

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Minutes
Thursday 26 November 2020
Via Videoconference

Present

UK Statistics Authority

Sir David Norgrove (Chair)
Ms Sian Jones (Deputy Chair)
Ms Sam Beckett
Ms Helen Boaden
Professor Sir Ian Diamond
Mr Richard Dobbs
Professor David Hand
Professor Jonathan Haskel
Mr Ed Humpherson
Ms Nora Nanayakkara
Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter

Also in attendance

Mr Jonathan Athow
Mr Nick Bateson
Mr Iain Bell
Mr Owen Brace
Mr Robert Bumpstead
Mr Douglas Cameron (Secretariat)
Mr Duane Carey (for item 6)
Mr Raf Cobb (for item 6)
Mr Phillip Davies (for item 6)
Ms Sarah Fisher (for item 6)
Ms Steffi Gijji (for item 6)
Ms Megan Green (for item 6)
Ms Mary Gregory (for item 12)
Ms Sally-Ann Jones (Secretariat)
Mr Will Laffan (for item 11)
Ms Zoe Moore (for item 6)
Ms Alison Pritchard
Ms Emma Rourke (for item 10)
Ms Palvi Shah (for item 6)
Mr Bill South (for item 6)
Ms Ruth Studley (for item 6)
Mr James Tierney (for item 6)
Ms Nicola Tyson-Payne (for item 14)
Ms Amy Williams (Secretariat)

Apologies

Professor Anne Trefethen

1. Presentation from the Northern Ireland Statistics Research Agency (NISRI)

- 1.1 Sir David welcomed Ms Siobhan Carey, (Chief Executive and Registrar General, NISRA) and Mr Chris Ganley to the meeting.
- 1.2 The Board heard about the priorities and challenges facing NISRA, including the work on EU Exit analyses and with ONS on the 2021 Census.
- 1.3 The Board and Sir Ian noted their thanks to Ms Carey and Mr Ganley for an excellent presentation.

2. Apologies

- 2.1 Apologies were received from Professor Anne Trefethen.

3. Declarations of interest

- 3.1 Mr Dobbs had noted a conflict of interest regarding the COVID-19 Infection Survey agenda item in advance of the meeting.

4. Minutes and matters arising from previous meetings

- 4.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 29 October 2020 were agreed.

5. Report from the Authority Chair

- 5.1 Non-executive directors had met prior to the Board. They had discussed statistical quality and legacy transformation.
- 5.2 The Chair reported on his recent activity since the Board last met:
 - i. Sir David had discussed the transparency and communication of data related to COVID-19 with Prof. Chris Whitty, ahead of Mr Humpherson's letter to Prof. Whitty on 5 November;
 - ii. Sir David had met Mr Andrew Bailey, Governor of the Bank of England on 9 November;
 - iii. Sir David alongside Sir Ian had met Welsh Government Officials on 10 November to discuss the Authority strategy; and
 - iv. on 25 November Sir David and the Chancellor of the Exchequer had responded to the joint consultation on reforming the methodology of the Retail Prices Index (RPI). The Chancellor had acknowledged the statistical case for the Authority's proposed changes to the RPI, but was unable to offer his consent to the implementation before 2030. It was noted that it is the Authority's policy to address the shortcomings of the RPI in full at the earliest practical time. The change proposed could legally and practically be made by the Authority in February 2030.
- 5.3 Sir David Spiegelhalter reported on his attendance, in a personal capacity, at the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee Data Transparency and Accountability: COVID-19 Inquiry on 24 November. Both Prof. David Hand and Prof. Trefethen had e-visited the Data Science Campus on 11 November, and agreed the content of the report that Prof Hand presented.

6. Report from the Chief Executive [SA(20)68]

- 6.1 Sir Ian provided the Board with an overview of activity and issues for November, highlighting the following:
 - i. the ONS-Health Data Research UK partnership continued to make good progress on the COVID-19 National Core Studies Programme. It was enabling the UK to use health data and research to inform decision making, as well as accelerating progress to establish a health data and research infrastructure for the future;
 - ii. with regard to improving access to health data the ONS continued to hold meetings with NHS Digital;
 - iii. the developments to migration statistics using alternative data sources;

- iv. the forthcoming Lancet Public Health paper in relation to the COVID-19 Infection Survey; and
 - v. the recently published report by the Economic Centre of Excellence on the Public Understanding of Economics and Economic Statistics.
- 6.2 At this point the following members of the cross-directorate CIS team joined the meeting: Ms Ruth Studley, Ms Palvi Shah, Mr Raf Cobb, Ms Steffi Gijji, Ms Megan Green, Mr James Tierney, Ms Sarah Fisher, Mr Bill South, Ms Zoe Moore, Mr Phillip Davies and Mr Duane Carey. Sir Ian reported on the significant achievement by the team on CIS statistics to support and inform decision making. Sir David commended all those involved for working 'above and beyond' to produce the data, noting that the Board was 'proud' of the achievement and all those involved.
- 7. Report from the Director General for Regulation [SA(20)70]**
- 7.1 Mr Humpherson provided an update on regulation activity since the last meeting. Mr Humpherson reported progress of OSR's review of the approach to developing statistical models designed for awarding 2020 exam results. A further discussion was scheduled for Regulation Committee with the aim of publishing the report in the New Year.
- 8. Report from the Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee**
- 8.1 Ms Nanayakkara reported on the work of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, which had met on 12 November 2020.
- 8.2 Committee members had considered:
- i. the current financial position;
 - ii. the proposed approach to the organisation's response to the Spending Review;
 - iii. the developing risk and assurance framework for the CIS;
 - iv. the progress by the Commercial Service team regarding contract management; and
 - v. progress on the work around statistical quality with oversight by the Quality Committee;
- 8.3 Ms Nanayakkara noted that progress had been made to develop and embed the risk management framework across the organisation. The Committee had been assured by the recent report on the Operational Readiness of the Census, which concluded that the successful delivery of the Census collection was feasible.
- 9. Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme [SA(20)76]**
- 9.1 Mr Bell and Ms Tyson-Payne introduced a paper which provided an update on the programme with a focus on the Operational Readiness for the Census and questionnaire guidance.
- 9.2 Mr Bell reported that the judgement on the judicial review had found that the decision not to include a Sikh tick box under the ethnicity question in the 2021 Census was lawful. Progress was being made to finalise the guidance for the sex question, with the methodology to be considered by the Methodology and Assurance Panel. As noted already in meeting the recent Operational Readiness Review had concluded the successful delivery of the Census collection was feasible, with the team effectively managing the challenges going forward. The digital build and testing were on track and the acquisition of administrative data remained a key focus.
- 9.3 The Board welcomed the update and noted the progress made.
- 10. COVID-19 Infection Survey and Surveillance Studies [SA(20)72]**
- 10.1 Ms Rourke and Mr Bell introduced a paper which provided an update on the COVID-19 Infection Survey (CIS) programme and wider surveillance studies.

