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Peer review on the implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Main findings (including an assessment of the co-ordination role of the National Statistical Institute):

The peer review took place at the London premises of the Office for National Statistics of the United Kingdom from 24 – 26 September 2007.

It is important to note that a new Statistics and Registration Service Act has been passed by the Parliament in July 2007, which implies a significant change in the organisation of the British statistical system from 1st April 2008 when the new Act comes into force. The following three paragraphs describe major changes introduced by the new Statistics and Registration Service Act. They are based on the 10 pages brochure “A Brief Guide to the new Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007” that has been drafted by ONS management and disseminated to ONS staff members.

The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 creates an independent Statistics Board, as a non-ministerial department accountable to Parliament, whose objective is to promote and safeguard (i) the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good; and (ii) the quality, good practice and comprehensiveness of official statistics. This new organisation replaces the current Statistics Commission and Office for National Statistics. The legislation does not alter the basic structure for statistical production in the UK, where ONS (as part of the new Statistics Board) will retain its position as the national statistical office, and policy departments will retain responsibility for their statistical outputs on their topic areas.

The Statistics Board's main functions are:

- Monitoring and reporting on all official statistics – the Statistics Board is required to monitor, and may report on, all official statistics (wherever produced), whether or not they are National Statistics.
- Independent assessment of key statistics – the Statistics Board will be required to prepare and publish a Code of Practice against which it will be required to independently assess the quality and integrity of key statistics (both produced in ONS and across government departments) for formal approval as National Statistics.
- Oversight of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – the Statistics Board will provide the top level of governance for what is currently ONS, replacing the oversight role that Treasury Ministers now perform. The Statistics Board consequently has a statutory power to produce statistics, as the ONS does now.

The key posts established by the Statistics and Registration Service Act are:

- The Statistics Board's membership – the Chair, at least five other non-executive members (some appointed after consultation with the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland), the National Statistician and two other executive members.
- The National Statistician – who will be a full member of the Statistics Board, and will be directly responsible for the work of the current ONS, reporting to the Statistics Board not Ministers, as well as being the Statistics Board's chief professional statistical adviser and chief executive.
- The Head of Assessment – who will be the Statistics Board's principal adviser on assessment.

The peer review team had therefore to decide whether it would assess the current system, which will be replaced on 1st April 2008, or assess the future system as it is supposed to work from 1st April 2008, on the basis of the text of the new Statistics Act and a number of assumptions on future organisational arrangements.

It has been decided to look at the future and to consider the compliance of the UK statistical office with the European Statistics Code of Practice after 1st April 2008. It certainly is the most promising approach, but it is as well a challenge because a number of organisational arrangements have not yet been fixed. The peer review team is therefore pointing out that its conclusions are to some extent subject to confirmation once the new system will be established. In the absence of any decision made so far and for the sake of clarity, the peer review team has decided to continue with the current name "Office for National Statistics (ONS)".

The situation established from 1st April 2008 will comply to a very large extent with the principle of professional independence. Some restrictions are however introduced in the Statistics and Registration Service Act about the retail price index and devolved statistics in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. While restrictions on retail price index are not likely to influence the production and publication of European statistics, the potential for Ministerial involvement in decisions on devolved statistics appears to have a marginal impact on European statistics.

The mandate for data collection is not explicitly given by the law to statistical authorities, but there is a clear mandate for data production and publication. The statistical authority cannot compel response to all statistical surveys. This is possible only for statistics covered by specific acts, especially Population Census Act, Statistics of Trade Act, and Population Statistics Act.

Financial resources are granted to the new statistical authorities over five years, which is commendable. At the same time, some concerns can be expressed about human resources (high turnover) and IT equipment (risk of obsolescence).

In general, there is a strong quality commitment in the ONS, which is expected to be strengthened and increased even more when the new Act comes into force (April 2008).

In the same way, statistical confidentiality is strongly guaranteed both in the new law and also in practice in the current daily work at ONS.

Impartiality and objectivity of European statistics produced by statistical authorities are a major goal of the future Statistics Board. The Statistics Board will be the legal successor of the ONS. However there is still margin for progress in this area, especially on public information on methods and procedures. The same can be said about accessibility and clarity of published data.

The Statistics and Registration Service Act describes a clear coordination role of government statistical system on several levels. The Chair of the Statistics Board and the National Statistician will have enough influence, in the new system, to coordinate other departments involved in making official statistics. Heads of other departments' statistical bodies, who have been interviewed by the peer review team recognise and seemingly accept this leading position.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the adoption of the European Statistics Code of Practice, the Statistical Programme Committee (SPC) committed itself to adhering to its principles. At its meeting on 25 May 2005, the SPC endorsed a stepwise monitoring procedure for the implementation of the Code over three years during which countries' self-assessments should be combined with elements of peer review, benchmarking and monitoring on the basis of the explanatory indicators added to each principle of the Code.

During December 2005 / January 2006 the National Statistical Institutes and Eurostat have completed their self-assessments, the results have been summarised by Eurostat in a report submitted to the Economic and Financial Committee in May 2006 which has been published on the Eurostat website.

As a next step towards implementation of the Code, the European Statistical System is organising peer reviews to complement the self-assessments starting with 2006. They are considered a vital element for the implementation of the Code of Practice given their capacity to encourage the sharing of best practice and to contribute to transparency in what is, essentially, a self-regulatory approach. This approach is designed to enhance accountability and to help building trust in the integrity of the European Statistical System, its processes and outputs.

The Code of Practice peer reviews follow a common methodology focusing on the institutional environment and dissemination part of the Code comprising the following principles: (1) Professional independence, (2) Mandate for data collection, (3) Adequacy of resources, (4) Quality commitment, (5) Statistical confidentiality, (6) Impartiality and Objectivity and (15) Accessibility and Clarity. In principle, the peer review is limited to the National Statistical Institute and its co-ordination role within a dispersed national statistical system. A short document provided by the National Statistical Institute which summarises key aspects of the functioning of the national statistical system is published together with this report.

During a three days visit on-site and on the basis of information material provided by the National Statistical Institute and Eurostat prior to the review, peer reviews yield a report assessing compliance with the Code of Practice at indicator level and by principle following a four point assessment scale. The report includes a refined set of improvement actions covering all principles of the Code which are being used to feed the monitoring process of the implementation of the Code in the European Statistical System.

While the peer reviewers will undertake to base their assessment to the extent possible on factual information, it is worth noting some of the limitations of the peer review process. For example, peer reviewers are dependent upon the resources made available to them (though experienced reviewers can be expected to identify where appropriate information is not forthcoming). In addition these reviews are conducted on a strategic, organisation-wide and system wide basis. Accordingly it is not straightforward to ascertain that certain practices or behaviours or systems operate in all statistical domains.

2. FINDINGS PER PRINCIPLE

Principle 1: Professional Independence

The professional independence of statistical authorities from other policy, regulatory or administrative departments and bodies, as well as from private sector operators, ensures the credibility of European Statistics.

