

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Minutes
Thursday 25 February 2021
Via Videoconference

Present

UK Statistics Authority

Sir David Norgrove (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 Athrow
Nick Bateson
Iain Bell
Owen Brace
Robert Bumpstead
Sally-Ann Jones (Secretariat)
Darren Morgan (for item 11)
Alison Pritchard
Emma Rourke (for item 10)
Nicola Tyson-Payne (for item 9)
Amy Williams (Secretariat)

Apologies

Sian Jones (Deputy Chair)

1. Presentation from the Chief Statistician, Welsh Government, Stephanie Howarth

- 1.1 Sir David welcome Stephanie Howarth and Kathryn Helliwell to the meeting.
- 1.2 Stephanie Howarth presented on the challenges and priorities for Welsh Government in relation to statistics about Wales, which included the response to the pandemic, data sharing and maintaining a bilingual workforce. The Board heard about the Well-being of Wales publication, which measures progress towards national well-being goals. The Board also heard from Kathryn Helliwell on Administrative Data Research Wales and the use of administrative data for policy relevant research.
- 1.3 The Board noted their thanks to Stephanie Howarth and Kathryn Helliwell for an excellent presentation.

2. Apologies

- 2.1 Apologies were received from Sian Jones.

3. Declarations of interest

- 3.1 Richard 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 28 January 2021 were agreed.

5. Report from the Authority Chair

- 5.1 Non-executive directors had met prior to the Board meeting. They had discussed the COVID-19 Infection Survey (CIS) statistics.
- 5.2 The Chair reported on his recent activity since the Board last met:
 - i. on 9 February Sir David and Professor Sir Ian Diamond had visited Ofqual and heard about their research;
 - ii. Sir David had responded to the letter of 2 February from William Wragg MP (Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee) about the use of data and statistics in the last year;
 - iii. On 15 February Sir David had met Lord Jonathan Evans (Committee on Standards in Public Life) in relation to the Standards Matter Two review;
 - iv. Sir David had met with members of the Census team on 23 February; and
 - v. Sir David had spoken to the Secretary of State for Health on 24 February regarding the publication of vaccine statistics.

6. Report from the Chief Executive [SA(21)09]

- 6.1 Sir Ian provided the Board with an overview of activity and issues since the last meeting, highlighting the following:
 - i. the work by ONS to provide statistics for the Government Roadmap published on 22 February;
 - ii. the work being led by Sam Becket and Jonathan Athow on hybrid working for staff in preparation for a return to the Office in due course;
 - iii. work with colleagues across different health organisations toward the development of a public health data asset was ongoing;
 - iv. the Goldacre Review into the use of health data for research and analysis, with Sir Ian invited to join the stakeholder group;
 - v. the development of the full business case for the Integrated Data Programme and the ongoing Gateway Review by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority; and
 - vi. the Census 2021 sex question online guidance.

6.2 Board members discussed the update and considered the need to understand the structural change in the weekly death statistics in relation to deaths that occurred at home. It was agreed that an update would be provided at the next meeting.

7. Report from the Director General for Regulation [SA(21)10]

7.1 Ed Humpherson provided an update on regulation activity since the last meeting. The Board heard that OSR would be publishing its review of the approach to developing statistical models to award 2020 exam results on 2 March. The report set out lessons from the approaches taken to awarding exam grades in 2020.

8. Report from the Chair of the Regulation Committee

8.1 Anne Trefethen reported on the Regulation Committee which had met on 11 February.

8.2 Committee members had considered:

- i. OSR's response to the pandemic including the introduction of rapid reviews of new statistical outputs and guidance for producers.
- ii. the approach to business planning and development of OSR's programme of work for 2021/22;
- iii. OSR's work associated with automation and Artificial Intelligence; and
- iv. the emerging findings from the ongoing assessment of ONS Productivity statistics.

8.3 The Committee had also received a presentation from the Department of Health and Social Care on its response to the pandemic.

9. Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme [SA(21)11]

9.1 Iain Bell and Nicola Tyson-Payne introduced a paper which provided an update on the Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme.

9.2 The Board heard that the national media campaign had been launched, with awareness of the Census also being raised through virtual engagement with local communities. The digital build for household and communal establishments was complete. The digital system had successfully been launched on 23 February without issue. ONS continued to support Adecco on the recruitment of the field force.

9.3 It was noted that as planned Pete Benton would oversee the Census operation with Nicola Tyson-Payne focussing on the continuing development of census capacity for processing and outputs, the wider transformation, including the development of a new business register. The Census Coverage Survey was on track for delivery. Progress on the acquisition of administrative data continued to be a key focus. Work was ongoing in preparation for the evidence to inform the 2023 recommendation on the future of the Census.

9.4 Board members discussed the update and commended the team for the progress made.

10. COVID-19 Infection Survey and Surveillance Studies [SA(21)12]

10.1 Iain Bell and Emma Rourke introduced a paper which provided an update on the CIS programme.

10.2 The Board heard that the swab testing targets were being met or exceeded. In the coming period, the CIS would transition to a new collection approach. This would enable the survey to have an increased role in vaccine monitoring, provide the ability to increase the volume of antibody testing, and provide an opportunity for efficiency savings.

