



National Audit Office

Measuring Up

How good are the Government's data systems for monitoring performance against Public Service Agreements?

PSA 21: 'Build more cohesive, empowered and active communities'

A review of the data systems underpinning the Public Service Agreement led by the Department for Communities and Local Government under the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007

REPORT BY THE NATIONAL AUDIT OFFICE

Validation of the data systems for the PSA 21, Spending Review Period 2008-11

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Executive Summary

Introduction

1. This report summarises the results of our examination of the data systems used by the Government in 2008 to monitor and report on progress against PSA 21.

The PSA and the Departments

2. PSAs are at the centre of Government's performance measurement system. They are usually three year agreements, set during the spending review process and negotiated between Departments and the Treasury. They set the objectives for the priority areas of Government's work.
3. This PSA is led by the Department for Communities and Local Government, with data provided by the Office of National Statistics (ONS) and a range of other sources. Each PSA has a Senior Responsible Officer who is responsible for maintaining a sound system of control across Departmental boundaries that supports the achievement of the PSA. The underlying data systems are an important element in this framework of control.
4. The most recent public statement provided by the Department on progress against this PSA was in the 2008 Autumn Performance Report.

The purpose and scope of this review

5. The Government invited the Comptroller and Auditor General to validate the data systems used by Government to monitor and report its performance. During the period August to November 2008, the National Audit Office (NAO) carried out an examination of the data systems for all the indicators used to report performance against this PSA. This involved a detailed review of the processes and controls governing:
 - The match between the indicators selected to measure performance and the PSA. The indicators should address all key elements of performance referred to in the PSA;
 - The match between indicators and their data systems. The data system should produce data that allow the Department to accurately measure the relevant element of performance;
 - For each indicator, the selection, collection, processing and analysis of data. Control procedures should mitigate all known significant risks to data reliability. In addition, system processes and controls should be adequately documented to support consistent application over time; and
 - The reporting of results. Outturn data should be presented fairly for all key aspects of performance referred to in the target. Any significant

limitations should be disclosed and the implications for interpreting progress explained.

6. Our conclusions are summarised in the form of traffic lights (see figure 1). The ratings are based on the extent to which Departments have:
 - (i) put in place and operated internal controls over the data systems that are effective and proportionate to the risks involved; and
 - (ii) explained clearly any limitations in the quality of its data systems to Parliament and the public.
7. The remaining sections of this report provide an overview of the results of our assessment, followed by a brief description of the findings and conclusions for each individual data system. Our assessment does not provide a conclusion on the accuracy of the outturn figures included in the Department’s public performance statements. This is because the existence of sound data systems reduces but does not eliminate the possibility of error in reported data.

Figure 1: Key to traffic light ratings

Rating	Meaning ...
GREEN (Fit for purpose)	The data system is fit for the purpose of measuring and reporting performance against the indicator.
GREEN (Disclosure)	The data system is appropriate for the indicator and the Department has explained fully the implications of limitations that cannot be cost-effectively controlled.
AMBER (Systems)	Broadly appropriate, but needs strengthening to ensure that remaining risks are adequately controlled.
AMBER (Disclosure)	Broadly appropriate, but includes limitations that cannot be cost-effectively controlled; the Department should explain the implications of these.
RED (Systems)	The data system does not permit reliable measurement and reporting of performance against the indicator.
RED (Not established)	The Department has not yet put in place a system to measure performance against the indicator.

Overview

8. The aim of this PSA is to build cohesive, empowered and active communities. This PSA is supported by six indicators, one of which – indicator five – is broken down

into two sub-indicators. There is a named officer within the Department responsible for each of these indicators. This officer is supported by a lead analyst, who is responsible for the quality of the data used to calculate performance against each indicator.

9. Performance against the indicators is monitored monthly within the Department as part of its internal PSA performance reporting.
10. For this PSA, we have concluded that the indicators selected to measure progress are consistent with the scope of the PSA and afford a reasonable view of progress.
11. Figure 2 summarises our assessment of the data systems.

