

Independence for UK official statistics: the new UK Statistics Authority

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Abstract

The creation of an independent UK Statistics Authority, at arms' length from government with statutory objectives clearly set out in legislation, was a mechanism through which the UK Government anticipated it could rebuild public confidence in official statistics and trust in the official statistical system.

This paper sets out the rationale for the creation of the Authority, its role, and the way it has started to work.

Short history and nature of the UK statistical system

UK official statistics have a long history but for the purposes of this paper we are concentrating on the last 70 years – Annex A sets out some landmarks over the longer term.

Until the Second World War, the statistical system had no central office or management, with each major government department maintaining its own statistical unit. In 1941, the Central Statistical Office (CSO) was created as part of the Cabinet Office, primarily to ensure greater coherence in the collection and production of official economic statistics. Also in 1941, the Government Social Survey was established – originally as part of the Ministry of Information – again as part of the war effort. Following a Parliamentary committee review of Government Statistical Services in 1966, government created the Business Statistics Office (established in 1969) and merged the General Register Office and the Government Social Survey to form the Office for Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS - established in 1970); OPCS being responsible for the Census, social surveys, population statistics and vital statistics.

Together with the CSO, the BSO and OPCS formed the core of the Government Statistical Service whose modern-day role is to manage official statistics and develop “a cadre of professional statisticians across government”.¹

Early in the 1980s, a review was undertaken by Derek Rayner, (a leading retail sector manager) at the request of the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. It resulted in a reduction of statistical activities and staff; and weakened an already small Central Statistical Office. “The Rayner Doctrine”, as it became known, stated that the objective of the Government’s statistical service should be that information should not be collected primarily for publication - it should be collected primarily because the Government needed it for its own business.² This doctrine was at odds with professional advice and international opinion and was progressively abandoned over the following ten years - but its influence can be seen to the current day. More recently, there has been wide acceptance that statistics play a vital role across society – a view influenced by, and echoing, Principle 1 of the UN Fundamental Principles.

In 1989, concerns about the reliability of UK economic statistics led to a formal review, which brought about the transfer of the Business Statistics Office to the CSO

¹ HM Treasury *Independence for statistics: a consultation document*, 22 March 2006, p. 7

² *Rayner Report on the Office for Population Censuses and Surveys* (1981) (Cmnd 8236)

and the establishment in 1991 of the CSO as a distinct government department accountable to the Treasury. At the same time, responsibility for the Retail Prices Index and the Family Expenditure Survey (the UK's household budget survey) transferred to the CSO from the Department of Employment. Residual responsibility for the production of labour market statistics was transferred from the Department of Employment to the CSO in 1995. The Office for National Statistics was created in 1996 through the merger of the CSO and OPCS. By 1996, ONS was some 20 times larger than the CSO of the 1980s and had begun to emerge as an authoritative central office.

'National Statistics'

Debate about the quality and integrity of official statistics intensified during the 1990s. In 1995 a leading Opposition politician, Jack Straw MP, now Secretary of State for Justice, made a speech to the Royal Statistical Society in which he outlined the Labour Party's vision for a future independent national statistical service (Annex B). The Labour Party's 1997 election manifesto, on which it won power from the Conservative Party, pledged to establish an "independent national statistical service".³ In 1998, the new Labour Government launched a consultation exercise on the future of the UK's statistical system.⁴ The Government's proposals were set out in a White Paper *Building Trust in Statistics*, published in 1999, which recommended the development of a new but non-statutory framework.⁵

In 2000, the UK Government launched a new set of arrangements, called the 'Framework for National Statistics'. This was intended to safeguard the professional independence of official statisticians by introducing a more authoritative Code of Practice and establishing an independent Statistics Commission with an oversight role. Further details of the National Statistics framework are at Annex C.

Three key features of the UK statistical system remained unchanged:

- The existence of the Office for National Statistics as a department reporting to the Treasury continued, with ONS operating both as a producer of statistics and playing a co-ordinating role.
- The roles and responsibilities of Heads of Profession for statistics in government departments and agencies remained largely unchanged but were more clearly articulated.
- The professional grouping of statisticians in the Government Statistical Service continued to produce both statistics and policy advice across the decentralised system.

