

PEER REVIEW REPORT

ON COMPLIANCE WITH THE CODE OF PRACTICE AND
THE COORDINATION ROLE OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTE

MALTA

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Malta Statistics Authority (MSA) and the National Statistics Office (NSO) of Malta were established in 2001, as a single statutory entity. The MSA Board has six members as specified in the Malta Statistics Authority Act, representing various spheres of Malta's social and economic sectors. The chair is appointed by the Minister responsible for statistics, and the Director General of the NSO is an ex-officio member.

The MSA Act describes the NSO as the executive arm of the MSA. The Director General of the NSO is responsible for "day-to-day operations of the Office within the Authority in accordance with the general lines of policy established by the Authority". The NSO's mission is stated as being to produce efficiently and with minimum burden on respondents high-quality statistics that are relevant, reliable and comparable, and to disseminate them in an impartial, independent and timely manner, making them available simultaneously to all users.

The NSO is the main producer of official statistics in Malta although it has a coordinating function with regard to the statistical activities of other public authorities. In particular, the Central Bank of Malta is recognised as being responsible for some official statistics, and the Department of Health Information and Research (part of the Ministry for Energy and Health) is identified as an 'other national authority'.

The NSO's approach to promoting and ensuring good practice exploits the advantages of being a small national statistical institute within a small and relatively cohesive public administration. A lot is achieved through informal and pragmatic solutions that might not be so workable in a larger administration. Awareness of the European statistics Code of Practice (CoP) is good throughout the organisation and among other public bodies that have a role in relation to the production of European statistics. Relations with officials responsible for statistical work - either as producers or users - in other public bodies are handled on a mutually supportive basis.

Relative to its size, the NSO has a large output of News Releases that are presented clearly and consistently and cover virtually all the European statistics produced by Malta. This, and a new website that has been praised by users, reflect a strong commitment to public dissemination.

The description of the functions of the MSA Board and the NSO in the legislation leaves some scope for interpretation in terms of how the relationship between them is expected to function in practice. In 2013, some changes were made to the Board membership, and the new Board undertook to establish 'an effective regulatory and supervisory framework'. It also established a permanent secretariat operating independently of the NSO, and three sub-committees. Many of the stakeholders to whom the Peer Review team spoke supported the view that the division of responsibilities between the Authority Board and the NSO now needed to be defined and set out more clearly.

In effect, the Board sits between the Director General and the Ministry responsible for Statistics, providing both strategic guidance and a channel of communication. This puts the Chair of the Authority Board in a powerful position and, following the recent evolution in the supervisory role of the Board, it is now of particular importance that the appointment arrangements for all Board members should be based solely on the individuals' suitability.

The MSA Act is specific about the requirement on public and private authorities to cooperate with the NSO in relation to the use of administrative data for statistical purposes. Whilst there appears to be a comprehensive set of statutory provisions in this area, the Peer Review team was told that there were cases in which bodies were resistant to providing data and that they cited clauses in the Act that created some room to object. In view of these concerns, the Peer Review team

concluded that it would be beneficial if the intention of the MSA Act in relation to access to administrative data were to be restated clearly by the Government.

Although the quality of statistical data and processes is recognised as being of central importance, the NSO is still looking for an optimal approach to quality management, including how best to allocate relevant responsibilities and tasks. There is a Methodology and Research Unit which has accumulated a range of tasks over recent years. However, due to resource constraints it is not fully able to carry out all the tasks it was originally intended to undertake, including centralised quality monitoring and assessment functions. The Peer Review team concluded that whilst there is considerable priority and attention being given to quality issues by all parts of the MSA and NSO, there is a risk that the actions of the different players may have gaps, or be overlapping or obstructing one another, and that more formal and central coordination may be needed.

Data collection is handled in a wide range of ways. Some surveys are carried out using paper questionnaires, but there is also use of electronic data supply. Administrative data sources used for statistical purposes are in some cases delivered on Compact Disk Read-Only Memory (CD-ROM); in other cases via a query from the source's database, or via Excel tables. There is similar variety in the data processing arrangements. In discussion it was recognised that developing a more efficient, automated and standardised production process would be important. In particular, a more integrated approach to data processing, including a comprehensive data warehouse, may offer the best way forward - although resource constraints are currently an obstacle.

The NSO cooperates effectively with other authorities and has sought to reinforce this through several Memoranda of Understanding. There are also other mechanisms for coordination including some inter-institutional committees. Whilst recognising the value of the existing arrangements, the Peer Review team concluded that the various players in the statistical system would benefit from increased mutual awareness, coordination and exchange with each other. To that end it would be helpful to prepare an inventory of statistical activities across the public sector, analysing the contribution of each agency, with a view to possible efficiency gains, especially in light of the resources constraints that the NSO faces.

Documented information on the contribution of the different bodies involved in the production of statistics could also serve as the basis for the NSO to draw up and maintain a published plan clarifying each body's planned contribution to the system - with the aim of progressively taking stock and streamlining the functioning of the statistical system as a whole.

Although there already are a variety of channels through which users of statistics can make requests or suggestions to the NSO, the Peer Review team formed the impression that the NSO did not currently focus as sharply as it might on the use made of statistics. It concluded that it would be helpful to have a single dedicated, effectively promoted, channel for users to put forward requests, receive a considered response, suggest improvements or changes, and be more involved.

The NSO might also benefit from taking some steps to strengthen its own staff's understanding of the organisation as whole, and further develop a strong statistical culture. A greater sharing within the NSO of information and expertise could help to cross-fertilize knowledge. And giving key staff more opportunity to gain wider experience, for career advancement and professional development, could help with longer term organisational development and staff retention.

Overall, the Peer Review team concluded that although the NSO is one of the smallest statistical offices in the European Statistical System, and thus faces a relatively large overhead in terms of meeting EU statistical regulations, it is on course to fulfil all its commitments. And whilst the NSO and the other public authorities that contribute to the preparation of European statistics often

adopt informal and pragmatic approaches, they have nonetheless achieved a high level of compliance with the CoP.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Governance

1. The Malta Statistics Authority should put forward proposals to the relevant authorities for amendments to the Malta Statistics Authority Act to delineate more clearly and formally the responsibilities and practical authority of the Director General of the National Statistics Office on the one hand, and the Board of the Authority on the other. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 1)
2. Subject to any necessary legislative changes, the Malta Statistics Authority should communicate publicly and clearly the nature of its supervisory and regulatory role, setting out the mechanisms by which it will fulfil that role and the public interest rationale for it; and indicating how this will assure the independence and quality of official statistics. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 1)
3. Having regard to the evolving role of the Malta Statistics Authority Board, the relevant authorities should review and amend the statutory arrangements for the selection and appointment of the Chair and members of the Board to ensure appointments are made as transparently as possible, and solely on the basis of the relevant knowledge and suitability of the individuals. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 1).
4. The relevant authorities should take all necessary steps to ensure that there is full and continuing compliance with the provisions of Article 39 of the Malta Statistics Authority Act that allow the National Statistics Office access to administrative data for statistical purposes; and that all public bodies seek and follow the advice of the Director General in the development and management of administrative data systems that have statistical potential. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 8 and 10)

