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Peer review on the implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice

Statistics Austria

22-24 November 2006

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The year 2000 was a watershed in Austrian official statistics, with the enactment of the Federal Statistics Law Act. This has the following key features relevant to the implementation of the European Statistics Code of Practice:

- Clearly articulated overarching statistical principles, consistent with the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and embedded in Statistics Austria's Total Quality Management approach
- Governance arrangements designed to reinforce the professional independence and sound business management of (the newly established) Statistics Austria
- Funding arrangements based on a fixed annual budget (to conduct the statistical surveys in place at the time) with provision to charge Ministries for 'new' tasks, including the implementation of European Regulations – a budget that cannot be reduced, as a result of an amendment to the Act passed in 2003.

Statistics Austria is an ambitious organisation, reflected by its aspiration to be one of Europe's leading NSIs. It seems to be very well managed and governed. It has a strong and effective commitment to quality which pervades all aspects of its work, and it has become increasingly efficient in recent years – a move to new accommodation in 2004 helped reinforce the impression of a modern, well-equipped organisation. It has a relatively young (and increasingly highly qualified) workforce, which appears to be well trained and enthusiastic. Representatives of survey respondents have opportunities to influence data collection matters. The office and its products/services are well-regarded by users, on the basis of a recent User Satisfaction survey, and media criticism is minimal.

Statistics Austria is 'fully' compliant with the majority of indicators in Principles 1-6 and 15 (those assessed in the current peer review). In all other cases it is 'largely' compliant. It also seems to comply with virtually all EU statistical Regulations. On this basis it is making significant and rapid progress towards meeting its strategic aspiration.

The Austrian (Federal) Statistical System is highly centralised. Its NSI, Statistics Austria, is responsible for the vast majority of European Statistics produced within Austria. Whilst it has links with other Federal Statistics bodies these are not currently well-developed or systematic; it is noteworthy that "co-ordination" is not required by the Federal Statistics Act.

2. INTRODUCTION

With the adoption of the European Statistics Code of Practice, the Statistical Programme (SPC) committed itself to adhering to its principles. At its meeting on 25 May 2005, the 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.

During December 2005 / January 2006 the National Statistical Institutes and Eurostat have completed their self-assessments, the results have been summarised by Eurostat in a report submitted to the Economic and Financial Committee in May 2006 which has been published on the Eurostat website.

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 to help building trust in the integrity of the European Statistical System, its processes and outputs.

The Code of Practice peer reviews follow a common methodology focusing 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. In principle, the peer review is limited to the National Statistical Institute and its co-ordination role within a dispersed national statistical system. A short document provided by the National Statistical Institute which summarises key aspects of the functioning of the national statistical system is published together with this report.

During a three days visit on-site and on the basis of information material provided by the National Statistical Institute and Eurostat prior to the review, peer reviews yield a report assessing compliance with the Code of Practice at indicator level and by principle following a four point assessment scale. The report 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.

While the peer reviewers will undertake to base their assessment to the extent possible on factual information, 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.

3. FINDINGS PER PRINCIPLE

Principle 1: Professional Independence

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

Overall assessment: Statistics Austria has a strong degree of professional independence, which is derived from a strong legal basis (Federal Statistics Act, 2000) see <http://www.statistik.at/englisch/ueberuns/federal.pdf>. The practices of the organisation seem to be fully in line with legal stipulations. The Statistical Council has the obligation to control the quality of statistics and the Office's compliance in terms of legal provisions and of quality criteria.

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

Comments:

Objectivity and impartiality are stipulated in the Federal Statistics Act (Articles 14 and 24). They form a solid basis for the production and - together with Article 30 (3)* and (4) requiring statistics to be published immediately after they become available - dissemination of official statistics.

* Following the peer review, the English translation of Article 30(3) of the Austrian Federal Statistics Act has been revised to clarify that – in line with the German original - results are released to Ministers at the same time as they are published.

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

Comments: According to the Article 37 the management of Statistics Austria comprises two director generals - one for statistical matters and the other for financial matters. Their nominations go through the open competition. They both are nominated by the Federal Chancellery. The term of both DGs is fixed for five years and can be renewed. The hierarchical level of both directors is comparable to the heads of other "Federal Institutions under Public Law" in Austria or major state-owned business units, respectively.

In case of contradictory opinions on operational managerial issues, the Director General - Finance has stronger power than the Director General - Statistics to decide.

