OUR USE OF ADMINISTRATIVE SOURCES FOR STATISTICAL PURPOSES

Background

Official statistics published by the Department of Health (DoH) are based on two main sources – data gathered from statistical (censuses and) surveys, and data extracted from its own and from other organisations' administrative or management systems.

The Code of Practice encourages organisations to use quantitative information drawn from administrative systems for the management of government business, decision making and the production of official statistics. By using data which is already available within administrative or management systems, rather than collecting data afresh, we are able to limit the overall burden of compliance placed on data providers, and also avoid the costs of mounting dedicated data collection exercises. In addition, the information we extract from such systems often has the advantage of being more timely than statistical data and, when compared with data from surveys (and particularly sample surveys), can also deliver data with a greater breadth of coverage.

The UK Statistics Authority actively encourages public bodies to exploit administrative and management sources for statistical purposes. However the Authority recognises that the statistical advantages of such arrangements can only be fully realised if statisticians have appropriate access to such systems; if statistical purposes are reflected in the design, management, and development of such systems; and if adequate safeguards are put in place to ensure the professional integrity of any official statistics derived from them.

The Authority's main requirements are set out in the third Protocol attached to their Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Amongst other things, this Protocol requires all producers of official statistics to publish, in consultation with the National Statistician, a 'Statement of Administrative Sources' which lists:

- the administrative systems they currently use to produce official statistics;
- information about other administrative sources that are not currently used for statistical purposes but which have the potential to be so used; and
- the arrangements they have put in place to provide statistical staff with appropriate access such sources; to take account of changes to such systems; to audit the quality of the administrative data used for statistical purposes; and to ensure the security of the resultant statistical processes.

The DoH's own 'Statement of Administrative Sources' can be viewed by clicking on the following link: Statement of administrative sources | Department of Health