



Audit Commission Act 1998

1998 CHAPTER 18

PART III

STUDIES, PERFORMANCE STANDARDS AND OTHER FUNCTIONS

Studies and related functions

33 Studies for improving economy etc. in services

- (1) The Commission shall undertake or promote comparative and other studies designed to enable it to make recommendations—
 - (a) for improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of local authority services and of other services provided by bodies subject to audit; and
 - (b) for improving the financial or other management of bodies subject to audit.
- (2) The studies which the Commission is required to undertake or promote under subsection (1) include, in particular—
 - (a) studies designed to enable the Commission to determine what directions it should give under section 44; and
 - (b) studies of information published in pursuance of directions under that section which are designed to enable the Commission to determine, in relation to each financial year, what comparative information to publish itself about the standards of performance achieved by bodies which are relevant bodies for the purposes of that section.
- (3) In undertaking or promoting studies under subsection (1) relating to a health service body (services of which are excluded from studies under section 34) the Commission may take into account the implementation by the body of—
 - (a) any particular statutory provision or provisions, and
 - (b) any directions or guidance given by the Secretary of State (whether pursuant to any such provision or otherwise);

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but this subsection does not entitle the Commission to question the merits of the policy objectives of the Secretary of State.

- (4) The Commission may undertake or promote other studies relating to the provision by bodies subject to audit of their services besides the studies referred to in subsection (1) and section 34.
- (5) The Commission shall publish or otherwise make available its recommendations and the result of any studies under this section and, in the case of studies relating to a health service body, shall, on request, provide the Comptroller and Auditor General with all material relevant to the studies.
- (6) Before undertaking or promoting any study under this section, other than a study within paragraph (a) or (b) of subsection (2), the Commission shall—
 - (a) consult such associations of local authorities or other bodies subject to audit as appear to it to be concerned;
 - (b) consult such associations of employees as appear to it to be appropriate; and
 - (c) in the case of any health service bodies, also consult the Secretary of State and the Comptroller and Auditor General.

34 Reports on impact of statutory provisions etc

- (1) In addition to the studies referred to in section 33(1), the Commission shall undertake or promote studies designed to enable it to prepare reports as to the impact—
 - (a) of the operation of any particular statutory provision or provisions, or
 - (b) of any directions or guidance given by a Minister of the Crown (whether pursuant to any such provision or otherwise),on economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of local authority services and of other services provided by bodies subject to audit other than health service bodies, or on the financial management of such bodies.
- (2) The Commission shall publish or otherwise make available its report of the results of any study under this section, and shall send a copy of any such report to the Comptroller and Auditor General.
- (3) Where the Comptroller and Auditor General has received a copy of any such report he may, subject to subsection (4), require the Commission to provide him with any information obtained by it in connection with the preparation of the report, and for that purpose the Commission shall permit any person authorised by him to inspect and make copies of any documents containing such information.
- (4) No information shall be required by the Comptroller and Auditor General under this section in respect of any particular body.
- (5) The Comptroller and Auditor General shall from time to time lay before the House of Commons a report of any matters which, in his opinion, arise out of studies of the Commission under this section and ought to be drawn to the attention of that House.
- (6) Before undertaking or promoting any study under this section the Commission shall consult—
 - (a) the Comptroller and Auditor General;
 - (b) any Minister of the Crown who appears to it to be concerned;

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- (c) such associations of local authorities or other bodies subject to audit as appear to it to be concerned; and
- (d) such associations of employees as appear to it to be appropriate.

35 Studies at request of bodies subject to audit

- (1) The Commission may, at the request of the body concerned, promote or undertake studies designed to improve economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the management or operations of any body subject to audit.
- (2) Before making the request the body shall consult—
 - (a) such associations of employees, or
 - (b) in the case of a health service body, such other organisations,as appear to it to be appropriate.
- (3) The Commission shall charge the body such fees for services provided under this section as will cover the full cost of providing them.

36 Studies at request of educational bodies

- (1) The Commission may promote or undertake studies designed to improve economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the management or operations of a body in the first column in the Table below if requested to do so by the body (or one of the bodies) specified in relation to it in the second column—

<i>Subject of study</i>	<i>Requesting body</i>
A higher education funding council.	The council.
The governing body of an institution within the higher education sector.	The governing body or the higher education funding council.
A funding agency under Part I of the Education Act 1994.	The agency.
The governing body of an institution receiving financial support under Part I of the Education Act 1994.	The governing body or the appropriate funding agency.
A further education funding council.	The council.
The governing body of an institution within the further education sector.	The governing body or the appropriate further education funding council.
The Funding Agency for Schools.	The agency.
The Schools Funding Council for Wales.	The council.
The governing body of a grant-maintained school.	The governing body or the funding authority.

- (2) The Commission may, at the request of a higher education funding council or a further education funding council, give the council advice in connection with the discharge of the council's functions under section 124B(2)(b) of the Education Reform Act 1988 or paragraph 18(2)(b) of Schedule 7 to that Act.

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- (3) The Commission may, at the request of a higher education corporation, a further education corporation or the governing body of a grant-maintained school—
 - (a) advise them in connection with the appointment of persons to audit their accounts; and
 - (b) arrange for their accounts for any financial year to be audited by such of the Commission’s officers as the corporation or governing body may appoint.
- (4) In subsection (3)—
 - (a) “higher education corporation” and “further education corporation” have the same meaning as in the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, and
 - (b) references to the accounts of a higher education corporation include references to any statement of accounts prepared by the corporation under paragraph 18 of Schedule 7 to the Education Reform Act 1988.
- (5) The Commission shall charge the body at whose request any services are provided under this section such fees as will cover the full cost of providing them.
- (6) This section shall be construed as one with the Education Act 1996; and references in any enactment to the Education Acts include a reference to this section.

