

BSUG NEWS

ISSUE No.16 APR 2001
ISSN 1364-5412

Business Statistics Users' Group

REFORM OF STATISTICS USERS COUNCIL

EDITORIAL

G'day? Gnashing at G'nashernal Statistics

To resume from where we left off in our January issue, **one step at a time...** The Treasury Committee's 2nd Report 2000-01, HC.137 on National Statistics has elicited responses to its twelve conclusions and recommendations from the Government and the Statistics Commission, and these are published by the Committee as its Second Special Report, which is summarised in the adjacent main article.

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury appended to her response letter, "as promised in the oral evidence submitted to the Sub-Committee last November, a complete listing of National Statistics outputs as at early February". (Rise of expectations.) However, this has been foot-noted in the report "Not printed". (Dashing of hopes.) **Well, perhaps half a step.** No doubt this list will be (or even is) available on www.statistics.gov.uk, but so far its presence has received little or no publicity. Considering the fuss that greeted some of the shortcomings of the initial list when published, one would have thought that the opportunity would be taken to make amends. **Just a little more patience, then.**

Review by
IAN MACLEAN

Formed in 1970 in the heady days before Harold Wilson's white hot technology revolution had cooled, the council successfully brought together Users and Government Statisticians through a series of Annual Conferences and occasional seminars. It was a typically British development, with no written constitution.

The only requirement for membership was an interest in statistics and the willingness to attend meetings. Currently there are 14 member organisations (membership is for organisations not individuals): Association of British Chambers of Commerce, British Retail Consortium, BURISA, Confederation of British Industry, Economic and Social Research Council, Government Statistical Service, Institute of Actuaries, Institute of Investment Management and Research, Local Government Consultative Committee, Market Research Society, Policy Studies Institute, Royal Statistical Society, Society of Business Economists and Trades Union Congress.

The requirement to cater for the needs of individuals was recognised early and following the Annual Conference on Transport Statistics a Users Group was set up jointly between the SUC and the Chartered Institute of Transport. Subsequently User Groups have been formed for Business, Construction, Criminal Justice, Education, Environment, Finance, Health, International Trade, Labour, National Accounts, and Gender. Further Users Groups are under discussion for Agriculture and Race. Each of the Groups is self-supporting and for most of their existence have operated independently. The development following the Green Paper on Statistics and the interest shown in Official Statistics by the House of Commons Select Committee, pointed up the need for a co-ordinating mechanism between the User Groups.

The White Paper on Official Statistics and the subsequent Framework Document set up a Statistics Commission charged specifically with identifying and evaluating User needs and reporting to the Treasury Minister responsible for statistics the extent to which the Annual Plan prepared by the National Statistician has met User needs. The experience

of other countries suggested that the Commission could have incorporated the **SUC** within its own organisational framework - the two basic models are a Grand Council representing all Users and Providers with a small executive or a small board with links into the User/Provider communities. Our Statistics Commission (a small board) seems to favour a reactive rather than a proactive approach - they will respond to requests made to them rather than initiate an enquiry. Although the White Paper specifically stated that the Commission should recommend to Ministers.... its own machinery for covering the interests of Users, it seems strangely reluctant to develop

any formal procedures. In contrast the National Statistician through the Official Statistics Theme Groups has pursued an active policy of involving Users Groups in consultation for the Annual Statistics Plan. We may quibble with the effectiveness of the consultation, but there is no doubting the genuine commitment by the National Statistician to involve Users. In issue 12 of **BSUG NEWS** I wrote "the Statistics Commission represents the interests of Users, but it is not representative of users, as it would have been the Grand Council type of Commission, so instead of a dialogue between users and the **National Statistician**, we have a 'trialogue', hopefully more in tune with the harmony of

a trinity than the antagonisms of the eternal triangle". We seem to have a triangle, a very unequal triangle, **National Statistics** is a large organisation and the Commission has a reasonable budget (£1.5 million) and staffing level (currently 4 personnel); if this triangle is to work substantial extra resources need to be put behind the Users. The obvious first move is to integrate the User Groups administratively within the **SUC** and the User Group Chairs have been invited to join the Council to ensure that as far as possible the Users speak with one voice, until the **Statistics Commission** fulfils what we believe to be its true role as the Users' champion.



2001 MEETINGS

CIPFA, 3 Robert Street, London WC2 (6 for 6.30pm)

Wednesday 16 May 2001

HAS UK LABOUR MARKET PERFORMANCE CHANGED?
PROFESSOR STEVEN NICKELL, Monetary Policy Committee, Bank of England

Tuesday 12 June 2001

ANNUAL (1 DAY) CONFERENCE
FINANCIAL INSTABILITY – THREATS TO GLOBAL GROWTH

1. Global and UK Economic Outlook

GAIL FOSLER, Conference Board GILES KEATING, CSFB
NEIL BLAKE, Business Strategies Ltd

2. International Financial Stability

AVINASH PERSAUD, State Street Bank
PETER WARBURTON, Rhombus Research

ALL ENQUIRIES ABOUT ATTENDANCE OR MEMBERSHIP:
SOCIETY OF BUSINESS ECONOMISTS 01923 237 287

NATIONAL ACCOUNTS USER GROUP

There is a regular meeting once a quarter where the latest **national accounts** and **balance of payments data** released that day is presented to the group. The next of these meetings will be on 26 June. There is an opportunity for questions and also a buffet lunch.

Occasionally we have a meeting to discuss other topical issues in **national accounts**. Our next meeting is being held jointly with **BSUG** on 17 May. For details see page 11.

If you would like to be put on the mailing list or want more information, we would be pleased to help.



