

BERR | Department for Business
Enterprise & Regulatory Reform

Government Response to the National
Statistics Consultation on the
'Regional Competitiveness & State of
the Regions' publication

MAY 2009

BERR Public Consultation on the 'Regional Competitiveness & State of the Regions' publication

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Background

The web publication 'Regional Competitiveness & State of the Regions' (RCSOR) provides information covering 17 socio-economic indicators covering the nine English regions, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The main aim of the publication is to provide regional statistical information to regional bodies and the devolved administrations to enable them to develop and monitor their own economic strategies. 'Regional Competitiveness & State of the Regions' (RCSOR) is a compendium publication, containing regional information sourced from several different government departments, agencies and academic organisations.

The purpose of this National Statistics Consultation was to determine if readers continued to find all or part of the publication useful, for example that the regional statistics are used by regional bodies for a specific business need, including the formulation and monitoring of economic strategies. The consultation also asked for feedback and suggestions on how it could be improved.

The consultation also asked for views on the relationship with the REP PSA website, which contains some very similar analyses, but only for the English regions. It is updated regularly, whereas RCSOR is reissued once a year.

The closing date for the consultation was 1 December 2008. The Department would like to express its gratitude to the 13 respondents. A list of respondents is attached at Annex A.

Specific Questions Asked and Summary of Responses

Q1: Should the regional indicators contained with RCSOR be cut back, so as to focus only on those contained within the REP PSA indicator?

Of the ten who responded to this question, nine did not want coverage cut back. One respondent had no strong opinion but asked for coverage of Wales as well.

Government Response: Content will not be cut back

Q2: Alternatively, are there additional indicators which could be included?

The following suggestions were made (some under Q8 – Additional Comments):-

- CLG Planning and Housing statistics
- DEFRA sustainable development indicators
- A measure of sustainable economic growth, such as the New Economics Foundation's Index of Sustainable Wellbeing
- A quality of life indicator
- Average weekly earnings (instead of hourly) with more breakdowns, for example full time males and females, and by sector
- Percentage of employment in different sectors for each region
- Annual employment and unemployment data, in addition to quarterly
- Quarterly unemployment rates
- Number of businesses per head of population, as an indicator of business stock density
- VAT deregistrations per 10,000 resident adult population
- Business stock per 10,000 resident adults
- IDBR outputs on turnover or age of business
- Energy consumption by broad sector or emissions
- Air traffic
- Patents and copyrights
- Regional analysis of rural/urban productivity
- Additional productivity data including total regional GVA at current basic prices
- Real GVA measures (as on the REP PSA website)
- More detailed sectoral data, particularly for new growing sectors, such as Healthcare, Environment, creative and advanced flexible materials etc.
- Comparisons with similar areas in other EU countries, including detailed industrial sector breakdowns for specific industries

Government Response: None of the suggestions was made by more than one respondent, though there is a degree of overlap between some proposals. Some of the proposals are more obviously relevant to regional economic performance or the state of the regions than others. Again, some would be much easier to implement than others. Some data sources cannot realistically be expected to be capable of generating regional estimates, while others would require resource for development.

There is a link to Q4a, as the more data are included, the greater the burden of regular updating.

RCSOR largely consists of data already available elsewhere, though not necessarily in the same form. While there would be little point in duplicating large numbers of tables available elsewhere, BERR will seek to identify key analyses where this might be worthwhile, and where this is not, to consider the incorporation of links to other existing sources.

BERR intends to retain average hourly, rather than weekly, earnings, as it is more relevant to the bases on which productivity is assessed, one of which is GVA per hour.

Q3a: Does the commentary of RCSOR add much value to the publication?

Eleven responses were provided. Six did not make significant use of the commentary itself but some of these responses recognised that it could be of assistance to users less familiar with the publication. Four responses argued that the commentary did add value. One commented that its value was less than that of the data itself.

However, even those who did not use the commentary generally wanted the retention of the background detail on the datasets themselves.

Government Response: Production of the commentary is time consuming and distracts attention from handling datasets received close to the date of publication. As it appears to be of limited value it will be discontinued. The background notes will be retained.

Q3b: If answer to 3a is yes, would the provision of more charts be more useful?

Only three responses, one wanting more charts and maps, but two regarding this as unimportant.

Government Response: The decision to drop the commentary reduces the relevance of this question. However, BERR will consider making some or all of the existing maps and charts available through other means and is open to suggestions on specific additions.

Q4a: As new data becomes available throughout the year, should the set of tables be updated more frequently?

One non-response, but otherwise there was near unanimity that more regular updating would be helpful, though there was some recognition that a coherent “point in time” version provided a useful reference document.

Government Response: BERR will move to regular updating as soon as possible via a website presentation (see also Q7). A coherent annual “point in time” set of tables will remain available.

Q4b: If yes is it acceptable to update the tables without updating the commentary?

Ten responses were received, though two were ambiguous. One response thought the commentary should be updated each time. The others did not think it was necessary.

Government Response: As the commentary is being dropped, the question is no longer relevant.

Q5: Would the inclusion of additional derived groups of regions, such as those used in the REP PSA indicators be useful?

Nine responses to this question. The general view was that NUTS1 data should remain the priority, though there was some support for adding recognised groupings such as the Northern Way. One respondent requested sub-regional data and another information on specific growth areas.

Government Response: BERR will retain the existing NUTS1 focus. Provision of sub-regional data would substantially increase the amount of work involved, and many indicators would not be available at that level. Where readily available, data for the Northern Way will continue to be included on web outputs.

Q6: Should the name of the publication be changed?

Ten responses were received. Three were opposed to any change and three in favour. Four considered that a change of name would be acceptable if there was a merger with the REP PSA website (see Q7) or other substantial change.

Government Response: The name will be changed to “Regional Economic Performance Indicators” with the existing title used as a subtitle.

Q7: Are both RCSOR and the REP PSA indicator set both required?

Ten responses to this question. Four considered that the two should be kept separate, though one tied this to geography (REP PSA is currently restricted to England) and another stressed that both needed to be kept up to date. Six favoured a merger of the two sources, though one also expressed concern about data for other parts of the UK.

Government Response: BERR will move towards a merger of the two sources, expanding England only tables where possible (while making it plain that REP PSA targets do not extend beyond England). This will involve regular updating. A coherent annual “point in time” set of tables will remain available.

It is unlikely that a complete merger will be achieved by May 2009, when the next edition of RCSOR was due. Development work will probably continue for some time after that.

Q8: Additional Comments

- RCSOR should be better publicised to local and regional government data users.
- The opportunity to contribute to the consultation was welcome, though would welcome some kind of forum for more frequent consultation on the publication.

Government Response: The move to a more web-based approach should make it easier to respond flexibly to requests for change. BERR will consider means of making it easier for users to provide and discuss suggestions.

ANNEX A

List of respondents to consultation

Analytical Unit - Enterprise Directorate (BERR)
Association of Regional Observatories
East Midlands Development Agency
Environment Agency – Wales
Mr Brian Eaton
Mr Phil Hughes
North East Chambers of Commerce
North East Regional Information Partnership
North West Regional Intelligence Unit
South East of England Development Agency
South West Regional Assembly
South West Regional Development Agency
West Midlands Regional Observatory