10.3 The Board discussed the update and would remain engaged in the long term strategic development of the programme.

11. Economic Campus in the North of England [SA(21)13]

- 11.1 Darren Morgan introduced a paper which recommended that ONS make a commitment to have a small presence in the Economic Campus in the North of England. The commitment would be flexible until the location, and the size and make-up of other government departments were confirmed. It was noted that the proposal aligned with the principles of the strategy: Radical, Ambitious, Inclusive and Sustainable.
- 11.2 Board members discussed the proposal noting the benefit of a wider talent pool. There was also an opportunity for ONS to develop a stronger regional network and analysis. Any perception of a risk to ONS's independence was mitigated as ONS would be one of a number of departments; and no statistical production would be conducted at the campus.
- 11.3 The Board endorsed the proposal to move onto the next stage.

12. Business Plan Update [SA(21)14]

- 12.1 Nick Bateson introduced a paper which provided an update on the progress in the delivery of the business plan at 31 January 2021. The Portfolio and Investment Committee and the National Statistics Executive Group were overseeing the management action regarding the delivery of strategic objectives. It was noted that the work to refresh the business plan in the context of the spending review was on track for delivery with the outcomes of the review of enabling functions due to report late March.

13. Any other business

- 13.1 It was noted that the Minister for Finance and Trefnyd, (Welsh Government) had written to Sir David to consult on the addition of Digital Health and Care Wales to the Official Statistics (Wales) Order 2021. The Board endorsed the addition.
- 13.2 The Authority Board would meet next on 25 March 2021 by videoconference.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Agenda

25 February 2021, 10:30 to 14:00 via videoconference

Chair: Sir David Norgrove

Apologies: Sian Jones

Attendees: Darren Morgan (for item 9), Emma Rourke (for item 8), Nicola Tyson-Payne (for item 7)

NED Session: 10:30-11:00

1 11.00-11.25 25 mins	Presentation from Stephanie Howarth, Chief Statistician, Welsh Government	Stephanie Howarth
2 11.25-11.30 5 mins	Minutes and matters arising from previous meetings Declarations of interest	Meeting of 28 January 2021
3 11.30-11.40 10 mins	Report from the Authority Chair	Oral report Sir David Norgrove
4 11.40-12.00 20 mins	Report from the Chief Executive	SA(21)09 Prof. Sir Ian Diamond
5 12.00-12.10 10 mins	Report from the Director-General for Regulation	SA(21)10 Ed Humpherson
6 12.10-12.15 5 mins	Report from Committee Chair <ul style="list-style-type: none">Regulation Committee	Oral report Prof. Anne Trefethen
12.15-12.30 15 mins	Break	
7 12.30-12.50 20 mins	Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme	SA(21)11 Iain Bell Nicola Tyson-Payne
8 12.50-13.15 25 mins	COVID-19 Infection Survey and Surveillance Studies	SA(21)12 Iain Bell Emma Rourke
9 13.15-13.35 20 mins	Economic Campus in the North of England	SA(21)13 Darren Morgan
10 13.35-13.45 10 mins	Business Plan update	SA(21)14 Nick Bateson
11 13.45-14.00 15 mins	Any Other Business	

Next meeting: 25 March 2021, 10:30-14.00, via videoconference

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(21)09

Chief Executive's Report, February 2020

Purpose

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

Summary

2. We have continued to contribute to understanding the spread of COVID-19 and the effectiveness of National and Regional restrictions; and the impact on the economy, whilst ramping up to deliver brilliant Census next month.

Review of recent activities

3. Important developments in recent weeks include the following:
 - i. On Friday 12 February we published the final Methodological Advisory Research Panel paper which outlined the evidence for our conclusion on the data being collected for the sex question, as well as a supplementary paper detailing the subsequent guidance for the question.
 - ii. Through continued work with colleagues across health organisations the latest iteration of the Public Health Data Asset has been created.
 - iii. On 9 February the Chair and I did a virtual visit to Ofqual and heard from them about their statistical activities.
 - iv. This month the work on the Brilliant, Aligned and Sustainable Enabling (BASE) review has continued at real pace. We held a 'Your Call' session with all staff which gave insight into staff's worries and concerns. The call was engaging and appropriately challenging, recording more questions than any other all-staff session. Since then we have launched a questionnaire for all staff to gain an understanding of how the enabling functions are perceived across the office. We will supplement these findings with focus groups next month with a view to bring together the findings of the review shortly after.
 - v. Work continues to improve our population estimates, including those used in the estimation of our Labour Market statistics.
 - vi. I have been invited to join a steering group as part of the Goldacre Review, which has been commissioned by the Secretary of State for Health to complete a rapid, practical review into the better, broader and safer use of health data. The review will report its findings in April.
 - vii. Work on the Integrated Data Programme (IDP) is progressing well, with activity focussed on the Gateway Three Review and completion of the Full Business Case.
4. Levelling up is becoming increasingly important for Government as we recover from COVID-19. I am continuing to help chair a Senior Data Group, to prioritise and govern data sharing, linking and analysis across government.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond, 17 February 2020

Update from the Director General for Regulation

Purpose

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

Discussion

2. Our main areas of focus in recent weeks have are detailed below.

Exams Review

3. I noted in January that we have received a significant volume of comments from Ofqual. We have now worked our way through them, and I have met their new CEO. The revised draft was refined following input from the Regulation Committee and is now with the four UK regulators for final fact checking.
4. The main lesson we identify is that the task of implementing statistical models to support major decisions is never solely a technical exercise. The explanation of the approach, and openness about limitations, are equally important in securing public confidence.
5. We will publish the report in early March. We propose a range of follow up activities to highlight the report's messages with the Government Analysis and Digital functions, with the Government Statistical Service (GSS), and with senior policy makers.

