

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Minutes

Friday 18 December 2015

Boardroom, London

Present

UK Statistics Authority

Sir Andrew Dilnot (Chair)

Professor Sir Adrian Smith

Dame Colette Bowe (from item 7)

Dame Moira Gibb

Professor David Hand

Mr Ed Humpherson

Dr David Levy

Mr John Pullinger

Mr Glen Watson

Other Attendees

Mr Jonathan Athow

Dr David Best (for item 10)

Mr Robert Bumpstead

Mr Joe Cuddeford

Mr Ed Dunn (for item 11)

Mr Matt Jukes (for item 10)

Dr Neil Wooding (for item 5)

Apologies

Ms Heather Savory

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Ms Savory.

2. Declarations of interest

There were no new declarations of interest.

3. Minutes and matters arising from previous meetings

3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 November 2015 were agreed.

3.2 The Chair reported on the topics discussed at the meeting of the non-executive directors that had taken place prior to the start of the Board meeting. The non-executives had discussed recruitment of non-executive directors to the Authority Board. Recruitment of the next Chair of the Authority had also been discussed; as he had said from the start of his term, Sir Andrew would step down as Chair at the end of March 2017.

3.3 The meeting reviewed progress with actions. Since the previous meeting, which had considered the role of the Statistics Authority to safeguard the comprehensiveness of the official statistics system as a whole, Mr Pullinger had discussed the effect of the Spending Review on statistics across Government at a recent meeting of the Heads of Profession. Experiences were mixed; some departments had bid successfully for funds to conduct new analytical work, but others were facing very challenging settlements.

3.4 Mr Pullinger reported that the Heads of Profession had also looked at the Government Statistical Service (GSS)'s structure of Theme Groups, and had agreed to develop new arrangements which would make better use of the Deputy National Statisticians.

4. Report from the Authority Chair

The Chair reported on his recent activities. Through the Chair's engagement with external stakeholders, it had become clear that some important stakeholders did not always have a clear understanding of the Authority's role and activities. As well as delivering transformational change in 2016, the Chair stressed that more effective stakeholder engagement was essential.

5. Pay

5.1 Dr Wooding informed the Board that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury had agreed the Authority's pay business case that morning. This covered three elements: the legacy pay issue which was the subject of a legal dispute; the buyout of pay progression; and moving the pay structure to a more sustainable long term model.

5.2 The Board expressed gratitude to Dr Wooding and the team that had negotiated this resolution with the Treasury. The next months would be crucial, but it was hoped that payments could be made to staff before the end of this financial year.

6. Independent Review of Economic Statistics [SA(15)36]

6.1 The Chair led a discussion about the findings of the interim report of the independent review of UK economic statistics, which had been prepared and published by Professor Sir Charles Bean.

6.2 The Board welcomed the interim review, both for its vision for the future of economic statistics, and the way it contributed to the understanding of complex statistical issues.

The Authority was engaging with the review team to provide them with evidence to inform the final review report.

- 6.3 It was agreed that the review had implications beyond just economic statistics. In particular it was stressed that the planned London presence should not just be about economic statistics. It was important for the London presence to provide a bridge to Titchfield, Newport and the wider GSS. Crime, health, and population statistics were all relevant and to limit to economic statistics only would mean missing out on cross discipline insights.

7. Report from the Chief Executive [SA(15)37]

- 7.1 Mr Pullinger provided an overview of activity and issues for December, which included updates on plans for economic statistics, organisational transformation, a consultation on ONS products and services, and developments in the digital and data agenda across government.
- 7.2 The meeting received briefing on the current financial position of the Authority and heard that scrutiny of this had taken place at the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee.

8. Report from the Director General for Regulation [SA(15)38]

- 8.1 Mr Humpherson provided an update on regulation activity since the last meeting. In January, Mr Humpherson would set out a business plan for regulation, including a proposal for the size of the function for 2016/17.
- 8.2 The Board heard that plans for the health statistics were moving on, and invitations had been sent to senior decision makers to an Authority round table in early 2016.
- 8.3 Mr Humpherson reported that an assessment report on homelessness statistics had been published on 10 December. This was a prime example of statistics needing to be more than just 'collect and count' and that greater coherence and integration was an essential part of Code compliance. The regulatory team was watching closely to ensure that the requirements of the report would be implemented and would engage with the department as appropriate.

9. Reports from Committee Chairs

Audit and Risk Assurance Committee

- 9.1 Dame Colette reported on the meeting of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee held on 1 December. The meeting had considered an advisory review which examined the handling of intangible software assets which caused a delay to the publication of the Annual Report and Accounts. The Committee had considered how to ensure that the issues encountered would not occur again during the audit of the 2015/16 accounts.
- 9.2 The Committee had also considered key risks facing the delivery of the Census and the governance of data dissemination.

10. ONS website [SA(15)39]

- 10.1 Mr Best and Mr Jukes introduced a paper which provided an overview of the communications plan for the two months leading up to the launch of the new ONS website.

10.2 The meeting heard that a recent Government Digital Service (GDS) Service Assessment on 16 December had gone well and full approval was expected early in January. The Authority Board agreed that, following GDS approval, the National Statistician could make a final decision to authorise the launch of the new website.

10.3 Board members had been trying out the beta version of the new website. While there were some small issues to resolve, the overall user experience was considerably improved. Mr Jukes confirmed that the approach would not be 'launch and leave', but rather the new site would be continuously improved. The search function in particular would keep improving as feedback was collected.

10.4 The 'soft launch' approach was endorsed. It was expected that there would be interest from stakeholders in the new website, and a small group would be invited to an event around a week before the launch. The Board agreed that, once the website was established and functioning well, further promotion would be of value.

10.5 The Board paid tribute to the work of the website development team.

11. Survey response rates [SA(15)40]

11.1 Mr Watson and Mr Dunn introduced a paper which provided an overview of the challenges surrounding household survey response rates.

11.2 The following comments were made in the discussion.

- i. Declining response rates was a worldwide phenomenon. The long term solution was likely to feature reducing reliance on surveys by integrating more administrative data, and using more electronic data collection. Shorter term solutions included optimising the field model and making surveys shorter where possible.
- ii. From a statistical perspective, what mattered was not the response rate per se, but the representativeness, or randomness, of the response. Studies using Census data had offered some assurance on non response bias.
- iii. Household surveys represented a large share of ONS's budget. To meet overall efficiency targets it would be necessary to make efficiencies in the running of surveys and there was a chance this could lead to further declines in response rates, at least in the short term.
- iv. A variety of incentives had been used with varying effects. There was an established literature on the effectiveness of incentives. There were some concerns that incentives could make non response less random.
- v. It was not clear what underlying factors were contributing to the general downward trend in response. Possible factors included confusion between these surveys and commercial marketing surveys.
- vi. Behavioural insight techniques had been used recently by ONS to review the survey materials, and promote the normative aspect of responding to a survey. It was suggested that there could be further insights from behavioural science and that ONS might be able to learn from the commercial sector in this regard.
- vii. Questionnaire length was assumed to be a factor in response rates. The Labour Force Survey took approximately 40 minutes to complete per household member. But as the length was not increasing gradually over time this could not in itself explain the gradual decline in response rates over time.
- viii. ONS used weighting techniques to gross up estimates from surveys. This was a way to help mitigate bias.