In organisational terms, the main new feature of the statistical system was the establishment of the Statistics Commission. Annex D provides a summary of the various bodies that might be seen as comprising the UK statistical system.

³ Labour Party *New Labour: Because Britain deserves better* (1997)

⁴ HM Treasury *Statistics: A Matter of Trust*, 1998 (Cm 3882), and Office for National Statistics *Statistics: A Matter of Trust: Report on the Consultation Exercise*, 1998
<http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/ons/govstat/report.htm>
http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/national_statistics/downloads/GreenPaperSummaryofResponses.pdf

⁵ HM Treasury *Building Trust in Statistics*, 1999 (Cm 4412)
http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/national_statistics/documentation.asp

In 2001, following the devolution of some powers to Devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, a *Concordat on Statistics* was agreed, forming part of the formal *Memorandum of Understanding* between the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations. The Concordat sets out mechanisms for co-operation on matters in relation to statistics.⁶

Ongoing problems with trust in UK official statistics

Between 2002 and 2004 a new National Statistics Code of Practice, and 12 supporting protocols, were published. Overall these codified good statistical practice and indicated what it meant to have the label “National Statistic”. Despite this, a report published by the Office for National Statistics in February 2005, based on data collected from the National Statistics Omnibus Survey, identified that less than one-in-five (17%) of those surveyed thought that official statistics were produced without any interference by government, 59% perceived that the government used statistics dishonestly, and only one-third (34%) felt that government figures were accurate.⁷

In a report published in 2005, the Statistics Commission observed:

There is a strong feeling ... that action needs to be taken to increase trust in, and the credibility of, official statistics. For many, the key to achieving this lies with securing independence for the statistical service. It is felt that, of late, the production of statistics has become politicised and when set against a backdrop of distrust in the Government generally, then a comprehensive restructuring of the statistical service is necessary. It is widely believed that by increasing the distance between the Government and the statistical service, there will be less of an inclination to view its outputs with suspicion.⁸

The Government’s reform of official statistics

In November 2005, the Chancellor of the Exchequer (UK finance minister) announced that the Government intended to publish proposals to legislate to provide for an independent Statistics Board with responsibility for oversight of the UK official statistics system, including governance of the ONS.⁹

The Government considered four options:

- No change – retention of the existing non-legislative Framework for National Statistics;
- Parliamentary model – centralisation of statistical production within a single organisation, located within Parliament;
- Strengthened Statistics Commission – placing the Statistics Commission on a statutory footing; and,
- Statutory Board – legislating to create an independent Board with responsibility for meeting an overall objective of statistical quality and integrity. This was the Government’s preferred option.¹⁰

⁶ http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/national_statistics/downloads/concordat_on_statistics.pdf

⁷ Office for National Statistics *Public Confidence in Official Statistics: An analysis based on data collected in the National Statistics Omnibus Survey* (February 2005)
<http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/development-programmes/public-confidence/reports/quantitative-analysis-of-the-general-public-s-view-of-official-statistics.pdf>

⁸ Statistics Commission *Official Statistics: Perception and Trust* (2005), p. 37
<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/archive/statistics-commission-archive/research/report-24--official-statistics---perceptions-and-trust.pdf>

⁹ House of Commons *Official Report (Hansard)*, HC Deb 28 November 2005, c78w

¹⁰ HM Treasury *Independence for statistics: A Regulatory Impact Assessment*, 22 November 2006 http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/stats_ria_221106.pdf

The Government proposed that the legislation would:

- create an independent governing board for the ONS, with delegated responsibility for meeting an overall objective for the integrity of the UK official statistics system;
- appoint external (non-executive) members to the Board, drawn from leading experts in statistics, and from academic and business; and,
- provide for accountability of the new Board to Parliament through regular reporting to explain, and be questioned on, the Board's performance.