Vaccines

6. We wrote to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) and published a statement on vaccines data, highlighting that:
 - i. in England, the primary source of data is NHS England, but some data have been published by Public Health England (PHE). PHE started to publish data by age band, but suspended this publication, because of differences in the population base being used for different sources. At the time of writing, these PHE data are no longer available. NHS England is adding additional age groups to its publication and PHE is looking to resolve its concerns and restart its publication– but in the meantime figures are being quoted in the media, based on unpublished information;
 - ii. on Northern Ireland, where the Department of Health (NI) is releasing data in a fairly inconsistent way (primarily via Twitter), and not through its own dashboard; and
 - iii. we have seen some positive progress with England now publishing figures on ethnicity (at an all-England level), and Scotland publishes figures by vaccine type. We want to see more progress. In England progress is being held up by challenges in defining the population base used to calculate the percentage of vaccinations within different sub-groups (e.g. age bands). We know that ONS are working very closely with NHS England, the Department of Health and Social Care, and Public Health England, and the issue may well be resolved by the time the Board meets.

Statistical Leadership

7. We published our report on [statistical leadership](#) on 3 February. This report highlights the important role that statisticians and analysts play in supporting appropriate use of evidence. It also emphasises the importance of an organisational culture that values evidence, and of career opportunities for analysts. We are promoting the report through a range of channels, including a [blog](#) from Number Ten analysts on their data masterclasses (already published) and at the GSS conference and in the Royal Statistical Society Significance magazine.

Economic statistics

8. In the last month, we have responded to concerns in two areas:
 - i. the measurement of public service output in GDP. These concerns, raised by Simon Briscoe among others, questioned the ONS approach and whether it is comparable with other countries. We agree that there is an issue of international comparability, but support the ONS's approach as being conceptually sound and providing a meaningful measure of economic activity; and
 - ii. estimates of unemployment and employment from the Labour Force Survey. The change to collecting the data by phone rather than face to face has reduced responses from some sub-populations, notably foreign-born workers. This has led to some questions about whether changes to the number of foreign-born workers and, by extension, UK-born workers, is plausible. We have published a short statement to note that we are aware of the issue and of ONS' efforts to address it.

National Statistics review

9. The National Statistics review is now in full swing, with a wide range of discussions and events with Heads of Profession and other analysts in Government.

Conclusion

10. The main challenge facing the Office for Statistics Regulation this month, as last month, has been the latest lockdown. It has impacted our capacity to deliver. We continue to respond flexibly, rearranging project teams and deferring some work.