- 11.3 The Board considered the application of behavioural science to the business more generally. Many government departments now had a behavioural insight team. This had applicability beyond response rate problems and had the potential to help drive the Authority's strategy forward in many ways.
- 11.4 Considering the proposal in the paper that the case for compulsory household surveys should be re-examined, the Board noted the potential difficulties in pursuing such a course and felt that gaining better access to administrative data for statistical purposes would be of more value. This would open up the opportunity for a hybrid approach, where survey data could be pre-populated from administrative data, and respondents were asked to verify that the data was correct.
- 11.5 Summing up, the Chair stressed the seriousness of declining response rates given the current reliance on surveys. The Board supported the initiatives set out in the paper, and wished for these to be taken forward in addition to the further measures discussed. It was recognised that response rates needed to be considered in the broader data collection landscape and it was agreed that the data collection transformation strategy should be considered at a future meeting.
- 12. Statistics to inform the referendum on EU membership [SA(15)41]**
- 12.1 Mr Watson introduced a paper about plans for an ONS led project to produce an easily accessible compendium of official statistics relevant to the debate on the forthcoming EU referendum.
- 12.2 The meeting heard that it would be necessary to make editorial decisions about which statistics to include. The Board considered the risk that, due to the highly political context of the debate, ONS's impartiality in these editorial decisions might be challenged.
- 12.3 It was agreed that the discontinuation of regular statistical compendia, such as Social Trends and the Monthly Digest of Statistics, had meant it was now more difficult for the public to find an easily accessible statistical description of the UK, and also meant that publishing a one-off compendium was more difficult.
- 12.4 The Board agreed that the EU compendium should go ahead, on the condition that ONS considered reintroducing a regular compendium providing a statistical description of the UK.
- 13. Forward look to 2016 [SA(15)42]**
- 13.1 Mr Bumpstead introduced a draft list of transformation deliverables, further to a request from the previous meeting for a forward plan of key deliverables for the next 12 to 18 months.
- 13.2 The Board agreed that the list was useful, and that updates on progress with delivery should be included in the regular performance report from January.

14. Any other business

- 14.1 Professor Hand reported that the Administrative Data Research Network (ADRN) was seeking a Chair for the midterm review of the Network. Board members were invited to suggest possible names.
- 14.2 Mr Athow reported that, further to the joint meeting between the Authority Board and the HM Revenue and Customs Executive Committee the previous month, he was developing a number of joint work streams and would report back as these developed. The first would be about technology.
- 14.3 There was no other business. The Authority Board would meet next on 29 January 2016 at 10:00 in London.

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Agenda

Friday 18 December 2015
Boardroom, London, 10:30 – 16:00

Chair: Sir Andrew Dilnot

Apologies: Ms Heather Savory

10:30 to 11:00 – Non-executive session

1	Minutes and matters arising from previous meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Declarations of interest 	Meeting of 24-11-15
2	Report from the Authority Chair <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruitment of non-executive directors 	Sir Andrew Dilnot
3	Reports from Committee Chairs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audit and Risk Assurance Committee 	Dame Colette Bowe
4	Pay	Discussion Mr John Pullinger and Dr Neil Wooding
5	Independent Review of Economic Statistics	SA(15)36 Sir Andrew Dilnot
6	Report from the Chief Executive	SA(15)37 Mr John Pullinger
7	Report from the Director General for Regulation	SA(15)38 Mr Ed Humpherson

12:30 to 13:00 – Lunch

8	ONS website	SA(15)39 Dr David Best and Mr Matt Jukes
9	Survey response rates	SA(15)40 Mr Glen Watson and Mr Pete Benton
10	Statistics to inform the referendum on EU membership	SA(15)41 Mr Glen Watson
11	Forward look to 2016 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Transformation on a page 	SA(15)42 Sir Andrew Dilnot
12	Any other business	

Next meeting: 29 January 2016, 10:30 to 16:00, London

SA(15)36 – Independent Review of Economic Statistics

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SA(15)36

Independent Review of Economic Statistics

This document has been published on HM Treasury and Cabinet Office website.

To see this document go to:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-uk-economic-statistics-interim-report>

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SA(15)37

Chief Executive's Report, December 2015

Purpose

1. This report provides the Board with an overview of activity and issues for December.

Summary

2. Since the last Board meeting the Spending Review has concluded and Charlie Bean has published his first report on economic statistics. For the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the financial picture for the period to 2019-20 requires us to make a further 20 per cent efficiency saving but we will be able to recycle savings made into better statistics, not least to further the agenda mapped out in the Bean review. We will also have funds available to take forward our transformation plans. Funding for the Census is earmarked but contingent on the business case which will be completed early in 2016. Across the rest of the Government Statistical Service (GSS) the picture is not yet so clear, although in some departments, such as HM Revenue and Customs, the demand for statistics skills and analysis is set to rise.
3. This month has also been a busy one on the wider government data programme. The Spending Review and other government announcements herald a major drive towards realising the maximum benefits across government from the data revolution. Many GSS colleagues are at the forefront of this work and the GSS is leading on the development of the necessary skills in data science and related disciplines.

Review of recent activities

4. Following the Spending Review the focus within ONS has been on setting out detailed plans to match activities and outcomes to budgets. The immediate priorities have been the:
 - i. conclusion of the pay settlement;
 - ii. mechanisms to effect workforce transformation, including the launch of our academy concept, most recently the digital academy;
 - iii. consultation on areas where we plan to change or reduce outputs in order to maximise overall value for money; and
 - iv. publication of plans for economics at ONS, including in London.
5. A new Inter-Ministerial Group on Government Digital Transformation has been established and has met for the first time. We have been working closely with the Government Digital Service and others supporting this group. A comprehensive digital strategy is being developed following the Spending Review. We have an interest in all elements, but particularly those relating to the Government Data Programme, where I chair the Steering Group of, mainly external, advisors. The Government Data Programme is the umbrella under which issues ranging from development of registers (including the business register and address register), to data skills, to data access – legislation, ethics and privacy, will be considered.
6. At the same time the Prime Minister's Council for Science and Technology, chaired by Mark Walport and Nancy Rothwell is considering developments in government data. I attended an in-depth discussion with that group along with colleagues from the Cabinet Office and NHS bodies. We can expect them to make some pertinent observations on this issue.

7. Other important developments in recent weeks include the following.

- i. Strong focus on issues of security to provide ourselves with assurance that our procedures are robust. The executive group will be considering this issue in depth next month.
- ii. Developments in our ethical framework. A report from the National Statistician's Data Ethics Advisory Committee has been provided to the Board for information.
- iii. In the run up to the switch over to the new ONS website we have increased our efforts on communications. Our new Head of Communications, Chris Lines, will join us at the beginning of March.
- iv. The new advisory panels on consumer prices have met for the first time and are considering a range of issues, including the recent consultation process.
- v. Classification questions have continued to have a high salience and the team working on the classification of entities to public or private sectors is doing a magnificent job of maintaining professionalism in a highly sensitive area.
- vi. The executive group has been reviewing our international work, not least to prepare for a major focus on EU matters over the coming period.
- vii. We are also undertaking an in-depth review of the staff survey results and agreed a range of actions. In parallel we are deepening our efforts on diversity. A round of staff talks has gone well, although the main topic of interest is pay which remains the top priority for resolution in the month ahead.

Future look

8. In the next few weeks we will be bringing forward plans for consideration by the Board. A list of key initial milestones which are planned to be delivered as part of the transformation of ONS is provided at paper [SA(15)42].

John Pullinger, 10 December 2015

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SA(15)38

Report from the Director General for Regulation

Purpose

1. This paper provides an update on regulation activity since the last meeting.

Recommendation

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to note the activities and proposed actions.

