

# The effect of the cuts on government statistics and their use

Radical Statistics' Reduced Statistics working group

27<sup>th</sup> September 2012. Work in progress. The authors<sup>1</sup> welcome contributions and updates from others: [reducedstatistics@radstats.org.uk](mailto:reducedstatistics@radstats.org.uk) or <http://radstats.wordpress.com/>.

## 1. The political and economic context

The first two years of the UK Coalition government since 2010 have seen the pursuit of two broad political goals: reducing the extent of the state's activities, and reducing public debt. The retrenchment of direct provision by the state has seen further privatisation in education, health, welfare benefits and other services, as well as devolution of housing and planning responsibilities to local authorities and neighbourhood organisations. Volunteering has been a third but thus far less successful route to replace and curtail state operations. Total employment has changed little – employment rates in 2012 Quarter 1 are the same as at the recessionary trough in 2010 Q1. However, over the same two years total public sector employment has fallen by around 400,000 (see the section on staffing below), and now comprises a share of overall GB employment only slightly above the mid-2000s, before the financial crisis. Involuntary part-time working has increased. The shift from state-provided services has been justified as a necessary means to the end of reducing the public debt, but the end has been achieved less successfully than the mean. National debt is expected to be £24bn in 2016-17, not much less than the £26bn forecast in Labour's last budget of March 2010.

It would not be realistic to expect official statistics to remain untouched in such an onslaught on their main provider. However, investigating the pattern of cuts to statistics can tell us something about the broader political currents of the government. Practically, it is essential both for evaluating the effects of current changes and for future good government, to identify what has been lost, with what effect, and how losses to important parts of the UK evidence base might be avoided.

## 2. The context of official statistics

Statistics are collected within institutional structures that shape their content and availability. The resources and requirements of government have stimulated an organised framework for official statistics, which has developed and changed over time. Thus the needs of defence and taxation gave impetus to establish authoritative statistics including trade flows and later censuses of populations (eg Foucault 2007). Much closer to our own time, the UK's Central Statistical Office was finally established in 1941 to support the War effort (Ward and Doggett 1991). Social statistics and publicly available analysis expanded from 1967 to 1980, under both Labour and Conservative

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<sup>1</sup> Note about authorship: What is Radical Statistics? Radical Statistics has been championing the development of statistics for public use and progressive change since 1975; through publications, an annual conference and the work of its subgroups, it has been home to many a statistician and user of statistics who values extra-curricular activities. Its website is [www.radstats.org.uk](http://www.radstats.org.uk). Radical Statistics is not the latest flight of Bayesian fancy as queried recently by one nonagenarian senior statistician, untouched by four decades of our existence! As a result of a blog on cuts in statistics started last year, not limited to the UK and hosted by Radical Statistics, Ludi Simpson and Alison Macfarlane were asked to contribute to a session on the impact of government cutbacks on the UK evidence base, at the Royal Statistical Society's annual conference, on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2012 in Telford. This report has been prepared by Ludi Simpson, Alex Fenton, Alison Macfarlane and Tom Clarke – with the help of many others we have talked with in the course of the last few months or from whose work we have learned, and to whom we hope we give appropriate citation. Attached to this report are summaries for particular sectors: Housing and communities in England, Local Government, and Health.

governments. At that time, the Government Statistical Service under the leadership of Claus Moser explicitly aimed to create a broad factual base which politicians of different perspectives could agree as useful to them. This period might be seen as an aberration, a very welcome one, in the context of what came before and after. The Thatcher government's Rayner Review and the subsequent 1980 Government Statistical Services white paper refocused official statistics on the needs of government (Levitas, 1996). The Government Statistical Service staff reduced by nearly 30% by April 1984 (Mayes, 1984: 1). However, even during the 1970s the core agenda for official statistics was clearly government and business needs (Government Statisticians' Collective, 1979).

Both the technological revolution and performance-led management stimulated an expansion of information, including organised statistical sources, during the 1990s and 2000s. The impact of technology on official statistics has included the extraction of data from computerised administration of government functions, giving rise to both the expansion of statistics and the particular problems of interpretation and definition associated with administrative data rather than data collection designed for statistical use. The number of posts in the UK Government Statistical Group doubled to about 1,500 between the years 2000 and 2011 (UKSA, 2012: Annex C; the interpretation of these figures is discussed below).

The current public service cutbacks may be expected to result in another retrenchment to the core governmental demands from statistics. The evolving structure of an independent statistical service accountable to parliament may succeed in monitoring or influencing such a retrenchment, although the evidence reviewed below does not suggest that it has done so thus far.

In what follows we try to take a wide view of official statistics. We include the collection of data, such as by social surveys or extraction from administrative systems and the collation and publication of such data as 'official statistics'. We also include summaries, analysis and interpretation made publicly available by both local and central government and its agencies and subcontractors, and fundamental work on infrastructure and methodology that develop the measurement of social phenomena. This goes beyond the UK Statistical Authority's *Official Statistics*, of which *National Statistics* are the subset which have been certified as compliant with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics (<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/national-statistician/types-of-official-statistics>).

While few may argue with the idea that government needs are, in practice, the prime shaper of official statistics, there can remain arguments over what those needs may be. They can include these increasingly wider briefs:

- **Appraisal and evaluation of policies by civil servants** and those working on the government's behalf
- **Support for enterprise**, knowledge and innovation - statistics being used for things from commercial market analysis to academic research
- **Democratic accountability** for the outcomes of policy, providing a basis for debate in the public sphere (for NGOs, think tanks, political parties or movements)

Where a government statistical service has an explicit brief for its work, the brief may determine and protect some aims, and exclude others. The current UK Statistics Authority is the result of ten years of regulations and legislation during the Labour Party administrations of 1997-2010, but their brief is very general:

*“Our main responsibilities as the Executive Office of the UK Statistics Authority include the collection, compilation, analysis and dissemination of a range of economic, social and demographic statistics relating to the United Kingdom that serve the public good and meet our legal obligations (both domestic and international); the provision of statistical leadership and methodological advice for the benefit of UK official statistics; representing the UK in the international arena; and the development and maintenance of definitions, methodologies, and*

*classifications of statistics.” ONS (2012d) (our emphasis)*

The rest of this report describes the impact of changes to official statistics since public service cuts began in earnest in 2010. First it describes several dimensions of the extent of official statistics and uses them to describe changes. Second, we review the impacts of these changes.

Clearly any changes arising from government cuts and their impacts are incomplete at the time of writing. The government’s 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) informed budgets for the four years 2011/12 to 2014/15, a period which we are barely half-way through. Some patterns are clear:

1. the pruning of investment in primary data collection such as large-scale sample surveys, and reductions in original analysis such as commissioned research;
2. the devolvement and privatisation of some responsibility for implementing policy and in some cases for the policy itself, which deter comprehensive statistical outputs and analysis;
3. the disproportionate culling in the Department of Communities and Local Government, and in local government itself;
4. the reduction of analysis, and within this the ceasing (or intention to cease) secondary products and public analyses, relative to data processing and personnel;
5. political motivation in the reduction of some analyses, rather than cost.
6. the cumulative negative impact of the above on the function of statistics that serves democratic accountability – the public realm – authoritative, comprehensive statistics in the public domain that can be used to assess the government’s performance in particular policy domains.