The Government's proposals were published in March 2006 in a consultation document *Independence for statistics*, and a formal 12-week consultation process was undertaken, closing in June 2006.¹¹ The proposals were also scrutinised by the House of Commons Treasury Sub-Committee, and the Sub-Committee published a substantive report in July 2006.¹² The Sub-Committee's chair, Michael Fallon MP, observed that, while the Government's proposals were a "welcome step in the right direction, more radical reform was needed in order to make government statistics demonstrably independent".

The Sub-Committee further warned that "allowing Ministers to retain control over such a significant number of datasets could damage the perceived independence of the statistics system". The separation between the National Statistician's role in the executive delivery of statistics and the governing board's oversight of the statistical system as a whole needed to be "clearer". The Committee also called for a significant reduction in pre-release access to statistics. Mr. Fallon concluded:

The Government mustn't miss this opportunity to ensure that official statistics are not only independent, but seen to be independent. Public confidence is the yardstick by which the success of the proposed legislation will ultimately be measured.¹³

The Government responded to the Sub-Committee's report in October 2006, and confirmed its intention to legislate to provide for the independence of UK official statistics through legislation, and:

- introduce direct reporting and accountability of a new Statistics Board to Parliament, rather than through Ministers;
- place a statutory responsibility on the Board to assess and approve all National Statistics against a new statutory Code of Practice;
- make key appointments to the Board through open and fair competition;
- remove the Statistics Board and, within it, the executive office (as the successor to the ONS), from ministerial control by establishing it as a non-ministerial department with special funding arrangements outside the normal Spending Review process; and,
- retain the current decentralised system of statistical production across government departments and agencies, and the Devolved Administrations.¹⁴

¹¹ HM Treasury *Independence for statistics: a consultation document*, 22 March 2006
http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/bud06_ons_357.pdf

¹² House of Commons Treasury Committee *Independence for statistics*, Tenth Report of Session 2005-06, 26 July 2006, HC 1111
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmtreasy/1111/1111.pdf>

¹³ House of Commons Treasury Committee *Press Notice 55* (26 July 2006)
http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/treasury_committee/tcpn260706.cfm

¹⁴ HM Treasury *Independence for statistics: the Government response*, 15 December 2006
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200506/cmselect/cmtreasy/1604/1604.pdf>

The Government introduced the legislation into the House of Commons in November 2006 as the *Statistics and Registration Service Bill*, and the Second Reading (main substantive debate) was held in early January 2007, after which the Bill was considered in committee, and the procedure was repeated in the upper House, the House of Lords.¹⁵

The parliamentary process was unexpectedly lengthy. During the committee stages in the House of Commons, the Bill was amended to include a statutory objective for the Board to operate in the public interest, to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics *to serve the public good*. The most significant amendment was made during the House of Lords stages when an amendment was carried to give residual ministerial responsibility for the new Statistics Board to the Cabinet Office instead of the Treasury. While the Government conceded to this amendment, it refused to concede to other Lords' amendments, forcing a period of "ping-pong" for the Bill. The Bill was finally passed in July 2007, with the provisions of the new *Statistics and Registration Service Act* coming into force in April 2008.¹⁶

Key features of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*

Statutory objectives of the Authority

Section 7 of the Act sets out the objective of the Authority:

- (1) In the exercise of its functions under sections 8 to 21 the Board is to have the objective of promoting and safeguarding the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good.
- (2) In subsection (1) the reference to serving the public good includes in particular—
 - (a) informing the public about social and economic matters, and
 - (b) assisting in the development and evaluation of public policy.
- (3) The Board is accordingly, in the exercise of its functions under sections 8 to 21, to promote and safeguard—
 - (a) the quality of official statistics,
 - (b) good practice in relation to official statistics, and
 - (c) the comprehensiveness of official statistics.
- (4) In this Part references to the quality of any official statistics includes—
 - (a) their impartiality, accuracy and relevance, and
 - (b) their coherence with other official statistics.
- (5) In this Part references to good practice in relation to official statistics includes ensuring their accessibility.

Section 8 further requires the Authority to "monitor the production and publication of official statistics".

