

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Minutes
Thursday 15 December 2020
Via Videoconference

Present

UK Statistics Authority

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

Also in attendance

Jonathan Athow
Nick Bateson
Iain Bell
Owen Brace
Robert Bumpstead
Douglas Cameron (Secretariat)
Sally-Ann Jones (Secretariat)
Alison Pritchard
Emma Rourke (for item 8)
Nicola Tyson-Payne (for item 9)
Amy Williams (Secretariat)

Apologies

None

1. Apologies

- 1.1 There were no apologies received.

2. Declarations of interest

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

3. Minutes and matters arising from previous meetings

- 3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 November 2020 were agreed, subject to a minor amendment.

4. Report from the Authority Chair

- 4.1 Non-executive directors had met prior to the Board. They had discussed the communication of COVID-19 data.
- 4.2 The Chair reported on his recent activity since the Board last met:
- i. alongside Professor Sir Ian Diamond, Sir David had visited the Department for Work and Pensions to present the strategy, Statistics for the Public Good;
 - ii. he had met the Chair of the Commons Science and Technology Committee with Ed Humpherson regarding COVID-19 data;
 - iii. he had recorded a training podcast with Sam Beckett for HM Treasury;
 - iv. he had met members of the CIS team and Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter regarding the COVID-19 Infection Survey (CIS) incidence model;
 - v. on 10 December he had attended Regulation Committee; and
 - vi. at the invitation of the Chair of the Committee of Standards in Public Life, he had met with the Chairs of a number of independent bodies, including the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority and the Electoral Commission.
- 4.3 Board members discussed the impact of the recent Economic Statistics Centre of Excellence report, 'Addressing the Challenges of Measuring the Modern Economy,' which highlighted the challenges associated with the communication of statistics.

5. Report from the Chief Executive [SA(20)77]

- 5.1 Sir Ian provided the Board with an overview of activity and issues for November, highlighting;
- i. that the range of faster economic indicators continued to be developed to provide insight into the UK economy to inform decision making;
 - ii. the continued delivery of the COVID-19 Infection Survey (CIS) and its development, in particular in relation to the vaccine programme. Results from the Schools Infection Survey had been published and the surveillance work for universities was ongoing;
 - iii. the engagement by ONS and the Government Statistical Service with the Cabinet Office regarding the data flows needed beyond the pandemic; and
 - iv. the People Survey results for ONS and the Authority, which had the highest response rate for the organisation at 85 per cent since the survey had been introduced. Staff engagement had increased overall from 63 per cent in 2019 to 71 per cent in 2020. This was the highest level of engagement on record.
- 5.2 The Board noted the report and commended the ONS communications team, which provided a high level of response to press queries, enabling statistical experts from across the organisation to speak directly with the media.

6. Report from the Director General for Regulation [SA(20)78]

- 6.1 Ed Humpherson provided an update on regulation activity since the last meeting, and highlighted the progress made on OSR's review of approaches to developing statistical models designed for awarding 2020 exam results. The aim was to publish the review in the New Year.

- 6.2 The work on OSR's draft guidance for statistical producers on collecting and processing data on sex and gender had also progressed.
- 6.3 The Board heard that the People Survey results for OSR had also improved with an increase in staff engagement. Learning and development would be a focus for OSR in the coming months.

7. Report from the Chair of the Regulation Committee

- 7.1 Professor Anne Trefethen reported on the work of the Regulation Committee, which had met on 10 December 2020.
- 7.2 Committee members had considered OSR's work programme and priorities for the coming year and the budget for 2021/22 in the context of the Spending Review.
- 7.3 The Committee had also considered OSR's review of approaches to developing statistical models designed for awarding 2020 exam results. The Committee commended the work.