Other patterns we can hint at in our conclusions. We hope that those conclusions help to identify what we should be looking for and what we should be avoiding in the next years.

## 2. What cuts in statistics?

There are several different ways we might try to quantify changes in the production of official statistics. One might develop a theory and model of the value of official statistics, quantifying a variety of uses to which each set of statistics may be put. We do not have such a model; nor do we think that such a model would gain acceptance easily. Instead we can look at a variety of measures of statistical production, of which staffing and outputs are most easily obtained.

1. Measures of **input** (i.e expenditure).

This would be useful but has proved hard to get comparability over time or between activities. Government spending on research and development is sometimes separately identified as such, but often included within the programme it is attached to. Education has a central research budget, other departments do not, or do not represent this consistently from year to year. The Chief Scientific Advisor John Beddington’s report to a House of Lords Committee on historical and planned spending on research and development which “has involved a team working for about four or five months to get as far as we have, and I have to question the allocation of resources”. (House of Lords, 2011: 5). The accompanying tables were highly incomplete. He nonetheless felt that the “overall picture is really quite good” (p3), because he felt that research and development was not taking a disproportionate hit from the cuts. Some Departmental R&D spending was increasing, although the Department of Media, Culture and Sports small R&D spending expected to be cut by 45% over 4 years, the DWP expected to reduce spending on external research from £22m in 2010-11 to £17m in 2011-12. His report gave no figures for spending on external research in the Department of Communities and Local Government, but our own calculations (see Annex on Housing and Communities in

England) show that it has reduced by 63% between 2008/09 and 2011/12, and staff report that it has been minimal since 2010. The published programmes of DCLG research have been abolished. DfES has a central research budget that has been reduced by 30% since 2009/10.

Research Council spending will be flat in cash terms, a likely reduction of 10% over 4 years in inflation-linked terms, leading to universities being expected to pre-screen applications to research councils to control the demand on the remaining funds.

Local government total expenditure budgeted for 2011/12 was 10% below the out-turn in 2009/10, with the larger authorities serving the poorest areas suffering larger cuts (IFS, 2012). London and northern areas were affected more than southern areas on average. Development and planning functions, which include significant research capacity, were hit disproportionately, with half of local authorities reducing their expenditure by 40% or more during that two year period. A report based on budget documents and interviews with 25 Chief Executives concludes that “monitoring and evaluation roles appear to be one of the foremost casualties of back office efficiencies in many, if not all, authorities. ... it has important implications for the development of an evidence base capable of facilitating understanding of the scale and impact of budget contraction.” (Hastings et al., 2012: 38).

Each government department’s annual report, and the expenditure reports that are now published monthly, have poor identification of research and statistical activity. The purported labels or headings used to classify research expenditure reflect internal accounting procedures rather than categories relevant to public understanding and policy streams. So, for example, one of DCLG’s largest single items of expenditure, on the English Housing Survey, is made to the Office of National Statistics, but is classified in the expenditure reports as being related to ‘Finance and Corporate Services’ rather than, as one might expect, ‘Housing and Planning’.

The SET statistics (Science, Engineering and Technology) may be the best source of expenditure on data collection, research and analysis. It is provided by the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills as “a summary of key science, engineering and technology indicators and is prepared in collaboration with the Office for National Statistics” (BIS, 2011). It intends to include all Government expenditure and therefore covers Research Council income as well as government departments. However, the series was most recently published in November 2011, 18 months after the end of the last period it refers to, 2009/10. While it gives past trends in funding research and development, it does not yet cover any of the period following the Comprehensive Spending Review of autumn 2010.

The difficulty of identifying and interpreting expenditure on statistics and associated research and analytical activity highlights the limitations of the 'open data' policies. Data requires accompanying resources to aid interpretation which in turn must be capable of influencing the production of the data themselves to ensure their utility.

The Office for National Statistics including the UK Statistics Authority plans to reduce programme expenditure in cash terms from £141.3m in 2011/12 by 7.4% to £130.8m by 2014/15, excluding the Census and work on alternatives to the Census, which have been protected until 2014 (ONS, 2012).

## 2. Measures of **staffing**.

The unit of measurement is clear for staffing, whether number of posts or the full-time equivalent. We expect that the National Statistician will be able to provide a time series of

staffing patterns within the Government Statisticians Group (GSG). Our research on the available staffing figures shows that a) long-term increases in most government research staff categories are a necessary context to interpret recent changes; b) the categorisations (who is counted, and their experience or grade) are important. The existence of statistician, Economist, Social Researcher, Operations Research professions within the civil service makes it easier to monitor staff changes in government, and their absence prevents such monitoring for local government; and c) staffing changes do not measure non-person changes such as discontinued series, reduced sample sizes, commissioned research, and the quality of products.

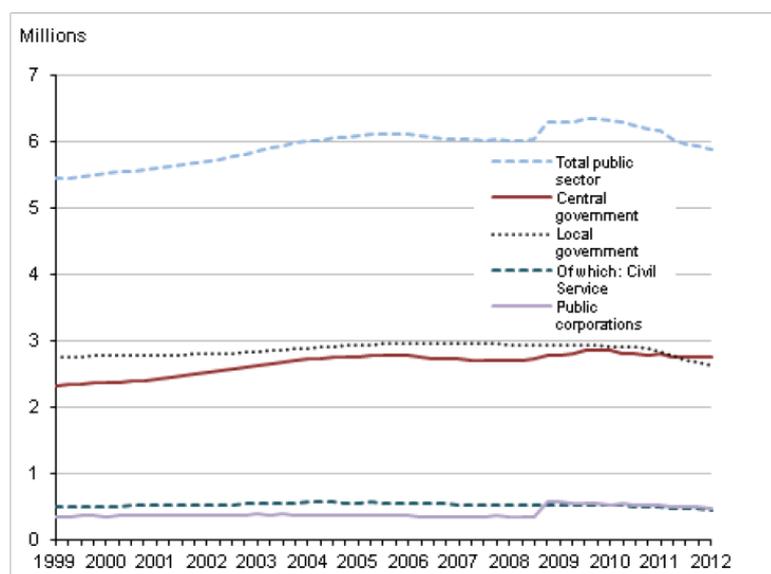
Within central Government, the large increase in statisticians and other research professions during the 2000s has been halted, but a reduction on the scale of the early 1980s has not been repeated. Government Social Researchers reduced from 1000 to 949 between 2010 and 2012, and Government Economists from 1295 to 1200 in the same time period, but in both cases the 2012 number of staff was still more than in 2008. Among statisticians, the increase of the 2000s continues among those below senior level (see chart). At senior level, there has been a steady number between 70-75 up to 2010, with a reduction of 10 posts since then (UKSA, 2012: Annexes C and D). The heads of both Economist and Statistician professions within the Civil Service have gained an exemption from the general government freeze on recruitment, which has allowed staff numbers to rise in 2012. The increase in Government Statisticians Group indicated in the chart may be exaggerated, as the scope of Official Statistics has been extended, but we have no way of estimating this impact. Similarly, the GSG does not include statisticians employed in the central civil service who do not work on Official Statistics, so its increase or decrease is not wholly reflective of total statistical human resources.



