



Committee Clerk
Science and Technology Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

29 January 2016

Dear Mr Fiander

Science and Technology Committee - 'Evidence check'

The Market Research Society (MRS) is pleased to submit some general comments to the House of Commons Science and Technology Committee on the the Government's approach to evidence-check papers. We confirm that no parts of the response are confidential and that the information may be attributed to MRS.

About MRS and the research market

MRS is the world's largest research association. It's for everyone with professional equity in market, social and opinion research and in business intelligence, market analysis, customer insight and consultancy. MRS supports best practice in the research industry by setting and enforcing industry standards. We represent both large businesses and SMEs and we have a range of research suppliers included in our membership.

The UK is the second largest research market in the world (second to the US) and the UK research sector is recognised as leading the way in the development of creative and innovative research approaches. According to the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) Annual Business Survey¹ it is estimated that the total UK turnover of the c.3,000 enterprises involved in market research and opinion polling to be £3.6 billion in 2014. Further in 2012, MRS with PWC undertook an assessment of the size and impact of the UK research and evidence market, producing the MRS report *The*

¹ Office of National Statistics (ONS), (2013) Annual Business Survey. Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) 73.2: Market research and opinion polling. <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/abs/annual-business-survey/index.html>

*Business of Evidence*². One of the main findings from this report is that the UK 'business of evidence' market is substantially larger than previously estimated, employing up to 59,000 people and generating £3billion in annual gross value added (GVA).

Comments on use of evidence checks in Government Policy-Making

MRS welcomes the approach to greater transparency and embedded simplicity in reporting on the evidence base for policy-making, as set out in the Institute for Government "Show your workings – Assessing how government uses evidence to make policy" paper. This provides a clear template and tool for assessment of the use of the evidence underlying a range of public policy decisions. Transparency of evidence sources is important in demonstrating and explaining the evidence used to inform the policy and should also assist in "unpicking" evidence provided by other interested parties.

The value of the approach is seen for example in the Digital Government Evidence Check Form which sets out clear links between a digital vision and outputs. However it is less clear on links to wider policy agenda such as data protection reforms and additionally it is hard to evaluate the nature of the data sources/evidence used in diagnosing and building all the policies as greater emphasis is placed on evidencing value for money in the implementation of the policy. It might be useful to combine simplicity of the approach with additional references to the detailed evidence blocks used in crafting the policy decisions. Overall however the approach works in distilling and communicating transparently a broad policy agenda.

We consider that it is also important to highlight that rigour in the evidence collection process will also ensure greater robustness and quality of the evidence base. Although, as is noted in the Institute of Government paper, the assessment of quality of evidence, often requires subject matter expertise, it remains that Government Departments need to be clear on the criteria for a good quality evidence base.

² See www.mrs.org.uk/pdf/The_Business_of_Evidence_Final_08102012.pdf for a copy of the full report.

The use of market and social research, often forms part of the evidence base for policy-making, and is one of the pillars for supporting evidence based decision making. Government departments need to clearly set out research requirements in order to ensure value for money by commissioning research that is likely to assist in diagnosis of problem and form part of the evidence base. This includes:

- Procurement from regulated research suppliers who follow professional standards as members of a recognised professional association. This is critical and should be a qualifying requirement for public procurement of market research. High ethical, commercial and methodological practices supported by a Code of Conduct and clear compliance procedures will both support those engaged in research and reassure the general public that research is carried out in a professional and ethical manner.
- Clarity in purpose and scope of project to ensure evidence amassed is pertinent – One of the most difficult areas when commissioning research is ensuring that the business problem or challenge to be addressed has been properly identified and defined, and as a consequence the best research approach procured. Having specialists that understand research as a discipline ensure that, for the most part, the right research solutions are procured and there is less wasted research, resources and time as a result.

Effective diagnosis and understanding of the issue, its causes, effects, and scale needs to be considered and properly scoped at the start of the evidence collection process. We hope these comments are helpful and look forward to reviewing the results of the Evidence Check Review and its use in future Committee work and to engaging further with all parties on the move in focus from the transparency of the evidence to the quality of the evidence.

Yours sincerely,

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