Policy Statement on Meeting User Needs through Engagement with Users

Meeting User Needs through Engagement with Users

The Code of Practice for Official Statistics requires all producers of Official Statistics to publish transparent guidance on their policy for meeting user needs, through engagement with users.

The Department of Education (DE) Analytical Services Unit (ASU) produces and publishes accurate, timely, user friendly and easily accessible statistics, both National and Official Statistics. This document sets out Department’s statistical policies and procedures on:

- User Service Commitment
- User Engagement Policy
- Access to statistics – routine publications
- Access to information not in scheduled publications
- Information on developments to statistics
- Consultation on statistical developments
- Consulting on the analysis and evidence agenda, incorporating the annual statistical work plan
- Responding to consultations
- Service to Data Suppliers
- Complaints
  - Team Commitment
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**User Service Commitment**

1. DE will publish timely, relevant, high quality statistics in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Our commitment to the users of our statistics is:

   - To publish our statistics on the pre-announced time and date;
   - To publish our statistics in line with the Code and the Department’s Statistical Policies and Procedures;
   - To give open and easy-to-use routes to allow users to supply us with their views and opinions;
   - To respond quickly and accurately to questions and enquiries from our users;
   - To consult with users on developments and changes to our statistical methodologies, publications or publication processes;
   - To consult annually with users on our statistical workplan;
   - To respond in a timely manner to any complaints from users;
   - To be transparent when we are unable to meet any of these commitments.

**User Engagement Policy**

2. Our users are mainly from the following groups:

   - Ministers and policy makers within the Department;
   - Policy makers within Government including Non-Departmental Public Bodies;
   - Political representatives, including Members of the Assembly and the Assembly Education Committee;
   - Local Government;
   - Schools, which are also data providers;
   - Academics;
   - Expert external special interest and pressure groups;
   - Media and commentators;
   - Members of the public;
3. We will approach the identification of users in a number of ways, including some, or all, of:

- By creating registers of users, starting with the ones that we know about already;
- By logging feedback from users as and when we receive it and noting who provided the feedback;
- By inviting comments through our website and in the publications themselves;
- By encouraging users to engage with us on developments in official statistics;

4. We have direct contact with internal users within DE. However, our engagement policy is designed to ensure that, on key developments to our statistics, there are transparent and clear processes allowing for views from both internal and external users. The usual route for engagement with users and access to our statistics is through the Statistics and Research part of DE’s website.

5. Our engagement policy recognises that different users have different needs, for example:

- some users simply require quick and easy access to the latest statistics;
- some require to be informed of the publication of the latest statistics and any developments to the statistics;
- some may wish to challenge the statistics,
- some may wish to be consulted on developments to our statistics, either in terms of methodology, publication or use;
- some may wish to be fully involved in steering the statistical workplan to ensure their needs are taken into account in the workplan, which is incorporated into DE’s analysis and evidence agenda.

6. Our user engagement policy recognises these different needs and seeks to establish ways of engaging users which meet their different needs. The primary route for the provision of information to users will continue to be through the Statistics and Research part of DE’s website. We also notify users using an email distribution list when our statistics are released on the DE website, and the Gov.uk website. Users can request that their names are added to the distribution list for any or all of our statistics by sending an email request to: statistics@education-ni.gov.uk

7. The primary route for users to contact the Department about general enquiries about our statistics is by email, also to statistics@education-ni.gov.uk

8. The names of the responsible statisticians are listed in the relevant statistical release and specific enquiries about the statistics should be directed to the responsible statistician by post or phone, or by email. Users can also provide comments and feedback directly to the responsible statistician, copied to statistics@education-ni.gov.uk
Revisions to our statistics and consultations about changes to our statistics will be announced on the Statistics and Research part of the DE website.

9. Users will also have the opportunity to influence the Department’s annual statistical workplan, which is incorporated into DE’s analysis and evidence agenda.

Access to statistics – regular publications

10. Statistics which are produced and released on a regular basis are available free of charge on the Statistics and Research part of the DE website, at:
https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-research/statistics

11. In accordance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, we will announce the month of release of these statistics at least 12 months in advance of release and the exact date at least 4 weeks in advance. All statistical releases are published at 9.30am.

12. Our statistics will be published in a timely manner and in line with the following Department’s Statistical Policy Statements:

• Statement of Compliance with the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order (Northern Ireland) 2009;
• Statement on Meeting User Needs through Engagement with Users;
• Statement on Revisions and Errors;
• Statement on Confidentiality and Access
• Policy Statement on Quality

13. These Statements are all available at: https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/statistical-policies

14. Statistical releases will be made available in Adobe Acrobat format. Tables from published statistics will also be made available in Microsoft Excel format on request, where the information is not already available in such format in the ‘Statistics on Education’ part of the website. Statistical releases and other information posted on the Statistics and Research part of the DE website will comply with the Department’s Internet Accessibility policies.

Access to information not in scheduled publications

15. All statistical releases will contain the names and contact details of the responsible statisticians. Users should contact the named statisticians, except in the case of media enquiries, which should be directed to the Department’s Press Office, email press.office@education-ni.gov.uk.
16. Where users require statistics that are not available from the regular statistical releases, enquiries should be addressed by email to the responsible statistician, copied to: statistics@education-ni.gov.uk. Users can expect to receive a substantive reply within 15 working days, commencing from the date when correspondence is received. The response will either be an answer to the issue you have raised, or a notification that the correspondence is being dealt with, but noting that the reply may take longer than the initial 15 day period. In the event of a holding reply being issued, it will either contain a date by which ASU intend to provide a full response or a date by when you will be contacted with a progress update.

