
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Andrew Dilnot CBE

Nick Hurd MP
Minister for Civil Society
Cabinet Office
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LONDON
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3 May 2012

Dear Mr Hurd

OFFICIAL STATISTICS AND THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR

I am pleased to enclose a short report by the Statistics Authority. It reviews both the use of official statistics by the voluntary sector and the adequacy of the published statistics about the scale and activities of that sector.

The report concludes (paragraph 19) that the use and potential use of official statistics by the voluntary sector would be enhanced by closer engagement between representatives of voluntary bodies and some of the many bodies that produce relevant official statistics. It is our view that this would help those government bodies to develop a fuller understanding of the voluntary sector's needs and ensure that official statistics are published in ways that are helpful to the sector.

We conclude (paragraph 25) that there may be a need for government departments to review together the adequacy, for their own purposes, of the statistics they collect about the voluntary sector. We see a shortage of regular and timely data in this area and we think it likely that this will inhibit the monitoring of the beneficial impact of the voluntary sector and its contribution to the Big Society and other Government initiatives.

We note (paragraph 26) that the Government, in a recent White Paper, has already called on providers of public services from all sectors to publish information on performance and user satisfaction to improve transparency and to allow the public to make informed choices. This is likely to lead a greater pool of data which, if properly co-ordinated, could help to produce a coherent national picture and allow the activities and outcomes of voluntary bodies to be compared with others.

We also suggest (paragraph 27) that there would be merit in further discussion of the standards and principles that should apply to the production of statistical data by, at least, the larger voluntary bodies and we would welcome the Statistics Authority's involvement in such discussions.

The report was produced for the Statistics Authority under the direction of Richard Alldritt, Director General for Monitoring and Assessment, and he will be drawing the conclusions to the attention of relevant government departments and external bodies.

I am copying this letter to the Bernard Jenkin MP, Chair of the House of Commons Public Administration Committee, to Rt. Hon. Francis Maude MP, Minister for the Cabinet Office, and to Jil Matheson, the National Statistician.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Dilnot". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and 'D'.

Andrew Dilnot CBE

Monitoring Brief

Monitoring Brief 5/12
3 May 2012

Official Statistics and the Voluntary Sector

Introduction

1. This Monitoring Brief explores how the voluntary sector uses official statistics, and how it engages with bodies that produce them. It is the first in a series of Briefs looking at the use made of official statistics in different sectors. The statistical needs of the voluntary sector are relatively under-researched compared with those of, for example, central and local government, or the business sector. This Brief is not intended to be a comprehensive review but we have consulted a small number of voluntary organisations about their specific use of official statistics (Annex A). In the course of this research, we have also drawn some conclusions about the adequacy of the statistical information publicly available about the voluntary sector itself. Our conclusions are at paragraphs 16 to 27 below.
2. The voluntary sector is defined and described in various ways. The Government's Office for Civil Society refers to the 'voluntary, community and social enterprise sector' as *civil society*; it has also been known as the *third sector*. For the purposes of this Brief we simply refer to the 'voluntary sector' and focus on those organisations run by volunteers or largely funded by voluntary contributions, such as registered charities and community groups.
3. Of course, one statistical need of the voluntary sector, and of many others, is to have adequate statistical information about the voluntary sector itself. The main source of statistics about the sector is the National Council for Voluntary Organisations¹. NCVO publishes *The UK Civil Society Almanac*² (*Almanac*) which builds on information from the Charity Commission's database³ of registered charities, the Labour Force Survey⁴, the Office for National Statistics Opinions Survey⁵ and other sources. With many voluntary sector organisations being small and not necessarily captured on the Charity Commission's database – the picture is incomplete. Until 2011, the Government's *Citizenship Survey*⁶ provided information about the nature and extent of volunteering, but it has now been discontinued as part of public expenditure cuts. The NCVO estimates that there were around 900,000⁷ organisations operating in the wider civil society in the UK in 2009/10 (the most recent year for which estimates are available). This included 163,800 registered charitable bodies, with around 765,000 paid staff (2% of the UK workforce) and with a total expenditure of around £36.3bn. NCVO estimates there are a further 600,000⁸ small, informal organisations. These organisations, sometimes termed 'below the

¹The voluntary sector is represented by NCVO in England, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations in Scotland (SCVO), the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) in Wales, and the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) in Northern Ireland.