Note: GSG, Government Statisticians Group, is a subset of the Government Statistical Service including all those working on Official Statistics. Source: UKSA, 2012: Annex C; Economist and Social Researcher data refer to all grades, from data provided by their chiefs of profession, via ONS.

In local government, the dispersed organisation of research and analysis does not allow a time series of staffing levels. Total local government employment in the UK has fallen about three times as fast as central government employment between the change in government in 2010 (2010 Q2) and the latest published statistics (2012 Q1), by 9.6% compared to 2.8% from similar totals of near 2 million (Figure below). This full-time equivalent drop of 325,000 in public sector employment involves a loss of 393,000 jobs. Local government employment is now at the low level it was at the end of the previous conservative administration in 1997, itself the lowest point since published time series begins in 1991 (ONS 2012b,c).

## Public Sector Employment by Sector Classification, Q1 2012



Source: ONS (2012b). Headcount.

While there are rough edges that affect the detailed interpretation of these statistics, they do not distract from the overall picture of strong cuts in the local government workforce, at a faster rate than in central government, which can be expected to affect research and analytical staffing more than front-line services.

A survey sponsored by the Local Authority Research and Intelligence Association in which the authors are involved currently, shows that the research teams of half the local authority respondents have experienced cuts to budget and staff resources in both 2010/11 and 2011/12, about a third of the reductions being ‘severe’ rather than ‘moderate’. Many senior staff have left including from the Greater London Authority, Birmingham and other large authorities, and including many voluntary redundancy or early retirement packages. According to one informant involved in the core work of census analysis across many local authorities, the staff now “often have been project managers or administrators, and know they need to do something but don’t know what... jobs are changing, they are picking up a bit of everything whereas previously there would be jobs with say ‘demographic analysis’ as a major part of their work. Knowledge of research tools is not deep so that “The new model may meet the authorities’ business needs, but whenever there is a requirement to understand technical geographical aspects or the metadata of a dataset, they will be stumped.” The survey confirms an emphasis on cuts to strategic analysis: Reductions have affected ‘Central Services’ and ‘Economic and Regeneration’ rather than have been most severely reduced, more than education, pre-school and social care.

### 3. Measures of **activity** or **output**.

While it is hard to imagine a summary measure of the number of official surveys, the sample size of surveys, the number of publications and other aspects of activity, this is the aspect of cuts to official statistics which is noticed most immediately by users.

In the aftermath of the CSR, each government department chose its own way of meeting the CSR targets. Some like the Department for Justice and the ONS, consulted externally on its priorities before establishing a new business plan. Others like the DfES and DCLG made decisions with much less prior consultation. The UKSA has had to argue publicly to be at

least consulted about all changes to Official Statistics (Scholar, 2010), which the government has not agreed.

Three significant surveys have been cut completely:

- The TellUs Survey (Schools) from 2006 to 2009 annually collected children and young people's views and self-reported behaviour, the only source of data on children's emotional security, bullying and children using drugs, alcohol and volatile solvents.
- The Citizenship Survey (Communities and Local Government) each two years from 2001 and continuously from 2007 asked a sample of 15,000 adults including 5,000 targeted sample of minorities, questions on race equality, faith, feelings about their community, volunteering and participation. It was the major source of information on these issues with a sample size sufficient for detailed analysis.
- The Place Survey (Communities and Local Government) in 2008 and 2010 collected national indicators in local government areas for the purpose of evaluating local government performance, the only measurement of citizen satisfaction with local services. The Place Survey was a development of the Best Value Performance Indicators survey carried out in 2000, 2003 and 2006 (and other related enquiries).

In each case, the Surveys can be seen as easy targets for the new government. On the one hand they are each commissioned surveys where the majority of work is managed through short-term contracts that could be ended without changes to government staffing levels. They were easily achievable cuts with immediate financial consequences. On the other hand, they had each been developed in response to the Labour administration's policies to which the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition ministers need feel no attachment, and indeed that origin may have been a justification for their ends. The cost of the Place Survey was borne mainly by local authorities, and the TellUs Survey was administered in schools; another justification used for the ending of each of these surveys was to reduce the burden on institutions outside central government.

The table below has been compiled from the annual lists of Official Statistics. The 'Themes' shown since 2010 are somewhat inconsistently used – the tiny size of the categories of 'Compendia and Reference' and 'Migration' indicate only that these types of statistics are usually included in other themes, and suggest that the numbers for other categories are somewhat unreliable. The totals show a reduction of 203 Official Statistics from 2011 to 2012, more than 15%. But a reduction is not straightforward to interpret; the merging of ten outputs to one entry in the list would feasibly create a reduction of nine without a loss of activity.

National Statistics Theme		2008	2010	2011	2012	Deleted 2011-12 (merged, ceased, lost status)
A&E	Agriculture and Environment		116	123	111	28
B&E	Business and Energy		39	42	46	1
C&J	Crime and Justice		49	55	47	10
C&R	Compendia and Reference			4	2	3
CES	Children, Education and Schools		97	97	86	16
Econ	Economy		195	185	125	44
Govt	Government		43	42	33	5
HSC	Health and Social Care		246	284	208	102
LM	Labour Market		32	37	34	1
Mig	Migration		3	3		3
P&P	People and Places		93	72	64	18
Pop	Population		105	101	115	9
S&W				1	1	
T&T	Travel and Transport		67	88	60	32
Total		1193	1085	1135	932	272

Source: UKSA, for example <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/national-statistician/types-of-official-statistics/list-of-national-statistics/list-of-national-statistics--march-2012.xls>

One would expect that the number of Official Statistics deleted between 2011 and 2012, shown in the last column, to be more than the reduction in number of Official Statistics between the two years, as there will also be additions. Nonetheless, the reduction in Economy and Government is greater than the number deleted, which demands some explanation.

The lists also show the frequency of each Official Statistic. Here, the 'Ad hoc' category stands out, having reduced from 157 in 2010 to 120 in 2011 and 46 in 2012, a drop of more than two thirds during the two year period. 50 of the 272 listed as 'Deleted or merged' for 2011-12 are 'Ad hoc' including:

- Mental health of children and young people in Great Britain
- Survey of Public Attitudes and Behaviours Towards the Environment
- Bus Punctuality Statistics
- UK Input-Output Analyses
- Infant deaths by ethnicity in England and Wales
- Focus reports on roads, ports, social inequalities.

Although some of these may have been included in other Official Statistics items, the lists do seem to confirm the stripping down of analytical work including the reviews represented by 'Focus' reports and topic reports from surveys.

The UKSA's Committee on Official Statistics meeting on February 15<sup>th</sup> 2012 (UKSA, 2012) lists 7 cessations of statistical series that have been reported to the National Statistician. Not all cessations are reported. It lists 11 consultations on changes to Official Statistics, with end-dates of October 2011 or nearer the date of the meeting. Discussion among UKSA members highlighted the little that could be interpreted from the information, in particular since there was no comparison with new series or with the level of change in the past. It made no recommendations except to continue monitoring the situation through quarterly reports. These reports from the National Statistician have continued, for example in May 2012 noting the cessation of DWP's publication of quarterly numbers of National Insurance

numbers issued to foreign citizens, and cessation of the Northern Ireland Abstract of Statistics Online.

