

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

*Agenda*

**5 December 2019**  
**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 17-10-19
2	Update from the Director General for Regulation	Mr Ed Humpherson
3	National Statistics designation: Update	Dr Penny Babb
4	Strategy, Work Programme and Business Plan 2020/21	Ms Mary Gregory
<b>Domains/Regulatory work</b>		
5	OSR Automation work overview	Ms Mary Gregory
6	Assessment: National Rail Passenger Survey	Mr Oliver Fox-Tatum & Ms Vicky Stone
7	Update on Housing and Planning Systemic Review	Mr Oliver Fox-Tatum & Ms Gemma Keane
8	Skills Systemic Review: communications planning	Ms Louisa McCutcheon & Ms Gail Rankin
9	HMRC quality review	Mr Mark Pont
10	Communicating Uncertainty in Official Statistics	Mr Mark Pont
<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 13 February, London, 13:00 to 16:00**

***Supplementary Information***

List of issues raised with the Authority	Information paper
Forward Look	Information paper
Internal Audit Report	Information paper

# UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

## Regulation Committee

### Minutes

**Meeting of Thursday 5 December 2019  
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  
Ms Vanessa Holden  
Mr Rob Lewis

##### **Other attendees**

Ms Michelle Alderson (item 8, via Skype)  
Ms Nisha Bunting (item 8, via Skype)  
Mr Oliver Fox-Tatum (item 6 and 7, via Skype)  
Ms Mary Gregory  
Ms Gemma Keane (item 7, via Skype)  
Ms Louisa McCutcheon (item 8)  
Ms Katy Nicholls  
Mr Mark Pont  
Ms Gail Rankin  
Ms Vicky Stone (item 6, via Skype)

##### **Apologies**

Dr Penny Babb (item 3)

##### **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.

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

- 2.1 Mr Humpherson introduced his update, noting the recent discussion of co-location and separation at the Authority Board. Mr Humpherson would bring a further Board paper in the new year, looking at how the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) presents separation through branding, online presence, as well as physical location.
- 2.2 The Committee also discussed OSR's activity during the election, including a letter from the Authority Chair to the Leader of the Opposition on crime statistics, and an upcoming statement on homelessness statistics.

## **3. National Statistics designation**

- 3.1 Mr Humpherson introduced this item on behalf of Dr Babb, who sent apologies. In October, the Committee discussed the importance of understanding users' needs from designation, and how well the current system currently serves that need.
- 3.2 In the short term, Mr Humpherson recommended a consultation on renaming 'experimental statistics' to 'statistics in development'.
- 3.3 In the longer term, it was acknowledged that there were benefits and risks to reviewing the current system. The Committee discussed the potential need for an advisory group to discuss long-term changes to designation, and the importance of communicating quality in a clear way to all users of statistics, including non-experts.
- 3.4 The Committee acknowledged the breadth of this work, looking at communication of statistics as a whole, would benefit from considerable discussion with users and stakeholders including Heads of Profession and the National Statistician. The Committee recommended that a paper be brought to the Authority Board for wider discussion.

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

- 4.1 Mr Humpherson and Ms Gregory updated the Committee on developments to OSR's strategic priorities, work programme and business plan. The Committee were invited to comment on the three elements. The discussion primarily addressed the third strand, which explored the option of the OSR moving further into the data regulation space as 'OSDR'.
- 4.2 The following points were made in discussion:
  - i. rebranding the organisation as the statistics and data regulator would be a major undertaking that would need to be carefully considered, in collaboration with stakeholders;
  - ii. OSR could take advantage of its reputation and good relations with key stakeholders in the data space if it took this direction;
  - iii. OSR would need to be mindful of other organisations who operate in this space, and make their remit clear, monitoring (rather than setting) data standards and data ethics;
  - iv. this suggestion would have to be worked into the wider Authority strategy development; and
  - v. feedback on OSR's strategic priorities would be captured by the consultation on the Authority strategy in the round.

## **5. OSR automation work overview**

- 5.1 Ms Gregory introduced an update on OSR's automation work. The Committee heard that OSR had assigned an automation lead to take the work forward, and expand capability across OSR.
- 5.2 OSR would be using automation to support a number of work streams including: supporting casework judgements; informing the work programme; detecting statistical gaps; horizon scanning; identifying user needs; and, monitoring trends in the public debate.
- 5.3 OSR presented the Committee with a list of their initial projects. The Committee was satisfied with the direction OSR had set out.