The Code of Practice, and Assessment

While the legislation continued with the concept and label of National Statistics, it gave the Statistics Board a statutory responsibility for preparing and publishing, after due consultation, a new code of practice for statistics. Government ministers remain wholly responsible for the statistics produced in their departments where they are not currently National Statistics, and they continue to have responsibility for deciding whether they wish to put forward departmental statistics for assessment by the

¹⁵ *Statistics and Registration Service Bill* (Bill 8 of 2006-07)
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmbills/008/2007008.pdf>

¹⁶ *Statistics and Registration Service Act* (ch 18)
http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2007/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf

Statistics Board against the principles contained in the new Code. However, the Statistics Board must notify Ministers if it considers that any non-National Statistic should be assessed against the Code.

Responsibility for the assessment of official statistics against the provisions of the Code of Practice, and for making recommendations about their designation as National Statistics, rests with a Head of Assessment appointed by the non-executive members of the Board. The legislation provides for a separation of functions, such that the National Statistician is prevented from taking part in deliberations about the assessment of the statistics, and conversely, the Head of Assessment is prevented from being involved in the executive production of the statistics produced by the ONS. The remaining executive member of the Board is also prohibited from taking part in deliberations about assessment and designation.

The Board is required to publish a programme for the assessment and re-assessment of National Statistics, and to publish, after consultation, a statement of principles and procedures governing the arrangements for assessment.

Pre-release access to statistics (in their final form)

During the course of the parliamentary debates on the legislation, particular attention was paid to the provisions in the Bill relating to pre-release access. While the legislation gave a statutory responsibility to the new Board to prepare and publish a new code of practice for statistics, to replace the existing National Statistics code, specific provision was made for the arrangements governing pre-release. The legislation expressly prohibited the Authority from determining the arrangements for pre-release access to statistics in their final form as part of the new Code. The pre-release rules would, instead, be determined by the relevant Parliament(s).

The UK Government published its proposals for pre-release access arrangements in December 2007, and began a consultation process. The Scottish Government also launched a consultation on arrangements for pre-release access to Scottish devolved statistics. Following the consultations the UK Government has legislated to reduce pre-release access to non-market sensitive statistics to a period of up to 24 hours, whereas the Scottish Government has decided to grant up to 5 days' privileged access to Scottish devolved statistics.

In October 2008, the Authority published a statement in which it expressed the view that

...in the view of the Statistics Authority it still leaves government departments and ministers too much latitude. A system which continues to grant pre-access to statistics to ministers and officials, but not to other people, is unlikely to further our aim of promoting public trust in the statistical service.

The Authority's draft Code of Practice, the subject of a recent public consultation, promotes the principles of equality of access to statistics and the release of statistics at the earliest possible opportunity. Pre-release access sits uncomfortably alongside these principles and must be kept to the minimum.

The Authority now wants to see government departments using the flexibility given to them in the Order progressively to reduce the amount of time that pre-release access is granted, and the number of individuals to whom privileged access is given.

More generally, the Authority notes that the equivalent Order before the Scottish Parliament is different from the Westminster Order in important respects. The Authority hopes that there will be a fresh debate across the UK administrations about whether, and why, pre-release access to official statistics should be regarded as undesirable.¹⁷

Data sharing

The legislation contains powers to allow information sharing between public authorities and the Board where this is for statistical purposes only. All proposals to allow such sharing will be agreed by Ministers, enacted through secondary legislation and be subject to further scrutiny and approval by Parliament. The impact of this will be increased sharing of data between ONS and other Departments, subject to agreement by Parliament on a case-by-case basis. At the same time the Act also outlines measures designed to protect the confidentiality of personal information. Anyone guilty of contravening the Act will be liable to a fine, a prison sentence of up to two years, or both.

The early days of the Authority

As the shape of the Bill became clearer, the process for the appointment of the chair of the new Statistics Board began. Following an open competition, Sir Michael Scholar was nominated for appointment. The post of Chair of the Statistics Board was identified by the Government as the first senior public appointment to be subject to a pre-appointment confirmation hearing before Parliament, with a recommendation made through a formal motion put before both Houses. Sir Michael was formally appointed in July 2007 and took up post as chair-designate of the new Board in September 2007.¹⁸ The recruitment of the remaining non-executive members was undertaken during autumn 2007, and seven non-executive Board members took up post in January 2008.

