



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
EUROSTAT



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**Peer review report Central Bureau of Statistics, Netherlands on
the implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice**

4-6 April 2006

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1. Executive Summary

This was the second of two pilot Peer Reviews and took place in the Central Bureau of Statistics in Netherlands 4 - 6 April 2006. The review had two objectives

- to act as a real peer review for Statistics Netherlands and by doing so to validate the self assessment and to identify areas for improvement (starting from what had been proposed by Statistics Netherlands);
- to test the methodology designed by the CoP Task Force and refined already during the first pilot in Czech statistical office.

The three members of the team – Mr. Jan Byfuglien (Statistics Norway) chairman, Günter Kopsch (German statistical office) and Daniel Defays (Eurostat) – prepared the review through an intensive exchange of mail (between them and with a contact person in CBS) the two weeks preceding the visit. They organised one week before the meeting a phone-conference to finalise the review. A brief debriefing of the first pilot made it possible to take stock of what had been achieved in Czech and to adopt the first review team recommendations. It was thus agreed to concentrate on a global assessment of each indicator of the principles 1-6 and 15 and to elaborate the set of improvement actions proposed by the CBS.

The visit had a relatively short preparation time, thus there was no time to prepare a user survey. The persons attending the meeting had received information on the background and the purpose of the visit as well as the questions prepared in advance. The external partners had not received the results of the self-assessment.

The review was performed as interviews with representatives from the management and the staff of the CBS as well as the chairman of the Central Commission for Statistics (CCS), one other producer (the Dutch National Bank, which is at the same time a user) and some users (see Annex A)

The questions prepared and distributed in advance were only used to a limited degree. Instead the questions were somewhat adapted to be more relevant to the situation and to avoid using time on obvious and less relevant issues.

The approach adopted by the team was close to what had been agreed upon for the first pilot :

- distribution of the work inside the team, each member being responsible for a subset of principles and preparing after study of the existing material some specific questions;
- interviews, the first day, of the CBS management (Director General, chairman of the Central Commission for Statistics (CCS), person responsible for data confidentiality, director responsible for data dissemination and Macroeconomic Statistics, Quality manager);
- interview of main stakeholders (Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Economic Affairs, Ministry of Social Affairs, Central Planning Office, Dans - broker for CBS, putting protected micro-data at the disposal of the scientific community -, Dutch Central Bank, and some junior staff)
- the team spent some time outside its scheduled meetings to share conclusions and to prepare the next interviews; a first draft report was established on the second day.

Some of the main findings were:

The CBS has responsibility for a major part of official statistics in the Netherlands and is considered to have a strong and independent basis, especially through the Statistics Netherlands Act from November 2003 giving the CBS a separate legal personality. Thus there is a high degree of compliance with the principles related to independence and mandate for data collection. The CBS has also a strong methodological basis in several areas and thus has a very high degree of compliance in the area of statistical confidentiality. In regard to the principles mentioned, the CBS can be considered to represent reference practice. Also the level of compliance was good in relation to the other principles reviewed, and no serious discrepancies from best practice was discovered. Still there are some recommendations for improvements, and an action list is prepared (Annex B).

