

Working papers 2014:3

**Peer review report (Iceland)
and Statistics Iceland's
improvement action plan**

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1. Peer Review Report: Iceland

1.1 Executive Summary

Iceland is a small country, with a population of about 325 thousand; Statistics Iceland is a relatively small National Statistical Institute (NSI), with about 100 staff. However, even in a small country an NSI requires a substantial statistical and technical infrastructure. Although Statistics Iceland has considerable access to registers and other sources of administrative data, it is unable to meet all of the demands for information placed upon it, and it does not comply fully with many elements of the European Statistics Code of Practice (CoP). It appears to be under-resourced—for example, to produce some environmental statistics and to conduct some important surveys.

Statistics Iceland is a little old-fashioned in some respects, and rather inward-looking. This manifests itself in a number of ways, including:

- Its service delivery is largely driven by the capacity and commitment of individual production units (for example, it does not systematically publish the range of methodological or quality related information implicit in the CoP and required by users; the extent of user-engagement is variable; and the quality of data sharing agreements is mixed). In some respects it has operated in a rather piecemeal fashion, and legacies of this remain - partly for historical reasons, and partly because Statistics Iceland has not had sufficient resource to invest in the cultural, organisational and technological change programme that would be required to make it more corporate, and more user-focused. But it is taking steps to operate more corporately. Statistics Iceland needs to be shaped by users: its resource limitations will then become better identified and the challenge to the Government of Iceland will be more clearly articulated. And a greater user-focus will tend to enhance the impact of Statistics Iceland's statistical work.
- It does not collaborate with other experts as effectively as it might—with other NSIs, and with academics, for example. If it were able to do so it would strengthen its reputation further, and would be able to access rare skills and knowledge.
- It has a relatively low media and public profile, though it is generally well-regarded for its objectivity, expertise and professional independence by users and commentators, and its staff are regularly interviewed in the media. A higher public profile and more insightful statistical reports (they are currently rather bland) would tend to enhance its impact.
- It does not coordinate the National Statistical System (NSS) particularly effectively. In practice however the NSS is highly centralised, so the informal and ad hoc coordination arrangements do not appear to be a problem.

Despite the challenges it faces, Statistics Iceland is an ambitious and vigorous organisation. It has recently appointed a Quality Manager and a Methodologist, both of whom have important work programmes that will benefit Statistics Iceland in the years ahead. More generally, staff are well-trained, and Statistics Iceland's management and leadership teams are clearly committed to enhancing compliance with the CoP.

1.1.1 List of Recommendations

1. A Statistical Council, with external stakeholder representation, should be established in the Statistics Law.
2. The remit of the User Groups be reviewed (with users), and the current system of User Groups should be extended to cover other statistical domains.
3. Statistics Iceland should establish thematic/topic based groups of producers of, and contributors to, European (and other official) statistics, including owners of registers and administrative data sources.
4. A Methodological Advisory Committee, with external academic and other appropriate representation, should be established. Its remit—ideally the National Statistical System—and roles and responsibilities, and membership, should be publicised.
5. A plan for the National Statistical System (clearly identifying European Statistics) should be developed and published, and progress reported regularly.
6. Membership of the Quality Council should be broadened to include representatives of users and experts.
7. Membership of the Confidentiality Committee should be broadened to include relevant external experts from, for example, the research community (This would require a revision of article 7C of the “Rules of Procedure”).
8. Statistics Iceland should discuss with the EFTA secretariat, and if necessary successive Presidencies, the scope to be granted observer status at the Council Working Party for Statistics meetings.
9. Statistics Iceland should publish transparent plans and full descriptions of the role and functions of the Research Unit.
10. Statistics Iceland should review, formalise and publish all data sharing agreements—and should use this exercise to further enhance its understanding of the quality of administrative data, to explore access to other sources of administrative data, and to provide transparency about flows of data.
11. The production of methodological guidelines should be prioritised.
12. The desirability of transferring responsibility for the production of European Statistics currently produced by small Other National Authorities to Statistics Iceland should be considered.
13. A benchmarking exercise should be undertaken as part of reviewing Statistics Iceland’s business model.
14. Statistics Iceland should discuss with the Government the scope for additional funding to meet the European requirements.
15. Statistics Iceland should develop a strategic training plan that is aligned with its Business Plan.
16. Partnerships with the scientific community should be strengthened. For example involvement of users in methodological discussions should be formalised and the scientific community could be involved in professional training of Statistics Iceland staff.
17. Collaboration with other National Statistical Institutes on complex issues such as quality indicators should be strengthened.
18. Statistics Iceland should prioritise the development of a business register in order to comply with the Regulation on Business Registers and to meet national needs.

19. Statistics Iceland should continue to enhance its website, including graphical illustrations of statistics.
20. The explanation of statistical messages, in bulletins and reports, should be improved.
21. Statistics Iceland should review the Quality Management System from a user-perspective.
22. Statistics Iceland should prioritise the production of methodological documentation, and user-oriented metadata.
23. Statistics Iceland should work more pro-actively with the media, including holding press conference and seminars, both to raise awareness of its work and to strengthen its communication capacity.
24. Statistics Iceland should publish and implement a revisions policy.

1.2 Introduction

This peer review report is part of a series of assessments, the objective of which is to evaluate the extent to which National Statistical Institutes (NSIs and the European Statistical System (ESS)¹ comply with the European Statistics Code of Practice (CoP).

The CoP, which sets out a common quality framework for the ESS, was first adopted in 2005 by the Statistical Programme Committee and updated in 2011 by its successor, the European Statistical System Committee. The CoP — 15 principles and related indicators of good practice — covers the institutional environment, the statistical production process and the output of European statistics. The ESS is committed to fully complying with the CoP and is working towards its full implementation. Periodic assessments review progress towards reaching this goal.

The first global assessment, a round of peer reviews in 2006–2008, explored how the NSIs and Eurostat were progressing in implementing the parts of the CoP relating to the institutional environment and dissemination of statistics (principles 1–6 and 15). This resulted in reports for each NSI and Eurostat, available on the Eurostat website.² These reports also include a set of improvement actions covering all the principles of the CoP; these informed the annual monitoring of the implementation of the CoP in the ESS in the period 2009–2013.

The scope of this second round of peer reviews is broader: the assessment of CoP compliance covers all principles; the CoP compliance of selected other national producers of European statistics (as well as the NSI) in each country is being assessed; and the way in which statistical authorities coordinate the production and dissemination of European statistics within their statistical systems is being explored.

It should be underlined that there is a fundamental difference between the reports in the previous round of peer reviews conducted in 2006–2008 and the reports from

¹ The ESS is the partnership between the Union statistical authority, which is the Commission (Eurostat), and the NSIs and the ONAs responsible in each Member State for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics. This Partnership also includes the EEA and EFTA countries.

² http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/quality/code_of_practice/peer_reviews

this round. In the 2006–2008 round compliance with principles 1 to 6 and 15 of the CoP was assessed by means of a four-level scale (fully met; largely met; partly met and not met) and improvement actions were agreed on all 15 principles. After five years of continuous development most of the improvement actions have been implemented and significant progress towards full compliance with the CoP has been made. Therefore, rather than stating the state of play for all principles of the CoP, the reports from the 2013–2015 round mainly focus on issues where full compliance with the CoP has not been found or further improvements are recommended by the Peer Review team.

In order to gain an independent view, the peer review exercise has been externalised and an audit-like approach, where all the answers to the self-assessment questionnaires have to be supported by evidence, has been applied. As in 2006–2008, all EU Member States and EFTA/EEA countries and Eurostat are subject to a peer review.

Each peer review in the Member States and EFTA/EEA countries is conducted by three reviewers and has four phases: completion of self-assessment questionnaires by a country; their assessment by peer reviewers; a peer review visit; and the preparation of reports on the outcomes. The peer review of Eurostat is being conducted by the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB).

To test and complete the methodology, it was piloted in two countries, Iceland and Slovakia, over the summer 2013.

The Icelandic peer review was conducted by Mr Richard Laux (chair), Ms Marie Bohatá and Ms Marina Gandolfo, with a peer review visit to Reykjavik on 3–6 September 2013. The programme of the visit is in Annex A and a list of participants in Annex B.

This report focuses on CoP compliance and the coordination of European statistics within the Icelandic statistical system. The report highlights the strengths of the Icelandic NSI in relation to its compliance with the CoP and to its coordination role, and contains recommendations for improvement. Improvement actions elaborated by the NSI on the basis of this report will be published within one month of the publication of this report.

1.3 Brief description of the Icelandic Statistical System (provided by Statistics Iceland)

As the Icelandic population is very small compared with other countries participating in the ESS, the NSS is rather centralised. The legal framework concentrates on Statistics Iceland as the main producer and coordinator of official statistics. There is no other body or coordinator of official statistics and thus no other National Authority with a mission or work programme for the NSS. Other producers of official statistics are rather small and only have limited functions in the NSS, except the Central Bank of Iceland which has a major role.

