

NORTHWEST REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

Subject	NWDA response to the ONS Consultation – Independence for Statistics
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The NWDA welcomes this opportunity to comment on proposals for the reform of the Framework for National Statistics. This response is based on the extensive experience of the NWDA Research Team/Northwest Regional Intelligence Unit (the NW Regional Observatory). As a regional body we are constantly using national statistics to inform regional policy, develop strategy and monitoring performance. As an RDA response to this consultation the following will take as its principle focus issues of concern when implementing and monitoring Regional Economic Strategies. We are also aware of and support fully the Association of Regional Observatory's response.

We strongly support of the principle of statistical provision independent of Government and welcome this move to entrench such provision in statute (para 1.9).

Concerns with the document:

- 1) Statistical provision has not kept pace with the demands of the regional policy development; often demands put on regional and sub-regional agencies to monitor and evaluate performance cannot be achieved due to inconsistency and inadequacy of national data sources. The best example of this is achieving PSA 2 targets and the inadequacy of GVA data in doing this across regions. This continues to be an issue within the Northwest's latest RES monitoring exercise. Unfortunately, the implementation of the Allsop recommendations has been slow and reform of this magnitude risks creating further delay. The duty to implement and move forward on this must remain an explicit part of the statutory remit of the proposed statistics office, Chief Statistician and board.
- 2) Currently many regional organisations do not have access to national datasets, crucial to the monitoring and performance assessment roles. This can lead to use of inadequate sources or purchasing of other commercial sources. As public sector agencies, proper access should be assured within this reform process.
- 3) It is essential for the proposed board to include strong regional representation, from RDAs/Regional Assembly or Observatory perspective and a Local representative (local authority or sub-regional partnership). There must be clear duty for this representation to disseminate and truly represent the regions.

- 4) Within the reform of statistics more should be done to maintain standardised geographies and definitions for the collection and reporting of data so that proper comparison can be made across devolved regions and English regions.
- 5) There is no reference to the implementation of the Regional Presence which could be slowed as a result of the consultation recommendations. Therefore a clear understanding of the consultations implications need to be developed specifically around this issue. RDAs have also promised funding for the Regional Presence but again this reform and its impacts are not clearly understood or addressed in this document.
- 6) Within the reform process a wider review of all government statistics and data collection should be examined to look for duplication and where best use can be made of data and who the clients are, increasingly regional bodies are primary clients but are not involved in the development or establishment of work.
- 7) Statutory high-level objectives should include reference to the production regional and local statistics and the executive role and role of scrutiny should be split.

Comments on options for reform

In general we support the reform with these exceptions:

Decentralisation this should not be pursued at the expense of coordination and consistency (4.7 - 4.8).

A clear separation of executive and scrutiny functions is desirable with a clear form of redress. The Statistics Commission should not be abolished if the board is to have executive functions. (4.10).

Maintenance, development and enforcement of the Code of Practice should be a principal function of the Chief (National) Statistician and board. This responsibility should extend to all statistics produced by government departments to maximise consistency. The board will need to consult widely on prioritisation of statistics for production and should be fully independent (4.14 – 4.15).

The Responsibilities of the Board and Chief Statistician require clarification. Some fundamental elements of statistical coverage should be defined in statute. Key regional statistics, as required to monitor and develop regional economic strategies and all associated strategies, should be identified in this fashion. (4.23).

Compliance costs associated with statistical production should be minimised where possible and any government departments already collecting data should be covered by this review and reform, but data must provide the

evidence required to inform public policy and resource allocation within the public service (4.24)

Funding arrangements must be consistent with statutory independence. The flexibility suggested by 4.44 could compromise the perception and reality of their independence, see comment above on RDA funding of Regional Presence. (4.42-4.45).

Government must use the opportunity afforded by this proposed reform to institute a wholesale review of relevant statistical legislation. In particular, legislation restricting access by regional organisations information relevant to their roles and responsibilities must be repealed. (4.52).

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