Among the more notable cessations in official statistics, that are clearly cuts to the UK evidence base rather than a natural change in the statistical environment, are:

- All regional reporting by DCLG,
- The Electronic Survey of Empty Homes,
- Houses in Multiple Occupation.

In addition, the institutional environment has changed so that some institutions involved in the collection and publication of statistics no longer exist:

- The Tenants Services Agency (TSA) was responsible for regulating housing associations, and produced data on the sector. It has been abolished and its functions and rump staff absorbed by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA)
- The entire regional layer of government (GORs and also RDAs) has been abolished. GORs coordinated spatial planning including housing need assessments and economic strategy.
- The National Housing and Planning Advice Unit (NHPAU), which investigated the functioning of housing markets has been disbanded. It had a small staff, but was a substantial commissioner of external research.
- The Audit Commission monitored the financial and management effectiveness of social landlords, including local authorities. It has been abolished, although auditors in the private sector are expected to carry out some of the inspections of individual local authorities, and the National Audit Office has been given a remit to look at systemic issues affecting local government.

#### 4. Measures of **quality**.

Although the Code of Practice for official statistics includes a variety of criteria for establishing series which do or do not attain the status of National Statistics, the procedures for monitoring changes in quality are not sensitive enough to establish changes in quality due to the public spending cuts. We can gain some sense of danger points from conversations with staff involved.

One researcher in DWP described the reductions in staff as reducing not so much the statistical or research output as the time spent on checking and validating outputs. Thus answers to Parliamentary Questions which previously had been checked by two members of staff senior to the person who prepared them, were now passed on with one or sometimes no such checks. In the DCLG where the major Place and Citizenship surveys have ended, staff report an inevitable reliance on increasingly out-of-date evidence for policy discussions.

The pressure of fewer staff to cover the same duties clearly will have some effect on morale, but maintenance of high quality will also be a consequence of the way in which changes have been made. Where staff have been lost by voluntary redundancy, it is usual for senior and experienced staff to be disproportionately lost, partly because redundancy payments depend on length of service, partly because more senior staff are old enough to receive early pensions, and partly because those with experience are most aware of the changes that reduced staffing will bring to their work. Devolvement of ONS from London produced a similar loss of experienced staff even where the total number of staff was not reduced.

Where there are significant job losses it has common practice for this to be achieved not by a planned reduction in activity but a major structural re-organisation with little regard to content, and in particular an emphasis on wider job descriptions, euphemistically labelled flexibility and corporate responsibility. Management of specific activities is considered only when a new reduced structure is in place, resulting in disruption of work, developed systems falling into disrepair, and many untrained staff picking up jobs of those who have left as part of their increased duties. This has been the reported experience in many local authorities, and in the re-organisation of the public health service. It is inconceivable that the quality of research and statistical work has not suffered under these circumstances.

The third Civil Service annual staff survey in 2011 was sent to all staff. It gained a 76% response rate in the DCLG which has suffered severe cuts to its commissioned research. All aspects of positive engagement (speaks positively of the Department, committed to it, and motivated to do the best for it) were reduced by about 10% on the previous year, and were 20-30% lower than the average for the Civil Service as a whole. Causal relationships between these indicators of morale and the quality of work achieved probably work in both directions.

#### 5. Measures of **effectiveness**.

The economic impact of UK academic libraries and the Economic and Social Data Service have been investigated in cash terms by asking its users about the effects of withdrawing a service, and the telling question 'how much would you accept to not have this service?'. The results have valued statistical and data services at five times more than the investment made to fund them (Charles Beagrie Ltd & CSES, 2012). But the approach faces the difficulty of identifying the relevant users.

It is a difficulty common to consultations that they cannot easily weight the opinions of different types of user. A statistical series may be essential to the occasional user – those referring to take-up of benefits is a current example – in ways that the specialist regular user approached in consultations cannot represent.

Methods of measuring the impact or effectiveness of official statistics are clearly relevant to answer the question of the impact of the cuts, but are not likely to provide practical results, at least in the short term.

In summary, these measurements indicate an impact of public sector cuts on the UK evidence base:

- The overall picture is one of large cuts in some areas, smaller cuts or none in others. The cuts take place from a high point of increased analysis and data collection.
- The more lasting impact is likely to come from major re-organisations, for example in health and spatial planning, which affect both the providers of statistics and their users.
- The cuts appear to have fallen more heavily on analysis, such that policy guidance is likely to be less researched.

### **3. Have cuts undermined the statistical base?**

We are better at agreeing what is a good (or bad) official statistic when we see one, than how much is the *right amount* of official statistics. A view is going to depend partly on our view of the remit of official statistics, for example whether it includes one or more of the three aims suggested above, to support government activity, to support wider enterprise and knowledge, and to support public accountability. The narrower view of official statistics only as support for government, creates a

more politically determined agenda for official statistics, dependent for example on how much the state should do, and what and how it should do it.

In this section we address how the government attitude towards statistics has changed the evidence base, and give some examples of the impact of a weak evidence base.

### **A changed philosophy**

Important strands of Conservative and Liberal philosophy represented in the current government see government activity as generally interfering, over-controlling, burdensome, bureaucratic, part of a state that puts fetters on individual initiative, whether in business or voluntary guises. Research and some official statistics are seen in that perspective – activity which unnecessarily and unhelpfully monitors and controls. If research activity is needed, they may say, then that will be demonstrated when academics or others do it. Ministers have also had three terms to watch the previous government set targets, measure impacts and then admit that they had not met them in too many cases. They may feel they have learned a political lesson, albeit one that results in less planning and evaluation of services and more short-term political planning. However, short-term political decisions often have long-term impacts that can be only slowly altered.

As the cuts are implemented by a coalition, the ministers in each Department can have greater influence. There is a continuum of attitudes towards research, with probably the DCLG at one end with a particularly robust mindset against monitoring.

Thus a personal communication from DCLG staff reads “Here, there has been a very big move away from commissioning research towards engagement with the academic community as a way of informing policy ... the ethos has completely changed. Policy leads are highly resistant to undertaking any research. They have not changed - they are the same people who were very keen on research under the previous administration. The change in them reflects their perception that our ministers are not keen on government commissioning research. ... This change of ethos has a very big impact on policy-makers (who don't want to irritate the minister by suggesting research when it will be rejected) so analysts' suggestions for research rarely make it to ministers and are rejected by policy colleagues at first suggestion. Some stuff does get through - but you need policy makers to be really convinced that it is essential before they will put it to ministers.”

DCLG ministers have been responsible for devolving many of its planning responsibilities to local authorities and others institutions, along with the responsibility for monitoring their own actions and their impact. Regional statistics have been abolished along with government regional offices, and local housing statistics will be more reliant on local council priorities.

While this one example illustrates the way in which research and statistics are being devalued in the sphere of regional planning and community relations, the Coalition government's pursuit of diversity of provision under the banner of ‘choice’ may more widely undermine the statistical evidence base of social conditions in the UK.

