

National Statistics Work Programme

2002/03–2004/05

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About the Office for National Statistics

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is the government agency responsible for compiling, analysing and disseminating many of the United Kingdom's economic, social and demographic statistics, including the retail prices index, trade figures and labour market data, as well as the periodic census of the population and health statistics. The Director of ONS is also the National Statistician and the Registrar General for England and Wales, and the agency that administers the registration of births, marriages and deaths there.

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Preface by the National Statistician

This is the second National Statistics Work Programme. It sets out our plans for the years 2002/03 to 2004/05. Its purpose is to present a high level programme for National Statistics that reflects the needs of users and brings together the key elements of statistical work across government. Its publication supports one of the three objectives of National Statistics – to improve their quality and relevance. By producing a published plan, which is available for public comment, on which the Statistics Commission comments, and Ministers publish a response, the process of priority setting for statistical outputs becomes more transparent.

There is a substantial agenda for improved and expanded statistics in the United Kingdom (UK) which can only be achieved by meeting our aspirations of providing, in all areas, a statistical system that is world class.

The last decade has provided major opportunities stemming from the internet, information management tools and systems, access to administrative records, and portable, exchangeable systems and processes. These are common not only to national statistical offices but also to many spheres of business.

This National Statistics plan is founded on the fundamental presumption that, over the next five years, it will be the exploitation and effective implementation of these four major drivers of change that will be the focus of most development activity in National Statistics. Topic-focused initiatives will generally need to be separately funded.

We have fallen behind in taking advantage of these opportunities, and our development strategy seeks to recognise that the inadequacy of investment in these areas over the past decade has locked much of our resources into high cost and difficult means of producing many regular statistics. Our investment strategy cannot provide firm commitments until we can release the investment funds we need through productivity gains, output cuts and spending review support that will arise as we proceed.

Len Cook

Structure of this work programme

There are six main components to this work programme:

1. a strategic direction for National Statistics: this is a revision of the initial strategy published last year which reflects the broader views of government departments;
2. three chapters on infrastructure development: Creating an infrastructure for National Statistics; Developing the statistical sources, and; Enhancing quality and methodology – all reflecting the pre-eminent position of these aspects of the National Statistics strategy;
3. three ‘Cross-cutting’ chapters on the Neighbourhood Statistics Service (NeSS); Sustainable Development Indicators; and International Strategy.
4. a summary of the most significant developments across each of the National Statistics Themes over the next three years;
5. twelve ‘Theme’-specific chapters which detail proposed developments and work plans for particular topic areas. Where possible, cost estimates have been noted for proposed developments in each Theme where these are expected to cost in excess of £50,000. Such cost estimates are calculated on a full economic cost basis and, for some elements (e.g. by-products of developments to administrative systems), only the marginal costs of producing the National Statistics themselves are set out. These cost estimates are indicative only and are included purely to assist readers in assessing the cost/benefit trade-offs of developmental projects. Decisions about resources within Government Departments may in a number of cases be tentative. This does not take away from the fact that, in other areas, there are commitments to particular costed developments. Furthermore, in some cases, there is more work to be done before specific developments can receive the financial commitments needed;

6. annexes covering the planned schedule of quality assurance reviews for National Statistics, the costs of National Statistics, and a glossary of abbreviations.

Next year’s Work Programme

The publication of this year’s work programme builds on the strategy initially set out last year and presents that strategy, together with the infrastructure chapters, in a form which should remain relevant for the next few years. Consequently it is intended that the next annual work programme will only provide a simple update of our plans with a fuller update of the strategy included in, perhaps, two or three years time.

Contacts and further information

The National Statistics website can be found at www.statistics.gov.uk

If you have any data queries please contact the National Statistics Customer Enquiry Centre.

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If you have any comments on the specific contents of a Theme chapter, please use the appropriate Theme-specific email address given at the end of each chapter.

If you would like to comment generally about this work programme and the planning process, or about governance and consultation arrangements for National Statistics, please contact the Office for National Statistics’s National Statistics and Policy Division:

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Management Summary

The primary aim of National Statistics (NS) is to provide an accurate, up-to-date, comprehensive and meaningful picture of the economy and society to support the formulation and monitoring of economic and social policies by government at all levels. The main objectives of NS are to improve the quality and relevance of official statistics, to improve public confidence in the way they are managed and disseminated, and to operate in an efficient and cost-effective manner. In order to achieve these aims and objectives we will pursue a strategy which embraces a number of separate but complementary initiatives:

We will improve public trust and confidence in National Statistics by:

- establishing and implementing a new Code of Practice;
- introducing a Quality Framework;
- taking forward a rolling five-year Quality Assurance Programme;
- regularly reviewing the scope of National Statistics;
- building up a strong, integrated methodological and technological infrastructure to underpin National Statistics; and
- involving stakeholders.

We will improve the integrity, efficiency and effectiveness of National Statistics by:

- exploiting all known sources of data including administrative sources;
- making maximum use of data through harmonisation and integration;
- updating and expanding our methodological capability, particularly through the National Statistics Methodology Programme;
- using standard tools, processes and systems including through the Statistical Infrastructure Development Programme (SIDP);
- exploiting developing techniques and technologies including through the Information Management (IM) and Information Age Access (IAA) Programmes; and
- obtaining and developing the right skills – the Human Resources (HR) Strategy.

This overarching strategy will inform and influence several cross-cutting initiatives, and the twelve, Theme-based business programmes. All of these programmes will be undertaken within the level of resources which are expected to be made available to each of the Government Departments and Agencies that produce NS.

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