**Engaging with users to improve quality**

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**Abstract**

‘Quality is everyone’s responsibility.’ Do you review processes to ensure the best quality data is produced? Regardless of the topic, speaking to our users to improve the quality of a process or output is an important step.

There is a requirement under the UK Code of Practice for Official Statistics to:

‘Report annually the estimated costs (for example, on businesses, service providers, or the public) of responding to statistical surveys and strive to develop methods that will reduce the costs to individual organisations or people.’

The ONS collects compliance information from all Government Departments in the UK (excluding Scotland) and publishes it in a report called the Online List of Government Statistical Surveys. This publication was set up a number of years ago to meet the Code of Practice obligation. Like any output the quality should be assessed on a regular basis. Current metrics on the use of the Online List are minimal; this is an indication that the quality needs to be improved. A list of all Government Statistical surveys and their compliance is beneficial for a multitude of reasons, therefore, a user review needed to be conducted to improve quality, exposure and capability.

The processes are being reviewed by Methodology to ensure the current methodology is fit for purpose, the publication itself is having a facelift, and users are being asked what they want.

The main focus of the user review is to explore:

* who uses compliance information.
* what is compliance information used for.
* is there any additional information users would like.

The paper details users and data compilers feedback, along with recommendations made to improve the publication and prevent misuse of data.

**Keywords** – user review, users, quality reviews, compliance

**1. Introduction**

This paper discusses the UK’s Office for National Statistics (ONS), plan to improve survey compliance information. It covers the approach we took and the next steps.

**2. Background**

Currently the survey compliance data is collated by Quality Centre within ONS and published annually in the Online List of Government Statistical Surveys (OLGSS) which is an Excel spreadsheet. This publication provides compliance costs for business and social surveys reported in relation to respondent burden. The publication includes the following variables survey name, sample size and sample achieved, theme, mode, compliance cost (in minutes or pounds) and previous compliance cost. Previously there was an Annual Report that provided details at a Department level, this was disbanded after a user consultation showed limited use.

**3. Why is Quality important?**

Speaking to users is critical in order to improve quality in our outputs, this allows us to have a clear understanding of both the data we publish and our user’s needs.

In order to improve the ‘survey compliance’ publication we carried out a user consultation. Historically this information was collected from Government Departments across the Government Statistical Service (GSS), under Prime Ministers Instructions of August 1994, and more recently the Code of Practice for Statistics, although there is regulatory reason to produce a dataset on ‘survey compliance’, it’s important to discuss with users their needs and improve the quality.

**4. User review**

We initially investigated the web metric information, this provided the average number of website visits per day and the average time spent on the page containing the publication.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Number of views | Average views per day | Average time spent |
| 1125 | 4 | 3 minutes |

This information did not tell us how many times the publication had been downloaded, however a bounce rate of 75% suggests that most visitors to the webpage did not explore any further.

**4.1 What did users say?**

The next step in the plan was to obtain feedback from users.

A survey monkey questionnaire was created to capture information from potential users regarding what they use the compliance information for and to explore how easily they could find the information required on the spreadsheet. We are currently collating this information ready to analyse, to explore user’s opinions on the use of survey compliance data.

**4.2 What do they use the data for?**

We know that Government Departments provide us with the data, but do they use it? This thought led to the next step in the user testing plan, which was to meet with both those Government Departments that supply the data and those that currently don’t.

Initially we held an event where a representative from 15 different Government Departments attended, and in small groups the usability of the OLGSS was tested. Each group had a separate list of questions to follow, and an observer captured how easy or difficult they found each question. The groups then provided feedback on their thoughts of the usability.

On a separate occasion with a different group of users we ran a focus group session asking open questions to enable us to capture the rich detailed information on their thoughts of the OLGSS spreadsheet. This information has been valuable to ensure the usability of the OLGSS, and provides assurance that users could find the relevant information.

**4.3 Who uses compliance information and what for?**

We have managed to capture thoughts on the usability of the tool, but the big question remained, who uses this information and what for?

Further investigations are required before answering this question, however we can present some initial findings from Government Departments, which means we are getting closer to an answer.

The information gathered so far indicates that Government Departments are unaware of anyone outside of Government using the survey compliance figures, however they know users within their Government Departments occasionally use the list of surveys.

Although we are no closer to understanding if wider users would find the survey compliance data useful, we did discover that Departments themselves are interested in their own data, this adds value to the purpose of collecting this data. Departments use their survey compliance data to establish how many surveys they run along with the justification to run them. This leads to improvements being made through designing better questions which reduces respondent time and re-contact. They also use the compliance data to measure change, through transformation or mode of collection.

Government Departments were asked if any further changes would be helpful. It was suggested that the data could be more useful if it was published on a timelier basis, specifically within 6 months of year end as this would ensure the data is relevant when used.

**5. What’s next?**

The survey compliance 2016-17 data was circulated with commentary to all Government Departments only for internal purposes only. A list of all surveys along with contact information has been published on the GSS website.

Over the next few months we plan to meet with more Government Departments and hopefully other potential users, where we will continue to make headway into answering the question who uses compliance information and what for. Once all the information has been collected and the data analysed, we will better understand the need for this information which will allow us to make a suitable recommendation on how to improve the quality of the OLGSS.

**6. References**

UK Statistics Authority, (2018), Code of Practice of Statistics.https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/