### **Impacts**

How is the change in the UK evidence base felt? It is too early to say. It was a decade after the Rayner Review reduced official statistics at the outset of the 1980s Conservative administrations, before the lack of evidence on economic trends was recognised enough to cause serious debate (Levitas 1996; Briscoe 2005).

Where evidence is lacking, policy will develop based more on practical alliances and political expediency than on evidence of need, giving relatively more weight to convenience, political understanding, and financial priorities.

One cannot tell of horror stories until they happen. They are likely to involve the weakness of political responses to events that demand clarity. Responses to the riots of 2011 were made at a time of cessation of annually-collected information on neighbourhood conditions (in the English Housing Survey) and the main survey on community relations. The proposed ending of benefit take-up statistics will make it hard both to criticise and to defend the efficiency and effectiveness of government expenditure on welfare benefits that total c£50bn. Those take-up statistics are secondary products from ongoing surveys (HBAI/FRS), that the Department of Work and Pensions is uniquely well-placed to produce; the saving is said to be the equivalent of two full-time posts. An especially specious argument for cutting this series is the fact that the estimates of take-up have wide confidence intervals; the cutting of the FRS's target achieved sample from 25,000 to 20,000 from April 2011 of course widened these.

## **Final remarks**

The running down of the statistical cupboard and the loss of statisticians and researchers experienced in particular fields are clearly things to lament for those close enough to that work to appreciate the lost endeavour. Data series that are maintained over time acquire their value by being longstanding; cuts and changes to such data series can obscure real social and economic change. Highlighting the impacts of these losses and limiting them where possible are important tasks for us all during the consultations and public discussions that do take place.

The diversification of service provision makes it particularly difficult to maintain the quality of the statistical base. Diversification has recently been spurred through introducing multiple types of non-state providers (in education and health for example) and through 'localising' government responsibilities. There is a need for statistical standards and training to support such a diversified state provision.

Official statistics are much more than data. The 'open data' initiatives to make available records and counts of activity mainly from administrative systems do not add to the UK evidence base unless they are accompanied by documentation that allows meaningful interpretation of the data, and validation of the data to ensure that it can support unambiguous interpretation. That understanding of administrative data should be capable of affecting its collection in ways that improve the evidence base, and lead to continued use of designed surveys where administrative data is shown to give an incomplete picture.

In the longer run the UK evidence base is dependent on the nature of public responsibility in society. It will be influenced by the pressure brought to bear for public accountability as well as by the need for evidence to plan and implement public policies and their provision.

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# Annex 1: Reduced Statistics: Housing and Communities in England – Department for Communities and Local Government

*Alex Fenton, May 2012 (revised September 2012)*

## Overview

Among all departments, DCLG has had one of the largest (perhaps the largest) cuts to its budget – 7.8% in the 2010 Budget, with further large yearly reductions to 2015. Under the doctrine of 'localism', much of its core policy and analysis work in housing, planning and regeneration has been devolved to local authorities. A number of its non-Whitehall agencies which produced statistics have also been abolished or merged.

Its statistical and analytic capacity is already much reduced. Compared to March 2009, it has lost 30-40% of its FTE headcount of all research professions, and 25-32% of its statisticians. Of its three major sample surveys, the Citizenship Survey and the Places Survey have been cancelled, and the English Housing Survey has had a 20-25% reduction in sample size, and a smaller schedule. Its real-terms total expenditure on external research in 2011/12 is down by around 65% relative to 2008/09. DCLG is ceasing publication of a number of housing data series, including some National Statistics. DCLG is also responsible for funding and monitoring local government in England; the National Indicator data set for local authorities and the abolition of the Audit Commission are reductions in research output in this part of DCLG's responsibility.

Since English local authorities are themselves absorbing cuts in their spending power of up to 10% (with those serving deprived urban areas the biggest losers) it seems unlikely that they will be able to make up the lost analytic and statistical capacity in housing. Regional observatories and local authority monitoring sections are being cut back at the same time as central capacity is falling.

## Policy & institutional background

The Department for Communities and Local Government has (or had) responsibility for a wide range of housing and related functions: housing need, social housing, private housing markets, homelessness, spatial planning and neighbourhood regeneration. It also has responsibility for local and (erstwhile) regional government and emergency services; a large part of its budget is transferred to local authorities under local government finance. However, housing and neighbourhoods comprised the largest part of its central policy work.

By the doctrine of 'localism', and the Localism Bill, policy responsibility for much of this is devolved to local authorities 'and beyond', to 'communities'. Districts are now primarily responsible for determining housing need, housing allocations, finance and rents, planning development and so on. Direct grants for the construction of affordable housing are much reduced. There are no longer any national programmes or funding regimes for 'neighbourhood renewal' or 'regeneration' – again, these are wholly a matter for districts. Regional housing, spatial and economic planning has been dismantled, as has the national monitoring and target-setting framework for local authorities.

DCLG's budget in the 2010 settlement was reduced by 7.8%, the largest percentage cut of any department<sup>2</sup>. Its total expenditure is to be further reduced each year to 2015; total expenditure should drop from £28.4bn to £23.6bn (17%)<sup>3</sup>.

A number of public bodies involved in housing, and producing statistics or research have been abolished:

- The Tenants Services Agency (TSA) was responsible for regulating housing associations, and produced data on the sector. It has been abolished and its functions and rump staff absorbed

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2010/may/24/coalition-government-public-finance>

<sup>3</sup> [http://cdn.hm-treasury.gov.uk/budget2012\\_chapter2.pdf](http://cdn.hm-treasury.gov.uk/budget2012_chapter2.pdf) – Table 2.4

by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA)

- The entire regional layer of government (GORs and also RDAs) has been abolished. GORs coordinated housing need assessments.
- The National Housing and Planning Advice Unit (NHPAU), which investigated the functioning of housing markets has been disbanded. It had a small staff, but was a substantial commissioner of external research.
- The Audit Commission monitored the financial and management effectiveness of social landlords, including local authorities. It has been abolished.

## Staffing and resources

Overall headcount at DCLG has been cut by 27% between Q3 2010 and Q4 2011, according to the Institute for Government<sup>4</sup>. The effects of upheaval on morale on the staff of the department as a whole are reflected in the results of the Civil Service's People Survey. For DCLG there were large falls in the percentage of staff responding positively to questions about their engagement with their work, their work environment, their confidence in decision-makers and in the management of change, and their desire to remain in their job<sup>5</sup>. There was no such large decline in reported staff morale in any other civil service department over the period.

DCLG's research staff are, divided into three major 'professions' which are common across the civil service: Economics, Social Research and Statistics. There are smaller numbers of other research and analysis specialists, such as geographers and physical scientists. The headcount of the three major professions is given in DCLG's recent 'non-senior staff' spreadsheets, and can be compared to the figures reported in the last full Annual Report for 2008/09. Estimated figures for Aug 2010 come from applying the Institute of Government headcount reduction to March 2011 figures.