Quality and methodology

5. The National Statistics Office of Malta should develop a formal Quality Management Framework that sets out clearly the part that each element of the organisation is expected to play in assuring quality. This framework documentation should clarify how these roles link together. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 4.1)
6. The Quality Management Framework of the National Statistics Office of Malta should be published, regularly updated and used to promote a common understanding of the system of quality management among all those involved. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicators 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3)
7. As part of the Quality Management Framework, the National Statistics Office of Malta should give high priority to completing the systematic documentation of statistical processes; and use the documentation to improve the design of those processes and to monitor more systematically the work of the office. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 4)

8. The National Statistics Office of Malta should review both the responsibilities and resources of the Methodology and Research Unit to ensure that it has the capacity to lead work relating to methodology and quality management - if necessary by transferring some existing tasks to other units. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicators 4.1 and 4.4 and Indicators 7.6 and 7.7)
9. The National Statistics Office of Malta should give priority to the development of a more integrated information technology environment, including the implementation of a unified database in order to decrease the diversity of applications and parallel solutions throughout its production process. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 7.2 and Indicator 10.2)

Coordination and communication

10. The National Statistics Office of Malta should prepare and make public a report indicating the role of all relevant public authorities in the production of Malta's official statistics and other statistics issued directly by those bodies. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 1 and 10, and coordination)
11. Building on the published information on the statistical activities of the various public authorities, the National Statistics Office of Malta should seek to develop a more comprehensive planning process for public sector statistics. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 1 and 10 and coordination)
12. The National Statistics Office of Malta should seek to develop a more open and approachable relationship with journalists and the news media. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 6 and 15)
13. The National Statistics Office of Malta should establish and promote a central and more systematic process for inviting and assessing external users' views on, and proposals for changes to, its current products and services. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 11 and 15)
14. The National Statistics Office of Malta should aim to achieve a greater degree of staff mobility, and seek to enhance training and career development opportunities for its staff. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 3)
15. The National Statistics Office of Malta should find ways to enhance horizontal communication between units and directorates, sharing expertise and promoting cooperation across subject matter boundaries. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 3)

2. INTRODUCTION

This peer review report is part of a series of assessments, the objective of which is to evaluate the extent to which National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) and the European Statistical System (ESS)¹ comply with the European statistics Code of Practice (CoP).

The CoP, which sets out a common quality framework for the ESS, was first adopted in 2005 by the Statistical Programme Committee and updated in 2011 by its successor, the European Statistical System Committee. The CoP – 15 principles and related indicators of good practice – covers the institutional environment, the statistical production process and the output of European statistics. The ESS is committed to fully complying with the CoP and is working towards its full implementation. Periodic assessments review progress towards reaching this goal.

The first global assessment, a round of peer reviews in 2006–2008, explored how the NSIs and Eurostat were progressing in implementing the parts of the CoP relating to the institutional environment and dissemination of statistics (principles 1–6 and 15). This resulted in reports for each NSI and Eurostat, available on the Eurostat website². These reports also include a set of improvement actions covering all the principles of the CoP; these informed the annual monitoring of the implementation of the CoP in the ESS in the period 2009-2013.

The scope of this second round of peer reviews is broader: the assessment of CoP compliance covers all principles; the CoP compliance of selected other national producers of European statistics (as well as the NSI) in each country is assessed; and the way in which statistical authorities coordinate the production and dissemination of European statistics within their statistical systems is explored.

It should be underlined that there is a fundamental difference between the reports in the previous round of peer reviews conducted in 2006-2008 and the reports from this round. In the 2006-2008 round compliance with principles 1 to 6 and 15 of the CoP was assessed by means of a four-level scale (fully met; largely met; partly met and not met) and improvement actions were agreed on all 15 principles. After five years of continuous development most of the improvement actions have been implemented and significant progress towards full compliance with the CoP has been made. Therefore, rather than stating the state of play for all principles of the CoP, the reports from the 2013-2015 round mainly focus on issues where full compliance with the CoP has not been found or further improvements are recommended by the Peer Review team.

In order to gain an independent view, the peer review exercise has been externalised and an audit-like approach, where all the answers to the self-assessment questionnaires have to be supported by evidence, has been applied. As in 2006-2008, all EU Member States, the EFTA/EEA countries and Eurostat are subject to a peer review.

Each peer review in the Member States and EFTA/EEA countries is conducted by three reviewers and has four phases: completion of self-assessment questionnaires by a country; their assessment by Peer Reviewers; a peer review visit; and the preparation of reports on the outcomes. The peer review of Eurostat has been conducted by the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB).

¹ The ESS is the partnership between the Union statistical authority, which is the Commission (Eurostat), the national statistical institutes (NSIs) and other national authorities responsible in each Member State for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics. This Partnership also includes the EFTA /EEA countries.

² <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/quality/first-round-of-peer-reviews>

To test and complete the methodology, it was piloted in two countries, Iceland and Slovakia, over the summer of 2013.

The Peer Review of Malta was conducted by Richard Alldritt (chair), Michelle Jouvenal and József Kárpáti, who conducted a peer review visit to Valletta on 9-13 March 2015. The programme of the visit is in Annex A and a list of participants in Annex B.

This report focuses on compliance with the CoP and the coordination of European statistics within the Maltese statistical system. The report highlights some of the strengths of the National Statistics Office and Malta Statistics Authority in these contexts and contains recommendations for improvement. Improvement actions developed by the National Statistics Office of Malta and other relevant authorities on the basis of this report will be published within the four-week period starting when the final report is sent to the NSI.

3. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM

The Malta Statistics Authority (MSA) and the National Statistics Office (NSO) were established in their current form in March 2001, as a single statutory entity, under the provisions of the Malta Statistics Authority Act of 2000 ('the MSA Act'). The NSO replaced the Central Office of Statistics (COS) which had been operating since the early 1950s. The Authority Board comprises a chair, appointed by the Minister responsible for statistics, the Director General of the NSO in an ex-officio capacity, and six other members appointed by the Minister after consultation as specified in the legislation.

The statutory functions of the Authority include the following: to regulate and supervise the production of official statistics in accordance with international requirements and standards; to discuss and advise on statistical matters, including methodologies, relating to the collection, compilation and dissemination of statistics; and to establish priorities in responding to the demand for official statistics.

The Act establishes the NSO, as the executive arm of the MSA, and specifies its functions as being the collection, compilation, extraction and release of official statistics relating to demographic, social, environmental, economic and general activities and conditions of Malta, as listed in a Schedule to the Act. The Director General of the NSO is responsible for "day-to-day operations of the Office within the Authority in accordance with the general lines of policy established by the Authority".

Objectives

The NSO states its mission as being to produce efficiently and with minimum burden on respondents high-quality statistics that are relevant, reliable and comparable, and to disseminate them in an impartial, independent and timely manner, making them available simultaneously to all users. In addition, under the legislation, the NSO has the following broad objectives: reliability, objectivity, relevance, statistical confidentiality, transparency, specificity, and proportionality. Moreover, the Office shall produce statistics which shall aim to mirror as faithfully as possible the real situations, disseminate the results to the public and the users thereof in a neutral and impartial way, focus on the phenomena which are essential for decision makers and honour the citizens' right to public information."

Structure

The NSO is the main producer of official statistics in Malta although it has a coordinating function with regard to the statistical activities of other public authorities in the country. The Central Bank of Malta and the Department of Health Information and Research (part of the Ministry for Energy and Health) are identified as other national authorities in the context of EC Regulation 223/2009.

