

## Foreword

Welcome to our User engagement strategy.

I want our users to see their priorities clearly reflected in our business plans. The first step towards this is a more flexible approach in our engagement, which adapts to changing relationships and incorporates a wide range of users of our statistics. The user engagement strategy is the first of a number of targeted stakeholder strategies, underpinned by the ONS Stakeholder Framework.

The approach set out in our user engagement strategy was used in our recent consultation on our future work programme. The consultation on our work programme will inform our four year business plans and it will be the first time users will be able to see how they have contributed to our business plans.

The User engagement strategy informed our recent consultation on our future work programme



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## Contents

Foreword.....	3
Contents.....	4
1.0 Background.....	5
2.0 User engagement strategy .....	6
3.0 Diversity .....	13
4.0 Measurement and reporting.....	13
Annex 1 ONS stakeholder framework.....	14
Annex 2 Existing engagement approaches .....	16

## 1.0 Background

### 1.1 Acknowledgements

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) went out to public consultation on the user engagement strategy between 6 June and 8 September 2010. We are grateful to the wide range of organisations who responded to the consultation, which have helped informed this version of the strategy.

This consultation itself builds on discussions with major stakeholders over the last two years through workshops and face-to-face meetings. In addition, we have consulted the Statistics User Forum (SUF) and the UK Statistics Authority, so they could contribute to the proposals. The resultant consultation exercise, focus groups and meetings have informed the development of both the ONS Stakeholder Framework and the User engagement strategy.

## 2.0 User engagement strategy

### 2.1 Introduction

'**ONS – where people come first for trusted statistics**' is the new ONS vision. We want to be an organisation where people value our statistics, analysis and advice. This can only be achieved by working with and through other people and organisations.

Our stakeholders are individuals or groups who depend on ONS to fulfil their own goals and on who, in turn, ONS depends. They all have an effect on, or a 'stake' in, what ONS does and how well it does it. To drive this forward, a number of strategies underpinned by a Stakeholder Framework has been published (Annex 1). These include a strategy for:

- **Users** – individuals or groups who use, or could use, our statistics
- **Respondents** – the people, businesses and organisations who take part in our surveys
- **Partners** – the people and organisations who provide ONS with services and supplies and collaborate with ONS to produce our statistics, whether directly or indirectly
- **Funders** – the organisations who provide baseline funding for ONS, including HM Treasury and government departments and others who fund some of our key statistics and programmes
- **ONS employees** – people who contribute to the delivery of ONS's objectives and the trade unions who represent them
- **Other bodies** – those who hold ONS to account, such as the UK Statistics Authority, Parliament, Eurostat, and organisations or bodies that publicly express views about ONS, such as the National Audit Office (NAO) and the Office of Government Commerce (OGC)

ONS acknowledges that an organisation could be represented in a number of stakeholder strategies as well as within each strategy itself, for example the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is a provider of data as well as a customer for ONS statistics.

### 2.2 User engagement strategy – aims, objectives and outcomes

This strategy is focused on our users and sets out how we will encourage and promote user engagement as a driver for improvement and achieving our vision. ONS believes that it should be leading the way in terms of effective user engagement, this will see ONS's role within the Government Statistical Service (GSS) further enhanced and promote greater trust across official statistics and the GSS. ONS is firmly committed to working with and partnering GSS and non-GSS bodies to enhance the way in which it engages with users.

The strategy is intended to be a high level document from which ONS Directorates and Divisions will develop more detailed user engagement plans specific to their users, incorporating the corporate objectives and principles of user engagement.

The statistics we produce that serve the public good are produced free of charge to our users.

ONS users are defined in this strategy document as ‘individuals or groups who use, or could use, our statistics’ and we define customers as users who we know and are in regular contact with.

The User engagement strategy therefore has two key aims:

- to turn users into customers, and customers into ambassadors
- to broaden our engagement with users

Through an effective engagement strategy, we aim to understand more about our infrequent and frequent users by improving our dialogue with them, helping us better understand their needs and to help them better understand and use our statistics in an informed way. This will help them become informed customers. In due course, active partnership working with our customers will encourage them to take on an ambassador role for ONS, promoting our statistics and services to their peers.