**Information on developments to statistics**

17. The primary route to information on developments in statistics will be the statistical pages of the Department’s Statistics and Research website. Should further information be required, users should contact the Team by email at: statistics@education-ni.gov.uk.

**Consultation on statistical developments**

18. ASU will consult on all major planned developments to its statistics. Consultations will be announced through the Statistics and Research part of the DE website. Consultations will be authorised by the Department’s Senior Statistician. They will normally be open for 12 weeks, though this period may be shortened, depending on the nature of the consultation. ASU will undertake consultations when we wish to make significant changes to: (i) the content of our releases, (ii) the method of dissemination of our releases, (iii) the methodology used in the derivation and production of our statistics, and (iv) how we publish our statistics (for example, the merger of more than one release into a single release on the same day, or the demerger of one release to more than one release on different days), or we wish to decide on the contents of our annual statistical workplan.

19. The Department consults EA and software suppliers about data requirements and delivery through various groups, including the LMS Officers Group and the C2k Liaison Group. Proposals for new data requirements are scrutinised by staff from ASU, in conjunction with relevant policy colleagues and their impact on data collection exercises and burdens on schools and on administrative systems considered on balance with the need for the information. This ensures that full account is taken of the implications for official statistics when changes to administrative systems are contemplated.

**Consultation on the analysis and evidence agenda, incorporating the annual statistical workplan**

20. Analytical Services Unit, in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, will consult annually with users on its statistical workplan, which is incorporated into the Departmental Analysis and Evidence Agenda. The Code requires the Departmental Senior Statistician to ensure the statistical workplan reflects
the needs of all users, both internal and external to the Department, and balances the needs of users with the cost and burden on suppliers.

21. Consultations will take place according to timescales related to the relevant period of data collection, for example, academic or financial year.

**Responding to consultations**

22. Following consultation exercises, the Department will provide a summary of all responses; the way forward and the rationale for the decisions on the way forward. The Department’s response to all consultations on statistics will be published on the Statistics and Research part of the DE website.

**Service to Data Suppliers**

23. ASU will endeavour to operate efficiently, by placing the minimum load necessary on data providers and by integrating its statistical work across DE and other NICS departments. ASU will take good care of all the information provided to it and will respect the confidentiality of all identifying information in accordance with the accompanying Statement on Confidentiality.

**Complaints**

24. This guide explains procedures for making a complaint, should individuals not be satisfied with the level of service received from ASU, whether the issue is of a statistical or administrative nature.

**Team commitment**

25. ASU aims to deliver a high quality service, but recognise that things can sometimes go wrong. Sometimes, the Unit’s service delivery standards will be affected by circumstances beyond its control. And occasionally mistakes are made. When this happens, ASU will do its best to put matters right quickly.

26. ASU will listen to your complaint and
   - treat it seriously, and in confidence;
   - investigate it thoroughly and fairly;
   - resolve it promptly, and informally whenever possible;
   - wherever possible find a remedy; and,
   - learn from complaints to improve its services.

27. If you have a concern about the quality of the Unit’s service, or the treatment you have received from ASU and you cannot resolve the problem with the person you have been dealing with, you can make a formal complaint.
What to do if you have a formal complaint

28. You can complain in writing, by fax, by e-mail, by telephone or in person (by appointment please). Please provide as much relevant information as possible so that your case can be dealt with promptly.

29. If you know which area of work is relevant to your complaint, or the name, or title of the appropriate member of staff, please make your complaint direct to them (referring to this complaints procedure would be helpful).

30. If you do not have this information, please telephone our public enquiry point on 028 9127 9401. You will then be put in touch with the most appropriate person.

31. If direct contact is not possible, or, if having done this you remain dissatisfied, you should write to:

Pauline Donnan  
Principal Statistician  
6th floor  
Rathgael House  
Balloo Road  
Rathgill  
Bangor BT19 7PR  
Pauline.Donnan@education-ni.gov.uk

32. Where the nature of the complaint relates to information provided under the Freedom of Information Act, the Department will review and respond in line with the internal review process set out under the Freedom of Information Act. If however, your complaint relates to any other aspect of service, your complaint will be acknowledged within 3 working days of receipt, giving the name of the member of staff dealing with it. ASU aims to issue a full response to your complaint within 15 working days of receiving it. If it cannot, ASU will tell you why and let you know when you can expect to get a full reply. It will help ASU deal with your complaint if you can provide as much background information as possible.

Not satisfied

33. If you are not satisfied with the initial response you receive, or the way in which your complaint has been handled by the Principal statistician, you can ask for your complaint to be referred to the Head of Analytical Services Unit. You should write to:

Bobby Clulow  
Analytical Services Unit  
Department of Education  
6th floor  
Rathgael House  
Balloo Road  
Rathgill
Bangor
BT19 7PR
Bobby.Clulow@education-ni.gov.uk

34. If you are not satisfied with the response, and the issue is of a statistical nature, you can then refer your complaint to the Head of Profession for Government Statistics in Northern Ireland.

The address for the Head of Profession is:

    Siobhan Carey
    NISRA
    McAuley House
    2-14 Castle Street
    Belfast
    BT1 1SA

35. Alternately, if your issue does not relate to statistics and you are not satisfied with the response received from the Department, you can ask an Assembly member to request that the Northern Ireland Ombudsman investigate your complaint and how it has been handled. The Ombudsman will only investigate after any internal review has been completed. If the Ombudsman is satisfied that your complaint has been dealt with fairly, he will close your case.

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