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

Comments: Around 90 per cent of the European Statistics are compiled and published by Statistics Austria. According to the Federal Act the official statistics has to be available for the general public, be disseminated without delay and respect the confidentiality of data subjects (e.g. articles 19 and 30).

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

Comments: The Director General - Statistics is in all matters of scientific methodology personally responsible for the performance of his/her duties (Stat. Act Article 38). The annual work programme dictating the priorities of development projects, the schedules of statistical products and activities are discussed by the Statistical Council and decided by the Economic Council in the context of the annual budget.

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

Fully met

Comments: Statistics Austria publishes its annual work programme and periodic monitoring reports in the web, <http://www.statistik.at/institution/Arbeitsprogramm06.pdf> and <http://www.statistik.at/institution/taetigkeitsbericht05.pdf>. Both are embedded in a strategic business plan. Their integration and level of detail can be considered good practice in the ESS (see chapter 5).

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

Fully met

Comments: It is the policy of Statistics Austria not to include any political comments in their statistical releases. The policy seems to be well adopted in the organisation. Special training for writers of press releases strengthens the way of working. During the year there are a few joint press conferences where the representatives of the ministries may give their political comments in addition to statistical presentations of Statistics Austria.

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

Fully met

Comments: On the basis of the Statistics Act [Art. 29 (3)] Statistics Austria reacts publicly if its statistics are falsely interpreted or used. Specific examples were identified during the peer review.

Principle 2: Mandate for Data Collection

Statistical authorities must have a clear legal mandate to collect information for European statistical purposes. Administrations, enterprises and 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: Statistics Austria has the legal mandate to collect data directly from enterprises, institutions and households. If new data have to be collected following European statistical legislation, special orders issued by the corresponding subject-matter ministries are required. The minimisation of the response burden is stipulated in the act as well as the preferred use of administrative data.

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

Fully met

Comments: On the basis of the Federal Statistics Act (article 4, article 6 and article 23(1)) Statistics Austria can collect data 1) for the surveys prevailing in 2000 and mentioned in the annex of the Statistics Act and 2) for the surveys or statistical compilations which the different ministries have ordered, e.g. on the basis on the new European statistical legislation. During the peer review some concerns were raised about the late issue of the orders by one ministry.

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

Fully met

Comments: According to the Federal Statistics Act, Article 10, administrative bodies have to provide data for the compilation of statistics. Statistics Austria is obliged to use administrative data whenever possible. The Austrian National Bank and Statutory interest groups are not obliged to transmit administrative or statistical data if that might harm their proper confidentiality.

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

Fully met

Comments: On the basis of the Federal Statistics Act, Statistics Austria may compel response to statutory surveys, although the Act requires Statistics Austria to consider the use of voluntary surveys in preference to using compulsion. Sanctions are not normally used in the case of household respondents.

Principle 3: Adequacy of Resources

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

Overall assessment: Since 2000 Statistics Austria has had a guaranteed, fixed budget. No inflation corrections have been made. The additional requirements of the EU legislation since that have been funded by different Federal Ministries. The new framework system seems to have worked adequately, but may not be sustainable in the longer term.

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

Fully met

Comments: Since 2000 when the new organisational structure of Statistics Austria was established, the staff profile has changed quite remarkably. The number of staff has decreased from 1,064 (1 January 2000) by 215 persons, totalling currently 849 (1 December 2006; full time equivalents: 815). The educational structure of the staff has changed. The share of academic staff is currently around 20 per cent whereas five years ago it was around 10 per cent. The figure is still lower than many other national statistical institutes.

The organisational status gives Statistics Austria relative advantages in terms of hiring skilled resources if it needs to. In the longer run the current set-up of the budget may, however, cause problems if the cost-savings or new income-raising measures (going beyond statistical work) exceed what is sustainable for the statistical system.

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: Statistics Austria uses a total quality management approach, elements of which are embedded in its statistical law. The approach focuses on product quality, customer satisfaction, and reduction of respondents' burden, efficiency and staff orientation - each dimension being reflected in Statistics Austria strategic plan with ambitious concrete objectives. Its approach towards monitoring and improving product and process quality can be considered good practice in the European Statistical System (see chapter 5)..

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

Fully met

Comments: In line with legal requirements (Article 24(3) of the Austrian Federal Statistics Act) Statistics Austria monitors the quality of its products. To this end it has produced comprehensive quality reports for 80% of its products, with the objective of covering all statistics by the end of 2007.