- 10.2 Mr Bell highlighted the continued successful delivery and impact of the CIS. The School Surveillance Study had been launched. As noted earlier in the meeting, the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee had received an update on the developing risk framework. The management of complaints had improved with a reduction in the overall escalation of concerns.
- 10.3 The Board heard about the range of work on surveillance studies and ONS's role in analysing data from the CIS and the Opinions and Lifestyle survey. The ONS was leading on the work regarding the coherence of health statistics with the Devolved Administrations and the English Health Statistics Steering Group.
- 10.4 Board members discussed the longer-term strategic development of the CIS and the opportunities to adapt the model to meet a broader range of needs.

11. EU Transition [SA(20)73]

- 11.1 Mr Laffan introduced a paper which provided a further update on the work of the Authority's EU Exit Programme, following on from papers provided to the Board in September and October.
- 11.2 Mr Laffan informed the meeting of the developments and preparations for the end of the end of the transition period. A phased approach had been developed to establish the domestic advisory functions to support the UK's framework for economic statistics. A review of the new arrangements would be included in OSR's work programme. It was noted that these arrangements could not be finalised until the broader UK-EU relationship was clear.
- 11.3 With regard to statistics and analysis the Board heard that ONS was working collaboratively with other departments to ensure government had the latest data and analysis following the EU transition.
- 11.4 The Board endorsed the plans in place following the EU transition.

12. Interventions Policy [SA(20)74]

- 12.1 Ms Gregory and Mr Humpherson introduced a paper which provided a summary of the changes to the Authority Interventions Policy and plans for publication.
- 12.2 Board members discussed the scope, impact and users of the policy. The Board agreed that the draft policy could be published for comment in December.

13. Integrated Data Programme [SA(20)75]

- 13.1 Ms Pritchard introduced a paper which provided an update on progress and structure of the Integrated Data Programme (IDP).
- 13.2 Board members heard about the vision and purpose of the IDP. Plans were in place to develop the full business case by March 2021. A review by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority would be undertaken in the New Year.
- 13.3 The Board noted the update.

14. Strategic Review [SA(20)71]

- 14.1 Mr Bateson introduced a paper which set out the approach to Spending Review (SR). A phased approach would be undertaken for a rapid strategic review of the organisation in the context of the SR settlement. The phased approach had been agreed by the National Statistics Executive Group, and an update had been provided at the recent Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meeting.
- 14.2 Board members noted the approach to the strategic review and would remain engaged as the work progressed.

15. Strategic Business Plan update [SA(20)69]

15.1 Mr Bateson introduced a paper which provided an update on the delivery of the business plan at 31 October 2020.

15.2 The Board noted the report, which was discussed as part of the previous item.

16. Any other business

16.1 The Authority Board would meet next on 15 December by videoconference.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Agenda

26 November 2020, 10:30 to 14:00, via videoconference

Chair: Sir David Norgrove

Apologies: Prof. Anne Trefethen

Attendees: Ms Siobhan Carey (for item 1), Mr Will Laffan (for item 10), Ms Emma Rourke (for item 9), Ms Nicola Tyson-Payne (for item 13),

NED Session: 10:30-11:00

1 11.00-11.20 20 mins	Presentation from Chief Executive and Registrar General for Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency	Ms Siobhan Carey
2 11:20-11:25 5 mins	Minutes and matters arising from previous meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declarations of interest 	Meeting of 29 October 2020
3 11.25-11.40 15 mins	Report from the Authority Chair	Oral report Sir David Norgrove
4 11.40-11.55 15 mins	Report from the Chief Executive	SA(20)68 Prof. Sir Ian Diamond
5 11.55-12.10 15 mins	Strategic Business Plan update	SA(20)69 Mr Nick Bateson
6 12.10-12.20 10 mins	Report from the Director-General for Regulation	SA(20)70 Mr Ed Humpherson
7 12.20-12.25 5 mins	Report from Committee Chair <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audit and Risk Assurance Committee 	Oral report Ms Nora Nanayakkara
8 12.25-12.35 10 mins	Strategic Review	SA(20)71 Mr Nick Bateson
9 12.35-12.50 15 mins	COVID-19 Infection Survey and Surveillance Studies	SA(20)72 Ms Emma Rourke Mr Iain Bell
12.50-13.00 10 mins	Break 10 mins	
10 13.00-13.15 15 mins	EU Transition	SA(20)73 Mr Will Laffan
11 13.15-13.25 10 mins	Interventions Policy	SA(20)74 Ms Mary Gregory Mr Ed Humpherson
12 13.25-13.40 15 mins	Integrated Data Programme	SA(20)75 Ms Alison Pritchard

13 13.40-13.55 15 mins	Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme	SA(20)76 Mr Iain Bell Ms Nicola Tyson-Payne
14 13.55-14.00 5 mins	Any Other Business	

Next meeting: 15 December 2020, 09:15-11:15, via teleconference

Chief Executive's Report, November 2020

Purpose

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

Summary

2. In the face of a second wave, new restrictions and an ever-increasing demand for rapid and robust analysis we have continued to contribute to understanding the spread the virus and the effectiveness of National and Regional restrictions. Equally, November has provided a chance to celebrate inter-faith week and the highest people survey response rate for ONS to date.