ONS views all of its stakeholders as important. Historically, ONS has focused its engagement on the more 'powerful, traditional and urgent requestors'. Section 7 of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 requires us to produce official statistics that serve the public good, and Principle 1 of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics requires a focus on official statistics that meet the requirements of a wide range of users. This strategy therefore demonstrates that ONS is moving toward a more flexible approach to engagement that adapts to changing relationships and incorporates a wider range of users of our statistics.

ONS is committed to becoming more proactive and solution orientated, our statistics are only of value when they are used and our stakeholders are a key part of this and their views and support are key to ONS's success in delivering the ONS vision, “where people come first for trusted statistics.

Through effective stakeholder engagement, ONS expects to:

- make our overall performance more effective
- seek and identify solutions
- establish and improve the credibility of ONS
- become more innovative, develop new business and access new markets
- identify emerging issues at the earliest opportunity
- gain a greater understanding of the societal perspective
- utilise outside expertise and advice in ONS to further our objective of becoming a learning organisation
- create a more positive public image, enhance our community relations and improve our reputation
- resolve negative feedback and mitigate at the earliest possibility
- value diversity and difference among our stakeholder groups

- to better understand users' needs and to supply data better suited to stakeholder requirements and improving dissemination e.g. via the new ONS website
- to help statistics to be used in a more informed and informative manner by helping users understand the quality of our statistics

The ONS user stakeholder engagement strategy builds on the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, Principle 1: Meeting user needs and Protocol 1: User engagement, as well as the ONS Stakeholder Framework. In developing the strategy we have considered the recommendations in Monitoring Report 7 – Strengthening User Engagement published by the UK Statistics Authority. In particular, ONS wants to:

- **be inclusive**, identifying a diverse range of users
- provide clear **information** that is open and accessible to all
- **engage** with users, using a variety of methods appropriate to them
- investigate and document the **needs** of users, the use made of our statistics and the decisions they inform
- publish **statistical reports** that take account of user needs
- **be open** and **honest**, publishing information about user experience, data quality and the timeliness of reports
- **consult** users before making changes that affect ONS statistics
- feedback and demonstrate the **impact** and **influence** of comments received

## 2.3 User engagement – modes of engagement

### 2.3.1 Overview

The approach ONS takes in terms of engagement will vary depending upon the purpose and the users consulted. As part of our engagement, we welcome the Code of Practice for Official Statistics which requires us to improve our engagement with customers on statistical quality, ensuring that customers understand the quality of our statistics and establishing how far the quality meets customer needs. In addition, government security requirements and the continued concern about data assurance mean that we must ensure we meet our confidentiality commitments and maintain the security of our statistics.

The table below summarises each of the engagement approaches. It further defines the communication process and ONS's pledge to each.

	Objective	Communication	ONS's pledge	Examples of engagement approach
<b>Communicate</b>	Inform or educate stakeholders	One-way: ONS to stakeholder	'ONS will keep you informed'	Marketing Communication
<b>Consultation</b>	Gain information & feedback from stakeholders to inform decisions made internally	Limited two-way: ONS asks questions and stakeholders reply	'ONS will keep you informed, listen to your concerns, consider your insights and provide feedback on our decisions'	Customer Contact Centre Web-based surveys One-to-one meetings
<b>Dialogue</b>	Work directly with stakeholders to ensure their concerns are fully understood and considered in decision making	Two-way or multi-way: between ONS and stakeholders	'ONS will work with you to ensure your concerns are understood, to develop alternative proposals and provide feedback about how stakeholders' views influenced our decision making'	Forums Roadshows Seek input into communication strategies One to one meetings
<b>Partnerships</b>	Partner with or convene a network of stakeholders to develop mutually agreed solutions and actions	Two-way or multi-way: learning, negotiation	'ONS will look to you for direct advice and participation in finding and implementing solutions to shared challenges'	Projects Memorandum of understanding
<b>Monitor</b>	Monitor stakeholders' views	One-way: stakeholder to ONS	'ONS will monitor your views'	Research Media coverage

Our 'users' are categorised into eight user groups and these are defined as follows:

- **Major policy customers** – dialogue between Official Statistics producers and policy customers, UK government ministers, devolved administrations and European and International bodies. Relationships are usually governed by a concordat
- **Other government departments (OGDs)** – users of our statistics where no formal mechanism necessarily exists, for example concordat, service level agreement or similar document.

