



28 February 2014
Our ref: Statistics Consultation Response

By email only: stats.info.desk@wales.qsi.gov.uk

Dear Sir/Madam

Proposals Concerning the Publication of Official Statistics

Introduction

ICAEW welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Welsh Government's Proposals concerning the publication of official statistics.

Background

ICAEW is a world-leading professional accountancy body. We operate under a Royal Charter, working in the public interest. ICAEW's regulation of its members, in particular its responsibilities in respect of auditors, is overseen by the UK Financial Reporting Council. We provide leadership and practical support to over 142,000 member chartered accountants in more than 160 countries, working with governments, regulators and industry in order to ensure that the highest standards are maintained.

ICAEW members operate across a wide range of areas in business, practice and the public sector. They provide financial expertise and guidance based on the highest professional, technical and ethical standards. They are trained to provide clarity and apply rigour, and so help create long-term sustainable economic value.

ICAEW, an active member of Commerce Cymru (formerly Business Wales) and the Council for Economic Renewal, has 3,000 members in Wales. We work closely with the Welsh Government in a number of different ways.

ICAEW has more than 20,000 members working outside the UK. The ICAEW qualification is recognised around the world as a prestigious professional business qualification. Members are entitled to the description chartered accountant and to the designatory letters ACA or FCA. Examinations for the qualification can be taken in a wide range of countries across the globe including China, Russia, Malaysia and Pakistan: however, papers are always set and marked in the English language.

Response

We accept that there is a balance to be struck between the timely publication of statistics, the need for suitable analysis and explanation, and the call on staff resources, given the tight constraints on public expenditure. In general, we accept that the proposals made represent a proportionate response and from our perspective, we do not believe that they will have any significant adverse effect on the Institute or our members.

However, we would stress that if the default position is to be for data to be published as soon as they are available, with Statistical First Releases produced less frequently than at present and Compendia no longer published, it is essential to ensure that suitable communications systems are deployed to alert potential users to the publication of data and analysis and to signpost them to the data. We believe email distribution lists and social media need to be employed to ensure users are aware of data as they are made available.

We also believe that a high priority needs to be given to improving user support mechanisms for Stats Wales, as suggested under Proposal 2.

Turning to more specific points, from the Institute's point of view, we feel that it would be preferable to retain the monthly publication of the regional economic and labour market profile, if at all possible, although a quarterly bulletin would be acceptable.

While we also accept the logic of no longer producing analysis of other organisations' statistics, we would stress the importance of the Annual Business Survey to ourselves and other business organisations and would hope that the Welsh Government will give priority both to publicising the publication of Survey data and to signposting to the relevant Welsh data within these datasets. Similarly, if the annual analysis of business demography (births and deaths) is no longer published, good signposting to the relevant data on StatsWales will be essential

We would also stress the importance of transparency over local government finance and expenditure. We note that proposals are to be developed to find an alternative approach to the publication of the compendium on Local Government Financial Statistics and would stress our view that any alternative should not diminish or dilute the information made available publicly.

As an additional point, we would emphasise the need for robust statistical information for the Welsh Government's Treasury function as that develops. Information provided should be as accurate as possible, and the level of accuracy should be clearly stated.

Yours sincerely

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