JON BEADLE 0207 533 5938 jon.beadle@ons.gov.uk

ALISON BRIDGES 0207 533 5943 alison.bridges@ons.gov.uk

CATHERINE BULMER 0207 533 5653 catherine.bulmer@ons.gov.uk

BSUG CONTACT ADDRESSES

CHAIRMAN : Ian Maclean

Lancaster House, More Lane,
Esher, Surrey KT10 8AP

Tel: 01372 463121 Fax: 01372 469847

Email: bts@dial.pipex.com

SECRETARY : Geoff Noon

MTTA, 62 Bayswater Road,
London W2 3PS

Tel: 020 7298 6400 Fax: 020 7298 6430

Email: gnoon@mtta.co.uk

HON. TREASURER and GROUP PUBLISHER : John Cunningham

69 Warwick Park, Tunbridge Wells,
Kent TN2 5EJ

Tel: 01892 534 599 Fax: 01892 514 955

Email: aidancald@msn.com

BSUG NEWS EDITOR : Ulric Spencer

Silchester Hall, Silchester, Reading,
Berks. RG7 2LX

Tel: 0118 970 0219

Fax: 0118 970 0751

Email: uspencer@silch.fsnet.co.uk

FINANCIAL SERVICES : David Fleming

Applied Business Statistics Limited
Chalice House, Brook Lane, Barton St. David,
Somerton. TA11 6DH

Tel: 01458 851 441 Fax: 01458 851 442

david.fleming@business-statistics.co.uk

National Statistics revisits Treasury Sub-Committee

Responses from the government and the Statistics Commission to the Treasury Sub-Committee's 2nd Report of Session 2000-01¹

A second special 6-page report was published at the end of March giving the Government and the Statistical Commission's responses to the Treasury Committee's twelve conclusions and recommendations. These may be summarised as:

Support for changes in management and structure of Government statistics: welcomed.

Failure to move towards a statutory foundation: [Statistics Commission](#) is tasked to review the need.

Scope of national statistics needs to expand over time, to improve Government policy-making and Parliamentary and public scrutiny: commitment to keep under review: current set of outputs is very comprehensive, list supplied (NB. but not printed in report); [ONS](#) working with other Departments to make such information available in future from the [National Statistics](#) website.

Welcome the intentions of the Commission and the [National Statistician](#) to advise on scope, and recommends that the Government acknowledges and clarifies their roles: roles are stated in the Framework, Commission intends to take up the cudgels, when appropriate.

Concern about Ministers' discretion in determining scope, would prefer such decision to be made independently by [National Statistician](#), in consultation with the Commission: Government sees no need for change, Commission more conciliatory.

Users, particularly in Parliament and the media, should pay careful attention to distinguishing between statistics which do or don't carry the [National Statistics](#) badge: Government agrees.

Commission could complement Parliamentary scrutiny of Government statistics: Government and Commission agree.

National Statistician's direct access to the Prime Minister should mean just that, and not via the Head of the Home Civil Service: Government draw a distinction between direct access and normal access (through Departmental heads and Ministers), right of direct access is about the way the right of access is ascertained and is not a qualification of it. Commission hope it will be possible to resolve this issue between those most directly involved but would expect the National Statistician to inform the Commission if he wanted direct access and it was not forthcoming.

Welcome attention Commission will give to division of responsibilities for RPI between the National Statistician and the **Chancellor of the Exchequer**; having heard no sound argument as to why the Chancellor should control this rather than the National Statistician: Government relies on the status quo as justification, Commission intends to undertake further scoping study of price indices and deflators.

Welcome the Commission's early attention to reliability of [National Statistics](#) and look forward to development of clear, consistent guidance for users on this: Government agrees,

will be setting high standards in forthcoming Code of Practice, Commission believes that information on reliability could be improved, though it will need resources, which should be provided.

Following the [ONS](#) review of the reliability and use made of job vacancy statistics, recommend Commission give close attention to labour market statistics: Commission notes the request, has already sought a report on progress in implementing the Review of the Revisions to the Average Earnings Index.

Recommend Government publishes its full thinking on future development of average earnings data: on the [AEI](#), it is intended to expand the sample size and schedule a routine quality review for it.

Essential to enshrine the new arrangements for [National Statistics](#) in a Statistics Act; if Commission agrees in two years time, expect legislation as a priority: Government will consider Commission's report at the appropriate time; Commission intends to address this issue without waiting for two years, believes balance of arguments strongly in favour but what legislation will cover and how need careful consideration. Examining experience in other countries is important, grateful for RSS offer to invite international experts to London to contribute this. Meanwhile disappointed that consultation draft Code of Practice has not yet been issued.

¹ Available from [The Stationery Office](#). ISBN 0-10-222601-6, £3.40 or www.parliament.uk/commons/selcom/treahome.htm

Suggestions for Future FSUG Meetings

The **Financial Statistics Users' Group** is actively seeking the views of members on ideas for future meetings.

Please telephone your suggestions to:

Anna Filipposian
on **020 7370 0680**

INTRASTAT MEETING

6 June 2001

Topic and Speakers to be arranged

Further details: **GERALD HARVEY**
Telephone: **0171 930 3206**



DEVELOPING THE ANNUAL PLAN FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS

Report by **Ulric Spencer** of meeting of 27 February 2001

Glenn Everett, recently appointed **Chief Adviser on Statistics** at the DTI and **Chair of the National Statistics Commerce, Energy and Industry Theme Group** opened the meeting by giving his views on **National Statistics** planning. It was breaking new ground, stressing the needs of users and creating the **Statistics Commission**, whose responses would be made public.

The programme entailed by the National statistics planning cycle (see box), indicates that the Work Plan, is due to be delivered by the beginning of March. It would include:

an initial overall strategy, a general summary of developments for the next three years, chapters on each of the twelve Theme Groups, two chapters on cross-cutting issues - statistics on neighbourhoods and on sustainable development, and a list of **National Statistics** output, plus glossary and, index.

