
indicates that they do trust the figures
{INSERT SOFT CHECK IF 8 TO 10 CODED AT TRSTUMP AND DISTRUST REASON GIVEN AT UMPRES}
the respondent said they do trust the figures but you've selected an answer here which
indicates that they don't trust the figures
INSERT CHECK IF CONTRADICTORY ANSWERS
You've chosen contradictory answers, please check
ASK IF Other IN UMPRES
UMPResO
Record other reason. Please recode to 1 to 12 at previous question, where possible.
STRING[250]

ASK IF MORE THAN ONE REASON GIVEN AT UMPRES
UMPRESM
And which of those is the most important reason?
IF NECESSARY, INFORM RESPONDENT OF THE CATEGORIES YOU RECORDED FOR THEIR PREVIOUS ANSWER, CONFIRM THAT THEY AGREE (OR CHANGE ACCORDINGLY), THEN ASK THEM TO CHOOSE WHICH REASON IS MOST IMPORTANT.
Answers as at UMPRES

ASK ALL
Intro3
Now I'm going to read out several statements. Taking your answer from this card, please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.

So, firstly, how strongly do you agree or disagree that…

Press 1 and <Enter> to continue

ORDER OF STATEMENTS (ACCURAT TO NEWSHON) TO BE RANDOMISED.

ACCURAT
SHOWCARD
(how strongly do you agree or disagree that…)

…Official figures are generally accurate.
Strongly agree
Tend to agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Tend to disagree
Strongly disagree

ASK IF ACCURAT = TEND TO DISAGREE OR STRONGLY DISAGREE
ACCRES
May I just check, why do you disagree that official figures are generally accurate?
CODE ALL THAT APPLY
SET [7] OF
Figures are manipulated or adjusted for political purposes
Figures are misrepresented or spun by politicians or the media
Figures are contradicted or disputed by politicians, the media or other sources
Don't trust figures, from personal experience
Figures are difficult to count or measure/information is not always reported
Figures alone do not tell the whole story/there is more to it than just the figures
Other (please specify)
Don't understand figures or statistics

IF ACCRES=OTHER
ACCRESO
Please specify other
STRING[255]
ASK ALL
POLINTF
SHOWCARD
(how strongly do you agree or disagree that…)
Official figures are produced without political interference.

Strongly agree
Tend to agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Tend to disagree
Strongly disagree

GOVHON
SHOWCARD
(how strongly do you agree or disagree that…)
The Government presents official figures honestly when talking about its policies.
Strongly agree
Tend to agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Tend to disagree
Strongly disagree

NEWSHON
SHOWCARD
(how strongly do you agree or disagree that…)
Newspapers present official figures honestly.
Strongly agree
Tend to agree
Neither agree nor disagree
Tend to disagree
Strongly disagree

UNDSTAT
SHOWCARD
In general, how would you describe your understanding of official statistics when they are presented by the government or in the media?
Very good
Fairly good
Fairly bad
Very bad

STATINT
How much attention do you pay to official statistics, such as unemployment, crime, when they are published, would you say...
Running prompt
a great deal,
quite a lot,
some,
not much,
or none at all?

PreRel
SHOWCARD
And finally, Government ministers can be shown official statistics (the day before[in England]/five days before[in Scotland or Wales]) they are made public. Some say this is right because it gives ministers time to provide considered comment on the statistics when they are published, or to respond quickly to any questions. Other people disagree because they think it gives ministers a chance to influence how the statistics are presented to the public, or an unfair advantage over everyone else.

Looking at this card, what do you think…

Government ministers should be given early access to official statistics or,
Government ministers should not be given early access to official statistics?

IF PREREL=SHOULD BE GIVEN ACCESS
ACCTIME
Do you think that the amount of time that ministers have to see the figures before they are published is about right, or do you think it should be shorter, or longer?

About right
Shorter
Longer

Trends in User Needs[1]

Richard Laux and Richard Alldritt, UK Statistics Authority.

1. The changing nature of users and uses

1.1 From the time of the Domesday Book (compiled in England in 1086 to ensure the payment of taxes) through to the late 19th Century, the *users* of statistics tended to be people in positions of authority or influence. They often took it on themselves to collect as much statistical information as they thought they needed. Their needs were clear to them – whether it was to collect revenue or to bring about social change. In 2004, Len Cook, the then UK National Statistician, gave a lecture about the "extraordinary contribution to public life" of the Victorian statistical movement[2] and the important role played in this by the Royal Statistical Society.

1.2 Moving on to more recent times, the late twentieth century saw a massive expansion in the state's capacity to generate statistical data and a consequent, and progressive, focus among the producers of statistics on filling 'gaps' in the statistical tapestry.

1.3 Whilst this was indeed progress it can be argued that it led also to a loss of focus on what users of statistics really needed. If a subject could be identified on which statistics *might* be needed, the priority was to fill that gap regardless of whether doing so was driven by a balanced assessment of user requirements. The UK's decentralised statistical structure, with many separate funding streams and separate lines of accountability, undoubtedly contributed to this focus on production rather than service.

1.4 The growth in the supply of statistics also meant that the user was increasingly bombarded with statistical material from a multitude of sources. Where once there had been only one set of statistics on consumer prices, say, now there were more and more versions and variations. The statistical users of the 1980s and 1990s can have had little idea where some of the statistics came from; and the many producers of those statistics can have had little idea who

1 Paper presented at the 2008 Conference of the International Association for Official Statistics in Shanghai
2 http://www.statistics.gov.uk/events/annual_vc.asp

was using their products or for what. Whilst this observation is made in relation to the United Kingdom, which may have been at one extreme in terms of lack of central control, we suspect some elements of this picture may have been true in many countries.

1.5 As with any service industry, a loss of focus on the user prompts criticism and the more recent history, at least in the UK, has been about trying to re-connect the producer and the user of official statistics and help the producers respond more systematically and effectively to changing user priorities.

1.6 Even where official statistics had been well-focused on the needs of major users, these needs were starting to evolve more rapidly and are now changing much faster than twenty years ago. The UK's membership of the European Union progressively re-defined the requirement for broad areas of our official statistical production. Domestically, there was also a major shift towards using official statistics to measure progress against performance indicators for all public services. And statistics were increasingly relied on, whether performance indicators had been defined or not, to identify the need for, and justify, government intervention (in terms of policy or resources) targeted at particular social or geographical groups – for example, the need for central government to make repeated interventions in the management of the National Health Service.

1.7 At the same time as the importance of statistics to this sort of national decision-making was recognised, an increasingly wide range of other user requirements were also seen to be valid and important. From the early 1990s, the UK government formally recognised that official statistics are used, not just by government to make policy and run local services, but also by the general public in holding government to account; by the private sector in building an efficient economy and by the voluntary sector in providing much needed services. *All* of these uses constituted a public good.

1.8 Various reports pointed to the use of official figures by business, pressure groups, the voluntary sector, and the individual person, for decision-making purposes that included planning, marketing, resource allocation, monitoring, policy making, benchmarking, targeting, and many other processes that benefited the citizen directly or indirectly[3]. Among the wider uses of statistics there was growing recognition of their importance in evaluating and assessing the processes involved in implementing policy, providing a metric for the performance of government and public bodies, and for scientific, research and analytical work in many fields.

3 For examples, see Statistics Commission Report No. 33, The Use Made of Official Statistics – http://www.statscom.org.uk/C_1145.aspx

1.9 This very broad concept of the value of official statistics has now been formalised in the new UK Statistics and Registration Service Act, which talks about the obligation to produce official statistics that serve the 'public good'. This phrase embraces all the uses mentioned above.

1.10 There is a natural corollary to this focus on the public good. Official statisticians must now legitimise their role by demonstrating that they fulfil their part in the informal contract that governs their work – taxpayers support statisticians' activity and provide survey and administrative data; in return statisticians provide a service that is responsive to the needs of all parts of the society where there is benefit to the public.

2. The changing nature of society

2.1 The 19th Century saw fundamental change in almost every aspect of society which official statistics might be expected to measure. By way of examples, there were great changes in population and migration, international trade, national wealth, defence spending, construction, welfare investment, agricultural production, manufacturing, household income, crime, life expectancy and expectation of good health, education, borrowing, public investment, research and development, and the built environment.

2.2 Perhaps prompted by all this social upheaval, the foundations of the modern official statistics system were also laid in the 19th century. The statistical tools established at that time were designed to measure the substantial social and economic changes and many of these tools are still in use today. The UK's population estimates are still based on the system of registration of births and deaths established in 1836, and on census data obtained using the same basic methods as established in our first modern census of 1851.

2.3 The 21st century, so far, seems to have had a different dynamic to the 19th century. There is perhaps more social stability but some very important changes are happening nonetheless. Western nations have broadly stable population numbers, but with significant periods of economic migration and asylum seeking. Public sector expenditure hovers around 40 – 60% across Europe but there are significant relative changes in tax and spend through economic cycles. The UK economy is relatively stable (or at least has been), but with important relative changes in the role of the financial markets and other tertiary industries. Life expectancy growth has slowed, but there remain substantial differences in expectations of healthy life according to social class and place. Overall standards in education are reasonably stable, but substantial differences in schools' standards exist within small areas. National crime rates are stable, but policing and crime prevention are focussed on specific areas and

narrow sub-sections of the population where worrying extremes are found. New concerns – about climate change, the cost and availability of transport, the credit crunch, and the risk of pandemic disease, among many others, have perhaps not yet usurped more established social and economic anxieties (crime, incomes or housing costs) but are steadily rising in the public consciousness.

2.4 It can be argued that economic statistics have adapted reasonably well to the different dynamics of the current century although some might note that the service sector, particularly the global financial sector, is not yet well enough measured; or that the measurement of public sector productivity is not yet sufficiently developed. But taking a broad sweep, economic statistics are founded on indicators of trends, rather than absolute measures. The error in the measure of, say, foreign direct investment, is recognised by users as less important than the direction of travel of the indicator. And different countries have achieved a good measure of common practice with most having National Accounts founded on the SNA, and also having associated economic indicators of relative change in key features of the economy.

2.5 In retrospect, social statistics may be seen not to have adapted or developed as well. It may now be time to think in terms of developing a framework for Social Accounts with key social indicators, as a tool-set more adapted to measuring relative, not net, social changes. However, the test will be one of utility. We must not produce a social accounting framework because we can, or because we would find it interesting. It must be because steps in that direction are seen to serve the user; and through helping the user to serve the public good.

3. Quality of the statistics

3.1 As statistics have become more used and more influential, so the demands to improve their quality have increased. Improvements have been achieved in terms of relevance, coherence, timeliness, and accessibility.

Relevance

3.2 As noted above, the trend during the 20th Century has been a shift from producing whatever statistics could be collected (on a broad subject), to products tailored to specific user interests. At the same time, in both the national and European contexts, there is an inevitable tension between making statistics relevant to government users and making them relevant to other users – this is all the more acute in an era of limited resources available (from government) for the production of statistics.

3.3 Of course, many developments do meet the needs of a broad range of users. A recent example of this is the Neighbourhood Statistics System, designed to bring together a range of social and socio-economic data on different policy domains – education, health, welfare, crime etc – from a variety of sources. The intention was to provide an evidence base to inform decisions about policy interventions and resource allocation (under the generic heading of Neighbourhood Renewal), and also to provide the public with information to inform their own local (housing, schooling, voting) decisions.

3.4 And the UK's National Statistical Institute – the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – has established the UK Centre for the Measurement of Government Activity[4], to strengthen the capability of ONS to publish authoritative and coherent measures of change over time in the inputs, output and productivity of government funded services. Again, this serves the needs of both government and citizens.

Coherence

3.5 In recent years, users have demanded greater coherence in all aspects of official statistics – their planning, their collection and analysis, and their reporting. The official statistical community has initiated a number of innovations designed to improve coherence:

- collection: harmonisation of survey definitions and classifications; the new integrated household survey
- analysis and reporting: where a phenomenon is described by multiple sources, there are considerable opportunities to present rounded pictures of broad social and economic domains – ONS produces integrated labour market statistics publications, and integrated releases of migration and related statistics, for example

3.6 However it has made less progress on the development of coherent statistical planning, largely because of the decentralised and devolved organisation of statistics in the UK. Nevertheless this is a priority area for the new UK Statistics Authority. It is picked up below.

4 http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/ukcemga/index.html

Timeliness

3.7 Economic competition has led to a demand for ever-quicker flows of information to support rapid decision-making. This has applied to economic statistics. To meet EU strategies there has been sustained effort to produce estimates of Principal European Economic Indicators[5] (PEEIs) more quickly, benchmarked against competitors such as the USA. More generally, new IT and survey processing systems have led to the quicker production of estimates as the demand for 'timeliness' has become ingrained. For example, estimates from the UK's Labour Force Survey were produced 15 weeks after the survey reference period in 1993; today they are produced after only 6 weeks.

Accessibility

3.8 Major improvements in the accessibility of statistics have resulted from developments in ICT. The growth of the internet in particular has enabled users of statistics to access statistics more efficiently and effectively than ever before.

4. The suitability of the statistical service

4.1 In UK public services the trend is increasingly one of tailoring public services (the provision of social benefits, health services and so on) to be convenient to the customer/user rather than simply providing the service in a way that is convenient for the provider – sometimes called citizen-centric service provision. As identified in section 1, in the world of official statistics a similar though perhaps less developed trend can also be seen. This has the potential to support us in legitimating our statistical activities by being seen to provide a statistical service that demonstrably serves the public good rather than (solely) the imperatives of the government of the day.

4.2 This has manifested itself in a number of ways; a few examples illustrate the point.

5 http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page?_pageid=1194,47773485,1194_47782287:1194_66724556&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL

4.3 *Trust and confidence* – the debate in the 1980s about the appropriateness of measures of the out-of-work claiming unemployment benefit (the 'claimant count') – as a measure of unemployment did lasting damage to the confidence of the public in the integrity of UK official statistics. The introduction of National Statistics in 2000, and a new Code of Practice in 2002 were important developments, though the most high profile stage in addressing questions of trust was the Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007), which introduced an independent organisation – the UK Statistics Authority – to replace the role of Ministers in the running of ONS and the strategic oversight of the statistical production and dissemination across government.

4.4 *Information* – In the UK, users are not so much demanding new data now as better access and advice. In a busy world in which people are bombarded with information of varying degrees of quality, users want objective and clear communication of the key messages in official statistics, and better access to statistical products including by exploiting new technologies.

4.5 *New products and new methods* – Where users *do* want new data, it is often a matter of wanting the same *type* of information as before but smaller geographies, or longer time series, or more reliable estimates. And the growing diversity of user needs, especially from the research sector, has led to a demand for bespoke products which ONS has not been able to meet directly. Instead ONS has facilitated others' analysis of its microdata, by increasing access to microdata. This has had spin-off benefits for producers too – for example, by producing bespoke research datasets to enable methodologists to improve their understanding of the characteristics of survey non-respondents, in order to improve survey taking and processing techniques.

5. Implications of these trends

Identifying and engaging with users

5.1 The statistical system needs to take more active steps to understand who its users (and potential users) are, if it is to understand the uses to which they want to put official statistics and more generally give users the opportunity to influence the way the system develops. Relationships need to be close enough for users to accept that there are limitations on what producers can achieve in a given time, and that prioritisation inevitably means that some needs are not met – but that prioritisation nonetheless takes account of the full range of user needs.

5.2 This is not easy. ONS has a good understanding of its users in central and local government, and strong links with the academic and research communities, and the business sector. And the links between ONS and the Statistics User Forum[6] – an umbrella organisation bringing together the existing sectoral user groups – provide an opportunity for users to influence the direction of official statistics.

5.3 However, it takes time and sustained effort to build an effective relationship with a broad community of users, and in an era of scarce resources it can be hard to convince budget holders that the investment is worthwhile given the intangible benefits that accrue. Nevertheless these arguments must be made because if producers lose contact with users they lose their support and without that support budget holders will be even less sympathetic to statistical investment.

5.4 The relationship between the business sector, and official statistics, is a case in point. Some business representatives consider surveys to be an administrative burden, and press for their reduction. Others, in contrast, regard the government's economic statistics as either directly important in running their own businesses, or indirectly recognise that their best interests are served by enabling the government to manage the economy informed by the statistics that result from the data they provide – and hence see survey completion as a price worth paying. Given the dependence on business surveys for the production of economic statistics it is vital that ONS engages with the business sector effectively[7].

5.5 The governance of an effective relationship with users is also difficult – issues include perceptions of the importance of different user communities, and the extent to which they are able to organise themselves effectively. It is all-too-easy for central government users to dominate the relationship with the NSI in a way that appears exclusive to other users.

5.6 The UK statistical community has addressed this primarily by working with representatives of the Statistics User Forum (SUF) to establish a Producers and Users Group (PUG). This provides an opportunity for users to discuss strategic developments in official statistics, and progress against users' priorities[8], with senior officials in ONS and from across the wider Government Statistical Service. PUG meets about three times a year and is still evolving, but it provides an infrastructure to ensure that (organised) users' views are heard.

