

E: CONCORDAT ON STATISTICS

Introduction

E1 This Concordat sets out an agreed framework for co-operation among the UK Government and devolved administrations¹¹ on all matters in relation to statistics. It assumes the general arrangements agreed by the four administrations in the Memorandum of Understanding. More specific arrangements will be contained within bilateral concordats between UK Government departments and the devolved administrations. This concordat is not intended to constitute a legally enforceable contract or to create any rights or obligations which are legally enforceable. It is intended to be binding in honour only.

E2 The administrations recognise that co-operation in statistical work is necessary to meet their respective policy and business objectives and their collective responsibility to deliver official statistics to the required standard. Each has a contribution to make to the provision of statistical advice and information in relation to both devolved and reserved matters, and to the production of coherent statistics about the UK whilst recognising that the priorities and objectives of the administrations may not always be identical. They have a common interest in promoting the integrity of official statistics and adherence to high professional standards.

Purpose of Concordat

E3 The purposes of this Concordat are:

- to specify the basis on which the four administrations, and their respective departments, consult with each other, exchange information, and work together in relation to statistics; and
- to specify the basis for co-operation across the administrations on professional matters relating to statistics.

Parties to the Concordat and arrangements for review

E4 This Concordat is made between the Head of the Government Statistical Service (GSS), the Permanent Secretaries to the Scottish Executive and to the National Assembly for Wales, the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service and the Head of the Home Civil Service.

E5 The Concordat will be formally reviewed after one year, and thereafter every five years. A formal review can be held at any time at the request of any

¹¹ The General Register Office for Scotland is part of the Scottish Administration and is included within the scope of this Concordat.

party, but a review of the operation of the Concordat will be conducted every year. The views of all parties, including Departments of the UK Government (“UK Departments”), must be sought on any proposed changes to the Concordat.

Implementation of the Concordat

E6 The basic principles underlying the implementation of the concordat are as specified in the Memorandum of Understanding. If statistical matters cannot be resolved by the parties directly involved, the Head of the GSS will attempt to broker an agreement before the Joint Ministerial Committee procedures are invoked.

Other Concordats

E7 Where bilateral concordats describe arrangements to be made in relation to statistical matters, these arrangements are based on the principles set out in this document, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

E8 In particular, some of the devolved administrations may establish concordats with the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which deal with a number of professional and other issues.

Scope of the Concordat

E9 The Concordat covers:

- any government activity involving the use of information for statistical purposes, including information obtained from administrative, statistical or other sources, where two or more of the administrations have a direct interest as information providers or users: this includes, but is not restricted to, work carried out by the Government Statistical Service;
- activity associated with ensuring the maintenance of consistently high professional standards across the administrations in the provision and use of statistical information.

Basis on which administrations will work together

E10 This section describes the basis on which the four administrations agree to work together on statistical issues.

E10.1 The administrations will provide each other with the information for statistical purposes which they agree is required to meet business needs,

subject to availability, agreements about cost sharing, and adherence to the other terms of this agreement.

E10.1.1 Each administration collects and processes statistical information that may be required by the others to meet their business needs. Unless there are exceptional circumstances that can be clearly demonstrated, or legal barriers which cannot be overcome, each administration will make this information available to the others, in line with any specific agreements about how the terms of this concordat are to be applied. In deciding whether and how to exchange information, any principles which apply within administrations will apply between administrations, except that administrations will not be required to provide information to each other about the statistical advice which has been given to policy makers or Ministers (although they may agree to do so). Information provided by one administration to another or others will also be accompanied on request by supporting information on the quality of what is provided.

E10.2 Administrations will reach agreements about cost sharing where appropriate.

E10.2.1 Existing arrangements for cost sharing will continue until one or more parties propose change. Any party may propose change where new demands are made, where the costs to the providers change, or where circumstances change. The arrangements will then be negotiated.

E10.3 The administrations will work together to ensure the provision of agreed coherent, reliable, consistent and timely statistics about and across the UK.

