



The Social Metrics Commission

Voluntary compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics

February 2019

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About the Social Metrics Commission

The Social Metrics Commission is an independent Commission formed and led by the Legatum Institute's CEO Baroness Stroud.

It is an independent and rigorously non-partisan organisation dedicated to helping policy makers and the public understand and take action to tackle poverty. Its ultimate goal has been to develop new poverty metrics for the UK which will have both long-term political support and effectively identify those who are in poverty. By doing so, we hope that Government and others will be better able to develop interventions that reduce the number of people experiencing poverty and improve outcomes for those people who do experience it.

This report summarises the Commission's work over the last two and half years and outlines its conclusions and recommendations for how poverty measurement should develop in the UK.

The Commission would like to thank both the Legatum Institute for hosting the Commission and making available the resources of its Centre for Metrics, and the Legatum Foundation for their significant support of this work. This report would not have been possible without that support, and the research, editorial and functional independence that has underpinned the Commission's work.

Contacting us and contributing to our work

We welcome discussion on these issues and would appreciate constructive feedback and comment on our approach. To contact the Commission's secretariat, please use the following email address:

secretariat@socialmetricscommission.org.uk.

Website: socialmetricscommission.org.uk

Twitter: @SocMetricsComm

Supporters of the Commission

The Social Metrics Commission would like to thank the following organisations and people for their generous support for the work of developing new poverty metrics for the UK.

- Joseph Rowntree Foundation;
- Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (UK Branch);
- Garfield Weston Trust;
- PF Charitable Trust; and
- Mr Sanjit and Mrs Sangeeta Talukdar.

Over the course of the Commission, Oliver Wyman have provided significant pro-bono technical support to the Commission. Without the support of both their talented consultants and analysts and their senior leadership team, this work would not have been possible.

Voluntary statement of compliance

The Commission’s approach is underpinned by the need to build consensus and trust in its work and the analysis it produces. With that trust, the Commission hopes to play a central role in improving the measurement of poverty in the UK, and as a consequence, driving better outcomes for people and families who are struggling to make ends meet.

As such, the Commission, Commissioners, Secretariat and all of those who have contributed and continue to contribute to our work, are fully committed to adhering to the highest standards for analysis possible. To help to ensure that, the Commission has voluntarily complied with the principles of the UK Statistics Authority’s Code of Practice for Statistics. Whilst the Commission does not produce official statistics, we hope that building our approach on these principles, will make it easier for those who do, to take on our approach as an official statistic in due course.

The Code of Practice has three pillars: Trustworthiness, Quality and Value. The Commission’s compliance with these pillars of the Code of Practice are highlighted in table 1.

Table 1: The Commission’s voluntary compliance with the Code of Practice

| <i>Pillar</i> | <i>Detail</i> |
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| <p>Trustworthiness: confidence in the people and organisations that produce statistics and data.</p> | <p>The Commission was established as an independent charitable organisation in 2016. It has since been housed within the Legatum Institute’s Centre for Metrics. The Commission has retained full research, editorial and functional independence and is committed to upholding its charitable purpose. The Commission is an independent and rigorously non-partisan organisation dedicated to helping policy makers and the public understand and take action to tackle poverty.</p> <p>Its ultimate goal has been to develop new poverty metrics for the UK which will have both long-term political support and effectively identify those who are in poverty. By doing so, it hopes that Government and others will be better able to develop interventions that reduce the number of people experiencing poverty and improve outcomes for those people who do experience it.</p> <p>Commissioners role in decision making</p> <p>Details of the Commission’s Secretariat and technical teams are demonstrated below. Before turning to that, it is important to highlight the role that Commissioners themselves play in ensuring trustworthiness. Commissioners include top UK poverty thinkers from different political and professional backgrounds alongside data and analytical experts and those with experience of working with and supporting people living in poverty. They are involved on a personal basis and represent their own perspectives and opinions, rather than those of their respective organisations.</p> <p>The decision-making process involves the independent Secretariat and Technical Team presenting Commissioners with detailed analysis, research and advice, through which evidence-based decisions can be made. All decisions on development of methodology and publications are based on building a consensus view of all Commissioners. Where this is not possible, the further Commission</p> |

meetings are scheduled, and the Secretariat and Technical team undertake more research and analysis, until a consensus view can be established.