Overall assessment: The situation established from 1st April 2008 will comply to a very large extent with this principle. If risks of limitations of professional independence of statistical authorities exist, they are not likely to substantially affect the production of European Statistics in the UK.

Indicator 1.1: The independence of the statistical authority from political and other external interference in producing and disseminating official statistics is specified in law.

Assessment: **Largely met**

Comments: According to the Statistics and Registration Service Act of July 2007, a new corporate body will exist (from 1st April 2008), to be known as the Statistics Board. This Board will exercise its functions on behalf of the Crown (Article 2).

The chairman of the Statistics Board will be appointed by Her Majesty, and at least five other non-executive members of the Statistics Board will be appointed by the Minister for the Cabinet Office after consultation of the chairman (Article 3). The Minister for the Cabinet Office may give directions to the Board only if he or she considers that there has been serious failure by the Board. The same is true with Scottish Ministers, Welsh Ministers, and the Department of Finance and Personnel for Northern Ireland. Any direction is published and a copy is laid before Parliament (Article 29).

Article 7 of the Statistics and Registration Service Act states that the Statistics Board is to have the objective of promoting and safeguarding the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good, and that the Statistics Board is accordingly to promote and safeguard the quality of official statistics, good practice in relation to official statistics, and the comprehensiveness of official statistics. Article 7 also specifies that references to the quality of any official statistics includes their impartiality, accuracy and relevance, and their coherence with other official statistics, and that references to good practices in relation to official statistics includes ensuring their accessibility.

Article 8 of the Statistics and Registration Service Act states that the Statistics Board is to monitor the production and publication of official statistics. Article 9 specifies that the Statistics Board is to develop and maintain definitions, methodologies, classifications and standards for official statistics, and promote their use in relation to official statistics; for this purpose it may give guidance and advice to persons responsible for official statistics. Article 10 states that the Statistics Board is to prepare, adopt and publish a Code of Practice for Statistics.

Article 27 of the Statistics and Registration Service Act specifies that the Statistics Board is reporting to the Parliament, the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales, and the Northern Ireland Assembly on its activities and any matter relating to the exercise of its functions.

On the basis of above mentioned Articles of the Statistics and Registration Service Act, it can be recognised that, in general, the independence of the Statistics Board from political and other

external interference in producing and disseminating official statistics is specified in law. But two limitations are mentioned in the Act:

- The retail price index, where the Bank of England can oblige the Statistics Board to request the consent of the Chancellor of the Exchequer for any change to the coverage or the basic calculation of the index, which would be taken by the Bank as a fundamental change being materially detrimental to the interests of the holders of relevant index-linked gilt-edged securities (Article 21);
- Devolved statistics: the Statistics Board may not produce and publish Scottish, or Welsh, or Northern Ireland devolved statistics without the consent of Scottish Ministers, Welsh Ministers, or the appropriate Northern Ireland department (Article 20).

In the case of the retail price index, it is to be noted that the consumer price index (CPI) is published at the same time as the retail price index (RPI), and background notes in the press release make clear that the CPI is the main UK domestic measure of consumer inflation for macroeconomic purposes. It is related to the European Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP). The RPI is introduced as the “most long-standing general purpose measure of inflation, and is used for a variety of purposes, including indexation”. Therefore, any possible scope for involvement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer is limited to an index that is not the main index for purely statistical purposes. Moreover, the RPI is not part of European Statistics. Therefore, it can be considered that this specific case of limitation of professional independence of the statistical authority has no significant influence on the production of European statistics.

For the devolved statistics, the situation is less clear, and has raised a lively discussion between the peer review team and ONS management. Representatives of academia and the media interviewed by the peer review team disputed whether the new Statistics and Registration Services Act would change anything to the existing situation in relation to professional independence. The example of agricultural statistics has been quoted. These are devolved statistics. If the Welsh Ministers decide to stop producing these statistics, it will not be possible for the UK Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to continue producing such statistics for UK, including regional breakdowns, without the consent of Welsh Ministers. However, this example is valid only for statistics that are not (or not yet) made compulsory by European Community legislation. According to Government of Wales Act 1998 (Article 24), Scotland Act 1998 (Articles 29, 53, and 57), and Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Article 24), the obligation to respect “Community law” is devolved together with corresponding statistical areas.

According to the “Peer’s Guide” (Version 1.2) of Eurostat the scope of the peer review is limited ‘to European statistics only’ (Peer’s Guide, Section 2.2). Moreover, ‘While a delineation between European and national statistics can be difficult in practice, the concept of European statistics can be best approximated by the so-called “acquis statistique” of which a summary is available in the Eurostat statistical requirement compendium’. This compendium includes statistics that are covered by legal acts as well as statistics that are covered by “gentleman agreements”.

To summarise:

- (i) According to Article 20 of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007, there is a risk of political interference in devolved statistical area.
- (ii) This risk cannot exist for statistics that are covered by Community law.

- (iii) The scope of the peer review covers all European statistics, which can be best approximated by the so-called “acquis statistique” of which a summary is available in the Eurostat statistical requirement compendium. This compendium includes all statistics that are covered either by a Community legal act or by a gentleman agreement.

The opinion of the peer review team is that, in general, the independence of the Statistics Board from political and other external interference in producing and disseminating official statistics is specified in the Statistics and Registration Service Law. However, it appears that there is a potential risk of such interference in devolved statistics that are part of European statistics but are not covered by a Community legal act. The opinion of the peer review team is that the subject of indicator 1.1 is reflected to a significant degree in the new legal framework and is implemented in the majority of instances.

Indicator 1.2: The head of the statistical authority has sufficiently high hierarchical standing to ensure senior level access to policy authorities and administrative public bodies. He/She should be of the highest professional calibre.

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The chairman of the Statistics Board is appointed by Her Majesty (Article 3 of the Statistics and Registration Service Act). The National Statistician is ex officio one of the three executive members of the Board (Article 3). He or She is appointed by Her Majesty. The National Statistician is to be the Board's principal adviser on the quality of official statistics, good practices in relation to official statistics, and the comprehensiveness of official statistics (Article 30) and the chief executive of the Board (Article 31). The Board must have regard to the advice of the National Statistician. When it rejects the advice of the National Statistician, the Board must publish a statement of its reasons for doing so. It must as soon as possible thereafter lay a copy before Parliament (Article 30).

Indicator 1.3: The head of the statistical authority and, where appropriate, the heads of its statistical bodies have responsibility for ensuring that European Statistics are produced and disseminated in an independent manner.

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: According to the Statistics and Registration Service Act (Article 8), "the Board is to monitor the production and publication of official statistics." Moreover, "the Board may report any concerns it has about (i) the quality of any official statistics; (ii) good practice in relation to any official statistics; or (iii) the comprehensiveness of any official statistics, to the person responsible for those statistics." Eventually, "the Board may publish its findings or any report under this section."

Indicator 1.4: The head of the statistical authority and, where appropriate, the heads of its statistical bodies have the sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases.