Date	Mar-09	Aug-10	Mar-11	Sep-11	Change
Measure	"posts" <sup>6</sup>	est. FTE	FTE, junior <sup>7</sup>	FTE, junior <sup>8</sup>	2009 - 2011
Economists	44	44	35	26	-41%
Social Researchers	51	35	28	28	-45%
Statisticians	54	52	42	37	-32%
<b>All research professions</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>130</b>	<b>104</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>-39%</b>

The total analyst FTE is down by about 40%, with social researchers cut the most, and statisticians (relatively) protected. One uncertainty is whether the 'posts' in March 2009 are given as full-time equivalents, and whether they include senior staff. If we assumed, say that 0.9 posts were 1.0 FTE junior equivalent, it would reduce the cut to 30% of all researchers, and 25% of statisticians. Note also that the 2009 Annual Report mentions '18 physical scientists and engineers, 4 operational researchers and 5 geographers among its research capacity'. Whichever way, it represents a very substantial reduction in analytic capacity.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/our-work/more-effective-whitehall/whitehall-monitor> Issue #12

<sup>5</sup> Civil Service People Survey, headline results 2011 : [http://resources.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/csps2011\\_externalsummary\\_final\\_20120201.pdf](http://resources.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/csps2011_externalsummary_final_20120201.pdf) - page 20

<sup>6</sup> DCLG Annual Report 2009, p172, <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/pdf/1281142.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/dclgstaffdata032011> (Junior Post Dataset)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/dclgstaffdata092011> (Junior Post Dataset)

## Externally funded research

DCLG has also reduced its expenditure on external research and consulting. The restructuring of the department means it's not possible to compare expenditure on particular areas (e.g. housing). The reported expenditure on research (presumably not including internal salaries) in 2008/09 was broken down by 'strategic area'<sup>9</sup>:

DSO	Title	OutTurn £,000	%
DSO1	Local Government	£1,460	6.1
DSO2	Housing	£13,071	54.5
DSO3	Prosperous Communities	£1,673	7.0
DSO4	Cohesive Communities	£3,321	13.9
DSO5	Planning	£648	2.7
DSO6	Safer Communities	£3,110	13.0
	Cross-Cutting	£683	2.8
<b>Total</b>		<b>£23,967</b>	<b>100.0</b>

So, the department spent around £24m on external research. No figures are available for 2009/10, because only a limited annual expenditure report was produced, because of the election and change of government. We can compare this with the reported expenditure for 2010/11 and 2011/12<sup>10</sup>:

	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	Mar 2011 – Jan 2012	2011/12 projected	Change, 2008/09 to 2011/12
Nominal (£m)	24.0	-	22.8	7.3	8.8	-63%
Real (£m) <sup>11</sup>	24.6	-	23.1	7.3	8.8	-64%

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has a longer time series of R&D expenditure by Civil Service departments, although it is wholly comparable to the figures above. It shows that in the years 2002/03 to 2006/07, DCLG's R&D expenditure was in the range £30-£35m (in 2009/10 prices); in 2007/08 to 2009/10, the range was £26m to £28m (again, 2009/10 prices).

DCLG no longer publishes an annual programme of research, but will commission *ad hoc*. Some of the reductions are down to changes in the major sample surveys run by DCLG:

- The *English Housing Survey* (EHS) is a household survey with a property survey of a subset of the sample. It has run annually (as SEH) since 1994/5 and is the prime source for housing researchers. To save money, its sample is being reduced by 20-25% (from around 18,000), which will further reduce the accuracy of estimates for population sub-groups, and some items (e.g. on neighbourhood) that have been continually asked will no longer be included every year. It has withdrawn from contributing to the Integrated Household Survey (a combined large sample on core socio-economic topics).

<sup>9</sup> DCLG Annual Report 2009, p173, <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/pdf/1281142.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> From DCLG departmental expenditure spreadsheets

<sup>11</sup> Expenditure are adjusted by the Q3 2011 Services Producer Price Index for "Market Research" (not general consumer price inflation): <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/ppi2/services-producer-price-indices/quarter-3-2011/tsd-services-producer-price-index---quarter-3-2011.html>

- The *Citizenship Survey* asked about trust, community relations, participation, and was run every other year from 2002. It has been cancelled. Some relevant items have been included in waves of *Understanding Society*.
- The *Places Survey* aimed to measure the performance of local authority services. It has been cancelled.

Additionally, some externally commissioned statistical services have been cancelled and taken in-house by DCLG or its agencies. The Regulatory Statistics Service (of the stock and activities of housing associations) was provided by Cambridge University, and will now be done by HCA. The CORE log of lettings by all social landlords was run by St Andrews; it has been re-contracted and is now run by the company TSR.

## Discontinued series

Following a consultation, DCLG has announced that it will cease publication of several series<sup>12</sup>:

6. The Electronic Survey of Empty Homes
7. Neighbourhood Statistics on Vacancies and Second Homes
8. Houses in Multiple Occupation

Also, the future of other data series, on social housing lettings, homelessness, sales transactions is unclear. DCLG has proposed ceasing all regional disaggregations, reflecting the end of regional government.

## Additional datasets

From 2012, the Land Registry's price-paid dataset of individual house sales transaction is 'open' rather than subject to a fee. I'm not aware of any other additional 'open data' bar that on expenditure. However, these expenditure data are pretty much useless since the 'activity' categorisations are wrong – or rather, they presumably reflect internal accounting procedures rather than areas of work comprehensible to an external user of the data.

The Valuation Office Agency is publishing some new data on private rents and council tax records of dwellings, and has committed to maintaining the Neighbourhood Statistics series on dwelling counts, which was ceased by DCLG.

## Implications

DCLG and its research and analysis capacity has been more severely reduced than other departments. One net effect is likely that it will be much harder or impossible to appraise the overall effect of the radical changes to housing policy, and particularly how they are working in different places. There is a continuity here between 'localism' as doctrine and statistical capacity. One aspect of the central production of statistics is the design and maintenance of standard taxonomies and classifications, of metadata that permit comparison between places, and support in the interpretation of raw data. In so far as these are reduced, the comparability of locally produced data is also reduced.

The Housing Statistics Network considered that DCLG's programme showed a “lack of recognition of the importance and value of statistics to users other than the Government” and an “absence of a strategic approach evidenced by the lack of principles, criteria, assessment of future needs or

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/pdf/2101434.pdf>

development of the use of administrative data”<sup>13</sup>. The Housing Studies Association took the view that the cumulative changes were “biased against independent academic research”. Given the cuts to local authority budgets, it seems likely that they will not be able to make good the reductions in national statistics, and this affects their newly enhanced housing management and strategy role.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://housingstatisticsnetwork.org/node/104>

**Annex 2: Health statistics, example impacts of the cuts on health statistics**  
**Alison Macfarlane, for Radical Statistics' working group Reduced Statistics**  
**24 August 2012**

It is difficult to quantify the impact of cuts on health statistics since National Statistics on health are produced by a number of different agencies. Population based statistics about births and deaths are published by ONS for England and Wales, by the National Archives of Scotland and by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. Further analyses are undertaken by other agencies, notably the public health observatories. In England, these are being absorbed into Public Health England along with other agencies. Although there are anecdotal accounts of statistics posts disappearing in this process, it is too soon to quantify what is happening.

