Defra User Engagement Policy Statement

Introduction

Defra (the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs), with its Arms' Length Bodies (ALB's), is committed to producing high quality, timely and relevant statistics in line with the Code of Practice for Statistics[1] and with our Statement of Compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics[2].

Our key objectives are to ensure that our statistics are of value to our users, informing debate and having an impact on decision making. The statistics we produce across our portfolio should anticipate user needs and be regarded as being of high quality and fostering trust and clear understanding. In order to achieve this we need to maintain a two-way dialogue with users and, wherever possible, take action based on the feedback we gather.

Our commitment

To meet our objectives, when producing our portfolios of statistics we will:

- Aim to reach the widest possible range of users who can gain value from our products.
- Ensure that all of our products are as accessible as possible.
- Aim to improve the communication of our statistics and analyses.
- Be progressive and innovative in our methods of engagement with our users.
- Be open and transparent about our compliance with the Code of Practice.
- Respond in a timely manner to any complaints from users as set out in our Statement on User Service and Complaints[3].
- Keep and process the data we hold legally and securely.

This policy statement sets out how we intend to meet these commitments. It will be adopted by core Defra statistics teams and by any teams in our ALB's who wish to do so in preference to publishing their own policy on user engagement.

Who are our users?

We know our users are drawn from a diverse range of backgrounds and have varying needs from access to continually updated raw data to a full statistical report.

Outside Defra Group we know that those accessing and using our products include:

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[1] Code of Practice for Statistics https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/

[2] Code of Practice – Compliance Statement https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs/about/statistics

[3] Statement on User Service and Complaints https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs/about/statistics

- European / International bodies e.g. Eurostat, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO).
- Local/regional government and other local public sector bodies.
- Academics, researchers and students.
- Private sector, where we further categorise users by industry type e.g. agriculture, environmental industry sector, other specific industry types (finance, particular manufacturing industries, service sector, health, catering & hospitality, consultancy firms).
- Voluntary sector.
- Media and commentators.
- The general public.

We will assess potential options to continually develop our knowledge of who our users are and extend our reach to new users by:

i. Utilising information already collected e.g. feedback, complaints, ad hoc requests, consultation responses, social media.

ii. Inviting comments through our statistics webpages.

iii. Encouraging users to register as users and engage with us on development of our statistics.

iv. Exploring options to engage via community discussion groups e.g. on StatsUserNet[4].

What do our users want?

The composition of our statistics portfolio and the methods of delivery of outputs are guided by our understanding of user needs. To understand user needs effectively we will use a variety of approaches to gain insight into what they are looking for, how they look for it and how valuable it is to them.

We will use web analytics as a base to gain insight into the relative popularity of our various outputs and formats.

We will seek user views on:

- The breadth and cohesiveness of our portfolios.
- Timing of outputs.
- Ease of access and navigation.
- Methods employed.
- Content of products (e.g. commentary vs data).

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[4] StatsUserNet http://www.statsusernet.org.uk/home

How we engage with our users

We aim to maintain a 2-way dialogue with our users and will:

i. Keep users informed about changes we have made in response to feedback.
ii. Engage with users about statistical developments.
iii. Treat user engagement as an ongoing, collaborative activity using an informal iterative approach in preference to formal consultation.

To better engage with our users we will:

- Aim to make use of blogs and focus groups.

- Invite users to targeted segmented workshops/seminars/face to face meetings/forums focusing on:
  - o our most significant and important users (e.g. those who most frequently interact with us irrespective of route);
  - o individuals / organisations who use the datasets/releases deemed to be of the highest value (e.g. based on web usage analytics and user feedback).

In addition to these aims for improving our engagement with users, we will provide open, easy access and use the most appropriate route in each instance.

i. Our primary engagement route will continue to be through our statistics webpages on GOV.UK where we have the facility to invite comments from users.

ii. We will use short surveys to identify new users and to collect information on views and preferences. These will be advertised to users via the website and social media.

iii. We will use the social media platform Twitter to flag the release of our highest profile outputs. We will also advertise the release of our more popular outputs and others as we see appropriate (based on evidence from analytics).

iv. We will provide appropriate contact details on all our official statistics outputs.

Authority

This policy statement has been drawn up by Defra Group's Head of Profession for Statistics, who is also responsible for ensuring the day-to-day implementation of these arrangements in the core Department and providing professional oversight and guidance to our ALB's.

Any enquiries about the contents of this statement should be directed to StatisticsHoPDefra@defra.gov.uk

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