

SUBJECT

c.c. Harter  
9/81

Gov Mack  
C. J. Bachman



10 DOWNING STREET

THE PRIME MINISTER

Personal Minute

No. M12/81

MINISTERS IN CHARGE OF DEPARTMENTS

Survey Control

One theme of the White Paper on Government Statistical Surveys was that we should control more tightly the demands we make for form-filling. We can achieve this by keeping Ministers properly alerted to the survey work carried out on their behalf, and by extending the work of the Survey Control Unit (SCU) of the Central Statistical Office. Statistical surveys cost money, not only for those who conduct them but also for those who reply. We must ensure we get full value for this money. To help achieve this I propose that:

- a. regular surveys to business and local authorities should be thoroughly reviewed at least once every 5 years and reports presented to Ministers;
- b. new ad hoc surveys to businesses and local authorities should not go ahead without Ministerial authority; and the SCU's advice should be included in departmental submissions;
- c. agencies for which a Minister is ultimately responsible should also follow these new arrangements.

I set out in the Annex to this minute the procedure for bringing these arrangements into effect from 1 January 1982.

/ Returns which

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Returns which are collected using statutory powers can be a source of particular resentment. Ministers responsible for surveys should be especially alert to these. Each Minister should ensure that he is provided once a year with a report comprising a list of all statistics collected using his statutory powers, the timeliness of the results, when each was last approved by him, a summary of any complaints from the public, and when the next scrutiny is planned.

To make the scrutinies of regular surveys more effective, the statistical services in departments should try to improve their estimates of the burdens which forms impose on the businesses who reply to them. Great precision is not necessary, and departments should ensure that obtaining this information does not add appreciably to the burden on firms.

SCU clearance will no longer be required for surveys to households and individuals; such surveys should be controlled within the department concerned. SCU should however still be given such details as are necessary to maintain their central register of Government surveys.

The aim of the new arrangements is to encourage better (and perhaps fewer) surveys, with less paperwork for respondents. The SCU will do all it can to help departments achieve this objective. I shall be grateful for your support.

*Margaret Thatcher*

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19 October 1981



- 1. SIR ROBERT ARMSTRONG
- 2. PRIME MINISTER

*RA*

SURVEY CONTROL

Paragraphs 11-14 of Annex 2 to the White Paper on Government Statistical Services (Command 8236) propose new arrangements for controlling statistical forms sent out by government departments and agencies and in particular lay additional responsibilities on the Survey Control Unit (SCU) of the Central Statistical Office.

2. Present arrangements for survey control derive from Prime Ministerial directives issued in 1972, 1974 and 1976. However, they did not cover the full range of tasks now laid upon the SCU and I recommend therefore that a new directive should be sent to Ministers in charge of Departments to re-emphasise the importance of controlling the form-filling burden and to describe more explicitly the respective roles of departmental ministers and the Central Statistical Office.

3. I attach a draft directive to Ministers in charge of Departments.

*To issue JLB  
WR  
19/10*

*John Boreham*

*Prime Minister*

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*A minute to ministers in charge of departments is attached for your signature. It gives effect to the new arrangements for controlling statistical forms sent out by departments that were described in the White Paper on Government Statistical Services.*

JOHN BOREHAM

6 October 1981

*RA*

*10.x.81.*

*WR*

*14/10*



PROCEDURES FOR SCRUTINIES AND FOR SURVEY CONTROL UNIT CLEARANCE

GENERAL

1. These procedures cover existing and proposed statistical surveys carried out either by or on behalf of all departments (including their regional offices), and those carried out by public bodies other than nationalised industries (eg. the Civil Aviation Authority, Tourist Boards and Industry Training Boards) whose range of activities are the responsibility of a department. All such surveys should be reported to the Survey Control Unit, Central Statistical Office.
2. Inquiries for administrative purposes should not be reported even though the information collected may, as a by-product, be used for compiling statistics. Broadly speaking, statistical surveys are concerned with compiling aggregated data, whereas administrative surveys collect data about individual entities (persons, businesses etc) for use directly in the administration of those entities. However, inquiries conducted for other purposes which contain questions solely for statistical purposes should be reported.
3. Surveys directed to fewer than ten respondents and surveys solely to respondents within Central Government should not be reported.

SURVEYS TO HOUSEHOLDS AND INDIVIDUALS

4. Brief descriptions only of surveys to households and individuals should be reported to the SCU by the departmental liaison officer (see below) for inclusion in the central register of surveys. SCU clearance is no longer needed. Standard forms for supplying the necessary information will be supplied by the SCU.

SURVEYS TO BUSINESSES AND LOCAL AUTHORITIES

5. Ad hoc and new regular surveys to businesses (including self-employed persons) and local authorities should be reported using a standard form available from the SCU. The form should be accompanied by sufficient background information to enable the SCU to ensure that there is no duplication with other studies within government and that the survey design is likely to meet the needs of the department paying for the research. All new surveys to businesses and



local authorities will require ministerial approval, which will normally be limited to the principle that a survey is required. The SCU should be consulted before that stage and their comments included in the submission to Ministers. Subsequent discussion of the design of the survey need not then involve Ministers.