6 http://www.rss.org.uk/main.asp?page=1391

7 Similar issues apply to the general public, who respond to Censuses and household surveys – the need to ensure that the benefits (ie the uses) of the information are explained to the providers

8 SUF priorities – http://www.rss.org.uk/main.asp?page=2699

5.7 Emphasising the importance of user focus, the chair of the UK Statistics Authority – Sir Michael Scholar – has talked about it being the Authority's role to encourage statistical planning with user engagement at its core, and about the need to engage with users in the Authority's scrutiny work, by establishing a systematic dialogue with the many user communities.

Disseminating statistics to meet the needs of users

5.8 It is well understood that users of official statistics place great emphasis on:

- ready access to statistics – requiring a well designed web presence
- descriptions of new statistical results that are clear, unambiguous, and objective – requiring standards for presentation, and a monitoring role
- rounded quality information – identifying the strengths and limitations of statistical series, written in ways that a wide range of users can understand, and including clear descriptions of the uses to which the statistics should (and should not) be put.
- understanding the environment in which the statistics are produced – requiring relevant Codes of Practice to be written in ways that users can readily understand, and ideally written with input from the user community.

5.9 The UK official statistics community has made a number of notable advances in its dissemination of statistics, including:

- a suite of re-designed websites which describe the UK Statistics Authority[9] and the ONS[10], and the new Publication Hub[11] (which acts as a single port-of-call for users wanting to access any statistical releases produced by any government department or agency; the commentary in these Releases will follow standards determined by the National Statistician)
- standards for the presentation of information about revisions in National Accounts First Releases – setting out when revisions are expected (and the rationale)[12]
- enhanced personalisation of statistics – the Personal Inflation Calculator[13], launched in 2007, enables individuals to approximate their own inflation rate based on their own spending patterns

9 http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/about-the-authority/index.html
10 http://www.statistics.gov.uk/default.asp
11 http://www.statistics.gov.uk/
12 http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/methodology_by_theme/revisions_policies/default.asp
13 http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pic/

- greatly enhanced visualisation of statistics – ONS has identified the need to bring statistical data to life by, for example, exploiting geographical information systems and producing dynamic population projections[14].

5.10 Another major improvement occurred at the time of the introduction of the National Statistics Code of Practice (in 2002). A policy of free access to headline statistics via the internet was adopted (with charging restricted to situations in which additional processing was required, or to cover the printing costs of reference volumes).

5.11 But whilst ONS has a good story to tell, it cannot afford to rest on its laurels. Users' needs will develop both spontaneously and in response to technological developments – such as the development of 'web 2.0' which is likely to lead to even greater use of (official) statistics as part of everyday discussion and decision-making.

Planning and prioritising

5.12 The absence of a coherent planning system across UK official statistics was mentioned earlier. In recent years ONS has published National Statistics Work Programmes[15], which have set out the scale of activity in both cross-cutting terms, and for individual themes, and this activity has typically been cross-government (that is to say, inter-agency). However, these plans have been in large part the aggregation of Departments' existing plans, brigaded together for the convenience of users.

5.13 The UK Statistics Authority is currently considering an approach to statistical planning characterised by elements of top-down planning (at a strategic level by the Authority) and bottom-up planning (by producers, in consultation with users), with the whole process 'moderated' by a committee of senior managers across the Government Statistical Service.

5.14 Of course there is some good practice already. For example, there is a "4 Nations Working Group" which ensures that statisticians who support the UK government (represented by ONS), and the Devolved Administrations in each of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, are aware of each others' plans and developments, so that harmonisation and comparability can be 'designed in' to statistical activities as far as possible[16].

14 http://www.statistics.gov.uk/populationestimates/svg_pyramid/default.htm

15 http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=9212

16 Analogous issues arise at the European level – see the discussion in the Opinion on the Statistical Programme of the European Commission for 2008, published by CEIES in October 2007.

5.15 And ONS has invested significant effort over the last year in developing its own Work Programme for 2008-12, which required considerable prioritisation. The objectives were to develop a prioritised list of outputs that would be relevant to stakeholders and provide value for money. The first step towards prioritisation was to identify the costs of outputs. This required a new costing method, mapping the costs of all the various dependencies across the organisation to the range of outputs, rather than the previous approach of allocating costs by organisational unit. Criteria were then developed to enable the scoring of outputs, with some weighting applied to certain criteria such as cost, benefits and known user needs. There then followed a multi-phased consultation exercise with all those with an interest in what ONS does and how it does it. ONS invited views on which of its products and services were most important, how they could be improved, which areas should (in their opinion) be given the highest priority for new investment, and on whether there were some areas where ONS could do less than it does now. ONS also welcomed views on innovative ways of funding its work. The results were then processed and a matrix of contributors, outputs and comments was compiled. This enabled decisions to be taken on producing a Work Programme reflecting an informed balance of priorities against available funding.

5.16 Finally, it is worth noting that ONS has actively chosen to extend its partnership working, not least as a response to its own resource limitations in terms of cash and expertise. So for example ONS works closely with academic experts[17] to help develop Samples of Anonymised Records (SARs) from the population censuses – using others' skills to help develop products that will benefit the research community, whilst ensuring that confidentiality is maintained.

Horizon scanning

5.17 To continue to provide relevant statistics, we need to know what users are likely to be interested in, preferably well before the demands emerge. Of course this is easier said than done, and it is hard to justify allocating scarce resources to topics which do not have a current user/sponsor. But it is important to look ahead, to ask what will be important in 10 years time, and how to consider the likely evidence base that will be needed. With this objective in mind the Statistics Authority has decided[18] as a priority to undertake research into both the arrangements for longer-term planning, and the issues currently on the horizon.

17 http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/sars/

18 http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/announcements/assessment-programme-and-authority-monitoring-reports.doc

5.18 ONS takes this type of activity seriously, recognising the need to be ahead of the game. The National Statistician has the rank of 'Permanent Secretary' (the highest level) in the UK Civil Service, and attends weekly meetings with her peers who lead policy ministries. This gives her a unique opportunity to hear about the issues that Government regards as future challenges for the country.

5.19 In addition, ONS conducts occasional horizon scanning exercises, as part of the UK public sector's wider activity[19]. And staff of the UK Statistics Authority are encouraged to engage in public debate about the future of statistics[20].

5.20 Finally, the European Statistical System (ESS) has established a high level Task Force (TF) charged with considering statistical challenges facing the ESS as a whole. This TF is considering, in discussion with a range of stakeholders, the future needs for statistics in major domains such as migration, labour market, and the economy, for example in recognition of the actual and potential implications of globalisation. The TF is also looking at methodological developments needed to meet these needs most effectively, whilst corresponding groups are considering resource and organisational issues. Staff of the Statistics Authority are closely involved with this activity, party as a contribution to the ESS but also with a weather eye on demands for statistics at the national level.

5.21 ONS is aware that there are gaps in the evidence base needed to inform the debate around pensions and pension reform. Filling these gaps will require research into some complex areas, such as the estimation of pension wealth, which will need to make use of expertise across the academic and government areas. ONS is exploring the idea for a virtual Wealth and Pensions Centre as a mechanism for taking forward a programme of work needed to provide the required evidence base. This approach would complement the establishment in 2007 of a Centre for Demography, the aims of which included improving estimates of migration, in response to strong user demands.

5.22 More generally, it is recognised that one of the most effective ways of preparing to meet future statistical needs is to ensure that producers have access to administrative data held across the public sector, and that they have suitable and flexible statistical infrastructures. The new Statistics Act should enable ONS to acquire administrative data held elsewhere, provided they can make convincing cases to Parliament about their needs. This is vitally important, although the climate of opinion in the UK about privacy may make it hard to convince Parliamentarians about the desirability of data sharing for statistical purposes.

19 http://www.foresight.gov.uk/Horizon%20Scanning%20Centre/index.asp

20 For example, "No islands: charting a course for UK official statistics" *(Richard Alldritt and Richard Laux*), Significance, March 2008.

5.23 In terms of a future statistical infrastructure, ONS is considering the linkage of 2011 Census data with administrative data in order to form the basis of a social statistics spine. This will need an organising framework, real access to data (political commitment), and investment in training and technology

6. Conclusions

6.1 Until the advent of advanced technology, users of statistics mostly just wanted statistics; and they would go out and collect the data themselves if they needed to. Now the world has changed: there has been an explosion in administrative data sources, and users often have access to more statistics than they can comprehend – and so they need help in navigating the sea of statistics of varying provenances that is available via the internet.

6.2 The role and culture of official statisticians has to change to match this changing requirement. Conducting sample surveys is no longer the primary activity, although we must not lose those skills. The first responsibility of an official statistician now must be to develop a deep understanding of all the statistical material relevant to a particular subject whether from official sources or not; be able to synthesise the data into the most useful estimates of particular quantities; and provide a trusted service – in the form of statistical products and advice – to a wide range of users.

6.3 Where there remains a mismatch between user needs (or anticipated needs) and the available statistical data, the statistician must look at a wide range of options for meeting the requirement. Traditional surveys remain an option but it may be more effective, and potentially less expensive, to adapt or develop the administrative sources managed by public services. But that often requires the close involvement of authorities that are not statistical authorities; and these people will have priorities other than the production of statistical information. So the planning of statistical services is becoming increasingly a matter for the whole of government rather than just the NSI.

6.4 Official statisticians are civil servants, and are used to discussing their statistics primarily with other civil servants who are familiar with operating in an environment in which different sources of information have different strengths and limitations. But this may well be less so for the wider user community – which puts the onus on official statisticians to understand that some users need practical, hands-on support in making informed use of statistics. In turn it will be important for the statistical community to skill itself and organise itself to meet this imperative.

6.5 It will also be increasingly important for the user community to organise itself in order both to lobby official statisticians, and to provide direct support itself to users. But the user community is becoming increasingly diverse and fragmented, with web2.0 concepts (such as wikis) proving irresistible. Some users want to be engaged with directly by the producers, and mechanisms to enable this are vital. But other users want to operate more passively, so producers have to be more imaginative in catering for their needs.

6.6 It is traditional to define a national statistical system in terms of the organisations responsible for production and for oversight/regulation. In the 21st Century we need to put the user at the heart of the statistical system – and then work through the implications for planning, production, dissemination, and adding value.

Annex C

Report from Ipsos Mori on interviews with opinion formers

Opinion formers' perceptions of official statistics
Qualitative research study conducted by Ipsos MORI for the UK Statistics Authority

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1. Introduction

Background

The UK Statistics Authority (UKSA) is an independent body operating at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament. It was established on 1 April 2008 by the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007.

The Authority's statutory objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. It is also required to promote and safeguard the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics, and ensure good practice in relation to official statistics. Examples of such statistics include population data, as well as data measuring GDP, and migration statistics.

The formation of the UKSA came about as a result of the Statistics and Registration Service Act of 2007, which called for the Statistics Commission to be replaced by a similar nondepartmental public body, but one not accountable to the Treasury. It was felt that this would help to enhance public trust in official statistics; something which was emphasized in Ipsos MORI's 2004 study for the Statistics Commission[1] on confidence and trust in official statistics.

Research aims and objectives

In September 2009, Ipsos MORI was commissioned by the UK Statistics Authority to conduct an extensive programme of research examining opinion formers' views of official statistics. This project was very similar in scope to that which we conducted in 2004 on behalf of the Statistics Commission in that we wished to ascertain levels of trust and confidence in official statistics among opinion formers. In addition, however, this project looked in close detail at opinion formers' views of the Authority – including feedback on its performance so far, and what it should prioritise for the future.

The detailed objectives for this project were as follows:

- An exploration of the ways in which participants use official statistics including: the types of statistics used; the reason and purpose of their use; and, the frequency with which they are used;

1 Trust in Official Statistics – Ipsos MORI January 2005

- An examination of the extent to which there is faith in statistics including: opinion formers' assessments of the integrity, impartiality and credibility of statistics; a discussion of the factors which can undermine this; and, views on pre-release access;
- The level of engagement that users have with the producers of official statistics, including both the ONS and the Authority including; barriers to engagement and how these could be overcome; and, strengthening engagement in the future; and,
- Views of the Authority's performance to date and the difference it has made including; suggestions of specific metrics by which the Authority's success could be measures; and, potential improvements it could make to its work and communications in the future.

Research design and sampling

Sixty in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted between 12th October and 1st December 2009. Interviews were conducted with senior opinion formers who use, and in some cases produce, official statistics.

The interviews with stakeholders were mostly conducted face-to-face where possible. A one-on-one approach works most effectively with the kind of senior audience we interviewed in this research. It allowed us to build a good rapport and get more out of the interview as participants were able to share their opinions more freely than they might in the presence of others.

However, some were carried out over the telephone – senior opinion formers, especially journalists, had a large number of other demands on their time so a telephone approach was sometimes the only means by which we could secure an interview. All interviews were structured by a discussion guide. This was developed in collaboration with the UKSA and is appended to this report.

The power and usefulness of this report is, to an extent, dependent on who we spoke to. To this end, we worked collaboratively with the Authority to generate a sample list from which we approached potential participants. Ipsos MORI initially provided the Authority with a list of names to contact. Subsequently, the Authority supplemented this with its own suggestions. In turn, certain participants of particular interest to the Authority due to their more frequent use of statistics or position within the statistics community were prioritised into an 'A-list' category. 24 of these 'A-list' interviews were conducted.

193 participants were selected in total, and an advance letter was sent out informing them of the research aims and objectives, and providing contact details should they be keen to take part, or be unwilling to do so. A copy of this letter is appended to the report.

The sixty opinion formers interviewed can be broken down into the following sub-groups:

Sector	Number of interviews
Think Tank/Academic	13
Whitehall	11
Business	7
Journalist	7
Regulator	6
Trade Unions/Industry Associations	4
Local Government	2
Scotland/Wales	2
Voluntary Sector	2
International	2
Police	2
Tourism	1
Parliamentarian	1
	60

Ideally, we would have liked to have included more parliamentarians in the sample. However the fieldwork period unfortunately coincided with parliamentary recess making recruitment difficult.

Interpretation of the findings

When discussing the findings presented in this report, it is important to consider what a qualitative approach is intended to provide. Qualitative research allows the attitudes and opinions of participants to be explored in detail, and provides an insight into the key reasons underlying their views. However, qualitative findings are *illustrative* and *indicative*, not statistically representative. Although the messages communicated within this report are based on common themes emerging across many of the interviews, it is not possible to quantify findings or suggest they reflect the attitudes of all participants. Furthermore, it is possible that some individuals may hold somewhat contradictory views – for example, we found that some stakeholders mentioned the Authority's independence from government as a key strength but also that the separation of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) from Whitehall may lead to some distrust. It is not unusual to unearth such seeming contradictions – 'cognitive dissonance' – in research of this kind.

Where possible, verbatim comments from the discussions have been included within this report. However, these comments should not be interpreted as defining the views of the discussions as a whole but have been selected to provide an insight into a particular body of opinion. Where there were key differences in opinion between the different sub-groups, then these have been highlighted in the report.

This study has been carried out by Ipsos MORI in compliance with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct.

Acknowledgments

Ipsos MORI would like to thank Cathy Kruger and the Authority project board for all their help and assistance in developing this project.

Finally, we would also like to thank all opinion formers for their hospitality and giving up their time to be interviewed, without whose input the research would not have been possible.

Suzanne Hall
Jerry Latter

2. Executive Summary

Views of official statistics

Generally, official statistics were viewed positively. This was because they provide an evidence base, and are also useful in holding both politicians and government to account. In addition, participants described they allow others, include opposition parties, to lobby for change, and are emblematic of an honest and transparent system of governance. Participants perceived them as being freely available to all, and stated that they cover all sectors and areas of public interest.

However, participants felt that the public views statistics with suspicion and some felt that this was due to the increasing amount of data produced. It was felt that this could be helped by clearly distinguishing which statistics are 'official' and which ones are not. Another amendment that was supported was the inclusion of contextual information to accompany the statistics. This is especially true in this economic and political climate; with the country in recession, and trust in parliamentarians low, it was felt that there is an increasing need for statistics, but an increasing risk to them if they are not protected by statisticians.

There was positivity expressed towards the Office for National Statistics, and, as a result, the statistics that it produces were seen in a more favourable light. This was in contrast to those produced by Government departments, which were seen as being less adept at public and stakeholder relations when compared with the ONS. However, many were concerned about the effect that the relocation to Newport will have on the ONS, particularly as it was felt that its intellectual resources will suffer.

Though generally participants felt that statistics were produced to a high degree, some were concerned that not enough scrutiny was applied when collecting statistics, particularly in contentious areas of crime and migration. However, for others, there was **too much** emphasis on exactness, and this was often felt to be at the expense of flexibility; the point was raised that statisticians are often too conservative in their treatment of the numbers which causes time lags in their release.

There were also concerns about changes made to historical definitions during the collection of data; also, some felt that changes had not been made to ensure the data are reflective of today's society, meaning that time series data are incomparable. Consequently, it was thought there was a need for increased information and transparency around why any changes were necessary and the effects of these.

The use and treatment of statistics

While there was positivity towards the production of official statistics, there were concerns with the way in which statistics are treated by the media and politicians, the two key conduits of statistical information to the public.