²<http://data.ncvo-vol.org.uk/>

³<http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/showcharity/registerofcharities/RegisterHomePage.aspx>. The Charity Commission does not hold a record of all charities, as those with an annual income of less than £5,000 are not required to register their status. This means that the available statistics are focused on the sub-sector of the voluntary sector that are registered charities with incomes over £5,000 – so excluding many small community groups.

⁴ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/all-releases.html?definition=tcm%3A77-21589>

⁵Information on charitable giving is based on data gathered by the ONS Opinions Survey: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/who-we-are/services/opinions--omnibus--survey/opinions--omnibus--survey.html>

⁶<http://www.communities.gov.uk/communities/research/citizenshipsurvey/>

⁷*UK Civil Society Almanac 2012*, National Council for Voluntary Organisations; see footnote 2

⁸According to research conducted by NCVO in 2001;

radar' groups, are the focus of a programme of research by the Third Sector Research Centre⁹ (TSRC), which aims to explore their role, function, impact and experience.

4. Voluntary organisations conduct a wide range of *activities*¹⁰, which are often grouped into sub-sectors or industries. The International Classification of Non-Profit Organisations allocates an organisation by its main activity type to help users make comparisons between groups of organisations; however, in reality many organisations undertake multiple activities. The main activity of the sector is in providing social services, which includes activities like caring for older people and looked-after children, through to providing assistance for people who are registered blind. Almost one fifth of all voluntary sector organisations provide social services. Voluntary organisations in the UK exist to assist a wide range of *beneficiaries*¹¹, covering all demographic groups within the population, as well as the environment, animals and people across the world.

Box 1: Main activities and beneficiaries of voluntary sector organisations, 2009/10

<p>Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social services – 19%• Culture and recreation – 14%• Religion – 8%• Parent Teacher Associations – 8%• Grant-making foundations – 7%	<p>Beneficiaries:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children and young people – 58%• General public - 41%• Older People – 28%• People with disabilities – 27%• Other charities – 17%
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Source: UK Civil Society Almanac 2012

5. The remainder of the voluntary sector includes, for example, youth groups, village halls, law and advocacy, research, and other intermediary bodies. The sector is represented by NCVO in England, the Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations in Scotland (SCVO), the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) in Wales and the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) in Northern Ireland.
6. Many people are familiar with the largest charities, but the majority of the UK's registered charities are small; 53% of them have an annual income of less than £10,000. A further 32% have an annual income of more than £10,000 but less than £100,000. Collectively, those organisations with an income of less than £100,000 account for only around 6% of the sector's total income. By contrast, around 75% of the annual income is accounted for by fewer than 3% of the biggest charities.
7. Since 2000 the sector's statutory income from government has grown faster than total public spending¹²; whilst this is a measure of 'inputs', NCVO suggests¹³ that "voluntary sector organisations are playing a greater role in public service delivery", but there is limited data available to quantify this. The Government's 'Big Society'¹⁴ initiative envisages the voluntary sector playing an even greater role in the delivery of aspects of some public services in the future, such as education, justice and health. The strategy sets out plans to 'support the creation and expansion of mutuals, co-operatives, charities and social enterprises', and to involve them further in public sector delivery. For example, the Home Office's Integrated Offender Management (IOM) strategy aims to reduce re-offending by encouraging a multi-

⁹ <http://www.tsrc.ac.uk/research/belowtheradarbtr/tabid/450/default.aspx>

¹⁰ <http://data.ncvo-vol.org.uk/almanac/voluntary-sector/scope/what-activities-does-the-voluntary-sector-undertake/>

¹¹ <http://data.ncvo-vol.org.uk/almanac/voluntary-sector/scope/who-and-what-benefits-from-the-work-of-the-voluntary-sector/>

¹² <http://data.ncvo-vol.org.uk/almanac/voluntary-sector/scope/what-is-the-voluntary-sectors-involvement-in-public-service-delivery/>

¹³ <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/savs>. This report was based on special analyses of the voluntary sector's contribution to public service delivery, undertaken by NCVO and ONS.

