

CHANGING REGIONAL AND CITY POLICY IN THE UK AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR STATISTICS

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Abstract

UK government policy relating to regions and cities has changed considerably in recent years. At the same time, there has been a significant shift in the strategic direction of the UK's official statistical system. Together, this has implications for the production and dissemination of sub-national statistics. This paper will consider the changing policy landscape over the last 20 years, the changing statistical environment, and finally show how the Office for National Statistics (ONS) are responding to these changes.

From the mid-1990's the policy focus was very much at the regional level. In 2010 the coalition government changed the emphasis from regions to more local areas, with regional bodies abolished and new organisations emerging. In the last couple of years, cities and city regions have become increasingly important. Most significantly has been the move to devolve powers and budgets to cities, with Greater Manchester leading the way. In November 2014 it was announced that it would have a directly-elected mayor and £1bn-worth of powers over transport, housing, planning and policing. Similar deals have been announced in other cities, and more are expected to follow.

In October 2014 the UK Statistics Authority launched its strategy for the 2015-2020 period. It stressed the need for our statistics to be relevant for making policy decisions, as well as informing public debate. It also recognised the opportunities presented by the data revolution (for example, increased use of administrative data), and the need to develop and implement innovative methods. Meanwhile, a recent independent review of economic statistics has re-emphasised the need to improve the availability and quality of statistical information, especially with regard to measuring the economy of regions and cities.

ONS are evolving to meet the changing policy and statistical landscapes. Some examples of recent outputs providing data and analysis for evolving geographic areas such as city regions, major towns and cities and the 'Northern Powerhouse' will be presented while we will also

discuss our future plans for regional, city and local statistics including a number of proposed new outputs together with improved timeliness and geographic flexibility in existing outputs.