The Central Bank (CB) is responsible for all monetary and banking statistics as well as Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and capital transfers. The CB compiles the financial

balance when estimating the overall current account, but Statistics Iceland is responsible for the trade in goods and services. Statistics Iceland and the CB have an agreement on the production of Financial Accounts and Statistics Iceland has regular meetings with the bank on statistical issues. To perform its duties the CB has wide permission to collect statistics from the financial sector, article 20 of the Act on the Central Bank of Iceland No 36, 2001:

In order to perform its function as described in Articles 3 and 4 above, the Central Bank of Iceland can directly collect information from parties concluding transactions with the Bank, cf. Article 6, cf. Article 7, as well as companies with payment systems and other companies or parties whose activities are subject to official supervision, cf. the Act on Official Supervision of Financial Activities.

All parties are obliged to provide the Central Bank with the information it requires to compile statistical reports; failure to do so shall be liable to penalties as provided for in Article 37.³

In the Act on the CB there are articles on confidentiality and the bank issues its own advance release calendar.

Other producers are the Environment Agency of Iceland (water and waste), the National Commissioner of the Icelandic Police, the National Energy Authority (energy statistics) and the Icelandic Transport Authority (transport by air) (which has recently replaced the Civil Aviation Administration (CAA)). They have only few people working on statistics. Statistics Iceland has been in active cooperation with the Environment Agency and the Energy Authority and has prepared draft cooperation agreements with these institutions. The agreements have not been signed as there is discussion on moving more of the statistical work to Statistics Iceland, especially on energy prices and environmental statistics - there is work underway at Statistics Iceland (supported by an IPA (Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance) multi-beneficiary grant) to fulfil the statistical requirement for water and waste.

The Environment Agency operates under the direction of the Ministry of the Environment and its role is to promote the protection as well as sustainable use of Iceland's natural resources. One of its tasks is to monitor environmental quality that is among other things monitoring water and waste as well as air quality. There are no requirements in the Act on the Environment Agency on data collection or dissemination, but due to its monitoring activities the Agency collects wide variety of information on the environment.⁴

The National Energy Authority is an agency under the Ministry of Industry and Innovation. Its main responsibilities include advising the government on energy issues and promoting energy research and administration and development of exploitation of energy resources. One of its tasks is to gather and publish data on various aspects

³ <http://www.cb.is/lisalib/getfile.aspx?itemid=7425>

⁴ <http://www.ust.is/the-environment-agency-of-iceland/>

of energy issues, such as the production, import and price of energy. In Article 2 of the Act in the National Energy Authority of Iceland no. 87, 2003 are the provisions for data collection:

To gather data on energy resources and other mineral and water resources, their utilisation and the energy utilisation of Iceland, to preserve the data and to disseminate the information to the authorities and the public.

In order to uphold its obligations according to item 3 of paragraph 3, the National Energy Authority may demand documentations concerning the utilisation of mineral and water resources, energy production and energy usage, incl. documentations concerning import, storage and marketing of fossil fuels. Those engaged in the preceding professional enterprises are obligated to provide the Authority with all the necessary documents within a time limit specified by the Authority. Further conditions on the type of documentations, quality and the deadline for submission shall be stated in a Regulation.⁵

The Icelandic Transport Authority (ITA) has a very specialised function as it supplies detailed information on transport by air. ITA gathers the information in close cooperation with ISAVIA, the provider of air services in Iceland, on issues regarding the management of air traffic and running of airports. ITA delivers the required data to Eurostat and Statistics Iceland has only contact with the ITA when there is a change in European regulation or standards.⁶

There is one interesting peculiarity in the NSS. The Icelandic Centre for Research (RANNIS) whose main responsibility is to support research and innovation in Iceland, decided to produce Research and Development (R&D) statistics on behalf of Iceland and deliver them to Eurostat, as well as to participate in WG on R&D statistics at Eurostat. Article 12 in the Act on National Support to Scientific Research, No 3/2002 states that RANNIS shall collect and disseminate data for the Research Council on research activities, technical progress and innovation, and collect international information on the development of science and technology. Statistics Iceland has not accepted RANNIS as a part of the NSS. Statistics Iceland has neither approved the methodology nor the quality of RANNIS statistics on R&D and does not consider them as impartial producers. Eurostat has not detected any particular quality problems in the transmitted data and thus considers Iceland as compliant in the field.

Statistics Iceland has discussed the matter with the Ministry of Education (the ministry responsible for RANNIS) and the Ministry's opinion is that R&D statistics should be produced by an impartial agent such as Statistics Iceland. There have been discussions within the ministries in Iceland for six or seven years on transferring the R&D statistics to Statistics Iceland, but these have always foundered on the question of who should foot the bill. Statistics Iceland sees an emerging problem as, according to the new Standards on National Accounts, spending on R&D will be recorded as

⁵ http://www.nea.is/media/log/NEA-Act_Final.pdf

⁶ http://ww2.caa.is/media/PDF/ACT_on_CAA_no_100_2006_Final.pdf

investments in National Accounts. Since RANNIS (as well as some other operators in other Member States) has a dual role in leading the policy and measuring the input at the same time, the transfer of responsibility for the compilation of R&D statistics to Statistics Iceland would enhance the compliance with the CoP.

1.4 Compliance with the Code of Practice and the co-ordination role within the National Statistical System

This section summarises the peer reviewers' views on the extent of CoP-compliance and the nature and effectiveness of co-ordination within the NSS. It first summarises the NSI's strengths in these respects, and then explores specific issues including making recommendations that the peer reviewers consider would strengthen compliance with the CoP.

1.4.1 Strengths of the National Statistical Institute in relation to its compliance with the Code of Practice and to its coordination role

The Statistical Law clearly asserts Statistics Iceland's professional independence; users and other stakeholders agreed that Statistics Iceland operates independently.

Statistics Iceland has effective access to a wide range of register and administrative databases.

Statistics Iceland has a strong tradition of confidentiality protection reflecting, in part, the small and geographically clustered population.

Staff are highly educated, well-trained, and appear to be dedicated to their roles. At a senior management level relationships are strong and the sense of team spirit is palpable.

1.5 Issues and recommendations

1.5.1 Modernise governance to improve coordination and to become more outward-facing

Statistics Council / User Groups

Article 2 of the Statistics Law says that “Statistics Iceland shall decide on [statistical projects] and prioritise its tasks taking account of the needs of the government for statistical information for policy-formation and decisions on public issues, international obligations of the state on statistical production and the needs and demands of the public, businesses, labour market organisations, and research and educational institutions for statistical information. For this purpose the institution shall carry out active consultation with these parties.”

Statistics Iceland has Advisory Committees—on the Consumer Prices Index and Labour Market statistics—and well-established User Groups—on Price Indices, on National Accounts, and on Wage (Labour Market) statistics—as part of fulfilling this require-

ment; in addition it is planning to establish further user groups relating to Social Statistics and Business Statistics.

The Peer Review (PR) team was told that these User Groups were regarded positively in themselves, for example as vehicles for user consultation. However, the User Groups are not yet seen as being sufficiently effective, with the consequent risk that users might disengage. User Groups might have an important role to play in helping to identify both emerging priorities and negative priorities—work that might be reduced or stopped - and to contribute to and publicly support decisions made by Statistics Iceland about resourcing.

The User Groups could usefully be complemented by a more strategic Statistical Council, established in statute, to enable external stakeholders—for example in academia and business:

- to influence plans and priorities;
- to help Statistics Iceland become culturally and practically more user-oriented (it appears not to have a systematic approach to understanding, documenting and using information about its users, or the use that they make of Icelandic statistics);
- to advise Statistics Iceland on issues such as how to raise its profile and when to respond publicly to the misuse of statistics;
- to advise Statistics Iceland on the interpretation of the CoP in an Icelandic context;
- to support Statistics Iceland's leadership and coordination roles in the national statistical system; and
- to ensure that Ministries are fully-aware of others' need for statistical information.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

- (1) A Statistical Council, with external stakeholder representation, should be established in the Statistics Law. (CoP: all Principles.)
- (2) The remit of the User Groups be reviewed (with users), and the current system of User Groups should be extended to cover other statistical domains. (CoP: 11.1, 11.2, 13.3, 15.6.)

Producer Groups

Article 3 of the Statistics Act requires Statistics Iceland to “coordinate official statistical activities for which it and other state institutions are responsible ... Statistics Iceland shall institute and maintain a process of regular consultation between the state institutions which are engaged in official statistics or collect data which are important for that process.”

Articles 5 and 6 of the Statistics Law establish Statistics Iceland's rights to access administrative data held by others, and its responsibilities in these regards. For example:

- “Statistics Iceland shall always provide information on the purpose of the data collection, the conditions for the processing, the safeguarding of the data and the dissemination of the results”.
- “Statistics Iceland shall ... seek to obtain data from administrative registers and other public registers where possible”.
- “Statistics Iceland may ... request the parties concerned to collect additional information for statistical purposes”.
- “State institutions ... shall consult Statistics Iceland on the organisation of new registers and the renewal of or change in existing registers ... Statistics Iceland is authorised to request that changes be made in registers.”

