Office for National Statistics

Approving New Surveys Of Businesses or Local Authorities

Reliable statistics are essential for Government and business but impose costs on data providers that need to be monitored and minimised. Survey control procedures are designed to achieve this. This checklist will help Survey Control Liaison Officers approve and review surveys of business and overall compliance plans.

Establish the need	• Why is the survey necessary? How will the results be used? • Have alternative data sources been considered, e.g. existing surveys, administrative data or data collected by other organisations? • If the survey is to meet EU requirements, does it go beyond these? If so, why?
Consider the impact on business, the costs and benefits	• What type and number of respondents are proposed? • What is the impact on smaller businesses? • What are the costs to business of providing the data? *A Compliance Cost Assessment should be provided as early as possible as part of the notification of the survey to the Survey Control Liaison Officer.* • What are the costs to Government? • Do the benefits outweigh all the costs?
Minimise the burden	• What is being done to minimise the burden on business? • Has the number of questions been kept to the minimum? • For surveys repeated at regular intervals, what would be the effect of reducing the frequency? • Is sampling to be used? Is the sample as small as possible? • What is being done to help the smaller firms?
Draw samples efficiently and fairly	• Is the sample as efficient as possible? • Is the Inter-Departmental business register (IDBR) being used in drawing the sample where possible? • Will the sample distribute the burden fairly, i.e. will similar firms have an equal chance of being selected? • Will the sample be rotated where this is sensible? The Government is committed to working towards guaranteed survey holidays for very small firms
Consult providers and users and test the survey	• What do businesses think? Are data providers and users content with the proposals?

	• Is the survey being tested on potential respondents? • Will there be a pilot survey?
Do Survey Control Unit (SCU) need to be informed?	Large business or Local Authority surveys with a compliance cost of >£80,000 should be sent to SCU before they are approved by the department SCLO. Similarly, surveys to households / individuals with a sample size >5,000 and taking 15 minutes or longer to complete should be sent to SCU.

Further Key Points of Good Practice

Make it easy, especially for small businesses	• Are electronic methods of data collection possible? Can the data be collected direct from the company records? Can accounting or other software be developed to help with this? • Are estimates allowable rather than exact figures? • Are definitions aligned with those used by business? Have potential respondents been consulted? • Are smaller firms excluded or are they sampled as lightly as possible? • Is there a simpler form for small businesses?
Design a good questionnaire …..	• Is the form professionally designed? Is it as short and simple as possible? • Is tick boxes used as appropriate? • Are the questions easy to understand, in a logical sequence and in language relevant to the respondent? • Are guidance notes easy to follow? Are they brief? Are they in the relevant place for the question? • Has the form been tested? Has the survey been piloted?
… and a helpful introductory letter	• Does it make clear why the survey is being conducted and whether it is voluntary or compulsory? • Does it explain any benefits to businesses taking part? • Does it give a confidentiality assurance? • Is the survey aimed at the right management level within the company? • Does it make clear what is required of respondents, where possible indicating the likely time to respond? Has enough time been allowed to return the data? Does it provide a contact point for guidance?
Other points to consider…	• Have potential overlaps with other surveys been considered? And avoided where possible? • Are classifications and definitions similar to those used in other surveys that collect similar information?