Ed Humpherson, UK Statistics Authority Regulation, 16 February 2020

List of Annexes

Annex A Regulatory dashboard

Regulatory Activities February 2021 - AB

Health and Social Care	Economy	Population and Society	Agriculture, Energy and Environment	Children, Education and Skills
<p>Rapid review: Writing up findings and recommendations for the ONS COVID-19 Infection Survey statistics rapid review.</p> <p>Assessments: Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) reviewing evidence for meeting requirements. Commenced engagement with NHS Business Services Authority in preparation for start of assessment of General Pharmaceutical Services statistics.</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: Gathering evidence and engaging with stakeholders and users for the Northern Ireland review is now underway.</p>	<p>Assessments: ONS Productivity statistics Continuing engagement with users, on track to report to Regulation Cttee in April</p> <p>Casework: responded to Simon Briscoe on how ONS calculates public services output for GDP</p> <p>Compliance Checks: Published letters on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ experimental estimates of GVA following double deflation (ONS) ▪ Regional Household Final Expenditure statistics (ONS) ▪ Northern Ireland's economic statistics (NISRA) <p>Plan to publish letter to HMRC regarding Child and Working Tax Credits in March</p> <p>Engaging with DIT and ONS on CC about FDI statistics with view to publishing letter around Easter</p>	<p>Assessments: Census ONS and NISRA recently published evidence reports which will support the assessment process. NISRA holding monthly catch up with assessment team in run up to census day and through live. User consultation for assessment is open with blog to promote published on 12/2. ONS's communication of its decision on guidance for the sex question has been further delayed and we have received correspondence raising concerns over ONS decision making and communication with users.</p> <p>Systemic Review: Loneliness User engagement continuing.</p> <p>Population projections Meetings with experts' users and complainants underway. Plan to engage with producers following user meetings in early March with a view to publish initial findings by the end of March.</p>	<p>Casework: Investigation into the estimated impacts of EU exit on fisheries ongoing.</p> <p>Compliance checks: Defra's flood defence spending statistics delayed (due to delay in the publication). Initial meeting for CC of natural capital accounts in early February.</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>Food statistics Initial scoping of review underway.</p>	<p>Exam Results Review: Identifies lessons learned from 2020 exams process. Preparing for publication of the report at end of February.</p> <p>Casework: Private letter sent to DfE on concerns around attendance statistics. TEF-Independent review and govt response has been published. Meeting with the RSS to discuss OSR response.</p> <p>Skills toolkit – media query around quality issues and use of unpublished data in a PQ.</p> <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>Systemic Reviews: Children and Young People: Review is on hold until the Exam Results Review concluded.</p>
Crime and Security	Business, Trade and International Development	Labour Market and Welfare	Housing, Planning and Local Services	Travel, Transport and Tourism
<p>Assessments: Completed user engagement for assessment of Home Office police funding statistics. Draft report to be submitted to April Regulation Committee meeting.</p> <p>Compliance Checks: Findings of CC of Scottish Government prison statistics will be published w/c 15 Feb.</p> <p>Guidance on data about sex: Guidance ready for publication and comms plan finalised. Provisional publication date of 22 Feb.</p> <p>Casework: investigating concerns about the recording and reporting of data about sex in crime statistics.</p>	<p>Assessments: 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> <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>Assessment: user interviews for Northern Ireland's Personal Independence Payment Stats are underway.</p> <p>Systemic Review: Poverty Statistics: Interviews underway with users and producers. A member of the Inclusive Data Taskforce (Prof David Gordon – Townsend Centre for International Poverty Research) will be observing two of the workshops.</p>	<p>Compliance checks: Findings of compliance check for LA social housing statistics transferred from MHCLG to the Regulator for Social Housing will be published 23 Feb. Initiating compliance check on National Record of Scotland Household projections</p>	<p>Assessment: Office for Rail and Road's Estimates of Station Usage statistics designated National Statistics. Published a joint follow up blog with ORR on 9 February.</p> <p>Scoping: currently scoping future domain projects and engaging with producers.</p>

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme

SA(21)11

Purpose

1. This paper provides an update on the programme as the campaign for Census 2021 goes live. It also provides the Board with a refreshed view on the wider transformation.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to note:
 - i. the whole programme retains an amber rating, whilst the Census collection has now been assessed as amber/green. Census delivery and ongoing build continues as planned but we remain adaptable to the changing nature of the pandemic. Plans for the wider transformation are being refreshed to take account of the availability of admin data and to ensure organisational priorities mean resource is available;
 - ii. Census build for Households and Communal Establishments is complete and the Programme Board agreed a “go” decision on 9 February. Ongoing risks continue to be managed and, despite some process issues within Adecco, the operation continues to recruit and induct field staff providing the field force necessary to effectively run the operation. The media campaign is now live and community engagement continues online;
 - iii. progress continues with the wider transformation. Business statistics transformation has dispatched more than one million online survey questionnaires to businesses, and work on Business Statistics Social Survey Transformation is being reviewed with Digital Services and Technology (DST) colleagues to ensure strategic solutions can form the basis of surveys going forwards; and
 - iv. additionally, to support both census and the building of a recommendation in 2023 on the future of census, the Population and Migration Statistics Transformation (PMST) project is refocusing to make the best use of the admin data available and is exploring opportunities from new data such as the vaccination data.

Discussion

Programme update

3. The whole programme remains at amber, reflecting the good progress made but also the challenges faced from both COVID-19 and our external dependencies. Despite some procedural issues with the recruitment of field staff, Census delivery remains on track, with additional mitigations supporting our continued delivery confidence.
4. The Programme Board held their initial “Go/No Go” meeting on 9 February, covering the collection operation for Households (HH) and Communal Establishments (CEs). It was unanimously agreed that the Census collection operation was in an amber/green position and should proceed as planned. As such, the media campaign launched on 12 February.

Final Preparations for Census

Final Build and Test

5. The digital build of all elements for HH and CEs are complete. Final security and performance testing is now underway, no issues have arisen, and performance meets more than double the plan. All digital elements, including the electronic questionnaire (eQ) will go live on 23 February, as planned.

6. The remaining build and testing for Census Customer Services and Non-Compliance (NC) operations are on track for delivery. Further work is now being undertaken to review the operational design of both to ensure they can be completed in a COVID-19 safe way.
7. We remain in close contact with the COVID-19 Task Force to ensure alignment with all the latest government guidance. Some communal establishment and non-contact field work will start in mid-February. However, the main field operation with staff knocking on doors to interact with the general public will not start until after Census Day. If required, a decision to delay this field work can be made up to 18 March and COVID-19 conditions are being closely monitored. Plans also still allow for an extension of field work in up to 50 local authorities if required. A decision on this will be made around 12 April depending on response rates.

