

Welsh Government

Consultation Document

Proposals concerning the publication of official statistics

Date of issue: **09 December 2013**

Action required: Responses by **03 March 2014**

Overview	This consultation presents proposals for changes to official statistics outputs produced by the Welsh Government.
How to respond	<p>We would be grateful for feedback on our proposals, in particular on the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What impact will these proposals have on your work? • What do you use the statistics for? • Do you agree with the focus on making datasets available in an open format with more analytical - but less frequent - statistical releases? • Where we are proposing to stop or reduce the statistics that are available, are there dependencies between our statistics and your work that we have not considered? • Are there particular issues of timing that we should consider when planning for reducing the frequency of statistics? <p>Please feedback your comments to Knowledge and Analytical Services' Policy and Standards Unit at stats.info.desk@wales.gsi.gov.uk using the subject title "RESPONSE TO OFFICIAL STATISTICS CONSULTATION"</p>
Further information and related documents	<p>Large print, Braille and alternate language versions of this document are available on request.</p> <p>Annex www.wales.gov.uk/consultations/statistics/proposals-concerning-publication-official-statistics</p> <p>All statistical outputs that are currently produced can be found on the Welsh Government website at www.wales.gov.uk/statistics and www.statswales.wales.gov.uk</p>
Contact details	For further information please contact: stats.info.desk@wales.gsi.gov.uk

Data protection

How the views and information you give us will be used

Any response you send us will be seen in full by Welsh Government staff dealing with the issues which this consultation is about. It may also be seen by other Welsh Government staff to help them plan future consultations.

The Welsh Government intends to publish a summary of the responses to this document. We may also publish responses in full. Normally, the name and address (or part of the address) of the person or organisation who sent the response are published with the response. This helps to show that the consultation was carried out properly. If you do not want your name or address published, please tell us this in writing when you send your response. We will then blank them out.

Names or addresses we blank out might still get published later, though we do not think this would happen very often. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004 allow the public to ask to see information held by many public bodies, including the Welsh Government. This includes information which has not been published. However, the law also allows us to withhold information in some circumstances. If anyone asks to see information we have withheld, we will have to decide whether to release it or not. If someone has asked for their name and address not to be published, that is an important fact we would take into account. However, there might sometimes be important reasons why we would have to reveal someone's name and address, even though they have asked for them not to be published. We would get in touch with the person and ask their views before we finally decided to reveal the information.

1. Foreword by Chief Statistician

Official statistics perform a vital role in helping government and other users make decisions, allocate resource, plan and understand the effectiveness of policy. We publish a huge range of statistics about Wales that are used on a daily basis by government, the Assembly, local authorities, business, academia, the health service, the education sector and the media.

Demand for evidence and data has increased rapidly over the past few years and we have expanded and developed our work. This ranges from new official statistics work (such as our statistics on Flying Start¹) to new ways of publishing data (see the My Local School² website) or working with partners to ensure they have the data they need for improvement and performance management (such as the development of All Wales Core Data Sets).

New technologies, open data and electronic dissemination have also changed the way that we as a Government Statistical Service are producing statistics. The Government Statistical Service recently published a strategy document with a vision to shift the balance from collection to analysis, interpretation and user support.

In line with this vision, we want to ensure that we are making the best use of the data by using more administrative sources and in the long term reducing data collection burden. We also want to ensure that we produce statistical outputs and analysis that add value to public debate and focus on the right priorities. This is all the more important given the reductions in expenditure that hit all areas of the public sector.

This consultation document highlights our priorities for the years ahead, building on the Evidence Plan published in May 2013. It highlights areas where we will make changes in response to the changing environment by making more use of electronic dissemination, avoiding duplication, working collaboratively across organisational boundaries and reducing work that is of lower value.

Thank you for taking the time to read this document. As ever, your feedback is important in helping us inform our decisions so please let us know what you think about our proposals.

Glyn Jones

¹ www.wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/flying-start/

² <http://mylocalschool.wales.gov.uk/>

2. Background

The Welsh Government publishes³ around 500 statistical outputs a year alongside a huge range of detailed data on StatsWales⁴. Most of this work is done by statisticians within the Knowledge and Analytical Services department who also provide statistical support to other Welsh Government departments. Our statisticians also play an important role in representing the interests of the Welsh Government, and Welsh users more generally, in dealing with other producers of official statistics such as the Office for National Statistics, UK government departments and other devolved administrations.

