UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Minutes

Monday 22 May 2017
Boardroom, London

Present
UK Statistics Authority
Sir David Norgrove (Chair)
Mr Jonathan Athow
Dame Moira Gibb
Professor David Hand
Professor Jonathan Haskel (from item 7)
Mr Ed Humpherson
Ms Nora Nanayakkara
Mr John Pullinger

Also in attendance
Mr Robert Bumpstead
Ms Siobhan Carey (for item 9)
Mr Ian Cope
Ms Laura Dewis (for item 10)
Ms Sally-Ann Jones
Mr Will Laffan (for item 11)
Ms Heather Savory
Mr Sean Whellams (for item 9)
Dr Neil Wooding (for item 9)

Apologies
Ms Sian Baldwin
Dame Colette Bowe
Dr David Levy
Professor Sir Adrian Smith (Deputy Chair)

1. Apologies

1.1 Apologies were received from Ms Baldwin, Dame Colette, Dr Levy and Professor Smith

2. Declarations of Interest

2.1 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 28 April 2017 were agreed.

3.2 The Chair reported on the topics discussed at the meeting of the non-executive directors that had taken place on 11 May. The NEDs had discussed the following:

   i. the need to define a more fully developed plan and timeline of the on-going transformation, including costs and benefits and with a sharpened focus on products, product owners and product development;

   ii. more information was needed on the management of interdependencies between the programmes;

   iii. detail on families of statistics related to outputs, e.g. plans to develop labour market statistics as a whole; and

   iv. the organisation had improved and matured over the past year, but there remained challenges in some areas.

3.3 Commenting on these topics, Mr Pullinger confirmed that:

   i. a more developed plan setting out quarterly milestones was in progress. It would be important not to over choreograph it to allow the organisation flexibility where needed;

   ii. improvements to the business planning process and management information were in hand;

   iii. fundamental changes had been made to the capability and governance of the organisation which had gone some way in addressing the cultural challenges; and

   iv. the strong focus on sharing best practice and learning at all levels would continue.

4. Report from the Authority Chair

4.1 The Chair reported on his recent activities and noted a number of introductory meetings and engagements and the first of a series of 'teach-ins' on key statistics produced by ONS.

5. Report from the Chair of the Administrative Data and Research Network

5.1 Professor Hand provided an update on developments with the Administrative Data Research Network (ADRN).

5.2 Parliament had decided that under the Digital Economy Act the Statistics Authority would be responsible for the accreditation of processors, researchers and research project in respect of sharing administrative data for research purposes. The horizon opened up by the Digital Economy Act would involve accrediting a wider range of organisations which would go well beyond the current scope of the ADRN. Consequently it was appropriate that the Authority stepped away from its role in the governance of the ADRN to take on this wider leadership role as Parliament had determined. The change of governance would be announced following the general election.

5.3 The ADRN Board would hold its final meeting on 5 June and the ADRN Board's final annual report would be published in due course.

5.4 The Chair noted thanks to members of the ADRN Board for their commitment and work.

6. Report from the Chief Executive [SA(17)21]

6.1 Mr Pullinger reported on activity and issues for May. Highlights included:

i. the Census Test response rate of 40 per cent. The team were confident that the objectives of the test had been met, understanding the impact of the sexual identity question on response rates; and

ii. focus in the coming months on planning including a joint horizon scanning session scheduled for the Board and National Statistics Executive Group in July.

6.2 The Board noted the success of Census Test.

7. Update on pre-release access

7.1 Mr Pullinger provided an update on pre-release access (PRA) following the Board's advice at the previous meeting.

7.2 The Board supported Mr Pullinger's decision to press ahead with plans to end PRA to ONS statistics. The decision would be communicated as soon after the election as was practicable.

8. Report from the Director General for Regulation [SA(17)22]

8.1 Mr Humpherson introduced a paper which provided an update on regulation activity since the last meeting. A third round table event on health and social care statistics had been held on 15 May. The Office for Statistics Regulation had commented on the coherence of health and social care statistics and had facilitated a process to reach a shared understanding of the issues to create a set of commitments. It was now appropriate the ONS as the executive would lead the work.

9. The Government Statistical Service [SA(17)23]

9.1 Mr Bumpstead introduced a paper which provided an overview of the Government Statistical Service (GSS) in the context of some key challenges. The following comments were made in discussion.

i. Recruitment and retention issues across the GSS might be addressed by taking a different approach to the recruitment process, by offering a formal training programme over a specific period e.g. five years, and accepting that there would always be a degree of turnover.

ii. Transformation of the ONS workforce was in progress including the use of fixed term contracts for some roles e.g. staff working on roles to transform a particular part of the business over a fixed time period.

iii. The new Civil Service fast stream recruitment was resulting in movement of fast stream staff across departments.

iv. The challenges potentially faced by smaller departments including recruitment could be supported by centralised support and co-ordination. The critical mass of the ONS might also be able to offer services like methodology.

v. There was a proposal to bring together the analytical professions into a formal single function across government.

vi. In relation to governance there was a question about how the GSS was held to account. The GSS was a network of people with the same vision and philosophy and as such performance could be measured by its ability to diagnose and solve problems by answering the critical questions faced by society.

9.2 The Board welcomed the update.

10. The ONS website [SA(17)24]

10.1 Ms Dewis introduced a paper which provided a forward look on the development of the ONS website and the development of statistical products, to meet the expectation of users online. The following comments were made in discussion.

i. The overall search strategy for the website was optimised for Google. User feedback was the main driver for the programme of work. User feedback also indicated a need for more granularity of data which would be a priority for 2017/18.
ii. Integrating ONS Visual into the main website was also a priority for 2017/18.
iii. The ONS website was considered a leading player among government departments. It would be important to identify performance success metrics to be able to measure success in the future.
iv. In the context of relationships across government ONS was in a strong position: ONS code was available and had been re-used by other departments.
v. A project was underway to align data publishing standards across the statistical system.

10.2 The Board welcomed the update, noted the significant progress that had been made since the ONS website was launched in February 2016, and plans going forward.

11. Update on Brexit
11.1 Mr Bumpstead and Mr Laffan provided an update on the implications of Brexit for the statistical system and the programme of work established in response.

11.2 A key consideration of the programme had been the position of those working in the ONS and wider GSS who were non UK nationals. Providing all possible support for this group would remain a priority.

11.3 The Board welcomed the update on the Brexit Programme.

12. New Code of Practice for Official Statistics [SA(17)25]
12.1 Mr Humpherson introduced a paper which presented proposals for a formal statutory consultation on a revised draft Code of Practice for Statistics. The following comments were made in discussion:

i. It was suggested that users might find an alternative format more intuitive.
ii. In terms of the duration of the consultation, consideration could be given to extending it beyond a 12 week period.
iii. The use of the terms 'must' and 'should' within the Code text should be considered.

12.2 The Board agreed to the launch of the consultation subject to the changes highlighted in the discussion and careful consideration about the date.

13. Any other business
13.1 There was no other business. The Authority Board would meet next on Thursday 29 June at 10:30 in Titchfield.