Review of recent activities

3. Important developments in recent weeks include the following:
 - i. Further to a request from the Scientific Advisory Group on Emergencies (SAGE) we have been working across government to help understand the effectiveness of the Tiers in controlling the spread of the virus. We have also established a group which will be undertaking analysis as part of understanding and evaluating transmission amongst school children. We will be reporting back to SAGE on both these streams of work at the end of the month;
 - ii. Inter-faith week took place earlier this month, an annual celebration of diversity in faith, belief and non-belief. As part of opening the week's events, I joined other colleagues for a panel discussion to explore the role of faith and belief at work and how it interacts with other aspects of diversity;
 - iii. On 3 November I hosted a Your Call session with ONS staff which was centred on the radical core principle of our strategy. Questions and discussions focussed around use administrative data, recruitment and careers and ONS brand and visibility;
 - iv. The People Survey, which closed at the end of October, has seen its highest organisational response rate of 85 per cent.;
 - v. I have continued to hold meetings between ONS colleagues and NHS Digital as part of improving access to health data. Due to legislative and other barriers, ONS has found it historically challenging to acquire data from NHS digital. Some progress has been made with the General Practitioner Extraction Service (GPES) data, created by NHS Digital as part of the COVID-19 response, now acquired;
 - vi. On 15 November I was interviewed on the Sophy Ridge Show with key discussion points focusing on COVID-19 prevalence, deaths and public adherence to restrictions;
 - vii. I recorded a virtual masterclass for Number Ten on the topic of data and communication in the public sector. This centred primarily around presentation of data as well as strengths and limitations of dashboards;
 - viii. Work is ongoing to adapt our plans on Comprehensive Spending Review in light of the announcement for a one-year settlement.;
 - ix. Following a boost to sample size at the end of October the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey is now seeing a consistent response rate of around 4,300 a week. This will offer new analytical opportunities such as considering differences in behaviours between tiers, countries across Great Britain and between different demographic groups; and
 - x. Over the past month I have continued virtual visits to other departments, presenting to and taking questions from GSS colleagues in the Department for International Trade and Ofsted on our new strategy, Statistics for the Public Good. Earlier last

week I was also joined by the Chairman for a session with colleagues from the Welsh Government. In all engagements it has been fantastic to hear from GSS colleagues and see their work showcased.

Future look

4. As we move into December, I, along with colleagues, will continue to offer insights and analysis on COVID-19 and the end of the transition period. We will also be considering the initial findings of the People Survey.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond, ONS, 17 November 2020

2020/21 October Business Plan Update

Purpose

1. The purpose of this paper is to provide the Authority Board with a supporting narrative to explain progress and in the delivery of the business plan at 31 October 2020.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to:
 - i. discuss the key messages and issues; and
 - ii. review the performance commentary in this paper.

Discussion

Key Messages

3. The key messages this month are as follows:
 - i. Strategic Objectives – the number of Accountability Framework Objectives reporting Amber and Red has begun to increase.
 - Programme progress and milestones – the progress of the key programmes continues to be broadly on track, noting the key actions below to reset the Economic Statistics Transformation Programme (ESTP) and review the scope of the Integrated Data Programme (IDP).
 - Mitigating actions – the sub-headed points below are the key mitigating activities that are being managed to ensure that the overall strategic business plan remains on track.

Strategic focus and ambition

- i. Managing demand – the external demands on the organisation remain high along with expectations around the pace of delivery. Ensuring that we have sufficient horizon scanning capacity; the ability to focus and prioritise our analytical and technical resources on the right areas and sufficient organisational agility will ensure that we can continue to drive improvements in our statistics and impactful analysis that can be measured.
- ii. Economic Statistics Transformation Programme review – a review of the programme and its structure is underway - in the context of the ambitions of the organisation set out in the Spending Review, the resources that have been provided in the settlement and the areas of fragility across the methods and infrastructure that deliver economic statistics.
- iii. Integrated Data Platform – refreshing the scope and programme deliverable following the appointment of a new Director General for Data Capability.
- iv. Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme (CDCTP) – continuing review of preparations for the Census in the context of the pandemic and recent readiness review.
- v. COVID-19 Infection Survey – ensuring that the programme is set up to balance the pace of the delivery, operational challenges and need for long term stability.

Managing resource and people constraints

- i. Strategic Review – as set out in the separate paper for the Board, delivering the scope of the strategic review will ensure the organisation is focussed on its highest value outcomes, is structured to deliver the strategy, and understands its risks and constraints in sufficient detail in the context of the likely Spending Review settlement.

- ii. Resource management – ensuring that the resource prioritisation and management is balanced across the organisation during the forecast period, including securing the necessary changes to budgets at the Supplementary Estimate to bring funding into balance with projected spend.
- iii. Capability – ensuring that we can access the people and commercial capability that we need to deliver the strategy.
- iv. Data acquisition – prioritising the resources for data acquisition towards the critical areas and ensuring that the mechanisms for delivering data are clear and complete – including the data required to support the Integrated Data Programme and COVID-19 Infection Survey and associated analysis.

Understanding risks and exposures

- i. Quality – understanding the quality exposures and impacts that we are carrying and the investment that is required in priority areas with links to the transformation of economic and public policy statistics and analysis.
- ii. Systems – understanding system and process fragilities to ensure we are mitigating risks and delivering outputs on robust. This includes plans to address the resilience of the website, following the outage of 3 November.

Nick Bateson, Director of Finance, Planning and Performance, 16 November 2020

Update from the Director General for Regulation

Purpose

1. This paper provides an update on regulation activity for the Board.

Discussion

2. Key activities since the last Board meeting have been as follows:
 - i. Exams Review: We are now drafting the report and will get feedback from the Regulation Committee on 24 November. The review considers the use of statistical models to award exam grades in all four countries of the UK. It will focus on identifying lessons learned to ensure that statistical models can command public confidence;
 - ii. Briefing on England's lockdown: Following the announcement of England's lockdown, we made a statement on 5 November. Our statement highlighted the importance of orderly release of the material that supports significant briefings. ONS is now providing further support to the Cabinet Office team that prepares the slides;
 - iii. Interventions policy: Following discussion with the Regulation Committee, we have revised the Authority's interventions policy (particularly in the light of experience during the coronavirus pandemic). We are seeking the Board's approval to this revised policy and there is a separate paper for this Board meeting; and
 - iv. Assessments: Since the last Board meeting, we have published assessments of:
 - Department for Work and Pension's Quarterly Benefit Statistics;
 - The Office of Rail and Road's station usage statistics;
 - The NHS Business Services Authority's Prescription Cost Analysis; and
 - The ONS's Business demography statistics.
3. All four assessments highlighted positive features of the statistics, but also identified the need to improve quality and increase user engagement. The Business Demography assessment was welcomed in a blog on the OSR website co-authored by Gavin Wallis from the Industrial Strategy Council and the Council's chair, Andy Haldane.
4. In terms of public engagement:
 - i. we published our annual review of casework, which highlighted the increased volume over the last year. It was highlighted in a piece in the Observer which interviewed Mary Gregory (my deputy) and David Spiegelhalter;
 - ii. we hosted a meeting of organisations who have adopted the Code of Practice on a voluntary basis. This included presentations from the winners of the inaugural Voluntary Adoption awards, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (for their data on building cladding) and the Scottish Fiscal Commission;
 - iii. we have been hosting seminars for organisations that consider the use of algorithms and AI in the public sector. The seminars allowed us to test the emerging findings from our review of exams with experts in the field;
 - iv. we held a session for GSS colleagues on our COVID-19 casework;
 - v. I spoke at Evidence Week at the UK Parliament, (alongside Sir Ian Diamond) which was hosted by Sense about Science and featured questions from the public to chairs of Parliamentary Committees and a panel of experts; and
 - vi. I also spoke at the Algo2020 event on setting standards for algorithms, alongside Emily Tew, who leads automation work for OSR, and David Hand; at the HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) Senior Leaders group about our recent HMRC review; and at an event for the staff of the House of Commons Library.

