

STATISTICS AND REGISTRATION SERVICE ACT 2007

EXPLANATORY NOTES

BACKGROUND TO PART 1

3. The United Kingdom's statistical system has historically been decentralised. Prior to the commencement of this Act, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) was the central producer of statistics in the United Kingdom but government departments and agencies other than the ONS have always produced a large proportion of statistics. Official statistical work covers a wide range of tasks (including the collection, analysis and publication of statistics, statistical support for departmental and agency functions, and policy-related work for Ministers) and all areas of national life.
4. The ONS was an Executive Agency accountable to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, as described in the *ONS Framework Document*¹. It was headed by the National Statistician who was concurrently the Registrar General for England and Wales. Consequently, the General Register Office (GRO), which administers the system for the registration of births, deaths, marriages and civil partnerships in England and Wales, was part of the ONS. The ONS was also responsible for the creation and maintenance of the National Health Service Central Register (NHSCR).
5. Prior to the commencement of this Act, the statistical system in the UK was governed by the non-statutory *Framework for National Statistics*² published in 2000. The Framework introduced a number of key structures and concepts, including the post of 'National Statistician', the Government's chief statistical adviser, with operational independence from Ministers; the concept of 'National Statistics', which aimed to provide an accurate, up-to-date, comprehensive and meaningful description of the economy and society of the UK, underpinned by professional standards as set out in a 'Code of Practice'; and the independent 'Statistics Commission', which advised on the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics.
6. Following the consultation, the Act provides for the creation of a new body, the Statistics Board, with a statutory responsibility to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. The Act establishes the Board as a Non-Ministerial Department, acting at arm's length from Ministers, composed of a majority of non-executive members. The Board's responsibilities will cover the whole UK statistical system, including England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
7. The Board is the legal successor body to the ONS. The ONS's responsibilities other than those relating to civil registration are the responsibility of the new Board. The Board also has powers to produce statistics, provide statistical services and promote statistical research. It will undertake the statistical functions of the Registrar General,

¹ http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about_ns/downloads/ons_framework.pdf

² Office for National Statistics (2000) *Framework for National Statistics* www.statistics.gov.uk/about/national_statistics/documentation.asp

*These notes refer to the Statistics and Registration Service
Act 2007 (c.18) which received Royal Assent on 26 July 2007*

including the preparation and publication of the census. The ONS and the Statistics Commission ceases to exist.

8. The Act leaves unchanged many other aspects of the statistical system, including:
 - the Government Statistical Service (GSS), a professional grouping of around 7,000 civil servants who collect, analyse and disseminate statistics, working in the Board, in government departments and agencies and in the Devolved Administrations in Scotland and Wales; and
 - the existence of departmental Heads of Profession for Statistics (HoPs) in government departments or agencies that produce National Statistics.