8. COVID-19 Infection Survey and Surveillance Studies

- 8.1 Emma Rourke and Iain Bell provided an oral update on the COVID-19 Infection Survey (CIS) programme, highlighting the continued delivery and high impact of the CIS.
- 8.2 The Board heard that the well-developed incident management procedures in place for the Census programme had been applied to the CIS. It was noted that ONS would continue to work with the Science Media Centre.
- 8.3 As noted already the results from the first phase of the Schools Infection Survey had been published. A dashboard on COVID-19 latest insights had also been published on the ONS website on 11 December, with further ongoing content development underway. ONS continued positive engagement with the Joint Biosecurity Centre and Public Health England, including on the Code of Practice.
- 8.4 Board members discussed the recent media coverage of the CIS and agreed the benefits of being proactive.

9. Census and Data Collection transformation Programme

- 9.1 Iain Bell and Nicola Tyson-Payne provided an oral update on the Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme, highlighting that the delivery of a Census in March 2021 remained on course.
- 9.2 The Board heard that the digital build and testing was on track. The media campaign had been approved by the Programme Board with the television adverts for both England and Wales filmed and at the editing stage. The schools campaign in both primary and secondary schools was progressing well. The community engagement teams were impacting positively at a local level. The final COVID-19 Readiness Assessment on 1 December had confirmed confidence to proceed. It was noted that risk mitigation activities were in place to mitigate the remaining challenges.
- 9.3 With regard to wider transformation, business statistics transformation would onboard three surveys to the online platform in the first quarter of 2021. Progress was being made regarding the acquisition of administrative data, including Council Tax and DWP data.
- 9.4 The Board noted the update and commended the progress made.

10. Strategic Business Plan update [SA(20)79]

- 10.1 Nick Bateson introduced a paper which provided an update on progress in delivery of the business plan at 30 November 2020.

10.2 As reported to the Board in November the revised executive governance framework would underpin the organisation's approach to prioritisation in the context of the Spending Review. The approach to the review of enabling functions was in the process of being finalised.

10.3 The Board would remain engaged in the business planning and reprioritisation exercise.

11. Any other business

The Authority Board would meet next on 28 January 2021 by videoconference.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Agenda

15 December 2020, 09:15 to 11.15, via videoconference

Chair: Sir David Norgrove

Apologies: None

Attendees: Emma Rourke (for item 6), Nicola Tyson-Payne (for item 7)

NED Session: 09:15-09:45

1 09:45-9.50 5 mins	Minutes and matters arising from previous meetings Declarations of interest	Meeting of 26 November 2020
2 09.50-10:05 15 mins	Report from the Authority Chair	Oral report Sir David Norgrove
3 10.05-10.20 15 mins	Report from the Chief Executive	SA(20)77 Prof. Sir Ian Diamond
4 10.20-10.30 10 mins	Report from the Director-General for Regulation	SA(20)78 Ed Humpherson
5 10.30-10.35 5 mins	Report from Committee Chair <ul style="list-style-type: none">Regulation Committee	Oral report Prof. Anne Trefethen
6 10.35-10.45 10 mins	COVID-19 Infection Survey and Surveillance Studies	Oral report Iain Bell Emma Rourke
7 10.45-10.55 10 mins	Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme	Oral report Iain Bell Nicola Tyson-Payne
8 10.55-11.05 10 mins	Strategic Business Plan update	SA(20)79 Nick Bateson
9 11.05-11.15 10 mins	Any Other Business	

Next meeting: 28 January 2021, 09:15-12:45, via teleconference

Chief Executive's Report, December 2020

Purpose

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

Summary

2. In the face of a second wave of the COVID-19 virus, 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; and the impact on the economy. In addition, December has seen the initial results of the people survey published and these have been very positive.

Review of recent activities

3. Important developments in recent weeks include the following:
 - i. The first set of the results from this year's People Survey for ONS and UK Statistics Authority have been released with the highest response rate for the organisation, at 85 per cent. The results were very encouraging. Most themes improved on 2019, with staff engagement increasing from 63 per cent to 71 per cent, an organisational high.
 - ii. At the beginning of December, we held two half day awaydays. The first was with all directors and hosted a talk from Action Aid on their feminist principles of leadership; and the second, with all the Senior Civil Service, looked at a number of aspects of the strategy.
 - iii. On 1 December the Chair and I did a virtual visit to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) presenting the Strategy, Statistics for the Public Good, and took questions from GSS staff within DWP.
 - iv. On 4 December I provided a keynote to the GSS Methodology Symposium on its 25th Anniversary. This included my reflection on innovations in methods over the past 25 years.
 - v. As reported to the Board in November the revised executive governance framework will underpin the organisation's approach to prioritisation in the context of the Spending Review. Progress is already being made on the programme of work to address issues around statistical quality, which the Quality Committee is overseeing. A review of the governance framework is scheduled for the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee in March 2021.
 - vi. Preparations for the end of the EU transition period continue. We are preparing communications to assure users of the continuity of our regular high-quality statistical outputs beyond the end of transition, including thorough notes in statistical releases over December.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond, 8 December 2020

