

# Statistical Publication Principles and Future Developments

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## Purpose

To describe the principles which underpin release of Official Statistics by the HSCIC, next steps in the “Focus on...” series of publications, following publication of “Focus on Accident and Emergency” on 3 December 2013, and the work being taken forward on Publications Strategy.

## Background

### Official Statistics

Public trust in the statistics published by Government has tended to be low, which has caused successive Governments to introduce mechanisms with the aim of improving it. This culminated most recently in the Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007) which gave rise to the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA), a body which reports to Parliament, not Government, and which monitors and reports on the production of all Official Statistics in the UK. The UKSA also has a separate Executive arm, the Office for National Statistics.

UKSA published a Code of Practice for Official Statistics (the Code) in 2009. The Code lists the principles and practices which bodies producing Official Statistics are required to follow. Official Statistics are statistics produced by bodies listed in an annual Official Statistics Order; this includes HSCIC.

As at 1 January 2014, HSCIC is responsible for 111 series of Official Statistics of which 38 are designated as National Statistics, which means that UKSA recognises them as being compliant with the Code. The remainder, which must also follow the requirements of the Code, are either undergoing assessment or have not been formally assessed by the UKSA for compliance.

Major Official Statistics producing bodies such as HSCIC have a Head of Profession for Statistics (HoP). The HoP is responsible for ensuring compliance with the Code, and has a professional reporting line to the National Statistician (currently Jil Matheson), who is the Chief Executive of the UKSA. The National Statistician is also the Government’s Chief Advisor on Statistics.

## Principles governing publication

These flow from the Code, the Pre-release access to statistics order (2008) and associated guidance produced by the National Statistician’s Office.

The legislation and Code aim to ensure that Official Statistics are produced and explained to high standards and that they serve the public good. In particular, they require stringent release practices so that the statistics are, and can be seen to be, produced independently of the political process:

- The month of publication for each release of Official Statistics must be pre-announced in public 12 months’ ahead, with the exact date confirmed at least 4 weeks in advance;
- The HoP “must have sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases” (Code, principle 3);
- Access to the statistics before public release (“pre-release access”) must be minimised, and, where such access is for briefing or for preparation of statements by other than those producing the statistics, limited to 24 hours in advance of publication. A list of those receiving such access must be published alongside the statistics

To comply with these principles, the HSCIC:

- Maintains a publication calendar on its website and on the UKSA's "publication hub" and lists forthcoming publications according to the required timescales. New publications are added as soon as possible, once the decision to publish has been agreed internally.
- Ensures that final decisions on content, timing, methods and procedures are under the control of the HoP. In practice these processes are operated by the HSCIC teams producing the statistics, with advice from the HSCIC Statistical Governance team, and input from the HoP where necessary.
- Liaises with the Department of Health, NHS England, and other Government bodies to ensure that, subject to the constraints of the legislation, where they need to make statements or comment in public at the time of publication they are granted pre-release access to allow them to do so.

To ensure that DH and NHSE are aware of planned statistical publications, early each month, the HSCIC statistical governance team provides a list for the following month to the Statistical Governance team at DH and to the NHS England press office. To complement this, the HSCIC Media team sends a calendar of all forthcoming publications for this and the following month to interested parties, including external ones.

Briefings within DH/NHSE are produced by the relevant briefing coordinator within those organisations. Access to statistics for this purpose is restricted by the legislation to a limited list of named individuals, for no more than 24 hours in advance of publication.

Compliance with the principles protects HSCIC from potential or perceived political interference in the production or publication of its statistics, and strengthens trust in it and in the figures it produces. Failure to comply may result in a breach of the Code, which the HoP is under a professional obligation to report to the National Statistician. Breaches or other failures may result in public criticism by the UKSA, with the potential for reputational damage.

## Next steps with the 'Focus on...' series;

Building on the "Focus on A&E" publication, HSCIC plans to release a series of publications, with each release providing a focus on a different key area for which information is held across the organisation. It is anticipated that these publications will be released approximately quarterly with the intention of presenting the facts held to as wide an audience as possible and ensuring that public debate on aspects of Health and Social Care is underpinned by accurate information.

To do this we will use innovative techniques to present figures simply and intuitively and we intend to accompany the release of the publication with a media briefing. Once a topic has been selected, the publication will be pre-announced. We will link with analytical leads in DH and Arm's Length Bodies to try to coordinate our topics with their programmes if appropriate, whilst preserving the impartiality of our output.

The topics will be decided by a cross-organisational team based on

- the likely level of interest in the topic
- the extent to which a publication on the topic could inform debate and decision making
- alignment with other activities
- production capacity.

Potential topics for subsequent publication are being discussed, and at the time of writing include: Older People, Primary Care, Workforce and Mental Health.

# Update on the work on publication strategy

## Introduction

The publication strategy will ensure that the HSCIC achieves maximum impact with the information it makes available to all, including its official statistics. The strategy will outline an approach to getting this information used more widely to drive decisions around health and social care.

The strategy will cover all aspects of publication including why we will publish, what we will publish and how we will publish for different customer groups. It will also explore when we should publish and how we can collaborate with others in producing them. It will consider how we systematically measure success, in particular around how the publications drive decision making.

The strategy will be delivered as a Strategic Transformation Project. The delivery will have two separate strands delivered in parallel:

- 1) High impact rapid improvements and innovations
- 2) Organisation-wide publication review, strategy and implementation

## Strand 1) High impact rapid improvements and innovations

This will enable a number of highly visible improvements and innovations will be delivered to our publications. In addition to the continuation of the “Focus on..” series, these will include greater use of video in our outputs and improved customer engagement through webinars. It will also include the rapid adoption of emerging feedback from customer engagement.

These improvements will be delivered incrementally. A number of key ones will be delivered by April 2014.

## Strand 2) Organisation-wide publication review, strategy and implementation

This will be divided into three phases. The timescales allow for extensive internal and external engagement culminating in a strategy aligned to our customers’ needs over the next few years and one that is adopted across the organisation. The phases are:

- I. a root and branch review of the HSCIC current publication activities (January - May 2014)
- II. production of a finalised publication strategy and implementation plan (May - October 2014)
- III. implementation of this strategy (October 2014 – February 2015)

The internal engagement will ensure that current best practice is built on and that the strategy can be applied to all relevant HSCIC outputs. In addition to enabling us to meet our customers’ needs, the external engagement will enable us to apply best practice from similar organisations.

## Scope and delivery approach

The precise set of organisational outputs that the strategy will cover will be defined in the root and branch review. It is envisaged it will cover output from all parts of the HSCIC for the public domain that is capable of generating widespread interest. It will have a particular focus on that which the HSCIC is defined as being responsible for publishing in the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

The strategy will be delivered by current HSCIC staff and will draw on external expertise as appropriate. The external engagement will be aligned with other engagement initiatives, including the Customer Needs Analysis.

## **Actions Required of the Board**

To note and comment.