

**UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY**  
**REGULATION COMMITTEE**

***Agenda***

**13 February 2020**  
**Boardroom, Drummond Gate, London, 13:00 to 16:00**

**Chair:** Professor Anne Trefethen

**Apologies:** -

**13:00 to 13:10 – Non-executive session**

**13:10 to 16:00 – Main meeting**

1	Apologies, minutes and matters arising	Meeting of 05-12-19
2	Update from the Director General for Regulation	Mr Ed Humpherson
3	Strategy, Work Programme and Business Plan 2020/21	Ms Mary Gregory
4	PACAC Recommendations: co-location and separation	Mr Ed Humpherson
5	The Data Landscape and Artificial Intelligence	Dr Catherine Bromley & Ms Emily Tew
<b>Domains/Regulatory work</b>		
6	Gender and Sex Recording	Ms Gail Rankin
7	HMRC quality review – draft report	Mr Mark Pont
8	Labour market statistics – draft assessment report	Mr Job de Roij
9	Systemic Review: Statistical Leadership	Ms Mary Gregory & Mr Oliver Fox-Tatum
10	National Statistics Designation: Update	Mr Ed Humpherson
<b>Other updates</b>		
11	Regulatory Services Update (incl. draft assessment reports and designations)	Mr Mark Pont & Ms Gail Rankin
12	List and analysis of engagement activity	Mr Ed Humpherson
13	Any other business	

**Next meeting: Thursday 23 April, London, 13:00 to 16:00**

### ***Supplementary Information***

List of issues raised with the Authority	Information paper
Forward Look	Information paper

**UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY**

**Regulation Committee**

**Minutes**

**Meeting of Thursday 13 February 2020  
Boardroom, Drummond Gate, London**

**Present**

**Members**

Professor Anne Trefethen (Chair)  
Ms Helen Boaden  
Professor David Hand  
Professor Jonathan Haskel  
Mr Ed Humpherson  
Sir David Norgrove

**Secretariat**

Ms Sarah Cobden  
Mr Rob Lewis

**Other attendees**

Ms Liddy Brankley  
Dr Catherine Bromley (item 5)  
Mr Job de Roij (item 7)  
Mr Oliver Fox-Tatum (item 9)  
Ms Mary Gregory  
Mr Mark Pont  
Ms Gail Rankin  
Ms Emily Tew (item 5)  
Mr Ross Tivey

**Apologies**

None

**Declarations of Interest**

None

## **1. Apologies, minutes and matters arising**

- 1.1 The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as correct and all actions were in hand. The Chair welcomed two observers to the meeting.

## **2. Overview from the Director General for Regulation**

- 2.1 Mr Humpherson introduced his update, noting that the meeting's agenda reflected the current areas of interest for the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR), namely the forthcoming Authority strategy, business planning, and the impact of artificial intelligence on data.
- 2.2 He noted the domain-based items on labour market statistics and the review of quality in HMRC covered a broad range of issues about government statistics in the round. The Committee noted it as a well-structured update.

## **3. Strategy, Work Programme and Business Plan**

- 3.1 Ms Gregory invited the Committee to review OSR's draft business plan for 2020/21. The draft would be updated iteratively as the Authority's strategy was developed. The Committee's views were sought in particular on priorities and areas of focus for the next year, and the section 'what we aim to achieve'.
- 3.2 OSR had prioritised social care and mental health statistics as an area of focus; the Committee suggested expanding this to cover public health more widely. It was noted that OSR's work programme could be affected by activity elsewhere in the Government Statistical Service (GSS). This would impact on priorities and resourcing; OSR would look to be flexible and adapt as needed. There were also some minor suggestions on drafting.
- 3.3 An updated draft of the business plan would be circulated to members by correspondence, including more detail on resource implications.

## **4. PACAC Recommendations: Co-location and Separation**

- 4.1 Mr Humpherson introduced a paper which made a number of recommendations for OSR's website, location and strategy in response to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) report on Governance of Statistics.
- 4.2 The Committee encouraged greater clarity on the language and terminology around 'separation', and felt the issue was more about independence. The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007, in the creation of the Authority, created two roles: the National Statistician and the Head of Assessment (Director General for Regulation). Both report to the Authority Board, and have roles in relation to quality, good practice and comprehensiveness of statistics. ONS was the executive arm of the Board for the production of statistics, and OSR was the executive arm for the regulation of statistics, sitting beneath a single Board. OSR was a fundamental part of the Authority, operating separately from ONS.
- 4.3 In response to the paper's recommendations, the Committee discussed:
- i. clarity of the website recommendations, to give OSR its own digital presence;
  - ii. clearer signage in Newport and Edinburgh offices; and
  - iii. options for achieving a more distinct OSR space in the London office, including dividing walls, better signage, and confidential meeting spaces.

- 4.4 The Authority Chair would be meeting with the newly-appointed PACAC Chair to understand his views on the report. Mr Humpherson agreed to approach the London facilities team to understand what options were available, and bring this back to the Committee for discussion and agreement.

## **5. The Data Landscape and Artificial Intelligence**

- 5.1 Dr Bromley and Ms Tew presented an item on OSR's position in the wider data landscape, and the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on the regulation of statistics. Ms Bromley gave a short presentation on the exploratory work undertaken by OSR to map the players and sectors with an interest in data, statistics and AI, and why regulation is needed in this space.
- 5.2 The Committee discussed the potential role for OSR in this landscape, and how it might operate alongside other bodies such as the National Audit Office and the Information Commissioner's Office. Where machine learning was used in the production of official statistics, OSR would need to understand how this might impact on assessment against the Code of Practice for Statistics. OSR confirmed that its potential role in the AI space would be only in relation to official statistics and where AI was informing public debate; wider uses of AI, for example in medicine, would not be in scope.
- 5.3 The Committee noted the helpful discussion, and requested further clarity on OSR's regulatory role in this space, including some worked examples.