The PR team was told that:

- There is a need for more coherence—in some aspects of methodology, such as seasonal adjustment, and some topics such as health, high-tech industries, and education data;
- Some definitions or concepts in administrative data sources (such as the ‘family’) do not readily lend themselves to statistical purposes;
- The structure of some administrative data systems is not well understood;
- Some organisations that hold administrative data are unaware of the Statistics Law, which means that Statistics Iceland has to actively monitor potential changes;
- There are delays and difficulties influencing some owners of administrative data—the identification of apartments in Registry Iceland’s Population Register is a long-standing problem; more generally Statistics Iceland meets some administrative data owners quite infrequently (less than annually).

There would be benefit in bringing together those organisations which provide Statistics Iceland with administrative/register data or which produce statistical information relevant to the work of Statistics Iceland (such as the other statistical authorities - including the Central Bank - and other data providers), in order to raise awareness of Statistics Iceland’s needs and to act a means of implementing the strong provisions of the Statistics Act and more generally to strengthen the efficiency, effectiveness and coherence of statistical work—collection, processing, and presentation.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

- (3) Statistics Iceland should establish thematic/topic based groups of producers of, and contributors to, European (and other official) statistics, including owners of registers and administrative data sources. (CoP 2.2, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14.)

Methodological Advisory Committee

Article 4 of the Statistics Act says that “the Director General [of Statistics Iceland] bears professional responsibility for the statistical activities of Statistics Iceland. He/she makes decisions on methods and practices ... [and] on the application of classifications and standards”.

Whilst Statistics Iceland has hosted external review teams (such as from the IMF and Eurostat, in particular domains), it does not currently have a formal approach to methodological/quality reviews or audits, although this is envisaged for 2014-15 as the quality management strategy is implemented. It has recently appointed a full-time methodologist.

The PR team was told that Statistics Iceland does not formally cooperate with Icelandic universities on methodological issues, although the methodologist does have links with the University of Iceland. Formal links would seem to be helpful in order to support the greater standardisation of methods and the provision of appropriate training, as well as the provision of advice on technical statistical issues as a complement to advice received from other Nordic countries and from Eurostat. And to the extent that new methods are likely to lead to revisions in statistical series, the impartiality and objectivity of Statistics Iceland's work would seem to be supported by expert advice and advocacy which would not challenge the professional independence of the Director General.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

- (4) A Methodological Advisory Committee, with external academic and other appropriate representation, should be established. Its remit—ideally the National Statistical System—and roles and responsibilities, and membership, should be publicised. (CoP: 1.4, 4.5, 5.6, 6.1, 6.2, 7, 8, 12.2, 14.)

Plan for the National Statistical System

The Icelandic NSS is highly centralised around Statistics Iceland; the other producers of European Statistics are the Environment Agency of Iceland, the National Energy Authority, and the Icelandic Transport Authority.

Article 3 of the Statistics Act requires Statistics Iceland to “coordinate official statistical activities for which it and other state institutions are responsible ... Statistics Iceland shall institute and maintain a process of regular consultation between the state institutions which are engaged in official statistics or collect data which are important for that process”.

Whilst Statistics Iceland has a published work programme, there is no similar plan for the NSS as a whole. Whilst there would be considerable overlap in statistical products, reflecting the degree of centralisation in Icelandic statistics, the establishment and monitoring of such a plan would strengthen Statistics Iceland's coordination role, including:

- identifying inefficiencies;
- enhancing compliance with the CoP;
- ensuring that the needs for methodological and quality management expertise are identified; and
- delivering training to meet the needs of all statistical authorities.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

- (5) A plan for the National Statistical System (clearly identifying European Statistics) should be developed and published, and progress reported regularly. (CoP: all Principles; ‘coordination’.)

Broaden membership of the Quality Council and Confidentiality Committee

Statistics Iceland published its Quality Policy in January 2013, and is currently implementing its “Roadmap for Quality Management” (which is intended to meet the standards set out in Principle 4 of the CoP). This work is overseen by a committee of Statistics Iceland’s Directors, the Quality Council, which meets monthly. As noted elsewhere, the work on quality appears to be rather input-focused at present, and would benefit from a strategic re-orientation to enable users to influence its development.

Section III of the Statistics Act establishes high level principles for the protection of statistical confidentiality, and requires (article 13) Statistics Iceland to “issue more detailed rules on the provision or utilisation of data...” Consistent with this Statistics Iceland has published its “Rules of Procedure for Treating Confidential Data”, article 7C of which commits Statistics Iceland to operate an internal Confidentiality Committee. This Committee, more widely referred to as the Permanent Confidentiality Group, deals with external requests for data from the scientific/academic community. It is complemented by a recently-established (internal) Confidentiality Working Group (CWG)—a (temporary) project group - whose remit is to address emerging challenges to confidentiality, such as those emerging from IT developments.

In the same way that much methodological and quality-related work has been the responsibility of individual business areas, so has confidentiality protection. The PR team considers that confidentiality protection requires strong central oversight, and welcomes the establishment of the CWG.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

- (6) Membership of the Quality Council should be broadened to include representatives of users and experts. (CoP: 4, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15.)
- (7) Membership of the Confidentiality Committee should be broadened to include relevant external experts from, for example, the research community (This would require a revision of article 7C of the “Rules of Procedure”). (CoP: 5.4, 5.6, 15.)

Statistics Iceland’s “mission”

Article 1 of the Statistics Law describes the role of Statistics Iceland in the following terms:

Statistics Iceland is an independent institution under the aegis of the Minister which handles official statistics under this Act. It is the centre for official statistics in Iceland and has the leading role in the organisation, coordination and conduct thereof, and also in cooperation with international organisations concerning statistics.

The term *official statistics* in this Act refers to the operations of Statistics Iceland and other competent state institutions on the collection of data for the generation of statistics on the Icelandic economy and society, the processing of the data and the dissemination of statistical information to the public, businesses, institutions and public authorities on the basis of law and in accordance with instructions issued under this Act.

Statistics Iceland describes its role in the following terms: “Statistics Iceland produces objective statistics, is the centre for official statistics in Iceland, conducts research and thereby works towards informed discussion and professional decision making”.

The PR team considers that Statistics Iceland might:

- adopt a more visionary mission statement, aligned to Article 1 of the Statistics Law, which captures its role as a provider of information (analysis and explanation, rather than just description) to the public and other users of its statistics—and then:
- review its priorities (in the context of compliance with the CoP) in the light of this mission statement. This could provide an opportunity to raise the profile of Statistics Iceland.

Council Working Party for Statistics (CWPS) observer status

Two aspects of Statistics Iceland’s engagement with EU statistics developments are noteworthy:

- The PR team was told that EU Regulations and Directives are enacted by the Icelandic Parliament, and the costs (to Ministries) of implementing them are covered by additional funding. However, different processes apply in relation to EU statistical regulations entering the EEA-agreement—which are not incorporated in Icelandic law. As a consequence Statistics Iceland has to absorb the extended statistical obligations without satisfactory means to cover the additional costs. This issue has been raised with the Government.
- As Iceland is not represented at the CWPS, Statistics Iceland is sometimes unaware of changes and their wider political context in draft Regulations made after the European Statistical System Committee (ESSC) has performed its comitological role. Whilst some insights are provided by the Nordic countries, Statistics Iceland considers that its coordination role with other statistical authorities is potentially disadvantaged.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

- (8) Statistics Iceland should discuss with the EFTA secretariat, and if necessary successive Presidencies, the scope to be granted observer status at Council Working Party for Statistics meetings. (CoP: 3, 11; ‘coordination’.)

Research Unit

Article 1 of the Statistics Law includes the following: “Statistics Iceland shall operate an independent research unit that shall be separate from statistical operations. The

unit shall monitor the performance of the economy, make economic forecasts and plans and publish the results.”

The Research Unit, comprising three people, makes and publishes economic forecasts. It gets pre-release access—documented on Statistics Iceland’s website - to quarterly National Accounts statistics each June, as an input to its (June) economic forecast. The Research Unit itself grants pre-release access to its draft economic forecast—but not to the National Accounts statistics - to the Ministry of Finance. Although the issue was not raised by users during the PR, the PR team think that it would be helpful for Statistics Iceland to clarify the extent to which the Ministry of Finance might effectively have pre-release access to the June National Accounts statistics by virtue of the work of the Research Unit.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

- (9) Statistics Iceland should publish transparent plans and full descriptions of the role and functions of the Research Unit. (CoP: 1.1, 1.5, 6.)

Data sharing agreements

Statistics Iceland receives both data from Agencies—such as the Directorate of Fisheries and the Directorate of Customs—as well as administrative data from a number of organisations, and register information from Registers Iceland.

The PR team understands that some Agreements—covering cooperation generally, or data sharing in particular—are in place, but most are of a technical nature and are largely out-of-date (with the exception of the Agreement with the Central Bank which covers, for example, the shared responsibilities for the production of Financial Accounts statistics and the supply of firm-level data for Balance of Payments statistics). Some of these agreements are mentioned in Statistics Iceland’s Annual Report, but the agreements themselves do not appear to be published.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

- (10) Statistics Iceland should review, formalise and publish all data sharing agreements—and should use this exercise to further enhance its understanding of the quality of administrative data, to explore access to other sources of administrative data, and to provide transparency about flows of data. (CoP: 2.2, 5, 7.3, 7.4, 8.1, 9.6, 10.4, 14.3, 14.4.)