37 Social services studies for Secretary of State

- (1) At the request of the Secretary of State, the Commission may assist the Secretary of State in any study designed to improve economy, efficiency, effectiveness and quality of performance in the discharge of social services functions by local authorities.
- (2) In this section “social services functions” means—
 - (a) any function under any enactment for the time being specified in Schedule 1 to the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970; and
 - (b) any function for the time being designated by an order made by the Secretary of State under section 2(2) of the 1970 Act as being appropriate for discharge through a local authority’s social services committee.
- (3) In the following provisions of this section “study” means a study of a description mentioned in subsection (1).
- (4) If the Commission requires—
 - (a) a local authority included in a study, or
 - (b) an officer or member of such an authority,to supply the Commission or an authorised person with such information as is needed for the purposes of the study, the authority or officer or member shall supply the information.
- (5) If the Commission requires a local authority included in a study to make available for inspection by the Commission or an authorised person documents which relate to the authority and are needed for the purposes of the study, the authority shall make the documents available.
- (6) Any information obtained under a requirement under subsection (4) or (5) may be disclosed by the Commission to the Secretary of State for the purposes of any functions of his which are connected with the discharge of social services functions by local authorities.

- (7) In subsections (4) and (5) “authorised person” means a person authorised by the Commission for the purposes of this section.
- (8) Any report of a study in which the Commission assists the Secretary of State shall be published by the Secretary of State in conjunction with the Commission.
- (9) The Commission shall not provide assistance under subsection (1) unless before it does so the Secretary of State has agreed to pay the Commission an amount equal to the full costs incurred by the Commission in providing the assistance.

38 Benefit administration studies for Secretary of State

- (1) The Secretary of State may request the Commission to conduct or assist the Secretary of State in conducting studies designed to improve economy, efficiency, effectiveness and quality of performance in the discharge by local authorities of functions relating to the administration of housing benefit and council tax benefit.
- (2) In the following provisions of this section “study” means a study which the Commission is requested to conduct, or assist the Secretary of State in conducting, under subsection (1).
- (3) If the Commission requires—
 - (a) a local authority included in a study, or
 - (b) an officer or member of such an authority,to supply the Commission or an authorised person with such information as is needed for the purposes of the study, the authority or officer or member shall supply the information.
- (4) If the Commission requires a local authority included in a study to make available for inspection by the Commission or an authorised person documents which relate to the authority and are needed for the purposes of the study, the authority shall make the documents available.
- (5) Any information obtained under a requirement under subsection (3) or (4) may be disclosed by the Commission to the Secretary of State for the purposes of any functions of his which are connected with housing benefit or council tax benefit.
- (6) In subsections (3) and (4) “authorised person” means a person authorised by the Commission for the purposes of this section.
- (7) The Commission shall send to the Secretary of State a copy of any report of a study; and the Secretary of State or the Commission may send a copy of a report of a study to any local authority to which the study relates.
- (8) Any report of a study may be published by the Secretary of State in conjunction with the Commission.
- (9) The Commission shall not conduct, or assist the Secretary of State in conducting, a study unless before it does so the Secretary of State has made arrangements for the payment of such reasonable amount as may be agreed between him and the Commission in respect of the study.

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39 Social security references and reports to Secretary of State

- (1) The Commission or an auditor may refer to the Secretary of State any matter arising from an audit or study under this Act if it appears that it may be relevant for the purposes of any of the functions of the Secretary of State relating to social security.
- (2) The Commission may send to the Secretary of State a copy of any report of which a copy is sent to the Commission under section 10(2) and which contains observations on the administration by a local authority of housing benefit or council tax benefit.

40 Studies relating to registered social landlords

- (1) The Corporation and the Commission may agree one or more programmes of comparative studies designed to enable the Commission to make recommendations for improving economy, efficiency and effectiveness of registered social landlords.
- (2) Where the Corporation and the Commission fail to agree a programme proposed by either of them, either of them may refer the matter to the Secretary of State who may direct that the programme be carried out either without modifications or with modifications specified in the direction.
- (3) Where a programme is agreed or is directed to be carried out, the Commission shall ensure that studies giving effect to the programme are carried out by it or on its behalf.
- (4) It shall be a term of every such programme that the Corporation make good to the Commission the full costs incurred by the Commission in carrying out the programme.
- (5) The Commission shall publish reports on the studies carried out under this section.
- (6) Before publishing any such report the Commission shall show a draft of it to the Corporation and shall consider whether to revise the draft in the light of the comments made by the Corporation.

41 Provisions supplementary to section 40

- (1) The Commission may, if authorised to do so by the Corporation—
 - (a) require a registered social landlord, or any officer or member of a registered social landlord, to supply such information as the Commission may require for the purposes of any study under section 40; and
 - (b) require a registered social landlord included in any such study to make available for inspection such documents as are reasonably required for the purposes of the study.
- (2) The Commission may require the information to be supplied, or the documents to be made available, to the Commission or to a person authorised by the Commission for the purposes of this section.
- (3) A person who without reasonable excuse fails to comply with a requirement under this section commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 3 on the standard scale.
- (4) Information obtained by the Commission, or by a person acting on behalf of the Commission, in the course of a study under section 40 may be disclosed by the Commission to the Corporation.

42 Consultancy services relating to audit of accounts of registered social landlords

- (1) The Commission may provide the Corporation with consultancy services relating to the audit of accounts of registered social landlords.
- (2) The Commission may recover from the Corporation such costs incurred in providing the services as may be agreed by the Corporation.

43 Sections 40 to 42: interpretation

In sections 40 to 42 “the Corporation” and “registered social landlord” have the same meaning as in Part I of the Housing Act 1996.