The Office is structured in four directorates: Economic Statistics; Business Statistics; Social Statistics; and Resources and Support Services. The first three directorates are responsible for translating the Office's mission into statistical output that is timely, impartial, of a high quality and that is responsive to the country's needs. These are supported by the units within the Resources and Support Services Directorate. Two units - Methodology and Research and Regional Statistics - report directly to the Director General. A regional office for Gozo was established in 2014.

Appointment of the Director General

The Act sets out in general terms the process for appointing the Director General and the duties of the post. It specifies that the Director General shall be a person with professional qualifications with recognised competence and reputation in the domain of statistics, and shall be appointed by the Authority following consultation with the Minister for a period of three years. This period may be extended. The appointment procedure takes place after a public call for applications has been made.

The MSA Act further states that for a person to be considered, they are required to have, among other things, an advanced university degree in the field of statistics, social sciences or a closely related numeric discipline, or in the fields of education, finance, management or information and communication technology (ICT), where a substantial part of the studies focuses on applied statistics. Individuals also need to demonstrate at least eight years professional experience in a statistical, numeric or economics-related field, the majority of which in a senior position. At the time of the Peer Review visit, the appointment of a Director General on this basis was in progress.

Legislation

The main legislation is the Malta Statistics Authority Act of 2000. There is also a Census Act of 1948. There are no other laws or regulations that are specific to the work of the MSA or NSO.

Statistical programme

Article 7 of the Act requires the Authority Board to examine and submit, for the approval of the Minister, the business plan and financial estimates drawn up by the Director General for the administration of the Office.

Statistical products and dissemination

Statistical products are made available in news releases, publications in printed and electronic form, metadata and an online statistical database. In the course of 2013-14 a dedicated website for metadata was developed. This includes a repository of statistical concepts, metadata reports (including quality reports) for a wide range of surveys and domains as well as an extensive list of classifications used at the NSO.

The NSO's online statistical database offers users the opportunity to view and download, free of charge, time series data on various statistical themes. In addition, users may also submit tailored requests for data through the NSO website.

4. COMPLIANCE WITH THE CODE OF PRACTICE AND THE COORDINATION ROLE WITHIN THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM

4.1 STRENGTHS OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTE IN RELATION TO ITS COMPLIANCE WITH THE CODE OF PRACTICE AND TO ITS COORDINATION ROLE

This part of the report identifies some aspects of the CoP in relation to which NSO Malta, or the MSA, is regarded by the Peer Review team as showing high standards in relation to compliance with the CoP.

Principle 1 of the CoP requires that the independence of the NSI from political or other external interference is specified in law. Whilst there are some aspects of the MSA Act that the Peer Review team believes could be strengthened, as discussed later in this chapter, it nonetheless reflects a strong commitment to independence and has some distinctive features intended to distance the NSO from any inappropriate political or external influence.

More generally, the NSO's approach to promoting and ensuring good practice exploits the advantages of being a small NSI within a relatively small and cohesive public administration. A lot is achieved through informal and pragmatic solutions that would not be so workable in a larger administration. Awareness of the CoP is good throughout the organisation and also within other public bodies that have a role in the production of European statistics. Relations with officials responsible for statistical work, either as producers or users, in other public bodies are handled on a mutually supportive and friendly basis, with few problems of boundaries or conflicting priorities. This pragmatic approach to managing the production of European statistics and ensuring that the necessary standards are observed supports many principles of the CoP but especially Principle 10 on cost-effectiveness.

The main government users of statistics, journalists and academics all told the Peer Review team how helpful, professional and approachable the NSO staff were, even when it was clear that they were constrained by resource pressures. The expectation of a helpful service culture of this kind is implicit in various principles of the CoP, including Principles 1 and 15.

For a small NSI, the NSO has a large output of News Releases which are presented clearly and consistently and which cover virtually all the European statistics produced by Malta. This, and a new website that has been praised by users, indicate a strong commitment to meeting the expectations of Principle 15 of the CoP in relation to accessibility and clarity.

At the most general level, the Peer Review team was impressed with the progress that the NSO has made since Malta joined the EU in 2004. It is one of the smallest NSIs in the ESS, and therefore faces a proportionately large overhead in terms of meeting EU statistical regulations, but it is on course to fulfil all its commitments, without the current derogations, within a few years. This indicates strong compliance with the 'Statistical Output' elements of the CoP.

Although the Peer Review team did not identify any practices that are innovative in the broad sense relevant to these reports, the informal arrangements for 'cross-validation' of statistical news releases prior to publication – under which an individual member of staff from a different area of the office signs off each draft release after careful checking – has many benefits, not least in sharing expertise and experience, and emphasising shared responsibility.

4.2 ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.2.1 GOVERNANCE

Delineating responsibilities

The MSA Act of 2000 defines the Authority as a single legal entity of which the NSO forms a part. The Board of the Authority is composed of 8 members, including a non-executive Chair and Deputy Chair, and with the Director General of the NSO as a member in an ex-officio capacity. The Chair is a part-time position and has an office and secretariat within the NSO offices. The three secretariat staff are not regarded as being NSO staff.

It is clear from the text of the legislation that the Authority Board is expected to perform a set of functions distinct from those of the NSO. For example, the Act requires the Authority (Board) to:

- examine and submit, for the approval of the Minister, the business plan and financial estimates drawn up by the Director General for the administration of the Office;
- regulate and to generally supervise the production of official statistics in accordance with international requirements and standards;
- discuss and advise on statistical matters, including methodologies, relating to the collection, compilation and dissemination of statistics;
- establish priorities in responding to the demand for official statistics;
- liaise between the Office and other public bodies concerning the supply of data and the coordination of activities with statistical implications;
- consider and comment where necessary on the yearly report submitted by the Director General on the work of the Office.

This description of the functions of the Authority Board leaves scope for interpretation in terms of how the Board is expected to operate in practice. In July 2013, the Minister for Finance announced some changes to the Board membership, including a new Chair. Subsequently, in its first annual report, the new Board stated that "the incoming MSA Board, from its first meeting in August 2013, noted the need to take urgent steps to ensure that the provisions of the MSA Act are fulfilled. The most crucial step is that an effective regulatory and supervisory framework requires a clear separation of powers, roles and duties between the Authority and the NSO."

It also noted its intention to establish "a permanent secretariat reporting to the Board, operating independently of the NSO and ensuring that decisions taken at Board level are being acted on", and that it would establish three sub-committees of the Board responsible for Governance; Audit and Risk Assurance; and Monitoring and Assessment (of statistical outputs).

In the course of the review visit, the Peer Review team spoke to the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Board, one ex-member of the Board, senior officials of the NSO and several external stakeholders, all of whom supported the view that in the interests of good governance, the division of responsibilities between the Authority Board and the NSO now needed to be defined more precisely, and set out more clearly, than was the case currently.

There is no doubt that the MSA Act gives the Authority Board the practical authority to establish a regulatory and supervisory framework as it thinks best, but it is less clear for example whether the Act envisages the Authority Board making independent public statements about matters of controversy or public concern; or publicly challenging the misuse of official statistics in public debate. There has been one recent example of a public statement on a matter of political

controversy. In September 2014, the Chair of the Authority issued a statement about the content of a particular NSO news release which, according to newspaper reports, had been openly questioned by the Minister. The statement concluded that some of the statistical commentary in the news release was not correct.

