

User engagement strategy

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The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is the executive office of the UK Statistics Authority, a non-ministerial department which reports directly to Parliament. ONS is the UK government's single largest statistical producer. It compiles information about the UK's society and economy, and provides the evidence-base for policy and decision-making, the allocation of resources, and public accountability. The Director-General of ONS reports directly to the National Statistician who is the Authority's Chief Executive and the Head of the Government Statistical Service.

The Government Statistical Service

The Government Statistical Service (GSS) is a network of professional statisticians and their staff operating both within the Office for National Statistics and across more than 30 other government departments and agencies.

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Scope of the consultation

Topic of this consultation	ONS User engagement strategy
Scope of this consultation	To seek views on the proposed User engagement strategy
Geographical scope	No boundaries are specified

Basic information

To	This consultation is open to everyone that has used or currently uses ONS statistics.
Duration	Until 1 September 2010
Enquiries	Matthew Fido Stakeholder Consultation Office for National Statistics Room 1.301 Government Buildings Cardiff Rd Newport NP10 8XG Tel: 0845 601 3034 Email: stakeholderconsultation@ons.gov.uk
How to respond	Refer to Annex 5 Postal address as above Email: stakeholderconsultation@ons.gov.uk
Additional ways to become involved	This is a written consultation exercise. Please contact the Stakeholder consultation team if you require a copy of this paper in any format, such as Braille, large font or audio.
After the consultation	A summary of responses will be published before or alongside any further action

Foreword

Welcome to our User engagement strategy consultation paper.

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.

Please take time to consider our proposals and I look forward to receiving your comments.



Stephen Penneck

Director General, Office for National Statistics

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1.0 Background

1.1 Acknowledgements

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) already engages with its stakeholders in a variety of ways (Annex 2 & 3). Our approach in producing this consultation paper has been to review the existing practices and to identify new and improved methods of engagement. In identifying new methods, we have consulted with major stakeholders over the last 12–18 months through workshops and face-to-face meetings. In addition, we have consulted the Statistics User Forum (SUF) and the UK Statistics Authority, so they have been aware of these proposals. The resultant focus groups and meetings have informed the development of both the Stakeholder Framework and the User engagement strategy.

1.2 Introduction

The purpose of this consultation paper is to seek views on the User engagement strategy for the ONS. It sets out each of the engagement approaches, defines the communication process and ONS's pledge to each.

The paper can be downloaded from www.ons.gov.uk

This consultation is being conducted in line with the Government's Code of Practice on Consultation, the criteria for which are set out in Annex 4 of the paper.

ONS welcomes informed views from any quarter and therefore invites responses from interested parties.

The consultation period will end on 1 September 2010. We expect to publish a summary of responses before or alongside any further action, and this will be made available on the ONS website.

1.3 How to respond

The closing date for responses to this consultation is 1 September 2010.

You can email your views to us at: stakeholderconsultation@ons.gov.uk using the template in Annex 5, which is available as a word document on our consultation webpage.

Or you can write to us at:

Stakeholder Consultation, Office for National Statistics, Room 1.301, Government Buildings, Cardiff Road, Newport NP10 8XG

Additional copies of this paper can be downloaded from our website at www.ons.gov.uk.

1.4 Alternative formats

You should contact Stakeholder Consultation if you require a copy of this consultation paper in any other format, such as Braille, large font or audio.

1.5 Responses: confidentiality & disclaimer

The information you send us may be passed to colleagues within ONS, the Government or related agencies.

Furthermore, information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be published or disclosed in accordance with the access to information regimes (these are primarily the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA)).

If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, under the FOIA, there is a statutory Code of Practice with which public authorities must comply and which deals, among other things, with obligations of confidence. In view of this it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information, we will take full account of your explanation but we cannot give assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, itself, be regarded as binding on ONS.

Please ensure that your response is clearly marked if you wish your response and name to be kept confidential.

Confidential responses will be included in any statistical summary of numbers of comments received and views expressed.

ONS will process your personal data in accordance with the DPA; in the majority of circumstances this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.

Individual responses will not be acknowledged unless specifically requested.

Representative bodies are asked to give a summary of the people and organisations they represent when they respond.

2.0 Consultation document

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 will be published (Annex 1). These will 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

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.

The statistics we produce that serve the public good are produced free of charge to our customers and our wider user base.

ONS users are defined in this strategy document as 'individuals or groups who use, or could use, our statistics'.

The User engagement strategy has two 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, so they 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 important sponsors, advocates, partners and users of our statistics. Their views and support are key to ONS's success. It is imperative that ONS understands and effectively engages with all stakeholders to ensure delivery of the ONS vision.

