

Ottawa Group quality database (OGQD)

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1. Changed priorities in the work of the Ottawa Group

In order to make the work of the Ottawa Group available in accessible form there is a need for changed priorities. The new aim for the work program of the Ottawa Group is to begin with to produce some guidelines or outlines on best practices for quality adjustment.

A first step could be to collect and classify work that has been done earlier by the Ottawa Group. There is also a need to incorporate the work of other specialists in this field. This could be done by categorising available literature and other information on quality adjustment and making it easily accessible in a database in the public domain.

Since this is quite a formidable task taking only small steps at a time could be the key to a successful outcome.

2. Database on quality adjustment

One way to move forward could be to organise a database on quality adjustment where all available information about quality adjustment would be collected in one place. Such a database should cover what has been written on this matter and include information about practical details. This database should be open for everyone and no limits set on the information stored there.

In this way, the information already available would become a part of the OG program and it could also help the work of researchers and practical CPI compilers. There is a great amount of work necessary to keep such a database functioning but the benefits are doubtless very large.

The heart of such a database would be the classification used. A strong candidate is the COICOP classification already adopted internationally and used in Europe as the standard classification for the HICP.

Many technical and practical questions have to be answered and a great amount of work is required for it to succeed. One possibility in the first stage could be the use of some library database system for organising the material, but at this moment it is difficult to see how this could best be solved in practice. If a decision is taken on this matter it is essential that the program starts as soon as possible.

As soon as a database of this kind has been established the work on producing guidelines would become a lot easier and make the data available immediately to everyone interested. To open access to such a database would also confirm the group's aim of showing a concrete output of the OG work.

3. Organisation of the OGQD (Ottawa Group Quality Database)

The quality adjustment database could be divided into three parts.

The first part should contain the collection of all available and known information about quality adjustment in writing and describe where it is available. A simple way to start is to begin with the work of the Ottawa Group, classify it and bring it into the database.

The second part should extend to all available information on practical quality adjustments.

The third part could contain voluntary information from different countries with descriptions of practical quality adjustments that are being carried out. This part of the database could rely on the research work done for Eurostat (Boon etc., 1998).

Eurostat is now planning to open a database where the European countries can give and access information about practical quality adjustment procedures. Such information will be available to every participating country (17). A part of that material could be given voluntarily to be put into the OGQD (Ottawa Group Quality Database).

4. Next move for creating a quality adjustment database

The first practical move after deciding to build such a database should probably be defining closely what should be covered and how this can be done in practice. In the short run this means to decide the first move in the opening of the database. The long-run perspective is connected with the question of who is willing to maintain such a system in the future.

This work could be looked upon as a first step towards making the Ottawa Group expertise available and it would have immediate influence on the ongoing debate and work in this field. This means that a commitment is needed from the participants to work on this as well as a decision on how to solve technical problems in the short and the long run.

REFERENCES

Boon Martin, Jan de Haan and Eddy Opperdoes, (1998). A database of quality change estimates for harmonized indices of consumer prices. Statistics Netherlands, February 1998.

Quality Adjustment Database, (1999). Note from Eurostat for HICP Task Force meeting in Copenhagen 7-8 June 1999.