

**UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY
REGULATION COMMITTEE**

Agenda

Thursday 15 October 2020

**Virtual Meeting
13:00 – 14:40**

**Chair: Professor Anne Trefethen
Apologies: None.**

1	Apologies, minutes and matters arising	Meeting of 16.07.20
2	Update from the Director General for Regulation	Mr Ed Humpherson
3	Interventions Policy update	Mr Ed Humpherson
4	Guidance on Collection and Processing of Sex Data	Mr Ed Humpherson Ms Gail Rankin Mr Lewis Jack
5	OSR Research Programme	Mr Ed Humpherson Dr Mary Cowan
6	Forward Look	Secretariat
7	Any other business	

Next meeting: Thursday 10 December, Virtual Meeting, 13:00

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

REGULATION COMMITTEE

Minutes

Thursday 15 October 2020

**Virtual Meeting
13:00 – 14:40**

Members Present

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

Other Attendees

Dr Mary Cowan (Item 5)
Ms Mary Gregory
Mr Lewis Jack (Item 4)
Mr Mark Pont
Ms Gail Rankin
Ms Effie Roberts
Mr Ross Tivey

Secretariat

Ms Sarah Cobden
Ms Sally-Ann Jones
Ms Lauren Higgins

Apologies

None

Declarations of Interest

None

1. Apologies, minutes and matters arising

- 1.1 Members and additional attendees were welcomed to the meeting.
- 1.2 The minutes of the meeting on 16 July 2020 were agreed, and actions were reviewed.

2. Overview from the Director General for Regulation

- 2.1 Mr Humpherson introduced his update, focusing in particular on the exam results review, COVID-19 response, and the review of National Statistics designation.
- 2.2 The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) was midway through the exams review; work so far had focused on evidence gathering, and good progress was being made. The Expert Advisory Group was being utilised to test findings. The final report would need to be pitched at the right level, including lessons learned for others. The Committee discussed the issues around public acceptability testing, processes, and impact on individuals. OSR would circulate a draft of the final report in correspondence and work with the Secretariat to organise a standalone meeting of the Committee to discuss.
- 2.3 OSR was still handling a high volume of casework on COVID-19. An improvement in internal processes had sped up OSR's ability to turn around judgements. Some gaps in the statistics still remained. It would be important for OSR to get ahead of any upcoming issues around testing and vaccination statistics. OSR would be meeting with representatives of the Joint Biosecurity Centre (JBC) to discuss an upcoming joint publication by the JBC and the Office for National Statistics (ONS).
- 2.4 The Committee discussed the ongoing review of National Statistics Designation. The steering group, chaired by Ms Boaden, would soon meet for the second time. Conclusions were expected in the second quarter of 2021. The Committee would receive an interim update at the December meeting.

3. Interventions Policy Update

- 3.1 Ms Gregory introduced an update to the UK Statistics Authority's Interventions Policy, and a supporting Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document. This update had been prompted by the Committee discussion in July. OSR intended to publish an initial draft for consultation, with a final version returning to the Committee next year. The new policy and FAQs would provide more information to users about interventions. OSR would work in consultation with user groups to refine a policy that could remain static, with a supporting FAQ that could be updated as needed over time.
- 3.2 The Committee discussed the length and specificity of the draft documents. It was recommended that the policy retain the focus of the current version; the Code of Practice was given greater emphasis; and references to sharing draft letters be amended for accuracy. The Committee noted the use of FAQs was a helpful way for people to access the policy; this could be informed by any process queries received to date. It was agreed that OSR would revisit the length and specificity of the policy, and share the next draft in a paper to the Authority Board.

4. Guidance on Collection and Processing of Sex Data

- 4.1 Mr Humpherson, Ms Rankin and Mr Jack introduced a paper on guidance for statistical producers on collecting and processing data on sex and gender. The aim of this guidance was to clarify what producers should consider when collecting and reporting this data, not to define what data should be collected.
- 4.2 The Committee discussed the intent of the guidance, asking producers to be clear about what they are trying to measure in collecting this data and what they want to know. This guidance would also provide something tangible for OSR to refer back to

when assessing statistics in the future, if producers had not been clear about which definitions they were using.

4.3 The guidance would be shared with the Committee again, prior to any publication.

5. OSR Research Programme

5.1 Dr Cowan presented on the OSR research programme, a new workstream for OSR, to help develop a better understanding of the public good of statistics.

5.2 To date, the programme had launched three projects:

- i. a research programme overview to establish the overall framework for the programme, using change theory to create structure, which was complete;
- ii. a literature review to establish a foundation of evidence, which was near completion and due to be published shortly;
- iii. a qualitative content analysis to understand how researchers and statisticians conceptualise the public good was in progress; and
- iv. a fourth project, on how OSR conceptualises the public good, was currently being scoped.

5.3 The Committee commended this work. Members recommended looking back to when the Code of Practice was first written, and how the public good was initially defined then. Other definitions, particularly in media and economics, would also benefit from review. Some compelling examples and case studies of statistics being produced and published in the interest of the public good would also be beneficial.

5.4 It was agreed that this would return to the Committee in six months' time, by which point two more projects would be complete.

6. Forward Look

6.1 Secretariat introduced the forward agenda, looking ahead to October 2021 for the Regulation Committee. Members were asked to comment on the forward agenda, and recommend any additional items for discussion.

6.2 The Committee discussed UK Trade statistics, on the agenda for December, noting ONS' intention to carry out a deep dive into these statistics. December's discussion would follow the publication of experimental data; OSR was in regular communication with the ONS Trade team and would monitor the deep dive accordingly.

6.3 It was noted the COVID-19 situation would be around for some time, and this may need factoring into OSR's medium- to long- term plans, particularly any potential impacts on survey collection and the Census, on testing and on the collection and use of data in government more widely. Later, the capture and presentation of data on the introduction of vaccines would need careful consideration. In addition, a discussion on OSR's impact could be useful, to discuss areas where they had greatest impact, and where they could have had more. These risks and impacts were something for OSR to consider as part of their work programme.

6.4 Mr Humpherson and Ms Gregory would discuss scheduling with Secretariat after the meeting. Secretariat would continue to include the forward agenda in papers for every meeting for information, and would schedule a further forward look discussion in a year's time.

7. Any Other Business

7.1 Several papers had been issued for comment by correspondence. Comments had been received on the Systemic Review on Statistical Leadership. The Committee discussed the proportion of statisticians and economists who hold senior positions in government, and the role of data scientists, and what this might mean for the statistics profession. It was recommended OSR make the report stronger, and

include more detail on the USP of statisticians. This report linked to the broader challenges in recruiting statisticians across government to deliver the Strategy. A response or supporting statement from the National Statistician could also help make the report more impactful. OSR would incorporate the Committee's comments, and recirculate by correspondence.

- 7.2 Four assessment reports had been shared; all were noted as high quality, and approved for publication. OSR was also commended on the results of a recent Internal Audit.
- 7.3 The Committee would meet next on Thursday 10 December at 13:00.