

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 England, Forest Enterprise Scotland 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 Statistics team.

Background

3. Survey control procedures provide a mechanism for controlling the burden on businesses and local authorities by statistical surveys. The governance of survey control procedures changed in 2012 and the procedures are now implemented under the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This replaces the previous requirements under Prime Minister's instructions. The main effects of this change in governance are:

- There is no longer a requirement to seek Ministerial approval for surveys; and
- Survey control procedures are only required for surveys that are used to produce Official Statistics.

4. Principle 6 of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics states that:

"The cost burden on data suppliers should not be excessive and should be assessed relative to the benefits arising from the use of the statistics."

More specifically, the following practices are relevant:

- "Report annually the estimated costs (for example, on businesses, service providers, or the public) of responding to statistical surveys and strive to develop methods that will reduce the costs to individual organisations or people."
- "Analyse the costs of proposed new data requirements (to data suppliers) against the potential benefits."
- "Evaluate existing data sources and estimation techniques before undertaking new surveys."

Control of Statistical Surveys

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 Survey Control Unit in the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

6. The responsibilities of the Survey Control Unit in the Office for National Statistics (ONS) include the production of an annual report on Government Statistical Surveys of Businesses and Local Authorities and the creation and maintenance of an Online List of Government Statistical Surveys (OLGSS). Whilst the Survey Control Unit's Annual Report now covers only surveys that are used to produce Official Statistics (in accordance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics), the OLGSS is more comprehensive and includes surveys outwith the scope of current survey control procedures.

Scope of survey controls

7. Survey control procedures currently apply to all statistical surveys that are used to produce Official Statistics, where there is potentially a burden (or a perceived burden) on those approached to participate. This includes regular and ad hoc surveys; voluntary and statutory surveys; and surveys of businesses, local authorities and individuals.

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, personal interview and online surveys are also included.

Control of Statistical Surveys

11. The following are examples of statistical surveys 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.

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

- 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 Survey Control Liaison Officer, who is responsible for implementing survey control procedures within their department.

Survey Control in the Forestry Commission

14. The Forestry Commission's Survey Control Liaison Officer (SCLO) is responsible for implementing survey control procedures within the Forestry Commission and its Agencies (Forest Enterprise England, Forest Enterprise Scotland and Forest Research), as set out in paragraph 5, above. Annual reports on survey activity, covering surveys undertaken in the previous year and future plans, are produced and released on the Forestry Commission website at www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-6tzkzq

15. Anyone considering running a statistical survey should contact the SCLO at an early stage to ensure that the survey complies with survey control requirements. Late notification of surveys may result in delays in the operation of the survey. While the change in governance means that survey control activity is now only mandatory for surveys that are used to produce Official Statistics, the requirements set out in the Code of Practice Official Statistics represent recommended best practice. As such, the

Control of Statistical Surveys

Forestry Commission will continue to apply survey control procedures to all statistical surveys.

16. In addition to providing advice on survey control procedures, the SCLO and colleagues in the FC Statistics team 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 Forestry Commission website at www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-7nfl46

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

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