The British media was believed to be uniquely negative, persistent in its treatment of news, and was not felt to take stories at face value. Some participants stated that this presents a danger to statistics as the media tends to search for the angle which allows them to report a release in a negative light, and often to sensationalise the story. On the other hand, others felt that the media has a difficult job in disseminating large and complex statistical releases and cannot be expected to fully understand them in the way that the producers do. However, the rise of new media and blogging, which allows unregulated content to be publicly shared, was believed to present an even greater danger to the ability of the public to get the correct and complete statistical picture.

Participants also felt that politicians are also guilty of selectively reporting statistics, often, in the case of the Government, in order to announce good news. However, they were also believed to be guilty of misrepresenting statistics – in particular not comparing 'like with like'. Treatment of longitudinal crime statistics was cited as an example of this. In line with this, there was, for others, the idea that, with the increasing amount of statistics in the public domain, politicians are guilty of finding a figure that supports their policy ideas, rather then deciding policy based on the evidence available to them.

Participants had a great deal to say on the subject of pre-release access; broadly, there was consensus that 24 hour access is the right length of time, but confusion for many around what level of access was currently available, who was entitled to it, and for how long. Some felt that it should be extended to cover senior stakeholders who might have a vested interest in the data and be approached for comment. Some journalists believed that politicians should have only a few hours' prior sight of statistics, as this is often the time period to which they are restricted.

User Engagement

Many felt that they had a good relationship with statistical producers, and particularly the ONS. Journalists in particular spoke of having established relationships with individual staff at the ONS, and reported being satisfied with this level of engagement.

In contrast though, other stakeholders stated that there needs to be a better approach to building relations with users. It was thought that this could be achieved by improving communications around both the statistics and the statistical context, and by ensuring that that the statisticians themselves communicate the 'story' behind the statistics they have produced, as this is often as important as the numbers themselves.

Participants were positive about the customer service that the ONS provides, though did report that there were problems when they had a general query or when the enquirer did not know the name of the statistician they needed to speak to. This resulted in them being passed round departments, and led to frustration.

Additionally, the relationship that users have with producers of statistics was described as being one-directional, with few having any experience of ONS roadshows or events. There was a feeling that such events need to be promoted better, and, for those that were critical of them, be more about a two-way dialogue between users and producers, rather than self-promotion.

There was overwhelming negativity towards the ONS website – chiefly this was centred around navigability; users knew that the information they needed was on the website but were frustrated at being unable to find it. Many had suggestions for either simplifying the key recent findings, or clearly signposting surveys that had generated media interest. The website was described as being, for many, the key touchpoint to the organisation, and its lack of usability prevents them from engaging fully with the ONS.

Views of the Authority

Knowledge of the Authority was closely related to frequency of use of statistics; more casual users, such as journalists, knew very little, and many only knew the name.

However, even amongst more frequent users, there was confusion about the Authoity on a number of key issues: what it stands for; how it is staffed; how it regulates; how it differs from the Statistics Commission; and, what its relationship to the ONS is. Some also questioned the Authority's relationship with producers of statistics, claiming that, at times, it was too one-sided, and resulted in them feeling scrutinised by the Authority without understanding enough about its remit. This, however, was not the case across the board and some stakeholders had a very good relationship with the Authority, often driven by good individual relationships and a history of positive feedback on their production.

Many felt that the Authority needs to be more visible, and there was support for Sir Michael Scholar's censure of politicians who misrepresent statistics. It was thought that this was precisely what the organisation needs to be doing, but there were concerns that this should not happen too frequently for fear of the impact being diluted, and the spotlight turning to the Authority itself.

Finally, there was a strong feeling that the Authority needs to disentangle itself from the ONS, as the independence of the latter might be compromised by the perceived lack of distance from the former – though many had misconceptions of the Authority based on confusion about the organisation. Indeed, the independence of the Authority was seen to be the key to its success in working to establish public trust in official statistics.

3. Views of official statistics

This chapter will cover opinion formers' general views of statistics, as well as how they believe the public perceive them. We will discuss their attitudes towards those that produce statistics, both within government departments and the ONS, and their thoughts on the methods of statistical collection.

General views of official statistics

One of the first things that participants noted was the general importance of statistics, and the role they serve the nation.

"They are the stepping stones in the flurrying waters of public debate"

Journalist

Discussions with participants started with an exploration of the nature of statistics; what they are used for, how useful they are, and who they are there to help, as well as their thoughts on the amount of statistics that are produced in the UK. Throughout the course of this discussion, it soon became obvious that there was a clear difference between how participants perceived the data itself, and their views on how the data are treated.

There was, across the board, positivity towards the statistics that are produced in the UK – this seemed to be the case with *all* statistical releases, but **official** statistics were seen as particularly commendable, because of the high standards that their producers uphold in terms of the scrutiny they apply to the collection methods, as well as the systems in place to check and verify the data.

Opinion formers spoke of how all types of statistics are used in many different areas of professional life. Their main purpose is as an evidence base – as well as measuring the 'temperature of the nation' they give weight to a particular argument or point of view and allow individuals or organisations to demonstrate that they have researched, and understood, the topic at hand.

Another key factor underpinning the importance of statistics was felt to be the collapse in trust of parliamentarians; more than ever it was seen to be important that independent statistics are produced which are not, at least at the production stage, subject to manipulation and political spin.

There was, however, some confusion (particularly amongst less frequent users) about exactly what official statistics are – how they are defined, and whether they form just a part of national statistics. This ties in with the 2004 research, which identified a need for the 'kitemarking' of official statistics – to demonstrate which are, in effect, more superior than others, and which statistics the Authority has oversight of.

Participants felt it was important that statistics are readily available to the public, and at no cost. It was seen to be the mark of a transparent and democratic system of government that statistical releases are free and accessible to all. Though many academic institutions require subscription fees or membership before their statistics can be accessed, it was welcomed that this is not the case with regard to officially-produced statistics, as it was believed that it is in the public interest that they can be freely accessed. The growth of the internet and the ability to communicate easily to a large audience in recent years was felt to have driven this change, and this was coupled with a perception of a drive in recent years to make government more accountable, and provide evidence bases for policy.

Whereas 25 years ago I'd say this is available in such and such publication, which if you subscribe to it or pay X pounds a volume you can get hold of. So it has become more of a free good than it used to be.

Whitehall

There was a strong sense though that statistics should always be accompanied by information about the context around the data. This was because it was thought that, often, the numbers alone are not enough to support an argument and, instead, they are more powerful when used in conjunction with an explanation.

"They are there to support arguments, but should not be a substitute for wisdom"

Regulator

Indeed, opinion formers mentioned that, on occasion, ONS made efforts to provide this kind of information. An example given of this was with regard to the recent inflation statistics whereby an accompanying note helped to communicate what had driven the change in the data and what this meant for the country as a whole.

"An example of something they did reasonably well was inflation. In the last month it was a little higher than many would have expected, and it was driven almost entirely by increases in petrol prices. Now, when you

add that rider, you…don't suddenly start to raise interest rates. So, I think understanding the context and communicating the context is not the same as just saying there's a number come out which is inflation has gone up."

Academic

In Westminster, statistics were believed to have a dual role. Opinion formers stated that they allow the government to justify policy changes, but also for opposition parties to hold the government, and its policies, to account. This was also felt to be true for NGOs, lobbyists, and other organisations with a specific agenda. Consequently, the independence of the statistics used was thought of as crucial for adding both balance and weight to the arguments presented.

"They should provide independent and authoritative measures. Politics is bedevilled with soundbites – it's absolutely vital that these numbers are outside that"

Voluntary Sector

When talking to participants about official statistics, we discussed a broad range of releases in various different sectors – from environmental to economic releases, as well as crime figures and trends around societal changes. Indeed, many participants held the view that there are statistics for all industries and in all areas of public debate.

This proliferation of statistics was seen to be a good thing, as they are viewed positively as important tools to inform the public and to aid policy debate and decision making. However, opinion formers thought that attention should be paid to ensure that their impact is not dampened. For example, opinion formers felt that were every news story to be accompanied by a statistic, this might lead to fatigue, and a more widely held suspicion that a statistic can be produced to support or oppose any argument.

"The increasing amount of statistics in the public domain mean that there is more to choose from and pull apart. There is an increasing demand for statistics and an increasing risk to statistics as a result of this"

Journalist

Indeed, some felt that that the political climate at the end of 2009 was germane to the production of as many statistics as possible. With the country in recession, it was believed to be necessary for statistics to show areas of economic deprivation in order to assess how things can be bettered. Additionally, it was felt that the Labour Government had increased the amount of performance targets since it came to power

which, in turn, had increased the amount of data being gathered and publicised.

Throughout, there was a clear correlation between the frequency of use of statistics, and positivity towards them. Heavy users, and producers of statistics, were more likely to be positive, compared with more intermittent users, such as journalists.

Perceptions of the public's views of official statistics

The opinion formers that we spoke to, despite having a broadly positive view of statistics, were concerned that this sentiment was not shared by the public. Many felt that this could be because the public does not always understand the complex nature of official statistics and nor are they always able to see how statistics are, perhaps, manipulated at times by those that communicate them.

"There are people who are themselves innumerate and of questionable ethics who prey on the innumeracy of others to implicate fear"

Regulator

Furthermore, the public's primary source of information about statistics was believed to be the media, who, it was thought, tend to selectively report statistics in the interests of generating attention-grabbing headlines. This, however, was thought to come at the expense of providing the full picture, for instance, by including sampling details and collection methods. Indeed, some stated that such information should be provided not only in the interests of transparency but, furthermore, as a tool for increasing the public's knowledge about statistics, how they are collected and how to interpret them.

"Any such figures should be accompanied with some qualification or statement about maybe confidence intervals, or other things about how it was collected. There's no reason not to try to educate the population…."

Regulator

When discussing how data are often presented without accompanying notes, the British Crime Survey was often mentioned as a good example of this. Opinion formers state how the media tends to not only look for the 'bad news' within the figures, but also seeks to criticise the methodology used to generate them. It was thought that this, in turn, will negatively effect the public's views on the information as a whole.

Furthermore, it was felt that the abundance of statistics in the public domain in recent years has meant that their impact has been diminished. This was believed to have been driven not only by the increased amount of data available but, in addition, the ease with which they can be accessed. However, it was thought that because of this proliferation of statistics, the public pay less attention to them as they are simply overloaded with data. This was thought to be a concern by some opinion formers as they believed that, given the current economic climate, there was a greater need for the public to engage with the relevant data.

"People don't understand them and are cynical about motives. They'll be subjected to an avalanche of information every day and I don't believe most of the public take a lot of notice of the unfolding narrative of any of these stats"

Academic

Many also felt that the lack of confidence in MPs due to the expenses crisis, and low government approval ratings in anticipation of the forthcoming general election were also detrimental to the public's opinion of official statistics[2]. There is a sense of 'guilt by association' – if the public perceives the statistics are government-produced then they lose interest, and confidence in them. This ties in with the need for the independence of official statistics to be stressed from the outset.

Views of the ONS and its outputs

The overwhelming majority of participants were positive about both the ONS 'brand' – its reputation amongst both the statistical and the wider business community – and the statistics it produces. It was believed to be rigorous, trustworthy, and well-staffed.

Many felt that the ONS is an internationally unique organisation and should be an archetype for other countries to aspire to. This was partly due to how long it, and the time series data it holds, have existed. It was felt (however incorrectly) that few countries have departments of comparable size dedicated solely to the production and storage of such a wealth of statistical information.

2 Ipsos MORI Political Monitor showed that only 16% of the public were satisfied with the Government's performance in June 2009 – the lowest in 13 years.

However, there were concerns about the relocation to Newport, due to a fear that the quality of staff may suffer due to a small pool of people who would be willing to relocate with the organisation. Additionally, it was believed that in the future it will be difficult to replace staff with those who have the requisite skills. For instance, it was thought that graduates will be more likely to want to live in London and less inclined to move to south Wales to work. This 'brain drain' was concerning, as it was felt that it would have an effect on the quality of the ONS' output.

Some felt that the geographical separation from Whitehall, as well as the practical consideration of making interaction with other government departments more difficult, was seen as a sign that the government was taking the ONS, and, by extension statistics as a whole, less seriously.

"I think that moving the ONS to a Newport will undoubtedly be read as, it's a second rate agency, it doesn't really matter. It's like DVLA, or these things which are just process. ONS is much more important to politics than that. It's one of the most important elements of a democratic society, particularly in one with such a contested political system, with, and, with a very powerful, questioning media, and therefore, having it located at a distance from the core of government, I think, sends out the wrong signal."

Academic

Interestingly, however, none of the participants made a link between the move to Newport and the impression that the ONS has more independence than it used to. As stated, this was a key factor in positivity towards it, but there was no sense, from participants, that the move has physically demonstrated this.

Views of government departments and their outputs

Many participants, in discussing official statistics, made a distinction between those produced by the ONS and those produced by government departments. Less frequent users tended to confuse the two sources.

Government departments were seen as much less independent, and often produced statistics specifically to further a particular policy agenda that a minister wishes to pursue.

"As somebody outside those bodies you tend to feel that they're producing the data for their own purposes, for their own department and the sorts of data they produce are very much geared to their own needs"

Whitehall

There was a sense that Whitehall departments are more secretive and much less transparent than the ONS about their methods of collection and sampling. Furthermore, it was believed that the ONS has more quality assurance processes in place, though there was not necessarily a feeling that departmentally produced statistics lack quality as a result. Indeed, though participants did not doubt that government departments scrutinise their statistical outputs closely, some felt that their statistics are more susceptible to being spun to tell a particular story from their incipience, and this makes it more difficult to trust them.

The Home Office, in particular, was seen to be one department that could do more to ensure the rigour of its outputs in the areas of immigration and crime, due to a lack of both public and professional trust in many of these figures. However, some were quick to defend the department, as these two areas of social statistics were cited as being particularly difficult areas on which to compile accurate data. Additionally, the level of scrutiny applied to migration statistics was such that it was felt that they are more likely to be correct then not. Given these mitigations, some opinion formers felt that the statistics available on these two policy areas were the best that they could be.

"If someone doesn't want to be found, they won't be…the statistics are good, they've been through hell and back and out the other side"

Whitehall

The British Crime Survey was also mentioned in relation to the collection methods used. Some felt that either it favoured some crimes above others, or was not equipped to deal with the changes in society, which have created new types of crime. This, in turn, was felt to affect the quality of the data it produces.

"The British Crime Survey, is very, very short of being comprehensive because it excludes certain categories of crime, which it doesn't recognise. And they tend to be the crimes that ordinary citizens these days, are exposed to, identity theft, shoplifting, identity fraud and things of that sort are not caught, even by this attitudinal survey. So, I don't think I'm alone in suspecting that the crime statistics are not really representative of what's really going on."

Regulator

However, participants from Whitehall departments that produce statistics, perhaps predictably, were positive about their outputs. They felt that, because they answer directly to a minister, additional pressure is placed on them *not* to make mistakes. They stated that this was because of the political impact that might befall a government minister were the statistics to be found lacking in any way.

Issues with the production of official statistics

Participants discussed at length issues associated with the production of official statistics and these are covered in detail throughout this section. It should be worth stating upfront however that, as already mentioned, on the whole participants were generally satisfied that official statistics are produced to a high standard, and in particular those produced by the ONS, which are given an unofficial kite-mark of quality by virtue of their source. There were felt to be sufficient checking mechanisms in place to prevent errors, with large teams at work in each department to ensure that mistakes do not pass unnoticed. Where mistakes are made, many felt reassured by the accompanying apologies and the speed of the explanation for the mistake.

"I personally trust them a great deal because I am part of the machine that produces them. The data is of high quality, mistakes are few and far between and rectified with a lot of breast beating."

Whitehall, Producer

Indeed, it is perhaps worth commenting that the most commonly cited mistake made was in relation to the 2001 Census. That opinion formers often could not think of a more up-to-date example than those in a survey conducted eight years ago does help to demonstrate the quality of the data under discussion. Furthermore, some recognised that mistakes happen because of human error yet were reassured that the actual processes in place were robust enough to ensure that such instances are kept to a minimum.

"I wouldn't say that they're perfect. And they make mistakes. And they may be high profile mistakes, like the Census and so on. But I don't doubt the integrity of the process, no"

Whitehall, Producer

Timeliness of the data

Indeed, for some, the level of probity that is applied to official statistics is sometimes at the expense of timeliness or the explanation that accompanies them. Looking at this issue in more detail, often, timeliness was felt to be key, even more than quality assurance, and this was particularly true with those in the private sector. This was because of the time pressure that some of the stakeholders we engaged with were under. Their ability to fulfil their role depended on being able to access statistics on time and according to the timetable that had been set for their release. Indeed, such stakeholders mentioned that timing was of such paramount importance to them that they would prefer to work with draft data which would be released on time but liable to revisions rather than wait for more final figures to be issued.

Coverage

Another issue raised with the production of official statistics was that the statisticians themselves were often believed to be too conservative and risk averse. The upshot of this was believed to be that the whole production process lacked dynamism. Consequently, it was often considered that the data collected was not always what was needed, yet there was a reluctance on the part of statisticians to do anything to rectify this. In this sense, it was thought that there was a real need for those involved in the production of official statistics to build a better understanding of how their data are used.