## **6. Assessment: National Rail Passenger Survey**

- 6.1 Mr Fox-Tatum and Ms Stone updated the Committee on developments to the National Rail Passenger Survey assessment since the last meeting, and presented plans for publication.
- 6.2 The Committee welcomed the updates, and the proposed press notice. On timing, the Committee were content for OSR to decide whether a December or January publication was most appropriate.

## **7. Update on Housing and Planning Systemic Review**

- 7.1 With support from Ms Rankin, Mr Fox-Tatum and Ms Keane introduced a discussion on the Housing and Planning Systemic Review, recommending the closure of the systemic review following the publication a two-year update report. Following formal closure, the domain would continue to monitor under business-as-usual.
- 7.2 The Committee discussed the work undertaken to date, including greater collaboration between statisticians across the GSS, and the importance of monitoring known gaps including land use/ownership, and the private rental sector. The Committee were content for OSR to publish the proposed report, subject to minor changes discussed, and recommended further engagement with the construction sector.

## **8. Skills Systemic Review: communications planning**

- 8.1 Ms McCutcheon and Ms Rankin invited the Committee to comment on plans for publication of the report on post-16 education and skills statistics in the UK. This was the second report of its kind, with the former focused on England-only.
- 8.2 The Committee discussed some of the report's findings, including:
  - i. existing statistical gaps such as those who prematurely leave formal education, including care givers;
  - ii. risks as a result of systemic changes, including skills data collection through the Employer Skills Survey;
  - iii. issues collecting skills data on those trained overseas; and
  - iv. data on apprenticeships, and further education.
- 8.3 The Committee recommended, to obtain maximum traction from the report, to undertake stakeholder mapping techniques and tailor communications.

## **9. HMRC quality review**

- 9.1 Mr Pont introduced an item on the quality review that OSR had undertaken of HM Revenue and Customs' (HMRC's) data validation and statistical processes, by HMRC's request.
- 9.2 The Committee discussed the emerging findings. While there was appetite to improve, OSR noted some issues including undocumented processes, and outdated systems, however it was noted that legacy systems are a common issue across the GSS, and is not unique to HMRC. The Committee discussed whether OSR could use this as a case study for considering quality across the GSS.
- 9.3 While not in a position to make recommendations at this stage, OSR would bring a fuller paper to the Committee for discussion in the new year.

## **10. Communicating uncertainty in official statistics**

- 10.1 Mr Pont updated the Committee on work being undertaken on communicating uncertainty in official statistics, building on a scale put forward by the Winton Centre. Following further testing, OSR hoped to create some guidance for users.
- 10.2 The following points were made in discussion:
  - i. there is a limited extent to which the public understand uncertainty markers in statistics, for example, error bands in opinion poll statistics. OSR should take user needs into account as work continues in this area;
  - ii. one criterion relating to uncertainty not mentioned in the paper, that is key to decision-makers, is the likelihood and scale of revisions that will be made subsequently, and how this is communicated. This could be brought out more strongly; and
  - iii. importance of the prominence of descriptions of uncertainty within statistical releases, not just what is stated.
- 10.3 The Committee noted that this work fitted in well with the previous discussions around designation and communicating quality. OSR would take on the Committee's comments as the work progressed.

## **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 HM Treasury's Country and Regional Analyses of Government Spending as National Statistics. The Committee confirmed their approval to designate;
  - ii. a draft assessment report on Northern Ireland Motor Offence Statistics. The Committee agreed it for publication;
  - iii. an update on the programme of compliance checks and assessments, including those assessments coming to the Committee in 2020; and
  - iv. an update on the systemic review programme, including two new reviews currently being scoped on local data and loneliness, and the adult social care report currently with the Committee for review by correspondence.
- 11.2 The Committee was interested in what work OSR had undertaken around greenhouse gases and climate change. It was noted that OSR had recently published a review of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) air quality and emissions statistics.

11.3 The Committee requested updates on classifications, and income and earnings statistics. OSR committed to returning to classifications. On income and earnings, OSR were bringing a related paper in February. The Committee agreed that Mr Humpherson and the Authority Chair should also discuss with the National Statistician.

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

12.1 Mr Humpherson updated the Committee on his and the OSR leadership team's engagement activities, noting that Mr Humpherson had been more focused on cross-cutting systemic engagement, rather than at domain levels.

**13. Any other business**

13.1 The Committee discussed the feasibility of organising a workshop with stakeholders from across statistics regulation.

13.2 The next meeting would be on the 13 February 2020.