The new “shadow” Statistics Board held its first formal meetings in February 2008, and agreed that the other two executive members who should join the National Statistician on the Board should be the Head of Assessment – Richard Alldritt - and the ONS director of finance. One of its first decisions was for the Board to operate as the “UK Statistics Authority”, and that two of the seven non-executive members should occupy the posts of Deputy Chair; one responsible for governance of the ONS and the other responsible for oversight of the UK official statistics system.

The provisions of the Statistics Act came into force on 1 April and the Authority formally assumed its statutory responsibilities on that date, including launching its website www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk and a new Publication Hub as a “one-stop-shop” for the release of all National Statistics independent of ministerial or policy commentary www.statistics.gov.uk.

The Authority published a draft Code of Practice for Official Statistics in July 2008, alongside the draft principles and procedures for its assessment function. While the draft Code was similar in many respects to the National Statistics Code, in other respects it was quite different. In particular, the draft Code was shorter, simpler and more imperative in style; closer in style, structure and content as the European Code of Practice; drafted to apply to all bodies that produce official statistics, not just to

¹⁷ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/news-releases/pre-release-access-to-official-statistics.pdf>

¹⁸ House of Commons Treasury Committee *The appointment of the Chair of the Statistics Board*, Ninth Report of Session 2006–07, HC 934 (July 2007) <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmtreasy/934/934.pdf>

statistical staff or to the statistics themselves; and it did not set out exceptions and exemptions in the text of the Code itself.

Following the consultation phase, the Authority has amended the text of the Code and the supporting principles for assessment, and the Authority will publish the new Code in January 2009.

The Authority has established a Monitoring and Assessment (M&A) Team, under the direction of its Head of Assessment, to undertake the statutory assessment and designation of National Statistics, and to provide the wider monitoring function over the UK statistical system as a whole.

In October 2008, the Authority announced its initial programme for statutory assessments. They included:

- Migration Statistics (Office for National Statistics)
- Road Freight Statistics (Department for Transport)
- Road Accident Statistics (Department for Transport)
- Emissions of carbon dioxide for local authority areas (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs)
- Prison Population Projections (Ministry of Justice)
- Statistics on International Development (Department for International Development)
- Enrolments at Schools and in Funded Pre-School Education in Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Executive)
- Recorded Crime in Scotland (Scottish Government)
- Children looked after by local authorities (separate publications for each of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland)
- Statistics from the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System (National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse)¹⁹

Also in October, the Authority published the specifications for six Monitoring Reports, intended to fulfil its requirements under section 8 of the Statistics Act. Monitoring Reports will be produced with the involvement of external experts and user interests, and will reflect the independent views of the Authority. The reports currently planned include:

- Priorities for designation as National Statistics
- Progress in improving migration statistics
- Barriers to trust in relation to crime statistics
- The communication of measurements of inflation (and consumer prices)
- Statistical long-term planning
- Adequacy of environmental statistics.²⁰

The first of these Reports will be published in 2009.

Another output of the Monitoring and Assessment function is a series of published Notes. From time to time the Authority will commission the M&A Team to produce

¹⁹<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/news-releases/initial-programme-of-assessments-2008-09.pdf>

²⁰<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/announcements/reports-from-the-authority-s-m-a-team---update-no-1.pdf>

brief notes in response to concerns raised publicly or privately in relation to a particular statistical series or issue.

These notes will be discussed with producers of statistics to ensure factual correctness, and will then be published on the Authority's website. In considering whether to publish such notes, the team will consider the significance or topicality of the issue, whether there is a clear link between the issue concerned and trust in the statistical service, whether there are underlying issues that could relate to other statistical producers or products, and whether the necessary resources are available to address the issue at the time.

In October 2008 the Authority published a note on the volatility of the Retail Sales Index which had been the subject of discussion in the media and elsewhere, and in November a second note was published on the consistency of data on hospital waiting time statistics across the constituent countries of the UK.²¹

The Authority also maintains an "issues log", a public record of the substantive issues raised with it, either by journalists, users of statistics, commentators, or the wider general public. This is available on the Authority's website and is updated periodically.