**Analysis no longer a core priority, for the first time since William Farr in 19<sup>th</sup> century**

ONS, following in the footsteps of its predecessors, the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys and the General Register Office for England has a long tradition of going beyond simply publishing tables of data and analysing and interpreting the data it publishes. William Farr, who instigated this process, described its contribution to 'practical medicine' in 1839: 'The extent to which epidemics vary in different localities, seasons and classes of society, will be indicated by the registered diseases; and the experienced practitioner, wherever he may be placed, will learn to administer remedies with discrimination and with due reference to the circumstances of the population'.

In recent decades, ONS' health statistics staff had considerable analytical skills and good collaborative links with academics who worked with them on analyses, which were either published in ONS' own journals, Population Trends and Health Statistics Quarterly, in special reports or in academic journals. Subjects of detailed analyses included inequalities in health and analyses of time trends in mortality and factors associated with this. This process started to grind to a halt when many of these experienced staff took voluntary redundancy when their posts were relocated to Newport. They were replaced by smaller numbers of less experienced staff. Then a review of ONS' work programme in 2010 led to a decision that health statistics analysis was not part of ONS' core business and it should be discontinued: "re-focusing the ONS analysis programme including reducing the level of health and regional and local analysis; concentrating on the core business of ONS" (ONS 2012). This was followed by a decision to close all of ONS' journals.

**Resources and statistics about resources**

Each of the four countries of the UK processes the data compiled about the provision of health care separately. In each case, an NHS agency plays a major role in compiling the data. The extent to which they undertake analysis varies and some further analysis is done in the relevant health departments.

ISD Scotland is often perceived as the flagship of these NHS agencies. It has recently undergone cuts and restructuring. The "Workforce Planning Strategy 2011-2016" for National Services Scotland states that 'Information Services Division (ISD) will reduce permanent staffing levels by 11.2 % (52.5 WTE) whilst significantly reducing reliance and usage of temporary agency labour and fixed term staff.'

In England, The Information Centre for Health and Social care was initially modelled on ISD

Scotland but it has changed its name and status a number of times in its relatively short existence. It is about to change again as a result of the further responsibilities given it in the Health and Social Care Act. It has also experienced budget cuts although it is due to grow again, this is to take on new responsibilities.

In 2011, the Information Centre undertook a Fundamental Review of Central Returns which recommended discontinuing 25% of central returns and 'a reduction in burden on the NHS of approximately £10m.' It may be that some of these returns were no longer relevant, but this was not the case with all of them. For example the collection of information about bank and agency staff in the NHS was one which was discontinued. This led to a loss of information about nursing staff. For example in 2009, there were 322,425 whole time equivalent qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff in England, but this dropped to 306,887 when bank staff were excluded.

### **The impact of disclosure control**

ONS has developed increasingly restrictive disclosure control procedures, which limits the extent to which outside researchers can use MRC funds to undertake secondary analyses. In particular, decreasing numbers of staff and loss of experienced staff as a result of the relocation of health statistics work from London to Newport have led to long delays in releasing analyses for publication.

### References

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## Annex 3: Reduced Statistics: Local Government

*Ludi Simpson, 18<sup>th</sup> July 2012 (revised September 2012 with Tom Clarke)*

### Overview

English local authorities are absorbing cuts in their spending power of up to 10% (with those serving deprived urban areas the biggest losers). Local Government employment has reduced by 10% in less than two years of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government, at a faster rate than local government. Under the Localism Act 2011, responsibilities have been transferred into local government, involving greater accountability in law. Priority has been given to 'front line' services, such that it is unlikely that research and monitoring has been protected. The majority of research staff surveyed in mid-2011 already felt that 'achieving more with less' was the best description of their main challenge, in an essentially uncertain environment. Regional strategies that had stimulated research to support local decision-making in housing, town planning and population change, have been abolished. The Localism Act, by encouraging diversity of local responses and planning, has also made it more difficult to monitor its own impact on services.

### Policy & institutional background

By the doctrine of 'localism', and the Localism Act 2011, policy responsibility for local development is able to be devolved to local authorities 'and beyond', to 'communities', and in significant cases by 2012 has already been so devolved. According to the Minister for Decentralisation, it involves "a substantial and lasting shift in power away from central government and towards local people"<sup>14</sup>. In the areas of housing and planning, Districts are now primarily responsible for determining housing need and for making land-use plans for both housing and employment. This is a devolvement from County Councils and the abolished Regional Assemblies, the two layers where accountability and significant research capacity had previously existed. Regional housing, spatial and economic planning has been dismantled, as has the national monitoring and target-setting framework for local authorities. District Councils are now responsible for housing allocations, finance and rents. County Council research capacity has less funds and less direct justification for its work.

There are no longer any national programmes or funding regimes for 'neighbourhood renewal' or 'regeneration' – again, these are wholly a matter for districts. Direct grants for the construction of affordable housing are much reduced. Public Health is being transferred from the NHS to local authorities, with shadow boards already in existence, awaiting announcement of budget which will be in place in 2013. At the same time, reporting from Local Authorities to Government has been much reduced, and the government's *Places Survey* which aimed to measure the performance of local authority services has been cancelled.

There has been no planned change in local government organisation or responsibilities to accompany the reduction of 28% in grant from government to English local authorities during 2010/11-2014/15 (see below). The Localism Act 2011 encourages local authorities to act in any lawful way to pursue its priorities, including by requesting further powers from government Ministers. The powers do not include the ability to raise further taxes. The encouragement to manage their own affairs without government monitoring stimulates both a very diverse response to the cuts across local authorities, and a lack of information on those responses.

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<sup>14</sup> CLG 'A plain English guide to the Localism Act', November 2011, <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/localismplainenglishupdate>

## Staffing and resources

Total local government employment in the UK has fallen about three times as fast as central government employment between the change in government in 2010 (2010 Q2) and the latest published statistics (2012 Q1)<sup>15</sup>: 208 thousand in local government (9.6%), 67 thousand in central govt (2.8%), each from a base of near 2 million, with a further drop of 50 thousand in other public sector employment (10.0%). This full-time equivalent drop of 325,000 involves a loss of 393,000 jobs. Local government employment is now at the low level it was at the end of the previous conservative administration in 1997, itself the lowest point since published time series begins in 1991<sup>16</sup>. Local government includes most teachers which make up most of the education public sector identified by statistics, which has dropped less, 60 thousand from 1,192 thousand. There will be some movement between sectors – for example teachers moving from LEA to Academy schools are transferred from local to central government – but the overall picture is clearly one of strong cuts in the local government workforce, at a faster rate than in central government.

The government's Spending Review in December 2010 cut central funding for local government in England by 28% and funding for the Welsh Government by 7.5% over the four years to 2014/15. Local government total expenditure budgeted for 2011/12 was 10% below the out-turn in 2009/10, with the larger authorities serving the poorest areas suffering larger cuts<sup>17</sup>. London and northern areas were affected more than southern areas on average. Development and planning functions, which include significant research capacity, were hit disproportionately, with half of local authorities reducing their expenditure by 40% or more during that two year period.

In theory, local authorities could increase revenue through the council tax. However, since council tax revenue accounts for only one-quarter of local authority income, a 10% reduction in government grant would take an increase in council tax rates of around 25%. Since the government has pledged a two-year council tax freeze and penalised Councils that raise their tax rates, rises have not been on the agenda.