Challenges

5. The two main challenges on my mind are:
 - i. maintaining OSR's cohesion and resilience remains a priority; and
 - ii. continuing to balance a focus COVID-19 issues with other, more long-standing issues (e.g. business demography, inclusion).

Ed Humpherson, UK Statistics Authority Regulation, 17 November 2020

List of Annexes

Annex A Regulatory Dashboard

Regulatory Activities November 2020 - AB

Economy	Business, Trade and International Development	Population and Society	Children, Education and skills	Crime and Security
<p>Assessments: ONS Productivity statistics Engaging with users</p> <p>Compliance Checks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Published letter to HMRC about Personal Incomes Statistics ▪ Follow-up with HMRC to Quality Review of HMRC statistics ▪ Drafting letter to ONS about its Regional Household Final Expenditure statistics due for publication in the next few weeks ▪ ONS sighted on letter about its CPIH statistics due for publication 18 November ▪ Desk research on Northern Ireland's economic statistics with a view to publishing letter in December ▪ Desk research on ONS double deflation estimates with a view to publishing a letter in January ▪ Met with HMRC about review of Child and Working Tax Credits with letter planned for December <p>Stakeholder Engagement: Met Scottish Fiscal Commission official to mutually update on latest work and hear feedback about productivity statistics.</p>	<p>Assessments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Business Demography Report published, supported by a blog from the Industrial Strategy Council ▪ Annual Business Survey Strategic direction of Assessment agreed – kick off meeting with ONS set for the end of November ▪ UK Trade Balanced Trade asymmetry dataset due to be published on 24 November – regulatory update proposed for December Regulatory Committee. <p>Compliance Checks: Review of ONS Mergers and Acquisitions statistics due to be published on 19 November.</p>	<p>Assessments:</p> <p>Census Workshops with NRS on methods carried out in October. Ongoing engagement with Census offices on development work including greater transparency of harmonised working and guidance for the sex question.</p> <p>Compliance Checks: DWP NINo allocation statistics: re-designation of national Statistics status for NINo allocation statistics published 13 November.</p> <p>Systemic Review:</p> <p>Loneliness: Further engagement with users and producers is being undertaken in light of COVID.</p>	<p>Exam Results Review: identifies the lessons learned from the 2020 exams process. Our focus is on identifying how public bodies can ensure statistical model outputs command public confidence. A dedicated project webpage is providing regular external updates. Activities include report writing and holding seminars with stakeholders in the AI space. Aim to publish the review by 30 November.</p> <p>Systemic Reviews: Children and Young People: Review is on hold until the Exam Results Review concluded.</p> <p>Casework: Media query on DfE School attendance statistics</p> <p>Compliance Check: Graduate Outcomes: Kick-off meeting in December.</p> <p>ICO audit of DfE data protection: Continuing to engage with DfE over their response. Setting up a meeting with ICO to understand if there are implications across the statistics system.</p>	<p>Assessments: We will be kicking off an Assessment of HO police funding statistics in November, hoping to have a draft report ready for the February Regulation Committee meeting.</p> <p>Compliance Checks: We'll start a CC of MOD 'Deaths in service' statistics and of Scottish Government 'Criminal Justice' statistics in the next month.</p> <p>Guidance on data about sex: Discussed at October Regulation Committee. Now planning to bring a revised draft of the guidance to RC in December, and considering a scene-setting blog on the topic in the meantime.</p> <p>Raising awareness of OSR and the Code: Two presentations about OSR for MOD in November – one for producers about the Code and official stats production, and one for producers and policy on using statistics in briefings, with Ministers etc.</p>
Health and Social Care	Labour Market and Welfare	Agriculture, Energy and Environment	Housing, Planning and Local Services	Travel, Transport and Tourism
<p>Assessments: Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) report published 5 November.</p> <p>Submission: Enquiry into response to COVID-19 by Wales Health and Sport Committee</p> <p>Casework: Continues to focus mainly on COVID-19 primarily on evidence to support the national lockdowns. Our public interventions can be viewed on our COVID-19 webpage and correspondence page.</p> <p>Systemic Review: Mental Health initial scoping for Northern Ireland review underway.</p>	<p>Assessment: DWP Benefit Statistics report, planning to publish on 18 November.</p> <p>Compliance checks: Northern Ireland's Benefit Statistics Summary CC due for publication alongside the DWP assessment report.</p> <p>Systemic Review: Poverty Review: new project page on OSR website. This includes information on how users can contribute to the review.</p>	<p>Compliance checks: started desk research for CC of Defra's food defence spending statistics.</p> <p>Systemic reviews:</p> <p>Climate change statistics: scoping identified that development is planned on these statistics which may negate benefits of a review</p> <p>Systemic Review: Food statistics: initial scoping of review of food statistics landscape.</p>	<p>Assessment: Reviewing evidence provided by DfI to address NI planning statistics assessment requirements</p> <p>Compliance checks: Published findings of CC of the Scottish House Condition Survey statistics, reviewing Land use in England statistics and following up on review of English Housing Survey and Leasehold dwellings statistics.</p>	<p>Assessment: Assessment of the Office for Rail and Road's Estimates of Station Usage statistics report published 3 November.</p> <p>Compliance checks: Response to follow up of requirements from compliance check of ONS' travel and tourism statistics published.</p> <p>Scoping: currently scoping future domain projects.</p>

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY BOARD

SA(20)71

Strategic Review in the context of the Spending Review settlement

Purpose

1. Following publication of the five-year strategy ‘Statistics for the Public Good’ and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) Strategic Business Plans (SBP) in July 2020, this paper sets out how we are planning to review the activities of the organisation in the context of the Spending Review (SR) settlement we will receive from HM Treasury (HMT).