1.5.2 Enhance efficiency

Methodological guidelines

Sound methodology underpins quality statistics. Although Statistics Iceland does not have an overall methodological framework following European and other international standards, guidelines and practices, most of the ingredients are in place for specific statistical domains. Statistics Iceland strives to use relevant concepts, definitions and classifications which are based on European legislation.

The PR team was told that the systematic development of the necessary methodological infrastructure started at the beginning of 2013 and currently one person works full time on methodological projects. A road map to achieve compliance with principle 7 of the CoP has been adopted within the new quality policy at the institutional level. So far most methodological developments have been subject matter oriented and the supply of standard tools is limited (for example - Blaise for CATI/CAWI (Computer assisted telephone interview and Computer assisted web interview) surveys, Statistics Iceland's web portal and PX-web⁷ for data tables).

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

- (11) The production of methodological guidelines should be prioritised. (CoP 7.2.)

Responsibility for the production of European statistics currently produced by small Other National Authorities (ONAs)

According to the Statistical Law (act No 163/2007) Statistics Iceland coordinates official statistical activities for which it and other state institutions are responsible. The scope of this coordination work covers tasks and methods applied, standards and classifications, requirements for quality and publication and the treatment of data collected for statistical purposes. The coordination function is exercised through meetings organised with other producers: no specific coordination body has been established. Other producers of European statistics are independent official institutions but, with the exception of the Central Bank, they are weak in the sense of statistical production having only limited capacity to produce statistics. It is not realistic to expect such small teams or even individuals to operate in full compliance with the CoP.

The PR team was told that Statistics Iceland plans to institute and maintain a process of regular consultation between the state institutions which are engaged in official statistics or collect data which are important for that purpose. Cooperation agreements with other producers (except the Central Bank) have been developed, but not yet signed.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

- (12) The desirability of transferring responsibility for the production of European statistics currently produced by small Other National Authorities to Statistics Iceland should be considered. (CoP 1.4, compliance of small ONAs with the CoP.)

Statistics Iceland's business model

A design of a process model for the institution is a big achievement. Statistics Iceland has recently finalised version 2 of its statistical business process model based on the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) version 4. The continuous improvement of processes is at the core of Statistics Iceland's new quality policy. The process model describes different levels of processes: level 0 is a process map defining eight business processes within Statistics Iceland; level 1 is a description of these processes

⁷ PX-web is a solution for the web which is used to establish dynamic tables on internet from PC-Axis files.

(in the case of the statistical production process the description is almost identical with the GSBPM); and level 2 consists of standard operating procedures. Inevitably, though it is a long way from the design to the full implementation of the model. Process-orientation and process-thinking requires a big change to the status quo and as such has to be strongly supported by the management of the organization. Developing a sense of ownership by the staff is crucial.

The PR team was told that in most cases Statistics Iceland reviews and assesses solutions in use by other NSIs. Beyond the existing close cooperation within the network of Nordic countries Statistics Iceland has started some benchmarking activities with small EU countries, namely Malta and Luxembourg.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

- (13) A benchmarking exercise should be undertaken as part of reviewing Statistics Iceland's business model.

Funding to meet European requirements

After the collapse of Icelandic banks in late 2008, public expenditure was cut sharply, and Statistics Iceland has been suffering as a result - it had to reduce staff (by 8%) and limit its statistical production activity. The strategy implemented in this difficult situation was to reduce tasks and to maintain highly qualified staff, in an attempt to protect infrastructure such as IT and computing and to maintain quality. As an EU candidate country, Statistics Iceland benefitted from the pre-accession EU grants, namely for the Housing and Population Census, Agricultural statistics and improvement in National Accounts.

Comparing budgets in 2007 and 2012, the reduction in real terms adjusted for special occurrences, such as the aforementioned IPA grants and a special temporary appropriation to produce statistics on household debt, was 17% and on the per capita basis 19%. Accordingly Statistics Iceland was not able to meet the new demands of the European Statistical Programme and this lack of compliance with the Statistical Requirements Compendium was mapped in the accession process. The establishment of a Business register as a priority project in order to produce Short-term and Structural Business Statistics was included in the Action plan elaborated within the negotiation process. The Government of Iceland approved a continuation of its financing after the withdrawal of the IPA grants (for which Statistics Iceland planned to apply). The 2014 Budget includes appropriations to continue the work on business statistics, albeit at a slower pace than Statistics Iceland had planned. However there has been lack of financing of environmental statistics and some important surveys, including those relating to Health, Adult Education, and Job vacancies.

Statistics Iceland has also had problems in making use of EU grants managed by Eurostat, because projects cannot be supported by these grants if they are below a threshold of 25,000 euro. This has resulted in Statistics Iceland being unable to apply for several grants, which has made it more difficult to fulfil EU obligations.

The PR team was told that EU regulations on statistics - contrary to other EU regulations - are not incorporated into Icelandic law and are therefore not regarded as mandatory or binding expenditure. Thus the costs of new EU statistical commitments are not covered by the Ministry of Finance. This results in problems of compliance with the „statistical *acquis communautaire*“.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

- (14) Statistics Iceland should discuss with the Government the scope for additional funding to meet the European requirements. (CoP 3.1.)

Strategic training plan

Statistics Iceland's main strength is its highly qualified staff, and continuous vocational training is an important part of the human resource policy. In January 2013 a new career development policy was implemented. This aimed to enhance the knowledge of employees by providing access to courses, both domestic and international, and by providing peer-tutoring.

The training needs of staff are assessed systematically every two years in employee interviews. Training programmes are set up according to the results of interviews and information about staff training needs coming from the educational committee that meets twice a year. The Human Resources department is responsible for the development of common training programmes, and heads of unit apply for relevant courses on behalf of their staff. Staff members are partly responsible for their own training, namely for training not specified in the training programme. Employees have a right to paid leave to pursue job related training. There is no systematic or formal monitoring of which courses each employee has taken; only the time spent on training by each staff member is recorded.

The PR team was told that employees of Statistics Iceland are obliged to update their knowledge and skills, and to ensure that they are up to date. To do so they have significant rights to pursue any job related training or educational opportunity while on paid leave. All directorates have a fixed budget earmarked for attending international events including training courses.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

- (15) Statistics Iceland should develop a strategic training plan that is aligned with its Business Plan. (CoP 3.1.)

Partnerships with the scientific community (see also Rec 4)

Cooperation with the scientific community on complex issues is crucial in order to address many of the new challenges that official statisticians are facing (including limited resources, the necessity to respond ever more quickly to emerging user needs, and a drive to improve quality).

Statistics Iceland tries to involve the scientific community in user groups that have been established in several statistical domains, such as National Accounts, Labour Force Statistics and Consumer Price Indices. However, the potential to benefit from the knowledge and experience acquired within academia and universities is underutilised. There is no formal means of information exchange with the scientific community. Only one cooperation agreement with the business department of the University of Iceland has been signed—it covers cooperation on master thesis projects on statistical topics. Recently Statistics Iceland has established a steering group with representation drawn from the scientific community in an attempt to improve access to Microdata for scientific purposes - although progress is slow as it is difficult to obtain funding for improvements. The current cooperation model is based mainly on good personal relationships.

The PR team was told that there are good informal relationships and that the scientific community is very appreciative of Statistics Iceland's willingness to communicate and assist. However there are no formal lines of communication on methodology, IT and innovation.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

- (16) Partnerships with the scientific community should be strengthened. For example involvement of users in methodological discussions should be formalised (CoP 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 7.5, 7.7) and the scientific community could be involved in professional training of Statistics Iceland staff. (CoP 7.6.)

Collaboration with other NSIs on complex issues

In recent years Statistics Iceland has made considerable efforts to enhance quality management. The appointment of the quality manager and the adoption of the quality policy in the form of a Quality Commitment Statement were key milestones in this process. The majority of new initiatives have focused on process quality. More work has to be done on product quality monitoring and reporting. The existing close cooperation with the Nordic countries has been complemented by benchmarking with small EU countries, such as Malta and Luxembourg.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

- (17) Collaboration with other NSIs on complex issues such as quality indicators should be strengthened. (CoP 4.4, 14.5.)

Business register

Business registers are a backbone of the statistical infrastructure. There is currently no business register but preparations to build it (including procedures for evaluating and updating it) are in place.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

- (18) Statistics Iceland should prioritise the development of a business register in order to comply with the Regulation on Business Registers and to meet national needs. (CoP 7.1, 7.3.)

1.5.3 Enhance the value of investment in official statistics

Dissemination via Statistics Iceland's website

Article 14 of the Statistics Act establishes “In principle, Statistics Iceland provides its information free of charge, mainly on its website” and Statistics Iceland uses its website as the main channel to disseminate European statistics. Although there is not a formal dissemination policy, users are consulted about appropriate forms of dissemination and can download data from the website and use table-generation tools.