Assessment: Largely met

Comments: As mentioned above, the Statistics Board is to have the objective of promoting and safeguarding the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good (Article 7 of the Statistics and Registration Service Act); it is to monitor the production and publication of official statistics (Article 8); it is to develop and maintain definitions, methodologies, classifications and standards for official statistics, and promote their use in

relation to official statistics, and may for this purpose give guidance and advice to persons responsible for official statistics (Article 9).

There is a risk to have this responsibility shared, as explained in comments on indicator 1.1 above, (i) with the Bank of England and the Chancellor of the Exchequer for the retail price index (Article 21); and (ii) the Scottish Ministers, a Welsh ministerial authority, and the appropriate Northern Ireland department for devolved statistics (Article 20). This risk has been considered as (i) not impacting European statistics in the case of the retail price index; and (ii) having a potential though limited impact on devolved European statistics produced and disseminated by the Statistics Board.

Indicator 1.5: The statistical work programmes are published and periodic reports describe progress made.

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The Statistics Board must produce an annual report on (i) what it has done during the past year; (ii) what it has found during the past year; and (iii) what it intends to do during the next year. This report is laid before the Parliament, the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales, and the Northern Ireland Assembly. The report must be published as soon as possible thereafter (Article 27). This report will cover official statistics produced and published by the Statistics Board itself (Article 20) as well as official statistics produced and published by ministerial departments under monitoring by the Statistics Board (Article 8).

Indicator 1.6: Statistical releases are clearly distinguished and issued separately from political/policy statements.

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: In principle, the UK national Code of Practice establishes this distinction (under the heading "Integrity"). There are however evidences of violation of it. Several cases have been brought to the attention of the peer review team, but they relate to statistics produced and disseminated by Departments' statistical services (especially when the release is handled by the Press Office of the Department), which is outside the coverage of the peer review. As far as the ONS is concerned, the peer review team could verify that statistical releases are clearly distinguished from political statements, they are published with the ONS logo and are issued independently.

The ONS is developing the project of a First Release Hub with all statistical first releases in standard format, and plans to have it ready by 1st April 2009. The completion of this project is expected to bring the UK statistical system in full compliance with this indicator.

Indicator 1.7: The statistical authority, when appropriate, comments publicly on statistical issues, including criticisms and misuses of official statistics.

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: There is a rebuttals policy (letters to editors) that is publicly available on the website of the ONS. The basic principle of this policy is that ONS should respond if there is a factual inaccuracy or if the professionalism, honesty or independence of the organisation is called into question. Detailed rules on the decision to respond, the timing of response, and the hierarchical level of the signatory are spelled out in an internal regulation of ONS.

Letters are published on the Daily, intranet and the 'About ONS' section of the National Statistics Online website

The current practice of ONS is to react only to major criticisms and misuses of official statistics. The purpose is to draw attention of the public to very severe cases (a recent example has been given in the area of migration statistics). It is the current opinion of ONS management that too frequent reactions incur the risk of becoming “usual”, and have a limited impact.

It is important to point out that the position of the Statistics Board on this issue, especially of its chairman, after 1st April 2008 is still unknown by definition.

Principle 2: Mandate for Data Collection

Statistical authorities must have a clear legal mandate to collect information for European statistical purposes. Administrations, enterprises and households, and the public at large may be compelled by law to allow access to or deliver data for European statistical purposes at the request of statistical authorities.

Overall assessment: The Statistics Board has by law the mandate to produce and publish statistics for European statistical purposes. The new Statistics and Registration Services Act does not explicitly mention the collection of information as a preliminary step of the production process of European statistics. If it is accepted that the production of statistics generally implies the preliminary collection of information, the future statistical authorities will comply with this principle, with the important restriction that the right to compel response to statistical surveys is limited to statistics covered by the Population Census Act 1920, the Statistics of Trade Act 1947, and the Population Statistics Act 1938.

Indicator 2.1: The mandate to collect information for the production and dissemination of official statistics is specified in law.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: The Statistics Board may itself produce and publish statistics relating to any matter relating to the United Kingdom or any part of it (Article 20). The collection of data is not explicitly specified in the new law as a step toward the production of statistics. If it is accepted that the mandate to produce and disseminate official statistics generally implies the collection of information, the future organisation is complying with this indicator.

Indicator 2.2: The statistical authority is allowed by national legislation to use administrative records for statistical purposes.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: According to the Statistics and Registration Service Act of July 2007, public authorities can be authorised to disclose information to the Statistics Board in the areas of births and deaths, adoptions, marriages, civil partnership (Article 42), information relating to National Health Service registration (Articles 43 and 44), information held by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (Article 45), and other information held in administrative records where the disclosure would otherwise be prohibited by a rule or law or an Act passed before the Statistics and Registration Service Act, or where the authority would not otherwise have power to make the disclosure (Article 47).

Indicator 2.3: On the basis of a legal act, the statistical authority may compel response to statistical surveys.

Assessment: **Largely met**

Comments: The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 does not say anything about the possibility for the Statistics Board to compel response to statistical surveys. The possibility to compel response to statistical surveys exists in three legal acts, namely the Population Census Act 1920, the Statistics of Trade Act 1947, and the Population Statistics Act 1938, which is covering only a part of official statistics monitored by the Statistics Board. Households sample surveys, for example, are not covered by a legal act, on the basis of which the statistical authority would be able to compel response. This is an important part of social statistics.

To improve current practices, substantial efforts including further change of the legal framework are needed, which does not depend on the Statistics Board only.

Principle 3: Adequacy of Resources

The resources available to statistical authorities must be sufficient to meet European Statistics requirements.

Overall assessment: Budgetary resources are granted to the ONS for a five-years period and are broadly considered sufficient for the implementation of the new organisation created by the Statistics and Registration Services Act of July 2007. However, the high staff turnover and the risk for IT equipment to become obsolete might impact the level of resources available to meet European Statistics requirements.

Indicator 3.1: Staff, financial, and computing resources, adequate both in magnitude and in quality, are available to meet current European Statistics needs.

Assessment: **Largely met**

Comments: The ONS has been allotted a budget covering the five years 2008 – 2012 in view of the implementation of the new statistical organisation. At the same time an important turnover of staff is taking place, with older well skilled statisticians being replaced by younger less experienced professionals. Moreover, there is a concern at ONS about the ageing IT equipment that will not allow the use of most advanced software and technologies in the near future.

Indicator 3.2: The scope, detail and cost of European Statistics are commensurate with needs.

For European level reply

Indicator 3.3: Procedures exist to assess and justify demands for new European Statistics against their cost.

For European level reply

Indicator 3.4: Procedures exist to assess the continuing need for all European Statistics, to see if any can be discontinued or curtailed to free up resources.

For European level reply

Principle 4: Quality commitment

All ESS members commit themselves to work and co-operate according to the principles fixed in the Quality Declaration of the European Statistical System.