"Genuinely rigorous and objective and produced by people with a surprising ethos of doing a high quality and impartial job. But they are not as responsive and as agile as they could be and lag too far behind the policy curve in this context. They are a bit small 'c' conservative."

Whitehall

Looking at the issue of the comprehensiveness of official statistics in more detail, some heavy users felt that the measurement systems in place for large scale surveys are sometimes skewed. For instance, there was some concern that ONS economic data focuses too much on agriculture and manufacturing at the expense of measuring the service economy. Thus, though the information is not unreliable it was not always thought

to accurately reflect the world we live in. To this end, opinion formers considered that the ONS needs to take decisive action to only continue with time series data where the information gathered is *still* relevant and useful. Doing this, it was thought, would provide greater scope for the ONS to gather new and valuable economic indicators.

"But there does come a point when the divergence of the data collection method and the reality of the world becomes so large that you have to bite the bullet"

Regulator

Collection and definition

There were some concerns about the changes to historical definitions during the collection of data. Though this was believed to happen to ensure that the data reflects changes in society, there were concerns that this would affect the 'backwards comparability' of the time series data and, in turn, the extent to which the data could be used with confidence. One example of this was figures around school attendance.

"So a lot of things that I would like to know further back than 1997, and that I know were collected, aren't available because something has changed a little bit. One reason is they don't understand the innate value of long run time series. They just think "oh well those figures aren't quite exactly what we want to collect", which may be true, but means that we can't ever compare them back over time. It is vandalism. They need people to think like librarians or curators."

Journalist

Conversely though, others mentioned that changes to definitions had not been made which made them question the efficiency of the collection method. In many instances, this often brought the conversation back to crime statistics and the surveys used to generate them were not seen to be as flexible as they need to be in order to reflect a fast-changing society and criminal culture.

What was clear though, regardless of whether a change had or had not been made, was the demand for information. Opinion formers firmly believed in these instances that an explanation should be provided as to why a particular course of action had been taken and that this transparency would help maintain their confidence in the data and would indicate the extent to which they could use it in their work.

Revisions

Many participants mentioned the frequency with which data is revised, and this seemed particularly true for ONS data, perhaps because of the ONS' ability to communicate its release (and revision) schedule compared with government departments. Though, for some, this implies that the necessary processes are in place to ensure that the data are correct, there was concern from others that it would have the opposite effect in the public's mind.

To illustrate, as many felt that the public's understanding of the collection processes is limited, there was a feeling that the more frequently that data are revised, the more erosive this is on public trust, as they may assume that a mistake was made during the collection process. Worse, they may feel that the revision is due to ministerial interference; specifically, a government minister disliking the initial results. In spite of the discussions around timeliness mentioned earlier, some participants felt that if a revision to a statistic is inevitable, there is little point in releasing the data in the first place.

"One doesn't mind revisions, obviously, but, when you can predict the revisions, you're thinking, why didn't they just originally say that was the number?"

Journalist

There was also thought to be a need to improve communications around revisions. It was thought that this would help reassure the public that the data have been revised for legitimate reasons. Additionally, however, there was a sense that, currently, revisions either appear without warning, or that the original data does not make it clear that revisions will be made to it. Therefore, by providing additional information it was thought that the whole process of revisions would be much more transparent and users would have greater confidence in using the data.

"But what the ONS aren't very good at doing is producing almost digestible documentation to accompany revisions. Often you get inconsistencies in the message. It doesn't necessarily appear there's been an enormous amount of thinking or communication about why fundamentally they've thought the previous figures were wrong, and what they've done to close the gap."

Local Government

4. The use and treatment of statistics

In this section, we will discuss participants' opinions of the treatment that is given to statistics by the institutions that channel information about statistics to the public, and how this affects impartiality and credibility, and trust in statistics. We will also discuss pre-release access and the impact that this has on perceptions of credibility.

Where there was general positivity towards the production of official statistics, this did not extend to participants' perception of how statistics are treated. Opinion formers stated that the key communicators of official statistics are the media and politicians and they did not consider either party to have a vested interest in portraying the data accurately and impartially.

"The two sources that the public gets statistics from are politicians and the media, the two groups of people who are most mistrusted by the public[3]. So perhaps we are on a hiding to nothing, in some ways if we rely only on that."

Whitehall

The rest of this section goes on to explore opinion formers' perceptions in relation to the use and treatment of official statistics and how, in turn, this affects levels of trust.

The media's use of statistics

As discussed previously, many participants mentioned that they felt the ONS was 'unique', and this was a word that was also used to describe the media in the UK. The chief reason for this was its diligence and investigative persistence – unlike other countries, it was felt that the UK media rarely takes stories at face value, and has a tendency to exhaust every angle before it stops reporting on a story.

"In the UK we have a much more inquisitive or investigative press perhaps than in other countries, and maybe a much more disbelieving press"

International Organisation (British respondent)

This was often thought to be a good thing, as it holds politicians to account, and, often, producers of statistics who are working on their

3 In 2009, only 13% of the public trust politicians to tell the truth – the lowest figure ever recorded by the Ipsos MORI veracity index

behalf. The flipside, however, was thought to be that, very often, the media resorts to sensationalism in order to generate attention. This was believed to be particularly true with the traditional print media at a time when its revenue is under threat from new media. Some journalists were prepared to admit this, albeit without wanting to lay the blame at their own door.

"Statistics need to be protected from the mendacious[4] right-wing press."

Journalist

In sensationalising, it was stated that the media very often fixates on a particular figure from a statistical release in order to generate bad news. It was also thought that the media often ignores the bigger picture, preferring to focus on a specific figure which paints a policy or trend in a negative light. The British Crime Survey was an example that participants typically cited – they stated that the overall reduction in crime is often ignored at the expense of an increase in prevalence of a particular type of crime.

It was thought that the knock-on effect of this is that the public are often misled into thinking the situation is worse than it really is. Broadsheet publications were seen to be just as guilty as tabloids in this regard, particularly in recent years. This was because it was considered that there is more common ground in their choice of stories, and some felt, a decline in the standard of news reported by the broadsheet press (with the cited exception of the Financial Times).

"The broadsheets have the same agendas. They're just as biased, it's just that they don't have the attack dog mentality."

Journalist

Given the key role the media plays in informing the general public, this perception that it misleads the public in its reporting of statistics is clearly a problem. Indeed, the media was believed to be more culpable than politicians in this regard, who were not thought to be able to speak to people in such a direct way on such a regular basis.

Some within the media did try to defend themselves against these charges, however. They stated that they have a difficult task in disseminating complex statistical releases for public consumption, and it is therefore unsurprising that the 'full picture' is not presented, as this would simply take too long. Also, politicians themselves are often the

4 given to or characterized by deception or falsehood or divergence from absolute truth

source of the statistics rather than a statistician, which in many cases can add to misunderstandings as, it was argued, a spin on the data has already been applied.

"Well I don't think the public see the statistics that are produced. I think they see them via the conduit of the press or politicians who do tend to cherry pick data… If it's 300 pages long I'm not sure people are going to read all of it. But that's not the way that people get it."

Journalist

Indeed, many participants felt that the media's reputation for mistreatment of statistics is unjustified, as, not only do they have to work with what they perceive as impenetrable data, they often have access to the figures at the point of publication, which means that they need to rush out articles in order to coincide with statistical releases. It was thought that this makes them less likely to be able to understand the full scope of a release, and more likely to misinterpret what it contains.

"I think the media are more a victim than a contributor [of spin]. They are a contributor in the sense that they help distribute half truths. And indeed, you will be very pushed to find those who have either the time or the statistical experience to challenge any data that's put in front of them."

Regulator

It was also felt that the media are not particularly well versed in statistical matters, and lack the requisite expertise to be able to disseminate statistics. The knock on effect can be quite damaging, and lead to misreporting and giving certain statistics undue salience.

"I think that the nuances of statistics in terms of the complexities around the quality of the sampling, the randomness of it, the representativeness of it are very rarely presented in terms of significance. You'll see results from a fairly unrepresentative small sample survey presented as if they're as credible as a big random block sample survey."

Whitehall

The use of statistics – new media

Since the turn of the century, the rise of the internet and blogging has replaced some of the traditional forms of media as a popular source of news and information. For some opinion formers, this was considered a potentially dangerous trend as websites and blogs can allow people to post anything they like, with the result that, often, the information is unsubstantiated and can be transmitted without restriction. An Ipsos MORI survey from June 2009 showed that only 79% of the population access the internet, either at home or elsewhere.[5]

"Well the rise of the blogosphere means that every man is his own commentator. You'll get people reciting the same data over and over again, which is misleading or wrong or partial."

Think tank

As well as threatening its market share, it was felt that new media has an additional impact on traditional media, in that, where independent websites or blogs are distrusted, the public will refer to the traditional media, either in print or electronic form, to corroborate figures and statistics that they have read elsewhere.

This serves to increase trust in the traditional media, and, consequently makes it all the more important that they do not misrepresent the figures. Not only are statistics verified via the traditional media, but stories within the traditional media are regurgitated online, which therefore makes it more likely that mistakes or selective reporting will be assumed to be correct because of the source.

The use of statistics – politicians

In discussing politicians, most participants generally chose to focus on those on the Government benches rather than the opposition. Where participants felt that journalists are often guilty of selectively reporting statistics to highlight bad news, government politicians were thought to do the same in order to report good news. Though politicians were not thought to falsify information, it was considered that partial and selective press releases often belie the true picture.

5 http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/publications/publication.aspx?oItemId=1309

"Just picking the one out of 20 figures that says the thing that they want it to say and putting that as the only thing in the press release. It's just lying by omission, and they don't usually tell outright lies, but they lie about what they leave out."

Voluntary Sector

Many participants mentioned Jacqui Smith and the furore around the release of the knife crime figures as an example of statistics being used selectively and the inherent danger of this. In this case, the findings from specific police areas were confused with the nationwide picture. The original press release was widely covered in the media, despite statisticians trying to block its release, and, as such, the unsubstantiated information passed from Whitehall to the press, and from there to the public.

"That was taking a statistic and releasing it but demonstrating a willingness to put more weight on a statistic and take it out of context. They used the statistic to try and make a point that the statistic, to any proper, understanding user, did not make, to make a point that didn't stand up."

Journalist

Another example that was given of the incorrect use of a statistic by politicians was the example of the gender pay gap. The GEO published figures which showed a 23% pay gap between men and women, but this failed to take into account the higher number of female part-time workers. Though the figure was correct, without this caveat, the figures cannot be used to announce a pay discrepancy, and, consequently, this was cited as another example of a statistic being misreported.

"[The 22.6% figure] averages the average earnings of all women and all men. And more women than men are part time, so if you're only working half the week you're obviously going to be paid less than full time equivalent men. And actually if you allow for the part time, full time breakdown the gap's still there, but it's only 10%"

Whitehall

It is worth noting that, in both instances, the Authority, specifically Sir Michael Scholar, intervened to point out that these releases were misleading, and we will discuss this more in the last chapter.

Another form of selectivity that it was believed that politicians are guilty of is finding a statistic that justifies a particular change in policy. Rather than shaping policies based on available data, it was believed that ministers ascertain what direction they would like their policy agenda to take and, after this, task civil servants with finding statistics that support their argument, effectively removing all impartiality from the data.

Some, however, went further than this and suggested that those statistics produced by Departments are often done so specifically to support their Secretary of State's point of view. This means that while the statistics themselves may be accurate, they are already 'tainted' by an agenda which, in turn, affects the credibility with which they are regarded.

"What gets chosen for [departmental statisticians] to do is not impartial. After 12 years in government an awful lot of civil servants now see their job as making the government look good. And the press releases that the Health or the Education Department will put out at the same time as their figures will be outrageous"

Journalist

This ties in with a general feeling that there are more statistics available now than ever – and, with a "statistic for all seasons", ministers are able to 'shop around' departmental statistics until they find one that fits their purpose.

Pre-release access

Generally, there was a great deal of confusion around pre-release access, namely exactly what the pre-release entitlement was, and who was entitled to it. Though most thought that it was 24 hours, others thought that it was longer, and some thought that, after the knife crime censure, pre-release rights had been removed altogether. On the issue of who has access, there was much discussion in the interviews about whether it is only ministers or a select handful of civil servants (and presumably statisticians) too, and whether the opposition are allowed prior sight. Some mentioned that clarity in this area is something the Authority should be responsible for, as well as explaining the rationale behind the decision.

Despite this confusion, opinion formers had a lot to say on the principles of pre-release access. On the whole, most agreed that the changes to reduce pre-release access to 24 hours were necessary and were a fair

compromise allowing those who needed it time to get to grips with the data while, at the same time, not enough scope to manipulate it.

Indeed, many discussed pre-release access as something of a necessary evil. They felt that, ideally, pre-release access would be scrapped so as to remove all concerns of the data being spun. However, they also recognised that it allows for informed decision making to take place. This was believed to be especially important for economic statistics and market sensitive data – to prevent, for example, unprepared treasury ministers threatening the standing of the pound in the markets.

"I think they should have 24 hours. Feels about right. Because they've actually got to be asked questions and be able to respond to it. It takes time to digest and understand what it is, and I think that's entirely reasonable for ministers to actually do some thinking before you get abuse shouted at you. But I think the 24 hours that you've got feels right."

Whitehall

Indeed, given the importance of politicians being able to respond appropriately to questions and in the interests of them understanding the data in detail, some opinion formers in Whitehall felt that pre-release access should be extended. Furthermore, some journalists felt that they too should have greater sight of the data prior to its release. They stated that the risk of only having 24 hours was that they could not investigate the issue in as much depth as it might warrant and, as a result, their reporting would be lacking. It was thought that, in turn, this could negatively affect the public's understanding of the matter.

"24 hours is far too short for things like league tables – we used to have a week, and even that was a bit of a tight squeeze. Such a short pre-release period doesn't allow for proper analysis and consideration of the data. It often means that journalists have to rely on the "gloss" provided by departments rather than being able to dig around and find the real story"

Journalist

Others, however, were of the opinion that there should be no pre-release access at all so as to remove any risk of the data, or the interpretation of it, being spun. Given the low levels of trust in government, it was believed that this issue was more important than ever.

"Unfortunately, it shouldn't be justifiable. I think this government has brought it upon itself, simply by… so clearly manipulating inconvenient truths into something more palatable. It made public government

announcements on statistics disreputable. And I think that they had little choice but to introduce the regime that is now being introduced."

Business

For others, however, it was not the length of time that was the issue, but the restrictions on who has the access. Some argued that some statistics have as much, or more, impact on senior stakeholders in any given organisation as they will on politicians. Examples given of this were Chief Executives of NHS trusts or business leaders, who, it was thought, will often be confronted by employees, shareholders, the media etc. to discuss a statistic.

"Where I think it's different is where this is management information for public services. So things like staff survey or patient survey data shouldn't be shared with Ministers, but should be shared with Trust Chief Executives, because actually they should be getting on with it immediately to respond to what patients are saying about the quality of their services."

Whitehall

5. User Engagement

This section will cover the question of how users engage with both the statistical process and those who produce statistics, their outreach to users, and the ONS website.

General attitudes to user engagement

For many participants, 'engagement' was a two way process – how statistics-producing departments deal with users of their statistics, and how well such users task themselves with understanding, and building relationships within, the field of statistics production.

In a general sense, many felt that engagement happens at the point of need, and, for many, there was no real desire to further their relationship with ONS or any other statistics producing department, as their current relationship met their needs; often, the numbers themselves were sufficient. Many felt that any drive to increase engagement should not divert resources away from the mechanics of production.

"So ultimately yes there should be advice and there should be support and there should be consultation, but …I wouldn't be keen on anything becoming too user led or user involved because then you just end up with endless dialogue and no surveys."

Think tank

However, many felt that, where there were knowledge gaps amongst either their peers or the general public, statisticians could help to fill some of the gaps by communicating their work more coherently and simply. Interestingly though, some opinion formers recognised that the statisticians themselves may not have the skill sets necessary to undertake this task. Consequently, they stressed the importance of the producers building relationships with partner organisations who could help communicate complex issues in a novel and engaging way.

"The mechanics have become much more about the production of the numbers, getting data from surveys, putting it through surveys and creating the statistics that users need, but at the conceptual level there's a need for the statistical offices themselves to engage continuously with other partners to make sure that when we're pushing to create new standards and new concepts, we get the views of all statistical offices."

International

This point was made most often by heavy users of statistics, many of whom believed that casual users, and especially journalists who channel information to the public, could benefit from a better understanding of the data they used and, it was thought, that one way to achieve this would be to improve the channels by which the information is presented to them in the first instance.

Some opinion formers, however, went further than this and suggested that the media in particular need to be exposed to training in order to ensure they understand the statistics they use. One suggestion to help achieve this was that journalists could be seconded to statistics-producing departments to help them better understand the process.

"Perhaps analysts from the media could be seconded to work on government stats. If we had somebody from the BBC or from the Guardian working for three months on migration stats they'd have a feel for how things are produced and what is dealt with, which would put them in a better position to make more honest debate."

