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NATIONAL STATISTICS  
HEALTH AND CARE THEME WORKING GROUP

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USER CONSULTATION

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Issue

1. The Statistics White Paper (and the new Framework document when it is published) oblige us to consult a wide range of users in developing National Statistics plans. This paper sets out a common user consultation strategy for doing this, drawing on proposals from the user consultation subgroup that were agreed in principle by GSS(PM) (see paper GSS(PM)2000(8) for more details).

Action

2. You are asked to **agree** that this Theme Working Group, in common with all the others, should:
  - Put in place arrangements to consult users in order to develop the theme's National Statistics high level work programme and quality review programme;
  - Ensure that consultation takes place across all interested user communities (including beyond government), noting that different users may be treated differently when it comes to prioritising their needs;
  - Undertake as necessary the following four-stage approach to user consultation:
    - Identify known existing user base;
    - Evaluate existing user consultation mechanisms and determine whether these mechanisms are adequate, setting up additional or alternative arrangements as required;
    - Undertake consultations, making use of the internet as recommended by the user consultation sub-group as a medium for targeting non-government users as well as a means of reaching beyond the known user base;
    - Review and evaluate the effectiveness of user consultation arrangements, revise as appropriate and repeat.

You are also asked to consider whether additionally, to improve the transparency of the planning process, some or all Theme Working Group papers and or minutes should be placed on the National Statistics website.

You are asked to approve the review of theme outputs (see **Annex B**) proposed by ONS Communications Division in discussion with Greg Phillpotts at Department of Health, and nominate a member of staff to act as first contact for the ONS team (and who may also be involved in further agreeing/developing the review plan if you so wish).

## Timing

3. Theme Working Groups should agree the timing for implementing these user consultation arrangements.

## Background

### **4. Why do we need to consult users?**

4.1 Consulting a wide range of users is necessary because:

- It helps to plan, prioritise and deliver better public services;
- It creates a working partnership with users, so that they have an interest in better public services.

4.2 Additionally, the White Paper and framework document oblige producers of National Statistics to consult a wide range of users on a variety of issues, and this is the expectation of our users. The Statistics Commission will comment to Ministers on the programme for National Statistics, drawing on the views of users and suppliers and will publicly report if they do not believe that the National Statistics work programme sufficiently reflects the views of users. By conducting thorough consultations with a wide range of users, and taking these views on board when developing workplans we should be able to limit any such criticism by the Commission.

### **5. What is the user consultation role of the Theme Working Groups?**

5.1 Theme Working Groups are neither user consultation fora nor groups to take decisions on work programmes. Rather they are a co-ordinating group of National Statistics producers whose role is to pool together stakeholder views and draft a work programme based upon these to put to Ministers (departmentally, via Heads of Profession) for approval. Theme Working Groups therefore need to ensure that adequate user consultation arrangements are in place for their theme in order to develop this work programme.

### **6. What should we consult on?**

6.1 There are various levels of user consultation, from high level planning consultation to more detailed consultation on individual aspects of work programmes. Consultation on work programmes can also vary from consultation on implementing known and agreed aspects to consultation on its development. The Theme Working Groups must ensure that all levels of consultation are covered for their theme, but this paper focuses particularly on the requirements placed on Theme Working Groups for consultation on developing high level work programmes.

6.2 The White Paper stated that one of the key elements of the new arrangements will be *'transparent user consultation processes – covering both the scope and quality of statistics'*.

6.3 It is therefore proposed that high level consultation should cover as a minimum:

- The development of National Statistics work plans and priorities;
- The quality review programme (including priorities and timetable).

## **7. Who should we consult?**

7.1 Theme Working Groups must ensure that both government users and the wider user community are included in user consultation exercises. These two sets of users should be given the same consultation opportunities, even if the importance of the two communities' views varies when it comes to prioritising comments received through the consultation process.

## **8. How should we consult?**

8.1 The proposed four-stage process to user consultation is outlined below. Details are provided in **Annex A**.

- i. Identify user base
- ii. Assess existing consultation arrangements for internal and external users
- iii. Consult users, making use of the most appropriate communication routes to maximise the effectiveness and completeness of the consultation
- iv. Review effectiveness of arrangements, revise as appropriate and repeat loop.

8.2 It is important that we carefully manage users' expectations in consultation exercises. This will involve clearly setting out what users can expect from any consultation exercise and how this will feed into the decision making and prioritisation processes.

## **9. Priority Setting / Decision Making**

9.1 The White Paper stated that '*the Government is determined to address a lack of openness and transparency in priority-setting*'. It is crucial that Theme Working Groups are transparent when it comes to prioritising the proposals that come out of user consultation exercises because this will help to demonstrate that the consultation process does have an impact on National Statistics plans.