Overall assessment: The issue of Quality of Official Statistics is explicitly mentioned in the new Statistics and Registration Services Act 2007 under the objectives of the Statistics Board and also detailed by explicitly naming the elements of the quality to be included (Article 7). Article 10 of this Act refers to the national Code of Practice for Statistics to be prepared, adopted and published by the Statistics Board. With these articles the Statistics Board has explicitly committed itself to working in accordance with a Quality Declaration that is similar to the Quality Declaration of the European Statistical System. Until the Board has adopted and published the new Code of Practice, the existing national Code of Practice will be maintained by the Board (Article 19).

There is a wide ranging set of quality guidelines in place. For example the Guidelines for Measuring Statistical Quality, a Revision Policy and a Quality Management Protocol (as part of the National Statistics Code of Practice). All these guidelines are available in documents for all staff, several of them via the internal website. A quality centre with over a dozen staff members is supervising and guiding the work on quality issues and a system of providing quality assessments for separate statistics is in place.

The introduction of the Statistics and Registration Service Act will also increase the involvement in quality issues of those governmental departments involved in Official statistics outside the ONS. Already in 2002 an ambitious plan was prepared to assess the quality of all the 1300 statistics produced by the Governmental Statistical System (GSS). This plan has not been fully realised up till now. More staff resources for this exercise (25-30 full time equivalents) will be put in place in the near future.

Indicator 4.1 Product quality is regularly monitored according to the ESS quality components.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: A Quality Centre is established within ONS that in cooperation with the subject matter departments assesses the quality of its products. A large amount of the regular products of statistics are monitored on their quality via the system of domain reviews and specific quality assessments as well as Triennial / Quinquennial Reviews.

Indicator 4.2 Processes are in place to monitor the quality of the collection, processing and dissemination of statistics.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: The specialised Quality Centre supports the departments working on the specific parts of the statistical process as well as the subject matter departments. The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 (Article 8) provides the reference for the Statistics Board to monitor and report any concerns it has about, among others, the quality of any official statistics in ONS as well as in the other departments involved in Official statistics. This article 8 motivates the organisations to have a well organised structure on quality reporting in all its facets. This is currently already the case. Furthermore, a set of detailed descriptions for most if not all the statistical processes is available and can be used by each staff member (system known as 'STAG'). This system is known by many staff members, however, according to the expressions of the staff not yet used by all staff. Also the discipline to have it updated regularly was disputed.

In the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 the position of the head of Assessment in the Statistics Board is described. The exact profile and tasks of the head of assessment and his/her team and the division of roles between the different members of the Statistics Board there appears still to be unclear.

Indicator 4.3 Processes are in place to deal with quality considerations, including trade-offs within quality, and to guide planning for existing and emerging surveys.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: The quality monitoring and reporting based on the very detailed set of Guidelines for measuring statistical quality is used to rank the statistics according to their efficiency, fit for purpose as well as their pure statistical qualities. This allows the ONS Management to clearly recognise the statistics that are of high and of lower quality and functions as a tool in assessing the efficiency and via trade off between efficiency, quality and costs, of priority setting of statistics for improvement actions.

The preface of Guidelines for measuring statistical quality (version 3.0 of April 2006) specifies that "Using these guidelines when planning and producing statistics (...) will help ensure their quality."

The efficiency policy is applied beyond the ONS and is well armed also to work for the other departments in the GSS.

Indicator 4.4 Quality guidelines are documented and staff are well trained. These guidelines are spelled out in writing and made known to the public.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: The Guidelines for measuring statistical quality (version 3.0) are approved by ONS management and available on the website of ONS. The detailed documentation on the processes for all the statistical processes is available via the STAG system and updated on a regular way. The staff of ONS is well aware about these quality guidelines as well as the

availability of detailed process documentation, however in the meeting with the junior staff several staff members expressed that – even they are aware of the system - they are not using it. Training in quality is also provided.

The other governmental departments involved in official statistics are well aware about the Quality Guidelines as defined by the ONS. According to several commentators especially the senior members of the staff apply these on a regular basis.

Indicator 4.5 There is a regular and thorough review of the key statistical outputs using external experts where appropriate.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: About 20 core products (key statistical output) are reviewed on a regular (some yearly, others less frequent) basis in a rolling program of quality reviews. The quality assessment is done via only an internal review. Customers and users are consulted as part of these reviews; also parts of the reviews are based on assessments done by external reviewers. The Statistics User Forum is a system that allows for a regular feedback to the ONS on the quality of the outputs.

Principle 5: Statistical confidentiality

The privacy of data providers (households, enterprises, administrations and other respondents), the confidentiality of the information they provide and its use only for statistical purposes must be absolutely guaranteed.

Overall assessment: Statistical confidentiality is strongly guaranteed both in theory in the new Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 (Article 39) as well as in practice in the current daily work at ONS. There are new guidelines available for Disclosure Control Policies for tables produced from surveys as well as from Administrative data sources. In the security guide information is provided also on statistical confidentiality The detailed confidentiality protocol describes how to deal from a personnel staff viewpoint with the issue of confidentiality. The issue of confidentiality of administrative data is also treated in the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007. In this Act also the transfer of administrative data to the ONS is regulated as well as the use of the statistical data for research work by researchers (Article 39, 4 to the end).

Indicator 5.1 Statistical confidentiality is guaranteed in law.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: Articles 39 to 54 in the Statistics and Registration Services Act 2007 deal with the issue of confidentiality. These articles provide a comprehensive legal guarantee of the statistical confidentiality of all individual data obtained for statistical purposes relating to persons, households and enterprises. Also the confidentiality of administrative records in general is strongly regulated by this law. The Statistics and Registration Service Act refers explicitly to Acts for some specific statistics as the Census or the Statistics on International Trade (customs)

The stakeholders interviewed expressed their satisfaction in the manner in which ONS and the Statistics Board discharges its obligations in respect of statistical confidentiality.

Indicator 5.2 Statistical authority staff sign legal confidentiality commitments on appointment.

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: All staff signs confidentiality commitments on appointment and this is re-inforced in the training programmes. The discussions with all staff, including junior staff, revealed that there is a very strong awareness of the importance of statistical confidentiality throughout ONS as well as for those statisticians working in the other departments being part of the GSS. These also have signed a security agreement. In some of the departments involved in official statistics there are even specific declarations on confidentiality to be signed (for example, HMRC, which is involved in foreign trade statistics).

Indicator 5.3 Substantial penalties are prescribed for any wilful breaches of statistical confidentiality.

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The staff member when signing his appointment agrees with the confidentiality protocol (annexed to the security document). This document describes the penalties when breaching the confidentiality rules.

Also for external users of data that are provided to researchers the penalties when misusing the information - from the point of view of confidentiality - are described. In the last few years only one example was known about such a breach resulting in the withdrawal of access for the researcher in question.

Indicator 5.4 Instructions and guidelines are provided on the protection of statistical confidentiality in the production and dissemination processes. These guidelines are spelled out in writing and made known to the public.