¹⁴ In 2010, the UK Government launched its plans for the 'Big Society' <http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/news/building-big-society>. One element of this was to improve transparency by publishing more government data. It will be increasingly important for charities and other voluntary organisations to be able to access and use government official statistics and other data to monitor and evaluate the impact of their work.

agency approach to targeting and managing those offenders who local areas consider are committing most harm. As part of this initiative, the Home Office set up a small grants fund for voluntary organisations to work with these local partnerships as strategic partners (rather than just delivery partners). The Home Office has recently published a review¹⁵ of increasing the voluntary sectors involvement in IOM on its website.

Findings

Use of Official Statistics

8. Given the breadth of activities that voluntary sector organisations are involved in, it is unsurprising to find that they use a wide spectrum of official statistics.
9. The main use made is to *improve understanding of the subjects that voluntary sector organisations are addressing and to promote their cause*. This includes compiling and presenting material – both published reports and via web portals – to use in campaigns and to inform the development of policy, or producing information for others to refer to and use. Indeed, as well as being users of official statistics, some of the largest organisations act as producers of statistics in their own right, publishing a considerable volume of statistics and research and making this information accessible through their websites.
 - Age UK has a portal that provides information about policy and research; its 'Knowledge Hub'¹⁶ aims to provide accessible statistics on older people in the UK and internationally. Age UK also publishes *Evidence Reviews*: in-depth reports providing evidence to underpin decision making, fundraising, influencing and service commissioning. The reports bring together research from consultancy and academia and a range of official statistics from government – such as 'Excess Winter Deaths' (produced by ONS), as well as other vital events statistics, and statistics produced by the Department of Energy and Climate Change on fuel poverty. At a national level the information on its Knowledge Hub is used to influence government and develop policy for older people. The statistics are also used to support fundraising campaigns.
 - Shelter Scotland uses a number of official statistics – such as the Scottish Government's Operation of the Homeless Persons Legislation in Scotland, Housing Statistics for Scotland and the Scottish Household Survey – to help inform the charity's research and policy arguments, as well answering media enquiries.
 - Cancer Research UK publishes a range of statistics and factsheets on cancer rates, survival and mortality on its dedicated CancerStats¹⁷ online portal. This material is based on official statistics sources together with research and statistics that the charity funds and publishes.
 - Similarly, the British Heart Foundation¹⁸ (BHF) publishes a range of statistics and research drawing both on official statistics and on studies it has funded. It publishes an annual compendium¹⁹ that draws together statistics produced across the UK, including official statistics. The majority of the statistics are first published elsewhere, but the compendium includes some new statistics and presents contextual information about public health targets.
 - The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) publishes an annual report, *The State of the UK's Birds*²⁰, which gives an overview of the status of bird populations in the UK – a measure of biodiversity. This publication is an unusual example: rather than using official statistics it is a direct collaboration between the voluntary sector and Government organisations²¹. The statistics form the basis of the official statistics that

¹⁵<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/horr59/>

¹⁶<http://www.ageuk.org.uk/professional-resources-home/knowledge-hub-evidence-statistics/>

¹⁷<http://info.cancerresearchuk.org/cancerstats/>

¹⁸<http://www.heartstats.org>

¹⁹<http://www.bhf.org.uk/publications/view-publication.aspx?ps=1001546>

²⁰<http://www.rspb.org.uk/ourwork/science/sotukb/2011.aspx>

²¹*The state of the UK's birds 2011* was produced by a coalition of three Non Government Organisations – the RSPB, the British Trust for Ornithology and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust – and the UK Government's statutory nature conservation agencies – the Countryside Council for Wales, Natural England, Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs publishes on wild bird populations²².

- The national umbrella groups such as NCVO, SCVO, WCVA and NICVA bring together relevant statistics and research in one place to improve the accessibility of this information for their members. NCVO publishes a range of reports (including *Almanac*) which draw on official statistics. SCVO has an online evidence library²³ that makes use of an extensive range of official statistics and other sources, and is publicly available.