Whitehall

Engaging with different users

Participants had been in contact with the ONS for a variety of reasons – chiefly to query data that had already been published, but also for advice, to discuss best practice, and to enquire about the dates of future publications. On the whole, communications with ONS personnel were praised and its staff were cited as being friendly and approachable. There was, however, a feeling among opinion formers that the ONS operates a 'two tier' policy of communications with different audiences.

In the first instance, it was felt by some that the relocated ONS has aimed to create a better relationship with the general public, by increasing call handling to help deal with its increased output. However, there was a concern that this was at the expense of developing its relationship with users. Indeed, casual users of statistics that we spoke to were often frustrated at sometimes not being put through to the right team within ONS, or being able to find out who worked on a particular release.

Opinion formers who had phoned general enquiry lines and experienced this frustration felt that this is an area that could be improved. In short, they believed that the ONS should have the resources in place to be able to effectively route calls, particularly when they are from journalists

who are working to deadline. To help mitigate this, some felt that a user 'hotline' might be set up for statistics professionals so that their inquiries can be dealt with more expediently than enquiries from the general public. As well as saving them time, it was thought that this could engender a better relationship between professional users of statistics and the ONS, by making the former feel valued.

However, for the most part, when participants knew the name of the statistician in question, or had already built up a relationship with them, they were very positive about interacting with the ONS. It seemed that having a contact point at the organisation helped, as, even if they were not the person able to answer the enquiry, they would be able to direct the call to the relevant person.

"We do, from time to time, need to contact people in ONS to try and get a bit more certainty or quantification of particular issues or find out whether a certain data set is available or whether it isn't. It's a real benefit to build up those individual relationships in ONS that allow us to actually shortcut a little bit about our work, and helps us to understand what can and can't be produced, and how it's produced and so on. So that kind of more human touch is important."

Trade Union

Journalists in particular seemed to have a good relationship with the ONS – their junior reporters had been invited to press briefings, and the press office was commended for its good service which was typically described as friendly, fast and efficient. This seemed to differ from the experience that some participants had with statistics-producing government departments, where statisticians were rarely named on press releases and it is difficult to make contact with those responsible for producing the data which, in turn, fed into perceptions of mistrust around the statistics.

"There is a very good thing about the ONS releases, they name the statistician and they give a number. And that's great, and I know the ONS' press office has always been extremely good too. If you have a query they'll get back to you and they'll tell you who the best person to talk to is. And then you can talk directly to someone who produces the figures."

Journalist

However, aside from professional interaction with the ONS, few participants had any experience of its outreach towards the statistics community more broadly. Very few participants admitted to having been to an ONS roadshow, and felt these needed to be better publicised, to give the ONS as much exposure as possible, and to allow the opportunity

for users and producers to see and talk face to face with ONS staff. From those who had not attended the roadshows, there was much positive sentiment expressed towards such events as they conveyed the sense that the ONS was making a real effort to engage with users and that such work should be encouraged.

"Things are improving – I know the ONS have been going round the country telling people about the code of practice, but this could have been publicised more. It would have been beneficial to have producer groups – some sort of fora to discuss issues of implementation."

Think tank

However, from those who had attended the roadshows there was a sense that these events were not inclusive enough; though useful, a lot of the discussion was aimed at a particular audience, namely one which is involved in production, rather than the general user.

"I felt that their roadshow was aimed at a particular type of audience – those who produce national statistic sets. They didn't adjust that based on who was on the room. They were selling a process – trying to persuade people that registering as national statistics providers would be beneficial to them"

Think tank

Some were more critical, feeling that such exercises had more to do with self-promotion than anything else, and that they were not so much of a dialogue as an opportunity for the ONS to say it had engaged with interested parties, whilst paying little attention to the views of delegates.

"They're quite keen on running seminars where they basically tell you what they've done. And they run through a model. But they don't seem to take on board people's comments very easily. And they don't seem to have a culture where you have options, and what do people think about these options? So sometimes the consultation engagement feels quite hollow. It always feels like "Here are the stats we've produced. What do you think of them?""

Local Government

More broadly, for some, the process of consultative engagement seemed rather sporadic, and it was stated that it needs to be better organised so that the consultation does not occur too long after specific releases. Opinion formers stated that better still would be a 'rolling' process of engagement, but one in which opinions and concerns are always noted. Consulting with producers prior to release, rather than after means that

such events could act as a 'dress rehearsal' for when the data goes live – helping both users and producers to be ready for the real thing.

"We need to have a consistent process of engagement for all the statistics they produce, so that it's not always a one off piece of work. So if you produce, say, population estimates in August, you could have a consultation exercise in May, which will describe any changes to methodology. The ONS would produce draft data for those meetings, and people could actually work through and give meaningful feedback."

Local Government

The ONS website

There was overwhelming negativity towards the ONS website, and this came up spontaneously in almost every interview. For many, this was the key touchpoint with the organisation, and many, in frustration at being unable to find what they wanted online, had contacted the switchboard only to face further frustration.

The key problem with the website was navigability – being able to find the desired information. Many participants talked about an experience where they had seen headline-grabbing statistics referred to elsewhere (i.e. a news website) but were unable to find it on the ONS website, despite it having been released that day and still very topical. This was a source of considerable frustration.

"You just don't know where you are with the website – the major results are harder to find than the minor ones."

Business

What seemed to make navigation more difficult was the amount of data available on the website – participants talked about entering a search term (e.g. unemployment) and being presented with a page full of links specific to certain categories within the term. At this point, many opinion formers described how they would give up and try another website, would enter their search terms into Google in the hope that this would help them find the right page, or would phone the ONS directly.

Participants did not advocate the removal of information from the website, merely that the information should be better signposted within it, along with information about which four digit codes were necessary.

The design was felt to be due for an overhaul too – many commented that the site did not feel sufficiently modern.

The strength of negative feeling regarding the website has two knock-on effects. In the first instance, opinion formers commented how, for many, the website is any given user's first impression of the organisation. However, they stated that due to the poor layout and functionality of the website then it may encourage some, especially those who are less informed of the rigour and quality of the ONS, to question its statistical output.

"It's far easier to find things on the ONS through Google, than using its own search engine. It…just makes me wonder, well if they can't get this right then what are the statistics like?"

Academic

Secondly, opinion formers were concerned that if people were not able to find the data they wanted on the ONS site they may, as a result, be forced to look at other sources. They felt that the danger here was that users would end up relying on less trustworthy information.

"Clunky, not intuitive, just needs someone to get hold of it and make it much more accessible. People will go to others to intermediate the information. Means that the journey that piece of data has taken to get to them is far too long. And when you have a long journey with data it becomes polluted and distorted."

Regulator

Some felt that, during an overhaul of the website that it could become a little more cutting edge, perhaps incorporating RSS feeds, or updated video content outlining the top stories of the moment, which might help to answer some queries that searching the site cannot. It would also add to a feeling that the site, and the ONS, are embracing cultural change, and not defying it.

6. Views of the Authority

In this section, we will discuss opinion formers' view of the Authority, looking at knowledge of the organisation, thoughts on its level of visibility, and its relationship to the ONS. We will also examine how it meets its strategic aims, and suggestions for changes to its regulatory focus.

Knowledge of the Authority

In the main, knowledge of the Authority in terms of its purpose, goals and achievements to date was low. Indeed, a few only knew its name and were unable to offer any thoughts on its remit or work. However, as one might expect, knowledge of the Authority was closely linked to use of statistics, and it was light users, particularly journalists, who felt unable to comment on its performance, needing to know more about all aspects of the organisation before they were willing to make such a judgement. Encouragingly though, the appetite for this kind of information was apparent, with opinion formers expressing that they would like to know more about the work of the Authority.

"I would say the UKSA in itself has done nothing but if you could show me anything that the UKSA has done to change the public face of statistics or the contents of the statistics, I'd be delighted"

Journalist

However, even amongst statistics professionals, many felt that there was still a great deal that they did not know about the Authority, aside from its purpose, and what it stood for. Though there was recognition that it was still a relatively new organisation, there was a good deal of confusion about the way in which it differed from the Statistics Commission – whether the Commission had become the Authority, or had been replaced by it. To help answer these and the other questions that opinion formers had, many spoke about how it would be useful to receive information on how it operates, what powers it has, the size of the organisation, how it is funded and who it reports to. It was thought that providing this would help to bolster favourable opinions of the wider statistical process and would help build relations between opinion formers and the Authority.

"It would be useful if the UKSA presented their terms of reference slightly more clearly. What they can and can't do. Who they report to. What their governance structure is. What their expertise is in. Do they do data quality? Do they work with local authorities or do they work with central government? Or do they work solely independently? Or do they work

with other universities and academics? And how do they actually operate in practice?"

Local Government

Participants were also keen to find out about what difference the Authority makes – they were interested in how effective the Authority is as well as case study examples of when it has made a difference in the past. It was thought that by publicising such information it would be possible to engender the feeling among users that there is a body which scrutinises official statistics, and is able to deter organisations and individuals from the misuse of them.

As could be expected, however, producers and heavy users of statistics had a rounder view of the Authority through their experience of working with it. Such opinion formers were able to talk more fluently about what they perceived that it was there to do in terms of monitoring, regulation, and acting as a force for good in the defence and protection of official statistics. Furthermore, these opinion formers who had a high level of knowledge also mentioned that they had a good working relationship with the Authority.

"I've got a very clear idea of what the UKSA is about and that's three things. One is to keep ONS on the straight and narrow, the second one is that they oversee national statistics and the third one is this overarching look at official statistics more generally and challenging departments, ministers and so on. They've taken that on with much more zeal than I think the original legislation thought they should, but actually entirely predictable."

Whitehall

In truth, though, having a good working relationship and feeling knowledgeable about the Authority seemed to be the exception rather than the rule. Some producers felt that the Authority adopted more of a policing mentality towards them than a supportive role – that it was there to scrutinize them rather than mentor them. Such participants felt that the Authority preferred a much more one-sided relationship; one drew a comparison between the organization and a driving test examiner in that it only communicates with them when there is a problem or when something needs doing.

"I don't know how much they know about what we're doing, but I know that they would get in touch if there's a problem"

Whitehall

Some producers had experience of having been reviewed by the Authority – one participant in particular had received a 'conditional pass' which they stated was reassuring, in that they knew they were adhering to the correct procedures. However, they also felt that the criticisms given were pedantic, and that the Authority in general spends too much time "box-ticking" on the sidelines, rather than building relationships and engaging with stakeholders. This view of the Authority came about purely from its capacity as an auditor, and, as a result, some believed that it could pay attention to how it undertakes such processes to ensure that they not only criticise but reward and encourage as well.

"You can give recognition and motivate – the assessment tool could be used a motivational tool but they are not using it."

Whitehall

Others knew about the Authority mainly through the publication of the code of practice, but, perhaps because of a poor relationship with the former, were a little in the dark about some aspects of the latter. Examples included the rules around the times of press briefings and the disclosure of names within releases.

Visibility of the authority

Many participants felt that the Authority needs to be much more visible. Specifically, opinion formers stated that it needs to be vocal about both its approbations and censures and much more of a household name (both within the community and the public at large) than it currently is. This was particularly the case for those who had a low knowledge of the Authority, and particularly journalists, who felt that it needed to flex its regulatory muscles more frequently, to serve as a deterrent against the misuse of statistics.

"I would like to see the UKSA become proactive and to produce a report loud and clear in which they say they are constantly monitoring stories that misrepresent official figures and they should take a very noisy pro-active role as adjudicators"

Journalist

Even for those who knew little or nothing of the Authority, however, many were aware of Sir Michael Scholar, and in particular his intervention around the knife crime statistics. There was a great deal of praise for this, and many participants felt that this was exactly what "safeguarding

the production of statistics" meant – namely correcting those who make mistakes so that others do not do so. They also stated that a useful by-product of action of this nature is that it helps the Authority assert its independence, and decouple itself from accusations of political bias.

Furthermore, opinion formers stated that this type of action should not be restricted to politicians alone. Instead, the Authority should also feel free to extend its disapproval to civil servants, the media and the private sector to let other organisations and sectors know that they must also abide by the rules.

"Whatever the Stats Authority did to the Home Office around the data on knife crime, it sunk in and has made them quite intimidated – that shows they have power"

Police

However, the flip-side of this argument was presented by some participants, who felt that the constant criticism of politicians (who, obviously, belong to a particular political party) might lead to accusations of political bias. They stated that by answering to Parliament, the Authority is conflicted if it constantly has to criticise members of the House. Though, admittedly, it could be argued that there is a necessary distinction between parliament and government here that needs to be considered.

Those who felt that the Authority should be more discreet, or maintain its current level of discretion, tended to be those who had closer ties to the Authority. Such participants believed that the Authority should criticise judiciously, but less frequently, in order to prevent the dilution of its impact. They were also concerned that by criticising more, it would make the public feel that misrepresentation of statistics is more rife than it actually is.

Some also had concerns that questions might be deflected back to the Authority if it is constantly in the public eye – particularly around the source of its funding, and the implications that this might have on the effectiveness of its criticisms.

"If I was a journalist, writing absolute drivel, and the UKSA criticised me, I'd say, well how can you trust this? These are funded by the government who are lying to you all the time and of course they'll send their attack dogs in to get me. They know which side their bread is buttered".

Regulator

Indeed, some felt that the Authority was much more suited to as invisible a role as possible, and generally low understanding of the organisation need not be considered negatively. Opinion formers' reasoning for this was that they suggested that the nature of people is to fear things that we do not understand. Therefore, by knowing little about the Authority, it may be granted more respect and power than it actually has in practice.

Furthermore, some also made the point that invisibility is a sign that the Authority is doing well. Opinion formers stated how if it is frequently in the news then this means that statistics are being misused and misreported. However, if there is a lack of news on the Authority then it must mean that it is fulfilling its role of safeguarding statistics effectively.

"Awareness is not is a sign that it's working. The Authority is an insurance policy – if we have to call upon them then something has gone wrong. If we don't see problems then they are doing something right."

Voluntary Sector

Views of the authority's relationship to ONS

An area of confusion for many was around the nature of the relationship between the ONS and the Authority. Overall, many opinion formers tended to feel that the Authority needs to 'disentangle' itself from the ONS. For instance, they were of the belief that the Authority and the ONS share resources, including office, financial and human resources, and that, being so interwoven, it was difficult to tell where one organisation ends and the other begins. This, in turn, was felt to make their respective roles of regulation and production more difficult.

"That's one of the UKSA's biggest challenges, to be seen as entirely independent of the ONS when they're reviewing the quality of the statistics they produce while at the same time being helpful in saying what needs to change. They are probably using the same core of experts to drive both organisations"

Local Government

To help illustrate their comments, opinion formers drew on other models of working to describe how the relationship between the ONS and the Authority could, perhaps, be more effective in the future. One example that was recommended by opinion formers was the relationship between the BBC and the BBC Trust. There was felt to be more clarity about the difference between the two organisations, and it was thought that the BBC Trust had more of an 'arms-length' relationship with the BBC itself, meaning that the two organisations are not compromised by involvement with one another.

"I think it could look to the model of the BBC Trust which has got its own faults galore but, the trustees are a well resourced body, they are separate from the BBC Executive, and they do a whole bunch of things. They do reviews or they'll take an issue, they'll look at it thoroughly, they'll publish it, they'll have events, they've got a really rich website, they'll be participating in debates."

Business

Though opinion formers, aware that we have referred to them in such a way, were keen to talk about what they know (rather than what they are less aware of), there seemed also to be some confusion about where the Authority sits in relation, not only to the ONS, but also other organisations such as the GSS.

"It's not quite clear to me what the different roles are at the moment between the Statistical Authority, the National Statistician, and the GSS, the Office of National Statistics and the rest"

Academic

Such confusion indicates that it would be helpful for the Authority to clearly reiterate its roles and responsibilities as well as outlining how it works in comparison to other related organisations.

Perceptions of the authority's purpose and suggestions for change

The Authority's overall objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good.

Some participants, both producers and users of statistics, felt that the 'mission statement' outlined above, is broadly in line with what the Authority **should** be doing. However, they did think its mission statement should be stronger, less bland, and more explicit about the powers that the Authority holds.

By doing this it was thought that it would be clear from the outset that the Authority acts as a statistics watchdog and, as such, it would be a more effective deterrent. In turn, some producers felt that doing this would shift the emphasis away from what they perceived to be the Authority's close scrutiny of them towards those likely to misrepresent statistics in the public sphere, namely politicians and the media.

Some argued that the independence of the Authority should be stressed in this mission statement. It was felt that doing this would give the Authority additional credence, and would also dispel the belief that it is simply another arm of Whitehall, subject to government interference, which would give it additional clout as a regulator.

"Include integrity, impartiality and independence in its mission statement"

International

7. Future priorities

This final section examines what the priorities of the Authority going forward should be, the possibility of a change of government and the subsequent impact that this will have on both the authority and statistics production in general.

Listening to the user voice

One of the key messages that came through the research was a lack of a sense of two-way dialogue between the Authority and users of statistics. Very often, this was because users did not choose to initiate a dialogue but, in spite of this, many felt that the Authority could be more proactive in terms of relationship building.