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The Protocol on Release Practices Guide to Information Security gives guidelines for the protection of statistical confidentiality in the production and dissemination processes of statistics. Furthermore as described above specific set of guidelines for tables from surveys and from administrative sources have been adopted and are now accessible on ONS website. In training sessions instructions and guidelines are provided to the staff of the ONS and the other departments involved in official statistics. Via the website of ONS these guidelines are also made known to the users of ONS Statistics.

Indicator 5.5 Physical and technological provisions are in place to protect the security and integrity of statistical databases

Assessment: Fully met

Comments: The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 foresees in descriptions on the confidentiality regulations in general terms. The Director heading the IT section is responsible for ensuring the security and integrity of the statistical databases. Physical and technological protection provisions to this effect are clearly in place via common systems.

Indicator 5.6 Strict protocols apply to external users accessing statistical microdata for research purposes.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: Strict written protocols and physical protocols are in place governing access by external researchers to statistical micro data (Micro Data Release Procedure). The access to micro data via this procedure of 'granted researchers' and laboratories is a successful project allowing the interested group of academic researchers in the UK to access the data for research purposes. Systems for checking disclosure risks are in use to anonymise the data sets. A system of regular updates of the micro data sets that are accessible from the statistical archives allows the modernisation of these data sets to level that parallels the level of the data analysis techniques as used by the researchers.

Principle 6: Impartiality and objectivity

Statistical authorities must produce and disseminate European Statistics respecting scientific independence and in an objective, professional and transparent manner in which all users are treated equitably.

Overall assessment: None of the representatives of stakeholders questioned the impartiality and objectivity of the statistics produced by the ONS. From discussions it became evident that users need to be provided with more thorough information on methodological issues. There is a common understanding by all interested parties that the current practice of pre-release access to national statistics should be revised in view of the forthcoming Statistics and Registration Service Act.

Indicator 6.1: Statistics are compiled on an objective basis determined by statistical considerations.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: Article 7 (4) of the new Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 states that the quality of any official statistics means their impartiality, accuracy and relevance, as well as their coherence with other official statistics. Article 7(1) of the same Act imposes the Statistics Board, the legal successor to the ONS, a task of promoting and safeguarding the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. The Statistics Board will have a number of functions which enable it to realize this objective, including powers to monitor the quality of official statistics (Article 8), and to develop, maintain and promote the use of definitions, methodologies, classifications and standards used in official statistics (Article 9). Article 10 foresees that the Board will prepare, adopt and publish a new national Code of Practice for Statistics for the United Kingdom. The Board may at any time revise the Code. At the same time, in preparing or revising the Code the Board must consult Scottish Ministers, Welsh Ministers and the Department of Finance and Personnel for Northern Ireland. Articles 12 and 14 say that all official statistics produced in compliance with the Code must be designated as "National Statistics" by the Board. Article 26 allows the Board to publish anything in a manner it considers appropriate.

The current Code of Practice states that the National Statistician (the head of the ONS) has a final authority within the UK government on professional statistical issues, including the protection of confidentiality and privacy, the methodology and the format of release. Under the

current Code of Practice several protocols describe statistical considerations that should be followed when producing official statistics. The Protocol of Statistical Integration describes how coherent statistics will be achieved through the use of common concepts, frames, definitions, questions, classifications and output categories. More closely related protocols are also the Protocol of Quality Management, the Protocol on Managing Respondent Load, the Protocol on Professional Competence, etc.

Most stakeholders the Peer review team met with claimed that the ONS is an impartial producer of national statistics. It seems that professional users are quite satisfied with this aspect of the ONS' statistics. At the same time, some of the external persons met by the peer review team expressed the opinion that the general public does not hold the ONS in very high esteem. The public's distrust in the government and national scepticism about the authorities in general and the unfavourable image of the ONS created by part of the mass media – this is just to name some of the reasons for that. However, an opinion poll conducted gives evidence of that the ONS enjoys more trustworthiness among the public than the other producers of national statistics.

The Statistics and Registration Services Act to come into force from April 1, 2008 is indicative of the desire of the new Statistics Board to make a fresh start and maintain/promote the independence of the successor of the ONS.

Indicator 6.2: Choices of sources and statistical techniques are informed by statistical considerations.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: The ONS has policy to document choices of sources and statistical techniques based on the Protocol on Data Management, Documentation and Preservation under the National Statistics Code of Practice. That Protocol requires that statistical metadata (discovery metadata, statistical metadata, technical metadata) should be documented in a standard manner and should be made available to the widest possible audience through appropriate portals and other dissemination channels. There are also the Guidelines for Measuring Statistical Quality providing detailed standards for reporting metadata.

The Protocol on Quality Management under the National Statistics Code of Practice states that selection of statistical sources, methods and procedures is a professional responsibility and will be based on scientific principle and best international practice, taking account cost implications to producer of official statistics and data-providers.

No evidence was observed of a political influence on the choice of sources or statistical techniques.

See also indicator 6.1 above.

Indicator 6.3: Errors discovered in published statistics are corrected at the earliest possible date and publicised.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: The Protocol on Revisions under the National Statistics Code of Practice describes the policy of handling revisions. A more precise procedure is described in the Statement of

Compliance with the National Statistics Code of Practice and Protocols, which is available on the web site of the ONS.

Possible revisions are divided into two categories: scheduled and unexpected. Errors are treated as unexpected revisions. It is the National Statistician who makes decisions about the dissemination of unscheduled corrections, considering circumstances that prevail at that time. The procedure for making corrections requires them to be signed off by both the Communications Division and the Divisional and Executive Director responsible for the statistics involved. When it is decided that a correction is necessary to be published on the web, incorrect data will be removed and a note will be posted to give a reason for removal and an estimated date for the publication of the revised data. The corrected data will be published as soon as possible. If the correction is minor or insignificant, necessary amendments will be made without informing of the users. The corrected data are published with an accompanying note that corrections have been made, indicating also the reason for making corrections. When a substantial or significant error has occurred in a printed product, users are notified of it by telephone or e-mail and the revised data on the web are pointed to.

Serious errors rarely happen due to adequate procedures applied to guarantee quality. Minor errors occur approximately once a month. The errors log, which is maintained by the ONS, records all data and related metadata corrections made to national statistics on-line going back as far as about three years.

Indicator 6.4: Information on the methods and procedures used by the statistical authority are publicly available.

Assessment: **Largely met**

Comments: The UK subscribes to the SDDS of the IMF since 1996 and meets all SDDS requirements since 1999. A lot of information on the methods and procedures used are available on the web site of the ONS. However, most users met with by the team of peers complained that descriptions of methodology were difficult to find and were often not updated. At the time same, they also claimed that additional information is provided by the responsible statistician on request.