2. Introduction

Context

1. With the adoption of the European Statistics Code of Practice, the Statistical Programme (SPC) committed itself to adherence to its principles. At its meeting on 25 May 2005 SPC endorsed a stepwise monitoring procedure for the implementation of the Code over three years during which countries' self-assessments should be combined with elements of peer review, benchmarking and monitoring on the basis of the explanatory indicators added to each principle of the Code.
2. A first round of self-assessments was finalised during December 2005 / January 2006 on the basis of a common Code of Practice Questionnaire. Using this information Eurostat is drafting an aggregated report on the implementation status of the Code in the National Statistical Institutes (NSI) and Eurostat, for submission to the Economic and Financial Committee in May 2006.
3. As a next step towards implementation of the Code, the European Statistical System is organising peer reviews to complement the self-assessments starting with 2006. They are considered a vital element for the implementation of the Code of Practice given their capacity to encourage the sharing of best practice and to contribute to transparency in what is, essentially, a self-regulatory approach. This approach is designed to enhance accountability and help to build trust in the integrity of the European Statistical System, its processes and outputs.
4. Peer reviews are carried out on the basis of the National Statistical Institutes and Eurostat self-assessments using the Code of Practice Questionnaires as a starting point. However, they are expected to go beyond this initial exercise adding value by raising issues from a peer's perspective, going more into detail where needed and assessing the situation in a country as a whole. Areas for improvement and related actions identified in the self-assessments will be confirmed with NSIs, with peers contributing to their prioritisation where needed. The peer reviews contribute to a more complete picture of adherence to the Code at European Statistical System level identifying any common difficulties or gaps with regard to compliance with the code and to raise them at the level of the SPC.
5. At the same time, countries – assisted by the peers - benefit from more detailed overviews of the results of the first European Statistical System self-assessments positioning themselves in the European Statistical System with regard to the degrees and modes of adherence to the Code's principles. The peer review could thus stimulate a knowledge transfer from which all parties involved could profit by identifying benchmarks and sharing best practices.
6. As a result the peer reviews yield a report at country level focussing on the principles reviewed. In addition it includes a refined set of improvement actions covering all principles of the Code which are being used to feed the monitoring process of the implementation of the Code in the European Statistical System. However, it is worth noting some of the limitations of the peer review process. For example, peer reviewers are dependent upon the resources made available to them (though experienced reviewers can be expected to identify where appropriate information is not forthcoming). In addition these reviews are conducted on a strategic, organisation-wide and system wide basis. Accordingly it is not straightforward to ascertain that certain practices or behaviours or systems operate in all statistical domains.
7. The rounds of peer reviews have been designed to focus on the institutional environment and dissemination part of the Code comprising the following principles: (1) Professional independence, (2) Mandate for data collection, (3) Adequacy of resources, (4) Quality commitment, (5) Statistical confidentiality, (6) Impartiality and Objectivity and (15) Accessibility and Clarity.
8. The peer reviews take as their starting point the self-assessments against the Code of Practice - with its 15 principles detailed each by up to 7 indicators. In addition a checklist of open questions

targeted to the various interview partners has been provided to the peers in order to stimulate discussion and to invite sometimes personal reflections, going beyond the statements in the self-assessments. This will offer the peers an in depth understanding of the background and the situation.

Peer review of the Dutch Statistical System

9. The Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) of the Netherlands volunteered to participate in one of the two pilot peer reviews. The peer review has been carried out from 4 -6 April 2006.
10. Only principles 1-6 and 15 were reviewed. However, as the self-assessment already had indicated some improvement actions related to other principles, it was also decided to include those actions in the list, based on some more concrete specifications to be provided from the CBS.
11. The peer reviewers benefited from the availability of existing information about the Dutch Statistical System, especially The Statistics Netherlands Act.
12. This peer review was one of the two first pilots to be undertaken to monitor compliance with the European Statistics Code of Practice. Thus, one objective of this review related to testing a particular methodology and helping make recommendations to guide future reviews. The lessons learned concerning the methodology to be used in the peer review of the CBS are described in a separate report.
13. Programme of the visit: See annex 1.

3. Findings

Principle 1: Professional Independence

The professional independence of statistical authorities from other policy, regulatory departments and bodies, as well as from private sector operators, ensures the credibility of European Statistics.

Overall assessment: The CBS has a strong professional independence that is arranged in an exemplary manner.

Indicator 1.1: The independence of the statistical authority from political and other external interference in producing and disseminating official statistics is specified in law.

Fully met

The “Statistics Netherlands Act” of November 2003 gives the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) the task to produce and publish statistics and gives it an autonomous status. The strong independence of the CBS was underlined by all interview partners.

Indicator 1.2: The head of the statistical authority has sufficiently high hierarchical standing to ensure senior level access to policy authorities and administrative public bodies. He/She should be of the highest professional calibre.

Fully met

The hierarchical level of the Director-General of the CBS is comparable with the highest non-political public servants. The procedure of appointment of the Director General with the involvement of the

Central Commission for Statistics (CBS) making a formal recommendation to the Minister guarantees that he/she is of the highest professional calibre.