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to note:
 - i. the nature of the SR settlement received;
 - ii. the related uncertainty on some additional funding streams;
 - iii. the articulated view on the impact of this settlement on the activities proposed in the SR bid; and
 - iv. the staged process for a rapid strategic review of the organisation to review scope and resources in the context of the SR settlement.

Background

3. In July 2020, the Authority’s new strategy ‘Statistics for the Public Good’ was published alongside the SBPs for the ONS and OSR. The main thrust of the strategy and ONS SBP, from a planning and resourcing perspective, was to invest in cross-cutting analysis and integrated data; secure the core statistics that form the basis for understanding the economy and society; invest in the inclusivity of our data; and streamline the middle and back office functions.

Discussion

4. The rationale for a more extensive strategic review of the business model as set out below is to ensure that we do not stretch our resources too thinly and focus on the driving the organisation towards the overall delivery of the strategy.
5. This will enable us to advance some of the highest priority areas– while meeting the ambitions of the strategy and the clear need for information to manage the current challenges across government.

Scope of the strategic review

6. The aims of the review are to ensure that, in line with the strategy, we can:
 - i. create as much capacity as possible to advance our radical agenda for cross cutting analysis, integrated data and rapid indicators;
 - ii. build our ambitions for our core economic and public policy statistics;
 - iii. ensure that we can build the inclusivity of our data and working culture; and
 - iv. develop a sustainable business model with ongoing investment in our capability, technology, methodology and enabling functions.
7. The first step is to shape our choices and create a shared view on the decisions we need to take. This is likely to need more than one pass, but we can still operate at pace. Then we can determine which activities we are currently able to advance, and which need to be stopped or heavily re-sequenced now to provide maximum capacity to focus on our priorities.

Conclusion

8. The Board's views are sought on the initial view of SR settlement and the scope of the strategic review. This will shape the overall approach and sequencing of activity and ensure that we can drive forward our ambitions in the context of the SR.

Nick Bateson, Director of Finance, Planning and Performance, 13 November 2020

COVID-19 Infection Survey and associated surveillance studies**Purpose**

1. This paper provides an update on the COVID-19 Infection Survey (CIS) programme.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to note:
 - i. the continued successful delivery and high impact of the CIS;
 - ii. recent successful milestones, including the launch of the school surveillance study, the launch of the COVID-19 narrative and work to develop insights into Long-COVID; and
 - iii. that the CIS programme remains at Amber, with work focused to manage key issues around data quality and operational delivery.

DiscussionSurvey Performance

3. The survey performance remains strong and continues to exceed the critical requirement to deliver 150,000 unique tests per fortnight in England, with 344,351 participants now active in the study.
4. Weekly publications continue to show a rise in the infection rate and the incidence, with notable variation across region and age. The upscale of the CIS has enabled sub-regional analysis which is progressing well and will be published imminently. Additional analytical demands to support various government and Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) subgroups are growing.
5. The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) has recently reviewed the management of key risks and issues on the survey and positive progress continues to be made to reduce the overall risk profile. Of note:
 - iv. Oxford University have recently commended the ongoing improvements in data quality on the study. The implementation of new data capture software offering improved data entry error checking remains on track for delivery this month; and
 - v. IQVIA are delivering a strategic quality strategy in mid-November covering how to continually improve quality on an ongoing basis and focusing through to the spring when we will be running both the Census and COVID-19 Infection Survey at the same time.
6. The management of complaints continues to improve. To date, 1.37 per cent of participants is the total cumulative number of complaints. IQVIA have invested in additional resource to the complaints process and this is showing a reduction in the overall escalation of concerns.

Schools Surveillance Survey

7. The Schools Infection Survey (SIS) successfully launched on the 19 October. The first phase of virus and antibody testing across the 125 enrolled schools started on the 3 November. 5076 staff and 6699 pupils are currently enrolled on the study and this number continues to grow each day. Following the model created by CIS, the survey launched as a minimum viable product under exceptional tight timescales and is now undergoing a continued programme of development which will see wastewater testing, outbreak testing and qualitative interviews added in the coming weeks. A dedicated school engagement and communications campaign will also continue to prompt staff and pupil enrolment ready for the next phase of virus and antibody testing at the beginning of

December. The first results from this work will seek to inform the forthcoming SAGE paper on children/schools at the end of November.

COVID-19 Narrative Document

8. This document will tell the story of community infection with the line of sight from behaviour to potential hospitalisation and mortality. We have been working in partnership with the Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC) and Public Health England (PHE) to create a unique compendium of official statistics that reflects a system view. The first edition will be published on Friday 20 November, which has been pre-announced.

Monitoring COVID-19 in Other Settings

9. Universities – The second wave of the Student Behavioural Survey has been analysed, with over 4,000 responses from four universities. This is significantly more than the 1,300 in the first wave, thanks to promotion by the universities themselves. Results are being analysed with key findings on socialising, social distancing, as well as student wellbeing and travel plans for Christmas. Wave 3 will collect data between 16 and 23 November to cover the November increased restriction period. We are working closely with Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), JBC and other partners to map the broader data landscape and identify information gaps to combine into an analytical framework. A deep dive is being scoped with Exeter University.
10. Care Homes – ONS have been commissioned by DHSC to assist in providing a more statistically robust estimate of prevalence for the repeat testing that was rolled out across all care homes in July. ONS are developing a weighting methodology (based on that used for the July analysis) so that the prevalence measure is representative of all care homes, this will sit beside the DHSC Pillar 2 Dashboard.
11. Prisons – the second round of antigen testing of voluntarily consenting staff and residents in 28 prisons across the English closed prison estate has been completed, and the antibody testing for staff is underway. ONS are working with PHE, University of Southampton and the University of Manchester on analysis plans and publication later this year.
12. Ports and Airports – Behavioural insights questions will be added to the core International Passenger Survey (IPS) questionnaire which will go live in December. We are also proposing an additional module for a sub-set of IPS interviews with more in-depth behavioural questions, to go live in early 2021.