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

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 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, the Code of Practice for Official Statistics 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
Communicate	Inform or educate stakeholders	One-way: ONS to stakeholder	'ONS will keep you informed'	Marketing Communication
Consultation	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
Dialogue	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
Partnerships	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
Monitor	Monitor stakeholders' views	One-way: stakeholder to ONS	'ONS will monitor your views'	Research Media coverage

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

- **Major policy customers** – dialogue between Official Statistics producers and policy customers, UK government ministers 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. This group includes regional development agencies
- **Local authorities (LAs)** – all local authorities in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland
- **Academics and researchers** – specialist interest groups, research institutes, academic organisations, data intermediaries, professional organisations and learned societies
- **Public** – includes the citizen represented by an interest or user group or not. Other organisations included in this group include businesses, public organisations and the voluntary 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 customer	OGDs	LAs	Academics	Public	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 customer	OGDs	LAs	Academics	Public	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 customer	OGDs	LAs	Academics	Public	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 customer	OGDs	LAs	Academics	Public	Media
Alliances	✓	✓		✓		
Project teams	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Memorandum of Understanding	✓	✓				

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 customer	OGDs	LAs	Academics	Public	Media
Management Information System	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Research	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Media	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Given time and resource constraints, it is unrealistic to build a strategic relationship with every user and it is essential that when user engagement is considered, we identify and prioritise issues that we consult on. We need to recognise that stakeholders attach varying levels of importance to certain issues and this will be a factor in developing the engagement approach.

In determining whether we need to engage with users we will consider the following:

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

Engagement may only be communication when:

- there is low or no ONS commitment to an issue
- ONS has already made decisions on the issue
- 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 2010/11 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 2010/11 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

Annex 3 Roles and responsibilities for stakeholder engagement

Role of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Board

The ONS Board is chaired by Lord Rowe-Beddoe of Kilgetty, the UK Statistics Authority's Deputy Chair with responsibility for ONS. The ONS Board oversees the strategy and priorities of ONS and monitors the ONS budget and work programme.

Director General and Executive Directors

The Executive Committee is responsible for overseeing all our user stakeholder activity through the use of the Strategic Plan, monitored via the Corporate Scorecard and associated key performance indicators. It will evaluate our user engagement and wider stakeholder engagement and its impact on achieving the ONS vision.

Executive directors already have 'key account' relationships with key stakeholders and are specifically responsible for:

- maintaining a relationship with the specific stakeholder
- ensuring that our relationship is coherent and timely
- feeding back relevant information or views to the Executive Committee and the ONS Board

Deputy Directors

Deputy directors are responsible for maintaining working relationships with major policy customers and stakeholders. Information is fed back to the relevant member of the Executive Committee.

ONS employees

ONS employees are key to the delivery of our user strategy as they are in regular day-to-day contact with our users. This could be in our customer contact centre, library and information services or amongst the survey and operation teams. In addition, we have a very large field force who meet members of the public on a daily basis collecting information for our social surveys.

Annex 4 The seven consultation criteria

The Consultation follows the Government's Code of Practice on Consultation – the criteria for which are set out below:

1 – When to consult

Formal consultation should take place at a stage when there is scope to influence the policy outcome.

2 – Duration of consultation exercises

Consultations should normally last for at least 12 weeks with consideration given to longer timescales where feasible and sensible.

3 – Clarity of scope and impact

Consultation documents should be clear about the consultation process, what is being proposed, the scope to influence and the expected costs and benefits of the proposals.

4 – Accessibility of consultation exercises

Consultation exercises should be designed to be accessible to, and clearly targeted at, those people the exercise is intended to reach.

5 – The burden of consultation

Keeping the burden of consultation to a minimum is essential if consultations are to be effective and if consultees' buy-in to the process is to be obtained.

6 – Responsiveness of consultation exercises

Consultation responses should be analysed carefully and clear feedback should be provided to participants following the consultation.

7 – Capacity to consult

Officials running consultations should seek guidance in how to run an effective consultation exercise and share what they have learned from the experience.

The full Code of Practice on Consultation is available at:<http://www.berr.gov.uk/whatwedo/bre/consultation-guidance/page44420.html>

Consultation Co-ordinator

If you have a complaint or comment about the ONS's approach to consultation, you should contact the ONS Consultation Co-ordinator, Pat Thomas. Please DO NOT send your response to this consultation to Pat Thomas. The Co-ordinator works to promote best practice standards set by the Government's Code of Practice, advises policy teams on how to conduct consultations and investigates complaints made against the ONS.

The Coordinator can be emailed at: pat.thomas@ons.gov.uk or alternatively write to her at: Pat Thomas, Consultation Coordinator, Office for National Statistics, Room 1.301, Government Buildings, Cardiff Rd, Newport, NP10 8XG

Annex 5 Consultation response document



Interested parties are invited to respond using this template by the closing date via email or by post to:

Email: stakeholderconsultation@ons.gov.uk

Stakeholder Consultation
Office for National Statistics
Room 1.301
Government Buildings
Cardiff Rd
Newport
NP10 8XG

1. Name	
----------------	--

2. Please provide an email address and/or telephone number so that we are able to contact you if we need to clarify any points	
a) Telephone number	
b) Email address	

3. If you are representing a group or organisation, please provide details	
a) Organisation name	
b) Organisation address	

4. Type of group or organisation (to assist in monitoring the range of users the consultation has reached.) Please tick one or more boxes			
Central Government Department	<input type="checkbox"/>	Charity	<input type="checkbox"/>
Government Agency	<input type="checkbox"/>	International Organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local Government	<input type="checkbox"/>	Media	<input type="checkbox"/>
Higher/Further Education	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify below)	<input type="checkbox"/>
NHS	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Private/ commercial organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>		

5. Please provide any comments you have on the proposed strategy, where possible please reference the section the comments refer to (continued on next page)