Indicator 1.3: The head of the statistical authority and, where appropriate, the heads of its statistical bodies have responsibility for ensuring that European Statistics are produced and disseminated in an independent manner.

Fully met

Indicator 1.4. The head of the statistical authority and, where appropriate, the heads of its statistical bodies have the sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases.

Fully met

The Statistics Act of November 2003 stipulates (Section 18) that the Director General shall determine the methods by which the studies included in the work programme and the multi-annual programme will be carried out and the manner in which the results of those studies will be published.

Indicator 1.5: The statistical work programmes are published and periodic reports describe progress made

Fully met

The CBS carries out and publishes a more strategic oriented multi-annual programme and a yearly work programme. Progress is reported to the CCS and to the Minister of Economic Affairs.

Indicator 1.6: Statistical releases are clearly distinguished and issued separately from political/policy statements.

Fully met

The CBS publishes its own press releases which are clearly labelled as coming from the CBS and which are never mixed with any political statements.

Indicator 1.7: The statistical authority, when appropriate, comments publicly on statistical issues, including criticisms and misuses of official statistics.

Fully met

The CBS reacts only in selected cases on criticism or misuse of its statistics, as this is not always considered necessary and useful.

Principle 2: Mandate for Data Collection

Statistical authorities must have a clear legal mandate to collect information for European statistical purposes. Administrations, enterprises, households, and the public at large may be compelled by law to allow access to or deliver data for European statistical purposes at the request of statistical authorities.

Overall assessment: The CBS is given a clear mandate for data collection. The very broad authorization to use administrative data is to be underlined.

Indicator 2.1: The mandate to collect information for the production and dissemination of official statistics is specified in law.

Fully met

Sections 33 to 36 of the Statistics Netherlands Act give the CBS the mandate to collect the information needed for the production of official statistics.

Indicator 2.2: The statistical authority is allowed by national legislation to use administrative records for statistical purposes.

Fully met

The CBS has unconditional and free access to administrative records. It is not only allowed to use administrative data but it is requested to do so. The legal power to get access to records of semi-government institutions could be improved.

Indicator 2.3: On the basis of a legal act, the statistical authority can compel response to statistical surveys

Largely met

Like in many other countries, only businesses can be compelled to respond, not private households. The CBS wouldn't see any advantage in obligatory household surveys, on the contrary it is considered counterproductive.

Principle 3: Adequacy of Resources

The resources available to statistical authorities must be sufficient to meet European Statistics requirements.

Overall assessment: The resource situation of the CBS is in general considered to be adequate, with the need for improvements in staff and ICT quality.

Indicator 3.1: Staff, financial, and computing resources, adequate both in magnitude and in quality, are available to meet current European Statistics needs.

Largely met

The CBS states in its self-assessment that the magnitude of its resources is rather satisfactory. That is also substantiated through a good compliance with the data requirements of Eurostat. Both the self-assessment and the discussions during the peer-review, however, provided the information that there is a need for improvement in the composition of the staff (better management skills for changes in the field of ICT, more external orientation and broader overview at the level of the middle management and the development of analytical functions) and for further development of ICT (rationalization and standardization of tools and procedures).

Indicator 3.2: The scope, detail and cost of European Statistics are commensurate with needs.

For European level reply

Indicator 3.3: Procedures exist to assess and justify demands for new European Statistics against their cost.

For European level reply

Indicator 3.4: Procedures exist to assess the continuing need for all European Statistics, to see if any can be discontinued or curtailed to free up resources.

For European level reply

Principle 4: Quality commitment

All ESS members commit themselves to work and co-operate according to the principles fixed in the Quality Declaration of the European Statistical System

Overall assessment: The focus is mainly on process linking and process documentation and this is highly relevant given the way CBS is organised (functional organigramme). There does not exist an overall approach of quality. To meet that concern, CBS is currently integrating different improvement actions in a long term plan.