This was partly to do with users' relationship with the ONS. Many (though not all) participants who dealt with the ONS regularly, and have an ongoing relationship, seemed to be content with this arrangement, as they are given the explanation and background information directly from the statistical source. It was only when the Authority came up in the discussion did they feel that the Authority could improve its relationship with them– and be upfront both about what it does, and the service it can provide to users and producers that they do not receive from the ONS.

Though some producers had a very good relationship with the Authority, often driven by good relationships with individuals who worked there, others felt that the dialogue was too one-sided, and the Authority had adopted much more of an oversight role (similar to that of an auditor) than a role which incorporates guidance and assistance. However, there was thought to be a real need for a more iterative, dialogue based approach which, it was thought, would help facilitate improvements in the production and use of statistics.

"If it's about building trust and safeguarding production then you need to demonstrate that you've done that. The first stage is that they work with the producers of statistics in a constructive way to get them to improve."

Whitehall

The statistical context – explaining what the numbers mean

Some, and particularly international organisations, who were able to draw comparisons with other countries, felt that the Authority could, and should, do more to provide an international perspective on statistics. Such participants felt that the UK has a rather blinkered view of statistics, and seldom shows the numbers in the context of other countries, which deprives us of a basis for comparison. Furthermore, some felt that greater use of international data could show UK figures and social trends in a more positive light through comparing our performance to that of other countries.

"I think an area, where it (UKSA) could have more of an impact is trying to understand in more detail the competitive performance of our industry's relatives those in other EU member states"

Trade Union

Generally, across the research, there was a feeling that the statistics themselves need to be accompanied by contextual information about the data, as the numbers themselves only show part of the picture. Some felt that UK statisticians are exceptionally adept methodologists, but less skilled at the art of explaining the numbers that they produce. Though many felt that this should be part of their job descriptions, it could perhaps be argued that there is a role for the Authority here, as part of a drive to increase its profile within the statistics community.

"It needs to display statistics within the policy context for public consumption."

Business

Future challenges and priorities going forward

One of the main themes that came up in many discussions was the need for the independence of the Authority to be stressed wherever possible. It was felt that this was key to its success, as it was thought that in emphasising this, its work would be taken more seriously. In addition, opinion formers felt that if there is a general perception that it is in the thrall of government, then, in turn, it could damage the reputation of the ONS by association.

Transparency was also key, both in terms of what the Authority has done and what it is planning to do. Thus, as much information as possible about its planned work was welcomed.

"Are they a watchdog or a technical group? Stay independent. The biggest danger is if it looks like they are getting too close to the ONS. They should consider displaying the results of what they have done with the ONS, publish a timetable of issues to be covered and for each explain what their level of involvement has been"

Local Government

Opinion formers also discussed the future of official statistics in relation to a likely Conservative election victory in 2010. In particular, some stated that David Cameron's ethos of transparency may call for a large-scale overhaul of how the Authority operates, and particularly in relation to his pledge to cull "big government", i.e. slashing public spending, and cutting down on fiscal waste.

Because government is so badly joined up that, if I was chairman of the Stats Authority, I would say to, David Cameron, if you resource me properly for a few million pounds a year, I will cut the spend on official statistics in half and double the impact.

Business

There were also concerns about the 2011 census, largely as a result of the mistakes made in 2001 even though most were convinced that lessons had been learnt. However, a few were worried that the Conservatives would be less likely to view the Census with the importance it warrants. For instance, they mentioned how Nick Hurd had commented on how he perceived the 2011 Census to be 'increasingly invasive and intrusive' and designed by 'bedroom snoopers'. This, some felt, was perhaps a sign that the next Government would pay less attention to official statistics and would be less likely to be convinced of their importance.

There were concerns, too, about a Conservative Government's potential handling of employment statistics. This was largely driven by their recollection of the fact that the Thatcher government frequently changed the definition of employment. However, given the importance that this particular dataset has assumed since the recession, opinion formers were keen that they be reassured that these statistics be kept free from political interference on the formation of a new Government in 2010. The suggestion that it be independently audited was also mooted in response to this.

"Ensure independence from political influence. How about being audited by the NAO? Periodically needs to reassure the public that they are trustworthy."

Think Tank

Measuring the success of the Authority

Part of our discussions with stakeholders revolved around how to measure the success of the Authority. This, for many, was a difficult issue to debate with some suggesting that there is no tangible sign of its success other than the fact that statistics are not misused. Others mentioned that a lack of visibility of the Authority was a sign of success, in that it does not often have to exercise its regulatory power. One stakeholder went as far as to suggest that the only way the Authority could be seen as successful was by ceasing to exist.

From these discussions it became clear that the key measure of the Authority's success is less to do with the Authority itself, but more to do with the statistics it protects. In a simple sense, this is that public trust in statistics is not allowed to be undermined by those who are more concerned with their agenda than the statistics themselves. To facilitate this, stakeholders suggested that the Authority continues to monitor and report the abuse of statistics by high profile public figures. Additionally, it was thought that building awareness about the power and remit has would also help with this.

Finally, when thinking about measuring the success of the Authority many, inevitibly, compared its work to the Statistics Commission. While many were favourable about the fact that the Authority has more power, it was thought that it could learn from the Commission, particularly regarding strategies for stakeholder engagement, in order to ensure it is a success In the future.

Overall conclusions

Our research in 2004 showed that there was a need for the Statistics Commission to become an independent, regulatory body that would provide a forum for complaints, as well as advice and best practice about all matters statistical. To some extent this has happened with the

Authority, and there is widespread support for its existence. However, there is still a feeling from some that it needs to go further.

Crucially, it needs to declare both its impartiality and independence from external influences, be they political or otherwise. Most felt that it needs to be demystified, and it should clearly explain how it relates to Parliament, Whitehall, and the ONS and other statistical bodies. This would help to build trust in the organisation, and, by extension, imbue the statistics for which it has responsibility with an additional level of credibility.

It needs to continue to vocally criticise those in the public eye who misrepresent statistics, though do so with discretion – essentially walking a fine line between vocally criticising and quietly monitoring. It also needs to work in conjunction with users and producers, and act as an arena in which they can discuss, debate and be informed. In this way the authority can fill the gap between the expectations of opinion formers and the reality of its remit.

"Be brave"

Regulator

Appendix 1 – Discussion guide

The Statistics Authority Depth interviews with senior opinion formers

Discussion Guide – FINAL, 1st Oct 2009

Objectives

- To establish the purposes for which official statistics are used by opinion formers;
- To gauge perceptions as to the credibility, reliability and independence of official statistics;
- To ascertain the ways in which official statistics are used and presented by government;
- To determine how the independence and credibility of these statistics can be adversely affected, for example, through 'spin', leaking and errors by the producers;
- To understand why these problems occur and whether the situation has changed in recent years; and,
- To explore what measures and procedures can be put in place to ensure there is effective scrutiny with regards to the generation, presentation and use of statistics.

Summary of the research programme

- 60 x 45-60 minute semi-structured interviews with stakeholders, face-to-face unless participants have a preference for a telephone interview.
- Interviews to be conducted in September and October 2009.

Interview sections	Notes	Min timing
1. Introduction and background	Sets the scene and provides context	5 mins
2. Overall perceptions of statistics and the role they serve	Looks into how statistics are viewed in general, and their purpose more broadly	5 mins
3. Trust in officially produced statistics	Examines whether statistics are seen by stakeholders as trustworthy, credible and impartial	13 mins
4. User engagement	Examines how users engage with official statistics and the effects of this	10 mins
5. Views of the Authority and its work	Looks at stakeholder perceptions of the Authority – whether it acts as it is expected to act and what improvements could be made	10 mins
6. Summary and key message	Summing up	2 mins

Key questions	Notes	Approx timing
1. Introduction and background		
Introduction Thank interviewee for taking part Introduce self, Ipsos MORI and explain the aim of the interview. Emphasise that there will be plenty of scope for them to shape the discussion. Explain that this is an exercise that has been conducted in the past and we hope to also conduct in the future to monitor trends. Confidentiality: Remind participants how they were selected for interview (they will have already received a letter) – specifically selected by the Authority Reassure all responses anonymous and that information about individual cases will not be passed on to any third party (i.e. the Authority). They will be asked at end of interview how far they are happy for their comments to be attributed Start digirecorder **Background** IF APPROPRIATE: Just briefly, can you tell me about your current role and responsibilities? **Why are statistics important to you? What do you use them for?** PROBE ON: • Type of statistics used • Purpose of use • Frequency of use • Source of information	Introduces the research, orientates participants, prepares them to take part in the interview Outlines the 'ground rules' of the interview (including those we are required to tell them about under MRS and Data Protection Act guidelines) Initial exploration of level of involvement with statistics INTERVIEWER TO NOTE WHICH TYPE USED TO REFER TO LATER ON	5 mins

3. Trust in official statistics		
When you think of official statistics, what kind of words, phrases or images come to mind? What do you think about them generally? Why do you say that? **Who would you say are the main users of official statistics?** PROBE FULLY – academics, government, business, public sector, voluntary sector, think tanks etc. **What purpose do statistics serve?** • What purpose do they serve the public? • How easy or difficult are officially produced statistics to understand? **And what purpose should statistics serve?** • How are statistics best presented to those who use them? And to the public? • What difference would this make? **What issues in the public interest are normally supported by official statistics?** PROBE FOR CRIME, HEALTH, ASYLUM ETC **How does the use of official statistics impact on debate/understanding about these issues?** PROBE FULLY **Who do you think is responsible for producing official statistics?** • And who should be responsible/more responsible? **Who do you think is responsible for the scrutiny of official statistics?** • And who should be responsible/more responsible?	Brief overview of interviewee's top-of-mind perceptions of official statistics NOTE: Allow flexibility on time for this section, as areas covered in later sections of the guide may come up spontaneously here. If they do, the moderator will probe on them.	5 mins

3. Trust in official statistics		
How far do you trust officially produced statistics? • Why do you say this? • What makes you trust/distrust official statistics? **What types of statistics do you trust more than others?** • Why do you say this? • Is it the organisation that you distrust or the statistics they produce? **How impartial do you feel officially produced statistics are? And how credible do you feel that officially produced statistics are? What factors, if any, do you think undermine the independence and credibility of official statistics?** PROBE ON: • Mistakes/contradictory releases • Pre-release access • Government spin or the agenda of political parties • Leaks **Which of these has the most impact? Why? Has this got better or worse in the last few years? Why do you say that?** Are you personally aware of any measures in place to protect the credibility of official statistics? **PROBE IF YES** **Do you feel that you have enough faith in the institutions or organisations that produce them? Can you think of a recent example of a published statistic that was particularly well or particularly badly handled? What happened? Can you think of an example of best practice from another country? What do they do differently there?** PROBE for transparency/ lack of political agenda/contradictory releases **Should Ministers and civil servants have access to statistics before they are officially released, as is currently the case?** PROBE on the purpose of this and the impact it has on trust **How can official statistics be made more trustworthy or credible?** PROBE FULLY – Why do you say that? What other measures could be undertaken to ensure the quality of official statistics in the future? **PROBE FULLY FOR EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE**	Should focus on and refer back to the statistics that the interviewee mentioned that they use. The aim of this section is to assess how independent, trustworthy and credible stakeholders perceive official statistics to be, and the factors that affect this.	13 mins

4. User engagement		
You mentioned before some different types of users of official statistics. What level of engagement do you think that these different groups of users have with those who produce official statistics? (IF NECESSARY – e.g. The Government Statistical Service) PROBE FULLY – Where there are gaps, why is this? Have you been involved in such engagement yourself? **What are the drivers of engagement – when is a user more likely to be engaged with those who produce official statistics?** **What level of engagement should they have with those who produce official statistics? Why is this necessary?** **What factors can prevent users from engaging with those who produce official statistics?** **How can users become more engaged with official statistics in the future?** PROBE FULLY – Why do you say that? What difference would this make, both to perceptions about statistics and the actual statistics themselves? **How should data be presented to users so that it is understandable?** PROBE FOR CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATIONS, STYLE, ETC **In your experience, is it difficult to access to statistics and how could this be improved?** PROBE FOR HOW THEY ACCESS STATISTICS THEMSELVES, I.E. VIA THE INTERNET, HARD COPY PUBLICATIONS, DIRECTLY FROM THE PRODUCERS, ETC. **How different is this from what happens at present?**	The aim of this section is to explore user engagement with official statistics	10 mins

5. Views of the Authority		
How well do you feel you know the UK Statistics Authority? PROBE ON: • What contact have you had with the organisation? • How have you heard about it – what have you heard? **What do you think the Authority is there to do? What should it be there to do?** **What more would you like to know about the Authority?** **ONLY ASK THOSE WHO KNOW AT LEAST A LITTLE ABOUT THE AUTHORITY** **What is your overall impression of the Authority and how it performs?** PROBE ON: • Favourable vs. unfavourable • Reasons for favourability **(IF NECESSARY) READ – The objective of the UK Statistics Authority is to "promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good" What would you say the Authority does well at the moment?** • Why do you say this? **And what does it do less well?** • Why do you say this? **To what extent do you think the work of the Authority has an impact?** • Why do you say this? • What kind of impact has it had? PROBE FOR SPECIFIC EXAMPLES • Who/what does its work have an impact on? **Have you noticed any changes in how it works recently?** • Where have there been improvements? And are there any areas where things have got worse? Why has this happened? **In what areas could the Authority's work have more impact in the future? What would success look like for the Authority – how would you know if it was doing a good job?** PROBE FULLY – what would the success factors be and what evidence to support them would you want to see?	The aim of this section is to explore perceptions of the Authority's impact and how it can be improved in future. It will be important to elicit examples of where the Authority's work has had an impact, and where it could have had more of an impact.	10 mins

6. Summing up		
Thinking about the next year or so, what should the Authority's main priorities be? PROBE – Is there anything that it should do differently? **What would your key message to the Authority be in its work to safeguard and promote official statistics**? PROBE FOR USER ENGAGEMENT AND GOOD PRACTICE **Is there anything else that you would like to add?** *Thank interviewee. Explain the next steps (i.e. will be used to give the UK Statistics Authority an overview of users' perceptions and will feed into the development of its future strategy).*	This section will wrap up the discussion and will seek to establish participants' views on future priorities. We will also allow participants to shape the agenda of the discussion and raise any other issues which they feel are relevant.	2 mins

Appendix 2 – Advance Letter

September 2009

YOUR VIEWS ON OFFICIAL STATISTICS AND THE STATISTICS AUTHORITY

The importance of trust in official statistics, and the statistical system, cannot be over-stated. Official statistics inform decisions on matters including the state of the economy and public services, and provide the context for business decision-making. If the statistics are not trusted, there is a risk that they won't be used, with a consequent impact on decision-making. The factors underpinning decision-makers' trust in statistics, and the statistical system are complicated and inter-linked, but clearly views are informed to a considerable extent by a relatively small group of opinion-formers.

In this context, Ipsos MORI has been commissioned by the UK Statistics Authority to undertake research among key opinion-formers who use official statistics. The research is designed to provide the Authority with an in-depth understanding of the views of professional users of official statistics on the standard of statistics that are produced, the explanation which is provided with them and the utility of the statistics themselves. Furthermore, we are keen to hear your views about the UK Statistics Authority, both what it is doing well and areas for improvement to ensure it meets the expectations of those who use official statistics.

A member of the Ipsos MORI team will be in touch in the next couple of weeks to invite you to take part in a one-on-one interview and to seek a convenient date and time. The interview will take about 45 minutes and be conducted in person (or by telephone if you prefer) by a senior director or researcher. You will not need to do any preparation beforehand and your contribution will be completely confidential. Ipsos MORI is an independent research agency and abides by the MRS Code of Conduct.

If you have any queries or would like further information, please contact Jerry Latter at Ipsos MORI on 020 7347 3295 (or email jerry.latter@ipsos.com). Cathy Kruger at the Statistics Authority can provide more information about the aims of the research; she can be contacted on 020 7014 2443 (or email cathy.kruger@statistics.gsi.gov.uk).

We understand the pressures and time constraints that you face, but we do hope you are able to take part in this valuable research.

Nick Pettigrew Professor
Deputy Managing Director,
Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute

Sir Roger Jowell
Deputy Chair,
UK Statistics Authority

Annex D

Summary of user engagement activities in other countries

Introduction

1. In order to explore international experience of user engagement, the Authority's Monitoring & Assessment team sent a questionnaire to the National Statistical Institutes in 32 countries. The questionnaire aimed to gather evidence of other countries' approaches to, and experience of, user engagement and, in particular, to identify whether there were any particularly novel or innovative methods of user engagement that might be relevant in the UK.

2. The summary below highlights areas of commonality between approaches in different countries and focuses on examples of good practice where found. [We have arranged for the 32 questionnaires to be lodged on the website of the United Nations Statistical Division, in the interests of furthering international knowledge of national statistical practices].

3. The total number of responses was 22, spread across 17 countries. Responses were received from: Sweden; Denmark; Norway; Italy; Austria; Czech Republic; Slovak Republic; Hungary; Greece; Cyprus; Lithuania; Latvia; Romania; United States (individual responses received from six bureaux; – Energy, Economic Analysis, Census, Treasury, Agriculture and Justice); Canada; Australia; Mexico.