The Peer Review team concluded that the recent changes constituted an important development in the role being performed by the Authority Board (following the changes in membership in 2013) as had been highlighted in the Authority's own 2013 Annual Report. The working relationship between the Minister for Finance, the Authority Board and the NSO is now a relatively complex one and there are some overlaps, ambiguities and uncertainties, particularly in relation to the freedom of the Director General of the NSO to act without prior agreement of the Authority Board, or to maintain a stance on a statistical issue that is out of step with the majority view of the Board without jeopardising his or her own independent position.

The Act gives the Director General a wide range of responsibilities including to "maintain the integrity and validity of official statistics and public confidence in them" but much of the practical authority seems now to rest with the Authority Board whose members may have views that differ from those of the Director General on such matters. The Peer Review team considered that there was potential for tension over 'who is in charge' in relation to some professional and managerial judgements and that this uncertainty could be counter-productive in terms of statistical quality or confidence in the Authority as a whole.

There are many positive aspects to the supervisory/regulatory Board model that has been adopted and the Peer Review team heard no criticism, or grounds to question the actions or commitment to good practice of the Minister or members of the Board. However, Indicator 1.1 of the CoP requires that the independence of the National Statistical Institute from political and other external interference is specified in law; and indicator 1.4 requires that the head of the NSI has sole responsibility for deciding statistical methods, standards and procedures, and the content and timing of releases. In view of the ambiguities in the MSA Act, it is not self-evident that these indicators will necessarily continue to be fully met under the legal and administrative framework governing the Authority and NSO. Currently, that depends on the day-to-day interpretation of the roles of, in particular, the Minister, the Chair of the Authority and the Director General of the NSO.

The Peer Review team concluded that whilst clarification of the roles in legislation may not, of itself, be sufficient to ensure long term compliance with the CoP, it would nonetheless be a beneficial step and that the process of updating the legislation (for example, to include specific reference to the CoP) would prompt consideration at the highest level of how to ensure the ongoing independence of the Director General of the NSO within the framework of public administration. The argument was also made by more than one stakeholder that the MSA Act was now rather out of date overall.

To achieve and further enhance compliance with Principle 1 of the CoP **the Peer Reviewers make two recommendations:**

- 1. The Malta Statistics Authority should put forward proposals to the relevant authorities for amendments to the Malta Statistics Authority Act to delineate more clearly and formally the responsibilities and practical authority of the Director General of the National Statistics Office on the one hand, and the Board of the Authority on the other. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 1)**

2. **Subject to any necessary legislative changes, the Malta Statistics Authority should communicate publicly and clearly the nature of its supervisory and regulatory role, setting out the mechanisms by which it will fulfil that role and the public interest rationale for it; and indicating how this will assure the independence and quality of official statistics. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 1)**

Membership of the Authority Board

According to Article 5 of the MSA Act, the Chair and members of the Authority Board (other than the Director General) are appointed by the Minister for Finance. The Act specifies that one member will be appointed after consultation with the Central Bank of Malta; one after consultation with the trade union movement; one after consultation with the University of Malta; one after consultation with the business community; and two members being professionals in the field of statistics, appointed by the Minister. The Minister may further designate one member as Deputy Chairperson. The members are "paid such honoraria as the Minister may determine".

The Peer Review team saw no grounds to question the integrity with which this appointment process had been conducted to date, or the suitability of those appointed. Nor was it told of any case of political pressure being brought to bear on the Director General or NSO by the Authority Board. Indeed, everyone who offered views to the Peer Review team spoke highly of the respect for statistical independence of the Board members. However, under the existing appointment arrangements there is little transparency about how the Board members are selected; and the involvement of institutions which may be assumed to have distinct political agendas in selecting representatives to sit on the Board seems less than ideal for a Board whose main functions include supporting the independence and professionalism of the Director General.

Under the legislation, the Board sits, in effect, between the Director General and the Minister responsible for Statistics and, in practice, serves both as a source of strategic guidance and a channel of communication in both directions. This is clearly intended to put some distance between the Director General and Ministerial influence but it also gives the Chair of the Authority a powerful position supported by a dedicated secretariat, and this in turn increases the importance of having appointment arrangements that are seen to be based directly and solely on suitability for the role.

Since 2013, the role of the Authority Board has evolved and become more explicitly of a supervisory and regulatory kind – and in the view of some officials who gave evidence to the Peer Review this contrasts with a more low-key consultative role previously. Principle 1 of the CoP requires the professional independence of statistical authorities, and in the case of Malta that would seem to require not just the independence of the NSO but also of the Authority Board.

In view of these considerations and to further enhance compliance with Principle 1 of the CoP, **the Peer Reviewers recommend that:**

3. **Having regard to the evolving role of the Malta Statistics Authority Board, the relevant authorities should review and amend the statutory arrangements for the selection and appointment of the Chair and members of the Board to ensure appointments are made as transparently as possible, and solely on the basis of the relevant knowledge and suitability of the individuals. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 1)**

Exploitation of administrative sources

In the Self-Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ), the NSO notes increased co-operation with administrative data providers in recent years. For example, a Memorandum of Understanding has been established with the Inland Revenue Department for the provision of household and entrepreneurial employment income microdata; microdata on deaths, births, marriages, etc. from the Department of Public Registry are used more; and data from the VAT Department relating to Business statistics is increasingly available.

However, the SAQ also states that “a further increase of the use of administrative data is nevertheless necessary, some barriers still exist in certain domains, and it is not always possible for the Office to get access to all administrative information although these are available.” It quotes an example where the NSO is required to pay a fee to access administrative data from the Malta Financial Services Authority. Social Security data are also mentioned as problematic.

The MSA Act is specific about the requirement on public authorities (and others) to cooperate with the NSO in relation to the use of administrative data for statistical purposes. Article 38 states that any person or undertaking who holds records from which [statistical] information can be obtained, shall grant the NSO access to such records. Article 39 requires public authorities to allow officers of the NSO to access, inspect and take copies of any records; and to consult and cooperate with the Director General for the purpose of assessing the potential of the records as a source of statistical information and where appropriate and practicable, developing recording systems for statistical purposes. It further requires that any public authority that intends to carry out activities with statistical implications shall consult the NSO and accept any recommendation the NSO may make.

At first sight this appears to be a comprehensive set of statutory provisions and might be expected to have led to full cooperation with the NSO to make the most effective use of existing administrative data for statistical purposes. However, the Peer Review team was told that there were cases in which bodies – both public and private – were resistant to such cooperation and cited clauses in the articles of the Act that state that cooperation was only required “where appropriate and practicable” and “in so far as resources permit”. In some other cases, contradictory statutory requirements were cited despite the firm formulation of Article 38 of the Act which starts “Notwithstanding anything contained in any other law enjoining secrecy...”

In view of these concerns and the evidence that cooperation from the holders of administrative data is not as effective as it could be, the Peer Review team concluded that it would be beneficial if the intention of the MSA Act were to be restated clearly by the Government. Indicators 8.7 to 8.9 of the CoP require a shared commitment to the use of administrative data for statistical purposes. Indicator 10.3 requires proactive efforts to improve the statistical potential of administrative data in the interests of cost effectiveness. However, as the SAQ puts it “all institutions work in a solo approach rather than in a collective effort to reduce the burden as much as possible and to increase consistency between data suppliers.”