4.1 Product quality is regularly monitored according to the ESS quality components

Partly met

There exist different kinds of monitoring mechanisms. For instance, a strong methodological coordination is in place through the use of shared definitions stored in a common data base and audits for selected domains are conducted on an annual basis. But no plan exists for regularly monitoring the quality of all or the most important products. ESS quality declaration is not promoted.

4.2 Processes are in place to monitor the quality of the collection, processing and dissemination of statistics

Largely met

Collection, processing and dissemination of statistics are organised according to processes, which are well documented. Those processes are still fragmented and improvement actions to chain them along the different production lines are foreseen. A global strategy for evaluating them is missing.

4.3 Processes are in place to deal with quality considerations, including trade-offs within quality, and to guide planning for existing and emerging surveys

Partly met

Statistics Netherlands has not developed a TQM approach. A plan is currently being implemented with a partial integration of different actions dealing with quality considerations. Those activities target quality of the output, product assurance, risk analysis and improvement of the internal functioning of the bureau. This should lead to a comprehensive quality framework by 2008.

A clear separation exists between development work for new initiatives and production work with an assessment phase to go from development to production; external reviewer can be involved in the assessment. To be considered as good practice.

4.4 Quality guidelines are documented and staff is well trained. These guidelines are spelled out in writing and made known to the public

Largely met

Mobility of staff can challenge the sustainability of the quality of the services provided by the bureau. This is faced through an active project documentation policy. Only part of the production process is documented and this is not made available to the public.

4.5 There is a regular and thorough review of the key statistical outputs using external experts where appropriate

Partly met

Existence of statistical audits of specific products (11 are foreseen in 2006) selected by the top management and approved by the CCS. The audits can involve external reviewers. Lack of an overall plan to review all the major outputs and methodology still mainly based on self-assessments without a common set of guidelines.

Other concerns

Quality work is still very much driven by common guidelines and rules but the quality of the output does not seem to be checked or assessed through regular and thorough controls, evaluations.

A new quality manager has recently been implemented. Revisions of the current approaches are considered.

Principle 5: Statistical Confidentiality

The privacy of data providers (households, enterprises, administrations and other respondents), the confidentiality of the information they provide and its use only for statistical purposes must be absolutely guaranteed.

Overall assessment: CBS has highly invested, since years, in data protection research and has implemented a strong policy to protect the confidentiality of the statistical information.

5.1 Statistical confidentiality is guaranteed in law

Fully met

A section of the “Statistics Netherlands Act” of November 2003 (section 37) is devoted to the topic.

5.2 Statistical authority staff sign legal confidentiality commitments on appointment

Fully met

The commitment is signed by all the staff on appointment.

5.3 Substantial penalties are prescribed for any wilful breaches of statistical confidentiality

Fully met

Fully met for employees. For those who are not employees, contracts are signed which include provisions to respect data confidentiality.

5.4 Instructions and guidelines are provided on the protection of statistical confidentiality in the production and dissemination processes. These guidelines are spelled out in writing and made known to the public

Fully met

5.5 Physical and technological provisions are in place to protect the security and integrity of statistical databases

Fully met

CBS practices, with the use of a common software, a long history of research on the topic and the leadership of the CENEX project on confidentiality can be considered as good if not best practice. The bureau is currently testing the possibility of online access to anonymised data sets.

5.6 Strict protocols apply to external users accessing statistical microdata for research purposes.

Fully met

The data are well protected with different kinds of legal and technical provisions to prevent disclosure of confidential data. This does not prevent access to the data by researchers (100 per year approximately) on CBS site.

The strict policy implemented by CBS seems to efficiently protect the confidentiality of the data. But this could also lead to an unbalance between the level of protection and the availability of information for research/analysis purposes. Some researchers ask easier access and new ways to access the data are currently being tested.

Principle 6: Impartiality and objectivity

Statistical authorities must produce and disseminate European Statistics respecting scientific independence and in an objective, professional and transparent manner in which user are treated equitably

Overall assessment: The CBS is considered to have a high level of compliance with this principle.

Indicator 6.1: Statistics are compiled on an objective basis determined by statistical considerations.