These quality reports are elaborated in co-operation with the Quality Assurance Committee of the Austrian Statistical Council, used internally as an instrument for monitoring of quality over time and are published to inform users. Reporting on data punctuality forms part of Statistics Austria's annual activity report.

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

Fully met

Comments: In line with Article 24(2) u. (3) of the Austrian Federal Statistics Act Statistics Austria monitors the quality of its statistical processes and identifies improvement actions on the basis of comprehensive quality reports and so called "feedback talks" - carried out as far as possible on a monthly basis - which assume a kind of process auditing function in Statistics Austria (see indicator 4.5 and chapter 5 on good practices). Process quality is also addressed in the framework of various projects at Directorate level (among them on optimising data processing in business statistics, and an in-depth screening of the production of population statistics which led to a re-engineering of the Directorate) and at the level of Statistics Austria, e.g. in the framework of reducing respondents' burdens.

Indicator 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.

Fully met

Comments: Statistics Austria has adopted a comprehensive project management methodology to be followed prior to launching new surveys. Formal user consultation forms part of the

planning stage - apparently - including discussions on how trade-offs within quality could be best reconciled with users' priorities.

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

Largely met

Comments: Internal handbooks and guidelines are available for staff about most aspects of the statistical production process, and less detailed versions of these are made available to external users.

However, general quality guidelines are still to be elaborated to complement Statistics Austria's total quality management approach and strategic planning. All staff are trained in Statistics Austria's TQM approach and courses are provided on quality reporting standards and on methodological topics related to quality in statistics.

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

Fully met

Comments: The quality reports (see indicator 4.1) provide the basis for so called feedback talks on quality organised by the Quality Assurance unit in co-operation with the Quality Assurance Committee of the Statistical Council and Statistics Austria Total Quality Management Board. They are organised - as far as possible - every month scrutinising another product with the objective to have all products reviewed by the end of 2008 before launching a second round focussing on the implementation of the improvement actions. Feedback talks systematically bring together domain managers, national accountants, methodologists and involve important users and external experts (see as well chapter 5 on good practices).

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: The Federal Statistical Law contains strong legal provisions concerning the confidentiality of statistical data. Statistics Austria's staff are required to sign confidentiality undertakings, as part of their Terms and Conditions. One of the external users considered "confidentiality" to be the greatest strength of Statistics Austria.

Indicator 5.1 Statistical confidentiality is guaranteed in law.

Fully met

Comments: Confidentiality is guaranteed in law – article 17(1). Personal data may only be used for statistical purposes – article 5(2) – including the creation and use of registers (article 25(3)). This is consistent with Austria's Data Protection Act.

Indicator 5.2 Statistical authority staff sign legal confidentiality commitments on appointment.

Fully met

Comments: Article 17(3) requires staff working with personal data to treat these in strictest confidence. Article 17(4) says that “the confidentiality of statistics is an official secret ...”. Consistent with this, all Statistics Austria staff sign a confidentiality undertaking on appointment.

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

Fully met

Comments: The prescribed penalty for breaching confidentiality is up to three years imprisonment.

Indicator 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

Comments: Information about the protection of confidentiality in the production and dissemination processes is made available to staff, and to recipients of anonymised microdata. Survey respondents are assured that the data they provide will be treated as confidential.

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

Fully met

Comments: Statistics Austria has put in place a range of provisions to protect the security and integrity of statistical databases. The Federal Statistics Act (as noted above) provides an overall framework. In addition access to personal data is limited to those staff who need it, for the purposes of their job. And there are a range of network security measures and other technical controls to minimise the possibility of unauthorised access.

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

Fully met

Comments: Access to anonymised microdata is provided to suitably qualified researchers and scientific institutions governed by Article 31 of the Federal Statistics Act. Access is only

available on Statistics Austria's premises. In practice no enterprise data are made available in this way, because it cannot be adequately anonymised.

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 all users are treated equitably.

Overall assessment: The Federal Statistics Act explicitly requires Statistics Austria to perform its functions objectively. In addition many of its systems and methods are designed to reinforce impartiality and objectivity in practice. A few changes to release practices would lead to full compliance with this principle.

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

Fully met

Comments: The quality of objectivity is specified as an overarching principle for Statistics Austria in the Federal Statistics Act (article 14(1)). There has not been significant concern expressed in the media about objectivity in recent years.

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

Fully met

Comments: Statistics Austria has a policy that only statistical considerations underpin the selection of sources and techniques. In the Federal Statistics Act, article 14(1) stresses that "Federal Statistical bodies shall apply the principles of objectivity, reliability ...". Article 24(1) and 24(2) extend this. Sources and techniques are discussed with the technical subcommittees of the Central Statistical Commission and with the Statistics Council.