Official employment statistics do not identify research or related occupations, but with pressure to maintain 'front-line' services it is most likely that these occupations have seen a considerably greater cut than the local government average. A report based on budget documents and interviews with 25 Chief Executives concludes that "monitoring and evaluation roles appear to be one of the foremost casualties of back office efficiencies in many, if not all, authorities. ... it has important implications for the development of an evidence base capable of facilitating understanding of the scale and impact of budget contraction."<sup>18</sup> The LG-Inform initiative<sup>19</sup> aims to fill some of the gap in information for all local authorities following the demise of the Audit Commission, the Place Survey and other government-led initiatives, but the same report notes that information on outcomes has become an 'opt-in' activity rather than a requirement.

A survey undertaken among local authority research staff in March-June of 2011 found that the majority of the 249 respondents gave as the one best description of their challenge for the coming year as 'Achieving more with less'<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> ONS quarterly Statistical Bulletin on Public Sector Employment, June 20<sup>th</sup> 2012. The figures given here are full-time equivalent jobs. <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/pse/public-sector-employment/q1-2012/index.html>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/datasets-and-tables/data-selector.html?table-id=PSE1&dataset=pse>

<sup>17</sup> IFS 2012 '2012 Green Budget', chapter 6: Local government spending: where is the axe falling?  
<http://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/6003>

<sup>18</sup> Serving deprived communities in a recession, Annette Hastings, Glen Bramley, Nick Bailey and David Watkins, January 2012, Joseph Rowntree Foundation (<http://www.jrf.org.uk/publications/serving-deprived-communities-recession>). The report is from the pilot stage of a project that will continue in Autumn 2012 to examine local responses to reduced funding, described more fully at:  
<http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/socialpolitical/research/urbanstudies/projects/servingdeprivedcommunitiesinarecession/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.local.gov.uk/about-lginform>

<sup>20</sup> 249 Local Authority Research and Intelligence Association (LARIA) members from over 140 local authorities, predominantly those with most research activity, responded to a survey undertaken by BMG Ltd. These figures are for England; the proportion describing this greatest challenge were larger for the simultaneous surveys in Wales and

The same survey found that respondents' most common descriptions of their current situation were 'challenging' and 'uncertain', with 'uncertain' being the best one-word description (chosen by 30%, compared with 19% for challenging, and smaller proportions for 11 other options).

A further survey of LARIA members and others was undertaken in July-August 2012<sup>21</sup>. From our own analysis of the 179 respondents working in Local Government, the greatest challenge for most was as in 2011, 'Achieving more with less'. 49% had experienced reduced budgets in both of the previous years, 2010/11 and 2011/12. However the impact of the cuts was varied; at the other extreme, 8% (14 respondents) had experienced increases in budget in at least one of the two years.

Budget cuts fell particularly hard on central services, and economic and regeneration services:

Budget Changes, by Policy Area	Adult Social Care	Central Services	Economic and Regeneration	Housing	Pre-School	School	Other
Decreased	22	43	42	29	17	23	32
Increased	16	14	19	9	11	6	11
No Change	38	42	38	42	40	39	26
Don't know	103	80	80	99	111	111	110

Source: LARIA/People Matters Network survey, 2012, authors' analysis.

## Discontinued series

Local Authorities contribute to nationally consistent data series compiled by others. The following compiled by DCLG have ceased since 2008 or will cease shortly (taken from Reduced Statistics summary on housing and communities in England)<sup>22</sup>:

- The Electronic Survey of Empty Homes
- Neighbourhood Statistics on Vacancies and Second Homes.
- Houses in Multiple Occupation

DCLG expects to cease all regional disaggregations, reflecting the end of regional government.

The cessation of series produced by individual local authorities themselves is not compiled.

## Additional datasets

The transfer of public health responsibility from the NHS to local authorities will lead to further statistical output from local authorities.

## Implications

District Councils within County structures now have new responsibilities in land development and housing provision. Some get together, as had also happened earlier in Metropolitan districts where the county structure was abolished in the mid-1980s. Some counties, notably Essex and Kent, have made notable efforts to pass on their understanding and research tools to Districts, offering to

in Scotland.

<sup>21</sup> Headline results are reported by LARIA at <http://www.laria.gov.uk/laria/core/page.do?pageId=1035670>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/corporate/pdf/2101434.pdf>

co-ordinate, train or service the District's new needs. In some areas neighbouring local authorities increasingly work together. A celebrated example is the 'Tri-Borough' of Westminster, Hammersmith and Fulham and Kensington and Chelsea, with shared IT, HR and other services, which may also allow research and statistical skills to be sustained, although perhaps risking a loss of focus on the elected members' priorities. Within other counties, as also happened in some Metropolitan districts, consider that there is little to be gained in efficiency or in strategic outlook from such collaboration. A dislocation of research effort and evidence is one result, with loss of comparable studies.

The loss of jobs has led to re-organisation in many local authorities, in which research and statistical expertise in particular methods or datasets has been supplanted by generic data analytic posts. The loss of experience through redundancies, whether or not voluntary, has also reduced the pool of specific research skills. New roles have wider remits in which research and evaluation is taken on by those who previously were project managers or had other skills with low research content. Thus there is a noticeably increased need for basic training in response to 2011 Census data recently released, and for demographic and economic projections required by development planning.

The lack of attention to knowledge about data is apparent in the treatment of the Open Data policy in local government (as well as central government), such that the quality and understanding of data made available has not been prioritised.

The current government's decision to scrap or make voluntary a lot of the 1997-2010 Labour administrations' performance frameworks, which set targets for both local and central government departments, has meant that many performance teams are finding that their old outputs have become redundant. However, at the same time the government is pushing approaches characterised as 'payment by results' onto local authorities. These require more intensive, real time monitoring of a wider range of programme outcomes, directly linked to financial reporting structures – the challenge is to re-orient the work of performance officers to meet this new need.

The loss of Central government monitoring of local government, the abolition of Regional bodies, and the emphasis on district and neighbourhood localism rather than County responsibilities, each undermines traditional sources of support for good practice. Who now will set standards, not necessarily determining practice but disseminating efficient and effective strategies for collecting, collating and interpreting evidence for social policy and its implementation? Professional associations and networks such as LARIA, LGA, and the RTPPI are struggling to maintain and re-orientate their services to members – and to recruit the wider set of more professionals with a research and analytical responsibilities who have less time, less focus, and less training.

A relevant conclusion on housing statistics from the housing and communities summary (Annex 1 above): One net effect is likely that it will be much harder or impossible to appraise the overall effect of the radical changes to housing policy, and particularly how they are working in different places. There is continuity here between 'localism' as doctrine and statistical capacity. The Housing Statistics Network considered that DCLG's programme showed a "lack of recognition of the importance and value of statistics to users other than the Government" and an "absence of a strategic approach evidenced by the lack of principles, criteria, assessment of future needs or development of the use of administrative data"<sup>23</sup>. The Housing Studies Association took the view that the cumulative changes were "biased against independent academic research".

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<sup>23</sup> <http://housingstatisticsnetwork.org/node/104>