Indicator 6.2: Choices of sources and statistical techniques are informed by statistical considerations

Fully met

It is clearly stated in the Statistical law (Section 18) that the Director general shall determine the methods and be responsible to draw up annual plans (Section 15) and a multi-annual programme (Section 14). This task is supported by the Central Statistical Commission (CCS), which is an independent administrative body without corporate rights (Section 20-32). The CCS has a supervisory role and is involved in drawing up budgets and annual and multi-annual plans. The CCS has the role of adopting annual plans and multi-annual plans. Only the multi-annual programme is transmitted to the responsible ministry, which shall notify its views concerning the financial and organisational conditions to be met to carry out the multi-annual programme within 6 months.

Indicator 6.3: Errors discovered in published statistics are corrected at the earliest possible date and published.

Fully met

Corrections of errors are now being published regularly on the web.

Indicator 6.4: Information on the methods and procedures used by the statistical authority are publicly available.

Largely met

Documentation of most data published is available on the web in Dutch language, but some improvements can still be made. Some documentation is also available in English and is in the process of being improved.

Indicator 6.5: Statistical release dates and times are pre -announced.

Fully met

Release calendar is updated regularly

Indicator 6.6: All users have equal access to statistical releases at the same time and any privileged pre-release access to any outside user is limited, controlled and published. In the event that leaks occur, pre-release arrangements should be revised so as to ensure impartiality.

Largely met

In exceptional cases press releases on important issues are being sent under embargo to Ministries. In some cases results of statistical surveys are discussed with users (Ministry of Social affairs) in advance of release. The reason is to ensure proper quality and interpretation and not to allow any influence on the actual press release. The practice is not consistent and transparent and has to be evaluated and improved upon (see recommendations).

Indicator 6.7: Statistical releases and statements made in Press Conferences are objective and non-partisan.

Fully met

There were no indications from the discussions with the users that this was a difficult issue.

Principle 15: Accessibility and clarity

European Statistics should be presented in a clear and understandable form, disseminated in a suitable and convenient manner, available and accessible on an impartial basis with supporting metadata and guidance.

Overall assessment: The CBS is considered to have a high level of compliance with this principle.

Indicator 15.1: Statistics are presented in a clear and understandable form.

Largely met

In general statistical information is presented well structured and documented, but there were indications that users want more understandable and less technical explanations on background and quality of the data.

Indicator 15.2: Statistics are disseminated using modern information technology

Fully met

More or less all statistical information is being published on the internet free of charge.

Indicator 15.3: Custom-designed analyses are provided when feasible.

Fully met

CBS provides user services on-demand. The results of custom-designed analyses are always made public.

Indicator 15.4: Existence of strict protocols to access micro data for research purposes.

Fully met

CBS has a controlled environment for accessing microdata inhouse, and is also developing a secure solution for accessing data from outside CBS to users with agreement. This facility will make more flexible access policy sometimes perceived as extremely strict and facilitate secure access to the data by researchers.

Indicator 15.5: Metadata are documented according to standardised metadata systems.

Largely met

The review was not able to assess the situation in this area in detail, partly because a major part of the documentation is only available in national language, but the impression is that there is a need to clarify the actual situation and to implement some improvement actions in this area.

Indicator 15.6: Users are kept informed on the methodology and the quality of statistical processes and output.

Largely met

There are still needs for some improvements concerning the user-oriented information on methodology and the quality.

4) Proposed actions for improvements

The following recommendations were discussed during the meeting. See also annex 2 on improvement actions that were further developed and made more concrete after the visit.

- The need for more legal power to get better access to records of semi-government organizations
- A more intensive communication policy towards enterprises is needed to motivate survey response.
- A changed composition of the staff is needed and planned: better management skills for changes in the field of ICT, more external orientation and broader overview at the level of the level of middle management and the development of analytical functions.