The PR team was told that the priority in dissemination is the data required to comply with European legislation or agreements. The systematic dissemination of all data produced by Statistics Iceland would need further dedicated human resources. At the same time, the web-based publication policy is likely to release a substantial amount of human and financial resources which can then be diverted to improve the accessibility, the user friendliness and the content of website. Statistics Iceland is committed to enhancing its website, including by investing in the improvement of charts and tables.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

- (19) Statistics Iceland should continue to enhance its website, including graphical illustrations of statistics. (CoP 15.1, 15.2.)

Explanation of the messages in the statistics

Statistics Iceland's bulletins and reports are objective and factual in their statistical presentation. However this aspect of presentation could usefully be complemented by a storytelling (descriptive and analytical) approach to make sure users (including the media and the general public) understand the statistics and find them engaging and useful.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

- (20) The explanation of statistical messages, in bulletins and reports, should be improved. (CoP 15.2.)

Quality management

Quality Management, Quality Assurance and Quality Reporting tools are key components of a statistical Quality Management System (QMS). It is crucial that QMSs are developed to meet the needs of users. Training about 'quality' is a fundamental aspect for the successful implementation of a system for continuous improvement.

Statistics Iceland has launched a Roadmap for its Quality Management implementation. Although it is an impressive and laudable project, it is currently rather producer-ori-

ented; the user perspective should be considered in order to develop quality reporting that is more user-oriented.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

- (21) Statistics Iceland should review the Quality Management System from a user-perspective. (CoP 4,11,12.)

Methodological documentation

The description of concepts, definitions and classifications underpinning statistical data—metadata - is important to help users understand the published statistics. In addition, the publication of accessible metadata itself reinforces trust.

Statistics Iceland has recently created a new position of a chief methodologist; his remit includes enhancing the provision of methodological advice to the statistical production units, and harmonizing methodologies and documentation.

The active participation at experts meetings on methodological topics at the European level, the exchange of information with the scientific community (mainly the University of Iceland) and cooperation with the Nordic countries, all support Statistics Iceland's methodological activity.

Statistics Iceland produces and publishes methodological documents on an ad hoc basis. User groups could usefully be involved in establishing priorities for the development of a more systematic and user-oriented approach to methodological development and the provision of metadata.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

- (22) Statistics Iceland should prioritise the production of methodological documentation, and user-oriented metadata. (CoP 7.1, 7.2, 7.4, 8, 12, 14, and 15.6.)

Media engagement

Statistics Iceland has good relations with the media, which expressed a positive level of satisfaction in the activity of the Institute. Whilst Statistics Iceland releases new sets of statistics via its website, it does not hold press conferences to present and explain such data. Requests for clarifications and explanations from the media are met by the relevant statistical business area via telephone/mail or by publishing general comments on Statistics Iceland's website.

The PR team was told that Statistics Iceland has traditionally been reluctant to appear in the media in the context of political debates involving statistics, and that there is not a formal policy to react promptly in cases of criticism or the possible misuse of Statistics Iceland's statistical data.

Although there are no formal activities to involve the media in the improvement of Statistics Iceland's dissemination policy and communication strategy, a recent work-

shop attended by several users including media representatives was considered to have been very effective in improving awareness about Statistics Iceland's statistical activity.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

- (23) Statistics Iceland should work more pro-actively with the media, including holding press conference and seminars, both to raise awareness of its work and to strengthen its communication capacity. (CoP 1.7, 15.1.)

Revisions

Statistics Iceland does not have a published revisions policy, although in practice revisions are disseminated when new statistics are released. Users are informed in advance about the revision process and the information is available on the website.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP, the Peer Reviewers recommend that:

- (24) Statistics Iceland should publish and implement a revisions policy. (CoP 8.6, 12.3.)

1.6 National Statistical Institute views where they diverge from the peer reviewers' assessment

Statistics Iceland wants to thank the review team for excellent work and good and constructive recommendations. We think the report is balanced and fair and it does not diverge in any major way from our self-assessment.

2. Statistics Iceland's improvement action plan

2.1 Preview

The Icelandic peer review was conducted by Mr Richard Laux (chair), Ms Marie Bohatá and Ms Marina Gandolfo, with a peer review visit to Reykjavik on 3 – 6 September 2013. Following the visit, the peer review team documented their findings in a report. The final report, including 24 recommendations for improvement, was sent on 23 April 2004. This action plan includes the intended actions that Statistics Iceland will implement to act upon these recommendations and to improve quality and compliance with the ESS CoP.

2.2 Improvement action plan

Recommendation 1

A Statistical Council, with external stakeholder representation, should be established in the Statistics Law.

Action Plan

In the Statistics Act, Statistics Iceland decides on statistical projects and prioritises its tasks, taking account of the needs of users and international obligations. Statistics Iceland has several Advisory Committees in order to fulfil this requirement. These User Groups have not always been sufficiently effective and could be complemented by a more strategic Statistical Council. Before end of 2014 the Director-General will discuss this idea with the relevant authorities. There will be discussions on the pros and cons of this arrangement based on the experience from other institutions. The matter will also be discussed with the main users. Further actions will depend on the result of the communication with the ministry and users. As this action requires changes on the Statistical law it needs political approval and has to be presented to the Parliament.

Expected outcome

Decision whether this council will be established or not will be taken before end of 2014. If decided to establish the council, a bill on the composition and mandate would be presented to Parliament in 2015 or 2016.

Recommendation 2

The remit of the User Groups be reviewed (with users), and the current system of User Groups should be extended to cover other statistical domains.

Action Plan

Statistics Iceland has an advisory committee on the Consumer Prices Index, user groups on Labour Market statistics, Price Indices, National Accounts, and Wage

(Labour Market) statistics; in addition it is planning to establish further user groups relating to Social Statistics, R&D, Tourism, and Business Statistics.

These User Groups are regarded positively and are used as vehicles for user consultation. However, the User Groups could be more effective and could have a bigger role to play in helping to identify both emerging priorities and negative priorities (work that might be reduced or stopped) and to contribute to and publicly support Statistics Iceland work programme. Starting in 2014 Statistics Iceland will review the remit of user groups enhancing their role in priority settings. This project will also focus on the improvement of the quality management system from a user-perspective (see recommendation 21). This should be finished before the end of 2015.

Expected outcome

Before end 2015, redefined roles of user groups have been documented and eventual need for new groups have led to their establishment. The first meeting of each redefined user group has been held.

Recommendation 3

Statistics Iceland should establish thematic/topic based groups of producers of, and contributors to, European (and other official) statistics, including owners of registers and administrative data sources.

Action Plan

This project is expected to start by 2015 and finish by end of 2016, see also recommendations no. 12. According to the Statistical Act Statistics Iceland shall coordinate official statistical activities. In order to enhance this role the plan is to make agreements with other national producers of statistics. Regular meetings will be held with stakeholders to discuss common interests, coordination and to raise awareness of Statistics Iceland needs. These groups might be two: other national producers, and owners of registers.

Expected outcome

A document describing the roles of the thematic/topic based groups will be ready by first quarter of 2016. The first meetings in all of the groups have been held before the end of 2016.

Recommendation 4

A Methodological Advisory Committee, with external academic and other appropriate representation, should be established. Its remit — ideally the National Statistical System — and roles and responsibilities, and membership, should be publicised.

Action Plan

Since methodological work has mostly been planned and executed in a de-centralized manner at Statistics Iceland, there has not been a need for a Methodological Advi-

sory Committee. Now, as the planning and documentation of methodology has been shifting to a centralized organization (while the execution will still be de-centralized) the need for such a committee is apparent. Statistics Iceland therefore plans to set up such a committee which will consist of experts both from Statistics Iceland and from other institutions, for example the Central Bank of Iceland, the University of Iceland, major research entities, and relevant national statistical authorities. The possibility of including experts from other national statistical institutions from the European Statistical System will be examined. This project will start in the first quarter of 2015 when draft rules for nominations to the committee and dismissal of its members will be laid out. The Methodological Advisory Committee will be formed before the end of 2015.

Expected outcome

Formal cooperation between Statistics Iceland and external experts on methodological issues will be in place before the end of 2015 in order to support harmonization of methods and the provision of appropriate training. The main role of the committee will be to offer guidance on the construction of methodological guidelines, best practices and other relevant matters in the development and implementation of coordinated and harmonized methodology at Statistics Iceland.

Recommendation 5

A plan for the National Statistical System (clearly identifying European Statistics) should be developed and published, and progress reported regularly.

Action Plan

The Icelandic National Statistical system is highly centralised, with only few actors. Article 3 of the Statistics Act requires Statistics Iceland to coordinate official statistical activities. Statistics Iceland publishes work programme, but there is no similar plan for the National Statistical System as a whole. As the system is highly centralised there is not as much risk of overlap and possible inefficiencies due to double work as could be the case in more decentralised system. However a plan for the National Statistical System would strengthen the coordination role of Statistics Iceland. This project will start in 2015 and be finished before end of 2017 with the publication of a national statistical plan. As a first step there will be discussions with the biggest producer in Iceland, The Central bank of Iceland, with the aim to align the release calendars on published statistics. Meetings with other producers of statistics, on next year's statistical programme, will be held regularly. This would only apply to producers approved as a part of the National Statistical System.