10. Other uses of official statistics by voluntary sector organisations include the following:

- *to help bids for resources* - NCVO told us that many charities use information from *Almanac* in funding bids, to demonstrate the scope of the work of the voluntary sector. Official statistics that describe a community (such as the Census or ONS's Neighbourhood Statistics²⁴) or the extent of a particular issue are likely to be used in funding bids by organisations that work in those areas. We are aware of attempts to use the ONS' Neighbourhood Statistics portal to access socio-economic statistics about the catchment area of a school, as the basis for bidding for resources from the local council for a new youth club.
- *to allocate resources* – for example, Shelter Scotland told us that it uses statistics on homeless people in Scotland to help target its resources towards those most at risk and to the particular geographic areas that have the highest incidence of homelessness.
- *to improve service provision* - The Royal National Institute for Blind People (RNIB) uses statistics on the number of people registered as having a visual impairment to inform discussions with health and social care service providers, with a view to improving the delivery of care packages for people registered as blind or partially sighted. Patients' groups use General Practice Patients Survey²⁵ statistics to benchmark their local General Practice and lobby for improvements.
- *to monitor their own performance and assess their impact* – with the voluntary sector's increasing involvement in provision of public services, there is greater focus not just on monitoring performance (for example, in terms of the outputs they produce) but also on monitoring the impact, in terms of the change that is achieved. When assessing their impact, the voluntary sector may use official statistics as denominators (when estimating the proportion of the population affected by a particular issue, for example) or to provide a basis for comparison. For example, BHF uses statistics on death rates and causes to help monitor progress against its 'Research Milestones' for heart disease²⁶. It also uses Home Office statistics on live animal testing to help monitor the general trends in animal research.

Voluntary sector needs, in relation to Official Statistics

11. Small voluntary organisations tend to need statistics about the *local area* in which they operate, but many official statistics are not available at a sufficiently local level. Where they do exist (such as from the Census, Neighbourhood Statistics, or local crime data) small area official statistics are used to target resources, to establish the extent of a problem or need in a local area and to compare with the national picture. It is likely that such statistics are under-used by the voluntary sector due to a lack of awareness that they exist.

12. As voluntary sector organisations have limited resources they tend to rely on statistics that are freely available. Most are not able to commission bespoke analyses or research. Many voluntary sector organisations – particularly the smaller organisations which make up the majority of the sector – are likely to lack statistical knowledge and expertise, so it is important

²²<http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/environment/biodiversity/wild-bird-populations-in-england-1970-to-2010/>

²³<http://www.scvoevidencelibrary.org.uk>

²⁴<http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/>

²⁵produced by the Department for Health -

<http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/PublishedSurvey/GPpatientsurvey2007/index.htm>

²⁶<http://www.bhf.org.uk/research/research-milestones.aspx>

that the statistics are *accessible and easy to use*, both in terms of being able to find them and in being *clearly-explained* in non-technical language.

13. Voluntary sector organisations are also likely to benefit, even more than their counterparts in other sectors, from *ongoing support* and *closer engagement with experts in producer bodies*: to highlight available statistics, explain the relevant quality considerations and to give analytical advice, though it is recognised that producer bodies' resources are limited. For umbrella groups, this closer engagement would include the opportunity to influence statistical planning in producer bodies, to ensure that their members' interests are taken into account. Such organisations (and the voluntary sector more widely) may also find value in increased engagement with the Royal Statistical Society's Statistics User Forum²⁷ (SUF), which aims to be the strategic voice of users of official statistics. We recognise that the sheer scale and diversity of the voluntary sector presents challenges to this sort of engagement – but we think that this should not be seen as a deterrent by statistics producers.
14. In common with most users, voluntary sector organisations place a premium on *timely statistics*. For example, Shelter Scotland told us that it considers more timely information as a priority, although it does appreciate the time taken by producers to collect, quality assure and publish the statistics.
15. On 20 October 2010, as part of the World Statistics Day, 11 official statisticians in the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) provided a day's volunteer work²⁸ to provide statistical support to voluntary and community organisations. The statisticians provided services such as: quality assuring research and statistical outputs; helping to navigate official statistics sources online; and giving tutorials on how to use small-area statistics. The voluntary sector organisations involved in the project reported positively on the experience and NISRA told us that the number of statistical queries from these organisations increased after the event. This experience illustrates the scope for, and benefits to be derived from, increased engagement with the voluntary sector. NISRA also reported that its statisticians found the activity positive and worthwhile. In a separate exercise, statisticians at the Department for Transport have begun engaging with Pro Bono Economics²⁹, an organisation that matches volunteer economists with charities that wish to address questions around measurement, results and impact. The statisticians hope to be able to use their expertise to help charities collect and analyse data.