- Improvement of ICT necessary and planned (Masterplan); rationalization and standardization of tools and procedures.
- The CBS could benefit from a clear strategy and a framework for improved quality management in a broad sense (including for instance staff training and documentation); supplementing the existing very pragmatic bottom-up approach.
- The CBS should improve its procedures for involving external experts in the final analysis of data to be released to ensure consistency and transparency, as well as to ensure consistency and transparency of the policy for privileged pre-release access to press releases.
- Improved metadata are needed; better explanations for the media, development of real metadata systems integrated with the process chain for data.
- Error management might be improved to ensure that people are not afraid of making and admitting errors and that corrective actions are handled properly.

Programme Peer Review European Code of Practice to Statistics Netherlands

PEER REVIEW TEAM:

Jan Byfuglien
Daniel Defays
Günter Kopsch

DELEGATION STATISTICS NETHERLANDS:

Gosse van der Veen
Ada van Krimpen
Carina de Boer

Tuesday 4 April		
09.30 – 10.00	Welcome and introduction of programme	DG Gosse van der Veen
10.00 – 11.30	CBS, Principles 1, 2, 3	DG Gosse van der Veen and Dick Meuldijk
11.30 – 12.30	CBS, Principle 5	Frans Hoeve and Anco Hundepool
12.30 – 13.30	Lunch break	
13.30 – 14.30	Interview with Chairman CCS (Principles 1, 3)	Joop van Lunteren
14.30 – 15.30	Interview with DG and Quality manager Principle 4	Kees Zeelenberg, Eddy Francis, Peter Struijs
15.30 – 17.00	Interview with Directorate Macro Economic Statistics and Dissemination (MSP) (Principles 6 and 15)	Peter van de Ven, Huib van de Stadt
Wednesday 5 April		
09.30 – 10.30	Users' view: Ministry of Finance	Hans Monnikendam
10.30 – 11.30	Users' view: Ministry of Economic Affairs	Edith Heijting, Rudy van Zijp and Ilse Jansen
11.30 – 12.30	User's view: Data archive (DANS, KNAW)	Henk Harmsen
12.30 – 14.00	Lunch	
14.00 – 15.00	Users' view: SPB - Central Planning Bureau	Rocus van Opstal, Henry van der Wiel and Johan Verbruggen
15.00 – 16.00	Users' view: Ministry of social affairs	Paul Oomens
15:00 – 17:00	Users' view: Media	Perry Feenstra
Thursday 6 April		
09.30 – 11.30	Interview with Dutch	Coen Voormeulen and

	Central Bank (DNB)	Pim Claassen
11.30 – 12.45	Lunch/meeting junior staff	Paula van der Brug, Hank Hermans, Frans Hoeve, Hanneke Imbens, Menno Pover, Sylvia de Vries
12.45 – 13.30	Conclusions	DG Gosse van der Veen
13.30 – 14.30	User satisfaction survey	Peter Struijs and Dick Kroeze

Persons met

Statistics Netherlands

- Mr. Gosse van der Veen, director general
- Mr. Jaap van Lunteren, chairman of CCS
- Mrs. Ada van Krimpen, policy staff international relations, director
- Mrs. Carina de Boer, policy staff international relations, senior adviser
- Mr. Dick Meuldijk, policy staff, senior adviser
- Mr. Frans Hoeve, Head of Centre for Policy Related Statistics, Division Macro-Economic Statistics and dissemination
- Mr. Anco Hundepool, Project-leader Statistical Confidentiality, Division Technology and Methodology
- Mr. Eddy Francis: quality manager (till 01.04.2006), Division Technology and Methodology
- Mr. Peter Struijs: quality manager (from 01.04.2006), Division Technology and Methodology
- Mr. Kees Zeelenberg: deputy director of the division business statistics
- Mr. Peter van de Ven: Head National Accounts, Division Macro-Economic Statistics and dissemination, member of the CMFB Executive Body
- Mr. Huib van de Stadt: Head publication and communication, Division Macro-Economic Statistics and dissemination
- Mrs. Sylvia de Vries: Head of department financial institutions and government, Division Macro-Economic Statistics and dissemination
- Mrs. Hanneke Imbens:, Head of statistical analysis (Voorburg), Division of Social and Spatial Statistics
- Mr. Hank Hermans: Head of business surveys department (Heerlen), Division of Business Statistics
- Mr. Menno Pover: projectmanager social security, statistical analysis Voorburg, Division of Social and Spatial Statistics
- Mrs. Paula van der Brug: Project manager Ageing, Division Macro-Economic Statistics and dissemination
- Mr. Dick Kroeze, policy advisor, Division Technology and Methodology

