

# UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

**Minutes**  
**Thursday 28 January 2021**  
**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  
Ed Humpherson  
Nora Nanayakkara  
Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter

## **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 10)  
Nicola Tyson-Payne (for item 9)  
Amy Williams (Secretariat)

## **Apologies**

Professor Jonathan Haskel  
Professor Anne Trefethen

## **1. Apologies**

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Professor Anne Trefethen and Professor Jonathan Haskel.

## **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 15 December 2020 were agreed.

## **4. Report from the Authority Chair**

- 4.1 Non-executive directors had met prior to the Board meeting. They had discussed Internal Audit and assurance.
- 4.2 The Chair reported on his recent activity since the Board last met:
- i. On 6 January Sir David, Richard Dobbs, Alison Pritchard and Ed Humpherson had met to discuss the review by Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) of the approaches to developing statistical models designed for awarding 2020 exam results;
  - ii. Sir David and Professor Sir Ian Diamond had discussed the strategy, Statistics for the Public Good, at an event for Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) analysts and heard about the work of MHCLG;
  - iii. Sir David, Sir Ian and Ed Humpherson had met William Wragg MP (Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee) on 21 January to discuss vaccine statistics, the official statistics system and the role of the ONS and the National Statistician in relation to the analytical system as a whole; and
  - iv. on 25 January Board members had attended a workshop on the Integrated Data Programme led by Alison Pritchard.

## **5. Report from the Chief Executive [SA(21)01]**

- 5.1 Sir Ian provided the Board with an overview of activity and issues since the last meeting highlighting the following:
- i. in December 2020, two ad-hoc releases of statistics regarding the COVID-19 Infection Survey (CIS) on the prevalence and impact of the Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions had been published. With schools currently closed across the UK the next phase of the Schools Infection Survey had been paused;
  - ii. work with colleagues across different health organisations toward the development of a public health data asset was ongoing;
  - iii. as part of the work of the Health and Pandemic Insights Group international comparisons and the impact of long-Covid had been considered;
  - iv. Sir Ian had been asked to chair a cross-government data analysis group sponsored by the Chief Secretary of HM Treasury, as part of the work across government to reduce inequalities through the levelling up agenda;
  - v. a blog had been published on the work being undertaken by ONS at pace to assess the impact of the pandemic on the population. Sam Beckett had appeared on the Today programme to discuss ONS population, migration and labour market statistics;
  - vi. Sir Ian had met the Director General of Eurostat, Mariana Kotzeva, on 19 January to discuss the statistical element of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement going forward. Both had welcomed the opportunity to further discuss statistical matters in support of the Agreement; and
  - vii. the work by the International Development Team and Official Development Assistance funding. A paper would be provided for the Board at a forthcoming meeting.

5.2 Board members discussed the update. With regard to international comparisons of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) it was noted that changes in GDP during the pandemic were not always directly comparable with between countries due to differences in the measurement of public goods such as health and education. Further analysis of the issue would shortly be published by ONS.

## **6. Report from the Director General for Regulation [SA(21)02]**

6.1 Ed Humpherson provided an update on regulation activity since the last meeting. The draft report of OSR's review of the development process for statistical models designed to award 2020 exam results had been shared for comment with the UK regulators. The Board heard that OSR would be liaising further with Ofqual.

6.2 OSR had written to producers of health-related statistics across the UK regarding vaccine roll-out statistics. It was noted that the approach to vaccine statistics had been more structured than the approach to testing data in April and May last year. OSR had written separately to the Department of Health for Northern Ireland outlining the need for consistency when releasing data about vaccines.

## **7. Report from the Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee**

7.1 Nora Nanayakkara reported on the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee which had met on 21 January. The Board heard that a closed session had been held for members to consider the provision of the Internal Audit function. Committee members had agreed the recommended option, that Amanda Smith would cover both Internal Audit and Risk and Assurance through to year end, with the appropriate safeguards in place. The Committee would consider the future model for Internal Audit further in May.

7.2 The Committee noted the progress made by People Business and Services in relation to skills and capabilities. With regard to the COVID-19 Infection Survey (CIS), members had commended the organisation for being agile enough to stand up and carry out a highly innovative project such as the CIS. The Committee had also commended the Census team for their open and transparent reporting throughout the delivery of the programme.

7.3 The Committee also considered the programme of Internal Audit Reviews. Further work would be undertaken on legacy uplift.

7.4 The Committee had considered the financial position; and the progress made to embed the risk framework across the organisation with a new Head of Risk joining ONS in May.

## **8. Statistical Quality [SA(21)03]**

8.1 Jonathan Athow introduced a paper which provided an update on the current work on statistical quality in the ONS. The meeting heard that statistical quality was central to the work of ONS and wider Government Statistical Service (GSS). Following work by Internal Audit and consideration by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee, and as part of the revised executive governance framework, a new Quality Committee had been established to oversee the programme of work. The Quality Committee drew membership from across the ONS and wider GSS. The importance of external involvement in quality work was discussed.