Topics which needed attention included: better information on services, e-commerce, business sector structure, energy statistics, including a regional dimension, a quality review of the IDBR, and the replacement of hard copy outputs by free availability on the **National Statistics** website (www.statistics.gov.uk)

Mike Pepper, Head of Prices and Business Group, **ONS**, began by commenting that the planning process in 2000-01 was a bit slower than had been intended by the resource allocation. The new **National Statistician**, who arrived some seven months ago, had his own views on the recommendations

of the KPMG review which he was discussing with ministers and the Treasury.

The past neglect of infrastructure investment at **ONS** combined with taking on new work has not necessarily been a good policy. Consequently the balance of resource allocation between existing and new work was being reviewed.

A decision had been taken to have a new design website with an increasing volume of free data.

He noted that there had been a considerable number of downloads of the September 2000 paper on methodology changes to the ABI.

The findings of the Quality Review were being implemented.

Mentions of work in progress included: on services - trade in services, prototype Index of Services, Index of Distribution, Price Index for Services, ABI. Resampling for the Average Earnings Index had been done.

Subsequent discussion raised a number of issues. The mechanisms for user consultation - eg via the website and the **Statistics Commission** were criticised as lacking a market research approach of identifying users and seeking their views. However, **ONS** was beginning to tackle this.

With the EU as a major user, an aspect not mentioned in the Plan, was there a conflict between the requirements of the EU and other users? There had been development of comparability within the EU in recent years but this had not

resulted in identical methodology.

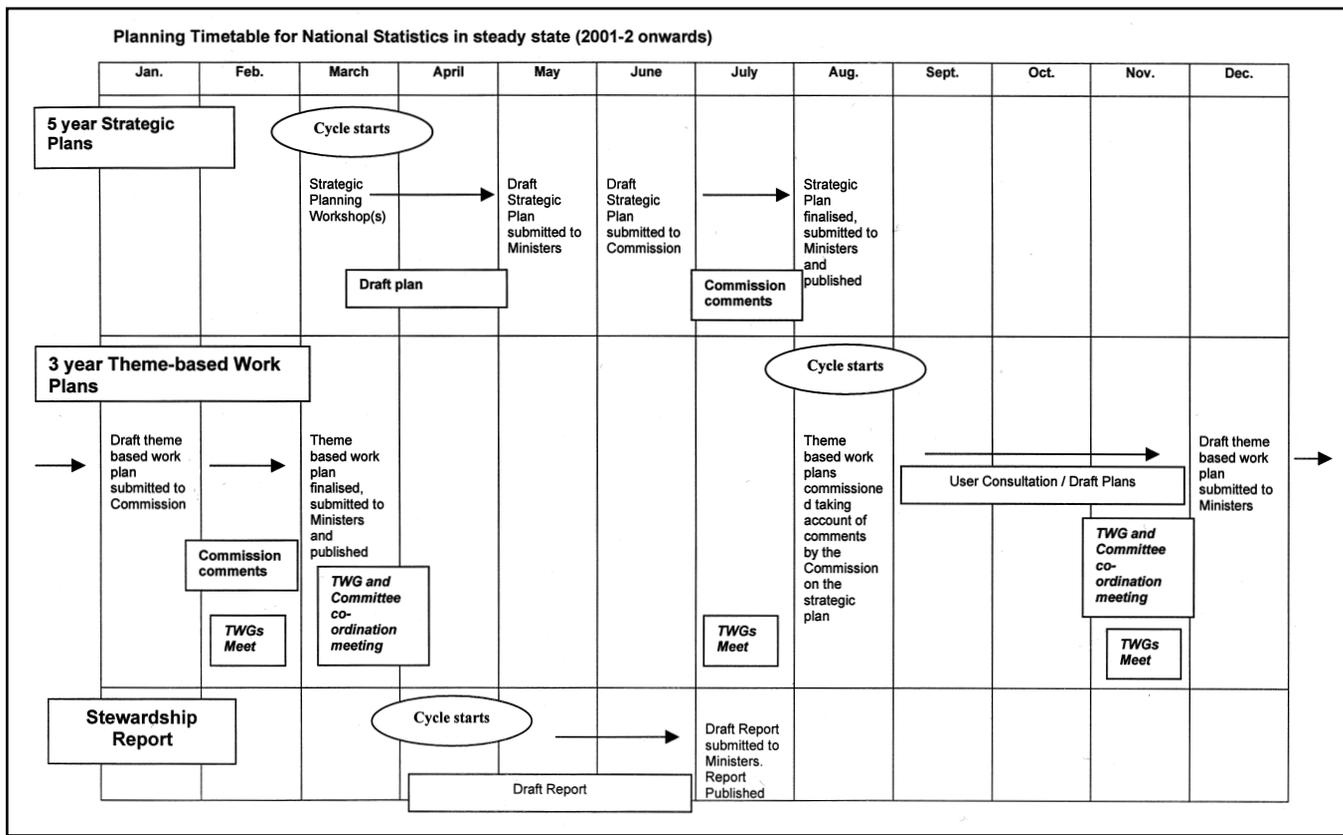
There was a need to improve the evaluation and weighting of user responses. The pressure on compliance costs was causing more attention to be given to alternative information sources.

Gill Eastabrook (Statistics Commission) intended to meet User Group chairmen to help in assessing the success of the consultation process.

A suggestion was made that as the bulk of official statistics had been designed for government use, there was need for them to become more user-oriented, perhaps applying cost-benefit criteria. The helpful role of trade associations was stressed. Perhaps the Theme Groups should have user representation? And what about administrative support for User groups?

A final question - what was the mechanism for commenting on the 'Final' version of the Work Plan Theme chapters and what budget was associated with it? This first version of the Plan was an aggregation of departmental plans, which would have to be resourced. (A fait accompli?)

The Statistics Commission would be considering the Plan together with users' comments. However users might be better advised to concentrate and comment on what should happen in the year following.