Our statistics are produced in accordance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This Code requires us to engage with users inside and outside of government and to consult with all users about changes to official statistics.

There are other official statistics producers in Wales including those that were named in the Official Statistics (Wales) Order 2013. All these producers play an important role in the collection and publication of statistics about Wales.

3. Our work and our priorities

Official statistics produced by the Welsh Government are widely used and are critical to informed decision making, resource allocation and accountability across Wales. They present an authoritative information source that are used daily by the Welsh Government, other political parties, the public sector, the private sector, academia, the media and the general public.

For example:

- Our NHS performance statistics provide the information required to be able to assess the performance of our health service against a range of government targets.
- Our school performance statistics are used to measure the performance of the sector, from Wales as a whole to individual schools, and are the basis of school self-improvement; the school banding methodology and the My Local School website.
- Our sub-national population projections and Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation are used to plan housing and development for the future and to allocate resources effectively.
- The £4.26bn distributed through the Local Government settlement is based heavily on official statistics collected by the Welsh Government and other producers.

Demand for data and evidence has increased over the past few years and emerging priorities mean that we continuously review what we do. Whilst maintaining a wide range of statistical outputs we have managed to regularly expand our production. Most recently this has included, for example, the development and publication of the first annual data from the National Survey

³ www.wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research

⁴ <http://statswales.wales.gov.uk>

for Wales; a new detailed data collection and set of official statistics on Flying Start and the new reading and numeracy tests; and new economic statistics outputs on Priority Sectors and Jobs Growth Wales. This is alongside work to support Ministerial priorities such as the development of the *My Local School* and *My Local Health Service* websites and School Banding, and work on hospital mortality statistics.

Each year we publish a statistical work plan⁵ to inform users of our priorities for the year(s) ahead, and this year this was published as part of a wider analytical plan incorporating the research programme.

A brief summary of our activity and priorities across portfolio areas can be found below.

Growth and sustainable jobs

- We continue to publish a range of economic statistics outputs about Wales, where they add value to publications from the ONS and other departments to ensure that users in Wales have access to analysis and interpretation of the economy and labour market in Wales.
- This includes our monthly key economic statistics bulletin, our regional profiles and our short-term output indicators as well as regular updates to bulletins on specific topics. We will also continue to develop our new monthly series on *Jobs Growth Wales*.
- As work on the Silk Commission recommendations is taken forward, we will also need to consider what data are needed on the economy and public finances in Wales in the context of potential tax-varying powers.
- We will collect, analyse and publish statistics about road accidents and casualties in Wales as well as collating information on transport statistics more generally from the variety of different producers.

Education and Skills

- We collect, collate and publish the wide range of critical information about schools and their performance. This includes the collection and dissemination of the Pupil Level Annual School Census from every school in Wales, attendance and exclusions data, and primary and secondary school performance.
- This information is used in our school banding calculations, our preparation of the All Wales Core Data Sets for schools and local authorities and is made available through the successful My Local School website.

⁵ www.wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/about/user-engagement/plans-practices/knowledge-analytical-services-evidence-plan

- We produce a range of post-16 statistics including performance data through the National Comparators and provider-level learner outcome reports, as well as our outputs on young people that are not in education, employment or training.
- We work closely with the Higher Education Statistics Agency and will continue to produce outputs about the higher education sector that are specific to Wales which cannot be produced elsewhere.
- Our work on student finance modelling is critical for budget monitoring and future policy development.

21st century healthcare

- We continue to publish regular data on NHS performance to support monitoring and accountability. This currently includes monthly data on a whole range of measures such as Referral to Treatment Times, Ambulance Response and Delayed Transfer of Care.
- However as we recently consulted on, in regards of A&E data, we will also work with NHS Wales Informatics Service to review how such publications can be done in a more timely and efficient manner.
- Following on from our first two Statistical Articles on hospital mortality we will continue the work to develop official statistics on hospital mortality in Wales in partnership with the Department for Health and Social Services, and continue to develop the *My Local Health Service* website.
- We will work with and support Public Health Wales as they become producers of official statistics and collaborate with them on the development and publication of a standardised collection of community contraception data, replacing the current collection of aggregate data returns.
- We will move to patient-level datasets for data on outpatient activity in Wales.
- We are seeking to enhance and improve the statistics published about eye care services to produce a comprehensive picture for Wales.
- We continue to undertake the Welsh Health Survey and publish the regular series of reports as determined by user need.