Expected outcome

Plan or programme for the National Statistical System has been published before the end of 2017 and it will be updated on a regular basis.

Recommendation 6

Membership of the Quality Council should be broadened to include representatives of users and experts.

Action Plan

Statistics Iceland plans to develop its quality management system to make it more user-oriented (see recommendation 21) utilizing user surveys, user groups (see recommendation 2), and establishing a process for improvement suggestions. In particular, the redefined user groups will serve the purpose of this recommendation. Do to the nature of the Quality Council and its agenda, there are no plans to broaden its membership.

Expected outcome

See expected outcomes under recommendations 2 and 21.

Recommendation 7

Membership of the Confidentiality Committee should be broadened to include relevant external experts from, for example, the research community (This would require a revision of article 7C of the “Rules of Procedure”).

Action Plan

The aim is to review the procedure for micro-data access in order to make it more effective for the scientific community and less risky as regards confidentiality. This will primarily be done by simplifying the present structures within Statistics Iceland such as the Confidentiality Committee through renewed mandate, well defined responsibilities and operating procedures as well as by introducing safe IT-solutions. To better reflect user needs for information the Confidential Committee will be extended to include external experts on a permanent basis.

Statistics Iceland has a clear legal mandate and is positively inclined towards further utilization of micro-data. Past years’ experiences have however been that the organization has some problems in handling the issue. User opinions stating that applying for micro-data access can be cumbersome are supporting that conclusion. Internal projects regarding services on one hand and on confidentiality on the other, also stress the need to review these procedure.

The action is based on internal work-force and will require active cooperation with users.

In order to verify the results of the action Statistics Iceland will ask internal and external stakeholders to assess the outcome. This will be done through Statistics Iceland’s User Satisfaction Survey and through other specific means of assessment. The action is expected to finish by first quarter 2015.

Expected outcome

Renewed mandate and operating procedures published on Statistics Iceland's web.

More effective procedures reflecting user needs will be implemented.

The first meeting with broadened external membership has been held by first quarter 2015.

Recommendation 8

Statistics Iceland should discuss with the EFTA secretariat, and if necessary successive Presidencies, the scope to be granted observer status at the Council Working Party for Statistics' meetings.

Action Plan

This issue will be discussed on EFTA statistical meeting in July 2014. As the EFTA countries are not represented in the Council Working Party for Statistics, Statistics Iceland is sometimes unaware of changes and their effects on regulation that has been approved by the ESS. This is of a growing concern as amendments to statistical regulations have recently been more common in the CWPS phase. Therefore it would be very helpful to have better information on the process and proposed amendments to statistical regulations.

Expected outcome

Observer status at the Council Working Party for Statistics' meetings or access to the minutes of the Council Working Party for Statistics, if accepted.

Recommendation 9

Statistics Iceland should publish transparent plans and full descriptions of the role and functions of the Research Unit.

Action Plan

The Research Unit makes and publishes the national Economic Forecast, which is the basis for the Budget of the Central Government. The Research Unit gets pre-release access to quarterly National Accounts statistics and this access is publicly documented on Statistics Iceland website. More detailed and formal description of the role of the Research Unit is needed and its interactions with other internal and external actors, especially the Ministry of Finance. Finish by end of 2014.

Expected outcome

Document describing the role and functions of the Research Unit published on the web of Statistics Iceland and its content made clear to the relevant agents by the end of 2014.

Recommendation 10

Statistics Iceland should review formalise and publish all data sharing agreements—and should use this exercise to further enhance its understanding of the quality of administrative data, to explore access to other sources of administrative data, and to provide transparency about flows of data.

Action Plan

The purpose of the action is to improve Statistics Iceland's governance by coordinating, formalising and restructuring Statistics Iceland's access to administrative data through data sharing agreements. Expected results are enhanced efficiency, increased knowledge of data-owners data management leading to further understanding of the quality of administrative data and better information to users on quality and data flows. Statistics Iceland uses administrative data to produce statistics, as this is both efficient and reduces the burden on respondents. The biggest holders of administrative data are the Tax Authorities, Directorate of Customs and Registers Iceland. Statistics Iceland has also access to register information from a number of other organisations. Some agreements are already in place, but the action will strive towards standardisation and extended use of agreements with all main providers of administrative data.

This project will start in 2015 and be finished before end of 2016.

Expected outcome

Data sharing agreements have been formalised and published on Statistics Iceland's website before the end of 2016.

Recommendation 11

The production of methodological guidelines should be prioritised.

Action Plan

As the planning, execution and documentation of methodological matters has traditionally been de-centralized at Statistics Iceland, methodological guidelines produced by the institution are few and fragmented. As the structure has shifted to a more centralized setup with regards to planning and documenting methodology, methodological guidelines are imperative. On the other hand, as the resources available to do this type of work are scarce it has to be well planned and be allowed to be more of a long-time goal. In order to keep the scope of the project manageable from the standpoint of the methodological unit of Statistics Iceland, methodological guidelines will, to begin with, be created for five selected methods; statistical disclosure control, seasonal adjustments, data editing, imputation, and weighting. The project started in 2013 by writing guidelines on statistical disclosure control. It is expected to be finished before end of 2017 (see also recommendation 22).

Expected outcome

Before the end of 2017, the project should result in documented methodological guidelines that have been introduced and explained to employees working in the statistical process along with practical solutions to implement these same guidelines in the production processes of Statistics Iceland.

Recommendation 12

The desirability of transferring responsibility for the production of European Statistics currently produced by small Other National Authorities to Statistics Iceland should be considered.

Action Plan

The Icelandic National Statistical System is rather concentrated and only few producers, where Statistics Iceland and the Central Bank of Iceland are the far biggest producers. Other producers are very small and do not have the infrastructure to fulfil the requirements set in the CoP, as statistics are only a minor part of their operation. In some cases it is desirable to transfer the responsibility for the production of statistics to Statistics Iceland, but in other instances these institutions have expertise in the relevant field that is essential for the production. Statistics Iceland is in the process of making contracts with other national producers in order to either move statistical production to Statistics Iceland or further formalize the coordination with clear responsibilities. Each case has to be evaluated and this action is also connected to recommendation no. 3. This project will start with a review of other producers in 2015 and be finished by end of 2015. Early 2014, statistics on research and development was transferred to Statistics Iceland

Expected outcome

Before the end of 2015, formal agreements will be made with other producers of European statistics (Central Bank of Iceland, The Environmental Agency of Iceland, and National Energy Authority); in some other cases the production will be moved to Statistics Iceland.

Recommendation 13

A benchmarking exercise should be undertaken as part of reviewing Statistics Iceland's business model.

Action Plan

Statistics Iceland has developed its process model that applies to all of its processes. In the case of the statistical production process the model is almost identical to with the GSBPM version 5.0. To fully implement the model it needs to be strongly supported by the management of the organization. To further enhance compliance with the CoP this model will be reviewed after a benchmarking exercise at another statistical institute. This project will start in the last quarter of 2015 and be finished before July 2016.

Expected outcome

Before July 2016, a revision of the process model will be ready in the form of a report following a benchmarking visit to another statistical institute.

Recommendation 14

Statistics Iceland should discuss with the Government the scope for additional funding to meet the European requirements.

Action Plan

As a consequence of budget cuts after the collapse of the Icelandic banking system, Statistics Iceland has not been able to meet demands of the European Statistical programme and had to reduce some services. The main problem has been the different treatment of EFTA relevant EU regulation on statistics in the Budget Process as compared with other similar regulations. The main goal is to make changes to the implementation of European regulations on statistics ensuring the same treatment and cost estimates in the Budget Process as applies to other EFTA relevant EU regulation. The new process will be in place before year end 2014.

Expected outcome

New administrative regulation on the incorporation of European regulations on statistics into Icelandic law, ensuring the same administrative procedures as applies to other similar regulations as concerns cost estimates and Budgeting will be in place before the end of 2014.

Recommendation 15

Statistics Iceland should develop a strategic training plan that is aligned with its Business Plan.

Action Plan

Statistics Iceland's main strength is its highly qualified staff, and continuous vocational training is an important part of the human resource policy. In January 2013 a new career development policy was implemented. This aimed to enhance the knowledge of employees by providing access to courses, both domestic and international, and by providing peer-tutoring. To bring long term vision to vocational training and better ensure the necessary skills and competencies are present within the organization a strategic training plan should exist. Such a plan should be made with the foresight to support the organization in adapting to new developments coming from ESS. Documented training plan has been introduced to all employees before end of 2015.

Expected outcome

Documented strategic training plan which is aligned with Statistics Iceland's business plan has been introduced to all employees before the end of 2015.

Recommendation 16

Partnerships with the scientific community should be strengthened. For example involvement of users in methodological discussions should be formalised and the scientific community could be involved in professional training of Statistics Iceland staff.