Operations

8. Successful, ongoing, virtual engagement with local communities continues. Locally there has been wide ranging support from local press as well as local groups in all areas. We have also received offers of support from mayors, including the London Mayor, to use their resources to support the enumeration of key population groups.
9. Recruitment continues for all areas of the field operation. Adecco have experienced problems sourcing candidates as well as ensuring a smooth recruitment journey, however, we expect to meet our minimum recruitment levels to run an effective operation. We will continue to support Adecco to ensure recruitment is as smooth and successful as possible and improve on this position.

Social Media and Communications

10. The media campaign launched on 12 February following the 'go' decision by the Programme Board on 9 February. With a plan to reach as close to 100 per cent of the population as possible, each person will have an average of 52.1 opportunities to see and hear the campaign.
11. So far over 6,700 schools have registered to participate in the award-winning census primary school education programme 'Let's Count' and over 800 to the secondary schools activity. A live lesson with historian Professor David Olusoga on diversity, equality, representation and the census on 4 February attracted nearly 40,000 views on its first day. More resources and competitions will be launched before Census Day.
12. Contact with Universities to gain their support for communications, including direct emails, to students continues to make progress. All Vice Chancellors have been written to and all universities have now been engaged. We have met with the National Union of Students and Universities UK who have offered to share our communications products wider and include our messaging in their newsletter to all university employees.

Assurance and Go Live

13. Following the Programme Board's first "Go/No Go" meeting on 9 February, an ongoing series of assurance check points continues to be monitored closely. This will ensure all services can go live, and then be maintained, as planned. All teams are collaborating as we build to 23 February when the eQ and supporting services go live. A further "Go/No Go" meeting covering the launch of the Census Coverage Survey (CCS) and NC operations will take place on 21 April.

Questionnaire Guidance

14. Following further engagement with stakeholders, and final legal advice, agreement was reached on the guidance to be used for the sex question. As such the paper presented to the Methodology Assurance Review Panel (MARP) in December and the resultant decision on the final guidance were published on 12 February.

Wider Transformation

Business Surveys

15. In addition to the Moving Survey Online (MSO) issuing over one million online questionnaires to businesses in 2020/2021 the team has also delivered the Business Impacts of Coronavirus (COVID-19) Survey (BICS) since March 2020 dispatching over 700,000 surveys to date. The team have built an agile model to allow them to react quickly to the needs of government departments in understanding the impact of the pandemic.
16. The Distributed Trades project continues to make good progress with the launch of a Beta product that provides a new production ready end to end retail sales pipeline that is now undergoing business acceptance testing. This work lays the foundations for further transformation of business statistics and will also help in moving ONS away from the use of legacy platforms. The requirements for the pipeline to go-live have been identified and are being fed into the remaining sprints.
17. Progress towards the development of the Statistical Business Register remains challenging. Work continues with DST colleagues to review options.

Social Survey Transformation

18. Social Survey Transformation (SST) has been working to transform the existing ONS social survey portfolio. This has been through two key strands of work:
 - i. introducing mixed mode online first data collection, rationalising survey content for when surveys are required; and
 - ii. collaborating to put administrative data at the heart of the population statistics system.
19. Initial focus of this work has been around the LMS, which has been live since April 2020 using NISRA's Blaise infrastructure. It has focused on collecting Labour market data to help mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the Labour Force Survey (LFS). It has also been used to support the Opinions survey and the COVID-19 Infection Survey. Performance to-date has been excellent and the online response rate in January was 40 per cent.
20. Using LMS as a trailblazer in this way, we can create a more efficient model of surveying by:
 - i. at first point of contact collecting a wide core of data from which to base analysis in addition to the respondent contact details (e.g. email address, telephone number);
 - ii. allowing a second or third contact with the respondent in a cheaper mode (online or by telephone);
 - iii. creating a core pool of respondents willing to take part in surveys; and
 - iv. spinning up new surveys more quickly from that pool of respondents with known characteristics. This also allows for creation of targeted surveys to a sample of specific characteristics (e.g. a particular age group, or occupation group).
21. Work continues to now strengthen LMS to extend its reach to be able support the replacement of the Labour Force Survey by April 2022. This work forms the foundation from which we can build larger surveys as required on ONS infrastructure of up to circa 500,000 new respondents each year. This will also include subsequent sub modules to meet more specific user needs, for example Household Finances, Health, Education surveys etc.
22. The target to complete this work is an ambitious one and will require the full support of DST colleagues to fully understand how we can build strategic, long-term sustainable platforms and services which fully meet our strategic requirements.

Population and Migration Statistics Transformation and 2023 Recommendation

23. Progress on the acquisition of administrative data remains constant. We are still anticipated the arrival of further Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) data in April 2021 and we are working closely with Methods, Data, Research (MDR) in the improvements they continue to make to their acquisition pipeline. As such production of the Admin Based Population Estimates (ABPEs) remains on track. These will both support the QA of census and give us an ABPE time series to support the 2023 recommendation on the future of Census.
24. The need for timely population and migration statistics has become ever more apparent during the pandemic and following the end of EU Exit transition. We are focusing some of the research within the PMST project to ensure we can support the response to the emerging challenges and support the delivery of 2021 Census. We want to ensure we are making best use of data currently available to us, including understanding how new data sources can add value (such as vaccine data), as well as directing resources towards our highest priorities.
25. To build to a clear plan for delivering the priority evidence needed for the 2023 Recommendation, we have engaged with a large number of stakeholders over the last month to determine an ambitious set of user needs. These will inform the transformation of our social statistics system and the 2023 recommendation. We are now collating this feedback into a refreshed statement of needs. We will then refocus our work on putting admin data at the core of social statistics and inputting into the design of our social survey mechanism ensuring that all requirements are well understood and captured.

