

Quality section on www.insee.fr

Context

The implementation of the quality section on [insee.fr](http://www.insee.fr) came from a request of the peer review in 2007. The peers asked Insee to take action to improve the documentation on information about quality. The recommendation was the following one : “Draw up and promulgate quality guidelines and make them available on the Insee website by the end of 2008”. This recommendation refers to indicator 4.4 of the European Statistics Code of Practice.

The setting up of a working group

A working group was set up in september 2007 to deal with the drawing up of Insee quality guidelines. This group comprised ten people : head of the unit in charge of quality at Insee chairing the group, heads of methodological units, quality experts from regional offices, head of the external communication at Insee, head of the unit in charge of managing Insee website and the members of the quality unit.

The mandate of the group was first to bring together comparisons of the quality guidelines of various NSI's and Eurostat on their respective websites and then contribute to the drafting of Insee's quality guidelines guide.

The two possible options for Insee

There appear to be two options open to Insee.

The first option was to opt for a guide for producers setting out the different aspects of quality. Such a document should provide an answer to the following question “ What are the means and methods used by producers and disseminators at Insee in order to achieve quality?”.

It was admitted that there was an extensive documentation on the description of the statistical production process at Insee but this documentation was not comprehensive and used mainly for internal purposes. A generic document containing quality guidelines, available to external users, did not exist. But such a document would have been only useful if the producers made recommendations and acknowledged their validity. The main difficulty was precisely that the working group had neither the requisite expertise nor the authority to ensure that this guide would quickly bring into general use in the Institute.

In any case the units in charge of statistical methodology at Insee would have been heavily solicited if such a guide were to be drafted. This, according to those same units, would give them an excessive workload.

The second option consisted in publishing Insee's quality commitments on Insee.fr, thus providing a clear description of the way in which the issue of quality is approached and managed at Insee. This would require the services of all the members of the unit in charge of quality at Insee but would also call upon the essential expertise of producers.

The two options were not mutually exclusive and could have both been achieved. But due to time and resource constraints, it was decided to make a choice between them.

That is why it was suggested to create a « user-oriented quality» website and to set out on this site a quality framework based on the 15 principles of the European Statistics Code of Practice.

The description of the quality section on Insee website

In accordance with the decision taken by the Insee Executive Committee on 12 February 2008, the quality section sets out the rules, methods and means used to ensure that public statistics meet, as far as is possible, the quality requirements. This information is based to a large extent on the 15 principles of the European Statistics Code of Practice and the indicators associated with them.

Users are directed to pages which show the level of conformity with the principles Insee is committed to.

The quality section comprises :

→ a declaration/commitment of Insee Director General which is the following one :

“For many years, the French statistical service has paid particular attention to output quality. Well before the European Statistics Code of Practice came into existence, legislators, INSEE and Ministerial Statistical Offices already took steps to guarantee the quality of the statistics they produced (using sound methodological tools, writing quality reports, displaying metadata, etc.).

Having completed in 2005 our Code of Practice reinforced this orientation while stressing the need for better informing users about the quality of statistics.

This quality rubric describes the rules, methods and resources that enable official statistics to meet quality requirements as well as possible. Such a description draws direct inspiration from the fifteen principles and related indicators from the European Statistics Code of Practice.

This quality section thus provides a clear presentation of how well implemented our official statistics quality commitments are. I hope it will provide users with all the material needed to better grasp and fruitfully use our statistics”.

→ a text giving a brief overview of statistical quality

→ the description of three stages for each principle of the Code of practice :

- description of the principle and corresponding indicators
- description of the mechanism(s) which enable the user to ensure that Insee is complying with the principle, meaning the description of existing practices or actions planned to better comply with the Code (as regards “actions planned”, users can easily find on the website the

plan for improving actions for Insee and other ministerial statistical offices with the timing of each action).

- links to the results (quality indicators, quality reports, methodological notes, ...)

Example of the principle on relevance:

1- description of the principle

European Statistics must meet the needs of users.

In order to do this:

Processes are in place to consult users, monitor the relevance and practical utility of existing statistics in meeting their needs, and advise on their emerging needs and priorities.

Priority needs are being met and reflected in the work programme.

User satisfaction surveys are undertaken periodically.

2- description of the two mechanisms enabling compliance with the principle and its indicators:

- description of the National Council for Statistical Information (CNIS) which is the body responsible for consultation between producers and users and for establishing the official statistics as a whole

- description of the user satisfaction surveys

3- results:

- link to CNIS website

- link to results, assessments of or reports on the satisfaction surveys that have been carried out

The consequences of the implementation of the quality section

The construction of the web pages is based on two premises:

- 1) The European Statistics Code of Practice is a sufficient framework for presenting quality issues at Insee. It especially makes it easier to draw comparisons with other countries' quality systems.
- 2) Insee and the public statistical system have a number of concerns regarding quality : provisions exist already, but they are not organised and presented within the framework of a quality process.

Our approach has therefore been to classify the existing practices of the public statistical system as a response to the CBP indicators.

There are two advantages to this.

Firstly, it reassures the institution by showing that it already has a lot of « good practices », whose status is thereby enhanced. Secondly, the inventory carried out also flags up the shortcomings and encourages producers and persons in charge of dissemination to react.

For example, in the case of France, the way in which the CNIS functions is a quality factor in a number of respects: relevance, response burden, confidentiality, accessibility ...

The quality of recruitment is another factor (statistical methodology).

Apart from some legislative problems, the weaknesses observed during the self-assessment or peer review exercises had more to do with the fact that the rules and procedures were not displayed than with criticism of these rules and procedures. In that sense, the construction of the quality web pages is a concrete response to the results of the review.

A very important rule is also established. The rule is to highlight as far as possible each indicator with an example. For instance, when it is said in the quality website that quality reports are systematically carried out after every survey, it should be possible for the user to get access to an example of quality report with a single click.

This enables the user to understand what is contained in a standard quality review and serves as a template for producers.

Systematically looking for a link to existing practices also brings to light shortcomings. In the case of Insee, a lot of documents were drafted such as these following ones :

- Description of the framework for household surveys,,
- Quality control of the inventory ,
- Compliance with confidentiality laws in the field of data production,
- Sampling system used in household surveys,
- Coordination of business samples,
- Insee satisfaction surveys,
- Embargo rules for dissemination.

In most cases, internal documents existed, but no permanently updated comprehensive description of the procedures, and even less still a document intended for users : when the web pages were created, producers had to make summary sheets for the general public.

Conclusion

The website has been on line since the end of 2008.

It is available at this following address : <http://www.insee.fr/en/insee-statistique-publique/default.asp?page=qualite/qualite.htm>

In 2009, the number of visits per quarter were about 1000 for internal users and 100 for external users.

It took about four months to design the webpages, three months to develop the website and one month to translate it into English.

About two simultaneous update in English and in French are made per year. They are now the most difficult step of this project, requiring a good knowledge of Insee surveys and processes and a close cooperation between all the producers.

Even if there is no doubt that posting a quality process and commitment on the website brings with it certain constraints for producers, one of the effects is that producers become aware of the need to produce user-friendly documents.

The implementation of the quality section also fosters a quality culture, including acceptance of the idea that statistician's work is assessed against the framework of the quality criteria published on Insee website.

An important part of Insee training courses on the European Statistics Code of practice is now devoted to the description of the quality section.