- **Sub national organisations** – all local authorities in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, other local public sector bodies and regional observatories
- **Academics and researchers** – individual academics or researchers, specialist interest groups, research institutes, academic organisations, data intermediaries, professional organisations and learned societies
- **Citizen** - whether represented by an interest or user group or not.
- **Private sector** – private businesses and organisations that represent private businesses
- **Voluntary and Community sector**
- **Journalists/media** – this group primarily includes UK media agencies

The table below contains details of each engagement approach that each user can expect from ONS.

### 2.3.2 Communication

Communicate information about ONS, its plans and products that users want to and need to know about. ONS wants to move towards educating users so that they can be informed participants in dialogue and consultation. ONS will be honest, transparent, accurate and timely in all communication.

	Major policy customers	OGDs	Sub National Organisations	Academics and Researchers	Citizen	Private sector	Voluntary and Community Sector	Journalists/ Media
Information sharing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Employee training	✓	✓						
Briefings and journals	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Corporate Plan	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Newsletters, websites, emails	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Speeches, conferences and presentations	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Press releases	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
SLAs and assessments	✓							
Strategic meetings	✓	✓	✓					

### 2.3.3 Consultation

ONS will improve its decision making and performance, by gaining external perspectives on current and emerging issues, perceptions of ONS (to change corporate practices and policies) as well as impact (performance, product, services and communications). In consulting with users, ONS will use informal and formal methods of communication, and ONS is committed to providing feedback to stakeholders on how their input has influenced and affected proposals. The process will be prompt and transparent.

	Major policy customers	OGDs	Sub National Organisations	Academics and Researchers	Citizen	Private sector	Voluntary and Community Sector	Journalists/ Media
Surveys, online forums	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Focus groups, stakeholder meetings	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Advisory/liaison panels	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
One-to-one meetings	✓	✓						

### 2.3.4 Dialogue

ONS will increase its dialogue with stakeholders to ensure that ONS considers a wide range of different perspectives, needs and alternatives, and to maintain mutual understanding, trust and co-operation on issues, strategies and initiatives. ONS is committed to listening to all opinions no matter how diverse and, where necessary, compromising to build trust among users.

	Major policy customers	OGDs	Sub National Organisations	Academics and Researchers	Citizen	Private sector	Voluntary and Community Sector	Journalists/ Media
Stakeholder meetings	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Advisory panels	✓	✓		✓				
Virtual engagement	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	
Forums and roadshows	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Communication Strategy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

### 2.3.5 Partnerships

Involve organisations with differing interests, shared views, values and culture to achieve a given objective.

	Major policy customers	OGDs	Sub National Organisations	Academics and Researchers	Citizen	Private sector	Voluntary and Community Sector	Journalists/ Media
<b>Alliances</b>	✓	✓		✓				
<b>Project teams</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Memorandum of Understanding</b>	✓	✓						

### 2.3.6 Monitor

Ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to record, monitor and act upon user feedback and comments on our statistics.

	Major policy customers	OGDs	Sub National Organisations	Academics and Researchers	Citizen	Private sector	Voluntary and Community Sector	Journalists/ Media
<b>Management Information System</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Research</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Media</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

We want continuous engagement with our users, but given time and resource constraints, it is unrealistic to build a strategic relationship with every user. We recognise that users attach varying levels of importance to certain issues and this will be a factor in developing the engagement approach.

For example, we will engage through consultation and dialogue when:

- there is a major issue confronting ONS
- there is an overlap between ONS objectives and those of our stakeholders
- there is concern about the impact of an ONS strategy or publication
- we need to improve our knowledge about a specific issue
- there is an opportunity to develop and improve our objectives or strategies
- we have sufficient control or influence over a decision
- we need to develop more options for a planned decision or action
- decisions have not yet been finalised

However, we may only communicate when:

- there is low or no ONS commitment to an issue
- a decision has already been made on the issue

- only in exceptional circumstances, where there is insufficient time to engage with users
- cost is prohibitive
- it is a short-term objective

### **3.0 Diversity**

ONS is committed to valuing diversity in everything it does. In any user engagement strategy there will be individuals and groups that are at risk of being excluded from engagement. These will not be limited to, but will include, those groups we are committed to under ONS's Equality and Diversity Policy. We will consider diversity in everything we do, to ensure that we engage with and communicate in ways that meet stakeholder needs. We are committed to using plain language and a variety of formats where applicable.

In 2010/11 we will complete an equality impact assessment on our overall stakeholder engagement strategy.