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

Fully met

Comments: Users are informed about significant errors in a number of ways, but chiefly via the medium in which the incorrect statistic was disseminated. For example, if an error appears in a printed publication then a corrected disk containing the publication is sent to those known to have bought it.

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

Fully met

Comments: Statistics Austria publishes (and regularly updates) information about methods and procedures on its website for the majority of its products. This will extend to all products over the next year.

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

Largely met

Comments: A release calendar showing dates for key economic series is published in advance. Procedures exist to revise this calendar, though this has only been done once in recent years. However, release *times* are not currently pre-announced.

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 publicised. In the event that leaks occur, pre-release arrangements should be revised so as to ensure impartiality.

Largely met

Comments: With a very few exceptions all users have access to new statistics at the same time. The exceptions relate to instances when Ministers and statisticians are attending joint press conferences – in which case a half-day's embargoed pre-release access is allowed.

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

Fully met

Comments: Whilst difficult to test this in the context of a peer review it is the case that the principles set out in the Federal Statistics Act – articles 14 and 24 – sets out an overall framework, whilst training is provided to allow statistical staff to acquire the necessary skills to ensure that statements are suitable objective.

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: Statistics Austria already complies to a large extent with this principle. Improvements relate to further streamlining its dissemination channels with an integrated office-wide policy in terms of a defined topical structure and product range, pricing policy and metadata links. Current work to modernise Statistics Austria's website may provide an opportunity to address these improvements.

Indicator 15.1: Statistics are presented in a form that facilitates proper interpretation and meaningful comparisons.

Largely met

Comments: Statistics Austria publishes its press releases and a broad range of key statistics in table format in English and German language in line with general ESS practices. A topical presentation structure and more user-friendly formats for downloading statistics as well as a better integration of metadata are straightforward ways to improve the accessibility of Statistics Austria's website and database. Users' views collected during the peer review broadly confirm this assessment.

Indicator 15.2: Dissemination services use modern information and communication technology and, if appropriate, traditional hard copy.

Fully met

Comments: In line with its statistical law, Statistics Austria publishes all main statistics free of charge on its website (Art. 30 (1) of the Federal Statistics Act). A wide range of key statistics in table format in English and German language are complemented by a range of paper publications which at the same time are made available in electronic format to be downloaded from the online catalogue. A statistical database, partly accessible free-of-charge on the internet, supplements the dissemination programme.

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

Largely met

Comments: Statistics Austria provides custom-made analysis on request. Currently, only some Directorates systematically notify the public about the work carried out.

Following legal provisions (Art. 30 (2) of the Federal Statistics Act) Statistics Austria provides detailed statistical results against a cost recovery fee calculated on the basis of table dimensions specified for each individual series. Currently, the definition of the publication range and the related pricing policy follow domain-specific considerations rather than an office-wide policy which seem to hamper accessibility and could be associated with a rather bureaucratic approach.

Indicator 15.4: Access to microdata can be allowed for research purposes. This access is subject to strict protocols.

Fully met

Comments: Access to anonymised microdata is provided to suitably qualified researchers and scientific institutions governed by Article 31 of the Federal Statistics Act. Access is only available on Statistics Austria's premises. In practice no enterprise data are made available in this way, because it cannot be adequately anonymised.

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

Largely met

Comments: Whilst Statistics Austria's quality reports provide a metadata standard, links to the various dissemination channels and are yet to be (fully) established in order to ensure a consistent set of metadata is presented next to the data. Assistance to users in understanding statistics on the web - including in English language - would further benefit Statistics Austria practices with regard to the provision of metadata.

Indicator 15.6: Users are kept informed on the methodology of statistical processes and the quality of statistical outputs with respect to the ESS quality criteria.

Fully met

Comments: As required by the Federal Statistics Act (Art. 19 and 23) Statistics Austria provides for the vast majority of its products comprehensive quality reports describing methodology and output quality in line with the ESS quality criteria and quality reporting standards (see principle 4).

