

Triennial Assembly: Proposed Contribution to the issue of Quality and Methods

Discussion Topic: Quality and Methods

Theme: Improving Current and Future methods of government statistics

The Better Statistics survey identified this as the (equal) second most important Topic to discuss at the Assembly. The discussion will present user concerns with the quality and methods of UKSA's data emphasising the need for complete transparency and greater interaction with users; considering the use and reporting of pilot work and learning from the private sector. The discussion should include a review of the trade off between quality and cost and how to evaluate the risk of unreliable information.

Suggested briefing material:

Code of conduct, together with a description of the hierarchy of Official Statistics (accreditation etc) and role of the OSR.

Description of user engagement in the development process and in the accreditation process.

The "***Worriers Guide to Risk***" by Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter, as published by the now defunct **Risk and Regulation Advisory Council**.

Background :

The Royal Statistical Society has recently published a series of examples of 'statistics under pressure' which, inter alia, has brought into focus the question of 'risk' and the reliability of data – when is it 'good enough'?

We suggest a discussion to examine the concept of 'risk' and relate it to the cost of error to emphasise the importance of probability in decision making and the need for corroborative evidence to justify going ahead with difficult decisions that may have a high cost. In particular there is a strong need to avoid confirmation bias – information that supports pre-determined views.

Possible Topics for Discussion:

1. Should the Code of conduct specify details to be provided in QMI's? For example:
 - a. detailing required reporting on response rates by key demographics?
 - b. Whenever admin data is applied, should example (anonymised) records of administrative data be provided
 - c. Whenever modelling / formulae are used should example workings always be provided?
2. Declining response rates and how to address them etc
3. Concerns about 'Modelling replacing Measuring'
4. Transparency eg the results of tests and pilots must be published

Conclusions would identify genuine user concerns, and recommendations. Possible ways forward. The issues where user consultation would be useful, Identification of a possible public User group

Proposed Facilitator/ Speakers: Tony Dent, Director Better Statistics. We would hope that Professors David Spiegelhalter and Paul Allin would also consider participating, if asked.

Proposed Mode: presentations from speakers plus breakout groups to address defined issues,

SELECTED COMMENTS FROM BS Associates Survey

Asking the right questions of the right people at the right time.

It sounds stats 101, but I think abuse of this lies behind the wide use of 'PR' stats.

The quality of 'estimated' population counts

The superficial nature of the technical appendices to even major surveys makes it difficult to understand whether they are fit for purpose. There is always a trade-off between cost, scale and quality and ultimately, value to the end user. The technical appendix should make it possible for external experts to assess the quality of the survey and how well it meets the needs of those who will be using the data.

Whether the quality of existing indicators is sufficient under existing methods/conditions

We must strive for the highest quality but also transparency - attention to language