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Agenda

Monday 22 May 2017

Boardroom, Drummond Gate, 10:30 – 16:00

Chair: Sir David Norgrove
Apologies: Dame Colette Bowe, Ms Sian Baldwin and Professor Jonathan Haskel

10:30 to 11:00: Non-Executive's Session

1 11:00-11:10 10 mins	Minutes and matters arising from previous meetings • Declarations of interest	Meeting of 28 April 2017
2 11:10-11:20 10 mins	Report from the Authority Chair	Oral report Sir David Norgrove
3 11:20-11:35 15 mins	Reports from Committee Chairs • Administrative Data and Research Network	Oral reports
4 11:35-12:00 25 mins	Report from the Chief Executive	SA(17)21 Mr John Pullinger
5 12:00-12:25 25 mins	Update on pre-release access	Oral update Mr John Pullinger
6 12:25-12:45 20 mins	Report from the Director General for Regulation	SA(17)22 Mr Ed Humpherson

12:45 to 13:15: Lunch

7 13:15-13:55 40 mins	The Government Statistical Service	SA(17)23 Mr Robert Bumpstead, Dr Neil Wooding, Ms Siobhan Carey and Mr Sean Whellams
8 13:55-14:25 30 mins	The ONS website	SA(17)24 Ms Laura Dewis
9 14:25-14:55 30 mins	Update on Brexit	Discussion Mr Robert Bumpstead and Mr William Laffan
10 14:55-15:25 30 mins	New Code of Practice for Official Statistics	SA(17)25 Mr Ed Humpherson
11 15:25-15:30 5 mins	Any other business	

Next meeting: 29 June 2017, 10:30 to 16:00, Titchfield

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Chief Executive's Report, May 2017

Purpose

1. This report provides the Board with an overview of activity and issues for May 2017.

Summary

2. At the last Board meeting we discussed a significant number of important milestones that had been delivered, contributing to the transformation of UK official statistics. We also recognised that there is some way still to go in moving us from the past position where we have been "skating on thin ice" in many areas to the vision articulated in our *Better Statistics: Better Decisions* strategy.

3. The discussions that took place at the meeting of the Audit and Risk Committee this month provided a clear reminder of the high level of risk we have been carrying in 2016-17 and what still needs to be done to reduce it. There are clear actions we need now to take to reduce risk in the short term whilst keeping our focus on the longer term fundamental transformation we are determined to make.

4. The recent global ransomware attack that has affected many organisations is a reminder of the changing and serious nature of the threats we face.

Review of recent activities

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

    i. We have achieved a 40 per cent response rate for the Census Test. While slightly below target we are confident that we will meet our primary objective to have sufficient information from different population groups to evaluate the possible inclusion of a sexual identity question in the next Census. We have also learned a great deal on the many further issues we wanted to test and will now able to proceed as planned with further analysis and testing ahead of the Census rehearsal in 2019.
    ii. In partnership with DataKind, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) hosted the first ever Welsh DataDive – a high energy marathon-style event where charities work alongside teams of volunteer data scientists to use data to gain insight into their areas of work.
    iii. The first Economic Statistics Centre of Excellence (ESCoE) event was hosted at the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR) where there were presentations from world-leading economic experts including Martin Weale, Leonard Nakamura (on the modern economy), and Erwin Diewert (on cyclical productivity).
    iv. Colleagues across ONS signed a time to change pledge to raise awareness and tackle stigma and discrimination around mental health.
    v. The Five Safes framework and ONS's use of it was nominated for a Digital Leaders 100 Club award.

Future look

6. In the next few weeks, following the arrival of Iain Bell, the senior leadership team will be working actively together to assess the current state of our transformation programmes and to scan the horizon. The post election period will provide a good opportunity to search beyond the time period of our current strategy and look at our plans from "right to left" – that is to start from where we want to be and consider whether the plans we have are the right ones to enable us to get there. We expect to have some useful material available in time for discussion by the Board in July 2017.

John Pullinger, 15 April 2017

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Report from the Director General for Regulation

Purpose

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

Recommendation

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

Discussion

3. Key areas of activity have been:

   i. **Code:** we have a separate item on the Code at this month's Board meeting. We propose to the Board that we should launch the consultation in the week of 19th June.
   ii. **Election:** In contrast to both the 2015 General Election and the EU referendum, we have not received significant demands for Authority comment during the General Election campaign so far.
   iii. **Core regulatory activities:** there are two issues to highlight. First, CPIH: we are working closely with ONS on final elements of meeting Requirements, and will be liaising with the Bank of England and HM Treasury at both senior and working level in the coming weeks. We recommend that the regulatory judgment on National Statistics status is taken at the July Regulation Committee, rather than in advance. Second, student migration: we have taken on board a number of ONS comments on the compliance report, and will meet the ONS team to ensure that the report is complete, and that we understand ONS concerns in full. We will then propose a final report to the July Regulation Committee.

4. The dashboard summary of regulatory activities is at **Annex A**.

Challenges

5. Although the campaign has been quiet from our point of view, the General Election could still create demands for a rapid and authoritative intervention.

6. Our plans for the Code consultation are ambitious – we want to go beyond the core GSS community and advocate the Code much more widely as a definitive statement of how providers of statistics and other data can command public confidence. This will mean that over the consultation period we will be engaging intensively both with the core community and with other audiences.

Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation, 15 May 2017

List of Annexes

Annex A   Regulatory Activities

Regulatory Activities April – May 2017

Economy	Health and social care	Business, industry, energy and trade	Crime and justice
• **CPIH Update:** ONS published an updated version of their Quality Assurance material on 10 May. We will be liaising with Bank and HMT at senior and working levels over the next 2-3 weeks to identify any final concerns. • **Scottish Fiscal Commission:** Meeting new head of Scottish Fiscal Commission (equivalent to OBR), John Ireland • **Regional GVA:** Developing assessment of GVA	• **Round Table**: Holding 3rd Round Table, exploring options for system-level redesign, on 15 May. • **Publications:** Reviewed NHS England decision to postpone publication of key performance statistics until the day after the Election. We are satisfied that this decision was taken by the Head of Profession and not for political reasons.	• No significant activity	• **Producer meetings:** Dates for producer meetings in Belfast and London fixed • **CSAC:** Attended National Statistician's Crime Statistics Advisory Committee meeting • **Review:** After publishing our review of Crime and Justice Statistics, held follow-up meetings with Home Office Strategy and Transformation team and with Nick Ross.

Labour market	Housing, planning and local services	Children, education and skills	Agriculture and environment
• **Migration:** Review of the labour force survey (on reliability of foreign born worker employment rates in the face of falling response rates) to be published in June. In discussion with ONS on revised version of review of student migration. • **NINOs**: Discussing meeting Requirements with DWP	• **Housing Review:** Progressing systemic review and developing proposals to address detailed findings from extensive user engagement (over 50 users) • **Assessment of UK House Price Index:** Assessment well underway, engaged with a number of key stakeholders . • **Housing shortage:** Reviewing Full Fact concern about data from official sources that appear to show that there is no housing shortage. We are sceptical about their analysis but will explore the different sources, and the extent of comparability, as part of our systemic review.	• **Ordinary families:** Wrote to DfE, DWP, HMRC and ONS to commend the consultation on analysing 'ordinary families' and their educational outcomes.	• No significant activity

Population	Culture and identity	Security, defence and intl relations	Travel, travel and tourism
• **Migration Roundtables –** 1st Roundtable to be held in July on employment. Others to follow in Autumn	• No significant activity	• **DfId:** Held seminar with DfID to engage producers with the refresh of the Code.	• No significant activity

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The Government Statistical Service

Purpose

1. This paper provides the Authority Board with an overview of the Government Statistical Service (GSS) in the context of some key challenges.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to discuss the issues outlined in this paper, in the context of three key challenges the GSS faces:

    i.   how can we promote comprehensiveness and coherence across an uncentralised statistical system? (paras 6 to 11);
    ii. how can we raise skills of statistical professionals across government? (paras 12 to 14); and
    iii. how can we ensure the GSS has influence at the most important levels? (paras 15 to 22).