Supporting people

- We are undertaking a project to improve the availability of linked data for social care; this will facilitate, in the medium term (within 2 years), the analysis of linked social care and health data.

Welsh homes

- We continue to collect and publish key housing statistics on a monthly, quarterly and annual basis as required;
- We produce housing finance forecasts and allocations, including the housing revenue account subsidy, social housing rents and major repairs allowance;
- Work will continue on developing an automated system for setting rent levels for social landlords based on the Welsh Government's new policy for social housing rents.
- We will carry out a feasibility study looking into the possible benefits, to both data providers and the Welsh Government, of collecting data on individual social housing properties, including whether it might be possible to extract data directly from providers' management information systems.

Safer communities for all

- We continue to publish a range of statistical outputs on fire incidents, and on the Fire and Rescue Services. We will also support work to implement outcomes from the consultation on fire statistics, such as improving information on effective targeting of prevention activities.

Tackling poverty

- In 2014, we will publish the next edition of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD), which is the Welsh Government's official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in Wales.
- We will continue to publish WIMD indicator data on an annual basis.
- We will continue with our new official statistics series on Flying Start, following the publication of the first official statistics this year.
- We support work within the Welsh Government relating to the Tackling Poverty Action Plan.

Rural communities

- We collect and disseminate the June and December Agricultural Surveys;
- Our analysis of agricultural and rural data from our own and external sources supports Welsh Government policy colleagues and other users;
- We support work within the Welsh Government on the impact of reforms to the Common Agricultural Policy;

Environment and sustainability

- We continue to publish quarterly and annual statistics on local authority municipal waste management
- Work with the new Natural Resources Wales body to consider roles and responsibilities in terms of statistics in relation to the environment.
- As the Future Generations Bill continues to develop, we will consider the requirement for supporting indicators.

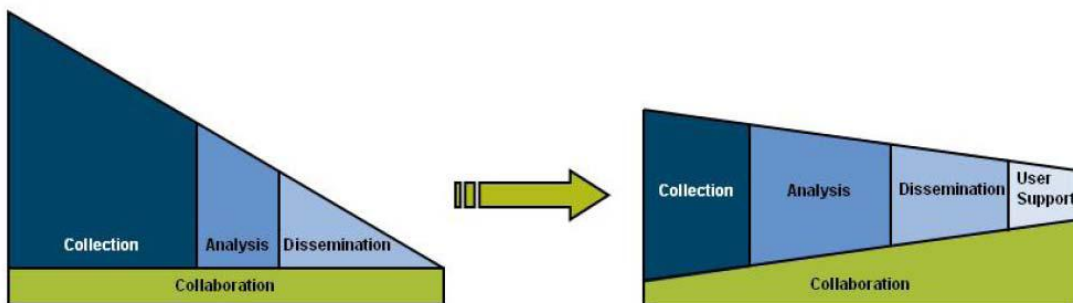
Cross-cutting activities

- Make use of the first year's results from the National Survey for Wales and continue to collect, review and develop the survey to maximise its impact.
- We work closely with the ONS with regards to Census outputs and we will develop and publish outputs relating to the 2011 Census of Population according to user need
- We are working with ONS to ensure Welsh interests are considered as part of the Beyond 2011 programme looking at the future of the Census
- We want to ensure we are making the most of the data we already hold. We will work in strategic partnership with the ESRC and the new Administrative Data Research Centre in Wales to develop and maximise the use of data sources to improve research and policy making.

4. Our improvement programme

We are continuously striving to improve how we do things in order to most efficiently meet as wide a range of user requirements as possible and to ensure we are reactive to emerging priorities.

The recently published Government Statistical Service (GSS) strategy "*Building the Community*"⁶ sets out the National Statistician's vision for the GSS. The vision is for statistics produced by a collaborative community, used in decision making and debate. It outlines how the GSS will seek to make greater use of available data and spend more time supporting users to interpret, understand and use statistics (see figure below).



Many of our plans going forward will seek to ensure that we can achieve these strategic goals, by working in collaboration with others, removing duplication and routine production and focusing on analysis that adds value to official statistics.

With demands increasing and the continuing difficult financial climate we also need to continue to find ways of working more effectively to allow us to maintain the range of services and high quality products we are producing whilst also minimising the burden on our data suppliers in local authorities, schools, and elsewhere.