Discussion

3. My team is now preparing our 2016-17 business plan. Important features to bring to the Board's attention include the following.
 - i. Board input: I will present outline ideas to the Board at the January meeting, and a full plan to the February Regulation Committee. I will also approach Board members for informal input on what you see as strengths and limitations of the UK system of official statistics, since these are environmental factors against which we define our strategy.
 - ii. Governance: the strategy and plan for regulation will be consistent with the Authority's a Better Statistics, Better Decisions strategy, but, crucially, will be distinct from the production arm's business plan. This separation is essential to preserve the independence of the regulatory arm.
 - iii. Resources: now that the Spending Review settlement is finalised, I will be returning to the options I placed before the Board in September: either maintaining the current resource position of regulation, or a small increase in resource to enable fuller coverage of official statistics across the UK.
 - iv. Strategy: we will continue to advocate and defend the National Statistics brand. We will take the Code of Practice out of the shadows and address the myths that have grown up about it (e.g. it inhibits innovation). In addition, we will improve our communication and stakeholder engagement to enhance our impact, while using our regulatory tools to support a shift from statistics as a 'collect and count' production process to a value-added service.
4. Our regulatory activities since the last board meeting on 24 November are outlined below.
 - i. Code stocktake: we have started on the Code stocktake. I have led 4 sessions (in London, Leeds, Belfast, and Liverpool) with GSS statisticians. As noted above, the aim is to highlight the benefits of the Code and address the misconceptions about it, for example that it is an enabler of good statistical practice.
 - ii. Homelessness report: we published our report on 10 December. It was endorsed by the homelessness sector, and provides a basis for stronger engagement with the sector in future. And it provided a prime example of what we mean by statistics needing to be more than just 'collect and count' - the need for greater coherence and integration was a prominent feature of our critique of the current range of homelessness statistics.

- iii. Health statistics: this week we are sending invitations to senior decision makers to an Authority round table in early 2016. There seems to be a general recognition of our diagnosis and of benefits of the Authority setting out publicly our principles for change - for example. I had, (thanks to Moira) a very positive meeting with Malcolm Grant, chair of NHS England.
 - iv. Income and Earnings: at last, some progress. As a result, I will delay publishing our evaluation of progress until early January to allow us to incorporate material on what ONS (in particular) has been doing, but will also record my overall verdict that progress has been disappointingly slow.
5. The main challenges include the below.
- i. Bean review: the initial report had many welcome features from the Authority point of view, not the least of which was the way it drew on past regulatory work on economic statistics. With the review now entering its second phase focussed on governance, we need to do two things:
 - a. explain clearly the benefits of the independent regulatory model within our overall governance; and
 - b. explain clearly how our governance ensures that there is clear separation of production and independent regulation within an overall common framework.
 - ii. Engagement: both the homelessness and the health work have involved very extensive engagement both inside and outside Government. While these endeavours have produced good results, they have also demonstrated that we are starting from a relatively low base of recognition and understanding of our regulatory function. Hence the need for more work on engagement and communication in 2016

Ed Humpherson, 11 December 2015

List of Annexes

Annex A Monitoring and Assessment activity since the last meeting

Annex A Key outputs since the last meeting

Assessment

- Assessment Report 317 – [Statistics on Traveller Caravans \(Department of Communities and Local Government\)](#)
- Assessment Report 318 - [2011 Census Phase 3 \(Office for National Statistics, National Records of Scotland and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency\)](#)
- Assessment Report 319 - [Cold Weather Payments Statistics \(Department for Work and Pensions\)](#)
- Assessment Report 320 - [Statistics on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping in England \(Department for Communities and Local Government\)](#)

Casework

- [Never worked households](#) – Jonathan Portes (NIESR) wrote to the Authority about the ONS publication on Working and Workless Households, and whether the limitations of the data were sufficiently articulated.
- [Statement made regarding a British Medical Journal article on mortality in hospitals on weekends](#) – the Authority received correspondence asking whether the Secretary of State for Health misspoke when he cited the BMJ article as evidence of a causal link between increased weekend mortality rates and staffing in hospitals at the weekend.
- [EU migration and UK total net migration statistics](#) – an inquiry from Will Moy (Full Fact) about how members of the Government had communicated the effect of migration from the EU on meeting its target of delivering net migration in the tens of thousands.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(15)39

5

Launch of the new ONS website

Purpose

1. This paper provides the Authority Board with an overview of the communications plan for the two months leading up to the launch of the new ONS website. This paper seeks the endorsement of the Board for the approach described.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to:
 - i. endorse the key messages at paragraph 9 and provide advice on any additional appropriate messages;
 - ii. note plans for a thank you event a week before the planned launch;
 - iii. provide a steer on initiatives that could impact on a launch date and/or communications messages; and
 - iv. agree that, following the Government Digital Service (GDS) Service Assessment on 16 December 2015, the National Statistician can make a final decision to authorise the launch of the new website.
3. A version of this paper is being considered at the National Statistics Executive Group (NSEG) on 15 December. A verbal update on the outcome of this can be provided at the meeting.

Background

4. The launch of the 2011 ONS website was badly received by users, the media and key stakeholders, including the Public Administration Select Committee and other government departments, agencies and public bodies. Since 2013, ONS has 'worked in public' to share what we are doing to improve the situation. An Alpha website went live in autumn 2014 and a Beta in summer 2015, enabling over 600 users and 80 organisations to be directly involved in user testing the new website. This work has been widely promoted via social media, a blog and e-newsletters. Due to this approach, the launch of a new website is already anticipated by some users and the transition should be straightforward.
5. Due to the background and in the context of an austere Spending Review, we recommend a reserved and reactive approach to communications around the new ONS website.

Discussion

6. A launch date will not be shared internally (beyond the immediate team and the Senior Civil Service) or externally (except the GDS). We will state an 'early 2016 launch', if asked. If we pass the GDS Service Assessment on the 16 December, the report is likely to be publically available from early January 2016. This will start to raise expectations of an imminent launch, if noticed.
7. Working with ONS Directors, we have identified a list of over 450 stakeholders from across government, the media and user groups. We plan to send all stakeholders an email on the day of launch, following confirmation that the site is stable. Media contacts will also be invited to a post-launch briefing. We suggest this should be run as an online question and answer to encourage attendance at short notice, and enable the team to

be in Newport on the day of launch. It is anticipated that only industry journalists (e.g. ComputerWorld) will attend if the launch goes well. It will only become of wider interest in the event of a failed launch. This is only likely to come to the attention of the media via users sharing information on social media. We are working closely with the Media Relations team.

8. We will invite a smaller group of stakeholders to an event around a week before the planned launch. This will include people who have been champions of our work, as well as those who have been critics. This will be positioned as an event to thank those who have given constructive feedback to help us develop the new site, rather than a launch event. It is proposed that a member of the Authority Board or the Senior Leadership team give a short speech about digital transformation at the ONS, including key messages about the website, indicating that the website is coming soon. There will be time for informal networking with senior staff and the team working on the website. We are looking at the potential to host this at a central London venue (e.g. National Audit Office, which has suitable facilities). We will be discussing the invite list and the logistics of this event with the offices of the National Statistician, the Chair of the UK Statistics Authority and the Director General of Data Capability. Invitations will need to be sent six weeks before the event.
9. Once we have launched the website, we will use the intranet, social media, the blog and email to notify stakeholders. It will become immediately obvious to users who are already using the website as it will be hosted at the same URL as the existing website. However, we will launch in a very quiet week for publications, so we don't expect a lot of general usage.