4. CO-ORDINATION ROLE OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTE

Subject matter experts at Statistics Austria seem to have regular contact with other Federal Statistics bodies producing the following European Statistics:

- | | |
|--|---------------------------|
| • Ministry of the Interior | Asylum, illegal migration |
| • Ministry of Economics and Labour | Energy, oil prices |
| • Ministry of Agriculture | Forestry |
| • The Austrian National Bank | BoP (financial accounts) |
| • The Financial Market Authority | Insurance Services |
| • The Authority for Environmental Protection | Waste, water and air |
| • The Labour Market Service | Registered unemployment |

The relationship with the Austrian National Bank is considered important enough to merit a formal Co-operation Agreement, underlying quarterly meetings.

Statistics Austria also has long-standing links with the Statistical Offices of the Länder. This cooperation and co-ordination is based on an agreement (from 1985) following Article 15a B-VG (the Austrian Federal Constitution). In this agreement it is also laid down that co-ordination meetings have to be held at least once a year to deal with "current technical, financial and organizational matters according to this agreement" (see Art. 6(1)). In recent years the objectives and subjects covered have included the relevance, timeliness and cost-effectiveness of statistics, duplication of survey activity, and data transmission to the Länder. Furthermore all nine Länder are represented in the Central Statistical Commission (SCS) and in all technical

sub-committees of the SCS, whilst one member of the Statistical Council is nominated by the Länder.

Other contact across government takes place too. For example:

- experts have provided advice to the Ministry of Agriculture on sample design
- close links exist with those Ministries responsible for administrative data which are used by Statistics Austria – for example, tax and social security data used for STS
- links have recently been established with other Federal Statistics bodies about the implementation of the ES Code of Practice

But whilst Statistics Austria has links with other Federal Statistics bodies, and with the Statistical Offices of the Lander, the links with other Federal Statistics bodies are not currently well-developed or systematic – for example, there do not seem to be regular co-ordinating (or even information sharing) meetings of statistical producers. It is noteworthy that “co-ordination” by Statistics Austria is not required by the Federal Statistics Act.

Statistics Austria is in a position to offer a great deal of expertise and practical know-how to other national authorities producing statistics in terms of standards, guidelines, quality management and methodology.

5. GOOD PRACTICES TO BE HIGHLIGHTED

5.1 Feedback talks

In the framework of Statistics Austria TQM approach, Statistics Austria has introduced standard quality reports to be produced and kept up-to-date for all statistics. The reports are based on the ESS definition of quality in statistics and follow the European standard quality report, and provide an essential basis for "feedback talks". These Talks are an important and innovative approach to the assessment and evaluation of the quality of Statistics Austria's statistical work. They involve both internal (including the production domain, a peer domain and national accountants) and external experts (such as main users and methodologists).

Feedback talks were introduced in mid 2003. They have been carried out - as far as possible on a monthly basis - in co-operation with the quality committee of the Statistical Council with the objective of having all statistics reviewed by end of 2008. The Talks represent a statistical audit function as they aim:

- to review statistical methods and the quality of processes in detail
- to identify quality improvement potential on the basis of external and internal users' views
- to improve the quality reports, and
- to define recommendations and actions.

The implementation of improvement actions is documented and is itself subject to review.

5.2 Business Planning

Statistics Austria has implemented in an exemplary manner business planning by integrating strategic perspectives, annual objectives and ex-post activity reporting. Its multi-annual strategic plan establishes clear links to its mission statement, and identifies long-term objectives and implementing measures in a very concise and operational way. The measures' innovative character reflects the way in which the strategic plan has been developed involving junior staff, middle and top management as well as the Statistical and Economic Councils.

Statistics Austria's annual work programme details the objectives by statistical domain including references to "negative priorities". A summary table of the main products for each domain complements the picture. As a third element an annual activity report complements the approach reporting in detail on the work carried out (including information on work that could not be carried out) with a summary overview of the main statistical products assessing the implementation of the plan.

In order to develop this approach further, the implementation of the business plan could be complemented by setting concrete targets, against which progress could be monitored. In addition, other readily available quality elements could be added to the overview tables which currently focus on punctuality only.