Conclusions

Better engagement between statistics producers and the voluntary sector

16. In its 2010 report, *The Use Made of Official Statistics*, the Statistics Authority identified informing the voluntary sector's activities as one generic type of use official statistics, but gave the impression that this was limited to lobbying and funding applications. In fact, as identified above, there is evidence that the sector's use of official statistics extends across many more types of use.
17. Given the extent to which the voluntary sector uses official statistics – and the potential for even greater use – the Authority considers it important for producer bodies to take account of the specific needs of voluntary sector organisations. The Authority also emphasises elsewhere the need for better dialogue between statistics producers and voluntary sector users, to help the statistical service support the public good intrinsic to the work of the work of the sector.
18. The *Code of Practice* requires producers to publicise their statistics in ways that enable users to identify and access information relevant to their needs, and make access to official statistics as

²⁷SUF acts as the umbrella organisation for the set of RSS User Groups, each one of which covers a particular subject matter from the spectrum of official statistics. SUF enables dialogue between users and producers of official statistics and encourages communication across the user community.

²⁸<http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/index/media-centre/news-departments/news-dfp/news-dfp-october-2010/news-dfp-191010-celebrating-world-statistics.htm>

²⁹<http://www.probonoeconomics.com/>

straightforward as possible³⁰. It also requires that producers prepare and disseminate commentary and analysis that aid interpretation³¹. Across the voluntary sector, there are examples of official statistics being used as an important tool to support fundraising and lobbying, and to formulate and monitor plans and strategies. However, it is also likely that there is scope for far greater use of official statistics, through improving awareness of the statistics that exist and providing more help and advice to identify and understand the right statistics.

19. We conclude that the use, and potential use, of official statistics by the voluntary sector would be enhanced by closer engagement between (representatives of) the sector and producers of official statistics, in order to:
 - develop a fuller understanding of the sector's needs;
 - ensure that statistics are presented in ways that make them accessible; and
 - identify significant unmet needs and develop plans to address these.
20. This 'closer engagement' could take many forms. For example, it might involve more regular contact by email and social networking, or meetings between producer bodies and senior figures in the voluntary sector who are interested in developing the sector's use of official statistics. Individual producer bodies may take the initiative, finding ways to develop closer links with voluntary sector users of its statistics, for example through the Statistics User Forum or by creating opportunities for statisticians to help charities collect and analyse data. We would encourage this, but we also believe there would be benefit in further co-ordination: for producer bodies collectively to consider the most effective ways to engage with the voluntary sector and to establish the existing and emerging statistical needs of the sector. We do not envisage this to be a one-off exercise: it should be an ongoing dialogue.
21. One example that might be explored is the practicability of voluntary sector 'champions' within the statistical service to facilitate engagement between the voluntary sector and producers of official statistics; to help raise awareness of the needs of the sector; and to promote and support the use of official statistics by the sector. A voluntary sector champion may also be able to find ways to engage the many local organisations (such as Councils for Voluntary Services) that provide support to voluntary organisations in a local area – perhaps through the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action³².
22. We see benefits in the RSS creating a voluntary sector user group with a presence on its new, and already effective, StatsUserNet³³ facility. Such a group might aim to encourage discussion about any aspect of official statistics of relevance to the sector and provide a forum that could, as an entity, contribute to and influence the statistical planning process across government.
23. Closer engagement between the voluntary sector and producers of official statistics is also likely to benefit the official statistics themselves, and so the wider users of these statistics. When producers have a good understanding of the ways that the voluntary sector uses official statistics, and the value that the sector often adds to official statistics (for example, through collating different sources and re-presenting them to meet the needs of *their* users) producers will be better able to build these needs into the production of the original official statistics. In some cases, there may be benefit from greater collaboration, drawing on or referring to voluntary sector sources in official statistics, to improve the value of the official statistics and to add insight.