Key messages

10. The proposed key messages are as follows.
 - i. We have been building a new website in 2015 that we expect to launch in early 2016, pending meeting the requirements of the GDS. This new website will help us deliver the vision of the *Better Statistics, Better Decisions* strategy and addresses criticisms raised in the House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee report '*Communicating statistics: Not just true but also fair*'.
 - ii. The work has been driven by users, with over 600 people and 80 organisations helping us test early prototypes. The work to date - Alpha and Beta - has passed GDS Service Assessments, been shortlisted in the Civil Service Innovation Awards and been well received by users and stakeholders. The Minister for the Cabinet Office, Matt Hancock MP, acknowledged the work in a speech at the National Digital Conference saying "*a small, highly skilled team built an alpha version in 3 months... the feedback has been fantastic*". This has assured us we are headed in the right direction, but we are aware that launching the site is just the beginning. It is important to users that we get the basics right, and quickly.
 - iii. The new website will increase the speed at which we can make improvements to the site. We will constantly improve the website after launch, to meet user expectations. The launch will address the main concerns users have told us about - search, the speed of finding statistics, the timeliness of publishing at 9.30, usability on mobile devices and cheaper, better technology. It will be easier to find statistics in major search engines - 60 per cent of visits to the website come from Google. We have designed with mobile technology in mind - 20 per cent of our traffic already comes from mobile devices. Current benchmarks demonstrate we can publish our statistics to consistently meet our 9.30am deadline.
 - iv. We will have a skilled team in place to manage ongoing improvements. In 2013 we established a Digital Publishing Division which has trained our staff in new digital

- production methods and recruited new skills into the organisation. Our Chief Publishing Officer shares best practice with the GSS via the Presentation and Dissemination Committee. In 2015, we recruited a Chief Digital Officer and Chief Technology Officer and a new Director of Digital, Technology and Methodology.
- v. We will migrate all historical data, including 45,000 time series, which will be much easier to find and use. There will be over 150,000 redirects in place at launch to ensure our users can find older content. We will move much of our older content (historical commentary/corporate content that isn't regularly accessed by users) to the UK Government Web Archive, held and preserved by the National Archives.

Communication channels

11. Internal communications channels will include: all staff 'Show and Tells', ONS divisional talks; directorate management team meetings; Improving Dissemination Programme (IDP) Board briefings in the Operations Room; IDP Board reports to Portfolio Management Division; Issue Log reports to NSEG and the Authority Board; briefings for Key Account Leads; intranet; Senior Civil Service (SCS) newsletter; Thursday Morning Colleagues updates; Yammer; use of Business Area Champions and the Statistical Products Working Group to cascade news.
12. External communications channels will include: the ONS digital blog; ONS Twitter channel; direct email; December meeting of the GSS Presentation and Dissemination Committee; user testing sessions; GSS and Royal Statistical Society website; existing events (e.g. Economic Forum, lock-ins); specific thank you event and post launch media briefing.

Next Steps

13. Next steps for the communications plan are as follows:
 - i. arrange an opportunity for Authority Board and NSEG members to try out the website with the team before launch;
 - ii. continue to provide personalised briefings for all Key Accounts meetings and other SCS meetings with users and stakeholders;
 - iii. continue to brief the Director of Digital, Technology and Methodology in weekly meetings, and the IDP Board and NSEG via fortnightly progress reports;
 - iv. attend all divisional ONS talks with internal staff to provide key messages;
 - v. establish all the email contacts for the stakeholder list;
 - vi. finalise the communications assets e.g. presentation slides, email copy etc.; and
 - vii. manage logistics for the thank you event and the post-launch media briefing.
14. Following the GDS Service Assessment on 16 December 2015, a further paper will be presented at the next meeting of NSEG on 21 January 2016. It is anticipated that this paper will seek final approval for the launch of the new website. The Authority Board is invited to agree that, following the GDS Service Assessment, the National Statistician can make a final decision to authorise the launch of the new website.

Laura Dewis, Chief Publishing Officer, ONS, 29 November 2015

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(15)40

Labour Force Survey (LFS) and other Household Survey Response Rates**Purpose**

1. This paper responds to an action from the September Board for 'a briefing note on the Labour Force Survey response rate, to include how the target of 60 per cent was set, what level of response would be acceptable to users, and in what ways administrative data could be used as a solution.' The paper also provides an overview of the challenges surrounding household survey response rates and sets out the actions we are taking.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to note:
 - i. the rationale for, and user view of, a 60 per cent target response rate to the LFS;
 - ii. the current challenges surrounding household survey response rates;
 - iii. our protective actions in the face of severe 2016/17 cost savings; and
 - iv. transformative actions proposed.
3. Members of the Authority Board are also invited to agree that the case for compulsory household surveys should be re-examined.

Background

4. ONS household surveys such as the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Living Costs and Food Survey (LCF) are key to informing monetary and economic policy by providing primary outputs on the labour market, underpinning the RPI/CPI and feeding into National Accounts.
5. The suite of measures presented in the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Performance Report includes the Labour Force Survey (LFS) Wave 1 response rate which has a target of 60 per cent. This target has not been met within a whole calendar quarter since April-June 2012 and not for an individual month since November 2014. The current Wave 1 response is about 58 per cent.
6. Long term trends in survey response rates across the world are generally downwards. Rising survey non-response increases the risk of bias in survey-based estimates and may also mean non-compliance with European Union (EU) regulations on achieved sample sizes.
7. A paper on this issue was presented to the ONS Board in March 2013 and more recently a paper was presented to the November meeting of the National Statistics Executive Group (NSEG). This issue is prominent within the Bean Review interim findings.

Discussion

8. Long term trends in response rates for both ONS and wider Government Statistical Service (GSS) household surveys are generally downwards declining from around 80 per cent in the early 1990s to below 60 per cent today (see **Annex A**).
9. Our experience is broadly consistent with evidence from other countries where, as the Bean Review interim findings highlight, it is recognised government survey response rates in Europe and North America are declining by approximately one percentage point per year. This trend will continue.

10. The reasons for this trend are twofold: an increase in the non-contact rate and a rising refusal rate. Generally, the refusal rate has increased more than the non-contact rate (see **Annexes B** and **C**).
11. Differences in outcomes by survey can be largely explained by different survey characteristics such as questionnaire length, how many and who in the household is being interviewed and the nature of the topic under investigation. Factors that are common to all surveys include falling contact rates, topic salience, market research overload, attitudes towards Government and available budgets.
12. An important part of the context of declining response rates is the financial climate within which surveys have operated over the past five or so years. For both ONS and GSS surveys, budgets have generally declined in real terms as illustrated by the LFS example (**Annex D**). While in part this will reflect genuine efficiencies in collection processes, the extent of the budgetary reductions will be a contributing factor to the declining levels of response. The severe cost saving demands of 2016/17 onwards would ordinarily exacerbate the decline in response, however we propose to largely protect the LFS budget and make the required savings elsewhere or implement cost saving measures with limited, or even beneficial, quality impacts (such as modernising the fieldwork geography which has remained largely unchanged since the 1990s).
13. ONS has a continuous programme of work designed to remedy declining response. Examples of recent tactical initiatives include: the use of seasonal and permanent monetary incentives, regular reviews of survey materials and questionnaire content, targeted activity in areas of low response, use of behavioural insights techniques and strengthened management and oversight of field activity. We are confident our activity compares generally favourably to that which is undertaken in other countries and across the GSS, however, the decreasing budget within frontline data collection is a significant constraint to ongoing Research and Development activity and we expect response rates to continue to fall.
14. Rising survey non-response increases the risk of bias in survey-based estimates. The Census provides a decennial opportunity to examine the representativeness of survey results by examining the characteristics of non-responders from their Census returns. These Census non-response link studies provide evidence on the levels of bias. The 2011 studies were reassuring, despite the decline in response since 2001, and suggested the level of bias was small. This is the origin of the 60 per cent response target. At the time of the 2011 study the LFS Wave 1 response rate was around 63 per cent. We set a 60 per cent target as a level below which significant remedial action may be required but this is not steadfast. Representativeness of respondents is paramount – a survey with 65 per cent response could be more biased than one with 55 per cent if the achieved sample is not representative of the general population.
15. Users across the GSS and elsewhere are concerned. Most recently the Department for Work and Pensions has requested briefing on ONS remedial action to the falling LFS response rate. At the same time, however, users are aware this is a broader phenomenon for which ONS can exert only limited control and, given worldwide trends, the short term prognosis is a further decline.
16. The emerging ONS Data Collection Strategy establishes the longer term plan for addressing survey non-response. Central tenets of this transformative plan include moving online and mixed mode collection; greater use of administrative data, both for direct survey replacement and to monitor bias; and the re-design and modularisation of

surveys as a result. The extent to which administrative data is a solution to the decline in survey response rates is currently uncertain, however, the transformation plans include a thorough assessment of each survey output to understand the value and impact administrative data may hold. It is worth noting surveys, such as the LFS, will remain, but with significant integration with other data sources.