⁶ <https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/about/gss-strategy/>

We will be working with the new Administrative Data Research Centre in Wales⁷ to seek to maximise our use of existing data sources to support the production of official statistics and research. In the long term, this may lead to benefits in terms of reduced data collection.

There is an ever-increasing demand for more timely information and access to underlying datasets. Last year we introduced a new process for publishing data on A&E departments whereby monthly data are published in a more timely fashion, without commentary, in order to allow us the space to publish a higher quality statistical release with added analysis, context and interpretation in line with the vision of the GSS strategy. We want to expand this approach.

Given the emphasis on using StatsWales we will seek to ensure we can develop our user support provision to allow users to make the most of its functionality and access the data we need.

This year, the National Assembly for Wales passed the Official Statistics (Wales) Order 2013⁸. This Order named five organisations in Wales as official statistics producers, who will need to publish statistics according to the principles of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics and the requirements of the Statistics and Registration Services Act 2007. Those bodies, along with others that may also be in scope of the Act, will be responsible for producing and publishing their own statistics. We are working closely with those bodies to develop these responsibilities and avoid duplication.

Furthermore users can keep up to date with publications of other bodies easily through social media and other outlets. Therefore there is little added value in the Welsh Government producing summaries of these statistics. In the spirit of developing a collaborative community, we are developing our StatsWales service to enable other official statistics producers in Wales to publish information directly if they wish.

This document presents a series of proposals that supports this emerging context and our need to have a flexible and sustainable workplan that meets a wide range of needs.

⁷ www.wales.gov.uk/newsroom/businessandconomy/2013/7956389/

⁸ www.legislation.gov.uk/id/wsi/2013/649

5. Our proposals

We propose:

- To build on our collaborative community with partner organisations and remove duplication in the publication of official statistics;
- To allow more time for value added interpretation and analysis, where appropriate we will publish datasets through StatsWales, whilst reducing the number of routine monthly and quarterly statistical outputs. We will seek to publish the datasets in a more timely fashion and with appropriate user support;
- To move the data from many of our compendia publications from hard copy/pdf to StatsWales, ensuring that the data is available to users in a manner that is open source and downloadable.
- For those few outputs that add less value, or have little use outside a very specialist or internal audience, we will reduce the frequency or cease either the data collections/publications.
- To publish ad-hoc requests for statistical information, whilst aligning our standards of service with our Freedom of Information commitments.

More detail on these proposals is provided in subsequent sections and the annex⁹ provides detail on how this will affect specific outputs.

6. Feedback and next steps

Following the outcome of this consultation we will publish a response.

We would be grateful for feedback on our proposals, in particular on the following questions.

- What impact will these proposals have on your work?
- What do you use the statistics for?
- Do you agree with the focus on making datasets available in an open format with more analytical - but less frequent - statistical releases?
- Where we are proposing to stop or reduce the statistics that are available, are there dependencies between our statistics and your work that we have not considered?
- Are there particular issues of timing that we should consider when planning for reducing the frequency of statistics?

Please feedback to Knowledge and Analytical Services' Policy and Standards Unit at stats.info.desk@wales.gsi.gov.uk using the subject title "RESPONSE TO OFFICIAL STATISTICS CONSULTATION"

⁹ www.wales.gov.uk/consultations/statistics/proposals-concerning-publication-official-statistics

7. Detailed proposals

7.1 To build on our collaborative community with partner organisations and remove duplication in the publication of official statistics.

We work very closely with a range of partners, such as the Office for National Statistics, Public Health Wales, NHS Wales Informatics Service, Higher Education Statistics Agency, Natural Resources Wales amongst others, who all have an important role in producing official statistics about Wales.

We will continue to do this but, as stated above, we will do so as a collaborative community in order to remove duplication and ensure users have a clear and coherent set of statistical information which is published, where possible, by those that collect the data. As part of this we will continue to develop our plans to allow other organisations to publish directly through StatsWales.

We will continue to ensure that the Statistics Wales website provides a window to these statistics through signposting users. However we will produce fewer short summaries of other organisation's statistics where this does not add value, and we will produce fewer Statistical Bulletins that duplicate information which can easily be found elsewhere.

We will also of course continue to represent the interest of users of statistics in Wales in our dealings with UK-wide organisations and seek to influence their publication plans and ensure the content of their outputs provide data specifically for Wales where possible.

Details are provided in the [annex](#) under Proposal 1

7.2 To allow more time for value added interpretation and analysis, where appropriate we will publish datasets through StatsWales, preferably in a more timely fashion and with user support, whilst reducing the number of routine monthly and quarterly statistical outputs.

