

13th December 2013

BY EMAIL to: data.sharing@lawcommission.gsi.gov.uk

Response to Law Commission Consultation Paper: Data sharing between public bodies

The Royal Statistical Society is interested in the issue of data sharing, as it cuts across a number of agendas, including data for research and improving the use of administrative data to provide Census-type outputs. Broadly speaking, we are positive towards the possibility of data sharing legislation.

We accept that there are barriers other than those of a legal nature to data sharing. These can include narrow or excessively cautious interpretations of the law, cultural and organisational factors, and a lack of understanding of the benefits to be gained from data sharing. That said, legislation has the potential to have a positive cultural impact in this regard, through sending a signal about the value and permissibility (within prescribed conditions) of data sharing. There have, in addition, been instances in which the law has in fact prevented the sharing of information, and thus legislation has the potential to have practical as well as symbolic value.

It is important that, however the Law Commission chooses to proceed, it ensures that risks are accounted for. Key to public acceptability of data sharing is likely to be ensuring that concerns around privacy and, where appropriate, anonymity are taken into account. Again, bringing forward legislation in which these concerns are explicitly addressed could have significant cultural impact.

Due to our limited resources and to our position as a membership organisation rather than one directly involved in data sharing-related activities, we are not able to respond comprehensively to all the consultation questions on this occasion. We would, however, be keen to be involved in future discussions in this area. We have also encouraged our members to respond, and have publicised this important issue through our networks, including the Statistics User Forum.

If there are any matters you would like to discuss further, do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

Hetan Shah
Executive Director