Iain Bell, Deputy National Statistician for Population and Public Policy and Nicola Tyson-Payne, Interim Director of Transformation, Population and Public Policy, 15 February 2020

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

COVID-19 Infection Survey and associated surveillance studies

SA(21)12

Purpose

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

Recommendations

2. Members of the Board are invited to note:
 - i. the continued successful delivery and high impact of the CIS;
 - ii. recent successful milestones, including the preparatory work to support the vaccine rollout; work to operationalise a second schools survey and further ad hoc analysis to support urgent policy decisions; and
 - iii. that the CIS programme remains at amber, with considerable progress made in addressing key risks on the programme; and
 - iv. the early strategic thinking and associated engagement for future population health surveillance.

Discussion

Survey Performance

3. The survey is now performing at its highest standard since its inception, with swab testing targets now being met, or exceeded, in the devolved nations now, as well as England. Additional information on Vaccines and Long-COVID is now being collected daily. Call queues have been eliminated and improvements to our processes result in fulfilling over 100,000 incentives transactions to respondents a week.
4. Over the next six weeks the CIS will transition from collecting venous blood for antibody testing to a new finger-prick capillary collection approach. This enables CIS to play an increased role in vaccine monitoring, unlocks the ability to increase the volume of antibody blood tests and provides the opportunity for efficiency savings across the survey through the reduced reliance on phlebotomists. With medical ethics approval now obtained, time is of the essence. Following a short pilot at the start of March, existing blood cohort and swab cohort respondents on the survey will be invited to consent to regular finger prick antibody testing so that a total of 150,000 tests a month are completed. Robust change management is being applied to such a significant shift in the role of the survey and the key risks relating to the data capture software changes, a possible national shortage of pipettes and the need for medical regulatory approval for the capillary kits all have active mitigations in place.
5. Following Cabinet Office approval, the re-competition of the CIS was launched at the end of January and continues to receive active market interest.

Impact

6. Recent influential outputs from CIS and wider health analysis include:
 - i. publication (academic pre-print PubMed) of excess hospitalisation post-acute COVID-19. This paper was developed jointly with Professor Kamelsh Khunti (Leicester University) and Prof. Ami Banerjee (UCL);
 - ii. analysis to validate the estimate of the B117 variant of SARS-CoV-2 on mortality (paper to NERVTAG);
 - iii. comparisons of ethnic differences in COVID-19 mortality between Wave 1 and Wave 2 of the pandemic was the BBC website most read article on 9 February;

- iv. Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) publication of the updated ONS Excess Mortality estimates;
- v. significant contribution to SAGE discussions on transmission, specifically around risks associated with occupation and sector and predictors of positivity; and
- vi. UK analyses on symptoms shown by those testing positive.

Schools Infection Study (SIS)

- 7. Following school closures, the SIS team is robustly planning for a range of School re-opening scenarios. To improve participation rates and data quality on the survey once Schools re-open, a comprehensive communications campaign has been developed which includes the introduction of a compensation package for schools. This package is funded by the underspend from the cancelled January testing.
- 8. Results from the autumn terms testing will be published on 1 March. This report is a collaboration with our SIS partners (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) and Public Health England (PHE)) and will include a comparison of results between the two rounds of testing in the autumn term, as well as new data on antibodies and implementation measures in place within the schools.
- 9. At the start of February ONS was asked to assist Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) in the operational delivery of an additional COVID-19 related schools' study. The Daily Contact Testing Trial seeks to understand whether daily lateral flow tests can be used as a substitute for the isolation period that test and trace contacts and bubbles in schools are faced with. This has the potential to be a game changer in the way the schools manage the pandemic and could lead the way more broadly across the country. ONS is currently working closely with DHSC to develop a viable operational plan, data capture approach with shared data and analytical architecture, and joint scientific oversight.

Monitoring COVID-19 in other settings

- 10. Care Homes – we are developing non-response weights to support DHSC Pillar 2 data for Care Home staff and residents. Discussions regarding analysis to monitor the impact of vaccination in care homes are ongoing.
- 11. Universities - in anticipation of the return of a further subset of students to campus-based teaching, a regular ONS ingest of provider-level COVID-19 case, mass testing, and self-isolation data is being coordinated from mandatory weekly reports collected by the Office for Students on behalf of Department for Education (DfE).

Opinions Survey on Behaviours

- 12. We have published Wave 4 of the student behavioural survey and are about to publish the latest findings from the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable survey, with some slight shifts in behaviour evident for those who have been vaccinated. Test and Trace cases is live in the field, and we are preparing an Over-80's survey, as well as in discussions about a longitudinal survey plan to capture behaviours and attitudes pre and post vaccination.
- 13. Qualitative research on six key groups with barriers to compliance is now complete, and we are working with the contractor to write up findings.