Figure 2: Summary of assessments for indicator data systems

No	Indicator	Rating
1	Percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area.	GREEN Fit for purpose
2	Percentage of people who have meaningful interactions on a regular basis with people from different ethnic or religious backgrounds.	GREEN Fit for purpose
3	Percentage of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood.	GREEN Fit for purpose
4	Percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their local area.	GREEN Fit for purpose
5	Thriving third sector. An index of (a) the percentage of people who engage in formal volunteering on a regular basis and (b) the number of full-time equivalent staff employed within the sector.	GREEN Fit for purpose
6	Percentage of people who participate in culture or sport.	GREEN Fit for purpose

12. The Department has worked to integrate the indicators within this PSA into its operational and performance management activities, for instance by integrating them into its business plan and performance reports.
13. The Department has formal mechanisms for identifying and assessing areas of risk and reporting these to the Board. The Department's risk management processes include consideration of issues related to PSAs.

14. The Department has satisfactory processes and controls in place designed to ensure the effective operation of business critical IT systems, including those used to collect, analyse and present performance information in respect of the Department's PSAs.
15. Issues of data quality are considered on many levels within the Department. The Department has an Evidence Strategy Group, chaired by the Director General Finance and Corporate Services, which is responsible for the Department's overall strategy on data quality.
16. The Director General Finance and Corporate Services has Board level responsibility for data quality. The Head of Profession for Statistics has day to day responsibility for data quality issues, with direct access and accountability to the Accounting Officer as required.
17. Directors General and Programme Boards are responsible for risk management on individual PSA indicators, and data quality risks will normally be managed at this level. However, data quality risks can be escalated either to the Departmental Board risk register for discussion, or to the Head of Profession for Statistics and the Director General Finance and Corporate Services, if required.
18. Other Directors General are responsible for data quality in their respective areas of activity and take a proactive role in promoting high quality performance information, for example through the review of indicator definitions and involvement in the design of data systems. Furthermore, members of staff receive training within this area appropriate to their roles, with regular reviews of their performance management needs.
19. The Department undertakes internal monitoring and analysis in respect of its performance against its PSAs and the underlying indicators, including the preparation of detailed monthly reports setting out progress in key areas of activity, current performance against the relevant indicators, significant risks to performance and further action to be taken in order to mitigate the risks identified and to further the achievement of the Department's objectives. Furthermore, the Department reports performance against its PSAs to the Board on a monthly basis.
20. Full performance is reported biannually in the Autumn Performance Report and Departmental Annual Report. The Department envisages that it will move to quarterly reporting, in line with other central government departments, once it is satisfied that its performance management and reporting arrangements – which have recently been revised to incorporate the new PSAs and DSOs as well as the underlying indicators – have been embedded fully across all areas of the Department.
21. Our main findings on the Department's overall arrangements with respect to the PSA and the indicators that it encompasses are as follows.

- The Department's governance arrangements in respect of its PSAs are generally satisfactory. The responsibilities for PSA indicators and data quality have been clearly assigned and the Department has processes in place to monitor and report performance against those indicators. Sufficient regard is given to data quality in respect of PSA indicators.
- From our review of the Department's performance indicators we note that, while some of these have quantitative targets attached, a significant proportion have no specific targets other than a general requirement for improvement against a baseline figure, as set out in the relevant Delivery Agreements and accompanying Measurement Annexes. Without clear targets in respect of individual indicators, and therefore a robust understanding of what and how much needs to be done in each area of activity, it will be difficult for the Department to prioritise its activities and allocate its resources effectively.
- The Department has agreed measurement annexes for all of its PSA indicators, setting out the definition of the indicator and the data sources to be used. It does not in all cases, however, have detailed written procedure notes in place, explaining how each indicator is to be calculated and how any outliers or missing data are to be addressed. While the Department's current procedures are robust, the fact that they are not all recorded formally may make it difficult for the Department to ensure the comparability of data over time, particularly if responsibility for the calculation of performance against a given indicator is passed to a different member of staff.

22. Where these findings have implications for individual indicators, we explore them in the next section of this report.