Action Plan

Statistics Iceland has a long tradition of user involvement through user groups in specific statistical domains. This has, however, not resulted in a great deal of cooperation between the Icelandic scientific community and Statistics Iceland, one reason being that there has not been a formal user group in this area of interest. Therefore a further partnership with academia is most welcome as it will result in a higher quality of published official statistics. In order to increase user involvement and strengthen collaboration with the scientific community there are two actions foreseen.

1) Establish a formal user group on the topic of scientific access to confidential data and service to the researcher community. The construction of this group will be done in cooperation with the major research entities in Iceland. This will allow for a more dynamic dialogue of the topical issues with the scientific community and allow Statistics Iceland to better serve this important group. This should be finished by end of 2015.

2) Existing user groups have not been granted a formal status with regard to how official statistics are made by Statistics Iceland, for example related to the methods being applied in the statistical production. This matter should be discussed with users of the statistics as they often have technical expertise and insights into the methods used for the production. Therefore a further partnership with academia is most welcome as it will result in a higher quality of published official statistics. Partnership with the scientific community will be strengthened in 2015 with the formation of a Methodological Advisory Committee (see recommendation 4). It is foreseen that the Methodological Advisory Committee will be able to identify possible gaps in the statistical knowledge and expertise of staff. This can be used to better plan staff training and to find the appropriate lectures which often come from the academia. This will be finish by end of 2016.

Expected outcome

1) User group, on scientific access to confidential data and service to the researcher community, will be formed. The first meeting will be held before end of 2015.

2) Methodological Advisory Committee will be established. This will increase the involvement of the scientific community in methodological discussions. Further, this will increase the utilization of external scientists, researchers, and academics in the methodological training of staff at Statistics Iceland. This will be finish by end of 2016.

Recommendation 17

Collaboration with other National Statistical Institutes on complex issues such as quality indicators should be strengthened.

Action Plan

Collaboration with other statistical institutions has been very important to Statistics Iceland. Such collaboration continues to be an ongoing process. Statistics Iceland has had a formal cooperation with the statistical institutions in the Nordic countries for decades. This covers for example quality indicators, non-response, and other issues. Also when new production is planned Statistics Iceland contacts statistical institutions both Nordic and other institutions within the ESS. In 2014 such collaboration will take place between Statistics Iceland and Statistics Finland on methodological issues and internal auditing. Plans for the following years have not yet been laid out and there are no plans to centralize the implementation of this recommendation since present arrangement has been quite efficient.

Expected outcome

In the course of 2014 a stronger professional relationship will be established between the above two statistical offices in the fields of quality and methodology.

Recommendation 18

Statistics Iceland should prioritise the development of a business register in order to comply with the Regulation on Business Registers and to meet national needs.

Action Plan

In 2012 department on Business Statistics was established in Statistics Iceland. Preparations for building a Business Register and production of STS and SBS statistics started in the spring of 2012 and for 2013 and 2014 further funding and resources have been added to the project. In early 2014 a second version of the Business Register was released and further versions will be released in 2014 and 2015. Early 2015 the first of the SBS data will be produced and by end of 2017 it is planned to have all the variables available and a fully functional Business Register in place. This is in line with the action plan worked in cooperation with Eurostat in the accession process.

Expected outcome

Business Register, which allows for a smooth production of STS and SBS variables, complies with the Regulation on Business Registers, and meets European and national needs by the end of 2017.

Recommendation 19

Statistics Iceland should continue to enhance its website, including graphical illustrations of statistics.

Action Plan

Statistics Iceland uses the website as the main channel of dissemination. Therefore emphasis has to be on user friendliness and easy navigation. Also users have requested more visual presentations and easier exportation of graphs into other media. To meet these demands Statistics Iceland is currently building a new web. In addition Statistics Iceland has started a project to increase the selection of time series in web tables. In developing the web, users will be consulted by user surveys.

Expected outcome

The new website of Statistics Iceland will open in 2014 with emphasis on visual presentations and easy access. Exportation of data and graphs will be easier and the web will be compatible for hand held tools such as tablets and smart phones.

Recommendation 20

The explanation of statistical messages, in bulletins and reports, should be improved.

Action Plan

A strategy and additional resources are required to support initiatives to enhance statistical analysis in publications. By improving cooperation in dissemination work between organizational units at Statistics Iceland an important step is taken towards increased value and quality of statistical information for users. Better explanations and setting the new statistics in context with other information adds value for the user. Further training and an annual training course for expert staff on how to write messages and bulletins will be part of the training policy, see recommendation 15. This project will start in fourth quarter 2014 by evaluation of current condition, and is expected to be finished by fourth quarter 2016 with a new evaluation and a report on improvements.

Expected outcome

The outcome of this project would be more and improved explanations and storytelling to set statistics in wider context in order to enhance their value for users. Annual training courses will be planned and the first course will be held in third quarter of 2015. Report on improvements with evaluations before and after, will be ready in fourth quarter 2016.

Recommendation 21

Statistics Iceland should review the Quality Management System from a user-perspective.

Action Plan

Create a process for suggestions and complaints from users. Create a process where these suggestions and complaints, together with results from user surveys, user groups, and external and internal audits, will be an important part of the continu-

ous improvement system. This work has already started and is expected to be finished by end of 2016.

Expected outcome

The expected outcome, to be finished by the end of 2016, is an implemented and documented process for suggestions and complaints, and a document showing how suggestions, complaints, user surveys, discussions in user groups, and results from external and internal audits, are used as an integral part of the quality management system.

Recommendation 22

Statistics Iceland should prioritise the production of methodological documentation, and user-oriented metadata.

Action Plan

As is stated in recommendation 11 methodological guidelines will be made in the coming months and years. The implementation of the project commenced in 2013 and is expected to be finished before end of 2017. Statistics Iceland has been working over the last year on how to implement the single integrated metadata system for all its products. The development of this metadata system (both user and producer oriented) is underway and is expected to be operational by the end of 2014, although at this time it is not clear when it will be put into use as the grant agreement, which the current developmental work is based upon, was not expected to cover the implementation of the system. The funding of the implementation of the system is therefore at this moment not guaranteed. One of the main goals of this new system is to make it easier for users to gain access to relevant metadata.

Expected outcome

Before the end of 2017, documented methodological guidelines that have been introduced and explained to employees working in the statistical process will be published. Documents containing user-oriented metadata will be available to users.

Recommendation 23

Statistics Iceland should work more pro-actively with the media, including holding press conference and seminars, both to raise awareness of its work and to strengthen its communication capacity.

Action Plan

A project to raise awareness of Statistics Iceland and to strengthen Statistics Iceland communicational capacity with the press started in the spring of 2014. Some meetings with the media have taken place and further actions are planned. Although Statistics Iceland has had good relations with the media, this could be more strategic and proactive. Often published data does not get full coverage until users have published it in their own publications, one or two days after the original publication of the data.

These users often have their own agenda and thus influence the interpretation of media of the results. Part of the action is to improve Statistics Iceland news releases, see also recommendation no. 20. This project is aimed at making stronger connections to the media and more open communication in order to inform the media on data and news releases.

Expected outcome

There will be conferences on specific topics and press meetings explaining statistics and how to use the web to access information. Press meetings when publishing major results, such as the Census. First press conference will be held in 2014 and seminar for the media will take place in 2015. News agencies will be invited regularly to enhance better communication and to assign key contacts.

Recommendation 24

Statistics Iceland should publish and implement a revisions policy.

Action Plan

Statistics Iceland has currently no published revision policy, although revisions are disseminated when new statistics are released and users informed in advance on the website. Therefore it is necessary to coordinate existing procedures and publish a revisions policy in line with the CoP. This action is planned to be finished by end of 2015.

Expected outcome

Documented and published revisions policy finished by the end of 2015.