9.2 National Statistics producers will be responsible for taking decisions about the nature of the outputs for which they are responsible and about the relative priorities of these. In making decisions producers will take into account :

- i. Information about user needs gathered in comprehensive exercises covering both governmental and non-governmental users;
- ii. Frames of reference for the relative weighting of the needs of different users;
- iii. The overall coherence, quality and value for money of National Statistics outputs and plans.

## **10. Transparency**

10.1 Transparency is required to build trust in official statistics. It is a separate issue to user consultation, but the two are linked in that transparency is an essential factor in successful user consultation.

10.2 This paper proposes that consultation exercises are conducted at least in part on the internet. As well as addressing the above White Paper objectives of building trust through

greater openness and improving responsiveness through greater user involvement in planning, it can facilitate consultation with a wider potential user base by reaching previously unidentified users (e.g. occasional or lapsed users). Theme Working Groups should also decide if they wish to place papers or minutes onto the website in the interests of user consultation and transparency more generally.

**NSPD Secretariat**  
**May 2000**

## **Annex A**

### **Detailed proposals for consultation**

#### **i. Identify user base**

A database of users of National Statistics and their theme interests will be developed in order to:

- Facilitate the process of electronic consultation by alerting users' to the availability of new papers on the website and increase users' awareness of new products through targeted e-mailing;
- Provide producers of National Statistics with a better idea of who the users' of National Statistics are, and their main areas of interest;
- Improve our ability to evaluate National Statistics products and services (e.g. through questionnaires).

The database will be built up through users registering an interest a particular theme or themes on the National Statistics website, via the Horizons magazine and from any other useful and relevant sources (e.g. membership of official user groups). The ability to register an interest should be promoted on all National Statistics products.

#### **ii. Assess existing consultation arrangements**

The identification stage may identify user communities (i.e. groups of users with common or similar interests or professional backgrounds, such as Parliament, academia or the City) rather than individuals. In assessing and developing user consultation arrangements, Theme Working Groups should consider whether consultation might be conducted more efficiently by making use of natural groupings of users. Particular note should be taken in addressing the needs of government and non-government users, which are highlighted below. In addition, Theme Working Groups need to be aware of, and co-ordinate with, related consultation mechanisms which can provide useful user input across a range of themes. An example might be the Central and Local Information Partnership (CLIP) forum which might provide an effective common channel for local government user input to several themes.

##### **Government users**

Because Theme Working Groups are composed of producers (rather than users) of National Statistics, some former government consultation arrangements, for instance where GSS committees acted partly as consultation fora, may no longer exist to provide consultation opportunities. It is up to individual Theme Working Groups to determine in the light of the new arrangements the best mechanisms to ensure that government users are properly and effectively consulted, but possible options include:

- Setting up formal cross-government users group(s);
- Organising ad-hoc or bilateral consultations with particular government users (e.g. on a departmental basis).

## **Non-government users**

There are three types of group that are currently used to consult external users:

- Advisory bodies (formed by producers for high level independent advice on statistical matters);
- Official Users' groups (formal groups of users mostly run through the Statistics User Council);
- Informal Users' groups (e.g. special interest or survey-based groups).

Theme Working Groups should identify existing arrangements for consulting external users for their theme, and determine whether these are adequate, or whether new or alternative groups need setting up.

Where official users' groups already exist and function effectively, Theme Working Groups should cultivate these and encourage them to participate in National Statistics consultation processes. Where there are no official users' groups, or a significant portion of the scope of the theme is not covered you may wish to discuss with the Statistics User Council and/or the Royal Statistical Society the possibility of setting up new groups to ensure that 'expert' user input is received and channelled. Consideration may need to be given to providing administrative support to run official user groups, a point which was made to, and noted by, GSS(PM) in their consideration of the user consultation sub-group's paper.

### **iii. Undertake consultation process**

As a minimum, user views should be sought on the following topics:

- Proposals for theme based work plans
- Proposals for the quality review programme (including prioritisation and timetable)

Consultation papers on these topics should be made available on the internet to provide the wider user community with the opportunity to feed in comments – the theme secretariat will be able to collate user views for Theme Working Groups to consider. Known users will be informed that consultation documents are available, for instance via electronic mailing lists.

Papers that are placed in the public domain (e.g. on the internet) for consultation should be drafted in a structured way to ensure that user comments are easily assimilated.

The user community have indicated that they do not always wish to be constrained in submitting views by either short and rigid consultation timetables or by limiting the structure of particular consultations (e.g. to address certain issues only). To implement this, the National Statistics website will include additional facilities to allow users to comment at any time and beyond the terms of particular consultation exercises. Theme Working Group secretaries will monitor and moderate this more unstructured feedback and will feed this in to the next available planning cycle as appropriate.

More detail on the consultation process will be available for the next meeting in a paper from the secretariat giving guidelines on consultation which take account of central government guidelines and Code of Practice.

iv. **Review effectiveness of arrangements, revise as necessary and repeat loop**

The effectiveness of each theme's user consultation arrangements should be reviewed, at least on a yearly basis to fit in with the planning cycle. It is recommended that Groups should consult users themselves on the effectiveness of the consultation arrangements.