The evidence presented here suggests that most National Statistical Offices tend to regard the people who access the statistics directly as being the main 'users'. There are however some references to wider concepts of 'use', such as use by the press, the existence of high level 'councils' with broad representation, and in outreach initiatives aimed at schools, businesses and communities.

The Statistics Authority is putting greater emphasis on those whose decisions and actions are influenced by the statistics and messages derived from them (including the public) as being the most important users, with those who study, analyse and further disseminate the statistics as being part of the value chain prior to that use – although of course it is possible that those who do further analysis and dissemination are doing so in direct support of a substantial community of users and can reasonably be regarded as representing those wider interests.

While this distinction was not made explicit in the questionnaire, such distinctions are not much in evidence in international practice. There are nonetheless a number of respects in which the UK may be able to adopt or adapt practice from other countries and it is likely that there is more to be learned than has been immediately identified in this quick survey.

Identifying users

4. The two most common methods used by countries to identify users of their statistics were (i) logging requests for information; and (ii) via events such as user councils, user groups or seminars. Almost all countries employed at least one of these methods. Different systems were used for logging requests for information. Some countries had central databases, allowing customer service staff to record user details or users themselves to register their details via the internet. In one country, registration was mandatory for users requesting information.

5. Roughly three quarters of the respondent organisations used some form of user survey. Most of these surveys were directed at users already known to the producer, and aimed to find out more about the needs and characteristics of users. Surveys that aimed to identify *unknown* users achieved this in one of two ways; either by including a survey alongside statistical releases, or as a 'pop-up' website survey which users were asked to complete when accessing particular statistical releases online.

6. Other methods for identifying users included:

- Monitoring the press, blogs and other media. The systematic monitoring of media outlets was common. One NSI mentioned that it uses the specialised software package *Vocus*[1] to track and analyse the use of its statistics in the media.
- Analysis of website statistics, drawn from digital tracks left by users accessing the website. This information is fairly broad – typically it is possible to identify only the country of origin and domain type (for example education or government) – but can serve as a general indicator of usage.
- Facilities for users to register an interest and receive updates. Some countries maintained a series of mailing lists by subject theme, for example one list for press releases, 19 separate lists by topic area, and one general newsletter. This allows producers to keep their users informed of relevant developments while at the same time identifying who is interested in their statistics.
- Subscriber lists for hard-copy publications. This was not a commonly cited method, perhaps due to increasing reliance on digital dissemination.
- One country runs a series of outreach programmes in schools, businesses and various communities. This helped identify users who may not think of themselves as users of statistics.

User classification

7. All of the countries that responded used some method of classifying their users. This was usually an informal working classification, but seven organisations appeared to have some kind of formalised framework for classifying users. For example, one country's classification system included 14 categories of user ranging from local authorities to citizen users. Respondents also mentioned an ESDS[2] (European Statistical Data Support) user classification. ESDS helps users find European statistical information, and on the basis of user feedback, advises Eurostat about possible improvements in the way the statistics are supplied and published. Wider usage of the ESDS user classification has the benefit of international consistency.

1 http://www.vocus.com/

2 The ESDS classification is shown below. Users are asked to choose one when they contact ESDS with a query. Public User; Student or Academic; Commercial company/enterprise; EU Institution/agency; Public administration/ Government; Press and other media; National statistical institute; International organisation; Political parties and political organisations; Other.

8. Most classifications were based on sector, such as government, business, or academia. One NSI mentioned that it applied an extra layer to its classification, by distinguishing between 'prominent/non-prominent users' (the former being those who have regular contact with the producer), and 'regular/irregular users' (the former being those using the statistics more often). It is likely that other countries have similar ways of distinguishing between users, but the questionnaire did not ask specifically about this type of classification.

Formal user groups, councils and committees

9. Most countries had some form of formal user council or committee. These varied in size, remit and structure. For example, in one country there was a well established national statistics council, with 40 members drawn from a wide range of fields and organised into twelve sub-committees, and a statistical policy council with 13 sub-committees. This national statistics council and its sub-committees advise statistical producers on all statistical activities and priorities, and aim to ensure that statistical programs remain relevant to the country's needs. The statistical policy council and its sub-committees have a responsibility to achieve a more effective and co-ordinated statistical system by specifying actions, formulating guidelines and setting up work groups. Another country has established a single advisory council, with membership mainly limited to senior public servants with the addition of five representatives of the scientific community.

10. Statutory provisions for such councils were fairly common. Five countries mentioned that they had passed laws for statistical councils – for example one country has legislated for an executive committee for statistics and a number of topic groups to act as advisory bodies. Their mandate is to map the needs of different user groups and to participate in the preparation of the annual statistical work plan. A similar statutory user council from another country meets twice a year and provides advice with regard to the preparation and implementation of the programme of statistical activities.

Taking part in user events

11. All but three NSIs said that they take part in user events. The most common type of event mentioned was conferences, followed by meetings

with key users. Other events included user group meetings, training courses, workshops, steering groups, meetings with opinion-formers such as journalists, exhibitions, and lectures or visits for university students.

12. Meetings with users are established on both an ad hoc and a regular basis, at varying levels, both in respect of specific products and strategically to discuss statistical planning. For example, in one country a different statistical product is selected each month to act as a topic for a user discussion. Participants for this include senior statistical staff, subject experts and invited users, and the discussion is based on the standard documentation for the statistics. Another country organises seminars on an ad hoc basis when there are specific developments to be discussed. Their most recent was a seminar for representatives of banks, where the topics discussed included seasonal adjustment and statistics on wages and salaries.

User surveys

13. Most organisations carried out some kind of user survey. Surveys were used to identify users, to find out more about their characteristics, to understand how they use (or would like to use) statistics, and to measure user satisfaction. Some organisations use measures of user satisfaction as high-level performance indicators. The most common methods for user surveys were:

- Questionnaires sent by email or post to known users
- Paper questionnaires attached to statistical releases
- Questionnaires completed online by users accessing the statistics website

14. Most countries used a combination of methods. Sending questionnaires to known users allows more technical questions to be targeted to specific users, but is only effective where the users are known to the producer. One country recently stopped sending questionnaires to known users because the majority of their statistics are accessed anonymously through the webpage and databases, so most users were not identifiable. Other countries have introduced surveys that target users accessing certain areas of the website. For example, one website carries product-specific 'pop-up' questionnaires – when users access certain statistics via the website, a pop-up window is activated which displays a maximum of seven questions related to the product. Another website allows users to cast votes at given periods concerning various statistical issues.

15. Three countries mentioned that they also carry out general population surveys to canvass wider user opinion. For example, one country conducts public opinion research studies. These range from small research projects to determine data and information needs and the expectations of specific client groups, to national opinion surveys identifying perceptions, expectations and satisfaction with the national statistical service.

Email notifications

16. Some organisations allow users to register interest in topics in order to receive notification of the latest publications and announcements. One organisation maintains 40 subscriber lists with more than 330,000 subscriptions, which allows it to let users know when new reports or data are available. Another country uses email 'pushes', where interested users are notified by email that certain statistics have been released.

17. Email notifications were used primarily to enhance the dissemination of information to users. In addition, they were used to collect information about users through registration, and to notify users of upcoming user engagement activities.

Points of communication

18. There were two approaches to handling enquiries from users: (i) centralised, where organisations aim to concentrate user enquiries to a single contact centre; and (ii) decentralised, where users are encouraged to contact the appropriate staff member directly. In general organisations used a mixture of both approaches. For example, one organisation handled thousands of emails and calls per year through a central contact centre, while at the same time they encouraged users to contact subject matter experts directly by publishing experts' details in an online directory.

Annex E

Review of media coverage

1. This note is based on a review of the way in which the media covered the publication of a number of statistical first releases and news releases[1] in 2009. The review was carried out over a period of three months and this note draws some general observations that may be of interest to statistical producers.

Reaching the audience

2. An article published in the Guardian in November 2007[2] said, "Journalists are not very good with figures…Basic statistical concepts – confidence intervals, standard deviation, probability and so on – are alien to them. Most journalism training courses do not have modules on how to handle numbers." Our own review suggests that statistical reports that use specialised terminology and jargon are often ignored by journalists, and hence may not be drawn to the attention of a wider public. This observation highlights the fact that the news media plays an important role in the dissemination of statistical information almost regardless of what is said about the statistics. The fact that the statistics are covered at all is often the key to ensuring that users of statistics are alerted to new data, and that potential users are made aware of their existence.

3. Clearly, it is also important in this context for statisticians writing such releases to ensure that technical terms are well explained, and that attention is drawn to any changes in methods which might affect the interpretation of the figures, and the reasons for those changes and the nature of their impact. As well as these self-evidently helpful steps, statisticians might also need to seek out opportunities to explain statistical concepts and issues to journalists at times other than when statistics are being released.

1 News releases were studied where available. Other statistical releases or bulletins were only studied where no other media briefing was found.

2 http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2007/nov/05/mondaymediasection.pressandpublishing

Packaging information

4. Authors of statistical releases do not always present enough description of the figures (commentary), to help users understand the statistics in context, and to ensure that the most important points are highlighted. We recognise that providing too many comments can be confusing. The aim must be to pick out the points that the reader is going to find of greatest interest rather than work through the content of the releases, commenting in a uniform way. There is an attendant risk of being seen to select points that favour a particular viewpoint but as long as the selection of points is professional and careful and not biased, it should be possible to rebut any such suggestion.

5. The 'main messages' need to be presented as clearly, and as near the beginning of the release, as possible. Our review suggests that the aspect of the data that is of most interest to the media often seems to differ from the messages emphasised by the statistics producer, either resulting in little coverage or requiring the journalists themselves to analyse the underlying data. Many of the messages in the releases we reviewed received no, or only one or two mentions in the media reporting, whilst other messages appeared in almost all coverage. While producers would not expect the media to pick up on every message in their releases, we think that it would be helpful to identify the messages that have gained the most coverage in order for producers to consider whether to package their information differently.

6. The non-expert user can most readily absorb statistical messages if these are presented in an appropriate framework (of concepts and contexts) that places the statistics in context, highlights inter-relationships, and so on. In doing this, authors of statistical releases could also help users more by providing links to associated data produced by other organisations, both within and outside government.

7. Illustrative tables and charts are help to capture media interest and present a variety of data in an easily accessible way. The Code of Practice underlines this, requiring producers to "ensure that official statistics are disseminated in forms that… are accessible to a range of different audiences".

8. Whilst statisticians writing statistical releases are mostly wise not to speculate about the reasons for patterns and trends there are occasions where some balanced and cautious speculation about what lies behind a trend may be real assistance to the user. Such comments should be couched in appropriate terms; the authors should keep in mind that the

aim is to help ensure that the statistics are used; not just to publish them.

9. Sometimes a particular issue is a matter of public (or at least media) concern but is only part of the story contained in the set of statistics being released. If statisticians know that one aspect of their figures is likely to be of particular interest at the time of release, then we see real merit in it being highlighted and commented on, in the context of the broader picture.

10. It is common for the text and charts to be essentially the same in each successive statistical release in a series. We would question whether that is necessarily a good idea. As long as changes to the presentation can be defended on the basis of responding to the evolution of the statistical information itself over time, we would put less emphasis on sticking to a rigid format and more on helping the reader to understand the content of the release.

11. Our review suggests that it is not always clear where to find the statistical information being released. In some cases producer bodies publish a 'News Release' intended specifically for the media, whilst in others a First Release or Statistical Bulletin is published without a News Release. These often have different layouts, include different data and are found in different areas of websites.

Statistical experts to explain statistics

12. The news media obviously do not see the dissemination of official statistics, as such, as one of their primary roles although, as noted earlier, they do in fact play an important part in drawing the existence of statistics to the attention of many people who may have an interest. The media focus is rather on stories and on comment from various kinds of experts. The news story will often quote the views of independent analysts, academics, lobbyists or industry representatives, especially when those views seem to challenge the official figures. This can lead on to a questioning of the figures and the statisticians' interpretation of them. This situation can be exacerbated if there is no visible, credible, expert spokesperson representing the producer body. We think that the media's coverage of statistics might be better informed if such experts – as happens currently from time to time – more regularly explained the statistics in an easily understandable way directly to the media. We understand that practices vary between producer bodies, and we think that an agreed policy across government would be helpful.

13. Quotable comment from statisticians in news releases may help the media in writing their story. We think that it would help the media if experts were available for further comment once a news release had been issued – presenting a public face for official statistics is likely to help secure trust in the people who produce them. The requirement in the Code of Practice that producers should "include the name and contact details of the responsible statistician in statistical reports" is a step in this direction.

The nature of releases

14. Our review suggested that the media often identify specific groups – geographical or social – to help bring the messages in the statistics to life. If authors of statistical releases did the same, but in a more authoritative way, then journalists might be more likely to use the official release directly rather than necessarily having to get comment or find the information elsewhere. So for example, the media present some statistics in per capita or individual terms, with articles on unemployment headlining that 'two women are sacked for every man' and that there is 'only one job for every 13 unemployed'. Authors could use such techniques more to bring the statistical to life. It may not look very 'professional' but as long as the statements are statistically valid, they can be used to give a more immediate message.

Promote editorial guidelines

1. Editorial guidelines or codes of practice, such as those published by the Press Complaints Commission[3] (especially section 1, on accuracy) and the BBC[4] can effectively provide a standard for the reporting of official statistics. The BBC's editorial guidelines note that "we should report statistics and risks in context, taking care not to worry the audience unduly, especially about health or crime. It may also be appropriate to report the margin of error and the source of figures to enable people to judge their significance…If reporting a change, consideration should be given to making the baseline figure clear." We support these types of guidelines, and feel that they could be developed more consistently and more generally as a standard for all media organisations.

3 http://www.pcc.org.uk/cop/practice.html
4 http://www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/edguide/accuracy/reportingstatis.shtml

Annex F

Mechanisms for user engagement

1. Some of the most common mechanisms of user engagement are presented in this note. It draws on evidence from assessments, discussions with users and producers and information gathered from international counterparts. It is not exhaustive, nor does it set out to be prescriptive about how producers should engage with users.

2. Not all of these methods are applicable in all circumstances – some are more appropriate to engagement at different points of the statistical value chain; some are more useful in gaining an in depth understanding of users' needs about particular issues, whilst others have more value in simply updating users about developments.

3. Mechanisms for engagement need to be fit-for-purpose – to be adapted for different circumstances, and to different types of users.

Formal consultations

4. Formal consultations normally involve the publication of a document seeking responses from the public on developments, specific issues or plans. They are typically conducted via the web, and follow the Cabinet Office's code of practice for public consultation[1]. Formal consultations follow a standard format, allowing 12 weeks for responses, followed by the publication of a document containing the responses (or a summary), and the producer's reaction. These sorts of consultation are widely used across government and are a well-recognised way of gathering the views of stakeholders. Formal consultations provide documented evidence about proposed changes and can therefore be a sound basis for transparent decision-making.

5. By their very nature formal consultations are relatively inflexible and time-consuming, and are best suited to longer-term planning, and to issues on which the producer organisations is genuinely uncertain about how to proceed because it does not (yet) understand users' perspectives.

1 http://www.berr.gov.uk/whatwedo/bre/consultation-guidance/page44420.html

They are less suitable in relation to ad hoc development issues or problems that occur in real time.

6. While formal consultations are open for all to respond, experience shows that frequently only larger organisations, established user groups, and particularly motivated individuals have the capacity and interest to respond. Interested parties can often sign up to receive notifications of new consultations from a particular department. The Royal Statistical Society plays a valuable role in drawing attention to statistical consultations that it becomes aware of. However less actively engaged users may not have the same level of awareness, so it is important for producers to consider carefully how they publicise their consultations, in order to reach a wide range of users and potential users.

Five-yearly reviews, Department for Transport

The Road Casualty Statistics team at the Department for Transport carries out a formal consultation every five years, to inform the Department's plans for the coming five year period. The formal consultation document[79] is publicised on the internet and is sent to a wide email network. The document sets out plans and invites views from users. The most recent consultation led to responses from a wide variety of users – policy-makers, other government departments, local authorities, researchers, road safety organisations and businesses. A sub-group of the Standing Committee on Road Accident Statistics, made up of data suppliers and users, considers the responses and drafts recommendations. Workshops are also held with users, to follow-up the consultation.

Official user councils

7. The UK has recently established the Statistics Suppliers and Users Group (STATSUG) – see para X of the main report. Other countries, such as Canada, Sweden, and Australia, have long-established user councils to provide direct input into the decision-making process. Councils generally have a formal remit to represent users' views, often detailed in the country's statistical legislation. Some councils have specific decision-

2 http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/committeesusergroups/scras/2008reviewstats19/

making responsibilities; others act more as advisory bodies, the recommendations of which are for consideration by producers.

8. Councils have proved very effective in discussing high-level or strategic statistical issues. However they are less well-suited to ad hoc and in-depth issues. Some countries therefore have developed a range of councils or boards for different subject areas. For example, Canada has a National Statistical Council, 12 Advisory Committees and a regional council on statistical policy. Similarly, Sweden has 9 programme boards and 3 councils administered by the National Statistical Institute (NSI) covering issues such as labour market statistics, economic statistics and regional statistics.