Update from the Director General for Regulation

Purpose

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

Discussion

2. My main areas of focus in recent weeks have been:
 - i. **Exams Review:** We have redrafted the report, following feedback from the Regulation Committee on 24 November and will discuss at the Regulation Committee on 10 December. We have also updated stakeholders on our decision to defer publication to the New Year. Most stakeholders understand our decision, and have been comfortable with the overall framework for the report that we have talked them through;
 - ii. **COVID-19:** We continue to handle a high volume of issues relating to the use of data on COVID-19 by the Government. A lot of the concerns relate to transparency, e.g. of data used to judge pressures on the National Health Service as opposed to misuse. I have also written to all four Governments to encourage coherent planning for data they publish on vaccine roll-out. In general, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and devolved equivalents are responsive to our recommendations and strive to improve their provision of information to the public. They are working in a high-pressure environment with political and communication teams, and find our input and public interventions helpful;
 - iii. **Data on sex:** We have revised the OSR guidance to all producers on the reporting of sex and will discuss with the Regulation Committee on 10 December. We propose to delay publication until after the ONS has settled on the guidance for the sex question for the Census;
 - iv. **National Statistics review:** we have also been developing our review of the National Statistics designation. Following the second meeting of the steering group, chaired by Helen Boaden, we have sharpened the focus of this exercise. We do not think there is much mileage in attempting to develop the designation as a consumer brand (i.e. like the Fair Trade kitemark) – it would take too much branding communication effort, and it does not seem as though there is much of a public audience for the brand itself (although of course there is an extensive public audience for statistics). Instead, we will focus on producers of statistics who use the National Statistics designation as a signal that they have complied with the highest standards. We will also ascertain the views of intermediaries, who may be more familiar with the statistical system but less aware of the designation itself. The next phase will be to engage extensively with the producer and intermediary audiences.
3. I would also like to take this opportunity to highlight the work done by the team in OSR in 2020. It has been a full year, featuring impactful reports, including our review in January of the National Rail Passengers Survey, quality of HMRC statistics (April), and business demography (October); a surge in casework (over 250 separate cases in 2020/21 so far, compared to less than 100 per annum in prior years); a series of systemic reviews (skills, mental health, social care) and some of our most high profile interventions, including on testing data in June. The team has dealt with the challenges of home working, the increased demands of pandemic *and* delivered almost all our existing business plan commitments. And the combined effect of all of this has been an increase in OSR's profile. So I will close this update by commending their work and their commitment to the Board.