Indicator 6.5: Statistical release dates and times are pre-announced.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: The Protocol on Release Practices under the National Statistics Code of Practice describes relevant arrangements concerning the indicator in question. Release dates for all the ONS' statistical outputs are pre-announced in the national statistics Release Calendar which is available as hard copy from the Press Office of the ONS and on the national statistics web-site. This calendar is maintained and regularly updated for a full year ahead. For all market sensitive releases and regular monthly and quarterly releases exact publication dates are given six months in advance. Among the output of the ONS, the index of production, retail sales, producer prices, consumer price indices, labour market statistics, public sector finances, motor vehicle production, UK trade, all measures of national accounts and balance of payments are regarded as market-sensitive information. For the other outputs, the month of publication is announced six months ahead and the exact date at least two weeks earlier.

Publication is usually announced in a statistical release at 9:30 AM.

Both, the staff of the ONS and representatives of different user groups, declared the occasions of missing the release calendar to be very rare. Any alteration to a pre-announced date will be made public as early as possible and is accompanied by an explanation. These changes may have been due to technical reasons, a delay in the production process, or quality checks.

Indicator 6.6: All users have equal access to statistical releases at the same time and any privileged pre-release access to any outside user is limited, controlled and publicised. In the event that leaks occur, pre-release arrangements should be revised so as to ensure impartiality.

Assessment: Largely met

Comments: Release practices of the ONS are regulated by the Protocol on Release Practices under the National Statistics Code of Practice. A lock-up system and embargoed access to journalists are available. Detailed information about early access to Ministries and their officials is available on the web site of the ONS. This list includes only those with access for briefing purposes. Lists of the persons/posts that have early access for quality assurance purposes can be provided by the ONS on request. The lists in question are reviewed frequently, but at least once a year. However, accidental leaks have happened, even at the Prime Minister level, for example, in September 2006, when he announced an unemployment trend to be published the following day. The ONS has resolutely reacted to such cases whenever they have occurred and when they were relevant to the public.

Current practice is that for market sensitive statistics, privileged early access is provided no earlier than 40.5 hours before the release — that is 5 PM on day one in advance of release at 9.30 AM on day three. Recipients are required to make a regular declaration to effect that they have only used information themselves for a specific purpose. For non-market sensitive statistics, privileged early access is provided no earlier than five days ahead of publication. Some commentators pointed it out that current wide pre-release practices hamper improving the image of the ONS as an independent institution. All other users are allowed simultaneous access.

During the discussion of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 in the Parliament, severe criticisms have been raised about the current practice. For instance, the Chair of the Treasury Select Committee expressed (on 7 July) in the House of Commons his concern about currency and completeness of pre-release access lists at ONS and other parts of the government statistical system. He described the current position as 'non-sense', expressed the view that 'There are far too many officials involved'; and that 'Many of the lists are out of date'.

The Green Paper on 'The Governance of Britain' from July 2007 states that, in the future, the Ministries' pre-release access to national statistics, whether or not market sensitive, will be limited to 24 hours. This change will be incorporated in the forthcoming secondary legislation.

The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 states (Article 11) that the appropriate authority may for the purposes of the National Code of Practice for Statistics by order provide for rules and principles relating to the granting of pre-release access to official statistics. It is specified that "appropriate authority" means the Minister for the Cabinet Office, except for official statistics that are wholly Scottish, or Welsh, or Northern Ireland devolved statistics. In the latter cases, "appropriate authority" means Scottish Ministers, or Welsh Ministers, or the Department of Finance and Personnel for Northern Ireland.

Therefore, it can be expected that the current situation will be improved after the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and the secondary legislation come into force.

It is the opinion of the peer review team that, in the current situation, indicator 6.6 should be rated as "Partly met". However, as explained in the executive summary above, the peer review team has decided as a general rule to consider the compliance of the UK statistical office with the European Statistics Code of Practice after 1st April 2008, i.e., after the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 come into force. The peer review team has assumed that the secondary legislation will be ready by the same time, and that it will include the streamlining and shortening of privileged pre-release access that has been announced. The peer review team has thus adopted the rating "Largely met".

If the assumption that the secondary legislation on privileged pre-release access will be ready on 1st April 2008, and will include the streamlining and shortening of this pre-release access is not confirmed, the peer review team considers that indicator 6.6 should continue to be rated as "Partly met".

Indicator 6.7: Statistical releases and statements made in Press Conferences are objective and non-partisan.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: Statistical releases of the ONS do not include any political statements. Releases include contact information of a statistician of the field. At briefings comments for journalists are also provided by the responsible statisticians themselves. Media trainings and briefing with the staff of the Press Office are provided for them to prepare for media events. According to stakeholders met with there has been no evidence of non-objective or non-partisan statements made at press conferences. The journalists acknowledged professional impartiality of the ONS. Sometimes the ONS publishes joint releases with other institutions, for example monthly public sector finances published together with the Treasury. The release contains data furnished by the Treasury and is equipped with analytical comments by the ONS.

In April 2009 the First Release Hub will be implemented. This Hub will be a central web site to host all first releases of national statistics, and to make a clear distinction between statistical releases and ministerial statements. The release through this Hub will be mandatory.

Principle 15: Accessibility and clarity

European Statistics should be presented in a clear and understandable form, disseminated in a suitable and convenient manner, available and accessible on an impartial basis with supporting metadata and guidance.

Overall assessment: The compliance of the ONS with this principle is satisfactory. There is a clear need for improving the structure and operational ability of the website of the ONS.

Indicator 15.1: Statistics are presented in a form that facilitates proper interpretation and meaningful comparisons.

Assessment: **Largely met.**

Comments: The ONS has an exhaustive 'ONS House Style and Author's Guide', which includes instructions for presenting tables, charts and maps, tips for writing and editing and

even dividing labour among authors, editors and subject-matter specialists. Each year about 100 staff members are trained in writing articles, publications, etc. in plain English. The management of the ONS favours a clear, consistent and straightforward communication tailored to meet the needs of a specific audience.

The user satisfaction survey carried out by the ONS and whose outcomes are qualitative only due to the small number of respondents, showed that more than 40% of the key users got necessary information from the ONS on request.

Almost all representatives of users and many staff members expressed their concern about the quality of the contents and operational ability of the web site of the ONS. The users even admitted that it was difficult to find necessary information without knowing a 4-digit code of the relevant web page or the phone number of a statistician involved.

Indicator 15.2: Dissemination services use modern information and communication technology and, if appropriate, traditional hard copy.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: Publications are released in both electronic and hard copy format, and most of them are available free of charge. A few are charged for on the basis of cost recovery, of printing and distribution costs. The web is declared to be the main channel of dissemination. This means that outputs may be published on the web before they become available in print. Everything published on the web can be downloaded free of charge. Outputs in the other formats are provided when there is a sufficient demand for them. The ONS' user satisfaction survey, the outcomes of which are qualitative only due to the small number of respondents, demonstrated that more than 50% of users still get necessary statistics from hardcopy publications.

Indicator 15.3: Custom-designed analyses are provided when feasible and are made public.

