

Statistical Reform Team
Room 3/07
HM Treasury
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

14 June 2006

Dear Sirs

**Consultation on Independence for Statistics – Response from
The Information Centre for health and social care**

On behalf of the Information Centre for health and social care (The IC), I am pleased to submit our response to the Consultation on Independence for Statistics.

Public confidence in official statistics is vital for a healthy democracy. We welcome the Government's commitment to legislate for independence in statistics and the proposals for reform outlined in the consultation document. The IC's Board finds that the Treasury's proposals serve to reinforce the rationale of the Department of Health for the establishment of The IC: *"to provide information of integrity, provide effective and timely access to information, develop an information culture and support policy development and research."* We therefore support *all* the key guiding principles outlined in paragraph 1.9 as the foundations of a strong statistical system.

Our response to this consultation focuses on the IC's governance and *modus operandi* and our position under the proposed arrangements.

Information Centre governance and *modus operandi*

The IC was established in April 2005 as an NHS Special Health Authority to place information at the heart of decision-making throughout health and social care. The IC works closely with front line staff with the aim of ensuring the relevance of the information to those managing and delivering health and social services as well as to those developing policies.

The IC provides a diverse range of information services, including the production and publication of National Statistics and other official statistics, relating to health and social care. Operating as an independent body, we are one of the biggest producers of official statistical information outside the ONS.

Mindful that public confidence in health statistics has been low, we are passionate about our role and responsibilities in building public confidence in all official statistics.

The IC's position as an arms length NHS organisation working closely with stakeholders provides an opportunity to improve the trustworthiness of health and social care statistics. The IC aims to change the information culture by ensuring that the public can readily access information about health and social care of the highest integrity; and by strengthening capacity for informed decision- and policy-making throughout the health and social care communities. We set good practice by managing the release of statistics ourselves and producing balanced press releases.

Statistics are for a purpose and must be of relevance to their users. Whilst recognising that centralised statistical systems potentially lend strength and greater professional identity to the statisticians, specialised agencies such as the IC can deliver greater benefits to users and help them to make sense of an increasingly complex world.

The IC has specialist expertise in the collection, use and analysis of health and social care data. It is developing strong links with the suppliers and users of such data and ensuring that the significant investment in the IT programme for health will yield major information benefits.

To this end, we support continued decentralisation, which we believe strengthens the relevance of statistics to both suppliers and users. We recognise that decentralisation poses risks in terms of real or perceived political interference but we believe that the model of the IC provides safeguards through:

- its position as an arms length body
- the independence of its board: comprising a Chair and five non-Executive Directors appointed by the NHS Appointments Commission
- its Information and Statistical Governance Committee, chaired by a non-Executive Director
- a Chief Executive with accountability to Parliament
- a professional statistician as its Chief Executive (who is also the Caldicott Guardian and Head of Profession for statistics)
- an internal Information Governance and Policy Directorate concerned with professional standards in the collection, processing and analysis of information.
- membership of the Government Statistical Service, including active participation in its key committees, training and continuing professional development
- compliance with the National Statistics Code of Practice

The Information Centre under the proposed arrangements

An advantage of a code enshrined in legislation would be greater clarity relating to the scope, release and early access of statistics, all of which are essential for increasing public confidence. It is the IC's belief that the code should apply to **all** official statistics. The IC aspires to adhere to the existing professional code for all its information, with the Chief Executive being responsible for transparency in cases where departures prove to be necessary, and the IC's Board insists on the rigorous investigation of any deliberate or inadvertent breaches.

We would like the IC to be recognised as a key element of the UK statistics system to which it would relate as follows under the proposed regime:

- 1) The IC's Board would ensure probity and accountability in accordance with statistics and other relevant legislation as well as best practice. The IC's Board would co-operate closely with the new Statistics Board, calling on it for external expert advice and scrutiny. The Statistics Board would initiate independent audits of the IC's work. We would regard the Chair of the Statistics Board as a 'statistical information commissioner' and the IC would have a similar relationship with his/her office to that which we currently have with the Information Commissioner's Office.
- 2) The IC would work in cooperation with the National Statistician to ensure the coherence of the statistics system particularly in relation to the harmonisation of UK-wide statistics and the integration of health and social care data with data from other sources. The IC would support the National Statistician in the development, implementation and promotion of professional standards.
- 3) The IC believes in the value of a network such as the Government Statistical Service (GSS) which promotes the professional development of those involved in the production of statistical information. However, some changes would be necessary to take account of the fact that staff are drawn from a wide range of information professions and that not all of them are civil servants. A rebranding of the GSS might signal these changes.

Conclusion

The IC sees the consultation document and its proposals as a very important step in rebuilding public confidence in statistics. The challenge is great and we pledge to play our part in the creation of a strengthened and more independent statistical system.

Yours faithfully



Professor Denise Lievesley
Chief Executive - The Information Centre for Health and Social Care