



## IPS Paper

### Statistics that serve the public good: a definition from the UK's statistics regulator

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#### Brief Description

The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) is responsible for regulating the UK's official statistics: our role is to ensure that statistics serve the public good.

But what is 'the public good'? We have a Research Programme dedicated to developing our understanding of public good and, in this talk, we will discuss the research we have carried out to build our evidence base.

We have investigated public good from different perspectives, such as the literature, researchers, and the general public, and this has recently culminated in work to generate an initial definition of public good, which will be discussed.

#### Abstract

The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) provides independent regulation of all official statistics produced in the UK: we aim to enhance public confidence in statistics produced by government. To do this, we independently review whether official statistics comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics and show trustworthiness, quality and value.

OSR has a Research Programme dedicated to developing the understanding of what it means for statistics to serve the public good. The Research Programme has carried out work to understand what the public good of statistics means in different contexts, in order to build the evidence base. We have carried out a literature review, which demonstrated that there are different definitions of public good depending on the perspective or topic of interest.

We then carried out a content analysis of researchers' applications to access public data, which demonstrated a tension regarding who 'the public' is. Our evidence suggested that researchers primarily view serving the public good as providing evidence for policy makers. This approach contrasts with others who advocate for the general public's need for information and want statistics to be able to contribute towards the general public's understanding of the world around them.

Following this, we worked to develop the understanding of public good from the perspective of members of the public. We collaborated with ADR UK (Administrative Data Research UK) to capture public perceptions of the public good use of data for research and statistics. We used a qualitative methodology called public dialogues with 68 participants taking part in workshops across the UK. Five main findings were generated from the public dialogues, highlighting that participants felt members of the public should be included in decisions about the public good, that data for research and statistics should be used to address inequalities in society, and that even more data could be collected in order to serve public good provided that best practice safeguarding is used. Additionally, participants felt that statistics producers could improve their public-facing communication to increase public awareness of statistics and the public good which is served by statistics, as well as increasing their public engagement in order to minimise any potential harm that could come from miscommunication.

In this talk, we will describe our most recent project, which involves synthesising all of the evidence we have gathered in order to generate a definition of public good. This definition will be used by OSR to guide our regulatory work and to develop the understanding of public good across the statistical system.