

National Statistician and Registrar General

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Dear Ian,

Review of Tourism Statistics

Thank you for your letter of 11 March. I regret that pressure of work has prevented me from replying before now.

This review provides a very strong foundation for planning the future of tourism statistics, and its authors are to be congratulated for its completeness, quality of argument and focus.

This review leaves us in no doubt that there would be benefit in looking more strategically at alternative ways of providing a strong common direction and coherence to official tourism statistics. Tourism is a complex and pervasive topic, involving a broad mix of partnerships between local and central government, and autonomous National Tourism Boards. It is apparent to me that the drive for tourism statistics is very strong for policy making and marketing at small areas, which creates a tension when it comes to protecting confidentiality and minimising the burden of data collection on respondents.

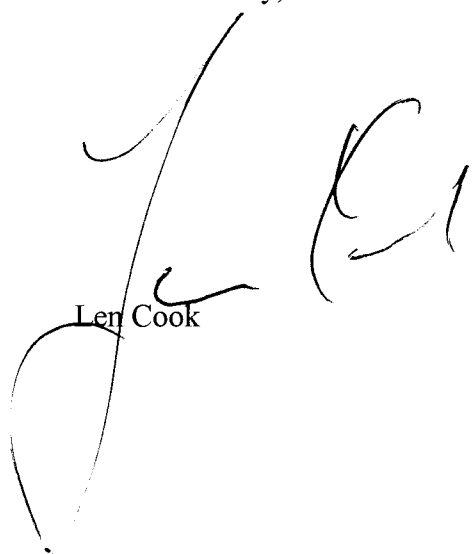
In some countries, a Tourism Satellite Account has given additional impetus for development of tourism statistics. I support the review's conclusion that there should be a stronger commitment to this in order to bring about not only more analytical information, but also to give impetus to a stronger degree of cohesion.

The review highlights some real difficulties and it will be a major task to take forward some of the recommendations. I see the example of measurement of accommodation occupancy as typical of the type of complexities you face, as it is fraught by both the size distribution of accommodation providers, and also the difficulties associated with delineating, at all times of the year, the reference population of the survey.

The establishment of a statistical frame will be difficult because of the definition of tourism businesses by their customer base (rather than product) and because of the regional needs for accuracy of regularly produced analyses. The analyses need to be rich in detail, particularly about the origins of the tourists. The usual survey methodologies we have are not sufficient, within the constraints of compliance load.

The review justifies DCMS, alongside ONS, developing a proposal for the long run direction of these statistics, and concluding where operational responsibility should lie. We will need to ensure that the work is complemented by ONS work on a Continuous Population Survey and on taking forward recommendations in the Review of Migration Statistics.

Yours sincerely,



Len Cook