Vaccine rollout

- 14. This month, the spotlight is on the work we are undertaking to support the vaccine rollout.
- 15. We are developing our analytical plans in partnership with SAGE Secretariat and the Vaccine Science Coordination Group.
- 16. Over the next six weeks, the CIS will transition from collecting venous blood for antibody testing to a new finger-prick capillary collection approach. This enables CIS to play an

increased role in vaccine monitoring, unlocks the ability to increase the volume of antibody blood tests and provides the opportunity for efficiency savings across the survey through the reduced reliance on phlebotomists.

17. Fieldwork for a qualitative study will begin week commencing 15 February interviewing 50 people on vaccine refusal attitudes and behaviours. It is expected to produce findings at the end of March.
18. Findings from the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable Survey (CEV), run in collaboration with DHSC, are expected to be published 23 February. The findings will provide insights into attitudes to vaccination among this group. A new Over-80's Vaccine Survey is due in the field on 15 February to collect data on this specific population.
19. ONS is contributing to discussions with UK administrations and government departments on the most appropriate denominators for reporting vaccine uptake by population sub-group.

Strategic planning

20. ONS has occupied an important place in UK health statistics for many years. During the coronavirus pandemic, we expanded our role and made a vital contribution to the country's response. This expanded role will continue to evolve into the future, because:
 - i. there will be an ongoing need to understand long-term challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic and by other existing and emerging health issues;
 - ii. the significant investment in data collection operations, building data assets, and developing analysis techniques and expertise, should deliver value for money into the future; and
 - iii. as a trusted, independent provider of data and analysis for the UK, ONS is well-placed to lead the UK statistical system's role in health and social care: improving outcomes, highlighting risks and inequalities and responding to future challenges.
21. Our vision is to lead and shape the UK statistical system's role in health and social care to meet the nation's needs now and in the future. We will:
 - i. continue to respond to users' needs for data and analysis about the current pandemic, including to understand its long-term implications;
 - ii. apply our new capabilities to answer questions about broader population health challenges, incorporating more health, social and economic data; and
 - iii. develop our readiness to respond quickly to future health challenges, by learning lessons from the current pandemic, monitoring requirements and building a toolkit to stand up surveillance as necessary.
22. Opportunities we have already identified to achieve this vision include:
 - i. We are further expanding our Public Health Data Asset (PHDA) as the most comprehensive public health dataset available across government. This has established us as an authority on Long-COVID and will continue to provide unique insights into the health of the nation.
 - ii. We are in discussions with Melinda Mills, Director, Leverhulme Centre for Demographic Science at Oxford to develop a proposal for a Longitudinal COVID-19 Infection Study, collecting biodata and information about socio-economic drivers and behaviours. This would follow a subsample of participants from the ONS COVID-19 Infection Survey to enable an understanding of the longer-term health and socio-economic consequences of COVID-19 infection and illness and the interplay between the two. It has the potential to be one of the most valuable global longitudinal studies in history, allowing detection of adverse outcomes to support key policy decisions for government, as well as novel research.
 - iii. This future expansion of health data will be underpinned by our work to understand the broader characteristics and drivers of the nation's health via the Health Index. As

a top-level single measure of health which focuses public debate and policy attention on a broad concept of health and 'healthiness', the index – along with broader, collaborative horizon-scanning – will help shape the future questions and challenges we need to address.

- iv. We are engaging with a range of organisations, including the Devolved Administrations and the bodies which will form the new UK Health Security Agency, to understand both their immediate information needs and their longer-term strategic direction.

Next Steps

23. We will integrate any feedback from the Board into further development of this strategic thinking.

Iain Bell, Director General, Population and Public Policy and Emma Rourke, Director, Health Analysis and Pandemic Insight, ONS, 17 February 2021

Economic Campus in the North of England: ONS presence

Purpose

1. This paper recommends that ONS has a presence in the Economic Campus in the North of England.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Board are invited to comment on the recommendations that:
 - i. ONS should have a presence in the Economic Campus in the North of England; and
 - ii. the commitment should be kept flexible at this stage with a view to firm up once the location, and the size and make-up of the presence of other government departments become known.
3. Views from the Board would also be welcome on the benefits and risks of the recommendations and whether additional mitigations should be considered to further reduce risk.

Background

4. An Economic Campus in the North of England is being developed, the location of which was expected to be announced as part of the 2021 Budget (3 March) with Leeds, Newcastle and Teesside being considered.