On a specific point of the drafting of the legislation, although Article 39 the MSA Act requires public authorities to cooperate with the Director General for the purpose of assessing the potential of records as a source of statistical information, the wording of the Act leaves some room for interpretation and negotiation, and the SAQ notes that cooperation in this regard is not always forthcoming. The Peer Review team considered whether there might be scope to strengthen the wording of the legislation but concluded that a robust interpretation of the current provisions, firmly supported by the Government, would be sufficient to ensure full compliance with the CoP.

Bearing in mind the considerations above, and to further enhance compliance with Principles 8 and 10 of the CoP, the Peer Reviewers make the following recommendation:

4. The relevant authorities should take all necessary steps to ensure that there is full and continuing compliance with the provisions of Article 39 of the Malta Statistics Authority Act that allow the National Statistics Office access to administrative data for statistical purposes; and that all public bodies seek and follow the advice of the Director General in the development and management of administrative data systems that have statistical potential. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 8 and 10)

4.2.2 QUALITY AND METHODOLOGY

Quality management

Although the quality of statistical data is recognised as being of central importance by the NSO, the office is still looking for an optimal approach to quality management, including how best to allocate relevant responsibilities and tasks. Staff in various subject matter units carry out specific data-checking tasks and prepare quality reports for Eurostat, or for the International Monetary Fund (IMF); but currently there is neither central coordination nor systematic monitoring at a higher level. Nor is there an overall 'quality framework' in place to define responsibilities and give an overview of quality issues across the office. In consequence, actions related to monitoring, maintaining and developing quality are mostly locally managed and, to some degree, isolated from one another. External quality audits are not a routine feature of the system, although in the case of the Short Term Statistics, data quality was examined by an external reviewer. There have also been some visits by international experts to help identify other possible areas of improvement. These external reviews proved valuable as the basis for subsequent quality developments.

The formal mission statement of the NSO underlines the importance of quality in relation to both products and processes. There is also a policy statement on "Documentation of Data Quality and Methodology", published on NSO's website, that summarises some concepts and definitions and gives basic advice on how to describe data quality and methodology issues for public use. However, it is quite brief and seems to date from 2003.

The NSO has a Methodology and Research Unit reporting directly to the Director General. The unit has accumulated a range of tasks over recent years and has developed as a central service to the office in relation to data and process quality. However, due to resource constraints it is not able to carry out fully all the tasks it was originally intended to undertake, and is currently not able to maintain centralised quality monitoring and assessment functions. The unit is seeking to formalise and standardise quality management in the NSO, but much of its capacity is devoted to survey methodology and other methodological issues, and to the management of externally funded projects.

With concerns about quality management partly in mind, the Authority Board established a Secretariat with three staff in 2013 and also established three subcommittees supported by the Secretariat. One of the subcommittees is responsible for monitoring and assessment in relation to the statistical outputs of the NSO. At present this seems to be working largely independently of the NSO itself, and the Peer Review team was not able to establish clearly to what extent the work of the subcommittee was, as yet, having a positive influence on the outputs of the office.

During 2014 and up to the time of the Peer Review in March 2015, the Methodology and Research Unit gave high priority to documentation of metadata and related tasks. As a result, starting with the improvement of the NSO website in early 2014, a growing catalogue of concepts,

definitions, classifications and standardised metadata reports (Euro-SDMX Metadata Structure (ESMS); ESS Standard for Quality Reports Structure (ESQRS)) was made accessible and searchable via the website. There is now an impressive amount of metadata detail on the NSO website.

In relation to some quality issues, the Information Technology Unit and the NSO's ICT Committee play an important role. There are also some important subject matter committees, including representatives of other agencies, whose remit covers quality. The Economic Statistics Development Programme and the Government Finance Statistics Committee are important examples.

The Peer Review team concluded that whilst there is considerable priority and attention being given to quality issues by all parts of the MSA and NSO, there is a risk that the actions of the different players may have gaps, or be overlapping or obstructing one another, and would benefit from more formal and central coordination. A documented general framework for quality management would be beneficial to clarify the tasks and responsibilities of the different units and committees. This could serve as a tool for mapping the required quality actions to be carried out throughout the value chain of statistical production. The framework could also help to identify how best to 'recycle' the experience and expertise gained in different parts of the office, defining the channels of feedback for improving quality more generally. Such a framework would also serve the information needs of different external stakeholders, underlining the transparency of the NSO's operation.

Principle 4 of the CoP requires statistical authorities to systematically and continuously improve process and product quality and to have procedures in place to plan and monitor quality. In order to further enhance compliance with Principle 4 of the CoP, **the Peer Reviewers make two recommendations:**

- 5. The National Statistics Office of Malta should develop a formal Quality Management Framework that sets out clearly the part that each element of the organisation is expected to play in assuring quality. This framework documentation should clarify how these roles link together. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 4.1)**
- 6. The Quality Management Framework of the National Statistics Office of Malta should be published, regularly updated and used to promote a common understanding of the system of quality management among all those involved. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicators 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3)**

Process quality documentation

Partly due to resource constraints, a relatively large proportion of the NSO's quality assurance activities relate to statistical data that are to be presented in news releases and publications. There is a regular cross-checking exercise on news releases among NSO units, by which individual members of staff from other units are nominated to undertake a detailed check of draft news releases, validating against other sources and verifying the content, to the extent that they are able to do so, before publication. Bearing in mind the relatively small size of the NSO and the lack of centralised quality management currently, this seems to be an effective and innovative way to check for weaknesses in statistical releases, although the Peer Review team noted that this 'cross-validation' was being conducted as an additional activity outside of normal working hours rather than as an integral part of the work of the office. That may not send the right message to staff about quality assurance.

There are four directorates in the NSO organisational structure. Each maintains one main document for internal use that is intended to serve as the core documentation of the statistical procedures for the units within the directorate. These basic documents are stored on the intranet of the NSO. The content and detail varies between the directorates. In some cases they give a mainly technical description of how the given tasks are to be carried out (specifying the data and process tables and where they can be found on the internal network of the NSO, or the actions required in relation to specific files for producing a final dataset). In other areas they contain more background information and practical explanations, and describe good practices and specific methodology more fully.

There is currently no central control or monitoring of how these documents are updated or developed. It was mentioned in the discussions with NSO staff that some other more specific process documents also exist in different parts of the organisation - to serve the needs of the particular unit or individual statistician but these are normally just maintained by the individuals who prepared them.

There was a plan to carry out an office-wide exercise during 2014 to align each of these documents with the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) and manage them centrally. The intention of this exercise was to enhance harmonisation and improvement of the documents to the benefit of process quality monitoring and management. However, due to other pressures it was delayed and had not progressed far by the time of the Peer Review visit. The Peer Review team concluded, and the NSO confirmed, that the preparation of standardised process documentation should be considered a high priority with a view to establishing a greater degree of central monitoring and control.

Several principles of the CoP implicitly require full and consistent documentation of statistical processes that are used for the production of European statistics and this is perhaps most directly stated at Indicators 4.2 and 4.3 which require that 'procedures are in place to plan and monitor the quality of the statistical production process' and that 'product quality is regularly monitored and reported according to the quality criteria for European statistics'.

In order to further enhance compliance with Principle 4 of the CoP, **the Peer Reviewers recommend that:**

- 7. As part of the Quality Management Framework, the National Statistics Office of Malta should give high priority to completing the systematic documentation of statistical processes; and use the documentation to improve the design of those processes and to monitor more systematically the work of the office. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 4)**

Strengthening capacity for quality management

The Methodology and Research Unit of the NSO was originally intended to advise on survey methodology and support survey activity. Its main tasks included sampling, confidentiality checking of tables and other survey related steps at different stages of the production process.