Background

3. The GSS is described in our *Better Statistics, Better Decisions* strategy as:

    "… a cross-government network, spread across a whole range of public bodies, including components of the devolved administrations and UK government departments. Led by the National Statistician, it includes statisticians, researchers, economists, analysts, operational delivery staff, IT specialists and other supporting roles. The GSS community works together to provide the statistical evidence base required by decision-makers, publishing around 2,000 sets of statistics each year, and providing professional advice and analysis to decision-makers. ONS has an important role at the heart of the GSS, providing guidance, support, standards and training."

4. In addition to published statistics, a significant part of the GSS's role is to provide internal analysis and advice to inform policymaking and the management of public services. Some common challenges are:

    i.   challenges in recruitment and retention of statistical staff;
    ii. building capability in data science and wider clarity about longer term career paths for statisticians within and across professions;
    iii. unlocking the potential of data sharing and the Digital Economy Act;
    iv. modernising data collection;
    v.   the impact of Brexit (which varies by department); and
    vi. issues of demand and supply. Demand for data and insight is increasing while at the same time there is downward pressure on public spending.

5. The Government Statistician Group (GSG) is a subset of GSS staff who are recognised formally as meeting professional statistical standards (including qualifications and competencies).

Discussion

Comprehensiveness and coherence

6. The GSS is a relatively decentralised network (uncentralised might be a better term as the system did not develop from a previously centralised model). Statisticians are employed by their departments and are managed within departmental reporting lines. They have a 'dotted line' professional accountability to the National Statistician, via their departmental Head of Profession (HoP) for Statistics.

7. The uncentralised model has advantages – statistical staff benefit from (potentially) being close to the tables where important decisions are made, and are able to respond at pace to emerging information needs, supporting the formation of effective policies. But there are also challenges in ensuring that the statistical system as a whole provides a coherent picture.

8. The GSS is not a legal entity. While it is not a term used in the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*, the legislation does give the Authority Board and the National Statistician a statutory responsibility to safeguard the comprehensiveness of official statistics wherever they are produced. Despite this broad role there are relatively few direct levers over the wider GSS.

9. Over the past two years, central governance of the GSS has been reformed, with the following developments:

    i. publication of the Better Statistics, Better Decisions strategy (which for the first time created a single vision and mission for the whole statistical system, whereas in the past there had been separate strategies for ONS, the GSS and the UK Statistics Authority);
    ii. establishing a National Statistics Executive Group (NSEG) with a cross-GSS remit and GSS members (though it has been observed that NSEG has tended to focus on ONS issues and has found it difficult to get a strategic view across the system);
    iii. creating three Deputy National Statistician roles with responsibilities for cross-GSS leadership;
    iv. introducing ways of working at ONS that aspire to be 'GSS-by-default', which means that wherever possible a system-wide approach should be taken;
    v. simplifying the governance structure, stopping a number of committees and steering groups which were not adding sufficient value (further information on GSS governance is at Annex A); and
    vi. reducing bureaucracy, e.g. by ceasing the requirement for each HoP to provide an annual written assurance report to the National Statistician.

10. While this has freed up time and resource across the GSS, further improvement to coordination and collaboration is required to deliver 'GSS by default'. There are a number of areas where cross-departmental working could lead to better statistics. Rather than attempting to force these issues into a formal committee structure, the approach increasingly adopted is to convene Task and Finish groups. These are deliberately constructed to have the right people at the table, suited to address the challenge at hand.

Example: Health Statistics Steering Group

Health and care statistics in England are produced in a complex system, with multiple organisations publishing different parts of the same picture. A review by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) found that a lack of coherency of health and care statistics can leave users knocking on several doors to find the information they need. Following this, OSR convened a series of round table events with the senior leaders of the various organisations concerned.

The GSS responded by establishing the English Health Statistics Steering Group, comprising senior analysts and HoPs from across organisations. The Group's aim is to develop a comprehensive, quality service to inform policy, enable analysis and research and improve decision making for health and social care in England. The service will be seamless to users, irrespective of the organisation responsible for the data and products. Analysis and advice will be cross-cutting, building on the expertise and knowledge within each relevant organisation.

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11. Other features of the system which help to create a common thread between the various parts of the GSS include:

i. The Code of Practice for Official Statistics, which applies to all official statistics and National Statistics. The regulatory function has a system-wide remit and takes a systemic view across statistical domains. The National Statistics label can be a tool for raising standards and improving coherence across the system (a note on de-designated statistics is at Annex B).

ii. A set of common standards, guidance documents and statistical policies help statistical teams carry out work in a professional and consistent way, and in accordance with the Code.

iii. Central services provided by ONS to the wider system, including methodology, good practice advice, recruitment and training. In future this could also include online collection and/or dissemination platforms.

12. Another challenge to the coherence of UK statistics is devolution and the diverging effect it has on the UK policy landscape. The Inter Administration Committee, which promotes coherence across the devolved administrations of the UK and resolves inter-administration issues, actively considers the effect of devolution. A further discussion on devolution and official statistics is scheduled for the next Authority Board meeting.

Skills and capability

13. The Authority's former Committee for Official Statistics (COS) dedicated much of its attention to the capability of the GSS. From July 2008 to July 2014, COS was chaired by the Authority's Deputy Chair for Official Statistics and had a remit to provide strategic oversight of the official statistics system in its entirety.

14. COS identified the following issues as priorities for improving GSS capability:

i. *Workforce profile*: Reversing the perceived trend that numbers of statisticians at Senior Civil Service posts was falling, despite an overall increase in the number of staff within analytical professions. This trend was difficult to be certain of due to incomplete data on staff numbers and seniority.

ii. *Recruitment*: Improving the quality of recruitment, including persuading outstanding graduates that statistics was what they wanted to do and that it offered an attractive and rewarding career.

iii. *Development*: Encouraging GSS staff to build skills beyond traditional statistical competencies, such as in new data science techniques and in leadership and communication.

iv. *Engagement and collaboration*: Increasing engagement and collaboration beyond the statistical community, including beyond government. It was suggested the GSS was reasonably good at internal collaboration, but could improve at working with outside entities such as those in the private sector that collect relevant data.

15. Since then, responsibility for developing the capability of the GSS has been brought together in ONS under the GSS Professional Support team, within the remit of the Deputy National Statistician for Data Capability. A note on their work to improve capability is at **Annex C**. Some data on GSG headcounts is at **Annex D.**

Influence beyond the GSS

16. Within government there is a wider community of analytical professions, of which the GSS is one part. The analytical professions are well established and well respected within the Civil Service, and demand for analytical resource has never been greater.

17. Despite this, there is scope to improve the influence of the GSS and the other analytical professions at the highest levels of Government. This would give analysts greater visibility and traction with the top of the Civil Service, and allow consideration of collective capability including the development and deployment of talent.

18. The wider analytical community includes:

i. *Government Operational Research Service (GORS):* Helping people find solutions to complex problems through problem structuring and mathematical and statistical modelling to understand real-world systems, policy options and impacts.

ii. *Government Social Research (GSR):* Understanding the potential and actual social impacts of policy decisions/practice, including understanding public perceptions and the opportunities for behaviour change. Advising across government on research methodologies and ethics.

iii. *Government Economic Service (GES):* Maximising welfare from scarce resources. Microeconomics does this by providing decision metrics for choosing one option or course of action over another; macroeconomics does this by fostering prosperity, high employment and stability across the economy.

iv. *Government Science and Engineering (GSE):* Applying science and engineering knowledge to understand problems and develop policy solutions, including the application of knowledge from individual specialisms.