HOW THE BRITISH PRINTING INDUSTRY FEDERATION USES STATISTICS

By Jon Giles, *Research Analyst, Corporate Affairs, BPIF*

The British Printing Industries Federation is the business support organisation for the printing, packaging and graphic communications industry and our principal aim is to improve the profitability of the industry. We do this by providing a range of tailored services to individual companies, from general management, finance, human resources, training, purchasing, production to marketing and sales. We also represent and lobby on behalf of the industry and provide networking opportunities for BPIF members to meet and exchange information. We currently have approximately 2500 members.

The sector is part of the UK's sixth largest manufacturing industry, with sales in the region of £13 billion, 1.7% of GDP. Overall, the UK industry employs over 170,000 people in more than 12,000 companies. The structure

reflects the diversity of its products and fragmented nature of its markets with approximately 25 printing companies employing more than 400 people and only around 500 employing between 50 and 399 people. Up to 90% of firms in the industry employ fewer than 20 employees.

Statistics such as the above are largely extracted from National Statistics information and can be found on our website at www.bpif.org.uk in a section entitled 'Industry Infofile'. This is currently being updated to provide the most up-to-date and relevant information and bring it more into line with our recently revamped site. Our linked website www.selectprinter.com allows printbuyers to source appropriate printers for a specific job from our member database by a range of criteria such as location, product and service.

We also show data on our main website provided by Customs and Excise and published by Business and Trade Statistics, highlighting the printing industry's positive contribution to the UK trade balance. The balance of trade in printed matter improved between 1990 and 1997, from £141 million to £712 million, before falling to £548 million in 1998 and £428 million in 1999, largely because of the strength of sterling.

There is also a wide range of other data shown, taken from a variety of sources. We track the price of different paper grades, printing's primary raw material, utilising an index from Paper Publications Limited. The BPIF also has an index of printers' costs, which is often built into company's contracts. In addition, we contribute to the statistical work of Intergraf – the umbrella organisation for the European printing industry.

However, although the above provides some valuable general information on the UK printing industry, our main statistical work comes from our own surveys. We conduct a number of highly respected and widely used surveys to provide our members with key information on the industry which can, amongst other things, be used for benchmarking purposes.

Our quarterly survey of trends in the printing industry, **Directions** (latest edition April 2001), provides trends over the previous quarter and expectations for the coming three months. A sample of 100 or so companies are questioned on such matters as the general state of the trade, the level of capacity, employment, prices and costs and capital expenditure. The statistics gathered and anecdotes collected form a report that is seen as the definitive guide to the current economic state of the industry.

We also carry out annual surveys, relating to salary rates in the industry, productivity and profitability, manpower levels and customer satisfaction. Specific assessments are made dependant on company size, region and the main sector that a firm operates in which allows companies to benchmark their own levels of performance and remuneration against other similar companies. For example, a label printer in the north west was recently able to use our reports to: benchmark its own productivity and profitability ratios (ratios such as the value of output per head or profit after financing as a

percentage of capital employed) against other companies in the same sector and the entire industry; help guide them to set sales targets and commission levels for its sales executives and to see how wages for their roll label machine minders compared with national levels. We currently provide the survey reports free, in either printed or electronic format, to all BPIF members who respond to the surveys.

Information from these surveys, and many other sources, impact on our annual negotiations with the GPMU (the printing industry's trade union) and are vital when it comes to monitoring how wage levels have changed in previous years and in predicting what effect an agreed increase in wages will have upon the industry's wage bill. The resulting National Agreement covers wages and conditions in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

A major event for the industry this year will be The National Business Conference for the printing industry, which will take place at The Dorchester Hotel, London on Thursday 14 June 2001. It will be the public platform for unveiling the findings and conclusions of a major government-sponsored research study into the competitiveness of the industry.

The study, which started in November last year, examines the competitiveness of the print, packaging and graphic communications industry versus other media, and will highlight areas of success as well as raise issues of

concern. This could not be done without the use of reliable industry, as well as national, statistics and information.

The **National Industry Conference, Print 21**, is aimed at industry leaders, and senior executives from the companies within the print, packaging, marketing and graphic communications industries. It is being managed by the BPIF with support from **Print Week** magazine.

Part-sponsored by the DTI, the competitiveness study has investigated the competitiveness of the print, packaging and graphic communications industry over the course of several months. Information and views have been gathered from a wide variety of industry companies and stakeholders, including printers, suppliers, customers, educational associations as well as trade bodies both in the UK and overseas.

A steering Group was formed to guide the progress of the project and ensure its continued relevance to the industry. The group, in addition to the DTI, comprised **Mike Hopkins**, Corporate Affairs Director at the BPIF, and lead consultant **Professor Peter James**, as well as representatives from BPIF member companies.

It can be seen that the use of statistics plays a vital role in the work of the BPIF. We are constantly looking for improved and more valuable sources of information to benefit our members, and this will undoubtedly continue as we attempt to drive the industry forward.

BSUG Website <http://home.btclick.com/bsug>

The Business Statistics Users Group has set up a trial website. This gives information covering the history of the group, its aims and objectives. Other sections cover committee member names and contact details and information about the next meeting which can be booked on-line through the website.

WHY NOT TRY IT AND SEE WHAT YOU THINK?

It can be accessed at: <http://home.btclick.com/bsug> and all comments and suggestions are welcome.

NEWS FROM THE ROYAL STATISTICAL SOCIETY

PROBLEMS IN MEASURING THE NEW ECONOMY

Report by **Ulric Spencer** of meeting of 31 January 2001 organised by the Official Statistics Section

Three speakers offered different perspectives on the problems of measuring the new economy.

James Sargeant from the Office of the e-Envoy (**Andrew Pinter** being the new e-Envoy from 31.1.01), stated that its target was 'to make the UK the best place in the world for e-commerce.' How was this measured? From attitude surveys. The **Trade and Industry Committee's 1999** report recommended a need for sharper definitions of the target.