## **6. Gender and Sex Recording**

- 6.1 Ms Rankin introduced a paper on sex and gender recording in the UK censuses. Historically, these terms had been used interchangeably but the public debate around the differences had noticeably increased. This had in part been driven by census development. The approaches to the gender identity questions differed across the three UK census offices, reflecting different identified user needs and research outcomes. The sex question would be common across all censuses in the UK however guidance for transgender respondents was likely to differ. OSR had been engaging with ONS, National Records of Scotland (NRS), and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) as part of a rolling programme of assessment on the censuses.
- 6.2 The Committee acknowledged that this was a polarising, contentious issue with strong views on all sides of the public debate. They discussed:
- i. the impact of digitisation of the census, where guidance is more accessible;
  - ii. making evidence-based recommendations as a result of testing;
  - iii. the importance of harmonisation of census outputs across the UK, and the use of surveys post-census; and
  - iv. the feasibility of the census collecting information on the trans, non-binary, and intersex populations.
- 6.3 OSR would return to the Committee with a paper on harmonisation of sex and gender outputs, including a report on risks and mitigating actions.

## **7. HMRC Quality Review**

- 7.1 Following discussion at the December meeting, OSR presented a draft report on the recent review of HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) quality practices. OSR had

undertaken positive engagement with HMRC as part of the review, and had discussed the report's findings with them. Following discussion by the Committee, OSR intended to share the finalised report with HMRC and publish before the end of March.

7.2 The Committee commented on the report's drafting:

- i. OSR had found some areas of good practice; the Committee recommended including more on this;
- ii. it was recommended that more detail on the corporation tax statistics error be included, which had been a catalyst for the review; and
- iii. a statement on resourcing should be revisited.

7.3 OSR suggested the lessons of this review could be valuably shared more widely across the GSS. An annex to the report would include a list of questions producers could use as a guide when thinking about quality.

7.4 OSR would refine the report based on the Committee's comments and publish. The Committee commended the review as an excellent piece of work by the team.

## **8. Labour Market statistics**

8.1 Mr de Roij introduced an item on ONS' labour market statistics, which included a draft assessment report for discussion and approval. Employment and jobs statistics were some of the more high-profile economic statistics produced by ONS, and had been the subject of much recent discussion by users and in the media. OSR's review had found a number of positives and areas for improvement, which were set out in the draft report.

8.2 In discussing the findings, the Committee suggested the report should include more on data acquisition from HMRC, and discussed ONS' plans for replacing and supplementing some surveys with administrative data, and moving surveys online. It was noted that this review had not included income and earnings statistics, which had been subject of another OSR review.

8.3 Incorporating the Committee's comments, OSR would finalise the report and publish in March.

## **9. Systemic Review: Statistical Leadership**

9.1 Ms Gregory and Mr Fox-Tatum introduced the emerging findings of the systemic review on statistical leadership, which was being undertaken with a view to supporting leadership across government. The outcomes of this review would be more engagement-focused, with a supporting report outlining the findings.

9.2 The Committee discussed further engagement with the High Potential Programme, and OSR's support to discussions with statisticians, decision makers and stakeholders including the Royal Statistical Society. The review had found statisticians to be valued by their customers and users, but were less likely to engage with policy issues at the lower grades, which could impact on their career paths. Training to improve communication and story-telling would be important.

9.3 The Committee was supportive of the proposals set out in the paper and discussion.

## **10. National Statistics Designation: Update**

- 10.1 Mr Humpherson provided an update on the National Statistics designation review, which had been discussed by the Authority Board in January. The paper presented a draft release for discussion and approval.
- 10.2 The Committee discussed the importance of good communication of this work, and suggested including detail on the Bean Review in the release. Following earlier discussion of the work programme, the Committee noted the potential impact of this work on OSR's activities and resources over the coming year.
- 10.3 The Committee agreed publication of the release in March, and for Mr Humpherson to approach members for the advisory group to the Board on this work.

## **11. Regulatory Services Update (incl. designations)**

- 11.1 Ms Rankin and Mr Pont gave an update on OSR's regulatory activities since the previous meeting. The Committee discussed:
- i. the recommendation to designate Northern Ireland Motor Offence Statistics as National Statistics. The Committee confirmed their approval to designate;
  - ii. an update on Trade statistics;
  - iii. the recently-published assessment of the National Rail Passenger Survey;
  - iv. the scoping of a new systemic review on local data; and
  - v. general updates on the rest of the work programme.
- 11.2 The Committee noted the comprehensive update.

## **12. List of analysis and engagement activity**

- 12.1 Mr Humpherson updated the Committee on the OSR leadership team's engagement activities, noting in particular engagement with the Department for International Development on voluntary application of the Code of Practice for Statistics.
- 12.2 The Committee discussed engagement in the housing domain, and the potential for a more integrated look at transport statistics in the round.

## **13. Any other business**

- 13.1 This would be Mr Lewis' last meeting with the Authority. He was thanked for his secretariat support to the Committee.
- 13.2 The next meeting would be on the 23 April 2020.