17. Another facet of the transformative Data Collection Strategy is to implement a more flexible field force model alongside a review of terms and conditions. The current field force contract offers no incentive for evening or weekend working (although it is clear this working pattern is expected) and interviewer calling patterns are unchanged as a result.
18. However, the strategy on its own will not address the public's declining willingness to participate. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) have recently been forced to abandon the Life Study (the latest birth cohort study) due to unwillingness to participate. A similar study in the US has also been abandoned for similar reasons. We therefore expect that social survey response rates will continue to fall.
19. We believe that some of the reluctance to participate is due to the length of the survey interview. While the LFS interview is relatively short compared with other ONS surveys at approximately 30 minutes, it nevertheless represents a considerable burden on the respondent. Options for significantly decreasing the length of interview are being explored, potentially limiting the survey to only those questions required to meet the LFS EU regulation or those that are needed for key labour market indicators.
20. In the medium term, it may be necessary to re-visit whether key social data collections - where they remain - should be compulsory. This may especially be the case for instances where strict European Regulations on achieved sample sizes are mandated on the UK. The case for a compulsory LFS was previously considered in 2012/13 and rejected. It is not straightforward; survey redesign, specific UK legislation and a compliance regime would be required. Legal advice suggested an 18-24 month lead in to prepare and pass the necessary legislation and the political will is uncertain. The Bean Review interim findings highlight the higher response rates achieved in Countries with a mandatory LFS but stop short of recommending it. The Board is invited to discuss whether ONS should reconsider making the case for social surveys to be compulsory.

Conclusion

21. The paper has explained the 60 per cent LFS target, the user view and the strategic aims around administrative data. The paper has provided an overview of the challenges household survey response rates present and is clear on the short and long term actions we will undertake. Survey data collection will remain, even in a fully transformed state, and so given ever increasing public apathy and unwillingness to participate we should revisit the notion of mandatory household surveys; particularly for key domestic and European requirements.

Ed Dunn, Social Survey Division, 9 December 2015

List of Annexes

- Annex A Response rates for key ONS household surveys**
- Annex B Contact rates for key ONS household surveys**
- Annex C Refusal rates for key ONS household surveys**
- Annex D Spending on the Labour Force Survey**

Annex A Response rates for key ONS household surveys

List of survey acronyms

LFS: [Labour Force Survey](#)

LCF: [Living Costs and Food Survey](#)

OPN: [Opinions and Lifestyle Survey](#)

WAS: [Wealth and Assets Survey](#)

FRS: [Family Resources Survey](#)

SLC: [Survey on Living Conditions](#)

CSEW: [Crime Survey for England and Wales](#)

6.1

Chart A.1: Annual response rates by survey

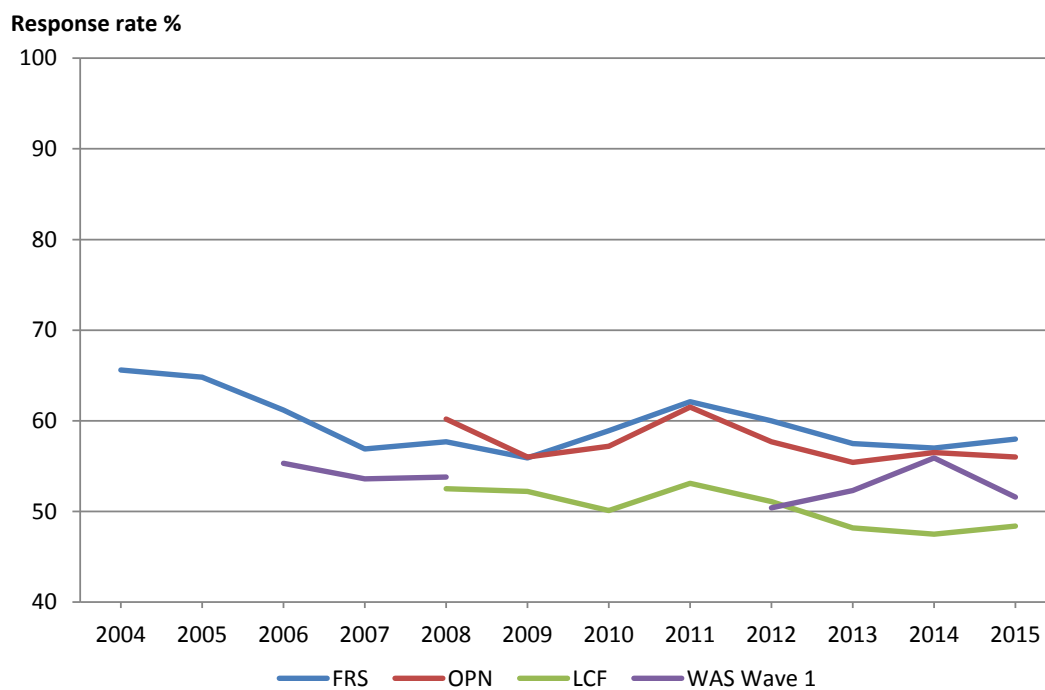
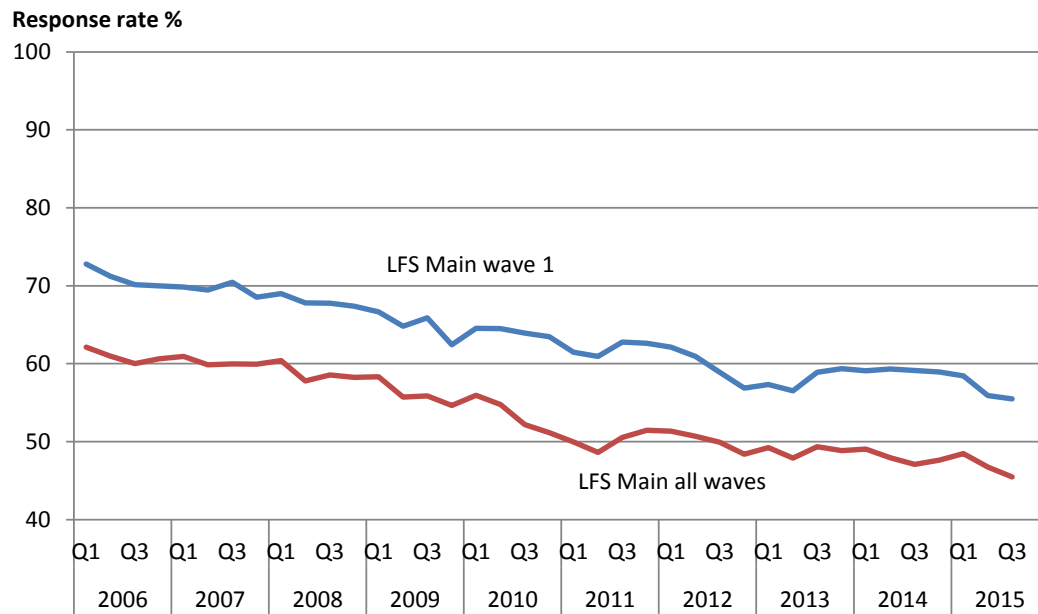
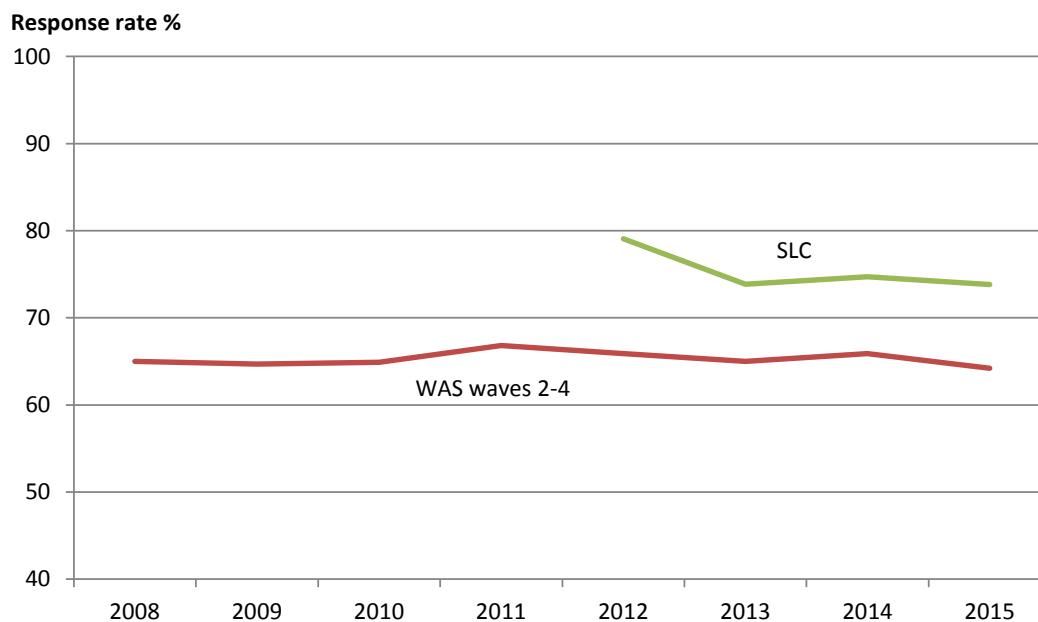
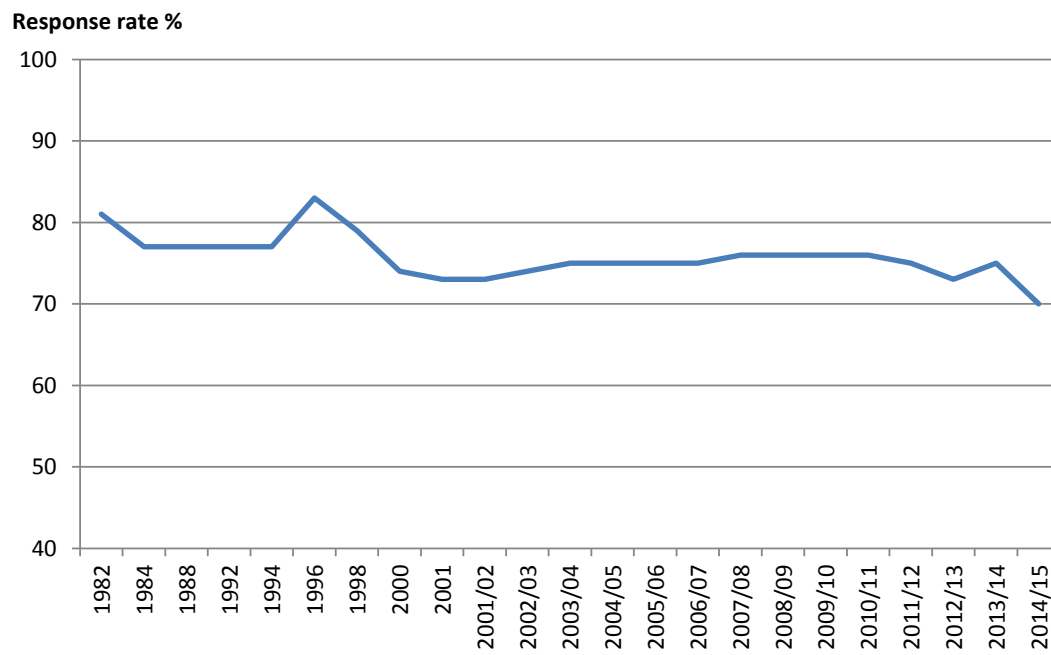


