

From data to decisions

Statistical literacy and the democratic process

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The Royal Statistical Society

- Since 1834
- Membership organisation
- 8000 members
- 26 staff, £2m annual turnover
- Professional body
- Charity: statistics for the public good



The Royal Statistical Society

Strategy 2014-2018:

A world with data
at the heart of understanding
and decision making



For statistics to be used effectively in the **public interest**, so that policy formulation and decision-making are informed by **evidence** for the good of society

For society to be more
statistically literate, so that people's
understanding of data, risk, and probability can
inform their daily **decision-making**, leading to
better outcomes



Influencing policy makers

Who?

What?

How?



Influencing policy makers – who?

- Politicians: ministers, MPs
- Senior civil service

- Wider audiences
 - pupils
 - legal profession
 - local decision makers



Influencing policy makers – what?

- **Importance** of statistical evidence in policy process
- **Knowledge** of basic statistics and evidence frameworks



1. Ensure that **data quality and data ethics** are taken into account in decision making. The UK Statistics Authority should play a key role in ensuring official statistics are trustworthy and inform policy. Government should end the practice of prerelease access whereby some people in government see statistics before the public. A Council for Data Ethics should proactively consider ethical challenges emerging from new data science developments.

2. Citizens should have greater access to quality **local data**. The availability of crime and accident data has shown local communities are interested when the data is relevant to them. Central government should encourage greater publication of data at local level and build on good practice.

Influencing policy makers – how?

- Workshops / training
- Lobbying campaigns
- Letters
- Meetings
- Consultations



Influencing policy makers – impact?

- RSS sits at the table – invites
- Better awareness of statistics
- Evidence 'ecosystem'
 - UK Statistics Authority
 - Full Fact





**LET'S STICK
TOGETHER**

We send the EU **£350 million** a week
let's fund our **NHS** instead  Vote Leave

#TakeControl

Let's take back control

“Families
would be
£4300
worse off”



“People in
this country
have had
enough of
experts”



ROYAL
STATISTICAL
SOCIETY

DATA | EVIDENCE | DECISIONS

A sobering experience

- Post-truth politics?
- Was this a special case?
- What can be done?



Post-truth politics?

- Evidence has become currency of the debate
- But....
 - Multiplicity of numbers and 'facts'
 - Distrust in politics and elites
 - Personal experience vs. the numbers
 - Networked public sphere
 - Echo chamber effect



Was this a special case?

- Campaign across party lines
 - Sense of usual responsibility diminished
- Emotionally charged
- Mix of issues



What can be done?

- Introspection
- Opportunity for debate / engagement
 - Complex issues around political engagement
- Relevance of statistics to citizens
 - Averages don't connect with reality
 - Headline GDP vs. distribution



Questions?

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