Information about the voluntary sector

24. We note that there is a shortage of regular and timely published statistics about the voluntary sector, and that pressure on statistics budgets across government suggests that this is not likely to change in the near-future. The Citizenship Survey, which was conducted by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) collected information on a wide range of issues

³⁰In relation to Principle 8 Practice 4 of the Code of Practice

³¹In relation to Principle 8 Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

³²<http://www.navca.org.uk/directory>

³³<http://statsusernet.org.uk/Home/>

including information about people's perceptions of their community, volunteering and civic participation. DCLG announced that the survey would be cancelled in March 2011. The Statistics Authority published a Statistical Expenditure Report on the cancellation of the Citizenship Survey³⁴ in April 2011, documenting the concerns of the user community. DCLG noted that it hoped academic and other external providers would continue to provide data and analysis where these were needed. The Taking Part Survey, published by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) provides some information on civic engagement and participation.

25. In 2005, the National Audit Office explored some of the barriers³⁵ to public service commissioning in the voluntary sector; it found that data on the sector and its part in delivering public services needs to be improved. We consider that the shortage of statistics about the voluntary sector is likely to be a barrier to monitoring the beneficial impact of the sector; and is thus likely to inhibit the monitoring of its contribution to Government objectives such as those under the 'Big Society' umbrella. The Office for Civil Society told us that Cabinet Office is considering options for collating the information it needs, at a national level, to track trends in issues key to 'Big Society'. The Government may further need to review the existing statistics about the voluntary sector; to identify gaps in the evidence base and to make plans to address these gaps. In addition, voluntary sector organisations are increasingly participating in 'payment by results' schemes (in which public service commissioners pay providers according to specified outcomes (normally defined by statistical measures) as opposed to paying for services at the start of a contract). Both the service organisations and Government commissioners will need to be sure of the adequacy and quality of the data on which payments are to be based.

Statistics provided by the voluntary sector

26. The Government stated in its recent Open Public Services White Paper³⁶, that 'providers of public services from all sectors will need to publish information on performance and user satisfaction' to improve transparency and to allow the public to make informed choices about their own public sector provision. It is likely that the amount of data being released by the voluntary and community sector will increase. We consider that the Government should take steps to ensure that sufficient information is made available by such organisations that a coherent national picture can be produced, and that the activities and outcomes of voluntary sector organisations can be compared with those of other organisations.
27. We are aware of some examples of public criticism of some charities' use of Official Statistics³⁷. The Authority recognises that it might not be appropriate to think in terms of a statistical code of practice that would apply, even voluntarily, to the sector as a whole. While the *Official Statistics Code of Practice* sets out the principles that government bodies should follow when producing and disseminating official statistics, there is no agreed set of statistical standards relating to the voluntary sector. We would however see merit in the larger voluntary organisations, to which the public and other organisations are likely to turn for statistics, publishing information about how they produce and publish their statistics and what principles of propriety they will follow. The Statistics Authority would be pleased to discuss with those bodies how best this might be approached and co-ordinated.