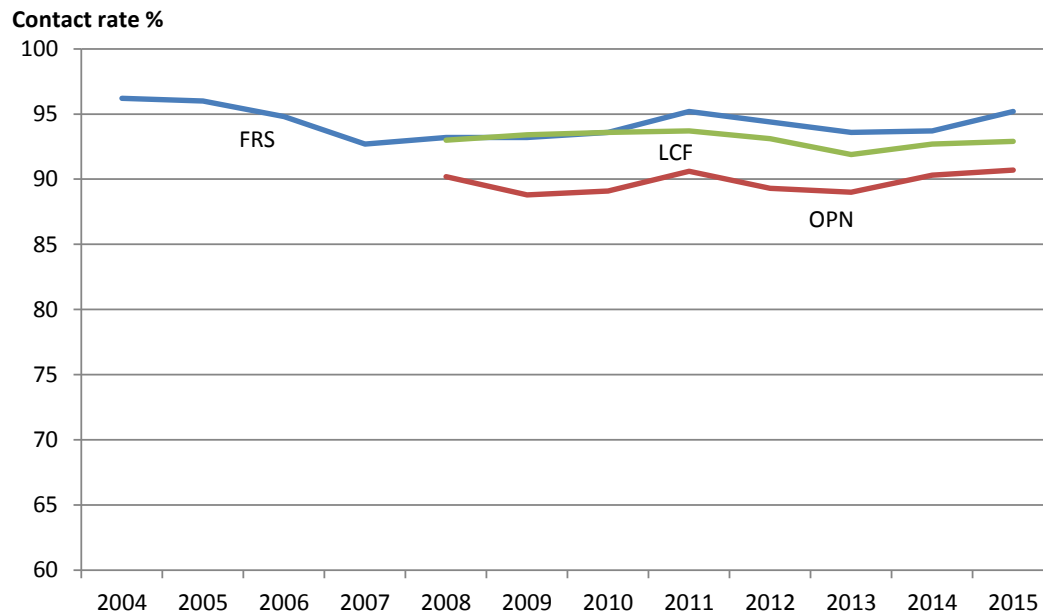
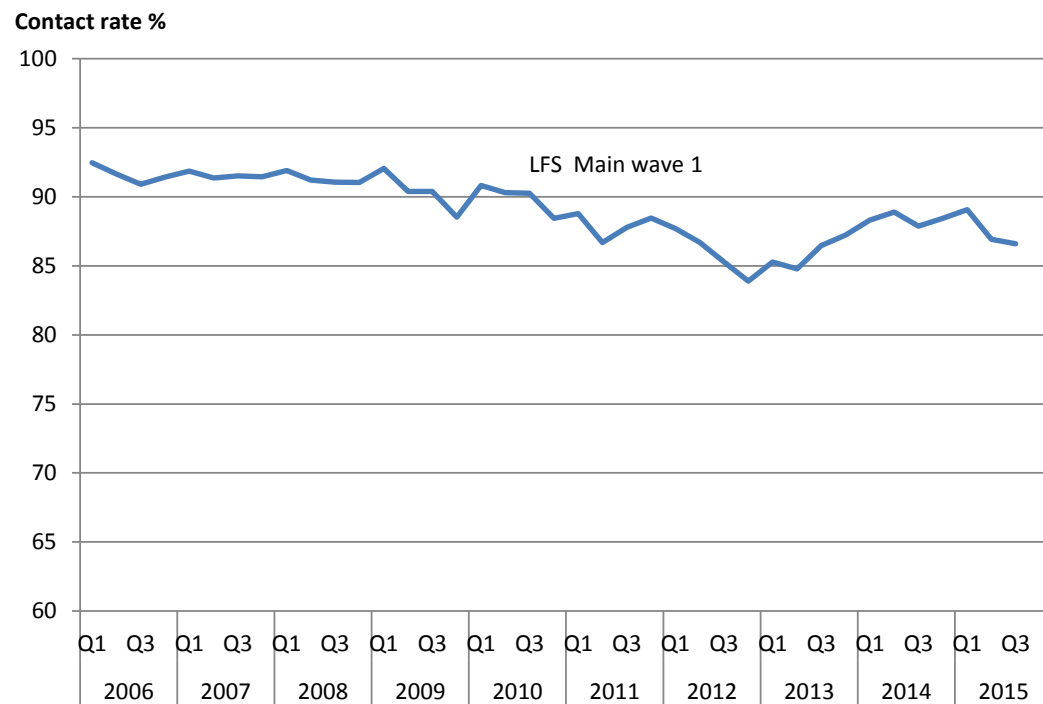
Chart A.2: LFS main quarterly response rate

NB. The 'all waves' response rate shows the proportion of all eligible households, across all five waves of the main LFS, who responded in that quarter.