19. Each of these disciplines secures skilled and professional staff through rigorous recruitment procedures; adherence to competency frameworks specific to that discipline; and continuous development programmes.

20. The other professions make an important contribution to the GSS and there are signs that collaborative working is increasing. For example, the professions share learning and recruit data scientists together.

21. Across the professions leadership is provided by:

i. *the Heads of Analysis group*: a meeting chaired by Tom Scholar (Permanent Secretary at HM Treasury) and comprising the leaders of each of the five analytical professions (including the National Statistician as Head of the GSS); and

ii. *the Departmental Directors of Analysis Network*: chaired by the National Statistician and comprising around 20 senior departmental analysts from across professions.

22. Over time, and particularly in recent years, the boundaries between the analytical professions have blurred. Most departments now have a single director of analysis (not always at Director level) who leads the work of teams drawn from various professions working collaboratively. This has enabled flexible recruitment and deployment of staff and made it easier for colleagues outside the analytical professions to find the right expertise to advise them and contribute to their work.

23. There is currently a proposal under consideration to recognise a single Analytical Function, as a model of collective functional leadership. Existing analytical professions would continue to operate as before, but would actively contribute to a government-wide function.

Joe Cuddeford, Central Policy Secretariat, 15 May 2017

List of Annexes

Annex A   GSS governance
Annex B   De-designated National Statistics
Annex C   Statistical Capability Developments – for Statisticians across Government
Annex D   GSG staff numbers
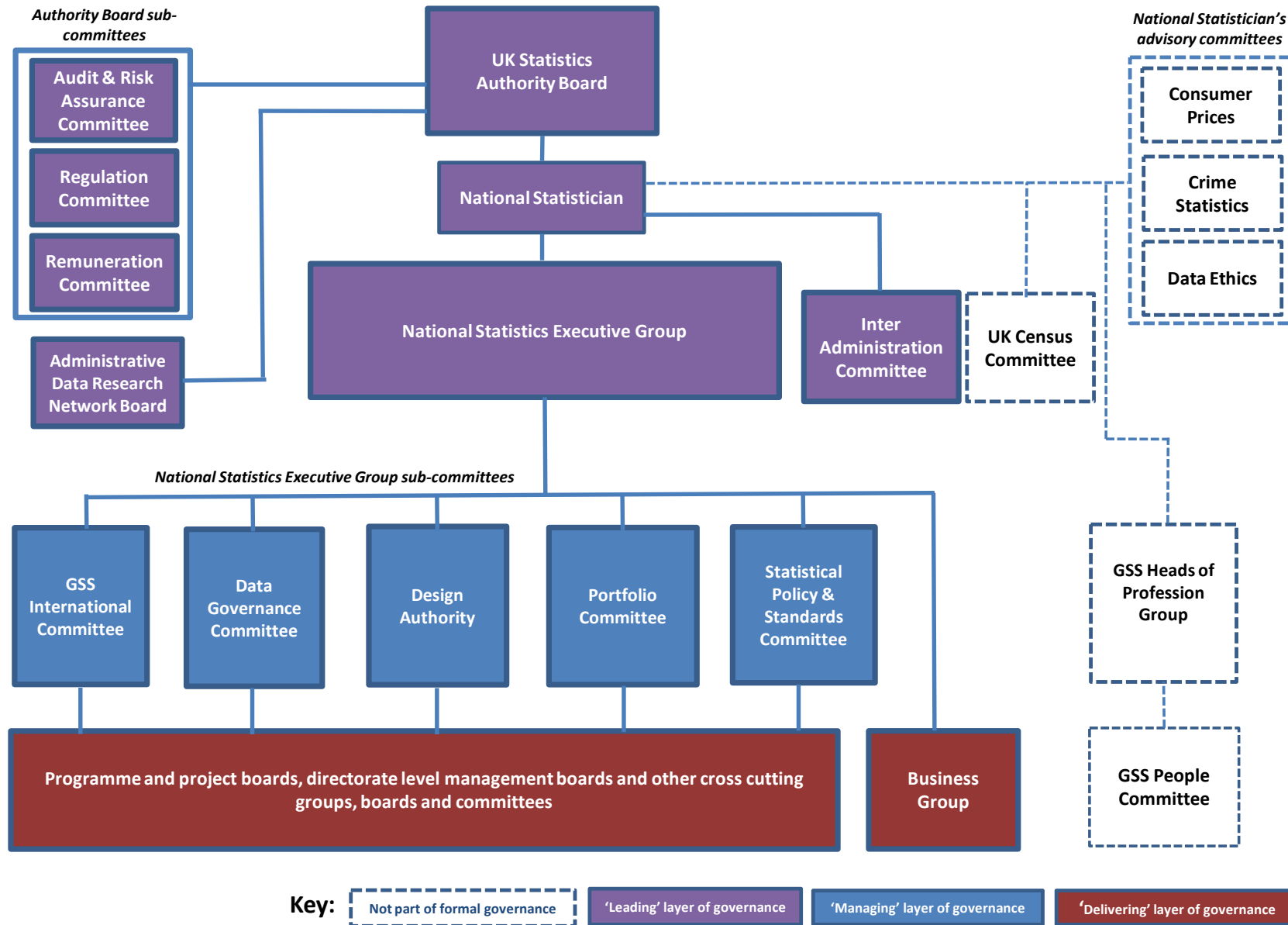
Annex A   GSS governance

Background

1. Following the appointment of John Pullinger as National Statistician in the summer of 2014, a new senior leadership structure for UK Statistics was introduced. This saw the creation of three Deputy National Statistician positions with responsibility for helping the National Statistician discharge his responsibilities across the entire statistical system. The role of the National Statistician was refocused more clearly as the Chief Executive of the Authority and ONS, with a remit for statistical delivery across the whole GSS, and clear accountability to the Authority Board. In parallel the Board took steps to make even clearer the distinct role of the regulatory function.

2. A review of governance in autumn 2014 established a number of core principles: that decision making should be simplified; decisions should be made at the right level; and, wherever possible, governance should provide greater integration between the UK Statistics Authority, the Office for National Statistics (ONS), and the Government Statistical Service (GSS).

GSS by Default

3. The Statistics Act left unchanged the un-centralised nature of the UK official statistics system. Each government department that produces official statistics has a GSS Head of Profession, who leads and manages the statistical activities within their own department[1]. They are accountable to their departmental management for day to day delivery, but also have a professional accountability to the National Statistician as the Head of the GSS.

4. Part of the rationale for the governance reforms introduced in 2014 was to bring ONS and the wider GSS community closer together. The principle of 'GSS by default' has been applied to the entire governance model. The National Statistics Executive Group (NSEG) is the primary executive leadership forum for the GSS, and its system-wide remit is reflected by its membership which includes two GSS Heads of Profession. Sub-committees of NSEG also have a GSS wide remit to varying degrees; for instance the Statistical Policy and Standards Committee (SPSC) has a particularly strong GSS role due to its focus on policies and standards, while the Portfolio Committee is focussed on ONS due to its role in managing the ONS investment fund.

5. In addition to the formal committee governance, all GSS Heads of Profession are invited to attend a quarterly meeting, chaired by the National Statistician. The Deputy National Statisticians also attend, as do some senior ONS staff and the Director General for Regulation. These quarterly meetings are used to:

   i.   cascade, communicate and share best practice,
   i.   engage the GSS leadership in the development of thinking,
   ii.   discuss issues and help find solutions, and
   iii. maintain relationships and galvanise collective leadership of the statistical system.

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[1] Some smaller departments and arms' length bodies have a 'lead official' with accountability to a Head of Profession from their sponsor department.