Ministry of Finance (see www.minfin.nl)

- Mr. Hans Monnikendam, deputy director Budget Affairs Directorate

Royal Netherlands Academy of Art and Sciences: Data Archiving Networked Services www.knaw.nl and www.dans.knaw.nl

- Henk Harmsen

CPB (Central Planning Office) Netherlands bureau for economic policy analyses (see: www.cpb.nl/eng)

- Mr. Rocus van Opstal, head of sector Short term analysis and fiscal affairs
- Mr. Henry van der Wiel, researcher
- Mr. Johan Verbruggen, head Business Cycle Analysis Unit

Ministry of Social Affairs

- Mr. Paul Oomens

Ministry of Economic Affairs www.minez.nl

- Mrs. Edith Heijting, senior advisor policy staff Secretary General
- Mr. Rudy van Zijp, Management Team Economic Policy Directorate
- Ms. Ilse Jansen, Financial Economic Division

DNB (Dutch Central Bank) www.dnb.nl

- ❑ Coen Voormeulen, director Statistics and Information
- ❑ Pim Claassen, Head Balance of Payments and Financial Accounts

Proposals of Statistics Netherlands for improvement actions as a basis for a national action plan

1. Professional independence

2. Mandate for Data Collection

□ A more intensive communication policy towards enterprises in order to obtain their cooperation. In its self-assessment in 2005, Statistics Netherlands mentioned this action item without explaining it further.

Several initiatives have been taken regarding this action item. Future self-assessments will list the concrete actions with deadlines.

The general data collection strategy of Statistics Netherlands includes the “electronic data collection” project. The main purpose of this project is a far-reaching digitalisation of the reporting process of SN. It comprises direct data collection from individuals and enterprises (primary observation,) as well as data collection from administrations from other (government) institutions (secondary observation). The “electronic data collection” project will run to the end of 2007.

Digitalisation of the data collection process has the following advantages:

- substantial cost saving
- quality improvements
- reduction of administrative burden

The establishment of the *Data Contact Centrum* (DCC) and making it ready for operation will take up the rest of 2006. This will bring internal and external advantages. In the near future enterprises will have a “single point of contact” for questions and data supply.

At this moment SN has no benchmarking policy of returning information to enterprises about their position in the market sector.

Action item SN: the general data collection strategy of Statistics Netherlands, of which “electronic data collection” is a part, will be elaborated in the self assessment of 2006.

□ “Indicator 2.3: On the basis of a legal act, the statistical authority can compel response to statistical surveys”.

Action item SN: Because the legal mandate for data collection in the Netherlands does not include the obligation of individuals or households to cooperate in surveys, we have to note explicitly the reason why we deviate from the principle.

□ Limit the demand for data that need to be obtained from companies directly to the absolute minimum (25% reduction in the period 2004–2008)

Action item SN: Our efforts to reduce the demand for data to the absolute minimum will be placed in the context of the principle “non-excessive burden on respondents” instead of principle 2.

3. Adequacy of Resources

❑ **Corporate Education Plan**

The development of middle management is being concretised in a **corporate education plan** with a structured overall plan for elevating managerial skills as well as analytical content.

Time path Corporate Education Plan

- Concept policy document will be discussed in Board of Directors (May 2006)
- Drawing up of the education plan at department level (Late 2006)
- Implementation of department education plans, including SN-wide education programmes (Early 2007)
- Test moments still have to be incorporated. This will be explicitly discussed in a policy context. In addition: implicit quantitative tests by means of status reports via Q reports.
- Courses in the "Tree of Statistics" are already being given and focus on statistical-methodological subjects. Some of the courses are still being developed. These could also be defined as corporate education, as they deal with the core business.

