

UK Statistics Legislation Questionnaire

The UK has never had an Official Statistics Act, only legislation authorising the census of population and the collection of business statistics. There has however, been a debate on the need for such an Act and in 2000 there was a ministerial directive setting up National Statistics with a clear commitment to independence from political interference and to providing the public at large with “a window on the work of Government”. In order to ensure the integrity of National Statistics the directive also set up a Statistics Commission as an independent watchdog. One of the tasks of the Commission is to advise the Minister on whether or not legislation is desirable.

There are three main questions/discussion areas

What are the main arguments in favour/against legislation?

Scope - what should be covered by the legislation?

How does your Statistics Act work in practice?

Arguments in favour/against legislation (answer on rating scale, where you regard 5 as very important, 1 as totally unimportant)

In favour

Public declaration that Government respects the integrity of the National Statistical Service/Office (NSO). (rating.....)

Opportunity to sign up to the UN principles for statistical service - attached. (.....)

Ensures that key controls are in place. e.g. who is responsible for NSO and various procedures such as appointment of National Statistics head (NSH). (.....)

Revision needed due to existing legislation causing problems. e.g. too narrowly defined confidentiality clauses. (.....)

Consolidation/integration of scattered laws. (.....)

Updating. Many changes needed. (.....)

Requirement to conform to international standards. (.....)

Other arguments for, please write in and rate.

Against

The culture in which the National Statistics Service/Office operates is more important than legislation. (.....)

Legislation produces unforeseen adverse results. (.....)

Legislation introduces rigidity making it difficult to make changes (.....)

Please give examples of 1.9 and 1.10

Other arguments against please write in and rate

Any comments on advantages/disadvantages of legislation would be welcome.

Scope of National Statistics Legislation

What should be covered? Hopefully most of the important points are listed below, but please add any others that you consider relevant. If you believe that the point should be in a Code of Practice not in legislation please enter CP in the bracket (.....) below. If a legislation point, answer on rating scale where you regard 5 as very important, 1 as totally unimportant, 4, 3 & 2 intermediate. The practice of several of these points is covered in Section 3.

Commitment to providing the public with statistics. (.....) see questions 3.8 to 3.13

Impartiality/Objectivity. (.....)

Confidentiality arrangements. (.....)

Requirement to comment on misuse of statistics (UN principle 4). (.....)

Concern for respondent burden. (.....)

Unification of statistical processes within the country. (.....)

Use of administrative data. (.....)

User consultation mechanisms. (.....)

Authority to collect statistics. (.....)

Mission of National Statistics Service/Office. (NSO) (.....)

Role of National Statistics Head. (NSH) (.....)

Procedure for appointing/dismissing NSH. (.....) see questions 3.3 to 3.5

Administrative responsibility for NSH i.e. reporting chain. (.....) see question 3.2

Setting up of a Statistics Council. (.....)

Procedure for planning and implementing the statistical programme. (.....)

Funding arrangements for NSO. (.....) see question 3.1

Access to information protected by other laws. (.....)

Access to micro-data. (.....)

Special legal arrangements for relationship between NSO and devolved or decentralised official statistics units. (.....)

International cooperation obligation. (.....)

Publication of a Code of Practice. (.....)

Statistics release dates practice. (.....) see question 3.7

Other

Please add any other points that you think are relevant. (include rating)

Observations on scope would be welcome. In particular whether you prefer a **short act based on general principles** _____ (tick) or an **act with highly detailed provisions**. _____

If the **current act has replaced earlier legislation** what were the main changes and why?

3 How does the Statistics Act work in practice?

National Statistical Service/Office

How is the Budget determined?

NSO prepares and Minister approves ____ (tick)

Budget based on work programme agreed with Minister ____ (tick)

Budget fixed by Government and work programme adjusted to meet budget ____ (tick)

Please comment.

Who does National Statistics Head report to

Is NSH a political appointment ____ (tick). Selected by the minister acting independently ____ (tick). Selected by independent panel from applicants applying to

national advertisement ____ *Please describe composition of panel.* Other method - ____ (tick)

Please describe.

What is the term of office for NSH ? ____ (years)

Who can dismiss NSH and what are the grounds for dismissal?

Is NSO responsible for own quality assurance ____ (tick) or is quality monitored by an outside organisation ____ (tick)

Comment.

Who if anyone is entitled to early release and what is the timescale in days/hours and does this vary by statistical series?

Statistics and Democratic debate

Should the NSO only be responsible for collecting and disseminating statistics or should it incorporate a research function which ensures that official statistics are relevant to public debate on key issues?

Include research function. YES/NO (delete which ever is not appropriate)

Comment

The decline in the percentage of the population voting in a General Election has been a cause of concern in the UK and many other countries especially when linked to a rise in direct action. Do you believe that Official Statistics properly used could stimulate public debate and thereby encourage more active participation in the democratic process?

YES/NO (delete which ever is not appropriate)

Comment

Is there a programme to develop new Statistical Series to underpin debate on issues of public concern YES/NO. If yes please give details.

Does the NSO organise an Official Statistics day or week to draw attention to the value of statistics in decision-making? YES/NO

The Internet has huge potential for disseminating Official Statistics to the public. How user friendly is your website? Can it be interrogated by queries such as how has the level of unemployment changed over the last five years in the southeast part of the country and how does this compare with the rest of the country. YES/NO
Would you favour joint development of an interrogation system based on 'familiar' rather than 'statistical terms'? YES/NO

Comment

Form and role of Statistics Council

If there is more than one organisation working with the NSO please copy questions 3.13 to 3.22 and repeat, giving the title of each organisation.

Number of members _____

Are they independents _____ (tick) or representatives of specified Organisations _____ (Please list the organisations)

Are members appointed by? (tick)

A Government Minister _____

The Head of the NSO _____

Nominated by the organisations represented on the council _____

What is the position of the National Statistics Head? (tick)

a full member of the Council _____

has the right to attend _____

attends only by invitation _____

Who chairs the meetings? _____

How frequently does the Commission/Council meet? _____

How does the Council operate?

Responds to plans presented by the NSO _____ (tick)

Initiates own plans for Official Statistics collection and dissemination _____ (tick)

Prepares Annual Report for Parliament _____ Minister _____ (tick)

(Examples of reports would be welcome)

Monitors quality of NSO output _____ (tick)

Is the council purely advisory _____ or does it have some executive functions _____ (tick)

Does the Council have

its own Secretariat separate from the NSO. YES/NO

its own Budget YES/NO If yes, how much _____ (tick)

Comment on method of operation