UK Statistical System Governance Map

6. The governance diagram on the previous page sets out the main groups and their relationships. Those that are most relevant to GSS governance are described below.

National Statistics Executive Group

7. The National Statistician chairs NSEG, the top level executive committee in the UK statistics system. NSEG supports the National Statistician in the discharge of his responsibilities as National Statistician, Chief Executive and Accounting Officer of the Authority and as the Head of the GSS. It has a cross-cutting remit across the UK statistical system to help achieve the collective mission and strategic objectives of the official statistics system. However, it has been highlighted that the group is often focussed on ONS issues.

8. NSEG comprises of the National Statistician, the three Deputy National Statisticians, the Head of Communications, the Director of Finance, the Authority's Chief of Staff and two Heads of Profession from the GSS. The National Statistician also nominates two additional voluntary members to attend meetings. Three ONS Directors, on rotation, also attend meetings. NSEG usually meets on a monthly basis to discuss:

   i.   major ONS projects and programmes and risks;
   ii.   ONS financial performance to budget;
   iii. key activities and decisions taken by its sub-committees; and
   iv.   other management information.

Heads of Profession Group

9. A quarterly forum chaired by the National Statistician and attended by the GSS Heads of Profession, the Deputy National Statisticians, the Director General for Regulation and some senior ONS staff. These meetings are used to cascade, communicate, engage, discuss issues and galvanise collective leadership of the statistical system.

Inter Administration Committee

10. An Inter Administration Committee (IAC), comprised of the National Statistician (chair) and the Chief Statisticians from the Devolved Administrations, meets quarterly to promote coherence across the administrations and resolve inter-administration issues. The IAC works within the context of the Concordat on Statistics[2] between the UK Government (including the UK Statistics Authority and Office for National Statistics) and each of the Devolved Administrations. The Concordat outlines the ways in which the four nations work together in relation to the production of statistics, for and within the UK, statistical standards and the statistics profession.

Statistical Policy and Standards Committee (and sub groups)

11. The Statistical Policy and Standards Committee (SPSC) supports the National Statistician in promoting and safeguarding the quality of official statistics across ONS and wider GSS. It meets quarterly and has three main responsibilities:

   i.   advising on legal obligations which affect statistics;
   ii.   developing and putting into action statistical policies and standards; and
   iii. improving the quality of statistics.

12. Membership includes Heads of Profession for Statistics in Government departments, a representative Chief Statistician from the devolved administrations (Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland), and senior statisticians from across the GSS. The Committee is

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[2] https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Concordat-on-Statistics_FINAL.pdf

chaired by the Head of Profession for Statistics at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), David Fry.

13. The SPSC is further supported by the work a number of sub-groups, as shown in the diagram below.

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                    │  Statistical Policy  │
                    │    and Standards     │
                    │     Committee        │
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│Registers│ │Advisory │ │Statistics│ │and      │ │and      │
│Group    │ │Committee│ │Harmonisation│ │Geography│ │Dissemination│
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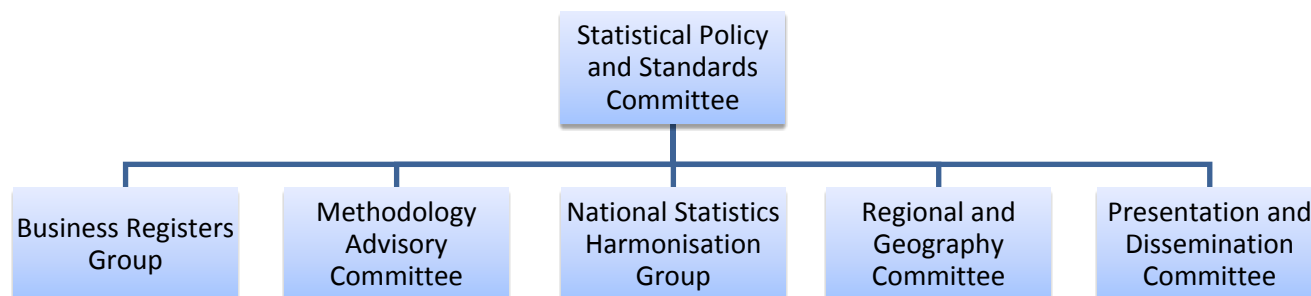
GSS International Committee

14. The GSS International Committee (GSSIC) is chaired by Ian Cope. Changing international circumstances following the EU referendum mean the Committee has recently (March 2017) reviewed and refreshed its role and membership.

15. The Committee has responsibility for coordination and strategic leadership in international affairs in official statistics in order for the GSS to have the capacity to exert its influence and make its contribution to international statistical development, in the interest of the B*etter Statistics, Better Decisions* strategy.

16. Its primary role is to guide and steer the international strategy of the GSS, which incorporates the strategic UK position with respect to engagement at all international statistics forums.

People Committee

17. A forum leading on GSS and GSG People issues, providing: advice on the development of people policies and practice, advice to HoPs on people issues for decision-making, the development and ongoing review of key reference documents such as the GSG Competency Framework and Continuing Professional Development policy, oversight of core statistical training programmes and GSS Recruitment.

UK Census Committee

18. This is a quarterly meeting with the same membership as the Inter Administration Committee, which meets to coordinate Census activity across the UK.

National Statistician's Data Ethics Advisory Committee

19. In November 2014 the Authority Board agreed that a Data Ethics Committee (NSDEC) should be established to act in an advisory capacity to the National Statistician on matters relating to policy and case work relating to ethics, and ensure transparency of the access, use and sharing of data. The chair of NSDEC is Ian Cope.

20. Specific responsibilities of the NSDEC include to:
    i.   provide ethical consideration of proposals to access, share and use data;
    ii. advise on individual policies and projects against NSDEC's ethical principles;
    iii. develop a consistent ethical framework for relevant projects related to official statistics;
    iv. promote transparency around data shares; and

v.   provide ethical advice on other data issues within the National Statistician's remit, which includes his role as head of the Government Statistical Service.

21. At the invitation of the Chair of the Administrative Data Research Network Board, NSDEC will also provide ethical consideration for government and third sector researchers wishing to access the ADRN.

Annex B   De-designated National Statistics

1. Where sets of official statistics do not maintain the high standards expected by the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*, acting on advice from the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) the Statistics Authority can remove their National Statistics status. In some cases National Statistics status will be removed after a producer body approaches the OSR when its statistics have temporarily fallen below expected standards – for example through error or during a change in methods. In other cases removal follows a fuller assessment, which has resulted in a range of actions for the producer body to implement before National Statistics status can be reinstated.

2. Tables 1 to 4 overleaf provide details of the 28 occasions when the National Statistics status has been removed from a set of official statistics, along with updates commissioned from each of the Heads of Profession in the relevant departments.

3. Some key points from this are:

   i. It should not be assumed that de-designation necessarily represents a cause for concern. Over the last couple of years, OSR has encouraged providers to take ownership of their own designations: where they have concerns about a particular set of statistics, OSR welcome them a requesting a de-designation. Other de-designations are driven by OSR analysis through assessments.

   ii. Of the 11 outputs seeking re-designation, on the whole, departments seem confident of re-designation, as reflected by the predominance of green and amber RAG ratings. The expected period from de-designation to re-designation varies from 1-3 years, with the longest being Crime Statistics in England and Wales being potentially four years.

   iii. There are 10 outputs that departments are not seeking re-designation of, with various reasons. Some have de-designated voluntarily at the departments own request due to data quality or the public value of the statistics.

   iv. Since the first de-designation in 2011, only four outputs have been re-designated. Each has taken at least a year, but the longest took 26 months.

   v. There have been three sets of statistics that have been temporarily de-designated for releases of a particular month. Of these, one (UK Trade Statistics) has since been de-designated indefinitely, and ONS is seeking to re-designate.

