

Official Statistics User Engagement Strategy

Introduction

The Student Loans Company (SLC) in compliance with the UK Statistics Authority code of practice (principal 1 and 2) has been charged with the duty to 'promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics' and in doing so in adhering to a user engagement strategy to achieve these principals.

The User Engagement strategy aims to address the needs of users of our statistics, and addresses the means under which SLC can encourage and promote wider engagement. This is a key requirement because engagement with users at all stages in statistical process is likely to produce benefits to justify the cost of that engagement. It delivers evidence of the relevance of statistics being produced. User engagement helps in prioritising what statistics should be produced in future; provide evidence of the value of the statistics and supports the business case to continue the work.

The objectives of the engagement are:

1. Identify the users and potential users of our publications
2. Enable users to provide feedback on the range and quality of statistics available
3. Understand our users and the application of the statistics
4. Establish an on-going dialogue with users to;
 - Inform users about the availability of new statistics
 - Improve text which accompanies the statistics to take account of likely users
 - Present statistics in ways that capture interest and can be readily understood
 - Anticipate and respond to changes in users' needs
 - Publish statistical reports that take into account user feedback
 - Document the needs of users
 - Provide feedback on the impact and influence of our users' input.

Approach for the Engagement

Identifying the users of the statistics and how the statistics are being used.

User: A user of statistics can be any person or organisation whose work, actions or decisions are influenced by official statistics or by messages derived from statistical data.

Potential User: This can be any person or organisation who might be influenced by the statistics.

Based on these definitions, we are able to identify our Users and Potential Users. These identified Users were divided into two groups: the Internal and External Users.

Internal Users comprise of the employees within Student Loans Company departments; Business Development, Marketing & Communication, Policy and Repayment Development, Freedom of Information Team, etc. This group uses the statistics to answer questions from the public, media, government agencies, parliamentary questions and research groups.

The External Users include our stakeholders (which include Government Administrations, Universities and funding councils) press, journalists, researchers / academics, students and parents. The external group uses the statistics for research purposes and awareness.

Modes of Engagement

SLC's user engagement activity will be performed on an ongoing basis and will vary depending on the purpose for the engagement. The plan will include five main streams of user engagement;

- Paper or electric questionnaire and direct dialogue with our users: as our understanding of who our users are, we will seek to canvass feedback directly with such users.
- Analysing the results from the on-line consultation survey. This is expected to be an important source to inform who our users are and what the uses are of our statistics. We expect that this will be an important source of suggestions and questions coming from our users. Once the results are analysed SLC will publish results and responses on the slc.co.uk website (<http://www.slc.co.uk/statistics/statistics-user-consultation.aspx>)

- User engagement forums and workshops where users can get the opportunity to review the current statistical publications and discuss new proposals for future releases.
- Working directly with the stakeholders to ensure they are fully understood and they are considered in the decision making of publications.
- Email notifications relating to specific statistical publications, future publication, pre- announcements etc.

These sessions will be an indicator to measure how we satisfy our user's need in regards to our statistical publications. This approach will help us in prioritising what statistics to produced in future; provide evidence of the value of the statistics and supports the business case to continue the work.