## **ANNEX B**

### **SCOPING THE THEME REVIEWS**

#### **Background**

- The ONS(D) and the GSS(D) agreed that as part of the “understanding customers” workpackage the Marketing Management Branch of Communication Division would investigate how the Theme portfolios might be assessed. In this context it was agreed that Health and Care and Economy would be used as pilot themes.
- At the time of the launch of National Statistics we hope to be clear about which outputs are covered by the National Statistics Brand. These outputs will be assigned to themes and although it is possible for outputs to be in more than one theme every output will have only one “lead” theme
- Part of this work involves the understanding of customers and because the remit of National Statistics is to be customer led it will be important to gain an early insight into what we know and what we need to know about customers
- The ONS Marketing Management team will help and advise with this understanding customers task but as resources are limited it will look to work in partnership with other Departmental colleagues to achieve the objectives.
- The work is an integral part of the delivery of the customer focused objective of National Statistics. It can go along in tandem with other work and involves a considerable amount of “legwork” to discover current knowledge and supplement it with meaningful research.

#### **Objective**

##### *Theme*

- To ensure that the outputs from the theme are customer driven and that a coherent product and services portfolio is made available covering the subjects embraced by the theme. To ensure that there are efficient and effective methods in place for continuous monitoring and review

##### *Task*

- To find out and report the current state of knowledge about customers of the Theme’s outputs. To make recommendations for enhancing that knowledge and matching the portfolio of products and services to the customers’ needs. To identify further steps in the process. To make suggestions about changes to the Theme portfolio

#### **Methods**

- Collect information about existing knowledge across the Departments contributing to each theme
- Instigate a portfolio review concentrating on identifying customers for the outputs of the theme and establish the breadth of dissemination.
- Suggest a customer prioritisation process to identify “key” customers
- Identify overlaps and gaps in the portfolio. Assimilate existing research knowledge
- Assess whether the portfolio meets the needs of the key customers
- Measure the customer knowledge of National Statistics and the theme outputs to assess the efficiency of the communication channels.
- Understand the external market, whether competitors exist and what opportunities there are for setting up partnerships to improve access for the customer
- Ensure the maximisation of market intelligence information and utilise user groups and other consultative arrangements to maximum effect
- Set up an on going research/review programme for the theme’s outputs

## **Roles and responsibilities**

- Departmental representatives to confirm all products and services covered by the theme
- Departmental representatives to identify product and service owners
- Departmental representatives will identify the depth of knowledge within contributing Departments and supply details of customers for each output where possible.
- Departmental representatives will advise Communication Division (MMB) of any customer research activity relevant to the outputs and MMB will, in turn, advise on ways of maintaining an ongoing customer input programme.
- Communication Division (MMB) will collate the outputs as described in StatBase and tabulate the relevant information about prices, publishers etc
- MMB in collaboration with the Departmental reps will fill in the gaps.
- MMB will broker the help of Marketing Communications Branch to advise and monitor the awareness levels of customers and act to maximise them.
- MMB will offer advice on dealing with partners, onsellors and resellers as necessary
- MMB will advise on the implementation of the Dissemination strategy and its impact on the theme's outputs
- There will be a joint assessment of how far the outputs meet customer need

## **Resources**

- There is a burden on Departmental resources to establish the customer knowledge. This will be a combination of Departmental representatives and product owners
- MMB resources are limited. Each Marketing Manager has four theme groups to which to liaise .
- Without increased resource Marketing Managers can only act in an advisory role
- The best scenario would be for a Departmental representative(s) to work with the Marketing Manager to achieve the objectives thus enabling a transfer of skills in both directions
- The customer intelligence gathering role will require extra resource in Communication Division (MMB). To produce lists and carry out customer analysis on a rolling programme is likely to need 2 extra B level staff. Coping with all of the themes at once would clearly require greater resource
- Communication Division is currently testing the usefulness of customer panels to help with customer understanding. If successful these panels will be available to advise on theme outputs. Panels will represent the majority of the key customer segments for Government Information. Extra ones may need to be set up for theme specific customer groups. This will have resource implications.

## **Timetable**

- The first task will be to establish a review team. This should be done by August 2000 at the latest
- The second task is to run what is effectively an audit of outputs as described in the method section. The target for this is November
- There needs also to be an audit of knowledge about customer needs. The target for this is also November
- There then needs to be an action plan arising out of the audits with its own timetable
- Concurrently a rolling programme of customer research and communication needs to be instigated. This should start as soon as customer segmentation is identified. It will be important that Communications Branch is appraised of all National Statistics key customers so that newsletters and other National Statistics communications material can be provided

## **Work Management**

- The review teams should be responsible to the Theme Groups and report regularly on progress.
- The Marketing Managers will be responsible to the ONS Communication Director through their own line management