Chart A.3: Annual response rate, longitudinal surveys

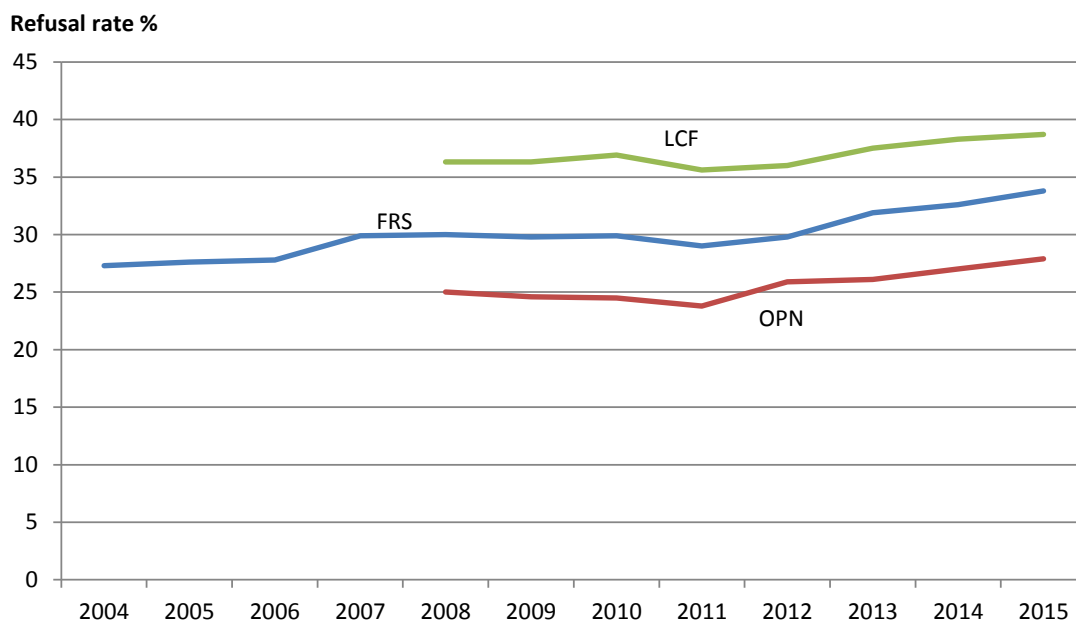
NB. Response rate calculation excludes eligible sample members that refused at a previous wave. As a result it is not possible to compare these response rates with the LFS above.

Chart A.4: Crime Survey for England and Wales annual response rates

Annex B Contact rates for key ONS household surveysChart B.1: Annual contract rate by survey**6.2**Chart B.2: LFS Main wave 1 quarterly contact rate

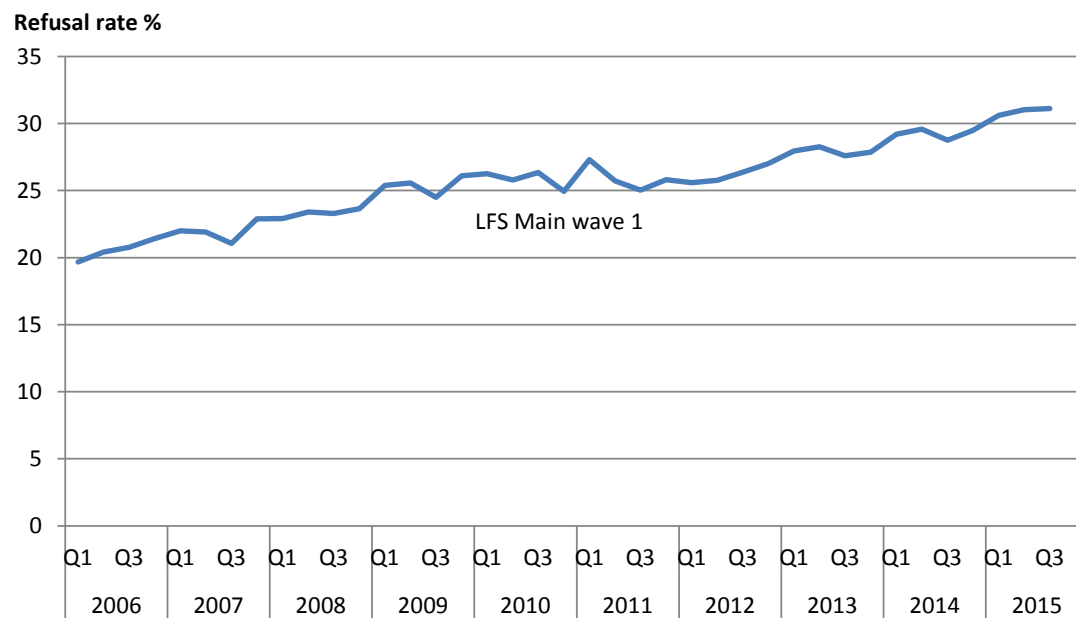
Annex C Refusal rates for key ONS household surveys

Chart C.1: Annual refusal rate by survey



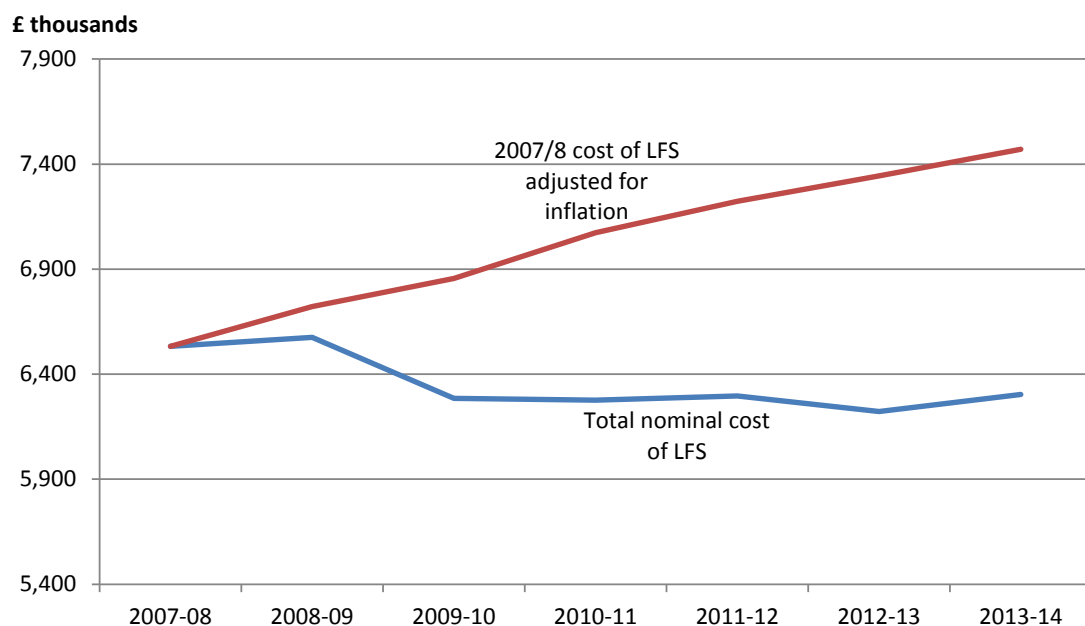
6.3

Chart C.2: LFS Main wave 1 quarterly refusal rate



Annex D Spending on the Labour Force Survey

Chart D.1: Spending on the Labour Force Survey – interviewer costs only



Notes:

Total nominal cost of LFS is the amount actually spent on LFS interviewer fees and expenses, in nominal terms.