³⁴<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/correspondence/cancellation-of-citizenship-survey.pdf>

³⁵http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/0506/working_with_the_third_sector.aspx

³⁶<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/open-public-services-white-paper>

³⁷For example, http://www.straightstatistics.org/article/giving-britain%E2%80%99s-children-bad-name?utm_source=twitterfeed&utm_medium=twitter and <http://www.chrishiley.com/content/it-just-me-or-did-they-cross-line>

Views of Voluntary Sector Organisations

1. In the course of producing this Brief we consulted a range of bodies, including national umbrella groups, charities and smaller organisations, to help us investigate the use made of official statistics by the voluntary sector.
2. **NCVO** is the largest umbrella body for the voluntary and community sector in England. NCVO told us that it expects that the cuts to statistical services, in combination with cuts to voluntary sector funding, will present a big challenge to the continued production of statistics that can be used and analysed by the sector. It felt that the information provided by the Citizenship Survey had been crucial for informing policy and practice in the sector and assessing its impact, which is an integral part of the Coalition Government's transparency agenda for voluntary sector service providers.
3. The **Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)** represents the sector in Scotland, where there were over 45,000 voluntary organisations operating in 2008/09, with a combined income of around £4.4bn³⁸. SCVO told us that it considers that the voluntary sector's use of official statistics would improve if additional resource was directed to make the statistics accessible and relevant to the sector. For example, better communication of the findings and improved information about the use of the statistics could increase awareness of the statistics amongst the voluntary sector. Improved engagement between producers and the sector would help to establish whether there are any specific needs that could be easily addressed.
4. **Age UK** is a large charity formed in 2009, the result of the merger between 'Age Concern' and 'Help the Aged'. There are about 170 independent organisations and subsidiaries that share the Age UK brand. Age UK has national partners - Age Scotland, Age Northern Ireland and Age Cymru. Age UK employs around 1,000 people across the UK. It provides a range of services, including: providing information and advice; public campaigning; commercial products such as insurance and home-aids; and funding research. Age UK outlined a need for more accessible statistics, with better explanations of the uses that can be made of them, and a need for more support for voluntary sector users to help improve their understanding of the statistics.
5. **Shelter Scotland** provides housing advice and support to people in Scotland, and campaigns for long-term solutions to homelessness and sub-standard housing. Shelter Scotland provides key statistics³⁹ on housing in Scotland on its website; the majority of these are taken from official statistics sources. Shelter Scotland told us that it has good links with the Scottish Government teams that produce these statistics. The Scottish Government often produces more detailed analysis at Shelter Scotland's request.
6. The **Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC)**, based at Southampton University, told us that it considers that the use of statistics by the voluntary sector has improved significantly over the past five years, at least partly because NCVO provides links to useful resources from its website. However, it also felt that there is room to improve the extent of the voluntary sector's use of official statistics. TSRC also expressed concern at the cancellation of the Citizenship Survey.
7. The **Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)** contacted us in response to the user consultation that we undertook as part of our formal Assessment of official statistics on social care⁴⁰, produced by the Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC). RNIB told us that it

³⁸ SCVO *Scottish Voluntary Sector Statistics, 2010*; latest figures for 2008-09 are from the SCVO biannual Panel Survey of voluntary organisations:

³⁹ http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/housing_issues/research_and_statistics/key_statistics

⁴⁰ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/assessment-report-192---statistics-on-ophthalmic-services-in-england-and-wales.pdf>

uses statistics on people registered as having a visual impairment – from *People Registered as Blind and Partially Sighted, in England*⁴¹ – to plan its own services and to help monitor registration trends over time by age and location. RNIB actively promotes the use of these statistics to health and social care service providers, commissioners and local authorities to help assess the demand for services. RNIB noted that it has strong links with NHS IC and feels adequately informed about its work. RNIB considers that the National Statistics designation is crucial evidence of the objectivity and trustworthiness of the statistics.

8. **Save the Children, Northern Ireland (StC)** contacted us in response to the user consultation that we undertook as part of our formal Assessment of official statistics on family resources⁴² produced by the Department for Social Development in Northern Ireland (DSD). StC told us that it has a particular interest in the child poverty statistics from DSD's Family Resources Survey. StC highlighted timeliness, small-area statistics and clearer commentary as areas for improvement. StC noted that it would welcome the opportunity for more engagement with government about official statistics.

⁴¹<http://www.ic.nhs.uk/statistics-and-data-collections/social-care/adult-social-care-information/registered-blind-and-partially-sighted-people--year-ending-31-march-2011-in-england>

⁴²<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/assessment-report-198---statistics-from-the-family-resources-survey-in-northern-ireland.pdf>