Opinions Survey on Behaviours

13. The third wave of the expanded sample has been successfully delivered, with 4,300 responses covering socialising, social distancing, travelling to work, face coverings, hand washing, wellbeing etc. This has already fed into evaluating the impact of the three tiers system in England and Firebreak in Wales. We have produced first results at regional and NUTS2 (e.g. Merseyside, Greater Manchester) level and are looking at changes as areas moved between tiers and into the highest restrictions. Work is also progressing with Cabinet Office on a risk matrix – combining risky behaviours with numbers of social contacts and mixing.
14. We have also launched a week-long survey to support mass testing in Liverpool, with invitations to take part in the survey sent to 60,000 households in the city.
15. Cabinet Office are leading on the evaluation of Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions (NPIs) across the tier system in England and Firebreak in Wales. We have fed data and insight in from the Infection Survey, Opinions Survey as well as a range of wider data through the Data Science Campus. The Opinions Survey publication on 20 November will focus on changes between tiers, lockdown and firebreak over the last four weeks, with the 27 November looking at sub-regional variation and trends.

16. We are a member of the Evaluation Steering Group for the Liverpool Mass Testing and are working with Test and Trace partners to develop an analysis plan for the project.

Analytical Spotlight

17. As the CIS programme moves to monthly updates to the Board, we will include a spotlight on a particular area of novel analysis the directorate is undertaking to support insight into the pandemic. For November, our spotlight is on long-COVID.
18. Despite a growing body of patient-reported cases, there is a paucity of empirical research into ongoing COVID-19 symptoms and long-term complications beyond the acute phase of the virus. This emerging phenomenon has been colloquially termed "long-COVID".
19. ONS has been commissioned by Number Ten to estimate the prevalence of long-COVID. This study aims to address the following primary (high priority) research questions:
 - i. What are the post-acute complications of COVID-19, and how prevalent are these complications in different socio-demographic groups?
 - ii. What are the socio-demographic and clinical risk factors for post-acute complications of COVID-19?
 - iii. Is there evidence of temporal clustering of post-acute complications of COVID-19, and does this temporal clustering vary across socio-demographic groups?
 - iv. How do the prevalence rates of, and risk factors for, post-acute complications among patients admitted to hospital with COVID-19 compare with those for of the same conditions among patients admitted to hospital with influenza in previous years?
20. The study is currently working on a set of linked data (Death registrations, COVID-19 test data, primary and secondary care records) in the NHS Digital analytical platform. This work will transfer to the ONS Public Health Data Asset to analyse the social and economic characteristics of long-COVID.
21. We are working with academic clinicians and have spoken to patient groups and sufferers to help identify the symptoms associated with long-COVID.
22. ONS is supporting the NHS Long-COVID Taskforce and we are aiming to have early prevalence estimates for the most severe long-COVID symptoms by the end of 2020.

Next Steps

23. In the near term the survey is currently requesting medical ethics approval (Protocol 6) for questionnaire changes (e.g. long-COVID), the extension of optional consent for other research studies and improved integration with Test and Trace.
24. Longer term, DHSC have indicated they are keen for the survey to continue to operate at the current scale at least to the end of 2021. Scenario planning over the last two weeks has aimed to ensure the survey is ready for both mass testing and vaccine roll-out. Work with DHSC and Oxford University has begun to define the future requirement for CIS (e.g. online data collection) which will increase efficiencies and form the basis of the future CIS competition and contract. We will be keen to bring an update to the board on this work next month.
25. The improvement in sophistication and breadth of our analytical outputs is continuing to increase user interest in our ability to present a dynamic interface for our data and insights. The directorate is working in partnership with Digital Communications to help develop a future dashboard across all COVID-19 surveillance. We will keep the Board advised of progress in this area.

Iain Bell, Director General, Population and Public Policy and Emma Rourke, Director, Health Analysis and Pandemic Insight, 17 November 2020

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(20)73

Preparations for End of EU Transition

This paper will be published following the outcome of the UK-EU negotiations.

UK Statistics Authority Interventions Policy Review

Purpose

1. This paper provides a summary of the changes to the UK Statistics Authority (the Authority) Interventions Policy and plans for publication.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to confirm whether you are content for the draft Interventions Policy to be published.

Background

3. The [Authority interventions policy](#) was first published in October 2017. Since then, our approach to casework has evolved and the volume and profile of our casework has increased. We would like to make sure the interventions policy reflects this evolution and provides clarity for those who approach the Authority with concerns.

Discussion

4. Subject to your approval, we plan to publish a draft update to the interventions policy in December, along with a series of FAQs.
5. We will welcome comments on the draft until mid-March and will take an updated version of the policy to the Regulation Committee in April for review, before bringing a final version back to the board for sign off before publication.
6. The interventions policy aims to provide transparency on our approach to casework. We think it has four key audiences: Producers of Statistics; Members of the public/others writing in; public figures receiving letters; and members of OSR understanding the process.
7. During the informal consultation, we hope to get feedback on the policy from each of these groups.
8. The main changes in this version of policy are:
 - i. the policy now explicitly references use, transparency, and production (it previously focused on misuse); and
 - ii. the detail e.g. around forecasts and when we will publish, have been moved to the FAQs.
9. The proposed FAQs cover more of the context and broader issues. We can evolve and develop the FAQs over time to reflect feedback and any changes to our approach.

Conclusion

10. The interventions policy has been in place since 2017, since then we have developed our approach to casework and the profile of OSR and the Authority has grown. It is therefore a good time to review the policy with a view to making sure it provides clarity, supports transparency and reflects our current approach to making judgments about when we will intervene.

Mary Gregory, OSR, 17 November 2020

Integrated Data Programme

Purpose

1. This paper provides an update for the Authority Board on progress and structure of the Integrated Data Programme (IDP) which is currently reporting an Amber RAG status.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to note and discuss:
 - i. plans to reset programme foundational elements ahead of the Full Business Case (FBC) in Spring;
 - ii. progress since the last update; and
 - iii. steps to increase visibility and communication of the programme outside (and inside) ONS.

Background

3. The programme will benefit from some foundational changes ahead of the FBC in Spring. We will also prepare for an Infrastructure and Projects Authority (Cabinet Office) Gateway Review (Gate 3) in the New Year which sets the gold standard for project delivery.

Discussion

Vision and Purpose

4. The vision is for a sustained leap forward in capability to support analysis of priority and complex data to provide for:
 - i. on-demand analytical needs of government; and
 - ii. wider and deeper analysis to support priority cross-cutting policy areas.
5. The purpose of the programme is to build on existing capability to deliver the platform, policies and linked data (see Table 1 below).

