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Public confidence in official statistics still low

Trust in official figures has not improved significantly since 2005, according to the latest survey on public confidence in official statistics published today by the Office for National Statistics.

The survey showed that, when asked if they thought that official figures are generally accurate, 36 per cent of people agreed, while 33 per cent disagreed. The remaining 31 per cent could not decide either way.

However, when people were asked how they thought figures were used, only 16 per cent agreed with the statement *'the government uses figures honestly when talking about its policies'*.

There has been a small increase in the number of people who felt that figures were compiled without political interference, up from 17 per cent in 2005, when the survey was last conducted, to 20 per cent in 2007.

The most common reasons given by people who disagreed that official statistics were generally accurate were that they perceived that the figures were manipulated for political purposes, or that they were misrepresented by politicians or the media.

The findings are published as ONS prepares to become independent of ministerial control and come under the direction of the new UK Statistics Authority which answers direct to Parliament and has a remit to improve public confidence and trust in official statistics.

The survey asked over 1,100 people aged 16 and over about their levels of trust in a range of statistics and official institutions, as well as their trust in official statistics in general. People had slightly more confidence in official statistics than they did in official institutions.

Some sets of statistics were regarded as more trustworthy than others. When asked why they were likely to distrust particular figures, most respondents said that it was either because they appeared to conflict with their own personal experience or that there appeared to be a vested interest on the part of the government in the information.

Respondents were also less likely to trust figures if they appeared to be difficult to collect. If figures seemed to be easy to measure, or to be free of any perceived vested interests, people were more likely to trust them.

Issued by
National Statistics
Government Buildings
Cardiff Road
Newport
NP10 8XG

Telephone
Press Office 01633 819393
Public Enquiries 0845 601 3034

Internet
www.statistics.gov.uk

People were asked about their level of trust in six sets of statistics: changes in the cost of living; the UK population size; internet use; hospital waiting lists; road casualties; and domestic burglaries. Figures on road casualties were the most likely to be trusted, while statistics on hospital waiting lists were the least trusted.

Television remains the most popular source of information used for forming opinion, as it was in 2005, used by 74 per cent of those questioned. Use of the internet is, however, increasing significantly, particularly among young people, with 24 per cent of respondents saying they used it in 2007, compared with 15 per cent in 2005.

Link to full report:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=13967>

BACKGROUND NOTES

1. Previous surveys were carried out in [2005](#) and [2004](#)
2. **National Statistics** are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference. © Crown copyright 2008.