Table 1: Seeking re-designation

	Department	Statistics	Date of de-designation	Expected date of re-designation	RAG	Other comments (from Heads of Profession/department)
1	Education	**Statistics on Unlawfully Large Infant Class Sizes**	11 March 2015	April 2017	Green	These were recently assessed by UK Statistics Authority as part of Schools Pupils and their Characteristics published a couple of weeks ago. We have some further actions to complete by April to achieve the re-designation but we are hopeful this will be achieved.
2	Home Office	**Statistics on Crime Outcomes (formerly Detections)**	15 July 2014	At the same time as ONS's police recorded crime (PRC).	Green	As the de-designation was removed with that for PRC it should be re-designated at the same time.
3	Natural England	**Milk utilisation statistics**	7 April 2017	Ready for 8 June 2017 publication.	Green	Hope to resolve methodology issues in about 8 weeks, then seek re-designation. Good progress so far and we have dedicated resource to complete the task.
4	NHS Digital	**Community Care Statistics: Social Services Activity, England**	25 February 2016	2018/2019	Amber	Original plan was this calendar year; data quality issues mean it will be 2018 or 2019 when we have had more time to work with data providers to support them in providing higher quality submissions and we have also developed the presentation. We may look to merge with another publication
5	NHS Digital	**Statistics on Inpatients formally detained in hospitals under the Mental Health Act 1983, and patients**	9 October 2014	2018, once there is confidence in the quality of the new Mental Health Services Dataset for producing summaries	Amber	Quality of submitted data not fully within our control although we can employ levers and incentives. We are actively working with CQC (who have responsibility for monitoring uses of the Mental Health Act) to improve the quality of data and with UK Statistics Authority Monitoring and Assessment Team (Pat Macleod) to agree the focus for re-designation considerations. NHS Digital is looking to move to a smaller, more focused portfolio of National Statistics that covers key series of

	Department	Statistics	Date of de-designation	Expected date of re-designation	RAG		Other comments (from Heads of Profession/department)
		subject to supervised community treatment		around detention			significant public value, in addition to quality and trustworthiness. This is likely to lead to a reduction in overall numbers of National Statistics. I am in the process of exchanging letters with Ed Humpherson around Ophthalmic Activity Statistics which we are looking to de-designate as part of this.
6	ONS	**Statistics on Construction Output and New Orders**	11 December 2014	Aiming for re-designation in Summer 2017.			An article outlining improvements will be published in due course.
7	ONS	**UK Trade Statistics**	14 November 2014	July 2017	Amber	Green	We anticipate getting re-designated in July. We have completed all the requirements form UK Statistics Authority and I believe these are to an acceptable standard. UK Statistics Authority have indicated that they will need user confidence to have been restored before they would re-designate Trade as a National Statistic. I have had good engagement with users and recognised that they have indicated that a longer period of error free data (at least 6 months) would give them full confidence. Nevertheless I don't think they would make comments that would block re-designation.
8	ONS	**Consumer Price Index Including Owner-Occupiers' Housing Costs (CPIH)**	14 August 2014	13 July Regulation Committee	Green		The UK Statistics Authority Regulation Committee met on 16 February to discuss the CPIH evidence. They have decided not to re-designate CPIH as a national statistic at this stage. They are looking for CPIH to establish itself over a longer period of time, and want to see how the index behaves in the current economic context. They have also identified further areas to improve, such as the QAAD which needs more quality assurance information on the non-administrative data sources, and updates to the rental article and information on OOH weights. They have also suggested that our rationale for rental

	Department	Statistics	Date of de-designation	Expected date of re-designation	RAG	Other comments (from Heads of Profession/department)
					Green	equivalence needs to be more balanced, and that we have more work to do engaging users. John Pullinger and Nick Vaughan met with the RPI/CPI User Group on 24 February to discuss the re-launch of CPIH. We are working towards the April Regulation Committee for reassessment.
9	ONS	**Statistics on Crime in England and Wales**	15 January 2014	Late 2017	Amber	Police Recorded Crime are the de-designated statistics. Not planning to seek re-designation at present, but if all goes well hope to do so in 6 months or so.
10	Scottish Government	**Scottish Input-output tables and multipliers**	15 June 2015	In due course. In line with the UK I-O tables – possibly 2018.	Green	All dependent on inclusion and quality of the Purchases Inquiry results.
11	Welsh Government	**Statistics on homelessness in Wales**	26 July 2016	We're hopeful to seek re-designation towards the summer 2017 when we have a whole year of data for 2016-17.	Green	The reason for the de-designation was because of known data issues that arose following a large change to definitions in 2015-16 as a result of a move to capturing prevention activity. The Welsh Government hope that the measures they have in place will lead to us having overcome these issues by the end of 2016-17.

Table 2: Not seeking re-designation

	Department	Statistics	Date of de-designation	Other comments (from Heads of Profession/department)
1	NHS Digital	**Statistics on General Ophthalmic Services Activity in England**	9 March 2017	De-designated at own request.
2	NHS England	**Statistics on NHS Hospital Activity**	18 May 2015	The intention is to move to greater use of individual level data and move away from the aggregate collections (of which Hospital activity is one). At some point during 2017/18 we hope to transfer to using SUS as the basis for hospital activity data rather than the current aggregate collection, and continue with a cut-down aggregate collection focusing on referrals data and any other data lines which aren't captured in SUS.
3	ONS	**Statistics on the Claimant Count**	10 June 2015	Becoming less relevant due to Universal Credit roll out.
4	ONS	**Retail Prices Index**	14 March 2013	
5	Scottish Government	**Statistics on Domestic Abuse Recorded by the Police in Scotland**	5 October 2015	Our domestic abuse product is based on a database system within Police Scotland that is under ongoing development, so we do not believe it appropriate to be seeking NS designation on this product at present.
6	Scottish Government	**Statistics on Firearm Certificates in Scotland**	5 October 2015	Firearm Certificates have transferred to Police Scotland (who are not producers of OS), and has a relatively low profile as a statistical product – so do not believe there is the demand to have this re-designated.
7	Scottish Government	**Statistics on Offences Involving Firearms in Scotland**	15 June 2015	We are considering the eventual amalgamation of the Firearm Offences product into the overall Recorded Crime bulletin (which does have NS status). Given other priorities that's unlikely to be this year – but confirms we've no plans to re-visit the designation of this product in its own right.
8	Scottish Government	**Statistics on Child Protection Referrals in Scotland**	2 December 2010	We no longer collect data on Child Protection Referrals so won't be seeking re-designation.

	Department	Statistics	Date of de-designation	Other comments (from Heads of Profession/department)
9	Welsh Government	**Fly-tipping Statistics for Wales**	25 February 2015	
10	Work and Pensions	**Statistics on National Insurance Number Allocations to Adult Overseas Nationals**	26 January 2017	We do welcome the recommendations from OSR on our NINO series, and are undertaking a range of work to address the comments, which we have shared with OSR colleagues. This has resulted in fairly positive noises from OSR, informally suggesting that we are at least half way towards meeting all the criteria.

However as we move towards a revised Code of Practice, and in the spirit of looking at National Statistics accreditation on thematic grounds – looking at statistics in the whole, rather than as separate counts, I was musing if indeed seeking re-accreditation for just the NINO series is the right thing to do at this time.