23. We recommend that:

- where indicators do not already have quantitative targets attached to them, the Department should determine appropriate targets that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and timebound.
- the Department develops for each indicator formal procedure notes setting out how the indicator is to be calculated and reported, so that this can be undertaken consistently over time and by different individual members of staff.

24. In response, the Department is already working to address our recommendations.

Assessment of indicator set

25. In undertaking the validation we reviewed the documentation associated with the PSA and considered whether the indicators selected to measure progress are consistent with the scope of this PSA.

26. We conclude that the indicators selected afford a reasonable view of progress.

Findings and conclusions for individual data systems

27. The following sections summarise the results of the NAO's examination of each data system.

Indicator 1

Percentage of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area

Conclusion: GREEN (Fit for purpose)

28. We have concluded that the data system underlying this indicator is fit for the purpose of measuring and reporting performance against the indicator.

29. The data used to calculate performance against this indicator are taken directly from the Citizenship Survey. No further processing or analysis of the data is required.

Characteristics of the data system

30. The data system for this indicator uses data from the Citizenship Survey, which is a large scale social research survey of a random sample of individuals from across England. The survey is an accredited National Statistic and is undertaken by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) on behalf of the Department.

31. The Citizenship Survey is a household survey covering a representative core sample of some 10,000 adults in England and Wales each year. There is also a minority ethnic boost sample of 5,000 to ensure that the views of these groups are robustly represented.

32. The data are weighted to correct for unequal sampling probabilities and non-response by sub-group. The weighting ensures that the survey sample matches the census population figures in terms of their age, sex and regional distribution.

33. The Citizenship Survey is conducted by trained interviewers through face to face interviews with respondents in their own homes. A standard question set is used, with appropriate controls in place – such as clear instructions to respondents, standardised wording of questions and restrictions on the level of assistance that can be given to respondents – to ensure that the data collected are robust, reliable and comparable.

34. The Department also expects to draw on local level data from the Place Survey. The Place Survey is undertaken by individual local authorities using guidance issued by the Department, with the results being reported to the Audit Commission. The Place Survey feeds into the National Data Set used by local authorities which in turn informs the Audit Commission's judgment with regards to the new Comprehensive Area Assessment. The deadline for local authorities to submit the

results for the 2008/09 Place Survey – the first time that this survey has been conducted - was 30th January 2009.

35. This indicator relates to a specific question on each survey, which asks respondents to what extent they agree or disagree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together. The local area is defined as being the area within 15 to 20 minutes walk of the respondent's home. The results of this element of the survey are used to calculate performance against the indicator. Consequently, no further processing or analysis of these data is required in the preparation of the indicator.
36. Performance against this indicator is reported on a national basis, rather than at the level of individual localities.

Findings

37. The national element of this indicator is also indicator 1 in the Department's Strategic Objective (DSO) 4. We note, however, that in the measurement annex for this PSA, the 95% confidence interval is shown as ± 1 percentage point, whereas in the DSO measurement annex it is shown as ± 1.5 percentage points. This issue does not impact on the robustness of the data system, but does have implications for the measurement of performance. We know from speaking to the Department that this discrepancy is due to rounding and that these two confidence intervals should be the same. The Department should clarify this issue in the relevant published documentation, so that performance can be measured consistently.
38. The Department is currently reviewing the data from the first Place Survey and it is yet to be published. Consequently, we are not able to form a conclusion on the reporting of the results of the Place Survey.

Indicator 2

Percentage of people who have meaningful interactions on a regular basis with people from different ethnic or religious backgrounds

Conclusion: GREEN (Fit for purpose)

39. We have concluded that the data system underlying this indicator is fit for the purpose of measuring and reporting performance against the indicator.
40. This indicator is essentially one of perception, in that it measures the percentage of people who feel that they have meaningful interactions with people from different ethnic or religious backgrounds.
41. The data used to calculate performance against this indicator are taken directly from the Citizenship Survey. No further processing or analysis of the data is necessary.