As a result, more specific targets have evolved:

- (1) There should be universal access by 2005; currently about one third of the population had access.
- (2) 1 million SMEs should be e-trading by 2002; the current level was about 27 per cent.
- (3) All government services should be on-line by 2005; this year about 42 per cent were available, by 2002 it was expected to be 73 per cent. Achievement of the target was dependent on Departmental strategies and the provision of extra funding. The Citizens' portal

was www.ukonline.gov.uk

- (4) Reduction of the gap in ICT with the US, Japan, Germany and France.

Main features of the Office's work included setting targets, making international comparisons and measuring a changing world. It was anticipated that access would migrate from PCs to mobiles.

Chris Drew (ONS) briefly described a number of e-commerce projects under way - surveys of ISPs, of businesses and of households who engaged in e-commerce, and measurement of ICTs. Definitions had been formulated: broad - included electronic transactions over a computer-mediated network; narrow - electronic transactions over the Internet. A transaction was an agreement between a buyer and a seller to transfer ownership electronically.

The voluntary ISP survey sample of 4,500 had been increased to 9,000 businesses. It was hoped to make this survey statutory. Rather than launching a completely new survey, the survey of households had initially used the ONS Omnibus Survey; other options included the FES, the GHS

and the **Time-Use Survey**. The **First Release on Internet Access** had been published in **December 2000**, the next was due in **March 2001**.

Mary O'Mahony (NIESR) concentrated on discussion of measuring the impact of the New Economy on productivity. The Growth Accounting Equation included inputs from labour (ICT/non-ICT), capital (ICT/non-ICT) and **Total Factor Productivity**. Investment flows had to be examined; computer equipment included hardware, software and communications equipment.

Points made by discussants included : (**Ben Broadbent**, **Goldman Sachs**) mention of a report of international comparisons between US, UK and Europe that there were two issues - tracking the New Economy, and measuring it; (**Peter Spencer**, **Birkbeck College**) capital stock measurement in this area was very difficult; the divisia approach being necessary; (**Jill Leyland**, **World Gold Council**) can the SIC and the National Accounts structure cope? (**Sudhir Junankar**, CBI) the CBI was engaged in a pilot study of e-commerce to be quarterly within financial services, to be complementary to ONS work. **Mike Clary** (DTI) provided a list of useful ICT references.

EXPERIMENTAL MONTHLY INDEX OF SERVICES

Report by **Ulric Spencer** of meeting held on 18 April, 2001 organised by the Quality Improvement Section & Official Statistics Section

Rob Pike (ONS) addressed two questions, starting with: why is ONS developing a monthly index of services? Compared with 1948, when production accounted for 41 per cent of the economy and services 46 per cent, the position now is production 27 per cent and services 66 per cent. So essentially its purpose is to catch up in providing regular data on the larger sector of the economy comparable to the index of production. Users such as the Bank of England, the Treasury and many in the City have registered their need; furthermore, it will improve the quarterly GDP figures.

For some sectors monthly GVA is available, for others proxies are used -

deflated turnover from surveys or VAT returns, or volume indicators (though they may miss changes in quality or mix of outputs), or employment (which is the least satisfactory).

Secondly, where are we now? Starting with the experimental index of distribution in December 1999, the experimental index of services was launched in December 2000. It covers four broad sectors - hotels and restaurants; transport, storage and communications; business and financial services; and government and other services. Monthly data are estimated where necessary from quarterly. The GDP(O) methodology and data sources are used and the

results are constrained to the quarterly GPD(O).

Ian Cope (ONS) in speaking about the development plan, said much had been done but there was at least 2 to 3 years more work to complete. Compared to the index of production, there are few subdivisions; the index of distribution has three but a long-term aim would be to provide increased disaggregation. Few other countries were working in this area, notably Japan, US and Canada, so the UK was a front-runner.

A description of the index was published in **Economic Trends**, December 1999.

News from ONS



Since the last edition of **BSUG NEWS**, the **Sector Liaison Statistician** scheme has been suspended for the foreseeable future. For all data requests, please phone 0845 601 3034, visit our website at www.statistics.gov.uk, or email us at info@statistics.gov.uk.

ONS LAUNCHES NEW ESTIMATES OF EMPLOYEE JOBS

11 April marked the end of a five-year work programme to change the way that ONS measures employee jobs. James Partington from Employment, Earnings & Productivity Division in ONS explains.

"Employee job figures from the new Annual Business Inquiry (ABI) were published for the first time on 11 April, replacing the figures from the Annual Employment Survey. The new survey is the culmination of a long-term project to streamline and improve the range of annual surveys run by ONS. The survey processing system uses the latest good practice in statistical estimation techniques, and by collecting employment and financial information from the same sample of businesses the ABI will lead to improvements in the way ONS measures productivity."

But it was the sharp increase in the number of employee jobs shown in the new survey that was the main focus of attention for ONS's statisticians.

"The ABI and AES surveys ran in parallel in 1998 and the early results from these showed that the ABI estimates of employee jobs were much higher than the AES was recording," says James. "To understand why this was so needed a major research programme which concluded that there had been weaknesses in the AES collection and estimation methods. It was only when this work was completed in the middle of 2000 that we could start considering how and when to introduce the new estimates.

"The changes stemming from the introduction of the ABI impact on

many of ONS's outputs, not just employee jobs but also productivity and claimant count rates. With such a major set of revisions, it was important to explain them to users. We invested a lot of effort in March and early April travelling round the country giving a series of regional seminars covering Glasgow, London, Cardiff and most English regions to give users the opportunity to hear more about the changes before they came into force. On launch day itself we put out a comprehensive article on the website explaining the background to the changes."