The finalised Code of Practice will be published in January 2009 alongside a report on the consultation exercise and a Monitoring Report highlighting those statistics not currently National Statistics that the Authority considers should be assessed against the new Code of Practice.

²¹<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring-and-assessment-notes/published-notes.html>

ANNEX A: Landmarks in the development of the UK Statistical System

- 1086** Domesday Book – earliest survey of England's population still in existence
- 1661** Published studies of life expectancy in London (William Petty)
- 1801** First Population Census in Britain
- 1810** First series of national crime statistics
- 1816** Survey on children employed in factories
- 1834** Establishment of the Royal Statistical Society (RSS)
- 1836** Appointment of the first Registrar General for England & Wales (Thomas Lister), to head the new General Register Office
- 1837** Civil registration (births, marriages and deaths) introduced
- 1840** Survey on children employed in mines
- 1906** First Annual Production Inquiry
- 1920** Census Act
- 1929** First official estimates of National Accounts (though not published until 1977 - the first published official estimates were in 1941)
- 1938** Population Statistics Act
- 1938** First use of sampling in a UK government enquiry (for the Cost of Living index)
- 1941** Creation of Central Statistical Office
- 1941** Creation of Government Social Survey
- 1947** Statistics of Trade Act
- 1966** Parliamentary Estimates Committee report on official statistics – recommended institutional changes to the production of statistics, as well as measures to strengthen the Government Statistical Service
- 1969** Creation of Business Statistics Office
- 1970** Creation of the Office for Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS)
- 1990** RSS report 'Counting with Confidence'
- 1996** Creation of the Office for National Statistics
- 2000** Framework for National Statistics – a government paper signed by all four administrations which redefined roles and responsibilities, introduced a new Code of Practice, and established the Statistics Commission.
- 2006** Statistics and Registration Service Bill
- 2007** Statistics and Registration Service Act; appointment of Sir Michael Scholar as Chair of UK Statistics Authority
- 2008** Appointment of remaining non-executive members of Authority; launch of Authority; consultation on draft Code of Practice

ANNEX B: Extract from speech by Jack Straw MP to the Royal Statistical Society (1995)

...the [unemployment] claimant count...is now simply not trusted as a proxy for a proper measure of unemployment, and for good reason...The lack of data on key aspects of the NHS is wholly unacceptable. No figures, for example, are available of the number of hospitals closed....If ever there were a case made for a National Statistical Service independent of Ministers, it is the NHS as much as the current reputation of the claimant count...Democracy is about conceding power to those with whom you disagree, not those with whom you agree; and about ensuring that every citizen has a similar access to the information on which decisions are made, and governments are judged. In a modern democracy, the system of official statistics should be a dignified part of the constitution. I believe that your Society's proposals, and ours, will help secure that end.²²

²² Speech by Jack Straw MP, Shadow Home Secretary, to the Royal Statistical Society (25 April 1995)

<http://www.rss.org.uk/pdf/Address%20to%20RSS%20by%20Jack%20Straw%201995.pdf>

ANNEX C: FRAMEWORK FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS (2000)

The non-statutory *Framework for National Statistics* was introduced in 2000, resulting in:

- the creation of the post of **National Statistician** as the Government's chief statistical adviser (and head of the Government Statistical Service). Under the Framework, the post holder is granted operational independence from Ministers, and is both the professional Head of National Statistics and the Director of the ONS. The National Statistician has responsibility for the professional statistical quality of all outputs comprising National Statistics²³ and for ensuring that all outputs are produced in accordance with the standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. The National Statistician is appointed by, and is accountable to, the Chancellor of the Exchequer (as Minister for National Statistics²⁴) for the performance of National Statistics and, with departmental Heads of Profession for Statistics, for the discharge of annual work programmes approved by Ministers;
- the creation of an independent **Statistics Commission**, to advise on quality assurance and integrity – including in areas of widespread concern – and priority setting for National Statistics.²⁵ Independent of both Ministers and producers of National Statistics, the Commission has its own budget and is able to determine its own activities. The Commission normally comprises eight Commissioners, supported by a Chief Executive and a secretariat of around ten staff. On the Framework's introduction, the Commission was explicitly tasked to "review the need for statistical legislation after two years and ... keep the legislative framework under review thereafter"; and
- the introduction of the concept of '**National Statistics**', aimed at providing an accurate, up-to-date, comprehensive and meaningful description of the UK economy and society, underpinned by professional standards as set out in a new Code of Practice. The Code – which draws on the United Nations' Fundamental Principles for Official Statistics²⁶ – is a guide for all public sector statistical work, and applies not only to outputs from the ONS, but also to all those National Statistics produced elsewhere. Ministers are responsible for