Assessment: **Largely met**

Comments: Custom-designed analyses are available, but the results are not always made public. This has already been stated in the Self Assessment of the ONS. A decision to make the results of a custom-designed analysis public emerges from the discussion with user groups. Results that are of high importance and relevance are published. Sometimes, experimental statistics are published based on custom-designed analyses. Experimental statistics are described in the Protocol on Data Presentation, Dissemination and Pricing under the Code of Practice.

Some users were worried that custom-designed analyses were too time-consuming and costly. Charging practices vary even within a subject matter.

Indicator 15.4: Access to microdata can be allowed for research purposes. This access is subject to strict protocols.

Assessment: **Fully met**

Comments: Access to micro-data is regulated by the Protocol on Data Access and Confidentiality under the National Code of Practice. Micro-data on both enterprises and individuals is available for research purposes, but under different rules (see also indicator 5.6).

Indicator 15.5: Metadata are documented according to standardised metadata systems.

Assessment: **Largely met**

Comments: The UK subscribes to the SDDS of the IMF since 1996. Metadata are available in the standard SDDS format on the IMF bulletin board. The ONS has 'Guidelines for measuring statistical quality' (version 3.0 of April 2006) for describing the quality of processes and templates for quality reporting of statistical products. A lot of information on the methods and procedures used are available on the web site of the ONS. However, most users met with by the team of peers complained that descriptions of methodology were difficult to find and were often not updated.

Junior staff members mentioned that standards of describing metadata do not always work in practice yet. Researchers and users from the central government were also concerned about the quality of the metadata which is often obsolete.

Indicator 15.6: Users are kept informed on the methodology of statistical processes and the quality of statistical outputs with respect to the ESS quality criteria.

Assessment: **Largely met**

Comments: The public is not very well informed about methodology. Regular users are more satisfied, but users from the Government pointed it out that they could cope with statistics of lower quality, but they need to know trade-offs. Accuracy elements of quality are better presented than the other elements, i.e. descriptions of techniques and methods used.

3. CO-ORDINATION ROLE OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTE

From its initial instalment the Governmental Statistical System (GSS) has played a coordinating role for the departments and statisticians working in these departments on official statistics. With the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 the soft coordination, currently mainly focussed on the grouping of staff of professional statisticians, will get a more formal base. This base however does not create a formal institution. However, by explicitly mentioning official statistics and the involved departments in the Statistics and Registration Services Act, these departments and the people who are involved in the production of official statistics are subject to the respective provisions and articles of this Act.

The Statistics and Registration Services Act describes a clear coordination role on several levels. The position of the Chair of the Statistics Board and the National Statistician allows them - based on the hierarchical and professional profile - via personal influence to guide the other departments involved in making official statistics. A value added to the system, is that issues like standards and guidance (for example in quality) recruitment and training, provision of specific (methodological) expertise, awareness raising (quality, confidentiality) and international coordination are organised in a centralised manner with a well defined and leading role for the National Statistician. In discussions with the peer review team the heads of the other departments involved in the production of official statistics recognise and seem to accept this leading / guiding position. Furthermore, the role of the National Statistician in leading the statistical work in communication with the external stakeholders is also recognised as such. In each of the fields mentioned above examples can be given for the success of the coordinating role.

For example on quality the ambitious plan to assess the quality of all 1300 statistics, the fact that the new Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 will define a work programme for the ONS as well as for the Statistics Board and furthermore that it has to report on the work program of the ONS and the Statistics Board on a yearly base to the Parliament. Other examples relate to the participation in recruitment schemes of staff of other departments with official statistics, mobility between the departments, the GSS wide intranet (Statnet) to be used for all kind of information including staff vacancies etc, the common First release Hub under development, the transfer of data from the other departments to the ONS and last but not least the quarterly meeting of the National Statistician with the 35 heads of profession in the other departments that fall under the heading of official statistics.

In discussions with the academia and other stakeholders as well as with the media the new Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 was not considered as considerably changing the situation. Overall there was a feeling that the 'Proof of the pudding is in the eating'.

Currently ONS has no power on the budgets of the other departments in official statistics. With the Statistics and Registration Act coming into force the Statistics Board could state that the budget for a specific department is not sufficient. However, the Statistics Board has no rights to allocate budgets.

4. GOOD PRACTICES TO BE HIGHLIGHTED

- **Experimental statistics:** The ONS has developed a concept of “experimental statistics”. Such statistics are still in a testing phase and are not fully developed, but the ONS is willing to involve users and other interested parties in the development of new statistics, and to build in quality at the earliest stages. Experimental statistics are introduced by an article on the National Statistics website and in the appropriate “Trends” publication, to explain their concepts and construction, etc. Experimental statistical series are then updated on the National Statistics website, and are accessible via a dedicated area of the “latest releases” section. Information may also appear in paper publications. It is important that these statistics are clearly marked as experimental. To move to the status of national statistics, experimental statistics have to comply with several criteria:
 - The defined development phase has ended.
 - The statistical methods have proved sufficiently robust to suit a variety of circumstances material to their use.
 - Coverage reaches a sufficient level.
 - User feedback indicates that the statistics are useful and credible.
 - It is judged that the statistics meet the quality standards of National Statistics.
- **Quality guidelines:** ONS can be considered a leading agency in the development of quality tools for statistics. It is clear that quality is at the heart of the ONS statistical system. Training to all staff and documentation on quality issues is available. The junior staff is aware about the issue of quality both with respect to the making of statistics as well as with respect to the reporting and output. In this context it can be mentioned that the motivation of the staff to produce high quality statistics is clearly visible in the attitude of the staff as well as in the remarks from users and the main stakeholders and that the quality of the statistics of ONS is considered to be of high quality. The new institutional arrangements established from 1st April 2008 are expected to increase the involvement in quality issues for departments involved in official statistics outside the ONS.

- Mobility of staff within the government statistical system: Mobility of statistical staff between the departments is made possible and encouraged by statistical authorities, and it is expected to continue in the new institutional arrangements. Staff of other departments involved in official statistics can participate in recruitment schemes. The GSS wide intranet (Statnet) is used for information on staff vacancies.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PEER REVIEW TEAM

On the basis of discussions with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders, the peer review team would like to emphasize some specific recommendations:

- The enforcement of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 is under way. There is a need for secondary legislation being drafted and enacted, in order to allow the new system to actually function from April 2008. For instance, pre-release access arrangements have to be defined; data sharing between public authorities and the Board have to be specified in concrete terms; etc.
- It is important to improve the website of ONS. Many users of statistics produced and published by the ONS, as well as a number of stakeholders have pointed out the need for a rapid renovation of this site, especially the structure of it, its navigation tools and search facilities, but also the way of presentation of metadata and more frequent updating of metadata.
- Data collection of business surveys is still conducted according to “classical” methods. The development of IC technologies could be used to improve this collection, using internet. This is likely to reduce the response burden for enterprises and increase the quality of data.

6. LIST OF IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS BY PRINCIPLE OF THE CODE

The list of improvement actions has been provided by ONS. In general, they cover areas where indicators are assessed by the peer review team as not yet fully met.