I have considered user consultation, an area OSR picked up on. We are currently involved in the wider consultation on migration statistics under ONS' lead, looking across the piece, so I am thinking that specific user engagement on this single series would not add much value at this time. NINO stats are a count of a DWP operational activity. On their own, there is not much more we can measure – but as a combined piece of the jigsaw, society can get a much richer picture of what is happening – and this aspect is already covered by ONS' wider user engagement.

So in summary I think it's best to pause any reassessment of the NINO series and instead we focus our energies on Migration statistics as a whole and plans announced recently by ONS to improve the evidence base of international migration statistics using a range of Government administrative data. This would be seem more in line with the future direction of the Code of Practice. |

Table 3: Re-designated

	Department	Statistics	Date of de-designation	Date of re-designation
1	Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy	**Construction Cost and Price Indices**	17 February 2011	1 November 2012
2	ONS	**Statistics on Overseas Travel and Tourism Expenditure**	14 November 2014	15 May 2015
3	Scottish Government	**Statistics on Scottish Police Recorded Crime**	31 July 2014	27 September 2016
4	Transport	**Road Freight Statistics**	15 October 2014	19 December 2016

Table 4: Temporarily de-designated

	Department	Statistics	Date of de-designation	Date of re-designation	Other comments (from Heads of Profession/department)
1	Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	**UK Milk Price Statistics**	14 July 2016		Applied to February 2015 and 2016 statistics notices, not the series as a whole. At this point in time, these statistics are still designated as National Statistics.
2	HMRC	**Statistics on UK Overseas Trade with the EU for April 2014**	20 June 2014	June 2014	
3	ONS	**UK Trade Statistics for April 2014**	18 June 2014	25 June 2014	

Annex C   Statistical Capability Developments – for Statisticians across Government

Capability developments for Statisticians across government, is steered by the GSS People Committee. It meets quarterly and discusses current issues and priorities for developing the statistical profession and often other analysts. Membership is through a constituency approach so that each department is represented. The GSS Professional Support team (at ONS) has played a key role in researching, developing, improving and implementing new capability priorities, steered by the GSS People Committee. For example:

a) The GSG Competency Framework was reviewed and implemented in March 2016. The competency framework for statisticians across government was refreshed to better illustrate the competencies required by innovative and impactful statisticians across government. The work was undertaken via a cross-government working group, led by the GSS Professional Support team.

b) A review of the mandatory training for the statistical profession was undertaken in 2016 to ensure that these courses aligned to the new GSG Competency Framework. There are three mandatory courses for professional statisticians: Induction; GSG Foundations course; and the Career Checkpoint course.

c) Centralisation of the recruitment and development of the Statistical Fast Stream. This commenced in the 2016 recruitment rounds. Statisticians are now centrally recruited and managed via Civil Service Resourcing (along with other fast stream professions). Fast Streamers are recruited onto a 4-year pathway, with training, mentoring, and secondment opportunities. This dedication was not previously possible.

d) Diversity and Talent. By June 2017, an interim dashboard, showing GSS/GSG talent and diversity metrics will be published. The GSS Professional Support team is evaluating the best way to monitor talent and diversity across the GSS and sits on the cross profession Analytical Talent Group. This enables a more effective review of the GSS Diversity Network work streams and enables realistic diversity targets to be set for the future alongside other analytical professions.

e) Loans and Secondments. The approach is to allow both inward and outward moves without creating resource gaps. GSS staff are already encouraged to consider secondments to the BBC and Full Fact. Further opportunities are being investigated for secondments with external organisations like Local Authorities (facilitated by DCLG). In 2017 there will be a focus on establishing opportunities for regional department staff moves as well as international secondments/swaps (e.g. Statistics Netherlands and Statistics Canada).

f) Work to review the qualifications pathway for GSS staff wishing to join the statistical profession (or just wishing to upskill) is underway. Levels 3 – 7 are under review (A-Level through to MSc) and are at different stages of development.

g) Level 3 learning is currently being scoped out, containing relevant Continuing Professional Development modules and/or accreditation. This complements A-Level courses which have been procured for delivery at ONS Newport and Titchfield sites.

h) Level 4 Data Analytics Apprenticeship programme (Wales). This was implemented in September 2016 following an ONS tendering process. The first Data Analytics Apprentices were recruited into the Data Science Campus and Welsh Government Sep – Dec 2016. This is now being extended into England.

i)   Level 4 Diploma in Data Analytics. We are currently looking to make the Apprenticeship training more widely accessible to all who are interested across the GSS.

j)   Level 6 Data Analytics Apprenticeship programme (England and Wales). Work to procure this programme is currently in train. We will also look to how we might make the training more accessible beyond the Apprentices.

k)   MSc in Data Analytics for Government (Level 7) has been developed and tendered, with three Universities successfully bidding: University College London, Southampton University and Oxford Brookes University. These will be managed via an ONS Framework agreement, and delivery will commence in September 2017.

Ceri Regan, GSS Professional Support

Annex D   GSG staff numbers (provided by the GSS Professional Support Team)

Table 1: Statistician GSG Members by Department

Department	SCS	Non -SCS	Total
CO	1	5	6
BEIS	3	73	76
DCLG	2	46	48
DCMS	0	7	7
DfE	3	128	131
DEFRA	2	29	31
DfID	1	49	50
DfT	4	41	45
DWP	3	187	190
DH	4	61	65
FSA	0	2	2
HSE	0	16	16
HSCIC	0	91	91
HMRC	4	152	156
HMT	0	19	19
HO	2	30	32
MOD	1	82	83
MOJ	3	76	79
ONS	23	201	224
OSE	1	21	22
OQER	0	1	1
ORR	0	2	2
other	5	16	21
SG	1	160	161
WG	2	74	76
Totals	**65**	**1590**	**1655**

Table 2: GSG members by grade (FTE)

	May 2013	January 2014	April 2017
Statistical Officer Grades	828	876	885
Fast Stream	134	147	169
Grade 6 & 7	522	532	536
SCS1 (Deputy Directors)	40	41	60
Directors and above	8	8	5
Total	**1532**	**1603**	**1655**

Note: these data were provided to Committee for Official Statistics on an ad-hoc basis and are not available from January 2014 to April 2017.

Table 3: Government Statistician Group by Region

	North East, North West, Yorkshire and the Humber	Wales/ South West	London/ South East	Scotland	East and West Midlands, East of England	Total
Statistical Officer Grades	221	135	376	140	13	885
Fast Stream	28	30	91	19	1	169
Grade 6 and 7	96	81	290	60	9	536
SCS1 (Deputy Directors)	5	18	35	1	1	60
Directors and above	0	1	4	0	0	5
Total	**350**	**265**	**796**	**220**	**24**	**1655**

Ceri Regan, GSS Professional Support

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

The ONS website

Purpose

1. This paper provides a forward look on the development of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) website and the development of our statistical products, to meet the expectation of users online.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to discuss the plans for the development of the website and online statistical products; and provide a steer on the direction of travel.

Background

3. The ONS website was launched on 25 February 2016, to replace a failing service. Given the imperative to provide a new service as quickly as possible, it was launched with just enough features to satisfy the priority needs of our two main user groups – expert analysts and information foragers – and to meet business critical requirements, such as stability and secure publishing of data at 9.30am. A new operating model ensured the website could be quickly and continuously improved once live.

4. The Board endorsed the following priorities for development of the ONS website in June 2016:

   i. To provide users with more opportunities to explore data via the main website rather than relying on the download of spreadsheets;
   ii. rationalise the broader ONS web estate; and
   iii. establish the feasibility of bringing together official statistics from across the wider Government Statistical Service (GSS) onto a single platform to make these easier for users to find.