To ensure on-going political neutrality and objectivity, the Commission has chosen to focus only on presenting information on poverty measurement itself. It will not to make recommendations on current or future policy direction.

Involving others

To inform and support the Commissioner's decision-making process, the Secretariat and Technical Team also work to engage a wide range of expert stakeholders, including academics focussed on poverty measurement (both in the UK and internationally). These stakeholders are vital in ensuring an open process of critique for the Commission's work.

The Secretariat and technical teams

The Commission's technical analysis and reporting is undertaken by a Secretariat team led by Matthew Oakley, within the Legatum Institute's Centre for Metrics. Matthew is an experienced economist and policy analyst. He has previously been responsible for ownership and management of personal labour market micro data security at HM Treasury. He has significant experience in managing and using confidential personal data and is an accredited to use confidential microdata. The Centre for Metrics is led by Doctor Stephen Brien. In addition to overseeing the Institute's policy programmes, his research focuses on the socio-economic drivers of prosperity. From 2015-17, Stephen was an Advisor to the Saudi Government. He has been a Director at Social Finance; and he also advised the UK Department for Work and Pensions from 2010 to 2013. He is the author of Dynamic Benefits (the blueprint for Universal Credit) and Outcome-based Government. Stephen has a B.Sc from University College, Dublin and a D.Phil in Computation and M.A in Law from Christ Church, Oxford.

Matthew reports directly to the Commission's Chair, Baroness Stroud. The Commission, Legatum Institute and WPI Economics all have robust data protection and information security procedures in place, as outlined in a GDPR regulation policy available to all staff. These are updated regularly, and all staff are aware of both their legal responsibilities and their broader responsibilities in ensuring the credibility and trustworthiness of the output of the Commission and analysts more generally.

Ensuring openness and transparency

The Commission also realises that openness and transparency are an important part of building trustworthiness. As such, it is committed to releasing statistics and analysis in an open and transparent manner, as well as working with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure that they understand and can access our research and analysis and can implement the approach we have developed.

Openness and transparency are also central to the Legatum Institute which, as an educational charity, is also aware of its objective of educating the public on its work, including through the Commission.

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| | <p>Together, this means that the Commission has made all of the analysis it has produced publicly available, through a data explorer tool on the internet. The Commission will continue to publish all analysis and research, including data tables through the website.</p> <p>It is worth note that the Code of Practice for Statistics requires that when official statistics are published (put in the public domain), they are equally available to all. The Commission is conscious that this is one area where it deviates slightly from these requirements, in terms of timing, as it will retain the flexibility to sequence the release of the results to maximise impact in the media. To do this, the Commission will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure that, where results are released early to media outlets and key stakeholders, this will be under a strict embargo. We will also consider all requests for access to embargoed releases. - When results are published, the Commission will make available the underlying analysis that has been used. - Given the significant volume of research and analysis being undertaken, it will not always be possible to publish all results immediately. However, the Commission is committed to making available as much of the underlying analysis and research as possible. It will also commit to working with interested parties to provide them with access to specific elements of the research and analysis, where this is possible. <p><i>Helping others to understand, access and use the poverty metrics</i></p> <p>In due course, and with the data owner’s permission, the Commission also intends to make available the underlying derived variables it has produced, and the full STATA code used to create its work. This will allow other users to explore the data and replicate the findings.</p> |
| <p>Quality: data and methods that produce assured statistics</p> | <p><i>Internal quality assurance</i></p> <p>The first element of the Commission’s approach to ensuring quality is centred on the expertise and experience of those involved in the Commission, both directly and indirectly. As highlighted above, it has drawn together a range of people and organisations with experience in using personal microdata and administrative data to analyse social and economic issues.</p> <p>The Secretariat team and Legatum also have a robust Quality Assurance procedure. This involves independent replication of results by at least two members of staff and a thorough documentation of all code, such that an audit trail can be traced.</p> <p><i>External quality assurance</i></p> <p>The Commission has also benefited from the expertise and experience of individuals outside of the technical and secretariat teams. For example, it has established (and continues to run) an Advisory Group and a group of academic experts. Full detail of approaches, data sources and methodologies are shared with these groups before publication. Whilst there is no formal responsibility on</p> |

