



NATIONAL STATISTICS

HEALTH AND CARE THEME WORKING GROUP

FURTHER GUIDANCE ON STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION

Issue

1. This paper sets out guidance for consulting stakeholders on the three year theme work plan and/or the programme for quality reviews (as TWGs may choose to incorporate this into the work plan or consult on this separately);

Action

2. Theme Working Groups are asked to consider the proposals set out in this paper, and **agree** a strategy for consulting government and non-government stakeholders on draft theme work plans;
3. Theme Working Groups should also **consider** how stakeholder input from this consultation process will be prioritised and responded to, so that stakeholder expectations from the process are correctly managed and to assist the process of drafting the theme work plans.

Timing

4. Theme Working Groups need to agree their consultation strategy at their July meeting. The issue of prioritising and responding to stakeholder input during the consultation process should be addressed at this meeting although discussion may continue through subsequent correspondence between members; a final decision should be made by the end of August.

Background

5. Paper NSTWG(H&C)(2000)4 sets out that the key period for drafting work programmes will be between July and November each year (though amendments can continue up until final plans are published each March). In line with views expressed by the NS User Consultation Sub-Group, we should not constrain all aspects of user consultation to short or rigid consultation timetables. However, conducting specific consultations on draft

work plans in the early part of this drafting period will clearly be beneficial, both to drafters and also to stakeholders (in terms of being able to influence the plans).

6. TWGs should not feel too constrained as to how they conduct consultations on draft work programmes: factors such as the way in which responsibility for drafting plans has been divided, or the existence of face-to-face user and supplier fora will influence decisions. This paper demonstrates how a consultation exercise could be conducted, and the resources required and available to do so.
7. Suppose that a TWG has decided that its chapter editor will compile a first draft of the theme work plan, pulling in departmental inputs as appropriate, by the end of August. [These inputs may well be based around earlier stakeholder consultation arising from, say, user group or inter-departmental meetings.] Then the following could constitute a suitable stakeholder consultation on the overall draft theme plan:
 - Step 1 – convert the draft work plan into a structured and specific consultation paper. The chapter editor and TWG Chair could undertake this, or others could be involved. Parties involved should review examples of good practice to assist them in developing such a paper – clarity of the questions being asked of respondents, the choices involved, and the degree and manner in which input will be treated (i.e. expectation management) are essential. [As well as looking at central guidance such as the *Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultation*, the Statistics Green Paper, and the No.10 website offer good examples to follow.] This stage needs to be undertaken fairly quickly, say by 1st or 2nd week of September.
 - Step 2 – put this paper out to consultation (see paragraph 8 for possible consultation processes). The Cabinet Office Code of Practice suggests that *'sufficient time should be allowed for considered responses from all groups with an interest. Twelve weeks is preferable, and eight weeks should be regarded as a general minimum'*. The planning process timetable allows only around six weeks for consultation - this will have to do for our purposes for the time being, but it indicates how important it is that the timetable does not slip further.
 - Step 3 – factor in stakeholder input from the consultation process to the plan as appropriate. TWGs clearly need to consider at an early stage how stakeholder views will be prioritised in the planning process, and how respondents will be informed of progress. This will be essential both in terms of managing expectations during the consultation process and also in providing guidance to the chapter editor to fulfil his/her duties at this drafting stage. This stage should be undertaken concurrently with the arrival of feedback, so that a revised draft can be considered at a TWG meeting in November.

The Consultation Process

Non-government stakeholders

8. The Cabinet Office Code suggests that *'Documents should be made widely available, using electronic means as far as possible (though not to the exclusion of others), and*

effectively drawn to the attention of all interested groups'. TWG members may therefore all have a role to play in ensuring that all interested stakeholders are effectively consulted, for instance by running or participating in users' group meetings in association with the SUC, Data Archive, RSS and so on. [Keeping the central TWG secretariat informed on plans for consultation will allow them to help co-ordinate different consultations to common stakeholder groups (e.g. local government) so that these stakeholders are contacted in an optimum fashion.] These arrangements will clearly vary from theme to theme, but the following paragraphs set out plans common to all themes for conducting electronic consultation via the NS website.

9. NSPD proposes the following strategy:

- The structured consultation paper is placed onto the theme area of the website (by TWG secretary).
- Stakeholders who have expressed an interest in a particular theme (via the registration form on the website, Horizons magazine, and possibly by other mailing lists or groups such as Data Archive email groups) are informed by e-mail (or if necessary via other media) from the TWG secretary that a consultation paper is available on the website for their comments. Communication Division at ONS will manage the website/ Horizons registration process and will maintain the resulting database of stakeholders and their interests.
- Each consultation will provide an email address (provisionally: theme_name@statistics.gov.uk) where stakeholders should feed in comments (other contact details will be made available for those without internet access).
- The TWG secretary will manage this email mailbox and forward any messages to the theme chapter editor to action.

10. You should note that since the registration facility on the website is only just being developed, there might not be a large number of stakeholders registered for this year's exercise. All TWG members should therefore particularly reinforce efforts this year to raise stakeholder awareness of any consultations, for example by notifying any relevant users' groups to the availability of the paper on the website, or by alerting stakeholders in relevant professional journals.

11. It should also be noted that parties might have to respond quickly to requests from stakeholders to supply the consultation paper in different formats. Chapter editors should be prepared to contact the Welsh Language Board, the Equal Opportunities Commission or the Royal National Institute for the Blind (to name some of the most obvious organisations) for advice and assistance.

Wider consultation facilities

12. The user community has indicated that they do not wish in general to be constrained in submitting views, neither by the time of year, or by limiting the structure of particular consultation to particular topics. In order to address this, two additional elements on the website are currently being developed:

- A feedback button for each theme - allowing stakeholders to comment on National Statistics at any time. Any comments related to work planning will be fed to the NSPD secretariat, who will forward these to the appropriate chapter editor(s) to process in the next available planning round. It is not the intention that comments received through this route will automatically receive a response, but where one is required, the comment will be passed on to a relevant TWG member to action. This facility should be up and running within the next few weeks.
- A theme discussion forum/guest book (along the lines of the 'speakers corner' section of the number 10 website) will allow visitors to deposit comments on issues of importance to them and to see others' comments. These will be periodically 'swept up' by the TWG secretariat and may, if appropriate, be fed to theme chapter editor(s) to action. [This facility can also be used to help structure the draft chapter consultation exercise: however, it is still at the development stage and may not be available for the forthcoming consultation exercise this year.]

Government Stakeholders

13. It is up to individual Theme Working Groups to determine the best way to consult government stakeholders. Options include:

- Using government users' group(s) or holding bilateral meetings with interested stakeholders;
- Using electronic dissemination to alert key government stakeholders to the availability of the draft plan and to request feedback.

National Statistics Policy Secretariat, ONS
June 2000

References

- Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultation (available from TWG secretariat)
- Building Trust in Statistics
- www.number-10.gov.uk