Discussion

5. The recommendation is that the commitment should be kept flexible at this stage. The early thinking, though, is to have a small cross-cutting team of circa 10 to 20 Full Time Equivalents during 2022 focussed on the analytical demands of 'Levelling Up' and then to review after a year. This would include colleagues from public policy, economic statistics, and data science fields at the very least. This provides a team of broad capability and it is considered that one this size would provide appropriate critical mass at inception with the flexibility to grow appropriately.
6. Key benefits include alignment to our own strategy and to wider policy and strategic priorities of government:
 - i. Radical, Ambitious, Inclusive and Sustainable: ONS is a growing organisation and to start increasing its presence around the country in collaboration with other government departments could be seen as both radical and ambitious (a true 'National' Statistics Office). This provides a strategic opportunity to increase our catchment areas and looking beyond our current recruitment pools is another example of being inclusive. Finally, widening our horizon for attracting talent has the potential to improve our sustainability;
 - ii. Places for Growth: ONS has only a relatively small presence in London and has already re-located posts outside of the capital. This commitment would, though, reinforce our commitment to further align to this government strategy;
 - iii. Levelling Up: is clearly a policy priority for the Government and building a team in the North of England would further strengthen our commitment to support this 'agenda' from an analytical perspective. The analytical resource could, of course, also flex and adapt as priorities change; and
 - iv. Collaboration and Engagement: we already work closely with some of the departments who will be moving to the new location. This provides a further opportunity to build on these relationships and indeed the local communities.

Conclusion

7. The paper recommends that ONS makes a commitment to have a presence in the Economic Campus in the North of England but that this should be kept flexible in the first instance and to only firm up once further details become known. The paper sets out the benefits of this and suggests we should proceed but that the Board's views on mitigation of any risks would be welcomed.

Darren Morgan, Economic Statistics Development, ONS, 15 February 2021

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

2020/21 January Business Plan Update

SA(21)14

Purpose

1. This paper provides the Authority Board with a supporting narrative to explain progress on the delivery of the Business Plan on 31 January 2021.

Recommendation

2. Members of the Board are asked to note the key messages, mitigating actions and associated owners below.

Key Messages

3. The key messages this month are laid out below.

Strategic Objectives

4. Reporting against the ONS Strategic Objectives (SOs) reflects a continued downward trend from green to amber – with all 12 SOs now reporting below the target of 70 per cent green. This trend is being addressed via management action, overseen by Portfolio and Investment Committee (PIC) and the National Statistician's Executive Group (NSEG). There are no red Accountability Framework Objectives being reported for this period.

Programme portfolio

5. Good progress is being made in the development of business cases for our Tier 1 Programmes:
 - i. the Integrated Data Programme (IDP) Full Business Case (FBC) is on track for review by Portfolio and Investment Committee (PIC) in March prior to HM Treasury (HMT) submission. The Infrastructure Projects Authority (IPA) is commencing a Gateway Review of the IDP on 22 February;
 - ii. the new Economic Statistics Transformation Programme (ESTP) business case is due to PIC in April;
 - iii. the FBC for COVID-19 Infection Survey (CIS), detailing the outcome of the re-procurement of services, is being considered at Commercial Approvals Group (CAG) in March ahead of submission to Cabinet Office in April.
6. Progress towards delivery of the 2021 Census continues, with the start of the collection operation and 'Census Day' in March 2021, as set out in a separate paper to the Board.
7. CIS continues to deliver at pace with two new weekly reports on transmissions and vaccinations.
8. Tier 1 programme risks and issues across the portfolio are being channelled to the most appropriate Board/Committee within the UK Statistics Authority Governance structure.

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

9. On strategic focus and ambition:
 - i. a review of the strategic drivers and strategic objectives was completed in December 2020, and a prioritisation framework is being developed by PIC to support strategic focus and direction; and
 - ii. 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.

10. On managing resource and people constraints:

- i. The Analysis and Evaluation Committee reviewed the allocation of statistical and analytical resource.
- ii. Strategic Business Plan (SBP) Review – work to refresh the SBP in the context of the Spending Review is on track and is being overseen by PIC.
- iii. BASE Review – we are progressing the BASE Review¹ of our enabling functions to assess how they are delivering services to the wider organisation.
- iv. Resource management – the in-year net financial position continues to improve with a forecast surplus of £14.9 million which relates to programme business cases, is a result of additional Supplementary Estimate funding received in month and the net impact of anticipated pressures and opportunities to the year end.
- v. Capability – we are continuing to focus on bringing in the analytical capability that is required to support the Public Policy Analysis, Health Analysis and Pandemic Insight (including CIS) and Economic Statistics Group.

11. On 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 Spending Review. A review of the governance framework is scheduled for the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) in March 2021.
- ii. Risk Management – NSEG is reviewing progress against the mitigations for the strategic risks which support that we are on track to align with the risk appetite range.
- iii. Quality – an update paper on the quality agenda was provided to the Board in January, with an update to ARAC due in March. This will show improvements to the quality and resilience of the plan to address quality risks and to the assurance mechanisms – following a positive discussion at QC in February.
- iv. System resilience – an update on the plans for addressing our legacy technical debt and system fragilities was presented to the ARAC in January.
- v. Data acquisition and usage – ARAC will be provided with an update on progress with Data acquisition and usage in March. The Strategic Business Plan review will include prioritisation of data acquisition resources across Census Data Collection Transformation Programme; ESTP; IDP and CIS and associated analysis.

Nick Bateson, Director of Finance, Planning and Performance, ONS, 16 February 2021

¹ BASE stands for Brilliant, Aligned and Sustainable Enabling functions.