You can see for yourself by looking at the national statistics website. The article describing the Launch of the ABI can be found at www.statistics.gov.uk/themes/labour_market/key_reports.asp

NEIGHBOURHOOD STATISTICS GO LIVE

The first stage of a new internet-based information service went live on Monday 26 February. Reliable information about local areas is just a few clicks away - accessible either through maps or by simply entering a post-code on the web site at:

www.statistics.gov.uk/neighbourhood

The ONS is developing this new service, designed to provide key local area data for the **National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal**. The Strategy aims to address the issue of social deprivation, providing local solutions to problems such as crime, drugs, unemployment, community breakdown and bad schools.

Neighbourhood Statistics is a joint initiative involving Central Government departments, local government, the wider public service and the devolved administrations, and promises to transform the availability of statistics and other information for thousands of local areas across the country.

A key part of the plans for the service

will be to encourage and enable organisations that collect and hold administrative information to provide statistics for small areas for incorporation into the service. The information already on the web pages includes statistics based on administrative records from the **Department of Social Security** and the **Registrar General**.

The service will be built over a number of years in a series of phases. The ONS was committed to making available existing ward-level data set as the first stage of developing the **Neighbourhood Statistics Service** on its website. Not only has the ONS achieved this, but has completed it well in advance of the target date of April 2001.

Throughout 2001 and 2002 additional datasets will be added and the web pages will be developed with a range of analytical tools which will help turn the raw data into relevant and understandable information. A key stage will be when the results from the 2001 Census are made available in 2003.

The new service will be guided by the needs of its users, and the list of organisations and people who will benefit is extensive: from government, health authorities and local community groups through to businesses, analysts and the private citizen.

Neighbourhood Statistics will be managed centrally by ONS. Detailed policies on protecting the confidentiality of data on individuals, the criteria for inclusion of data, rules on updating and guidance for users will be developed in consultation with users and suppliers of data. The aim will be to balance the value of comprehensive-ness against the hazards of including data of lesser quality or reliability.

We are currently setting up ways to communicate and consult. If you would like to be kept in touch with developments, visit our website at www.statistics.gov.uk; email us at neighbourhood@ons.gov.uk or phone the **Neighbourhood Statistics Team** on 020 7533 6152



News from HM Customs & Excise

Advances in Regional Trade Statistics

by LAURA PEARSON and SUSAN REID



The last article from Information Management Division (IMD), in Issue 12 of BSUG News, covered the official launch of the new regional trade data on 27 January 2000 at the Office for National Statistics, Drummond Gate, London. Since that time a confidentiality review has taken place. The review concluded that more detailed data could be released whilst still maintaining an appropriate level of confidentiality. Therefore, there is now an increase in the data that can be released at a detailed level. This gives a complete picture of the value of trade and the number of companies for each UK region.

Data are available for the 12 UK Regions:

- Wales
- Scotland
- Northern Ireland
- The Regional Government Offices in England:

Eastern	North East	South West
East Midlands	North West	West Midlands
London	South East	Yorkshire & the Humber

Two levels of data are provided. The overall value of UK imports and exports, together with the number of trading companies, for each region, are available free of charge in

Customs and Excise news releases and via our on-line trade information service which can be found at www.uktradeinfo.com. More detailed data are also available via the website, on subscription. These cover regional exports and imports by significant markets for 20 industry groups, based on the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC92) nomenclature, which include:

Basic Metals	Leather Goods	Other Transport
Chemicals	Mechanical Machinery	Paper Products
Clothing	Medical & Optical	Plastics
Communications	Metal Products	Recorded Media
Electrical Machinery	Motor Vehicles	Textiles
Food & Drink	Office Machinery	Wood Products
Fuels & Minerals	Other Manufactures	

The markets are:

European Union (Austria, Belgium/Luxembourg, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden).

Outside the EU (aggregated data are available for seven continent groupings):

Eastern Europe, Asia & Oceania, Western Europe, Middle East & N. Africa, Latin America & Caribbean, Sub-Saharan Africa, North America

Data are also available for the following significant UK markets:

Abu Dhabi	Czech Rep.	Kuwait	Saudi Arabia
Argentina	Dubai	Malaysia	Singapore
Australia	Egypt	Mexico	Slovakia
Bahrain	Hong Kong	New Zealand	Slovenia
Bolivia	Hungary	Norway	South Africa
Brazil	India	Oman	South Korea
Bulgaria	Indonesia	Peru	Switzerland
Canada	Iran	Philippines	Taiwan
Chile	Israel	Poland	Thailand
China	Japan	Qatar	Turkey
Colombia	Jordan	Romania	USA
Cyprus	Kenya	Russia	Venezuela

Other markets can be provided on request.

Tailor-made data products are also available and a specific price can quoted on request. For further information please contact:

Susan Reid
HM Customs and Excise
Information Management Division
Customer Services
5th Floor North Central
Alexander House
21 Victoria Avenue
Southend-on-Sea
Essex SS99 1AA
Tel: 01702 366087 Fax: 01702 366596
E-mail: susan.reid@hmce.gsi.gov.uk

UK Trade Trends, 2nd Edition Information Management Division

The second edition of HMCE IMD's new quarterly statistical journal UK Trade Trends was published in March.

It includes the regular tables of:

- the top 30 products traded between the UK and its trading partners. - quarterly and annual data for 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 by value and mass.
- the top 50 trading partners – quarterly and annual data for 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 by value and mass.

- Regional Trade in Goods – 1999 and 2000, quarterly data for Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the English Regions.

- UK Trade by Industry – annual totals 1990 – 2000 of the **Standard Industrial Classification (SIC)** by section, subsection and division.

The articles feature:

- The overall trade balance for the UK.
- UK trade in Chocolate.
- UK and Cuba - Partners in Trade

Can't see the Wood for the Codes: criticism of the existing CN codes for Chapter 44 and proposals for revisions.