Characteristics of the data system

42. The data system for this indicator uses data from the Citizenship Survey, which is a large scale social research survey of a random sample of individuals from across England. The survey is an accredited National Statistic and is undertaken by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) on behalf of the Department.
43. The Citizenship Survey is a household survey covering a representative core sample of some 10,000 adults in England and Wales each year. There is also a minority ethnic boost sample of 5,000 to ensure that the views of these groups are robustly represented.
44. The data are weighted to correct for unequal sampling probabilities and non-response by sub-group. The weighting ensures that the survey sample matches the census population figures in terms of their age, sex and regional distribution.
45. The Citizenship Survey is conducted by trained interviewers through face to face interviews with respondents in their own homes. A standard question set is used, with appropriate controls in place – such as clear instructions to respondents, standardised wording of questions and restrictions on the level of assistance that can be given to respondents – to ensure that the data collected are robust, reliable and comparable.
46. This indicator relates to a specific question on the survey, which asks respondents how often – if at all – in the last year they have mixed socially with people from different ethnic and religious groups to their own. ‘Mixing socially’ is defined as mixing with people on a personal level by having informal conversations with them at, for example, the shops, work or a child’s school, as well as meeting up with people to socialise. This excludes, however, interactions solely for work or business, for example just to buy something.

Findings

47. The term ‘meaningful interaction’ may mean different things to different people. However, the survey attempts to address this through the use of a specific question – as set out above – which explains what is meant by the term and gives specific examples. The extent to which people are able to identify whether people with whom they are interacting are from different ethnic and religious groups to their own could also be questioned. However, this indicator is essentially a measure of perception, and so it is only those interactions that respondents knowingly have with people from different religious and ethnic groups that are relevant.
48. This indicator is also indicator 2 in the Department’s Strategic Objective (DSO) 4. We note, however, that in the measurement annex for this PSA, the 95% confidence interval is shown as ± 1 percentage point, whereas in the DSO measurement annex it is shown as ± 1.5 percentage points. This issue does not impact on the robustness of the data system, but does have implications for the

measurement of performance. We know from speaking to the Department that this discrepancy is due to rounding and that these two confidence intervals should be the same. The Department should clarify this issue in the relevant published documentation, so that performance can be measured consistently.

Indicator 3

Percentage of people who feel that they belong to their neighbourhood

Conclusion: GREEN (Fit for purpose)

49. We have concluded that the data system underlying this indicator is fit for the purpose of measuring and reporting performance against the indicator.
50. The data used to calculate performance against this indicator are taken directly from the Citizenship Survey. No further processing or analysis of the data is required.

Characteristics of the data system

51. The data system for this indicator uses data from the Citizenship Survey, which is a large scale social research survey of a random sample of individuals from across England. The survey is an accredited National Statistic and is undertaken by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) on behalf of the Department.
52. The Citizenship Survey is a household survey covering a representative core sample of some 10,000 adults in England and Wales each year. There is also a minority ethnic boost sample of 5,000 to ensure that the views of these groups are robustly represented.
53. The data are weighted to correct for unequal sampling probabilities and non-response by sub-group. The weighting ensures that the survey sample matches the census population figures in terms of their age, sex and regional distribution.
54. The Citizenship Survey is conducted by trained interviewers through face to face interviews with respondents in their own homes. A standard question set is used, with appropriate controls in place – such as clear instructions to respondents, standardised wording of questions and restrictions on the level of assistance that can be given to respondents – to ensure that the data collected are robust, reliable and comparable.
55. The Department also expects to draw on local level data from the Place Survey. The Place Survey is undertaken by individual local authorities using guidance issued by the Department, with the results being reported to the Audit Commission. The deadline for local authorities to submit the results for the 2008/09 Place Survey – the first time that this survey has been conducted - was 30th January 2009.

56. This indicator relates to a specific question on each survey, which asks respondents how strongly they feel that they belong to their immediate neighbourhood. Neighbourhood is defined as the immediate area in which the respondent lives. The results of this element of the survey are used to calculate performance against the indicator. Consequently, no further processing or analysis of these data is required in the preparation of the indicator.