Subsequently, in 2008, the unit was given more general responsibility for system-wide quality issues. Currently, the unit consists of five members of staff including the head of unit; two of whom are more junior and relatively inexperienced. The resources of the unit are distributed among quality and metadata related tasks, disclosure control and confidentiality, survey methodology and dealing with user requests. The Peer Review team concluded during the discussions that the pressures on the unit to be involved in a wide range of specific subject matter issues had made it

something of a central resource for the office rather than one focused on leading work on quality and methods; and that this approach had resulted in delays to the more systemic quality-related actions that have been planned. In particular, the commitment to introduce a modern, centrally managed quality assurance system cannot be implemented throughout the organisation without further changes and strong support from top management.

Taken together, the indicators under Principles 4 and 7 of the CoP assume active central management of quality and methods. To further enhance compliance with these aspects of the CoP, **the Peer Reviewers recommend that:**

- 8. The National Statistics Office of Malta should review both the responsibilities and resources of the Methodology and Research Unit to ensure that it has the capacity to lead work relating to methodology and quality management - if necessary by transferring some existing tasks to other units. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicators 4.1 and 4.4 and Indicators 7.6 and 7.7)**

More integrated approach to data processing

Statistical surveys and data collections are handled in a wide range of ways within the NSO. Some business statistics surveys and household surveys are carried out using paper questionnaires, with the data subsequently being captured for processing from the written pages. There is also some limited use of electronic data supply – for example, in some household surveys portable devices are being used. Administrative data sources used for statistical purposes are sometimes delivered on CD-ROM discs; in other cases via a query from the source's database, or via Excel tables.

There is similar variety in the data processing steps of the production chain. In discussion it was recognised that developing a more efficient, automated and standardised production process, supported by standardised information technology infrastructure, is widely seen by NSIs as the way forward to replace single-use applications, manual processing and uniquely developed solutions. For some larger scale development work, the NSO relies on the Malta Information Technology Agency (MITA) that maintains the information technology environment and infrastructure for the public sector in Malta. However, some development is also taken forward as in-house activity in NSO, which has a small IT unit for this purpose. Smaller scale applications are sometimes developed by the production units themselves. Often, methodological work is directly carried out by the statistical units employing whatever applications seem most appropriate.

The Peer Review team concluded that a more integrated approach to data processing, including the possible implementation of a comprehensive data warehouse that would contain and manage all the data produced by the NSO, would be beneficial and help the NSO to meet the expectations of the CoP, particularly Principle 7 (sound methodology) and Principle 10 (cost effectiveness). Developments of this kind are already reflected in the mid-term plans of the NSO but resources are seen as a possibly major obstacle.

To enhance further compliance with Principles 7 and 10 of the CoP, **the Peer Reviewers recommend that:**

- 9. The National Statistics Office of Malta should give priority to the development of a more integrated information technology environment, including the implementation of a unified database in order to decrease the diversity of applications and parallel solutions throughout its production process. (European statistics Code of Practice, Indicator 7.2 and Indicator 10.2)**

4.2.3 COORDINATION AND COMMUNICATION

Coordination of the statistical system

The NSO produces the great majority of official statistics, and European statistics, for Malta and is referred to in the MSA Act as Malta's agency responsible for the provision of official statistics. However, the NSO also has a central co-ordinating function with regard to the statistical activities of other public authorities in the country. Under Article 10(g) of the Act, the NSO is required to "coordinate the production of official statistics", in connection with the collection, storage, processing, compilation, evaluation, and dissemination of statistical information on a wide range of domains. And Article 10(f) requires that "the Office shall monitor and coordinate the carrying out of tasks with statistical implications imposed on other public bodies".

The MSA Act thus strongly empowers the NSO to collect data for statistical purposes from all sources. To this end, the NSO cooperates with other authorities and has sought to define and reinforce the required cooperation through the signing of several Memoranda of Understanding. The NSO has recently adopted a standard template for such Memoranda, whereby many issues are now formalised into a common framework, with the aim of raising the profile of statistics and highlighting the obligation on public organisations to provide data. At present there are Memoranda of Understanding with the Central Bank of Malta, the Ministry for Sustainable Development, the Ministry for Environment and Climate Change, the Department of Fishery and Aquaculture, the Inland Revenue Department, the Malta Environment & Planning Authority, the Malta Resources Authority and the Gozo Channel Company Limited, the majority of which have been signed during the past two years.

Recently - in parallel to the Peer Review preparatory activities - the inclusion of the Directorate of Health Information and Research (within the Ministry for Energy and Health) in the list of 'other national authorities' was agreed, in conformity with Article 5(2) of EC Regulation 223/2009.

In addition, there is long standing cooperation with the Central Bank of Malta, which is also recognised as a producer of European statistics. The reciprocal activities between the NSO and the Central Bank were reported to the Peer Review team as being as fully functional and satisfactory, with continuous and fruitful exchange at the technical level. Close cooperation was also noted in other areas, such as in the recruitment of qualified staff. Whilst it was evident that relations with the Central Bank were effective and mutually supportive, the Bank did note that it would welcome the updating of the MSA Act to reflect recent developments following Malta's accession and belonging to the euro area.

In relation to coordination more generally, there are various mechanisms in use including some inter-institutional committees in particular subject matter areas. The most relevant of these are: the Economic Statistics Development Program (ESDP), established between the NSO, the Central Bank of Malta and the Ministry for Finance; the Government Finance Statistics Committee which includes the NSO, the Central Bank of Malta, the Ministry for Finance and the Treasury Department; the Retail Price Index Advisory Committee and the Energy Statistics Working Group. These Committees discuss matters of common interest and coordinate information exchange and technical alignment.

Whilst recognising the value and importance of the existing arrangements, the Peer Review team concluded that there would be benefit, particularly in the longer term, if the NSO were to reach out more to other public authorities producing statistics. Currently it does not seem to take a particularly pro-active role in this respect. The NSO, and the statistical system, could benefit from increased mutual awareness, coordination and exchange with other public authorities producing

statistics in Malta. To that end it would be helpful to prepare an inventory of such statistical activities, analysing their contribution to the production of official and European statistics, with a view to possible efficiency gains, especially in light of the resources constraints that the NSO faces. The elements of the CoP most relevant here are those relating to cost effectiveness (Principle 10) but there is also the consideration that for the NSO to assure the professional independence (Principle 1) of all parts of the production system for European statistics, it needs to have a clearer and more active overview of statistical activities across the public sector.

So to further enhance compliance with the Code of Practice, **the Peer Reviewers recommend that:**

- 10. The National Statistics Office of Malta should prepare and make public a report indicating the role of all relevant public authorities in the production of Malta's official statistics and other statistics issued directly by those bodies. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 1 and 10, and coordination)**

Coordinated planning

As well as engaging in a more structured and assertive way to foster recognition of, and shared knowledge about, the work of all the bodies that contribute to the production of official statistics, the NSO could build on this information to establish a more cohesive and mutually supportive statistical system. This would also help to establish a wider understanding, internally and externally, of its characteristics and functioning.