Ed Humpherson, UK Statistics Authority Regulation, 8 December 2020

List of Annexes

Annex A Regulatory dashboard

Regulatory Activities January 2021 - AB

Economy	Children, Education and skills	Health and Social Care	Population and Society	Labour Market and Welfare
<p>Assessments: ONS Productivity statistics Continuing engagement with users, early findings to be reported to Regulation Committee 11 February</p> <p>Compliance Checks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Published letter to ONS on experimental estimates of GVA following double deflation Engaging with ONS regarding its Regional Household Final Expenditure statistics -publication expected in next few weeks Engaging NISRA on Northern Ireland's economic statistics – publication expected in next four weeks Engaging with HMRC on its Child and Working Tax Credits– publication expected in next three weeks <p>Stakeholder Engagement: Met NAO as part of its work on the use of financial models in large Government Departments such as HMRC, BEIS, DWP, and DfE</p>	<p>Exam Results Review: Identifies lessons learned from 2020 exams process. Focus is identifying how public bodies ensure statistical model outputs command public confidence. Dedicated project webpage is providing regular external updates. Currently reviewing comments from qualifications regulators, refining recommendations and preparing for publication of the report.</p> <p>Systemic Reviews: Children and Young People: Review is on hold until the Exam Results Review concluded.</p> <p>Casework:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Media query about the quality of statistics on the DfE Skills Toolkit. Published letters: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The National Education Union, Concerns raised: Ad hoc analysis of teacher infection rates from ONS Covid Infection survey and Quoting local area attendance statistics ahead of publication. Wes Streeting MP following concerns raised about the use of statistics on school funding by the Conservative Party. Internally generated casework following delay to school attendance statistics for the last week of the Autumn term. Concerns raised informally with DfE. <p>Compliance Check: Graduate Outcomes: evidence gathering meeting held. Planning to complete and publish in March once the Exam Results Review is completed.</p> <p>ICO audit of DfE data protection: Continuing to engage with DfE over its response. Setting up a meeting with ICO to understand if there are implications across the statistics system.</p>	<p>Rapid review: gathering evidence and engaging with stakeholders for the ONS COVID-19 Infection Survey statistics rapid review.</p> <p>Assessments: Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) reviewing evidence for meeting requirements.</p> <p>Casework: Continues to focus mainly on COVID-19, primarily on evidence to support the vaccination programme. 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>Business, Trade and International Development</p> <p>Assessments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual Business Survey User engagement commenced. Ongoing research into quality issues, including the use of ABS data as a time series and the possible use of administrative datasets to improve timeliness. <p>UK Trade ESCoE paper on the construction of a balanced trade asymmetry dataset scheduled for publication w/c the 8th of February. Paper will include details on the purpose of the work and the benefits to users.</p>	<p>Assessments: Census ONS and NISRA due to publish accreditation report in Jan/Feb which will form evidence base for assessment and provide assurance to census data users of current position ahead of census day. ONS's communication of its further research on guidance for the sex question is also due in Jan; a key milestone in relation to assessment findings to date.</p> <p>Systemic Review: Loneliness: Further engagement with users and producers is being undertaken to consider how user needs may have changed given the impact of COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>Cross Domain review: Ethnicity Scoping of project ongoing. Organising internal event.</p> <p>Crime and Security</p> <p>Assessments: Most of the way through user engagement for the assessment of Home Office police funding statistics. We aim to submit a draft report to the April Regulation Committee meeting.</p> <p>Compliance Checks: MOD 'Deaths in service' statistics and of Scottish Government prison statistics ongoing.</p> <p>Guidance on data about sex: Guidance revised based on feedback from December Regulation Committee. Currently drawing up a communications plan, with a view to publishing at the end of Jan.</p>	<p>Assessment: started desk research for Northern Ireland's Personal Independence Payment Stats and have user interviews scheduled for early Feb.</p> <p>Systemic Review: Poverty Statistics: Two workshops scheduled with DWP as well as discussions with the relevant stats teams in ONS. User interviews taking place late Jan to mid-Feb.</p> <p>Housing, Planning and Local Services</p> <p>Assessment: Awarded National Statistics designation to DfI's NI planning statistics</p> <p>Compliance checks: Published findings of CC for MHCLG's English Housing Survey and leasehold dwellings statistics, and MHCLG's Land use change and land use stock in England statistics.</p> <p>Agriculture, Energy and Environment</p> <p>Compliance checks: started desk research for CC of Defra's flood defence spending statistics.</p> <p>Systemic reviews: Climate change statistics: scoping identified that ONS/GSS development is planned on these statistics, but we consider there is still value in a high-level review or position statement.</p> <p>Systemic Review: Food statistics: Initial scoping of review underway.</p> <p>Travel, Transport and Tourism</p> <p>Assessment: Office for Rail and Road's Estimates of Station Usage statistics designated National Statistics.</p> <p>Scoping: currently scoping future domain projects and engaging with producers.</p>

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY BOARD

2020/21 November Business Plan Update

SA(20)79

Purpose

1. This paper provides the Authority Board with a supporting narrative to explain progress in the delivery of the business plan at 30 November 2020.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to:
 - i. note the key messages and mitigating actions; and
 - ii. note the Business Plan Deliverables update.