2007/8 cost of LFS adjusted for inflation, shows the amount we would have spent annually if remained at 2007/8 levels of spending.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(15)41

A European statistical compendium

Purpose

1. This paper is to inform the Board about plans for an Office for National Statistics (ONS) led project to produce an easily accessible compendium of official Government Statistical Service (GSS) statistics that are relevant to the debate on whether or not the UK should stay in the EU.

Timing

2. The referendum date is not yet known, assuming that it will not be until late 2016/early 2017 then the ONS compendium plans are to launch in summer 2016, not before the May elections.

Recommendations

3. Members of the Authority Board are invited to note these plans so as to be informed in case of any meetings with likely interested parties such as Full Fact, Bank of England, and other government departments.

Background

4. The date of the EU referendum has not yet been set and, although it is pledged to happen by the end of 2017, there have been calls for it to occur earlier. It is thought to be unlikely to happen before, or with, the May elections in 2016. Elections in France in May 2017 and Germany in September 2017 may also play into the choice of referendum date.
5. ONS has released compendia of statistics in the past to ensure users have easy access to authoritative relevant statistics in one place. This was done in the run up to the Scottish independence referendum and in the run up to the 2015 UK General Election. The proposal to do something for the forthcoming EU referendum was agreed with the Deputy National Statistician, Population and Public Policy and the Director for Social and Analysis (Glen Watson and Guy Goodwin respectively), who requested that the outline plans be socialised with Directors and the Board.
6. ONS has consulted Full Fact and the House of Commons Library to ensure that there would be no duplication of effort or confusion caused by production of a European compendium. These consultations have confirmed that the proposed compendium would not duplicate their work and that it would be helpful for ONS to publish the evidence base that underpins the debate. Full Fact will use this, for example, as evidence in the work they plan to do which is aimed at tackling specific common misperceptions.

Discussion

7. The public debate has already started and is mainly about economic issues such as the cost and benefits of membership and the likely economic impact on the UK of leaving or staying in the EU. However, issues such as migration and the environment are also being raised. In the run up to the referendum it will be important to consider the issues in a wide global context and it will be helpful to ensure that the relevant authoritative statistics and analyses are assembled in one easy to locate place.
8. Decisions have yet to be made about the precise content and the release. Early thinking is that we will include the latest official UK level statistics on GDP, trade, labour market,

migration, tourism and the environment, giving as international a context as possible and providing a time series, going back 40 years where possible to the time of the last referendum.

9. The compendium although issued by ONS will be a GSS product which will be the result of collaboration across relevant departments. The approach will be as used successfully for previous compendia, which was through a GSS advisory board with a high level steering group to ensure smooth handling of the release with no surprises to key stakeholders.
10. The idea is for a visual front piece supported by links to a data catalogue and relevant analyses. Close working with the website team will ensure that we choose the optimal release channel. The product will be listed in the release schedule and brought to the attention of key users by sending a link on the release day. Decisions about whether or not to hold a press briefing will be made depending on the context nearer the time. The possibility of holding a seminar for MPs or their researchers will also be considered.
11. There is a wider piece of thinking that may be needed around the impact for statistics if the UK does leave the EU. That, however, is outside the scope of this project.

Roma Chappell and Pete Stokes, Public Policy Division, 8 December 2015

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(15)42

Transformation on a page

Purpose

1. This paper provides the Authority Board with a draft list of tangible transformation deliverables, further to the action agreed at the last meeting.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to consider the draft at **Annex A** and provide any comments. A revised version with real status updates will then be included alongside the regular Performance Report from January 2016 (please note the status updates included here are not real).

Discussion

3. The spending review settlement provided the Authority with the resources it needs to enable transformation over the next four to five years. This transformation will include data collection, digital and workforce transformation as well as ensuring that we produce modern statistical outputs that make the right impact and serve the public good. The Board requested visibility of the tangible milestones that would be seen over the next twelve months, in order to show demonstrable progress.
4. Annex A presents an initial draft 'transformation on a page' which is a list of these key milestones. The milestones are based on the work which has been undertaken to develop the Authority Business Plan, a first draft of which has been provided to the Board for information. So, the milestones are consistent with the plan.
5. Following any comments from the Board we will begin to report on progress towards these milestones from January. A revised corporate business plan will be submitted to the Board in February for approval.
6. It is further proposed to develop communication activity around each deliverable (internal and external as appropriate) so that staff and stakeholders are aware and can see the organisation transforming.

Ben Whitestone and Robert Bumpstead, 10 December 2015

List of Annexes

Annex A Draft transformation on a page

ONS TRANSFORMATION – KEY MILESTONES FOR 2016/17

The Authority's corporate business plan will set out how the organisation will transform over the 2015 Spending Review period. Below are the initial milestones on this transformation journey.

	What	Why	When	Status (Dec '15)
HELPFUL	Launch of the new ONS website	To deliver a significantly improved online portal for users	Q1 2016	●
	[Anything on Flow of funds or productivity?]	Ensure ONS outputs are fit for purpose for the needs of the modern user.	TBC	●
	[To include something on Sustainable Development Goals]		TBC	●
	First experimental improved fraud and cyber crime statistics		July 2016	●
	Increased London Presence of Economists and Economic Statisticians	Improve our engagement with key stakeholders.	TBC	●
PROFESSIONAL	Re-designation NS status for CPIH	Re-gain National Statistics status for ONS outputs in order to ensure quality.	Summer 2016	●
	[other plans for re-designation?]		TBC	●
	Publish 2016 Blue and Pink Books – further ESA compliance	Ensure our outputs meet international requirements.	July 2016	●
	Purchases Survey Dispatch		Mar 2016	●
INNOVATIVE	First Business Survey Online – Monthly Commodities	Survey data collection will be digital by default with benefits for ONS and survey respondents	April 2016	●
	First Annual Business Survey Online – BRES		October 2016	●
	ASHE online		March 2017	●
	Admin Data (VAT) used to reduce MBS sample	We use administrative data for more efficient statistical production	July 2016	●
	Access opened to corporation tax data		July 2016	●
	Publish further experimental Admin Data outputs for census		Autumn 2016	●
	Build processes and systems for the 2017 census test		2017	●
EFFICIENT	Run and conclude a consultation into changes to outputs and sources	Reductions made to core work in order to allow for transformation.	Jan 2015	●
	Finalise efficiency and continuous improvement plans for 2016/17		Feb 2015	●
CAPABLE	Launch of the Learning Academy	Proactively drive the transformation of the workforce – including size, shape and skills.	April 2016	●
	Completion of a satisfactory pay deal		March 2016	●
	Run 2016 VES scheme		July 2016	●
	Oracle Fusion ERP implemented	Tools for effective financial and workforce planning –provide a platform for future exploitation	July 2016	●
	Outlook replaces Lotus Notes for email and calendar	Modern business applications available to ONS staff.	Dec 2015	●
	Sharepoint replaces Lotus Notes for file sharing and internal databases		TBC	●

8.1