Statistics Sweden, Programme board for labour market statistics[85]

The Programme board for labour market statistics is one of nine programme boards in different statistical areas. The board was established by the Director General of Statistics Sweden, and has a mandate to represent stakeholders and customers in the area of labour market statistics. Its chair and members are external "users", such as from the Institute of Social Research, Sweden's Central Bank, the University of Umeå, the Association of Local Authorities and Regions, the Labour Ministry and the Ministry of Finance. The board met twice in 2009, and discussed issues such as seasonal adjustment and regional breakdowns within the Labour Market Surveys and a new gender-related database on business leaders. Board members presented the ways in which they use the statistics, and gave their views on needs and gaps in the data.

Statistics Sweden is currently reviewing the effectiveness of the programme boards.

9. The composition of councils is important. Councils need to be small enough to be effective, to include knowledgeable, engaged, independent people, whilst ensuring a wide enough representation to meet their terms of reference. In Sweden, the supervisory council includes representatives from trade unions, a national research institute, the Central Bank, the Ministry of Finance, the local authorities association and an opposition member of parliament. The Dutch Central Commission for Statistics includes economic advisors, representatives from the European Central Bank, business, academic institutions and former member of the European Parliament.

3 http://www.scb.se/default____2154.aspx

10. User councils can be difficult to coordinate in highly decentralised statistical systems, such as that in the UK.[4]

European Statistical Advisory Council (ESAC)[81]

The European Statistical System has long been interested in capturing users' views and a wider perspective on the development of its statistics – especially to minimise the burden on respondents in the member states and to balance priorities and resources.

The first user committee at the EU level (European Advisory Committee on Statistical Information in the Economic and Social Spheres, or CEIES) was set up in 1991, with the aim of taking into account user requirements and the costs for information providers and producers. CEIES comprised two representatives from each member state, plus the National Statistical Institutes and representatives from other EU bodies. The committee met only once a year and, with over 100 members, was too unwieldy to be truly effective in relaying user and supplier views.

ESAC replaced CEIES in 2008. Its 24 members represent producers, users and suppliers and deliver a formal Opinion on Eurostat's Multi-annual Statistical Programme.

User groups

11. User groups provide a means for users to discuss their views on particular types of statistics. Such groups are usually not statutory. In the UK, many user groups are coordinated within the SUF structure, as discussed in Section [ ]. These groups vary greatly in terms of their activity, membership, and the nature of their relationship with producers.

4 http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/about_eurostat/european_framework/statistical_committees

12. User groups typically rely on a relatively small number of highly-engaged volunteers to organise meetings. A lack of resources and time constraints can affect groups' ability to achieve their full potential. Statistical producers often support user groups, in terms of offering experts, and providing papers and meeting facilities. This can be mutually beneficial: the more effective the group, the more members it is likely to attract, and hence the wider the range of users that the producers can reach.

Demographic Statistics User Group (DUG)[82]

DUG represents the interests of a number of private companies, such as Boots and Tesco but, as a relatively active user group, its meetings and conferences also attract a wider audience. The most recent annual conference, for example, was attended by around 70 people from business, academia, local government and producer bodies.

DUG has been instrumental in articulating users' needs for Census data, and for population and migration statistics more generally. The group has given evidence to the Treasury Sub Committee for its report "Counting the Population"[83] and to the recent Public Administration Select Committee hearing on the 2011 Census[84] and the creation of an address register.

DUG has supported producers by providing examples of how data are used in the business sector, for example in putting forward the case for access to microdata from census records[85]. Demonstrating ways in which businesses use statistics, or could use statistics, provides valuable evidence to inform decisions about funding and about priorities.

5 http://www.demographicsusergroup.co.uk/
6 http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmtreasy/183/183.pdf
7 http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200910/cmselect/cmpubadm/10/09111901.htm
8 http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/sars/2011/documents/businesscase.pdf

Transport Statistics User Group (TSUG)[86]

This user group is run by a committee largely comprising external members, although statisticians at the Department for Transport (DfT) are active members. There are about 150 members of TSUG, including transport consultants, local authorities, researchers and journalists.

The committee canvasses group members for ideas for seminars. The seminars are usually held monthly, typically involving a DfT statistician making a presentation, complemented by others', and followed by a discussion. The seminars are used *inter alia* to initiate formal reviews, and to give feedback. The group's membership list is also used as the basis for formal consultations.

Listening events such as conferences, 'roadshows' and seminars

13. 'Listening' events allow producers to speak face-to-face with users. Producers often host or facilitate them, although other organisations, such as the Royal Statistical Society, also provide valuable fora for discussion.

14. Part of their value derives from the fact that they involve a number of users meeting to discuss their needs, and hearing about others' needs. Such meetings can highlight the range of user needs and help both producers and users understand these and how they might best be prioritised. They also provide producers with a cost-effective opportunity to present their work to a large number of users at one time.

15. Such events can be time-consuming. As noted in the context of the Census 2011 project, it is often appropriate for the experts themselves to present at events and talk to users – but experts are a scarce resource, with competing demands on their time. In order to ensure that such events realise their potential, they should ideally provide a forum for discussion and not just share to information (important though this is).

9 http://www.tsug.org.uk/

Census 2011 Roadshows

The Census has a widespread and diverse user base, which is reflected in the structure of the census offices' user engagement. It was not considered sufficient simply to have one user group or a focused formal consultation; instead a variety of different forms of engagement were needed in order to capture the wide-ranging views. Roadshows were one method used.

ONS' Census team organised a number of roadshows at different stages in the Census development, in 2005, 2008 and 2009. These roadshows provided an opportunity to discuss proposals and to test conclusions that had been drawn from the user and advisory groups and from formal consultations. For the consultation on outputs, for example, the Census team organised roadshow sessions in London, Leicester, Cardiff, Manchester, and Newcastle in October 2009.

Personal contact with users

16. Producers often hold meetings with users within government. Policy users are often based in the same building and are anyway easily accessible. Meetings with individual users outside the producer organisation can be more problematic – it can be difficult to identify which users to meet, and very time-consuming if many users are to be approached. However meetings or visits can be very useful in improving understanding about a particular user's needs and perspectives in more depth than is possible at a more open forum. Internationally, the European Statistical System's Task Force on Statistical Challenges held a number of high level meetings with stakeholders during 2008, leading to agreement about the need to establish a structure for continuing dialogue between the top level of management of Eurostat and stakeholders.

Market research

17. Market research can provide valuable insights into how a particular set of statistics is used, and what users need from the statistics. It can also provide information about related services, such as the accessibility of information from websites. Because market research is not a form of two-

way user engagement it is sometimes appropriate to follow up with those who responded, either individually or as a group, to ensure a rounded understanding of the findings.

Case study – Stakeholder Strategy project, ONS

In 2009 ONS commissioned market research experts to investigate the perceptions of ONS' stakeholders. The research yielded a number of positive messages about statistical quality and methodological integrity, and also highlighted a number of areas in which improvements might be made, such as relevance, transparency and user engagement.

In order to more fully understand the feedback received, ONS carried out a series of workshops with the respondents. These enabled ONS staff to investigate further the nature of the comments made, and to discuss ways forward.

The research led to the development and publication of a stakeholder strategy for ONS, which will be implemented in the coming year.[87]

Using the internet

18. The internet presents a wide range of possibilities for user engagement – its particular strength being the opportunity it provides to reach a wide range of users and potential users quickly, and its openness and accessibility[11].

19. Some users may not yet be keen to use the internet to engage with producers, preferring more traditional channels where these exist. Nevertheless, the internet offers the following possibilities:

- Email groups: these can be used for mailing out consultation documents, notifying users about changes or revisions, and as the basis for ad hoc consultations. Email group lists need to be reviewed regularly to ensure that they include the right people.
- Web surveys: used for example to gain initial input on Census 2011

10 link to ONS stakeholder strategy when published…

11 70% of households had Internet access in 2009, according to information from the National Statistics Opinions Survey (http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/iahi0809.pdf)

outputs. These surveys can be an effective means of collecting views, although it can be difficult for producers to follow-up or to identify the background and context of the opinions being given.

- Network-building: to identify who is interested in different statistical areas – for example, the ScotStat network described below.
- Notification systems: to alert registered users to changes, consultation launches, new publications, and so on. Again, these systems do not permit a two-way dialogue but can be a useful tool for producers to share information.
- Blogs: as a consultation tool, blogs can be rather limited as they are generally a one-way form of dialogue, and are typically unstructured. However they are useful as a way of identifying users of (and commentators on) statistics and identifying issues of concern. One example is the Straight Statistics blog[12] run by a group of journalists and academics.
- Wiki-style websites: used as a trial by the Census. Wikis are websites that allow anyone to log in and offer views about a given topic (such as the outputs, commentary, use and analysis of census data). Although very little use was made of the ONS' wiki-style Census 2011 website[13], such an approach seems most likely to become increasingly important.

Case study – ScotStat[91]

ScotStat is a consultation network hosted by the Scottish Government, linking data users, data providers and producers. It takes the form of a website, upon which users indicate their areas of interest. There are some 1,800 members of ScotStat and the registration system allows the hosts to identify the sector that these work in. The Scottish Government has recently begun a programme to attract more researchers and academics to use the website.

Regular (physical) meetings of ScotStat members are held, and papers from these meetings are available on the website.

12 http://www.straightstatistics.org/blog
13 http://2011ukcensus.wikidot.com/
14 http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/scotstat

Newsletters

20. Many statistical producers issue newsletters describing developments and ongoing work. Even if they are produced infrequently, they can be a useful way to spread information between meetings and between larger, more formal consultation exercises. Newsletters can be included on the relevant statistical pages on the producer's website, sent to an email mailing list, sent out via user groups; or linked to relevant statistical releases. Newsletters are primarily a means of sharing information, but the inclusion of the producer's contact details or an enquiry line can facilitate feedback.

General enquiry lines, customer relationship management

21. All government departments and other official bodies have some form of telephone enquiry line. Statistical enquiries, or comments about statistics, may be passed on to the statistical divisions within these organisations. Enquiry lines can provide a means of contact for less active users, even allowing them to speak directly to the statistical producer. There is some value in monitoring enquiries to identify any common issues that might be dealt with at a more general level.

22. However, this is not a transparent or active means for producers to communicate with users; other users have no way of knowing what enquiries are being received by producers or what response is being given.

Annex G

References to 'User Engagement' in the Code of Practice

Principle 1 Meeting User Needs

The production, management and dissemination of official statistics should meet the requirements of informed decision-making by government, public services, business, researchers and the public.

1. Engage effectively with users of statistics to promote trust and maximise public value, in accordance with Protocol 1.

2. Investigate and document the needs of users of official statistics, the use made of existing statistics and the types of decision they inform.

3. Adopt systematic statistical planning arrangements, including transparent priority setting, that reflect the obligation to serve the public good.

4. Publish statistical reports according to a published timetable that takes account of user needs.

5. Publish information about users' experiences of statistical services, data quality, and the format and timing of reports.

Principle 4 Sound Methods and Assured Quality

2. Ensure that official statistics are produced to a level of quality that meets users' needs, and that users are informed about the quality of statistical outputs, including estimates of the main sources of bias and other errors, and other aspects of the European Statistical System definition of quality.

3. Adopt quality assurance procedures, including the consideration of each statistical product against users' requirements, and of their coherence with other statistical products.

Principle 7 Resources

2. Consult users before changing the allocation of resources to statistical activities. Include specific resources for user consultation in budgets.

Principle 8 Frankness and Accessibility

1. Provide information on the quality and reliability of statistics in relation to the range of potential uses, and on methods, procedures, and classifications.

2. Prepare and disseminate commentary and analysis that aid interpretation, and provide factual information about the policy or operational context of official statistics. Adopt formats for the presentation of statistics in graphs, tables and maps that enhance clarity, interpretability and consistency.

3. Make statistics available in as much detail as is reliable and practicable, subject to legal and confidentiality constraints, offering choice and flexibility in the format according to the level of detail required by the user.

4. Publicise official statistics in ways that enable users to identify and access information relevant to their needs. Make access to official statistics as straightforward as possible by providing easy-to-use entry points.

5. Ensure that official statistics are disseminated in forms that, as far as possible, are accessible to a range of different audiences, including those with disabilities.

6. Ensure that official statistics are disseminated in forms that enable and encourage analysis and re-use. Release datasets and reference databases, supported by documentation, in formats that are convenient to users.

Protocol 1 User engagement

Effective user engagement is fundamental both to trust in statistics and securing maximum public value. This Protocol draws together the relevant practices set out elsewhere in the Code and expands on the requirements in relation to consultation.

1. Identify users. Document their statistical needs, and their wishes in terms of engagement.

2. Make users aware of how they can find the information they need.

3. Take account of users' views on the presentation of statistics, and associated commentary, datasets and metadata.

4. Provide users with information about the quality of statistics, including any statistical biases.

5. Involve users in the evaluation of *experimental statistics*.

6. Seek feedback from users on their experiences of the statistical service they receive, data quality, and the format and timing of outputs. Review the feedback systematically.

7. Consult users before making changes that affect statistics (for example, to coverage, definitions, or methods) or publications.

Annex H

Glossary of abbreviations

SUF	Statistics User Forum
RSS	Royal Statistical Society
GSS	Government Statistical Service
COS	Committee for Official Statistics
PUG	Producer-User Group (SUF)
ONS	Office for National Statistics
SARs	Sample of Anonymised Records
M&A	Monitoring and Assessment
NSI	National Statistical Institute
ESAC	European Statistics Advisory Council
EU	European Union
CEIES	European Advisory Committee on Statistical Information in the Economic and Social Spheres
DUG	Demographics User Group
TSUG	Transport Statistics User Group
DfT	Department for Transport
CRM	Customer Relationship Management

Annex I

Project board members

Professor Sir Roger Jowell (Chair)	City University, London and Deputy Chair, UK Statistics Authority
Richard Alldritt	Head of Assessment, UK Statistics Authority
Robert Clements	Director of Service Delivery, House of Commons
Professor Angela Dale	Director of the Centre for Census and Survey Research, University of Manchester
Jane Lewis	Director, Research in Practice
Dr Martin Dougherty	Executive Director, Royal Statistical Society
Professor Andrew Dilnot	St Hugh's College, Oxford University and Chair, Statistics User Forum
Caron Walker	Office for National Statistics/UK Statistics Authority
Richard Laux	Director, Assessment Programme, UK Statistics Authority

Note: non-Statistics Authority/ONS members attend in a personal capacity as experts rather than as representatives of their organisations.

Annex J

Recommendations presented in the Interim Report

An interim report from this monitoring review was published on 31 March 2010, to enable discussion of the emerging findings. Following feedback we received, we have made some changes to the final report. The full listing of recommendations from the interim report is given below with an indication of how these have been revised or retained in the final report.

1. All government departments and other bodies that produce official statistics should take steps to enhance their compliance with those aspects of the Code that relate to understanding the use, and users, of official statistics. Two examples of requirements in the Code that need to be met:

- 'Investigate and document the needs of users of official statistics, the use made of existing statistics and the types of decisions they inform.'
- 'Publish information about users' experiences of statistical services, data quality, and the format and timing of reports.'

The Statistics Authority will consider with the National Statistician whether further guidance on how to meet such requirements is needed

Many of the principles and practices in the Code refer to the use or usability of statistics. Whilst the process of assessment has demonstrated compliance with many of these, there is evidence that some parts of the Code are less well complied with. Therefore this recommendation has been enhanced to refer to these particular aspects of the Code. .

2. Statistical Heads of Profession in government should work with experts in the subjects to which the statistics relate, to find ways to explain more clearly in statistical releases the relevance and meaning of the figures

As the Code explicitly requires producers to ensure adequate explanation of the strengths and limitations of sets of statistics in relation to their uses, and commentary about the statistics, this recommendation was merged with Recommendation 1.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) should give priority to improving the navigability and accessibility of its website, and should publish plans for doing so as soon as possible.

This recommendation has been retained in the final report.

3. The National Statistician should publish a plan setting out how the Government Statistical Service (GSS) should use web technology, and innovative ways of exploiting digitised data, to enhance the accessibility of official statistics and related advice

The Authority considers that the National Statistician has a leading role to play in making progress on the greater exploitation of technology in presenting statistics. However the first step in any such work should be to discuss the possibilities with experts in the field. We have therefore amended the recommendation to reflect this.

4. Government statisticians should work together, and with the Royal Statistical Society (RSS), to improve communication between statistical experts and journalists. This might include supporting statistical training for student journalists; supporting courses or events and visits for journalists to statistical offices or departments; and increasing opportunities for journalists to talk directly to statisticians in government

This recommendation has been retained in the final report.

5. Given the great diversity of users of statistics, a high profile web-based forum (supported by an appropriate structure of meetings between users and producers) should be developed which would enable users of statistics to communicate more easily and openly with each other and with the producer bodies. While the lead on this should rest with SUF and the RSS, bodies producing official statistics should actively support this initiative, coordinated by the National Statistician

This recommendation has been retained in the final report.

6. All government departments and other producer bodies should work actively with SUF (and other user group structures), to help user groups represent the interests and priorities of their members

This recommendation has been retained in the final report.

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