5.3 Measuring respondents' burdens

In line with its legal requirement to minimise respondents' burden (in particular Art. 24,3 of the Federal Statistics Act), Statistics Austria in co-operation with the Austrian Economic Chamber publishes a Respondents' Burden Barometer including information on the development over time based on measuring the time taken to complete a questionnaire. In the future (2007) this will be supplemented by an assessment on the basis of the standard cost model providing a baseline to set targets against. <http://www.statistik.at/respondenten/index.shtml>

6. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PEER REVIEW TEAM

Strategic Issues

1. The Federal Statistics Act only allows Statistics Austria to make anonymised microdata available for research purposes. However, there is a trend in the ESS to try to make some identifiable data available to the research community. Statistics Austria should consider the steps it might wish to take in order to move from an approach of (disclosure) risk avoidance, to risk management, given the possibility of an integrated ESS policy in this area in future.
2. The Federal Statistics Act was passed in 2000 (amended in 2003). Although very powerful it is relatively detailed and prescriptive. At some stage there will be pressure to update it, and Statistics Austria should consider making it more flexible and light touch, and based more on contemporary thinking about sound statistical principles – perhaps simply by cross-referring to the ES Code of Practice. It should also review the (baseline) funding position, in order to minimise the risk that Statistics Austria be forced to seek additional tasks in order to raise revenue. And it should define a co-ordination role for Statistics Austria.

Co-ordination and co-operation

1. Statistics Austria already has contacts across the Austrian Federal Statistical System. However, Statistics Austria might consider systematically its relationship with other national data providers in terms of standards and guidance, and methodological support, with a view to formalising and strengthening a co-ordination role.
2. Statistics Austria has developed working relationships with the university sector in Austria. Within this framework more “secondary analysis” could be a priority, particularly to help improve understanding of the coherence of different data sources and statistical estimates.
3. The Federal Statistics Law defines the governance relationship between the Statistical and Economics Councils. However the Statistical Council might wish to review whether it is as effective as it might be in engaging with the Economic Council.

Operational issues

1. Statistics Austria already provides (potential) survey respondents with information about its products, to help improve response rates. However it should consider reviewing the ‘feedback’ information provided systematically across different business areas, and should discuss in detail with representatives of respondents whether more bespoke information might be targeted at different respondent constituencies.
2. Statistics Austria collects feedback from institutional users of its products and services. It should consider undertaking an opinion survey to understand better the views of the general public, about confidence in official statistics and about trust in Statistics Austria.
3. By law Statistics Austria can only collect data once it has a legal mandate. In some instances the collection of data needed to meet European Regulations is delayed – for up to two years – because the Ministry of Economy and Labour has not arranged national legislation (Orders) sufficiently quickly. The Director General (Statistics) should consider writing to the head of the Ministry to seek resolution of this problem.

7. LIST OF IMPROVEMENT ACTIONS BY PRINCIPLE OF THE CODE

Principle 4: Quality commitment

Quality guidelines to be elaborated in the framework of the European Statistics Code of Practice also incorporating the organisation's error treatment policy.

Timetable
Mid 2007

Principle 6: Impartiality and objectivity

Statistics Austria will move towards a harmonised release time – for example, 10.30 am – in line with international best practice. In addition the release calendar will be extended to cover all statistical releases.

Timetable
March 2007

Statistics Austria will develop and publish a policy on pre-release access, consistent with European best practice. It will also publicise – for example on its website - its pre-release arrangements, including details (statistical products, timescales, and names of recipients) of instances when Ministers have early access.

March 2007

Principle 9: Non-Excessive Burden on Respondents

Systematic, comprehensive assessment of whether administrative sources can be used for the production of statistics (covering all statistical products)

Timetable
End 2007

Formal agreements with institutions responsible for administrative data with regard to data quality and delivery reliability

End 2008

Principle 11: Relevance

Customer/user satisfaction surveys on a regular basis

Timetable
End 2008

Principle 12: Accuracy and Reliability

General quality guidelines to be elaborated (covering also questionnaire testing, management of overcoverage, undercoverage and misclassification, review of the survey design, calculation of quality indicators, supervision of field operations, data entry and coding, editing and imputation). [Note: this is also relevant to Principle 8, "Appropriate Statistical Procedures"].

Timetable
Mid 2007

Principle 12: Accuracy and Reliability

Timetable

Extension of calculation of quality indicators to be included in quality reports End 2008

Principle 13: Timeliness and Punctuality

Timetable

Harmonised release time for press releases – for example, 10.30 am – in line with international best practice. (see also Principle 6) March 2007

Systematic, comprehensive assessment of whether further improvements in timeliness are possible (covering all statistical products) Mid 2008

Principle 14: Coherence and Comparability

Timetable

Further efforts to extend analysis of coherence, e.g. in cooperation with the scientific community End 2008

Principle 15: Accessibility and clarity

Timetable

Relaunch of Statistics Austria website. Mid 2007

Improve accessibility of database following a transparent publication and simplified pricing policy. Mid 2009

Extend on an office-wide basis current practice of some Directorates to notify the public about custom-made analyses carried out by Statistics Austria. End 2007