Discussion

5. The website has been widely accepted as a vast improvement on the previous service. 40 per cent of the user feedback has been positive and the site has maintained the high levels of trust and perceptions of accuracy our users expect of us. Usage has increased by 60 per cent over the last 12 months and the website has been operational for 99.99 per cent of the time, has served 45 million requests per month and there have been 1,473 code changes (improvements) in the first year. These have included improvements to the Application Programming Interface (API), in-site search (**Annex A**) and the range of charts we can publish. Breaches of the Code of Practice have reduced by 65 per cent. In line with Government Digital Service standards, performance against a range of metrics is published at: https://performance.ons.gov.uk/

6. In parallel, we have been running a Beta service for citizen users. Visual.ONS has served more than one million people with articles exploring issues as diverse as international migration, cancer survival rates, EU funding and unpaid work. A further two million people have explored the interactive content, which has been embedded on websites such as BBC News, The Independent, The Guardian, The Telegraph, Daily Mail and many local and regional newspapers. The work has also featured on the front page of the FT and on a giant screen live on BBC One.

7. In addition, the Twitter account @ONS is the most followed social media account of any National Statistics Institute in the world, with more than 246,000 followers. We also actively manage a Facebook channel, publish on LinkedIn and SlideShare and publish a range of e-newsletters.

8. User feedback is the main driver for the prioritisation of work. 1,450 people have taken part in user research since launch. We have also received feedback through stakeholder engagement activity and surveys and are currently looking at how to best capture feedback directly through the website.

9. The key priorities for 2017/18 are to:

    i. enable users to find data at a more granular level (e.g. search by postcode) and to customise and download personalised slices of data. This work has a public Alpha and will move into the Beta stage in May 2017;
    ii. integrate the content and learning from the Beta Visual.ONS project, into the main website to enhance the delivery of all outputs. This will help address the needs of the inquiring citizen;
    iii. work with Full Fact to extend the data available via the API in a way that makes it possible to automate their fact checking work. This will help extend our reach beyond the users of our website;
    iv. improve our visibility in external search engines by adding additional structured metadata to our existing content;
    v. review and enhance the cross site navigation based on detailed analytics data showing where users are getting stuck when trying to find content;
    vi. reduce the time it takes to deploy new versions of the code and adapt the hosting provision to enable the greater customisation of data, as well as building towards the 2021 Census; and
    vii. consolidate the ONS web estate by shutting legacy systems that offer out of date information and no longer meet user needs.

10. The team regularly blog on what we are working on. A roadmap is made available to the public, which sets out our progress against plans. This commitment to working openly has been instrumental in regaining the trust of our critics, and reassures users that we are aware of their currently unmet needs and actively working to address these.

11. Alongside the improvements to the website, we have made the following operational changes to the publishing model:

    i. moved from a decentralised publishing operation with 350 staff publishing content directly to the website, to a centralised team of publishers providing editorial support ahead of publication;
    ii. built a team of in-house data journalists, working alongside our established data visualisation team, to develop a range of high quality visual content which meets industry standards, leading to reuse on third-party platforms. This helps reach a wider audience than that of our own website;
    iii. built an internal technical team of five people to ensure cost-effective sustainable ongoing development of the website;
    iv. introduced a weekly commissioning function, with an Editor in Chief role, to develop new forms of digital content which respond quickly to emerging user needs and topical events;
    v. introduced joint sign-off from subject matter experts in both the digital and statistical domains;
    vi. set up an internship programme for student journalists to work with us and media organisations and placements for computer science students from local universities; and
    vii. worked with HR to iterate our recruitment processes to ensure we are attracting the best possible quality of staff.

12. Next steps include:

    i. developing an editorial policy and guidelines to give staff more confidence in producing commentary which is both impartial and impactful;

ii. designing a course on how to better communicate statistics and develop digital products in multidisciplinary teams;

iii. continuing the work to improve existing products (e.g. bulletins), re-imagine products which curate cross cutting data around a theme and apply user research and testing to develop a new set of products that better utilise the opportunities provided by publishing digitally;

iv. preparing a content partnerships policy and developing our relationship with the BBC and Press Association in particular. There is an additional opportunity to work with the BBC and related production companies (such as Wingspan), to inform their production of both online and broadcast content. This policy will also extend to cover how we can best work across the Government Statistical Service (GSS) and, where appropriate, other government departments to serve user needs;

v. delivering on the intentions of the ONS content strategy to develop 'evidence-based' commissioning. This will include improving our methods of collating the questions that users ask. Inputs might include expert-led forums such as the Need to Know event, improved monitoring of conversations on the social web, and analysis of data captured in a new customer relationship management system;

vi. procuring an analysis of social media networks to increase our understanding of which users we are not reaching;

vii. in recognition of the continuing evolution of digital dissemination activities, work with ONS Directorates to shape their ongoing transformation strategies and implementation plans to ensure the digital skills and resources are in place to deliver the necessary change at scale and pace, and to ensure the plans recognise the cultural challenges to delivery; and

viii. working via the GSS Presentation and Dissemination Committee to align data publishing standards across the statistical system. This will provide a foundation for services to be built which enable data to be more easily found and more accurately utilised, without a need to know which department produces the data.

13. The key priorities (9) and next steps (12) detailed above indicate key themes of work. We suggest a focus on developing the functionality of the dissemination platform to provide consistent exploration of multivariate data and continuing to evolve the statistical products to ensure information provided by the ONS is set in the best digital context. Doing this step first will ensure that c50 per cent of GSS statistical data is in a consistent format, ensuring that the organisation is well set to lead on helping other providers to achieve the same. This, in turn, will ensure that a consistent, interoperable representation of statistics is then possible.

14. A focus on content partnerships and syndication is suggested to ensure that information provided by the ONS has the greatest reach and impact possible. This direction will ensure that the later stages of the ONS content strategy can be successfully enacted and that programmatic access (via APIs) to granular ONS data will be available for others (including fact checking organisations) to build applications and systems on. Some discussions have already taken place for example with Full Fact and the House of Commons Library, but it is expected that there will be a continuing series of meetings to establish where partnerships would be of benefit in achieving this objective.

Conclusion

15. This paper has addressed some of the priority actions that are being taken to build on the success of the ONS website following its first year of operation.

Laura Dewis, Digital Publishing Division, 24 April 2017

List of Annexes

Annex A   Improvements to ONS in-site search

Annex A   Improvements to ONS in-site search

Summary of ElasticSearch changes

Work already completed:

- Updated synonyms and stemming - synonyms are expanded as content is being indexed, and the stemmer uses a more recent and more accurate stemming algorithm.
- New analyser to exclude synonyms during querying
- Search test coverage improved using Cucumber and Gherkin, which is integrated into CI and reports are published
- Implemented full document indexing (including zip files, full pages and binary/proprietary files - PDF, XLS, DOC, ODF, ODS, etc)
- A bug where pages could be indexed multiple times has been fixed
- Content is now indexed concurrently, improving the speed of indexing search updates

Work dependent on other changes:

- New search indexing and querying service has been built, and is awaiting changes to the publishing process to avoid any impact on 60-second publishing times
- Latest version of ElasticSearch 5 including the HTTP API is now supported, but requires infrastructure changes which are in progress
- More in depth logging of search data (terms, pages, clicks) is awaiting infrastructure changes to increase the database capacity

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Code of Practice: Launch of consultation

The consultation on a refreshed Code of Practice for Statistics has now been launched at:

https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/osr/code-of-practice/consultation/.