

**CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN STATISTICIANS**

For discussion

Third meeting of the 2006/2007 Bureau  
Geneva, 12-13 February 2007

Item 1c of the Provisional  
Agenda

**IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF BUSINESS STATISTICS**

**Note prepared by Ivan Fellegi, Statistics Canada**

1. I am sorry to be a bit late in responding to the notes sent by the Secretariat as well as by Rob Edwards, Heli, Peter Everaers, and Ivo Havinga.
2. My starting point is to ask myself the purpose of this review. Presumably the purpose is not to prepare an inventory of interesting issues (there are lots of those), but rather to check one of two things: (a) whether there is international work already underway that would benefit from improved coordination; or (b) whether there are issues on which it would be productive to start new activities within the CES (presumably jointly with our partners).
3. Concerning (a), we should remind ourselves (as did both Heli and Mr. Havinga) of the Friends of the Chair created by the Statistical Commission which, in fact, prepared a list of the various activities already underway by various organs – presumably with a view to providing an assessment of where improvements might be needed. I think it would duplicate this work if we wanted to make an essentially similar review.
4. As regards (b), there are a number of interesting and useful suggestions made by all of the notes sent around. Let me address them up one at a time, with my “take” on their suggestions.

**Rob Edwards’ suggestions**

5. (a) Strategies for a coherent program of business statistics. This strikes me as far too broad a topic; at any rate, it is the topic that is addressed by the Friends of the Chair.  
(b) Statistical units. This seems to be a topic that is regularly addressed by the Round Table on Business Registers. There is also a relatively new “Steering Group on Business Registers” (which is on our agenda under item 7.b).  
(c) Contemporary relevance of international statistical manuals. This is indeed, an area which should be considered. However, a fruitful discussion would require a secretariat paper reviewing existing manuals with a critique.  
(d) Contemporary best practice in maintenance of business registers. This is clearly in the purview of the Round Table and the new Steering Group on Business Registers.  
(e) Satisfying user needs for business statistics. This strikes me as also too broad a topic for on-going work (it has a high probability of not being focused on specific outputs). It might be an interesting topic for one of our annual seminars.  
(f) Organization of work within NSOs. I am equally afraid that this would lead to meetings, but no products. However, I would be very supportive of establishing a small

steering group who would be charged to organise seminars on specific business survey issues such as, for example, Rob's next suggestion: Reducing reporting burden. Other topics can be, for example, quality assurance practices, the use of benchmarking of sub-annual surveys to periodic larger surveys or censuses, how different offices deal with declining response rates, etc. In each case the idea is to bring together in a seminar examples of best practice which could subsequently be made available on the Internet.

### **Heli's suggestions**

6. Concerning her suggestion to look at the issue of multinational enterprises, I think we should remember that we did have a review paper by Philip Smith of Statistics Canada and Robin Lynch of ONS, I think sometime last year. We asked them to do some follow-up. They are planning to organise meetings of national experts, dealing each time with some specific issue, held back-to-back with meetings of national accounts experts.

7. I agree with her other observations about Rob's suggestions.

### **Points raised by Ivo Havinga**

8. Leaving aside his notes about what is already underway under the aegis of the Commission (Friends of the Chair; ISIC), he mentions a series of topics on which seminars can be organised. This is essentially in line with my suggestion earlier to create a Steering Group for the explicit purpose of organising such seminars with the explicit purpose of disseminating best practices (plural!).

### **Paper of the UNECE Statistical Division**

9. This paper suggests focusing on technical cooperation with the South-East European and Commonwealth of Independent States countries. I agree with the suggestion, but this is likely to be an activity of individual agencies (NSOs, Eurostat, UNECE, etc.), rather than an activity of the CES as such.

### **Summary**

10. In summary, I think a great deal of activity is underway of a general stock-taking nature by the Friends of the Chair; work is supposedly getting underway on the organization of seminars dealing with the impact of globalisation (by the OECD and others on how to measure it, and by the Smith-Lynch initiative on how to cope with its impacts within our current system of economic statistics); also a lot of very good conceptual work is done and disseminated by the Round Table, by the Technical Subgroup on International Economic and Social Classifications and others on classification issues; and of course by the ISWNA on updating SNA93 Rev.1. However, there is no current forum at which practitioners of business surveys can get together to learn from best national practice in the area of business surveys: issues of response rates, exploiting administrative records, using business registers, combining benchmark surveys with current surveys, etc.

11. I think it would be useful to establish a steering group for the organisation of such seminars and for the dissemination of best national practices.

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