Annex A

Programme for the Peer Review visit to Iceland 3–6 September 2013

Day 1 (Tuesday)	Agenda	Organisation	Participants
9.00–9.30	Welcome and introduction of programme, and organisational matters.	Statistics Iceland	Ólafur Hjálmarsson, Elsa Knútsdóttir, Hrafnhildur Arnkelsdóttir, Magnús S. Magnússon, Ólafur Arnar Þórðarson, Rósmundur Guðnason
9.30–10.30	General information session with a description of how the national statistical system is organised.	Statistics Iceland	Ólafur Hjálmarsson, Elsa Knútsdóttir, Hrafnhildur Arnkelsdóttir, Magnús S. Magnússon, Ólafur Arnar Þórðarson, Rósmundur Guðnason
10.30–10.45	Coffee break.		
10.45–11.45	Coordination role of the NSI.	Statistics Iceland	Ólafur Hjálmarsson, Elsa Knútsdóttir, Hrafnhildur Arnkelsdóttir, Magnús S. Magnússon, Ólafur Arnar Þórðarson,
11.45–12.45	Cooperation/level of integration in the ESS.	Statistics Iceland	Ólafur Hjálmarsson, Elsa Knútsdóttir, Hrafnhildur Arnkelsdóttir, Magnús S. Magnússon, Ólafur Arnar Þórðarson, Rósmundur Guðnason
12.45–13.30	Lunch.		
13.30–14.45	Meeting with main users – Ministries and other public/private institutions.	Prime Minister's Office Ministry of Industries and Innovation Ministry of Education, Science and Culture Ministry of Foreign Affairs Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs The Central Bank of Iceland Fed. of Icelandic Industries The Icelandic Tourist Industry Association Fed. of Trade and Services Federation of State and Municipal Employees Association of Academics Arion Bank Icelandic Financial Services Association	Héðinn Unnsteinsson, Policy Analyst Margrét Sæmundsdóttir, Senior Economic Analyst Gunnar J. Árnason, Analyst Ólafur Sigurðsson, Minister Counsellor Elín Guðjónsdóttir, Head of Unit Dep. of Taxation Tómas Örn Kristinsson, Dir. Statistics Bjarni Már Gylfason, Economist Gunnar Valur Sveinsson, Project Manager Lárus Ólafsson, Lawyer Kristinn Bjarnason, Economist Georg Brynjarsson, Economist Brynjar Örn Ólafsson, Analyst Yngvi Örn Kristinsson, Economist
14.45–15.00	Coffee break.		
15.00–16.00	Meeting with main users – Media.	Vísbending / Frjáls verslun (Business magazine)	Benedikt Jóhannesson, MD and Editor
16.00–17.00	Meeting with main users – Scientific community.	<i>University of Iceland:</i> – MS Prog. in Health Economics – Fac. of History and Philosophy – Fac. of Business Admin. – School of Education – School of Education <i>Reykjavik University:</i> – School of Business – School of Business	Tinna Laufey Ásgeirsdóttir, Director Guðmundur Jónsson, Professor Sveinn Agnarsson, Associate Prof. Ólöf Garðarsdóttir, Professor Jón Torfi Jónsson, Professor Ólafur Ísleifsson, Associate Professor Katrín Ólafsdóttir, Associate Professor
Day 2 (Wednesday)	Agenda	Organisation	Participants
9.00–10.30	The statistical law and related legislation (CoP principles 1, 2, 5 and 6).	Statistics Iceland	Ólafur Hjálmarsson, Magnús S. Magnússon

10.30–10.45	Coffee break.		
10.45–12.45	Programming, planning and resources (CoP principles 3, 9 and 10).	Statistics Iceland	Ólafur Hjálmarsson, Elsa Knútsdóttir, Ólafur Arnar Þórðarson
12.45–13.30	Lunch.		
13.30–15.00	Quality (organisational str., tools, monitoring) (CoP principles 4 and 11 to 15).	Statistics Iceland	Anton Örn Karlsson, Hrafnhildur Arnkelsdóttir, Reynir Kristjánsson
15.00–15.15	Coffee break.		
15.15–16.45	Dissemination and confidentiality (CoP principles 5, 6 and 15).	Statistics Iceland	Björgvín Sigurðsson, Hrafnhildur Arnkelsdóttir, Magnús S. Magnússon
16.45–17.30	Population statistics based on census.	Statistics Iceland	Magnús S. Magnússon, Ómar Harðarson
19.30–21.30	Dinner at Fiskfélagið (Fish Company).		Ólafur, Elsa, Hrafnhildur, Magnús, Ólafur Arnar, Reynir, Rósmundur

Day 3 (Thursday)	Agenda	Organisation	Participants
09.00–10.15	Meeting with NCB, mainly as producer of European Statistics.	The Central Bank of Iceland	Ríkharður Ríkharðsson, Head of Unit Balance Payments
10.15–10.30	Coffee break.		
10.30–12.00	Methodology, data collection, data processing and admin. data (CoP principles 2, 7 and 8).	Statistics Iceland	Anton Örn Karlsson, Berglind Björk Hreinsdóttir, Björgvín Sigurðsson, Hrafnhildur Arnkelsdóttir
12.00–12.45	Lunch.		
12.45–13.45	This time was booked to continue the methodology meeting above, but proved not to be needed.		
13.45–14.45	Meeting with junior staff.	Statistics Iceland	See list in Annex B.
14.45–15.00	Coffee break.		
15.00–16.15	Meeting with other national authorities + Environmental statistics.	The Environment Agency The National Energy Authority Statistics Iceland	Gunnar Jónsson, Subj. Manager Nature Ágústa Loftsdóttir, Manager Fuels and Renew. Energy Kristinn Einarsson, Senior Manager EMRE Albert Sigurðsson Rósmundur Guðnason

Day 4 (Friday)	Agenda	Organisation	Participants
09.00–10.30	Meeting with main data providers/respondents	Directorate of Fisheries Directorate of Customs Registers Iceland	Þorsteinn Hilmarsson, Dir. of Information Department Guðni Ólafsson, Head of Unit Revision/Audit Ingi Þór Finnsson, Engineer
10.30–10.45	Coffee break		
10.45–12.45	Meeting with senior management: conclusions and recommendations	Statistics Iceland	Ólafur Hjálmarsson, Elsa Knútsdóttir, Hrafnhildur Arnkelsdóttir, Magnús S. Magnússon, Ólafur Arnar Þórðarson, Rósmundur Guðnason
12.45–13.30	Lunch		

Annex B

List of participants — Peer Review visit to Iceland 3–6 September 2013

Peer reviewers

1. Richard Laux, Director, Assessment Programme, UK Statistics Authority (Chair)
2. Marie Bohatá, Deputy Director General, Eurostat
3. Marina Gandolfo, Coordinator, International relations, ISTAT

Participants from Statistics Iceland

1. Ólafur Hjálmarsson, Director-General
2. Albert Sigurðsson, Expert, Environmental Statistics
3. Anton Örn Karlsson, Methodologist
4. Berglind Björk Hreinsdóttir, Head of Unit, Surveys
5. Björgvin Sigurðsson, Head of Unit, IT and Dissemination
6. Elsa Knútsdóttir, Financial Manager
7. Hrafnhildur Arnkeldsdóttir, Director, Resources and Services
8. Magnús S. Magnússon, Director, Social Statistics
9. Ólafur Arnar Þórðarson, Human Resources and International affairs
10. Ómar Harðarson, Leading Statistician, Census
11. Reynir Kristjánsson, Quality Manager
12. Rósmundur Guðnason, Director, Economic Statistics

Junior staff, Statistics Iceland

1. Alister Faulkes, IT and Dissemination
2. Árni Fannar Sigurðsson, Business Registers
3. Hjörvar Pétursson, Working Conditions and Census
4. Ingvi Jón Gunnarsson, IT and Dissemination
5. Snorri Gunnarsson, Price Statistics and Indices
6. Violetta Calian, Working Conditions and Census
7. Víkingur Guðmundsson, Price Statistics and Indices

Other participants

1. Héðinn Unnsteinsson, Policy Analyst, Prime Minister's Office
2. Margrét Sæmundsdóttir, Senior Economic Analyst, Ministry of Industries and Innovation
3. Gunnar J. Árnason, Analyst, Ministry of Education, Science and Culture
4. Ólafur Sigurðsson, Minister Counsellor, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
5. Elín Guðjónsdóttir, Head of Unit Dep. of Taxation, Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs
6. Tómas Örn Kristinsson, Dir. Statistics, The Central Bank of Iceland
7. Bjarni Már Gylfason, Economist, Fed. of Icelandic Industries
8. Gunnar Valur Sveinsson, Project Manager, The Icelandic Tourist Industry Association
9. Lárus Ólafsson, Lawyer, Fed. of Trade and Services
10. Kristinn Bjarnason, Economist, Federation of State and Municipal Employees
11. Georg Brynjarsson, Economist, Association of Academics
12. Brynjar Örn Ólafsson, Analyst, Arion Bank

13. Yngvi Örn Kristinsson, Economist, Icelandic Financial Services Association
14. Benedikt Jóhannesson, MD and Editor, Vísbending / Frjáls verslun (Business magazine)
15. Tinna Laufey Ásgeirsdóttir, Director, MS Programme in Health Economics, University of Iceland
16. Guðmundur Jónsson, Professor, Faculty of History and Philosophy, University of Iceland
17. Sveinn Agnarsson, Associate Professor, Faculty of Business Administration, University of Iceland
18. Ólöf Garðarsdóttir, Professor, School of Education, University of Iceland
19. Jón Torfi Jónsson, Professor, School of Education, University of Iceland
20. Ólafur Ísleifsson, Associate Professor, School of Business, Reykjavik University
21. Katrín Ólafsdóttir, Associate Professor, School of Business, Reykjavik University
22. Ríkharður Ríkharðsson, Head of Unit Balance Payments, The Central Bank of Iceland
23. Gunnar Jónsson, Subj. Manager Nature, The Environment Agency
24. Ágústa Loftsdóttir, Manager Fuels and Renew. Energy, The National Energy Authority
25. Kristinn Einarsson, Senior Manager EMRE, The National Energy Authority
26. Þorsteinn Hilmarsson, Director of Information Department, Directorate of Fisheries
27. Guðni Ólafsson, Head of Unit Revision / Audit, Directorate of Customs
28. Ingi Þór Finnsson, Engineer, Registers Iceland

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