Programme Design

6. The aim is to refine down the **workstreams**, clarify **accountability** and increase **visibility**.
7. In doing so we can better highlight activity to date, force more traction and use programme structures to drive progress (e.g. now triggering Alpha projects). Considerable activity is already taking place (especially in technical architecture for the platform) and we are *not* at a standing start:

Table 1: IDP Workstreams

Workstreams	OVERALL RAG AMBER	RAG
PROGRAMME	A focus on Government Major Programme best practice being adopted. There will be an uplift in <u>accountability, communications, recognising associated work as progress and dependencies</u> . Prog Dir is appointed. SRO campaign closed 10 Nov. Interim Director SRO being onboarded. Analytical Lighthouse Projects (ALPs) criteria are being set and will continue to set user requirements and leverage and test progress.	A/R
(i) PLATFORM	Refreshing the Secure Research Service (SRS) platform and setting up Google Cloud hotspots for the Data Science Campus to support COVID-19 related work provides a pathway to the future platform. Technical aspects of security will fall here. Information Management and Governance will fall under Policies. The cloud-based approach follows prior NSEG agreements and is consistent with <i>One Government Cloud</i> strategy.	A
(ii) POLICIES	Our existing policies are meeting current need and are maturing but need further development to ensure they can address the demands IDP will place upon them. The policy maturity framework under Ross Young and Andy Wall will aim to provide a progressive set of data and security policies that facilitate and maximise access while balancing legal, security, data protection and ethics, and wider obligations. This will provide an overarching data and security policy “wrapper” that builds on the current suite of policies, including the SRS.	A
(iii) DATA	Work under Sarah Henry to refine our data acquisition pipeline, data architecture and admin data methodology are underway. The Data Quality Hub and Data Science Campus will also advance technical ability to link and use data. The Government Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) Steering Group (GDSG) will be used to leverage progress as will the ALPs.	A/R

Platform

8. Utilising the Secure Research Service as a successful pattern for the service, the Minimum Viable Product (MVP) builds on the existing embryonic platform currently based in Amazon Web Services. This reflects the SRS being accredited in accordance with the Digital Economy Act (DEA). Each of the Lighthouse projects will further test and iterate and in parallel the work done on the existing SRS platform and the specific cloud-based hotspot solutions for COVID-19 based work will progress and improve the MVP platform.
9. The Platform workstream has built a successful representation of the Housing affordability ALP simulating the different datasets using our data virtualisation layer for connecting to disparate data sources. **All future ALPs will by default be Alpha projects on the new platform.**

Platform Progress

10. The SRS platform has been given added capacity to it to enable a stable, safe environment for COVID-19 research collaborations, in addition this has been augmented with a cloud-based analytical hotspot for additional research.
11. The Housing Affordability Analytical Lighthouse Project recreated as a proof of concept in the cloud-native technology envisaged to be the core of the solution.
12. Initial High-level design business architecture and as-is service blueprint (based on DAP model) based on substantive user research has been produced and presented to the IDP Advisory Board.
13. Two new visualisations created showing four nations deaths in care homes and automatic querying tool for Towns boundaries. The team is also supporting the BEIS led Energy Data Visibility project to bring together data from gov departments and regulators.

Policies

14. The policies will be ambitious, radical, sustainable and inclusive. In doing so we must continue to uphold and maintain public and stakeholder trust and confidence in how we use, hold, store, integrate, and provide safe and secure access to data for statistical and research purposes, for the public good.
15. Our data and security policies must protect and secure data to the highest possible standards, adhere to our legal and wider obligations, particularly to our data partners and stakeholders, and maintain public trust and confidence.

Policies Progress

16. A policy maturity framework is in train to facilitate and maximise access to data while balancing legal, security, data protection and ethics, and wider obligations. This will provide an overarching data and security policy “wrapper” for IDP that builds on our current suite of policies.
17. The Data Governance and Statistical Design Committee will receive a substantive update on this work at its meeting on 27 November and will oversee this work.

Data

18. IDP requires a leap forward in the pace and scope of Data Acquisition, Architecture and Methodology. The Reference Data Management Framework (RDMF), which underpins data matching and linking and continue to invest in admin data methods is a priority for this workstream.
19. Since the programme started, we have reviewed the Data Acquisition plan, moving activity from the backlog. We have continued to develop data products such as the such as those relating to encryption and statistical error and have increased our support to the GSS.

Data Progress

20. The third version of the Reference Data Management Framework will be published by the end of November and includes an improved Demographic Index.
21. We have reduced the number of Red acquirers from 24 six months ago to four. We ingested and processed 1,687 datasets in the calendar year to date (189 in October).

Analytical Lighthouse Projects (ALPs)

22. The number of ALPs will be reduced but have more impact. Each will now be considered an Alpha project in programme terms. The criteria for managing and setting ALPs is being set in conjunction with colleagues inside and outside ONS.

Analytical Lighthouse Projects Progress

23. Currently, 11 lighthouse projects are actively progressing, working through challenges including scaling analysis resource, data access and the ability to assemble large complex data sets. IDP is working with these projects to overcome these blockers as quickly as possible and learn from them.
24. An ALPs governance and evaluation model is developed to oversee how ALPs contribute to development of IDP Data, Platform and Policies. A cross government ALPs steering board will oversee and ratify projects.
25. New arrangements prepared to increase the momentum of ALP engagements awareness; convert engagements to a pipeline of new ALP proposals and agree analytical outcomes for ALPs and how these map to IDP Data, Platform and Policies.

Programme Plan – Key forthcoming milestones

26. The Programmes overall delivery confidence RAG status is **Amber** and may fluctuate in keeping with a programme of this scale.
27. Preparations for the Full Business Case are progressing with the plan for the first draft of the individual cases to be available in early January and submission to HM Treasury (HMT) in March. It is planned to progress to an IPA Gateway Review (Gateway 3) in the New Year prior to submission to review our investment approach and programme status and health.

Visibility

28. The Programme will benefit from an increased profile. Not least to maintain stakeholder interest and ensure support at FBC in Spring. The programme is developing an engagement and communications strategy and plan, for increasing visibility both within ONS and across government.
29. Measures to increase profile include:
 - i. engagements with the GSS Heads of Professions – already underway and continuing;
 - ii. presentations and engagement with cross-government Chief Digital and Information Officers (e.g. Digital, Data and Technology (DDaT) Functional Leaders Group and Civil Service Operations Board);
 - iii. two-minute video with explainers on the approach and contributions from analysts and policy makers out with ONS extolling the benefits; and
 - iv. significant initiatives under GDSG, which encourage public engagement.