Integrated metadata system to extend provision of metadata – including (parts) in English language - to all dissemination channels Mid 2009

8. ANNEX A: PROGRAMME OF THE VISIT

22 Nov 06	Discussion with internal stakeholders	Participants
09.30-10.00	Welcome and introduction of programme, organisational matters	DG Peter Hackl, DG Gabriela Petrovic, Werner Holzer, Brigitte Grandits
10.00-11.00	Statistics Austria, Principles 1,2	DG Peter Hackl, DG Gabriela Petrovic, Werner Holzer, Brigitte Grandits
11.00-11.30	Statistics Austria, Principle 3	DG Gabriela Petrovic, Gertrude List, Werner Spitzer, Oskar Zimmermann-Meinzingen, Werner Holzer, Brigitte Grandits
11.30-12.00	Statistics Austria, Principle 5	DG Gabriela Petrovic, Lilian Herle, Dieter Burget, Peter Findl, Franz Granner, Werner Holzer, Brigitte Grandits
12.00-12.30	Statistics Austria, Principles 6, 15	DG Peter Hackl, DG Gabriela Petrovic, Peter Findl, Franz Granner, Beate Schmidt, Reinhold Schwarzl, Norbert Rainer, Werner Holzer, Brigitte Grandits
12.30-13.30	Lunch break	
13.30-14.30	Statistics Austria, Principle 4	DG Peter Hackl, Werner Holzer, Thomas Burg, Peter Findl, Norbert Rainer, Brigitte Grandits
14.30-15.30	Meeting with junior staff Principles 1-6, 15	9 junior staff members, Werner Holzer, Brigitte Grandits
15.30-17.00	1) Meeting with Directors/Head of Units from production units to review specific aspects in practice (e.g. (electronic) data collection, Intrastat, CATI) 2) Presentation of strategic master plan 3) Response Burden Barometer 4) Results of user satisfaction survey	DG Peter Hackl, DG Gabriela Petrovic, Werner Holzer, 4 Directors, Norbert Rainer, Dieter Burget, Frederick Rennert, Thomas Burg, Heads of Unit, Brigitte Grandits
23 Nov 06	Discussion with external stakeholders, Statistical Council, Economic Council	Participants
09.30-10.30	Meeting with other national data producers	See „List of Participants“
10.30-11.30	Meeting with members of the Statistical Council	
11.30-12.30	Meeting with members of the Economic Council	
12.30-13.30	Lunch break	
13.30-14.30	Meeting with representatives of respondents	
14.30-15.45	Meeting with main users (ministries)	
15.45-17.00	Meeting with main users (other users)	
24 Nov 06	Conclusions	Participants
09.30-11.30	Meeting with management to sum-up and detailed review of list of improvement actions for all principles	Directors and Deputy Directors, Heads of Divisions and Deputy Head of Division
11.30-13.00	Meeting with top-management: conclusions, recommendations and follow-up (improvement actions)	DG Peter Hackl, DG Gabriela Petrovic, Werner Holzer, Brigitte Grandits

9. ANNEX B: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

<u>Peer review team:</u>	<u>Delegation Statistics Austria:</u>
Richard LAUX, ONS UK (chair) Hilkka VIHAVAINEN, Statistics Finland Martina HAHN, Eurostat	DG Peter Hackl DG Gabriela Petrovic Werner Holzer Brigitte Grandits

