

Survey Control in the Forestry Commission

Introduction

1. This paper outlines the procedures which Government Departments and Agencies are required to comply with when conducting statistical surveys. These procedures mainly relate to surveys of businesses or local authorities, however many of the principles are also important for surveys of households or individuals.
2. These procedures apply to all parts of the Forestry Commission, including Forest Enterprise and Forest Research. For information on running statistical surveys, please refer to the “Good Practice Guidance for Running Statistical Surveys” and/ or seek advice from the FC’s Economics and Statistics staff.

Background

3. All statistical surveys run by Government Departments and Agencies must comply with survey control procedures.
4. The survey control procedures provide Ministers and officials within departments with a mechanism for controlling the burden on business and local authorities without them necessarily being involved in the detail of individual surveys. The procedures require that:
 - Departments and agencies must keep records of surveys undertaken and their compliance costs.
 - They must prepare an annual report that sets out the statistical surveys to be conducted, their estimated compliance costs and proposed improvements. The plan should also report on previous activity.
 - Regular surveys must be reviewed at prescribed intervals. Detailed reviews are required for surveys with annual compliance costs exceeding £250,000. The level of detail required when reviewing less frequent large surveys should be agreed with the Quality Centre in the Office for National Statistics (ONS).
 - New, regular surveys of businesses, with compliance costs exceeding £50,000, must be cleared through the Quality Centre in the Office for National Statistics (ONS).
5. All departments have a designated Survey Control Liaison Officer (SCLO) who is responsible for:
 - providing advice and guidance on surveys and survey control procedures;
 - monitoring survey activity within their department (including associated agencies); and
 - liaising with the Quality Centre in the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Scope of survey controls

6. Survey controls apply to all statistical surveys of businesses and local authorities, conducted by, or on behalf of, Government departments or agencies where there is potentially a burden, or a perceived burden, on those approached to participate. This includes both regular and ad hoc surveys; both voluntary and statutory surveys. Surveys conducted by, or on behalf of, non-departmental public bodies are also covered. Such bodies may wish to report through, or combined with, parent departments.
7. Generally, surveys of individuals and households are outside survey control and do not form part of the reporting process. However, new regular surveys of individuals and households that exceed 5,000 respondents and 15 minutes completion time should be reported to the SCLO.
8. It should be noted that, for survey control purposes, woodland owners are regarded as businesses rather than individuals.

Definition of statistical surveys

9. A statistical survey is any structured inquiry designed to obtain aggregated data (which may be qualitative or quantitative) where the individual or corporate identities of the respondents are in themselves of little significance.
10. Statistical surveys in scope are not limited to those conducted by statistics teams and do not necessarily involve completion of a form; telephone and personal interview surveys are also included.
11. The following are examples of statistical surveys of businesses or local authorities covered by these controls:
 - surveys designed to obtain aggregated data;
 - surveys where responses are solicited by means of a direct approach to potential respondents;
 - surveys carried out for departmental sponsors by consultants or private organisations; and
 - customer satisfaction surveys designed to identify overall success of a product or service.

Control of Statistical Surveys

12. The following are examples of surveys excluded from survey control:

- surveys where there is no direct approach made and where respondents clearly select themselves (e.g. web sites, readership surveys, some types of consultation exercises where there is an invitation to comment);
- where information is required as an integral part of the operational management of a public service such returns will often be regulated under specific departmental controls;
- surveys relating to the contractual obligations of potential respondents to the department or agency concerned; and
- surveys to respondents in central government and its agencies.

13. Any doubt about the inclusion or exclusion of particular surveys should be clarified with the SCLO.

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14. The Forestry Commission's Survey Control Liaison Officer (SCLO) is responsible for preparing the FC's annual report. This reports on survey activity in the previous year and provides details of surveys planned for the forthcoming year, alongside outline plans for the 2 following years. Each year, the plan is submitted to Ministers by the FC National Offices for approval.

15. Anyone considering running a survey of businesses and/ or local authorities should therefore contact the SCLO at an early stage so that, if required, the survey can be included in the annual plan. Late notification of surveys may result in delays in the operation of the survey whilst Ministerial approval is sought.

16. In addition to providing advice on survey control procedures, the SCLO and colleagues in Economics and Statistics are available to provide advice on all aspects of running surveys. Further guidance on running surveys is also available in the document "Running Statistical Surveys – A Guide to Best Practice", which can be found on the Economics and Statistics area of e-Connect.

17. Any queries on survey control procedures should be directed to the SCLO. The SCLO for the Forestry Commission (including Forest Enterprise and Forest Research) is:

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