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| | <p>these groups, they provide a level of external critique, which is essential in developing the Commission’s approach and outputs.</p> <p>A similar position exists with data and policy experts within UK Government departments and the devolved administrations, where the Secretariat and technical teams have engaged extensively to test ideas, approaches, methodologies and the suitability of data sources. For example, the Commission has a strong working relationship with both DWP and the ONS, where issues around data quality and appropriateness (including on specific variables used) can be, and have been, discussed.</p> <p>Building on quality assurance</p> <p>Looking forward, as well as continuing with these approaches, the Commission will be seeking to bolster its external quality assurance over the course of 2019.</p> <p>Specifically, in early 2019, the Commission will be undertaking a process of external review and testing of the code that underpins its methodology. This is being undertaken with teams at the IFS and JRF. We will seek feedback from these teams both on the detailed approach that we have taken and the documentation that accompanies the code. This approach will be the forerunner to the Commission providing open access to our methodology and code to the public.</p> <p>Throughout the course of 2019, the Commission will also publish a series of more detailed technical papers to support its summary and full reports from 2018. These will provide more detail on particular decisions made, the impact of the decisions and how the decisions were made. This will allow scrutiny from a wide range of experts and researchers and we will be inviting views and comments on our work, in order to engage in a process of constant improvement. This is in keeping with the research policy of the Legatum Institute, which, as a charity, maintains a commitment to openness and transparency in all aspects of its research work, from conception to publication.</p> <p>Honesty about limitations</p> <p>The Commission has also been clear (and will continue to be) about the potential limitations of the data being used. It has explicitly highlighted where data quality is a concern and where more work needs to be done to develop better methodologies and more accurate data.</p> |
| <p>Value: statistics that support society’s needs for information</p> | <p>Improving knowledge and understanding</p> <p>This principle has been at the heart of the Commission’s approach. Unless poverty is measured accurately, and in a way that a wide range of people understand and support, it is highly unlikely that policymakers will be able to take effective action in terms of tackling the issue.</p> <p>The Commission’s goal of developing an improved measure of poverty for the UK and building consensus around this approach, is specifically focussed on adding value to society – both in terms of understanding poverty and, ultimately, improving outcomes.</p> |

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| | <p>The Commission's work to date has already had a clear impact on raising the level of understanding and discussion of poverty at all levels of government, in academia and in research organisations. Our future work will continue to do so by:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Publishing annual updates of our initial report;2) Publishing ad hoc analysis, technical papers and investigations that will shine further light on these issues;3) Undertaking further work to highlight areas where the approaches taken to measuring poverty in the UK and internationally do not lead to an accurate understanding of poverty; and4) Working with others to develop better data and improved approaches to poverty measurement that can be incorporated into our existing work. <p><i>Meeting the needs of different users of information</i></p> <p>The Commission realises that analysis and data are useful if they can be understood by users and readily applied to tackling the underlying issues that they seek to explain. We are also aware that the users of our work are varied and have different needs. Our approach to tackling this involves producing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Short non-technical summaries of our work;• Full reports with the detail;• Technical reports for those interested in the detail of our methodology; and• A range of infographics and a data explorer through which all users can understand and explore our analysis. <p><i>Sustainable value</i></p> <p>The Commission's ultimate goal is that a wide range of organisations, including the Government begin to use the approach to poverty measurement we have developed. We believe if this were achieved, the maximum value would be delivered from our work to date. That is one of the reasons why we are committed to publishing the underlying data and code that underpins our analysis, so that it can be easily replicated by other researchers and organisations.</p> <p>However, we are also aware that widescale adoption may take time. As such, the Commission is committed to continuing to publish annual reports on the full analysis of the Commission's poverty metrics, so that the improved information that we have developed can continue to add value to society.</p> |
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