Statistics Austria

Name	Title/Function	Organizational Unit
Mr Peter Hackl	Director General Statistics	
Ms Gabriela Petrovic	Director General Finance	
Mr Werner Holzer	Secretary General, Head of Quality Management, Chair of TQM Board	
Ms Brigitte Grandits	Head of Unit	International Relations
Ms Lilian Herle	Head of Unit	Legal Affairs
Ms Gertrude List	Head of Unit	Human Resource Management
Mr Werner Spitzer	Head of Unit	Controlling
Mr Oskar Zimmermann-Meinzigen	Head of Unit	Finance and Accounting
Mr Peter Findl	Director, TQM Board	Directorate Population Statistics
Mr Martin Bauer	Head of Unit	Social and Housing Statistics (Directorate Population Statistics)
Mr Ivo Ponocny	Head of Unit	Science, Technology, Education (Directorate Population Statistics)
Mr Franz Granner	Director	Directorate Business Statistics
Ms Waltraud Rath	Deputy Director	Directorate Business Statistics
Mr Hannes Hameseder	Head of Unit	Production (Directorate Business Statistics)
Ms Sabine Zach	Head of Unit	Services (Directorate Business Statistics)
Ms Antonia Egerer	Head of Unit	Foreign Trade (Directorate Business Statistics)
Mr Christian Buzin	Head of Unit	Transport (Directorate Business Statistics)
Ms Beate Schmidt	Director	Directorate Spatial Statistics
Mr Peter Laimer	Deputy Director	Directorate Spatial Statistics
Ms Eva Milota	Head of Unit	Environment (Directorate Spatial Statistics)
Mr Wolfgang Bittermann	Head of Unit	Energy (Directorate Spatial Statistics)
Mr Reinhold Schwarzl	Director	Directorate Macroeconomic Statistics
Mr Josef Auer	Deputy Director	Directorate Macroeconomic Statistics
Ms Ursula Havel	Head of Unit	National Accounts (Directorate Macroeconomic Statistics)
Mr Walter Stübler	Head of Unit	Sector Accounts and Government Finance Statistics (Directorate Macroeconomic Statistics)
Mr Norbert Rainer	Head of Division, TQM Board	Registers, Classifications and Methods Division
Mr Alois Haslinger	Deputy Head of Division	Registers, Classifications and Methods Division
Mr Thomas Burg	Deputy Head of Unit, TQM Board	Methods (Registers, Classifications and Methods Division)
Mr Dieter Burget	Head of Division	IT-Division

Mr Frederick Rennert	Expert	IT-Division
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Junior Staff:

Ms Monika Hackl	Expert	Directorate Population Statistics
Ms Nadja Lamei	Expert	Directorate Population Statistics
Ms Andrea Laßmann	Expert	Directorate Business Statistics
Mr Sacha Baud	Expert	Directorate Spatial Statistics
Mr Stefan Peyr	Expert	Directorate Spatial Statistics
Ms Alexandra Beisteiner	Expert	Directorate Macroeconomic Statistics
Mr Klaus Stöger	Expert	Directorate Macroeconomic Statistics
Ms Senta Lambaa	Expert	Registers, Classifications and Methods Division
Mr Thomas Karner	Expert	Registers, Classifications and Methods Division

Statistical Council, Economic Council, External Participants

Statistical Council:

Mr Ewald Kutzenberger	Statistical Council (chairman)
Mr Wilfried Grossmann	Statistical Council (vice-chairman); professor, chairman of the committee “quality assurance”
Mr Josef Richter	Statistical Council, chairman of the committee “work programme”
Ms Margit Epler	Statistical Council

Economic Council:

Mr Richard Bock	Economic Council (chairman)
Mr Manfred Matzka	Economic Council (vice-chairman)
Mr Wolfgang Koller	Economic Council (works council; Statistics Austria)

Other Data Producers:

Mr Andreas Buzek	Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour
Mr Rudolf Misurec	Federal Ministry for Interior
Mr Gernot Resinger	Federal Ministry for Interior
Mr Johannes Hangler	Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management
Mr Erich Hille	Austrian National Bank
Mr Michael Andreasch	Austrian National Bank
Mr Rudolf Legat	Umweltbundesamt (Authority of the Federal Government for Environmental Protection and Environmental Control)
Mr Harald Unger	Austrian Financial Market Authority (FMA)

Representatives of Respondents::

Ms Ulrike Oschischnig	Austrian Federal Economic Chamber
Mr Rudolf Hausmann	Presidential Conference of Austrian Chambers of Agriculture
Mr Andreas Weigl	Austrian Association of Towns

Users (ministries):

Mr Michael Lückl	Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture
Mr Mark Németh	Federal Ministry for Education, Science and Culture
Mr Michael Stern	Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour
Mr Gerhard Burian	Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour
Mr Gerald Breunhölder	Federal Ministry of Economics and Labour
Mr Alfred Katterl	Federal Ministry of Finance
Mr Franz Göttl	Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management
Mr Thomas Spiegel	Federal Ministry of Transport, Innovation and Technology

Users (other):

Ms Gudrun Biffel	Austrian Institute of Economic Research, professor
Mr Bernhard Böhm	Vienna University of Technology, professor
Mr Manfred Dreiszker	provincial government bodies (Länder), Burgenland (statistics)
Mr Ernst Fürst	provincial government bodies (Länder), Oberösterreich (statistics)
Mr Erich Hille	Austrian National Bank
Mr Manfred Fluch	Austrian National Bank
Mr Michael Korbel	APA (Austria Presse Agentur)