Key Messages

3. The key messages this month are as follows:

Strategic Objectives

- i. Three of the 12 ONS Strategic Objectives are reporting below the target of 70 per cent green. As we reflect on the available funding, review priorities and review our Tier 1 programmes, as set out below, there will be changes to the nature, timing and structure of the Strategic and Accountability Framework Objectives.

Programme progress and milestones

- i. Business cases are being developed, or are already under review, for three of our five key enabling (Tier 1) programmes – the COVID-19 Infection Survey (CIS); Economic Statistics Transformation Programme (ESTP); and Integrated Data Programme (IDP). Portfolio and Investment Committee (PIC), will oversee the business case pipeline (and approvals) as part of the Spending Review(SR) implementation plan and portfolio governance.
- ii. Work is ongoing with the Cabinet Office regarding the CIS contract re-procurement milestone – we carried out a supplier engagement session in the week of 7 December, with the overall procurement approach to be discussed with the Cabinet Office in the New Year.

Mitigating actions to ensure that the strategic business plan remains on track

4. Strategic focus and ambition
 - i. Managing demand – the external demands on the organisation remain high along with expectations around the pace of delivery. The Analysis and Evaluation Committee discussed the process for prioritising demand on 9 December and is developing a prioritisation framework. Additional actions include ensuring that we have sufficient horizon scanning capacity and organisational agility to continue to drive improvements in our statistics and impactful analysis that can be measured.
 - ii. ESTP review – discussions with HM Treasury (HMT) on the priorities for the use of additional funding provided through the SR continue. At this stage, we expect the work to focus on managing the impact of the end of the transition period, including regulatory oversight of economic statistics; understanding the economic and social impacts of COVID-19; and developing a revised fiscal framework.
 - iii. IDP– the scope and programme plan are being refreshed in advance of submission of the Full Business Case in February/March 2021
 - iv. CDCTP – preparations for the Census are being reviewed in the context of the pandemic – including ongoing readiness testing.

- v. CIS – delivery of the surveys and supporting analytics in schools and universities continues.

Managing resource and people constraints

- i. Strategic Business Plan Review – as set out at the November Board. The scope of the review has now been agreed and communicated across the Senior Civil Service community – with the exception of the BASE review, where the approach is still under discussion.
 - ii. Resource management – the in-year net resource position continues to improve with a forecast surplus after adjusting for our anticipated Supplementary Estimate funding.
 - iii. Capability – we are finalising our pay case for the year to August 2021 before submitting to HMT for negotiation.
5. Governance, risk management and control
- i. Governance Framework - As reported to the Board in November the revised executive governance framework will underpin the organisation’s approach to the Strategic Business Plan Review in the context of the SR. A review of the governance framework is scheduled for the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee in March 2021.
 - ii. Risk Management – NSEG is reviewing the fully scored strategic and operational risks and mitigations in December, before they are discussed at the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and Authority Board in January. Alongside this, substantial work is continuing to rationalise and clarify programme risks to ensure that the scoring aligns to the corporate and strategic layer.
 - iii. Quality – an update paper on the quality agenda will be provided to the Board in January. This will show the links between transformational work and ongoing iterative quality improvements and provide an update on the revised assurance processes. The plan for addressing the quality agenda will be supported by appropriate investment priorities to take forward in the ongoing review of the Strategic Business Plan.
 - iv. Systems – an update on the plans for addressing our legacy technical debt will be presented to the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee in January. This will include plans to address the resilience of the website, following the outage on 3 November.
 - v. Data acquisition – Audit and Risk Assurance Committee in March will be provided with an update on progress with Data Acquisition. The Strategic Business Plan review will include prioritisation of data acquisition resources across CDCTP; ESTP; IDP and CIS and associated analysis.

Nick Bateson, Director of Finance, Planning and Performance, 10 December 2020