Information on the role and contribution of the different bodies involved in the production of Malta's official statistics could also serve as the basis for the NSO to draw up and maintain a published plan clarifying each body's contribution to the system - with the aim of progressively taking stock and streamlining the functioning of the wider statistical system. This would allow the NSO to play a more active role at the centre of the system, supporting over time the efficient coordination of the statistical work of all the parties. It would also help to facilitate the integration of data from different sources, particularly administrative sources.

In furtherance of professional independence (Principle 1) and cost effectiveness (Principle 10) of the CoP and to foster and enhance the overall coordinating function of the NSO, **the Peer Reviewers recommend that:**

- 11. Building on the published information on the statistical activities of the various public authorities, the National Statistics Office of Malta should seek to develop a more comprehensive planning process for public sector statistics. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 1 and 10 and coordination)**

Public confidence

The NSO maintains an active dialogue with external stakeholders on technical matters, for example through meetings of the various committees and other bilateral meetings called for specific purposes. There have also been improvements in other communication channels. The NSO website has been successfully revamped and is now widely regarded as more user friendly and providing a wealth of information. In relation to its published outputs, the NSO issues an advance release calendar as well as approximately 250 news releases a year, prepared in a consistent user-oriented format.

As noted earlier in this report, there is effective bilateral communication with key users of statistics within the public administration. However, there is no regular system of structured meetings with the broader community of users and engagement with journalists is sporadic.

In meetings with the Peer Review team, representatives of the press reported good contact with the NSO in relation to the census, but signalled that they did not have regular opportunities to meet NSO officials, or to be introduced to specific issues and topics. They largely rely on the news releases for their work, although they also receive answers to specific questions via the External Cooperation and Communication Manager. Subject matter statisticians have little direct contact with journalists.

The journalists also noted that they would welcome more visual and media-ready presentation of data (graphs and visualisations); and that whilst they were aware that there were sometimes different European and national priorities in relation to statistics, it could be difficult to explain the consequent differences in the news media, for example in the case of the two consumer price indexes. The NSO noted that it had in the past organised specific training on communicating statistics for journalists, but that the level of interest and engagement had not been high, and the initiative was subsequently dropped.

The Peer Review team concluded that there would be benefit in taking additional steps to strengthen the public awareness of the NSO as an independent institution at the service of Malta's citizens and institutions. In recent years, some issues relating to official statistics had become matters of bipartisan political controversy in the news media which could have the effect of leaving a negative public impression unless countered effectively.

The NSO could benefit from a more open and engaged relationship with journalists, aiming to build trust in itself and in the use of its statistical outputs to explain phenomena of interest to institutions and citizens. Principle 6 of the CoP requires that NSIs are both objective and seen to be so. Principle 15 requires statistics to be presented in convenient and understandable ways and that users are kept informed.

To further enhance trust in the NSO and official statistics and compliance with the CoP, **the Peer Reviewers recommend that:**

- 12. The National Statistics Office of Malta should seek to develop a more open and approachable relationship with journalists and the news media. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 6 and 15)**

External user communication

Many of the bodies in both the public and private sector with which the NSO engages on statistical matters are both, in varying degree, users of statistics and contributors of data for their production. However, whilst the routine flow of data in to the NSO is under systematic control and part of a continuous process, some of these bodies expressed an interest in receiving data with different characteristics or formats, or were unsure how best to access or obtain specific information. Some users noted an interest in having more research cooperation with the NSO.

Whilst a variety of channels already exist for users to make requests or suggestions to the NSO, the Peer Review team formed the impression that the NSO did not focus sharply on the use and users of statistics as if production of the product to international standards was mostly regarded as a sufficient goal in itself.

Although there are many possible approaches to enhancing user engagement, the Peer Review team concluded that there could be benefit to the NSO in engaging more proactively and systematically with a wider range of users, potentially by establishing and promoting a single dedicated channel for users to put forward requests, receive a considered response, suggest improvements or changes, and feel involved in making data live, useful and relevant to them.

Whilst such an approach would be partly about maintaining good public relations and further enhancing confidence in the NSO, it could also contribute over time to improving the statistical product and increasing its utility, and thus its perceived value. Various elements of the CoP are relevant to this recommendation but especially Principle 11 on relevance and user consultation, and Principle 15 on accessibility and clarity.

To further enhance compliance with the CoP in relation to identifying and meeting user needs, **the Peer Reviewers recommend that:**

- 13. The National Statistics Office of Malta should establish and promote a central and more systematic process for inviting and assessing external users' views on, and proposals for changes to, its current products and services. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 11 and 15)**

Internal communication and staff development

The recommendations in this part of the report have proposed reviewing the roles of the various institutional players in the production of Malta's official statistics; developing a planning process that embraces all those institutions to create a more joined-up and mutually informed system; and establishing stronger mechanisms for user engagement, including with the news media. There is a risk that these things might be seen as additional rather than essential activities, potentially disruptive to the regular work of a small NSI, which already faces limited resources and ever-increasing demands. However, the Peer Review team considers that the benefits would more than compensate for the additional pressure on resources. The benefits would not just be in relation to enhancing compliance with the CoP but also in strengthening the cohesiveness and shared culture of the NSO as an organisation.

The Peer Reviewers saw potential benefit in some other steps that the NSO might take to strengthen internal understanding of the organisation's role and functions, and to further develop a mutually supportive culture.

Firstly, greater sharing within the NSO of information and expertise could help to cross-fertilize knowledge. The recently established system of cross-verification of news releases offers one specific example of how experience can be integrated and exchanged.

Secondly, giving those staff with the most potential more opportunity to gain wider experience, for career advancement and professional reward, would help with long term development and staff retention. It was noted during meetings that the scope for further developing vocational training in relation to statistical quality and methodology was limited. There are few opportunities for staff exchange or training with other NSIs due in part to the NSO's relatively small size and its geographical location which increases travel costs. Some staff attend European Statistical Training Programme (ESTP) courses, but more general training cooperation with other NSIs is not common. However, it was noted that there might be more scope to expand the practice of inviting international experts to visit the NSO. There might also be scope for greater cooperation with Malta's own academic community to develop relevant training both for NSO staff and others.

Taken together these recommendations may point to a need for more focus on human resource development, creating opportunities for increased mobility within the office; and creating more opportunities for vocational training and training in management and communication.

To help the best use of its resources in the longer term and to further enhance compliance with Principles 3 and 7 of the CoP, **the Peer Reviewers make two recommendations:**

- 14. The National Statistics Office of Malta should aim to achieve a greater degree of staff mobility, and seek to enhance training and career development opportunities for its staff. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 3)**

- 15. The National Statistics Office of Malta should find ways to enhance horizontal communication between units and directorates, sharing expertise and promoting cooperation across subject matter boundaries. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 3)**

4.3 NATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTE VIEWS WHERE THEY DIVERGE FROM PEER REVIEWERS' ASSESSMENT

Recommendation 3:

The Malta Statistics Authority (MSA) takes note of recommendation 3 but wishes to report that this is a matter of national interest and therefore the principle of subsidiarity applies. The way the MSA board is set up is laid down in the MSA Act. This is the same as for other National Authorities in Malta and encompasses public institutions and social partners. These bodies have always nominated highly-qualified individuals to represent them and thus the present selection process of the Chair and members of the Board is not only carried out in a transparent way, but is also effective from an operational perspective.