If you would like to receive a copy of this journal or to comment on its contents, contact [Gill Desso](mailto:gill.desso@hmce.gsi.gov.uk) at **Customer Services, Information Management Division, HM Customs and Excise, 5th Floor North Central, Alexander House, 21 Victoria Avenue, Southend-on-Sea, Essex SS99 1AA; Telephone: 01702-366087; Fax: 01702-366596; e-mail: gill.desso@hmce.gsi.gov.uk**

News from EUROSTAT

NEW ECONOMY ST@TISTICS

Those amongst our readers who are monitoring developments in e-commerce (such as those reported in [BSUG NEWS 15](#) in Magdalen Williams's contribution from ONS and the RSS meeting on 'measuring the hard-to-measure'), may find some useful and stimulating nuggets in the latest edition of [Sigma](#), 1/2001, the [Bulletin of European Statistics](#)¹. Nearly the entire issue is devoted to New Economy St@tistics comprising fifteen articles reflecting the views of senior statisticians from Eurostat, some NSIs, the Commission and other interested organisations on what is needed and

what is being done to hurry along the creation and collection of relevant data series. Clearly much thought and effort are being applied to the subject; one thread running through the articles is an appreciation of the urgent need to move quickly because of the speed of change in the subject being measured. For example, whilst acknowledging that the process to change NACE classifications is slow and always likely to lag behind real-life developments, a need is expressed for amendment from 2002, and the next major revision is not due until 2007. At the same time there is a wistful

reference to the 1997 North American classification, NAICS which is ahead of NACE, and towards which convergence is now regarded as desirable.

Come back, Macmillan and remind us about the plight of living with yesterday's Bradshaw.

¹ [Sigma](#) is available free from Eurostat Press & Communication Team, Bech A4/20, L-2920 Luxembourg. Fax: +352 4301 35349. e-mail: eurostat-pressoffice@cec.eu.int



BOOK REVIEW

Essential Data Skills for Business and Management



Steve Hurd and Jean Mangan eds., *Statistics for Education/ONS*, 2001, 183 pages £15.95

With the appearance of [National Statistics](#) and consequential increases in concentration on the needs and interests of users, clarifying the definition of the various constituencies of users has come to the fore. Thus this timely, concise publication subtitled *A Guide to Using Official Data Sources* (in a mauve cover, which echoes the *Official Guide to Sources*, the latest edition of which was published in March 2000), has been "written for people who need to use data as part of their day-to-day work in business and commerce. It is relevant to all of the main areas of business, including market research, production planning, costing and finance, human resources management and business strategy areas."

It is the result of co-operation between facilitators and authors from [ONS](#), business and academia, mainly business schools; some are statisticians, others economists. Although it might superficially seem a bit theoretical, it is very much a practical 'how to' book

aimed at drawing the attention of those in business to aspects of using official data, of which they might not be aware. Topics covered include useful inexpensive statistics; finding the most appropriate ones for different purposes; understanding commonly used statistical definitions and measurement conventions; calculating and graphing techniques for effective data presentation; and advice on using data intelligently to inform business decision-making.

Its ten chapters cover: the use of statistics in business; understanding national statistics; trends and fluctuations; market segments; analysing costs and prices; demand forecasting; the economy and business, national accounts and economic forecasting; using economic data in a multinational; and exports, imports and exchange rates. An Appendix lists the National Statistics Information and Library Service details, a selection of the major regular official statistical publications, a short note on StatBase and refers to a few

non-official sources mentioned in the book.

Although it is normal practice for a reviewer to read a book from cover to cover, and this one can be read fairly quickly, which would be recommended in order to obtain an initial general overview, best value would result from a more focused study of appropriate chapters when specific needs arise. Chapters are from 12 to 18 pages in length so that reader/users need not feel overwhelmed by any single subject and the style is accessible and user-friendly. Though not targeted at the 'Ten Minute Manager', as the subject matter rightly requires a bit longer to absorb, *Essential Data Skills* would be a helpful addition to many businessmen's kit, and deserves a potential market of many thousands, far beyond the readers of [BSUG NEWS](#), who could be enlisted to broadcast its existence to their wider network of contacts. The best of luck and a following wind!

Ulric Spencer

reasons to be cheerful:

1. an online bookstore dedicated to the business and professional community

2. an online bookstore packed with news, reviews and interviews with industry leaders

3. an online bookstore with unparalleled access to official, business and professional information

and for a limited period only:
FREE DELIVERY!

The Business & Professional Bookstore
clicktso.com
it's our domain

A service from



For all business and professional publications visit
www.clicktso.com

Would you like to know for any one (or more) of 5,000 products: What is **UK production (PRODCOM)** in both value and volume? And for some 10,000 products: what are the **imports?** Both in value and volume....from where and when. What are the **exports?** both in value and volume....to where and when. Do you know which companies are **importing?** What products and when. Which importers are the main **competitors** with your product(s)? Do you know what are the other **products** your competitors are importing....and when? If you don't know, then contact the people who do:



BUSINESS AND TRADE STATISTICS LTD.
Lancaster House, More Lane,
ESHER Surrey, Kt 10 8AP
Tel:01372 463121 Fax: 01372 469847 E.mail: bts @ dial pipex.com

Future **BSUG** Events

THURSDAY 17th MAY 2001

Starting at 2pm

at the **ROYAL STATISTICAL SOCIETY,**
12 Errol Street, London EC1

DOUBLE BILL AGM

Members are particularly invited to come and give their views on the future of the Group, now that National Statistics, the Statistics Commission and the annual planning process are in place.