There are exceptions:

- In principle 1, indicators 1.1 and 1.4 are assessed as only largely met. However, it is not clear to ONS management what measures could be taken by ONS to improve compliance with these two indicators. The peer review team recognizes that any action would be related to a change in legislation, which does not depend on ONS or, after April 2008, the Statistics Board.
- In principle 2, indicator 2.3 is assessed as only largely met. Again, any action would be related to a change in legislation, which does not depend on ONS or, after April 2008, the Statistics Board. Moreover, ONS management is of the opinion that a legal basis to obligate households/individuals to provide personal information is neither necessary nor the most effective method of achieving/maintaining response rates.
- In principle 6, indicator 6.6 is assessed as only largely met. ONS management is of the opinion that the report implies that pre-release access to ONS statistics is too long, but this, in the mind of ONS management, is outside the scope of what this indicator sets out to verify. ONS management is of the opinion that ONS pre-release practices are fully publicised and access lists are limited, controlled and regularly reviewed. Action has been taken with respect to past leaks.

Principle 1: Professional Independence Improvement actions	Timetable
Principle 2: Mandate for Data Collection Improvement actions	Timetable
Principle 3: Adequacy of Resources Improvement actions ★ <i>The ONS modernisation programme will both standardise and modernise the statistical and IT systems.</i>	Timetable By December 2012
Principle 4: Quality commitment Improvement actions	Timetable
Principle 5: Statistical Confidentiality Improvement actions	Timetable
Principle 6: Impartiality and objectivity Improvement actions ★ <i>About ONS website (in relation to indicator 6.4), see improvement actions related to principle 15.</i> ★ <i>About pre-release access (in relation to indicator 6.6), the opinion of ONS is presented at the beginning of this chapter.</i>	Timetable
Principle 7: Sound Methodology Improvement actions	Timetable
Principle 8: Appropriate Statistical Procedures Improvement actions ★ <i>A systematic programme of reviews of statistical procedures including survey design, sample designs, editing and imputation systems will be put in place, subject to the availability of funding.</i>	Timetable By 2011
Principle 9: Non-Excessive burden on respondents Improvement actions ★ <i>ONS will continue with its programme of electronic data delivery as part of the modernisation programme.</i>	Timetable To be concluded in 2012
Principle 10: Cost Effectiveness Improvement actions ★ <i>The ONS modernisation programme is both standardising and modernising the statistical systems and reducing clerical operations.</i>	Timetable To be completed in 2012
Principle 11: Relevance Improvement actions	Timetable

Principle 12: Accuracy and Reliability

Improvement actions

★ *Quality reports which cover all the ESS quality components will be developed and implemented across all major outputs.*

Timetable

By end 2008

Principle 13: Timeliness and Punctuality

Improvement actions

Timetable

Principle 14: Coherence and Comparability

Improvement actions

Timetable

Principle 15: Accessibility and clarity

Improvement actions

Timetable

★ *ONS will relaunch the website featuring a far more accessible navigation and taxonomy, with improved meta-tagging of the content to ensure that the search is far more effective than the current search*

By December 2008

★ *The relaunched ONS website will be double A compliant with WC3 throughout and triple A compliant where possible, allowing for some of the complex data presentation and visualisation content it will feature*

By December 2008

★ *A charging and access policy for custom designed analysis will be implemented across the organisation*

By December 2008

7. ANNEX A: PROGRAMME OF THE VISIT

**Programme for the Peer Review of ONS
24 to 26 September 2007**

24 September 2007

09:30 - 10:00 Welcome

10:00 - 11:30 Principles 1 to 3: *Professional Independence, Mandate for data collection & Adequacy of Resources*

11:30 - 12:00 Principle 5: *Statistical Confidentiality*

12:00 - 13:00 Principles 6 & 15: *Impartiality and Objectivity & Accessibility and Clarity*

14:00 - 15:00 Principle 4: *Quality Commitment*

15:00 - 16:00 Meeting with junior staff

16:00 - 17:00 Results of the user satisfaction survey

25 September 2007

09:00 - 10:00 Presentation on ONS' co-ordination role across the Government Statistical Service

10:00 - 11:00 Meeting with other national data producers

11:00 - 12:00 Meeting with users from central Government

12:00 - 13:00 Meeting with external commentators

14:30 - 15:30 Meeting with users from academia

15:30 - 16:30 Meeting with users from the media

16:30 - 17:30 Meeting with representatives of respondents

26 September 2007

09:30 - 10:30 Conclusions, recommendations and follow-up

8. ANNEX B: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Internal Stakeholders

Name and Surname	Title/Directorate/Unit
Karen DUNNELL	National Statistician
Joe GRICE	Director – Social and Public Services Analysis and Reporting
Colin MOWL	Director – Macro-economics and Labour Market
Mike HUGHES	Director – National Statistics Policy Group
Richard LAUX	Director – National Statistics and International Division
Martin BRAND	Director – Survey Methodology and Quality
Penny HALLETT	Director - Communication
Frank NOLAN	Director – Census and Survey Methodology
Paul JACKSON	Legal Services
Denise BLACKMORE	Surveys and Administrative Sources Directorate
Chris CHANTLER	Stakeholder Management
Adrian CHESSON	National accounts group
Tim CLODE	International Relations
Garnett COMPTON	Census, Demography and Regional Statistics Directorate
Mark MARTIN	Surveys and Administrative Sources Directorate
Steve WOODLAND	Surveys and Administrative Sources Directorate
Duncan ELLIOT	Methodology Directorate
Martina PORTANTI	Social and Public Services Analysis and Reporting Directorate
Bill SOUTH	Surveys and Administrative Sources Directorate
Jonathan BOWERS	Macro-economics and Labour Market Directorate

External Stakeholders

Name and Surname	Title/Directorate/Unit
Sean WHELLAMS	Chief Statistician – Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs
Geoff REED	Deputy Director – Statistics and Analysis – Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform
Peter HELM	Head of Profession for Statistics – Dept. for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
Dorothy ANDERSON	International Statistics – Department of Transport
Chris KELLY	Her Majesty's Treasury
Alex BOWEN	Bank of England
Keith DERBYSHIRE	Department of Health
Craig LINDSAY	Department for Work and Pensions
Jill LEYLAND	Royal Statistical Society
Keith DUGMORE	Chair – Statistics User Forum
Richard ALLDRITT	Chief Executive – Statistics Commission
Simon KIRBY	Research Fellow – National Institute of Economic and Social Research
Peter ELIAS	Institute for Employment Research – University of Warwick
David MARTIN	School of Geography – University of Southampton
Vanessa HIGGINS	School of Social Sciences – University of Manchester
Amanda CHARLES	National Statistics and International Division
Chris GILES	Journalist - Financial Times
David WALKER	Journalist – The Guardian
Jennifer RYAN	Journalist – Bloomberg
Jo HENSHER	Policy Adviser – Enterprise Group – Confederation of British Industry
Florence O'CONNELL	Management Information Specialist – London Borough of Camden