

National Statistics Code of Practice

Protocol on Managing Respondent Load



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Summary of Principles – Managing Respondent Load

National Statistics Code of Practice – Statement of Principles

Costs of compliance will be kept to an acceptable level and data collected only when the benefits of a statistical survey exceed the cost to providers.

A continuous effort will be made to develop techniques that reduce the burden on providers.

New statistical surveys will not duplicate existing sources. The costs of compliance will be taken into account in survey design.

The costs of complying with statistical surveys will be planned, managed and reported each year.

The value of administrative data in producing National Statistics will be recognised, and statistical purposes should be promoted in the design of administrative systems.

Compliance in household surveys will be sought primarily by persuasion.

Compulsory acquisition of data may improve the quality of National Statistics and result in a lower response burden on the population as a whole. Where there is statutory authority for data to be acquired by compulsion there will be clearly defined processes and penalties for dealing with non-compliance.

Introduction

For background information on this document please see *An Introduction to the National Statistics Code of Practice and its supporting Protocols*.

Purpose

This Protocol sets out how the producers of National Statistics will carry out their responsibility for minimising the load placed on data providers – as outlined in the *Framework for National Statistics* and described in the *National Statistics Code of Practice*.

The Protocol recognises that, while some respondents may welcome the opportunity to participate, and accept the importance of providing data to help assess and manage society and the economy, others may perceive surveys as an imposition – especially if they find it difficult to provide the required data.

Scope

This Protocol applies to all surveys of households, individuals, businesses, local authorities and other organisations and establishments that contribute to National Statistics outputs.

In the case of data drawn from administrative processes, this Protocol will also apply when additional information is collected or provided purely for statistical purposes, although some limitations may apply to that information because of the requirements of the administrative process.

The Protocol seeks to build on the Prime Minister's Instructions on the *Control of Statistical Surveys* issued in 1999, which remain in force within the United Kingdom Government. The Protocol also reflects agreed arrangements in the devolved administrations.

Compliance

It will be a challenge for the producers of National Statistics to meet all the principles in this Protocol. As a consequence, compliance will be achieved incrementally. Significant progress has already been made in the application of this Protocol to surveys of business and local authorities. Its principles will be extended, in turn, to other surveys and ultimately to all data providers.

A guide to putting the principles into practice

1. A continuous effort will be made to develop techniques that reduce the burden on providers.

All those involved in the production of National Statistics will recognise the impact that effective consultation can have on response rates, and hence quality, and engage constructively with data providers.

- a) Producers of National Statistics will ensure that the load placed on respondents is the minimum practicable to produce results of the required quality.
- b) Those conducting surveys will continue to seek opportunities to share and utilise new initiatives and best practice to minimise the load on respondents. This will include involving other organisations, where appropriate.
- c) Producers of National Statistics will evaluate the impact on respondents when changes to existing surveys are planned or new surveys proposed.
- d) All regular surveys of businesses, local authorities, households, and individuals will be reviewed at least every five years. Each review should ensure that the survey is still necessary and that the views of respondents and users of data are being taken into account.

- e) The methods used in the production of key National Statistics outputs will also be subject to review, at least every five years, as part of the programme of Quality Reviews of National Statistics products. The load on respondents and the possibility of alternative sources will be factors in assessing the quality and value of these products. The reviews of regular surveys and the separate National Statistics Quality Reviews of products will be integrated as and when appropriate.
 - f) Standard frameworks, questions and classifications will be used, wherever feasible.
2. **New statistical surveys will not duplicate existing sources. The costs of compliance will be taken into account in survey design.**
- a) Producers of National Statistics will consider using existing survey data, administrative data and other non-survey sources before introducing a new survey. They will examine existing data and document the consideration given to other potential sources. A survey will be conducted only where there is no suitable alternative data source.
 - b) For new surveys an analysis will be undertaken of the cost of the survey, against the potential benefits of conducting it. The requirement to collect information will be balanced against the survey production costs, and the load likely to be placed on respondents. This will be documented and, for regular surveys, subject to periodic review.
 - c) Objectives and associated quality standards will be developed for every proposed survey. These will be developed with key users. Consideration will be given to budgetary constraints and feasibility.
 - d) A detailed description of the methodology used will be publicly available for each survey.

- e) Producers of National Statistics will aim to collect information in a way that makes data easy to provide, using suitable data collection methods.
 - f) Data collection staff will have consideration for the expectations of respondents and be conversant with the main uses to which the data are put.
 - g) Data collection instruments will be tested to ensure that surveys can supply the necessary information to the required accuracy standards.
 - h) Appropriate statistical methods will be used to minimise respondent load. Appropriate sampling methods will be one preferred means by which producers of National Statistics will reduce the load, and will include the use of rotational sampling for small businesses.
3. **The costs of complying with statistical surveys will be planned, managed and reported each year.**
- a) Departments and Agencies within each administration will adopt a uniform approach for measuring the costs of responding to surveys.
 - b) UK Departments and Agencies will produce an annual compliance plan, which reports the cost of providing business and local authority survey data for the previous year. This is in keeping with the Prime Minister's Instructions on the *Control of Statistical Surveys* and the Osmotherly Report. Plans will identify those business and local authority surveys contributing to National Statistics products and will describe any steps taken to minimise the load on small businesses. In addition a measure of compliance costs for households, individuals and other organisations will be published.

4. **The value of administrative data in producing National Statistics will be recognised, and statistical purposes should be promoted in the design of administrative systems.**
 - a) National Statistics will, where appropriate, be derived from information supplied for the administration of government business and public services. This will be achieved, wherever possible, by direct extraction of relevant data from the systems supporting the administration.
 - b) Producers of National Statistics will seek to influence those responsible for the design of administrative systems so that these systems can also capture data for statistical purposes in an economical way.
5. **Compliance in household surveys will be sought primarily by persuasion.**

Participation in social surveys will be sought through a process of informed consent.

Survey managers will provide respondents with:

- a) an explanation of the purpose of the request and the primary use to which data will be put.
- b) information on:
 - who will have access to their data;
 - how confidentiality will be preserved;
 - where further information on the survey can be obtained.

Producers of National Statistics will establish and share best practice for obtaining high response rates.

6. **Compulsory acquisition of data may improve the quality of National Statistics and result in a lower response burden on the population as a whole. Where there is statutory authority for data to be acquired by compulsion there will be clearly defined processes and penalties for dealing with non-compliance.**
 - a) Statutory authority for the acquisition of data for statistical purposes will be applied only where there are clear benefits in doing so.
 - b) Departments will ensure that their processes for dealing with non-compliance are transparent and consistent, and in line with the government's Enforcement Concordat (see References).
 - c) Data collection instruments will state when data are being sought under legislation.
 - d) All reasonable attempts at obtaining data by persuasion will be made including reassuring prospective respondents about the confidentiality of their data, and explaining the purpose of collecting the data. Only when these are unsuccessful, will the use of statutory authority be considered.
 - e) If producers are contemplating statutory enforcement, prospective respondents will be alerted to the possible penalties at the earliest opportunity.

References

Procedures for the *Control of Statistical Surveys*
(Prime Minister's Office, May 1999)

Osmotherly Report: Statistical surveys: easing the burden on business (a report by the Osmotherly Steering Group)
Osmotherly E, Graham T, and Pepper M
(Office for National Statistics: London, 1996)

Enforcement Concordat
www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/publicsector/public%20sector%20archive/publicsector/enforcement/enforcement.htm