6. Existing regular surveys to businesses and local authorities will also be subject to scrutiny. Departments will assist the SCU in maintaining a list of all such regular surveys. A regular survey is one where substantially the same data is collected at fixed intervals - though not necessarily from the same set of respondents. Departments should aim to review each regular survey at least once in every five years. The scrutinies should broadly cover the following points:

- a. Background - the statutory status of the survey (including any EEC obligation) - the date of the last revision to the questionnaire, content/frequency of the survey. Whether respondents (or their representatives) have been consulted about the survey and, if so, their views about the survey.
- b. Cost - both to government and respondents (in terms of both manpower and money).
- c. Use - internal to the department and external (distinguishing government/non-government users) - do outside users pay for the data or are they likely to?
- d. Other sources - the likelihood of another (non-government) source emerging if the survey were stopped - if other departments collect data in the same field would a joint approach be feasible?
- e. Options for simplification - the implications for users of reducing and/or simplifying the survey - including any comment on the adequacy of the present survey techniques.

7. For scrutinies of local authority surveys departments should use their existing machinery for consultation with local authority representatives in preparing reports on regular surveys. Copies of the reports should be sent



to the SCU which will monitor coverage of the points listed in paragraph 6.

8. Scrutinies of regular surveys to businesses will be divided into two categories. The first group (Category A) will comprise those where a joint report by the SCU and the department will be prepared. These will generally be surveys where the burden on the respondent is high. The second group (Category B) will be the subject of an internal report. The SCU should be sent a draft of this report and may wish to raise any matters arising from the review before it is finalised. The broad lines of the reporting framework are set out in paragraph 6 but the depth and timing of the review will depend on any other recent examination of the inquiry. The programme of reviews of both categories of survey will be agreed in advance between the SCU and departments.

9. Regular surveys undertaken by agencies should also be reviewed once in every five years.

#### LIAISON WITH THE SCU

10. Departments should nominate a person, preferably in their statistics division, to co-ordinate reporting to the Survey Control Unit and particularly to ensure the incorporation of SCU comments in submissions to Ministers about new surveys. Departments should ensure that design details of all new business and local authority surveys are reported as early as possible and, in any case, at least three weeks before fieldwork begins. Agencies with extensive survey activity should also arrange to nominate someone to co-ordinate reporting.



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Statistical Surveys cost money not only for those who conduct them but also for those who reply. We must ensure we get full value for this money.

PRIME MINISTER'S DIRECTIVE ON SURVEY CONTROL

1. One theme of the White Paper on Government Statistical Services was that there should be tighter control of the form-filling burden. This can be achieved through <sup>we should control more tightly the demands we make for form filling, We</sup> increased awareness by Ministers of the survey work carried out on their behalf and <sup>this by keeping</sup> through an extension of the work of the Survey Control Unit (SCU) of the Central Statistical Office. <sup>are properly alerted to</sup> We must ensure that statistical surveys always provide full value for the money expended by respondents and by those conducting them. <sup>To help achieve this, I propose</sup> Accordingly it is my intention that

- a. regular surveys to business and local authorities should be thoroughly reviewed at least once every 5 years and reports presented to Ministers;
- b. new ad hoc surveys to businesses and local authorities should not go ahead without Ministerial authority; and the SCU's advice should be included in departmental submissions;
- c. agencies for which a Minister is ultimately responsible should <sup>also know</sup> conform to the <sup>new</sup> new arrangements.

2. I set out in the Annex to this minute the procedure for bringing these arrangements into effect from 1 January 1982.

<sup>Ministers say should be followed what to this, Best Ende</sup> 3. Returns which are collected using statutory powers can be a source of particular resentment. Accordingly, each Minister responsible for surveys should ensure that once a year he is provided with a report comprising a list of all statistics collected using his statutory powers, the timeliness of the results, when each was last approved by him, a summary of any complaints from the public, and when the next scrutiny is planned.

4. To <sup>make</sup> improve the effectiveness of the scrutinies of regular surveys, the statistical services in departments should try to improve <sup>their</sup> estimates of the burdens which forms impose on business respondents. Great precision is not necessary, and departments should ensure that obtaining this information does not add appreciably to the burden on firms. <sup>more effective</sup>

5. SCU clearance will no longer be required for surveys to households and individuals; such surveys should be controlled within the department concerned. SCU should however still be given such details as are necessary to maintain their central register of Government surveys.

6. The aim of the new arrangements is to encourage better (and perhaps fewer) surveys, with less paperwork for respondents. The SCU will do all it can to help departments achieve this objective. I shall be grateful for your support.



SM



*cc Sir John Boreham's Office  
for information, with my comps.  
Govt Machinery W Rickett  
PS/PM*

2 MARSHAM STREET  
LONDON SW1P 3EB

My ref: H/PSO/18422/81

Your ref:

*16* November 1981

*Personal Minute*

SURVEY CONTROL

I am replying to your Personal Minute of  
~~19~~ October. I shall ensure that the  
arrangements you suggest are implemented  
in my Department from 1 January 1982.

*ms*

MICHAEL HESELTINE

The Prime Minister



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