ANNEX A: PROGRAMME OF THE VISIT

Peer Review Team:

Mr Richard Alldritt (chair)

Ms Michelle Jouvenal

Mr József Kárpáti

Eurostat Observer:

Mr. Luis Del Barrio, Task Force Peer Reviews

AGENDA

9-13 March 2015 – Valletta, Malta

Time	Programme	Organisation	Participants
Day 1 – Monday 9 March 2015			
From-To	Subject	Institution	Name
09.00 – 11.45	PR team discussion to finalise preparations for the visit.		
11.45 – 12.30	Preparatory meeting with the NSI coordinator team to discuss practical aspects of the visit: introduction of programme, organisational matters.	NSO Malta	Mr. Silvan Zammit, Ms. Catherine Vella, Ms. Anne Marie Caruana, Ms. Diana Aquilina, Ms. Sue Anne Micallef
12.30 – 13.30	Lunch		
13.30 – 15.00	General information session with a description of how the national statistical system is organised.	NSO Malta	Mr. Joseph Bonello, Mr. Etienne Caruana, Mr. Carlos Camenzuli, Mr. Silvan Zammit, Ms. Catherine Vella, Ms. Anne Marie Caruana, Ms. Lara Montebello, Ms. Diana Aquilina, Ms. Sue Anne Micallef, Mr. Manuel Tabone
15.00 – 15.30	PR team meeting		
15.30 – 17.00	The statistical law and related legislation (CoP principles 1, 2, 5 and 6)	NSO Malta, MSA	Mr. Joseph Bonello, Mr. Silvan Zammit, Prof. Albert Leone Ganado, Dr. Aaron George Grech, Dr. Jacqueline Tanti Dougall
Day 2 – Tuesday 10 March 2015			
From-To	Subject	Institution	Name
09.00 – 09.30	PR team meeting		
09.30 – 10.30	Integration / cooperation with the ESS	NSO Malta	Mr. Joseph Bonello, Mr. Etienne Caruana, Mr. Carlos Camenzuli, Mr. Silvan Zammit, Ms. Catherine Vella, Ms. Anne Marie Caruana, Ms. Lara Montebello, Ms. Diana Aquilina, Ms. Sue Anne Micallef
10.30 – 11.00	PR team meeting		
11.00 – 12.30	Programming, planning and resources, including training (CoP principles 3, 9 and 10)	NSO Malta	Mr. Joseph Bonello, Mr. Etienne Caruana, Mr. Carlos Camenzuli, Mr. Silvan Zammit, Ms. Catherine Vella, Ms. Anne Marie Caruana, Ms. Lara Montebello, Ms. Diana Aquilina, Ms. Sue Anne Micallef, Mr. James

Time	Programme	Organisation	Participants
			Briscoe
12.30 – 13.30	Lunch		
13.30 – 14.30	Meeting with main users – Ministries and other public/private institutions (including Central Bank as a user)	<i>Various (Main users)</i>	Ms. Roberta Gellel, Mr. Jesmond Pule', Mr. Luciano Brincat, Mr. Felix Borg, Dr. Kathleen England, Mr. Andre Fenech, Ms. Lorraine Spiteri, Ms. Tania Sultana, Ms. Karen Grixti, Mr. Peter Grima, Mr. Noel Camilleri. Ms. Marica Mizzi
14.30 – 15.00	PR team meeting		
15.00 – 15.45	Meeting with main users – Media	<i>Various (Media)</i>	Mr. John Cordina, Mr. Kurt Sansone, Mr. Carl Joseph Farrugia
15.45 – 17.00	PR team meeting		
Day 3– Wednesday 11 March 2015			
From-To	Subject	Institution	Name
09.00 – 09.30	PR team meeting		
09.30 – 11.00	Quality (organisational structure, tools, monitoring, practical application) (CoP principles 4 and 11 to 15)	NSO Malta	Mr. Silvan Zammit, Ms. Catherine Vella, Ms. Anne Marie Caruana, Ms. Lara Montebello, Ms. Diana Aquilina, Ms. Sue Anne Micallef
11.00 – 11.30	PR team meeting		
11.30 – 12.30	Dissemination, including users' role (CoP principles 6, 11 and 15)	NSO Malta	Mr. Silvan Zammit, Ms. Catherine Vella, Ms. Anne Marie Caruana, Ms. Lara Montebello, Ms. Diana Aquilina, Ms. Sue Anne Micallef
12.30 – 14.00	Lunch		
14.00 – 15.15	Meeting with Junior staff	NSO Malta	Mr. Andre Formosa, Mr. Brandon Sacco, Ms. Christabel Grima, Ms. Francesca Mamo, Mr. Jeffrey Galea, Mr. Joseph Galea, Mr. Luigi Porto, Ms. Margaret Zammit, Mr. Marius Richard Cilia, Mr. Mark Grech, Ms. Natasha Bartolo Romano, Ms. Nicola Vella Haber, Ms. Sephora Debono Caruana, Mr. Shaun Sammut, Mr. Simon Peter Camilleri
15.15 – 15.30	PR team meeting		
15.30 – 16.30	Methodology, data collection, data processing and administrative data, including confidentiality (CoP principles 2,5,7 and 8)	NSO Malta	Mr. Joseph Bonello, Mr. Etienne Caruana, Mr. Carlos Camenzuli, Mr. Silvan Zammit, Ms. Catherine Vella, Ms. Anne Marie Caruana, Ms. Lara Montebello, Ms. Diana Aquilina, Ms. Sue Anne Micallef, Mr. Ivan Salomone.
16.30 – 17.00	PR team meeting		
Day 4– Thursday 12 March 2015			
From-To	Subject	Institution	Name
09.00 – 09.30	PR team meeting		
09.30 – 10.30	Meeting with main users – Scientific community	University of Malta (UoM)	Dr. Ian Cassar, Dr. Philip Von Brockdorf
10.30 – 11.00	PR team meeting		

Time	Programme	Organisation	Participants
11.00 – 12.00	Meeting with Other National Authorities	Other National Authorities	Mr. Jesmond Pule', Dr. Neville Calleja
12.00 – 13.30	Lunch		
13.30 – 14.30	Coordination role of the NSI and further clarifications, remaining or additional issues	NSO Malta, MSA	Mr. Joseph Bonello, Mr. Etienne Caruana, Mr. Carlos Camenzuli, Mr. Silvan Zammit, Ms. Catherine Vella, Ms. Anne Marie Caruana, Ms. Lara Montebello, Ms. Diana Aquilina, Ms. Sue Anne Micallef, Mr. Keith Grech
14.30 – 17.00	PR team meeting		

Day 5– Friday 13 March 2015

From-To	Subject	Institution	Name
09.00 – 12.00	PR team meeting		
12.00 – 13.00	Meeting with senior management: conclusions and recommendations	NSO Malta	Mr. Joseph Bonello, Mr. Etienne Caruana, Mr. Carlos Camenzuli, Mr. Silvan Zammit, Ms. Catherine Vella
13.00 – 14.00	Information meeting	Ministry for Finance (MFIN)	Mr. Alfred Camilleri
14.00 – 15.00	PR team meeting to plan preparation of report		

ANNEX B. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

	Peer reviewers
1	Mr Richard Alldritt (chair)
2	Ms Michelle Jouvenal
3	Mr József Kárpáti
	Observer
1	Mr Luis Del Barrio, Eurostat, Task Force Peer Reviews
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