Joint meeting with National Accounts User Group

SHORT-TERM INDICATORS

Ian Cope, ONS Introductory Review
Sam Brown, ONS Retail Sales Index
Mark Williams, ONS Index of Production
Rob Pike, ONS Index of Services

Please notify your intention to attend to
Geoff Noon

MTTA, 62 Bayswater Road, London W2 3PS
Tel: 020 7298 6400 Fax: 020 7298 6430
e-mail: gnoon@mtta.co.uk

PUBLICATION SCHEDULE FOR SELECTED NATIONAL (AND OTHER) STATISTICS IN 2001

Data	Source	National	For	Release Dates			
				May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Construction Output	DETR	NBE	Q1	-	1	-	-
Construction New Orders	DETR	NBE	Mar/Apr	3	7	-	-
Insolvency Statistics	DTI	CEI	Q1	4	-	-	-
M0 Data (Provisional)	BoE		Apr/May/June/July	8	4	2, 30	-
Distribution/Service Trade Turnover	ONS	CEI	Q1	-	-	5	-
Distributive Trade Survey	CBI		Apr/May/June/July	4	5	4	1
Monetary and Financial Statistics	BoE		Mar/Apr/May/June/July	2, 31	29	30	30
Acquisitions & Mergers	ONS	CEI	Q1	8	-	-	-
Profitability of UK Companies	ONS	EC	Q1	-	-	3	-
Index of Production	ONS	CEI	Mar/Apr/May/June	10	7	6	6
Labour Market Trends	ONS	LM	May/June/July/Aug	10	7	5	9
Housing Starts/Completions	DETR	NBE	Mar/Apr/May	10	7	5	-
Overseas Travel & Tourism	ONS	TTT	Mar/Apr/May/June	11	8	6	3
National Savings	NS		Mar/Apr/May	14	14	13	-
Capital Issues	BoE		Apr/May/June/July	14	13	12	13
Producer Prices	ONS	EC	Apr/May/June/July	14	11	9	13
Consumer Price Indices	ONS	EC	Apr/May/June	15	12	17	-
Labour Market Statistics				-	-	-	-
- Unemployment	ONS	LM	Apr/May/June/July	16	13	18	15
- Average Earnings	ONS	LM	Jan/Apr/May/June	16	13	18	15
- Productivity	ONS	LM	Mar/Apr/May/June	16	13	18	15
Economic Trends	ONS	EC	May/June/July/Aug	15	14	12	14
UK Economic Accounts	ONS	EC	Q1	-	-	12	-
Retail Sales	ONS	EC	Apr/May/June/July	17	14	20	16
Financial Statistics	ONS	EC	May/June/July/Aug	18	19	20	17
Building Society Monthly Figures	BSA		Apr/May/June/July	21	20	19	20
Mortgage Lending Survey	CML		Apr/May/June/July	21	20	19	20
M4 (Provisional Data)	BoE		Apr/May/June/July	21	20	19	20
Public Sector Finances	ONS/HMT	EC	Apr/May/June/July	21	20	19	20
Motor Vehicle Production	ONS	EC	Apr/May/June/July	23	21	19	20
Business Investment (provisional/revised)	ONS	EC	Q1, Q2	24P	25R	-	21P
Population Trends	ONS	PM	Summer	-	28	-	-
Consumer Trends	ONS	EC	Q1	-	-	X	-
Industrial Trends Survey	CBI		May/June/July/Aug	24	21	25	23
Monthly Digest of Statistics	ONS	OG	May/June/July/Aug	24	25	24	23
Major Banking Groups' mortgage lending	BBA		Apr/May/June/July	29	27	26	28
National Accounts	ONS	EC	Q1	-	26	-	-
UK Balance of Payments	ONS	EC	Q1	-	26	-	-
Weekly Deaths - England/Wales	ONS	HC		31	26	31	29
Energy Trends	DTI	CEI	Mar/Apr	31	28	-	-

TEL Nos. FOR STATISTICAL ENQUIRIES

BBA	= British Bankers' Association	020 7216 8800
BCC	= British Chambers of Commerce	020 7565 2021
BoE	= Bank of England	020 7601 4878
BRC	= British Retail Consortium	020 7647 1500
BSA	= Building Societies' Association	020 7437 0655
CBI	= Confederation of British Industry	020 7379 7400
CML	= Council of Mortgage Lenders	020 7437 0075
DETR	= Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions	020 7890 3333
DFEE	= Department for Education and Employment	020 7925 5757
DFID	= Department for International Development	01355 843329
DH	= Department of Health	020 7210 4850
DSS	= Department of Social Security	0191 225 7373
DTI	= Department of Trade & Industry	020 7215 5000
FC	= Forestry Commission	0131 314 6337
GAD	= Government Actuaries Department	020 7211 2600
GRO(S)	= General Register Office for Scotland	0131 334 0380
HMCE,IMD	= HM Customs & Excise, Information Management Division	01702 367485
HMT	= HM Treasury	020 7270 4860
HO	= Home Office	020 7273 4000
IR	= Inland Revenue	020 7438 6267
ISSB	= Iron and Steel Statistics Bureau	020 7343 3900
LCD	= Lord Chancellor's Department	020 7210 1752
MAFF	= Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries & Food	020 7270 8562
MoD	= Ministry of Defence	020 7218 9000
NAW	= National Assembly for Wales	01222 825044
NS	= National Savings	0645 645000
ONS	= Office for National Statistics	020 7533 5888
SE	= Scottish Executive	0131 244 0302

NATIONAL STATISTICS THEMES

AFF	= Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing
CJ	= Crime and Justice
TTT	= Transport, Travel and Tourism
NBE	= The Natural and Built Environment
ET	= Education and Training
PM	= Population and Migration
EC	= The Economy
CEI	= Commerce, Energy and Industry
LM	= Labour Market
SW	= Social and Welfare
HC	= Health and Care
OG	= Other Government
CR	= Compendia & Reference

Letters to
the Editor
(for publication)
are always
welcome

WE LOOK FORWARD
TO HEARING
YOUR COMMENTS
ON
BSUG NEWS