²³ The governance arrangements for the Retail Prices Index (RPI) are an exception – the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as Minister for National Statistics, is formally responsible for scope and definition, with the National Statistician advising only on methodology.

²⁴ Under devolution arrangements, Ministerial responsibility for the coordination of National Statistics is shared with the Minister for Finance in the Scottish Executive, the Finance Secretary in the National Assembly for Wales, and the Minister for the Department of Finance and Personnel in Northern Ireland.

²⁵ The *Framework for National Statistics* (2000) requires the Statistics Commission to "comment on the application of the National Statistics Code of Practice", "advise Ministers of areas of widespread concern about the quality of official statistics", and empowers the Commission to "comment on the quality assurance processes of National Statistics, as well as being able to carry out spot checks on departmental or other audits of National Statistics, to advise the National Statistician of any areas of concern that merit review and if necessary to carry out or commission its own audits".

²⁶ The UN *Fundamental Principles for Official Statistics* were adopted in 1994 to inform the organisation, collection and promulgation of official statistics across all UN members. See United Nations Economic and Social Council *UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics: Report of the Special Session of the Statistical Commission* (New York, 11-15 April 1994) E/1994/29

deciding the scope of National Statistics within their departments, and for ensuring that departmental Heads of Profession for statistics have the authority to maintain and demonstrate the integrity of such statistics in accordance with the Code. The National Statistician is responsible for the maintenance of the Code and its interpretation. The Code is supported by 12 protocols, which set out the specific responsibilities of data producers in a range of areas, for example in relation to Release Practices and Data Access and Confidentiality.²⁷

²⁷ The 12 protocols cover: Release Practices; Consultation Arrangements between the National Statistician and UK Government Ministers; Professional Competence; Customer Service and User Consultation; Data Presentation, Dissemination and Pricing; Statistical Integration; Data Management, Documentation and Presentation; Managing Respondent Load; Quality Management; Revisions; Data Access and Confidentiality; and Data Matching http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/national_statistics/cop/protocols_published.asp.

ANNEX D: Key organisations and stakeholders comprising the UK statistical system

PRODUCERS OF STATISTICS	COMMENTATORS	DECISION-MAKERS WHO NEED STATISTICS
<p>Office for National Statistics (co-ordinates others and produces around 20% of statistics)</p> <p>Department of Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Department of Health Department of Energy and Climate Change Information Centre for Health and Social Care Department for Children, Schools and Universities Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs Department for Transport Department for Work and Pensions HM Revenue and Customs Home Office Department of Communities and Local Government Cabinet Office Defence Analytical Services and Advice Ministry of Justice Department for Culture, Media and Sport Department for International Development Forestry Commission Government Actuary's Department Health and Safety Executive HM Treasury Office for Standards in Education Office of Manpower Economics</p> <p>Devolved Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency Local Government Data Unit Wales National Assembly for Wales Scottish Government General Register Office for Scotland</p> <p>Arms length bodies - numerous</p>	<p>Statistics Authority</p> <p>Royal Statistical Society</p> <p>Media</p>	<p>Parliament</p> <p>Central government Departments</p> <p>Devolved Administrations</p> <p>UK public services police, fire etc</p> <p>Local and regional government bodies</p> <p>Utilities</p> <p>Commercial services e.g. insurance, transport</p> <p>Businesses</p> <p>Voluntary sector</p> <p>Special interest groups</p> <p>Academics</p> <p>Citizens</p>