E10.3.1 In addition to ensuring exchanges of information, the administrations will co-operate to ensure that there are readily available, high quality and timely statistics about the UK, disaggregated as appropriate. They will agree mechanisms which ensure that these statistics are readily available to all four administrations - the Parliaments/Assemblies, international organisations, data providers and users, and the public - either by providing them directly or by providing information about sources. They will work together to ensure that all the statistics which are provided are coherent, reliable, are collected and compiled in a way which represents good value for money, and are consistent as far as data sources permit.

E10.3.2 Heads of Profession in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will work with their UK Government counterparts and the Head of the Government Statistical Service as appropriate where statistics are required to be submitted on a UK basis to the EU or other international bodies. Subject to the terms of the concordats on EU and international relations, the Head of the GSS will retain responsibility for the fulfilment of UK statistical obligations to the EU

and international bodies and for EU/international liaisons and co-operation on statistical matters.

E10.4 The administrations will each consult on statistical developments, and proposed publications, which could have an impact on the other.

E10.4.1 It is the responsibility of each administration to inform, and seek comment from, the others about any proposed significant changes to existing activity, or proposed release of statistical information, which might be considered relevant to the others. Statistics (and related commentary) to be published or released about Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland by a different administration will be checked as necessary with the relevant devolved administration(s) for statistical validity before the final version is agreed. Statistics (and related commentary) to be published or released about the UK or England by a devolved administration will be checked as necessary with the relevant UK Department(s) for statistical validity before the final version is agreed. It is the responsibility of those quoting statistics about another part of the UK to decide when it is necessary to consult explicitly with the relevant administration(s): in many cases, this will not be necessary.

E10.5 Statistical work will be carried out to common professional standards.

E10.5.1 Statistical work in the four administrations will be carried out in line with the Code of Practice on Official Statistics. Heads of Profession in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland will liaise with the Head of the GSS to ensure that, where appropriate, statistics in devolved areas satisfy any criteria set for GSS outputs. Similarly, Heads of Profession in UK Departments will liaise with the Head of the GSS to ensure that statistics about the UK and England provided by their own departments, where appropriate, also satisfy such criteria.

E10.5.2 The basis on which statistical information given in confidence can be used and exchanged is described in the Official Statistics Code of Practice.

E10.5.3 The administrations recognise their responsibility to monitor, and where appropriate to control, the compliance costs associated with surveys on businesses and local authorities. They will work together to minimise the total compliance cost burden, while seeking to ensure that each administration has access to the information that it needs.

E10.5.4 The recruitment, development and promotion of Government Statistical Service professional staff will be based on a common set of professional competences and in accordance with the GSS Human Resource Strategy. Heads of Profession and the Head of the GSS will work together to promote, and ensure adherence to, high technical and ethical standards, and to facilitate the movement of statistical staff between the administrations.

E10.6 The administrations will share statistical expertise and development.

E10.6.1 Statistical staff will co-operate to ensure best value for the resources invested in technical and staff development. They will keep each other informed of developments - to reduce duplication, and promote good practice. They will agree to share specific development tasks, both to maximise the use of available specialist expertise, and as one means of cost sharing. They will identify, and reach agreement on, any commercial considerations (such as charging to external customers - or to each other) before any development work starts.

E10.7 The Office for National Statistics will provide the GB administrations with a range of professional, technical and personnel services.

E10.7.1 ONS will provide a staff recruitment and transfer service to the three GB administrations, whereby they will manage the recruitment and initial deployment of members of the statistician group, advertise vacant posts across the GSS, broker transfers among GSS staff, and provide information and advice about recruitment of statistical staff (NB. statistical staff working in Northern Ireland are not part of the GSS). ONS will provide methodological advice to the UK administrations. These arrangements will be subject to cost sharing agreements as described in 10.2 above.

E10.8 GSS staff will contribute to the work of the GSS, and promote its values.

E10.8.1 In its role of co-ordinating the work of the GSS, ONS will invite statistics staff across the administrations (including those who are not members of the GSS) to participate in, and keep them informed about, GSS activities, and consult them about issues of statistical policy and methodology. GSS staff across the administrations will make a constructive contribution to the work of the GSS, including serving on its committees. Heads of Profession will serve on the GSS Policy and Management Committee, will consult with and

be consulted by the Head of the GSS on key issues relating to professionalism and integrity, and will promote GSS outputs and agreed GSS policy and values.