Alison Pritchard, Deputy National Statistician for Data Capability, ONS, 16 November 2020

Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme

Purpose

1. This paper provides an update on the programme, focusing on the Operational Readiness for Census, outcome of the Judicial Review and recent focus on questionnaire guidance.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to note:
 - i. the programme retains an amber rating. Final build as well as functional and non-functional testing are on track, as are the other preparations such as the media campaign, and we continue to remain confident of our ability to deliver a high-quality census in March 2021;
 - ii. the recent Operational Readiness Review concluded that successful delivery of the census collection operation appeared feasible. They recognised the challenges that still lie ahead but were confident the team were fully aware and actively managing them;
 - iii. the judgement on the most recent judicial review against the Cabinet Office was in our favour. They found the decision not to include a Sikh tick-box under the ethnicity question in the 2021 Census was lawful;
 - iv. progress is being made to finalise guidance on answering the sex question in Census 2021, with evidence currently under review and the methodology will be presented to the Methodology Assurance Review Panel;
 - v. although the acquisition of administrative data remains a concern, we continue to support Methods, Data and Research (MDR) colleagues in their improvements on the end to end service. The expected arrival of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) data in early December will allow us to understand how stable our admin-based population estimates are; and
 - vi. good progress is being made in the wider transformation with the Environmental Protection Expenditure (EPE) and the Management and Expectations Surveys (MES) now onboarded. Additionally, the Labour Market Survey (LMS) continues to be improved and extended, with response rates in the region of 45 per cent over the last four months.

Programme update

3. The programme remains at Amber. Census delivery is on track with all teams continuing their excellent work despite the ongoing challenges presented by COVID-19. All other programme elements also continue to make expected progress.
4. The acquisition of admin data remains a risk to the programme. The Task Force established in May has now been refocussed and will continue to assist all stages of the end to end pipeline. We will also be supporting the newly created programme of work within Data Capability to improve this service.

Preparations for Census

Operations and Build

5. Digital build and testing continue at pace and is on track. We remain confident of our ability to deliver a high-quality census in March 2021. Both system and business acceptance testing are on track and regular monthly performance testing is taking place.
6. Preparations for the main collection operation continue. The household address list, with almost 28 million addresses, has been delivered to Digital Services and Technology

(DST) as has the Communal Establishment print file. The second phase of recruitment, for Household and Communal Establishment Team Leaders, began on 2 November 2020. The number of applicants has already exceeded 20,000 for around 420 roles. Engagement is increasing at both local and national levels and Census Engagement Managers have now contacted 44 out of 46 Key Population Groups. We have also launched new channels on LinkedIn, Reddit and Instagram.

7. The final creative for the media campaign was approved at the November Programme Board. Filming of the main television advert starts later this month ready for delivery of a final edit for approval in December. Targeted campaign development as well as work on social media and the schools' campaign are also progressing well.
8. Recent publicity and Twitter activity have demonstrated the need to ensure that internal communications are aligned, and teams are providing consistent, cohesive messages across all media and to all potential stakeholders. As such, an internal team has been created. They are considering how best to support all stakeholders, including the UK Statistics Authority Board, when there is negative media coverage and social media communications.

Assurance and Legislation

9. As previously noted, the external Operational Readiness Review (Gate 4) was held between 2 and 5 November. This was to independently assure our preparations for live and allow us to understand the risks we are carrying as we head into the collection operation. They were satisfied that actions are in progress to deal with known issues and found no new risks or issues. They concluded that successful delivery of the census collection operation appeared feasible, with the main risk being the external forces impacting the operation.
10. The running of 'Mock Operations' continues allowing the operation to rehearse a range of scenarios. These scenarios remain under review fortnightly with the census leadership team and SRO, allowing for regular re-assessments of likely political, environmental and societal situations as new information emerges. We are continuing to explore options to allow us to extend the field operation in the event of any emerging risks, to ensure the Census quality targets can be met.
11. The next, and final, COVID-19 readiness assessment point is on 1 December. However, given all assurance activity, we remain confident in our ability to deliver a high-quality census.
12. On 6 November, judgment was handed down from the High Court in the (third) Judicial Review brought on behalf of the Sikh Federation UK against the Cabinet Office. This was about the lawfulness of the decision not to include a Sikh tick-box for the ethnicity question in the 2021 Census.
13. The judgement went against the claimant on all counts. The judge noted that the census, as designed, does not prevent respondents who wish to do so from identifying as ethnically Sikh. As in 2011, there will be a Sikh tick-box for the religion question. Anyone who wishes to identify as Sikh in response to the ethnic group question will be able to do so using the write-in option, supported online by the new search-as-you-type functionality.

Questionnaire Guidance

14. Work is currently being undertaken to finalise the guidance on answering the sex question in Census 2021, provided in the online self-help pages.
15. ONS is reviewing the existing evidence and will present its methodology to the to the Methodology Assurance Review Panel.

Wider transformation

16. Following re-planning, the Population and Migration System Transformation project is making good progress. A time series of Admin Based Population Estimates (ABPE) produced for 2016 to 2019 will be available by the end of this year. This will mean that for the first time we can understand how stable these population estimates are over time.
17. Once the DWP CIS and Benefits and Income Datasets (BIDS) data arrives (due early December), we will be able to add 2020 to the ABPE series, further enhancing our understanding of these estimates. This data will also provide important information to support quality assurance of the 2021 Census.
18. Social Survey Transformation have increased the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) sample by circa 20,000 to meet new requirements on attitudes and behaviours during lockdown and the tiered scenarios at regional level. A series of improvements have also been made to the secure file transfer from Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) to ONS to improve speed and performance for the benefit of all online social surveys. Work continues to improve the effectiveness of the online approach, which has generated response rates in the region of 45 per cent over the last four months. The lessons learned will be built into the design of a mixed mode solution expected to be deployed in the first half of 2021.
19. The teams continue to make progress moving surveys online and have now onboarded the EPE and the MES. They are currently focussing on those surveys that can be onboarded without additional Survey Data Collection (SDC) functionality, including the Low Carbon Survey.
20. Additionally, the first draft of the electronic questionnaire has been completed for the Financial Assets and Liabilities Survey (FALS) along with a first wave of feasibility/cognitive interviews. The project relies on some of the technology being developed as part of the Distributive Trades (DTrades) project which is progressing well.

Iain Bell, Deputy National Statistician for Population and Public Policy

Nicola Tyson-Payne, Interim Director of Transformation, Population and Public Policy

16 November 2020