Findings

57. The national element of this indicator is also indicator 3 in the Department's Strategic Objective (DSO) 4. We note, however, that in the measurement annex for the PSA, the 95% confidence interval is shown as ± 1 percentage point, whereas in the DSO measurement annex it is shown as ± 1.5 percentage points. This issue does not impact on the robustness of the data system, but does have implications for the measurement of performance. We know from speaking to the Department that this discrepancy is due to rounding and that these two confidence intervals should be the same. The Department should clarify this issue in the relevant published documentation, so that performance can be measured consistently.

58. The Department is currently reviewing the data from the first Place Survey and it is yet to be published. Consequently, we are not able to form a conclusion on the reporting of the results of the Place Survey.

Indicator 4

Percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality

Conclusion: GREEN (Fit for purpose)

59. We have concluded that the data system underlying this indicator is fit for the purpose of measuring and reporting performance against the indicator.

60. The data used to calculate performance against this indicator are taken directly from the Citizenship Survey. No further processing or analysis of the data is required.

Characteristics of the data system

61. The data system for this indicator uses data from the Citizenship Survey, which is a large scale social research survey of a random sample of individuals from across England. The survey is an accredited National Statistic and is undertaken by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) on behalf of the Department.

62. The Citizenship Survey is a household survey covering a representative core sample of some 10,000 adults in England and Wales each year. There is also a minority ethnic boost sample of 5,000 to ensure that the views of these groups are robustly represented.

63. The data are weighted to correct for unequal sampling probabilities and non-response by sub-group. The weighting ensures that the survey sample matches the census population figures in terms of their age, sex and regional distribution.
64. The Citizenship Survey is conducted by trained interviewers through face to face interviews with respondents in their own homes. A standard question set is used, with appropriate controls in place – such as clear instructions to respondents, standardised wording of questions and restrictions on the level of assistance that can be given to respondents – to ensure that the data collected are robust, reliable and comparable.
65. The Department also expects to draw on local level data from the Place Survey. The Place Survey is undertaken by individual local authorities using guidance issued by the Department, with the results being reported to the Audit Commission. The deadline for local authorities to submit the results for the 2008/09 Place Survey – the first time that this survey has been conducted - was 30th January 2009.
66. This indicator relates to a specific question on each survey, which asks respondents whether they agree or disagree that they can influence decisions affecting their local area. The types of decisions affecting the local area and the specific way in which respondents feel able to influence them is not explicitly defined and is purposefully left open to interpretation by the respondent. Respondents are said to feel able to influence decisions if they respond saying they “definitely agree” or “tend to agree” with the statement that they feel able to influence decisions affecting the local area. The local area is defined as the area within 15 to 20 minutes walk from the respondent’s home.
67. The results of this element of the survey are used to calculate performance against the indicator. Consequently, no further processing or analysis of these data is required in the preparation of the indicator.

Findings

68. We note that this indicator focuses on the percentage of people who feel that they can influence decisions in their locality, whereas the question in the Citizenship Survey (and, indeed, the description of the indicator in the measurement annex) asks respondents whether they feel that they can influence decisions affecting their local area. While this is only a minor difference in focus, it should be addressed by revising the description of the indicator to reflect the underlying question in the Citizenship Survey.
69. The national element of this indicator is also indicator 2 in the Department’s Strategic Objective (DSO) 1. However, in the measurement annex for the PSA, the 95% confidence interval for the Citizenship Survey is shown as ± 1 percentage point and that for the Place Survey is shown as ± 3 percentage points, whereas in the DSO measurement annex the confidence interval is shown simply as ± 2 percentage points. We know from speaking to the Department that this discrepancy

is due to roundings in the preparation of the measurement annex for the DSO indicator and that the confidence intervals in the two measurement annexes should be the same. The Department should clarify this issue, so that performance can be measured consistently.

70. The Department is currently reviewing the data from the first Place Survey and it is yet to be published. Consequently, we are not able to form a conclusion on the reporting of the results of the Place Survey.

Indicator 5

Thriving third sector

Conclusion: GREEN (Fit for purpose)

71. We have concluded that the data system underlying this indicator is fit for the purpose of measuring and reporting performance against the indicator.
72. The data used to calculate performance against this indicator are taken from the Citizenship Survey and the Labour Force Survey by the Office of the Third Sector (OTS), which is part of the Cabinet Office.

