Summary quality report for Occupational Pensions Schemes Survey

1 Introduction

This report is part of a rolling programme of quality reports being introduced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The full programme of work being carried out on Statistical Quality is available on the National Statistics website. Summary Quality Reports are overview notes which pull together key qualitative information on the various dimensions of quality as well as providing a summary of methods used to compile the output.

This report relates to the Occupational Pensions Scheme Survey (OPSS) which considers membership and other details of Occupational Pension Schemes. The OPSS has been run by ONS since 2006, having previously being run by the Government Actuary’s Department (GAD).

2 Summary of quality

2.1 Relevance

The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs for both coverage and content.

The surveys are conducted using questionnaires sent to the pension schemes. Different questionnaires are sent out dependent on the nature and size of the scheme. Where schemes have multiple sections a separate questionnaire is issued for each section up to a maximum of four questionnaires per scheme. Paper questionnaires may be returned or respondents can complete the electronic questionnaires online.

The OPSS questionnaires are reviewed each year to accommodate changes to pension legislation and ensure content and coverage is appropriate to user needs.

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<th>Occupational Pensions Schemes Survey</th>
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<td>What it measures</td>
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registry report total membership and while this is similar to the membership collected by the OPSS, the two differ due to a delay in the reporting of membership to TPR. The correlation between the two membership measures is used to improve the precision of the estimates produced from the survey. In the second weighting step the inverse of the sampling fraction is multiplied by the ratio, for those schemes that responded to the survey, of the total membership from the TPR registry to the total membership returned in the survey.

The third step makes adjustments to these factors to take account of the different response rates for the key variables of interest. In this step the scheme rating up factors are multiplied by the inverse of the response rates for individual questions where there is item non-response.

**Imputation**

There is currently no imputation used within the OPSS survey. Non-responders and schemes not sampled are both estimated for as detailed below.

**Estimation**

The weights as detailed above are applied to the returned data to give estimates for the entire population.

**Outliers**

Within the OPSS survey there is currently no treatment for outliers. However, any extreme values are verified with respondents at the validation stage.

The main users of OPSS are:
- Government Departments e.g.
  - Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
  - Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs (HMRC)

Other users include:
- Researchers into developments in pension provision
- UK and foreign press
- the general public

### 2.2 Accuracy

*The closeness between an estimated result and the (unknown) true value.*

#### Sampling Error

Sample surveys are employed rather than censuses because the census process is too lengthy and costly to be viable. Standard errors illustrate the spread of results, which would be expected from estimates derived from successive samples selected by chance from the same population using the same sample specification. While each sample is designed to produce the ‘best’ estimate of the true population value, different equal-sized samples covering the population would generally produce varying population estimates. The sampling error measures this variation. Estimated standard errors are calculated for the OPSS key variables and published in Chapter 9 of the Annual Report.

#### Non-Sampling Error

There is the potential for non-sampling errors that cannot be easily quantified. For example, undetected deficiencies may occur in the survey register and errors may be made by the respondents when completing the survey questionnaires.

Questionnaires are despatched to schemes in October after the end of the reference year. Two written reminders are subsequently sent to non-responding groups and are followed by telephone response chasing to groups to try to minimise non-response and thereby any non-response bias. There is also the possibility of using the legal powers of the Statistics of Trade
Act to force response, although the Office prefers to work together with respondents to produce the necessary information. Response rates are published in Chapter 9 of the Annual Report.

Returned information is run through a series of validation checks to identify any errors. These include tests to ensure that all questions are completed, that the responses to individual questions are consistent within the questionnaire as a whole, and that the return is consistent with historical data from the scheme.

2.3 Timeliness and Punctuality

Timeliness refers to the lapse of time between publication and the period to which the data refer. Punctuality refers to the time lag between the actual and planned dates of publication.

The National Statistics Release Calendar is available on the National Statistics website and provides twelve months advance notice of releases. The OPSS surveys meet publication deadlines published on the Release Calendar, providing timely estimates for users.

A Statistical Bulletin is initially published to highlight the headline figures, followed by a more detailed Annual Report publication giving further details. In 2009 these two publications will be released on the same date.

2.4 Accessibility and Clarity

Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data, also reflecting the format(s) in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of the metadata, illustrations and accompanying advice.

The Occupational Pension Schemes Survey publications are freely available from the National Statistics website, in pdf. format with spreadsheet links from the tables). Occupational Pensions Schemes Survey Publications

Further queries can be addressed to the OPSS public enquiry team at: opss@ons.gov

2.5 Comparability

The degree to which data can be compared over time and domain.

Since ONS took over the OPSS survey in 2006 some changes have been made to improve the methodology of the survey. This means some results are not comparable with earlier data from the GAD produced surveys. In 2008 a review of estimation methods led to changes in the methodology for producing estimates from 2006 (revised) onwards so that comparisons with earlier years should be treated with caution.

Changes in the definition of public and private sector schemes also mean that estimates differ prior to 2000, as some organisations such as the Post Office and the BBC were reclassified as private sector schemes at this stage.

Each year the OPSS questionnaires are reviewed with key customers. Questions may be added, removed or amended as necessary (for example in response to policy changes) to meet user needs and improve the questionnaires and resulting data quality. A data collection methodology review of the OPSS questionnaires is currently scheduled within the development work for OPSS 2010 with funding agreed. This means that the data collected may vary over time, although consistency is aimed for wherever possible. The surveys have become more consistent year on year since the first ONS survey as this approach has been different to the GAD surveys, which each considered different issues in detail. Prior to 2004 the OPSS was not an annual survey and so annual time series data are only available from 2004 onwards.
2.6 Coherence

The degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but which refer to the same phenomenon, are similar.

The ONS OPSS survey is the only source of some of the occupational pension scheme data at the breakdown level provided. Reports are also produced and available from TPR, covering different aspects of occupational pension scheme data.

3 Summary of methods used to compile the output

Chapter 9 of the OPSS Annual Report provides full details of the methodology used in the survey including questionnaire design, the electronic questionnaire, sample selection and response, adjustments to data, weighting of results, standard errors and disclosure control.

Coverage

The Pensions Scheme Registry maintained by TPR is used as the sampling frame. Schemes are selected at random using stratified sampling by size band as outlined in the table above. Further details of the coverage of the Occupational Pension Scheme Survey are given in Chapter of the OPSS Annual Report.

Sample Design

The sampling frame is divided into six strata by scheme size using scheme membership as recorded on the TPR register. In the private sector, the vast majority of schemes are very small with fewer than 12 members, and most of the remainder have fewer than 100 members. Schemes are sampled at random from these smaller size bands. However, the bulk of scheme membership is concentrated in a much smaller number of very large schemes. In creating the stratified sample to measure variables associated with membership, a higher sampling fraction is therefore used for the largest schemes: 100 per cent of schemes with 5,000 or more members are included, to ensure greater coverage of these schemes as they have the bulk of members.

Statistical Disclosure

Statistical disclosure control methodology is also applied to data. This ensures that information attributable to an individual organisation is not disclosed in any publication. The Code of Practice for Official Statistics and specifically Principle 5: Confidentiality, set out practices for how we protect data from being disclosed. The Principle includes a guarantee to survey respondents to “ensure that official statistics do not reveal the identity of an individual or organisation, or any private information relating to them”. More information can be found on the ONS Statistical Disclosure Control Methodology page of the ONS website.
## 4 References

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