Action item SN: The Corporate Education Plan will probably be adopted in 2006. In this case a more extensive report will be provided in the 2006 self-assessment, with a time path for implementation.

❑ **Management Development**

Corporate principles of integral management are being followed and translated to management potentials who have profound insight into our organisation and strategy. Managers should also have coaching skills and a clear vision on corporate matters such as mobility.

Time path Management Development

Stage 1 Development of the programme (to summer 2006)

Stage 2 Implementation (from September 2006)

Duration: probably to end 2007 for the collective part. Managers may also do individual courses.

Evaluation/tests: important conditions, also in the development stage. Relevant parties are still considering how this should be done.

The basic principle is that having completed individual and collective training, a manager must be able to demonstrate the required performance (in accordance with competence profiles) by the agreed deadline (end 2007).

Action item SN: none further at the moment. Implementation to start in 2006. This will be reported in the 2006 self-assessment, with a follow-up in the 2007 self-assessment.

- ❑ **Relation between quality of staff and ICT Master plan:** In order to develop the necessary quality in the production process of statistics, knowledge of the corporate process is needed. On the same level staff processes should likewise be forwarded in the support of the production process.

Action item SN: no specific action. Ongoing concern.

4. Quality Commitment

- ❑ A new quality manager has recently been implemented. Revisions of the current approaches are being considered.

- ❑ SN intends to adopt a quality management model as a framework for quality assurance. Preparations will start in the summer of 2006, with a preliminary study by a working group, which will draft recommendations before the end of the year on the choice of model, including self-assessment methods. The recommendations will constitute the basis for the 2007 Annual Programme. The implementation of the quality management model will take place from 2007. At the same time, in the period 2007-2012, the principles of the Code of Practice will be implemented.

The model and the code will constitute the framework in which risk analysis and risk management will receive systematic attention. In addition to these long-term developments, specific goals for the coming years are:

- o Production chain (supply chain) management
- o The implementation of a security organisation
- o Continual updating of process flows and data security measures (VIR; Dutch Regulation on Data Security)

Action item SN: the results of the preliminary study in aid of a quality management model will be available by the end of 2006. On the basis of these results, a decision will be made on how SN will introduce quality assurance procedures.

❑ **Audit schedule 2006:**

Construction statistics: April - August 2006

Crime statistics: April - August 2006

Consumer credit statistics: June - November 2006

Consumer price index: May - September 2006

Income support statistics: July - November 2006

Cause of death statistics: June - October 2006

Independent co-operation: July - November 2006

Change management applications: April - July 2006

Follow-up recommendations 2005: August - December 2006

Action item SN: Include audits in self-assessment 2006.

- ❑ Benchmarking with a NSI that has a well-developed quality policy in place (2007).
At the moment Statistics Netherlands is investigating which NSI can function as a sound benchmark with regard to general quality management, and quality reporting and quality assurance of the statistical process.

5. Statistical Confidentiality: best practice
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6. Impartiality and objectivity
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- ❑ *Indicator 6.4: Information on the methods and procedures used by the statistical authority are publicly available.*

Action item SN: The theme news pages will be worked out in further detail before 1 July 2006. The website will then provide more context.

The implementation of StatLine 4 on 1 November 2006 will facilitate the translation into English of StatLine. All new tables from that date will be bilingual. A completely bilingual website is not yet feasible.

- ❑ *Indicator 6.6: All users have equal access ... as to ensure impartiality.*

Action item SN: A policy document will be drafted on embargo policy, for both the main users and the media. The policy will be published on the website on 1 October at the latest. This will be included in self-assessment 2006.

15. Accessibility and clarity

- ❑ The theme news pages will be worked out in further detail before 1 July 2006. The website will then provide more context
- ❑ StatLine 4 will become operational on 1 November 2006. This will achieve considerably more consistency in the metadata. In addition, this will be the starting point for the further completion of the metadata system.

Error management

- At the end of 2005 a so-called gadfly will be appointed for each division. A working group was set up at the beginning of 2006 to work out this idea in further detail.
- Further error management policy reports will be included the 2006 self-assessment.