Characteristics of the data system

73. This indicator considers two aspects of performance, namely (i) the percentage of people who engage in formal volunteering on a regular basis and (ii) the number of full time equivalent staff employed within the third sector.
74. Together, these two aspects consider all individuals involved in third sector activities, through either voluntary activities or paid employment.
75. The data in respect of the former are taken from the results of the Citizenship Survey, which is a large scale social research survey of a random sample of individuals from across England. The survey is an accredited National Statistic and is undertaken by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) on behalf of the Department for Communities and Local Government, which provides the data to the OTS.
76. The data in respect of the latter are taken from the Labour Force Survey, which is undertaken by the Office of National Statistics.
77. The data are presented as a percentage and an absolute value respectively, as these are the forms in which the data is reported by the surveys used.
78. However, the OTS has converted the baseline data for both of these data streams to an index of 100. When performance is measured, this is compared against the baseline to produce a revised index for each stream. These indices are then combined by adding them and dividing by two, i.e. each separate index is weighted at 50% of the combined index.

79. When the OTS has calculated this combined index, it passes the performance information to the Department for Communities and Local Government for reporting against this indicator. The analyst within the Department who is responsible for this indicator has worked previously at the OTS, so is familiar with how performance against the indicator has been calculated.

Findings

80. We do not have any specific issues to report beyond our overall findings set out above.

Indicator 6

Percentage of people who participate in culture or sport

Conclusion: GREEN (Fit for purpose)

81. We have concluded that the data system underlying this indicator is fit for the purpose of measuring and, in due course, reporting performance against the indicator.
82. The data used to calculate performance against this indicator are taken directly from the Taking Part Survey. This survey is widely used by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and has been the basis for previous PSA targets, although the actual basis for recognising participation has been amended for PSAs in the SR2007.

Characteristics of the data system

83. The indicator measures the percentage of adults living in England who have recently taken part in defined cultural or sporting activities. A provisional indicative baseline was initially set at 60% of adults participating in nine or more different types of cultural or sporting activities with a 2% movement being required for performance assessment. Since the indicative baseline was published, DCMS have finalised and agreed the measurement criteria with Treasury. This is now defined as the frequency of participation in two or more different sport or cultural sectors, described as:
- engaging in at least three sessions of 30 minutes of moderate sport in the last week;
 - attending a library at least once in the last year;
 - attending a museum or gallery at least once in the last year;
 - attending two different heritage sites in the last year; and
 - engaging in the arts at least three times in the last year.
84. The data system used for this target is the Taking Part Survey. This survey was commissioned by DCMS specifically to measure performance against one of the

PSA 3 established for SR2004. The survey has been operational since mid-July 2005 and is well established.

85. The survey is undertaken by British Market Research Bureau, an external social research partner, on behalf of DCMS. The methodology has been subject to review by DCMS statisticians and is an accredited National Statistic.

Findings

86. The methodology for the survey is substantially the same as that set for SR2004, covering cultural and sporting participation. The key differences are that performance is now measured on an England only basis without a requirement to separately report on population categories, and there have been some changes to the types of activities which qualify for inclusion as participation. The removal of the requirement to report performance against specific sub-groups of the population has meant that the sample size can be reduced without compromising the reliability of the data. Some questions have been replaced to reflect the change in the qualifying activities.
87. DCMS has agreed which activities count as cultural or sporting opportunities and the frequency of participation. These definitions have been used in the questionnaire since April 2008. In due course, DCMS will publish a Technical Note which will set out, in more detail, how performance is measured. We understand that DCMS intends to publish this before the first set of performance data.
88. The Taking Part Survey Manager, a statistician, is responsible for data quality and this has been specified in the Measurement Annex for this indicator. DCMS's chief statistician is also involved in data quality, attending regular quarterly progress meetings and reviewing data reports.
89. We note that the reporting window for this indicator has not yet been reached as the first performance data will be published for the 2008-09 year, and will be reported in the DCMS Autumn Performance Report 2009. This is because the data for 2008-09 will form the baseline for the following two years. Consequently, we are not able to form a conclusion on the reporting of the results.