### **4.0 Measurement and reporting**

In 2011/12 ONS will begin establishing its user engagement baseline so that in subsequent years we can effectively monitor our progress. We will actively seek feedback from all our stakeholders on an annual and ad hoc basis using a variety of media available to ONS.

During 2011/12 we will publish a draft set of measures to monitor our user engagement performance and ensure that both ONS and users are content with the proposals. These targets will be measured in the ONS Corporate Scorecard, be part of our strategic plan and reported publicly.

## Annex 1 ONS stakeholder framework

### Introduction

ONS provides trusted, relevant and independent official statistics on the economy and society to help our customers make informed decisions. Statistics are only of value when they are used. We engage actively with customers to ensure we produce the statistics and analysis that are needed. Our vision is for ONS to be the place where people come first for trusted statistics. We want our customers to value our statistics, analysis and advice which drive their decisions, and meet their priorities. Our stakeholders are important sponsors, advocates, and partners and their views and support are key to ONS's success. Therefore understanding our stakeholders and effectively engaging with them will support the delivery of our vision. Our aim is to engage with our full range of stakeholders, reaching the right balance of interaction with each of our stakeholder groups and to build relationships that foster better understanding of mutual need, leading to real dialogue that empowers our stakeholders.

This framework describes the diverse range of ONS stakeholders and sets out the principles which underpin all stakeholder engagement activity in ONS.

### ONS stakeholders

Our stakeholders are individuals or groups who depend on ONS to fulfil their own goals and on whom in turn the organisation depends - they all have an effect on or a 'stake' in ONS. To drive forward this strategy, plans are being developed for the following groups: users, respondents, partners, funders, ONS employees and trade unions, and other bodies that hold ONS to account.

- **Users** – individuals or groups who use, or could use, our statistics
- **Respondents** – the people, businesses and organisations who take part in our surveys
- **Partners** – the people and organisations who provide ONS with services and supplies and collaborate with ONS to produce our statistics, whether directly or indirectly
- **Funders** – the organisations who provide baseline funding for ONS, including HM Treasury and government departments and others who fund some of our key statistics and programmes
- **ONS employees** – people who contribute to the delivery of ONS's objectives and the trade unions who represents them
- **Other bodies** – those who hold ONS to account, such as the UK Statistics Authority, Parliament, Eurostat, and organisations or bodies that publicly express views about ONS, such as the National Audit Office (NAO) and the Office of Government Commerce (OGC)

### Principles of engagement

The following principles will underpin all stakeholder engagement activity in ONS.

We will:

- **be inclusive**, identifying a diverse range of users
- provide clear **information** that is open and accessible to all

- **engage** with users, using a variety of methods appropriate to them
- investigate and document the **needs** of users, the use made of our statistics and the decisions they inform
- publish **statistical reports** that take account of user needs
- **be open** and **honest**, publishing information about user experience, data quality and the timeliness of reports
- **consult** users before making changes that affect ONS statistics
- feedback and demonstrate the **impact** and **influence** of comments received

## Annex 2 Existing engagement approaches

The following are examples of existing processes we use to engage our users.

- **Key accounts** – a number of our users are consulted as part of our key accounts (KA). Our KAs are underpinned by service level agreements (SLAs) and each 'customer' provides an annual assessment of ONS performance as well as attending regular meetings. Users of ONS data covered by this arrangement include: the Bank of England (BoE), HM Treasury (HMT), Department of Health (DoH), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS), Devolved Administrations, Communities and Local Government (CLG), Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)
- **Household Survey user groups and census user groups** – cross-departmental user groups
- **Subject matter user groups**, such as Health and National Accounts, including a variety of specialist users
- **Statistics User Forum (SUF)** – high-level discussions with representatives of non-government users held quarterly
- **Central and Local Government Information Partnership (CLIP)** – chaired by Head of Profession in CLG – to facilitate discussion of central government's data needs from local government and in turn, how central government can assist local government's information needs. CLIP has a number of sub-groups
- **Devolved administrations** – Inter-Administration Committee chaired by the National Statistician: Scottish Government – ScotStat, Northern Ireland Statistics Advisory Committee and the Welsh Assembly Government – Welsh Statistical Liaison Committee
- **Advisory groups** – cross-departmental representative and user groups are consulted on particular areas and subjects, for example public sector productivity, demography and methodology