In line with the GSS vision we want to ensure that we are focusing on analysis and interpretation that informs decision-making and debate. We also know that some users want access to data as quickly as possible in a form that can be reused.

We spend a great deal of time at present on monthly outputs that add very little value in terms of commentary and analysis. Some of these are critical outputs to monitor government targets such as ambulance response times. Others are published to ensure transparency of high profile management information such as Student Finance applications but have very little use outside of Welsh Government.

We propose to review our monthly and quarterly outputs to ensure that we continue to make the data available frequently, primarily through StatsWales, but that where appropriate we reduce the frequency of Statistical First Releases and Bulletins.

In most cases the authoritative set of official statistics will continue to be available to the same frequency (and perhaps quicker), but without accompanying narrative. We will instead produce less frequent but higher quality statistical outputs that will enable us to provide more improved commentary and interpretation. Our proposals relate to data on NHS performance for which it should be possible to publish monthly data more quickly; substance misuse; some housing series; and student finance data.

We will improve our user support for StatsWales, ensuring that guidance and training is provided to enable users to locate the information they need and make use of the functionality.

Details are provided in the [annex](#) under Proposal 2.

7.3 To move the data from many of our compendia publications from hard copy/pdf to StatsWales, ensuring that the data is available to users in a manner that is open source and downloadable.

Compendia publications are volumes of statistics in tabular form which provide reference information on a topic or a range of topics. We are aware that some users do value the information being provided in a reference format. Historically they were the main mechanism for releasing large amounts of underlying data.

However the volumes are time consuming to produce and in the age of the internet and open data they are quickly becoming outdated. They often contain data that are out of date before or soon after publication.

We propose to ensure that the data from these volumes are instead made available through StatsWales, which provides users with the flexibility to produce their own tables and download or access the data in open source format. We have already moved towards this in some areas such as school statistics and housing statistics and we will continue with this direction of travel. We will, however, be mindful of our statutory obligations and the different needs of users.

Details are provided in the [annex](#) under Proposal 3

7.4 For those few outputs that add less value, or have little use outside a very specialist or internal audience, we will reduce the frequency or cease either the data collections/publications.

To ensure that we are able to focus our activity on the right priorities and to ensure we have capacity to produce analysis and outputs that meet the strongest user need and emerging priorities it is inevitable that we may need to review those statistics that add little value. It is only right to review the purpose of our statistical work at regular intervals.

As a result of our considerations over recent months, and in the light of the tight financial situation across the public sector we are proposing to reduce the frequency or stop certain data collections and outputs.

One category are statistical bulletins which contain secondary analysis of certain data, usually of a specific topic. Often these outputs are produced and then repeated on an annual basis, although the story and narrative does not change very quickly. An example might be the detailed analysis of qualification levels in Wales, which is a very useful contextual document but changes very little from year to year. For such outputs we will review how frequently they are published and make clear to users and on our website when they are next likely to be produced. If possible we will continue to make underlying datasets available.

Another category are statistical bulletins where the audience is a very limited group, where data are generally only used by Welsh Government as management information, or where the information is mostly available from other sources. Examples of these are Financial Contingency Funds for students or the Stats2 and Stats3 education surveys of local authorities. For these outputs we will either reduce the data collections or stop the publications.

Details are provided in the [annex](#) under Proposal 4.

7.5 To publish ad-hoc requests for statistical information, whilst aligning our standards of service with our Freedom of Information commitments.

As well as our statistical publications we provide a service to users of statistics in Wales through the provision of statistical information on a request basis. These are either done as business as usual or through Freedom of Information processes.

Our standards of service for statistical requests were set in the first half of the last decade and can be found here:

www.wales.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/about/statement-of-compliance/customer-service-and-complaints

There is an inconsistency between these standards and the requirements of the Freedom of Information Act, and we will align the standards with those FOI requirements. We know that statistical information is often required very quickly, to feed into, for example, decisions, meetings or public speeches. Therefore we will continue to negotiate with requestors and seek to meet demand for quick turnaround where we can.

We will also seek to follow the best practice promoted by the UK Statistics Authority and the Freedom of Information Act and move towards publishing our responses to ad-hoc requests. This will allow users to identify information that might be of use to them more easily and better enable us to re-use our work.

Details are provided in the [annex](#) under Proposal 5.