8.2 The programme of work included: a series of quality deep dives to investigate quality in particular statistical domains; quality improvement plans for each division; and the roll out of a new statistical quality maturity model self-assessment tool. Other initiatives included surveys of staff attitudes to quality; new metrics for measuring and monitoring quality; and overseeing the ongoing implementation of the Macpherson principles for

best practice in modelling. A detailed plan was in development which would include the risk and assurance framework underpinning the programme.

- 8.3 Board members discussed the update and noted the need to consider data quality and the communication of statistics as part of this work. The refreshed governance framework would underpin the links between Quality Committee, Data Governance Committee and Communications Committee to ensure all aspects were considered.
- 8.4 It was agreed that the relative roles of ONS and OSR regarding quality would be further considered.

## **9. Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme [SA(21)04]**

- 9.1 Iain Bell and Nicola Tyson-Payne introduced a paper which provided an update on the Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme. Key operational aspects of the Census were considered. They highlighted the plans and mitigations that had been put in place to prioritise the safety of field staff and the public during the collection operation.
- 9.2 The Board heard that the digital build was close to 100 per cent. Testing was progressing at pace with 89 per cent of Systems Acceptance testing either complete or in progress for households and communal establishments, and 87 per cent of the build for Census Coverage Survey complete or in progress. Non-functional testing was progressing well. The load on the system had been tested to cope with twice the predicted model and in the event of a peak, respondents would experience a small delay.
- 9.3 Progress on the media campaign included engagement at a national and local level with articles in local press and on local radio. The Census communications team would use a specialist set of tools to monitor social media. The Programme Board would make a final decision on 9 February regarding the launch of the media campaign on 12 February.
- 9.4 Engagement with Local Authorities had received a range of feedback. A task force had been set up to review and mitigate for any data implications arising from the impact of some population groups not being in their usual residence. It was noted that students were likely to be the largest group this might impact.
- 9.5 The sex question guidance was being finalised after the research completed.
- 9.6 Board members discussed the update. Weekly progress updates would be provided for Board starting early March.

## **10. COVID-19 Infection Survey and Surveillance Studies [SA(21)05]**

- 10.1 Iain Bell and Emma Rourke introduced a paper which provided an update on the CIS programme. The survey's performance continued to exceed the requirement to deliver 150,000 unique test per fortnight in England.
- 10.2 The Board commended the ONS for the work on the CIS and openness and transparency of ONS in dealing with issues of a programme of this size.

## **11. Statistics in the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement [SA(21)06]**

- 11.1 Will Laffan introduced a paper which provided a summary of statistical aspects of the new Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the UK and the EU. Future statistical cooperation was covered in one key clause. A set of principles had been developed to underpin future discussions with Eurostat.
- 11.2 The Board welcomed the update.

## **12. Strategy Update [SA(21)07]**

- 12.1 Douglas Cameron and Nick Bateson introduced a paper which provided the second quarterly update on progress against the delivery of the strategy, Statistics for the Public Good.
- 12.2 The 2020 departmental People Survey results evidenced the positive impact of the new strategy with the score for the understanding of organisational objectives and purpose now at 85 per cent. The delivery plans of both ONS and OSR aligned with the principles of the strategy: Radical, Ambitious; Inclusive and Sustainable.
- 12.3 There were a number of key challenges and opportunities in the coming months, including the delivery of the Census and enhanced statistics on COVID-19 vaccination rollout. It was noted that the business planning and prioritisation process would seek to ensure that resources and capacity were optimised to meet the challenges ahead. In addition, the work with the Analysis Function would help ensure a system wide approach to statistical and analytical priorities.

## **13. Strategic Risk [SA(21)08]**

- 13.1 Nick Bateson introduced a paper which provided an update on reporting and oversight mechanisms to monitor progress against strategic risks. The refreshed governance framework had embedded risk management at its core, with National Statistics Executive Group sub committees responsible for oversight and challenge of the plans in place to mitigate risks and identify opportunities within the risk appetite range.
- 13.2 The Board heard that the strategic risks were part of a wider programme of work to strengthen ONS's assurance mechanisms. This included the development of an integrated assurance framework.

## **14. Any other business**

- 14.1 The Authority Board would meet next on 25 February 2021 by videoconference.

## UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

### Agenda

28 January 2021, 09:15 to 12:45, via videoconference

**Chair: Sir David Norgrove**

**Apologies: Prof. Anne Trefethen**

**Attendees: Will Laffan (for item 9), Emma Rourke (for item 8), Nicola Tyson-Payne (for item 7)**

**NED Session: 09:15-09:45**

1 09.45-09.50 5 mins	Minutes and matters arising from previous meetings Declarations of interest	Meeting of 15 December 2020
2 09.50-10.00 10 mins	Report from the Authority Chair	Oral report Sir David Norgrove
3 10.00-10.20 20 mins	Report from the Chief Executive	SA(21)01 Prof. Sir Ian Diamond
4 10.20-10.30 10 mins	Report from the Director-General for Regulation	SA(21)02 Ed Humpherson
5 10.30-10.35 5 mins	Report from Committee Chair <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Audit and Risk Assurance Committee</li></ul>	Oral report Nora Nanayakkara
6 10.35-10.55 20 mins	Statistical Quality	SA(21)03 Jonathan Athow
7 10.55-11.25 30 mins	Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme	SA(21)04 Iain Bell Nicola Tyson-Payne
11.25-11.35 10 mins	Break 10 mins	
8 11.35-11.50 15 mins	COVID-19 Infection Survey and Surveillance Studies	SA(21)05 Emma Rourke Iain Bell
9 11.50-12.05 15 mins	Statistics in the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement	SA(21)06 Will Laffan
10 12.05-12.20 15 mins	Strategy update	SA(21)07 Nick Bateson Douglas Cameron
11 12.20-12.35 15 mins	Strategic Risks	SA(21)08 Nick Bateson
12 12.35-12.45 10 mins	Any Other Business	

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

*Chief Executive's Report, January 2021*

**Purpose**

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

**Summary**

2. In the face of another lockdown 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.

**Review of recent activities**

3. Important developments in recent weeks include the following:
  - i. Over the Christmas period we continued to publish some of our weekly publications including faster indicators, and the infection survey, on Christmas Eve. Weekly deaths were also published in between Christmas and New Year on 30 December. In addition, the infection survey team published two ad-hoc publications during the Christmas period informing government on latest infection rates and the new variant;
  - ii. We have continued to work closely with colleagues across health organisations as part of developing a Public Health Data Asset. This will bring together social and health data enabling a range of analysis which will facilitate understanding and response to the pandemic.
  - iii. At the beginning of January, I presented to the Demographic User Group on the strategy and the ONS's work over the past year and how this has facilitated the response to the pandemic;
  - iv. On 12 January the Chair and I did a virtual visit to Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) presenting the Strategy, Statistics for the Public Good, and took questions from analytical staff within MHCLG;
  - v. This month we launched the BASE (Brilliant, Aligned and Sustainable) Review of Enabling Functions. The review will examine the coherence, alignment and focus of the enabling functions in the delivery of the strategy and the support they are providing to the business, including the analytical directorates.
  - vi. As part of supporting the Inclusive Data Task Force (IDTF), this month saw the public consultation seeking views on the inclusivity of data held across government go live. Responses to the consultation will help inform the work of the IDTF its recommendations. The consultation will close for responses on 26 March 2021;
  - vii. We have continued to work with GSS colleagues in health as part of refining the granularity of daily, weekly and monthly vaccine statistics; and
  - viii. As part of the government's ambition to reduce inequalities across the country through levelling up, I have been asked to Chair a cross government data and analysis group, sponsored by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to assess data and analytical needs for the March budget and beyond..

**Professor Sir Ian Diamond, National Statistician, 19 January 2021**

# UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(21)02

## *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 received comments on the report from the four UK regulators. The comments from the regulators in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland were reasonable and will help enhance the report. The comments from Ofqual, the regulator for England, were extensive. We will be discussing further with them before the Board meeting and I can update the Board at the meeting itself;
  - ii. **Vaccines:** We wrote to the four countries of the UK about the vaccine roll-out data. While we highlighted areas for further coverage, it is fair to say that the approach to vaccine data has been more structured than the approach to testing data in April and May. The one significant concern is Northern Ireland, where the Department of Health is releasing data in a fairly inconsistent way, and not through its own dashboard;
  - iii. **Population projections:** Our review of the population projections and population estimates produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), triggered by concerns about housing need in Coventry, is now in the fieldwork phase. Our review will consider to what extent the methods and approaches are as good as they can be, and to what extent the projections developed were appropriate for their intended purpose. It is not within our remit to regulate operational decisions made by government or local authorities, nor to form a judgement on decisions about government policy. The scope of our review will be formed around ensuring that the official statistics are used appropriately, and that they can bear the weight put on them where they are used in decision making;
  - iv. **COVID-19 by occupation and COVID-19 in Scottish care homes:** Two important pieces of casework in the last month have involved questions about the weight that can be put on survey evidence. In the case of COVID-19 by occupation, the question surrounds whether there is evidence that teachers are at higher risk than other occupations. In Scottish care homes, the question is about whether there was an impact on care home outbreaks when patients were discharged from hospitals;
  - v. **Statistical leadership:** we publish our report on statistical leadership on 28 January. This report highlights the important role that statisticians and analysts play in Government in supporting appropriate use of evidence as well as the importance of good use of data by government more generally. Although it may not generate immediate coverage, the report provides the bedrock for a lot of engagement activity and a framework for us to advocate the role of use and communication of evidence by Government; and
  - vi. **National Statistics review:** this is now entering the producer engagement phase and we have a series of meetings with Heads of Profession and others over the coming six to eight weeks.
3. The main challenge facing OSR has been the new lockdown, especially home schooling. We are a small team, and we really notice it when individuals are unable to work at their normal capacity. We have mitigated the impact by rearranging some project teams (e.g. population projections, noted above) and by deferring some work.

**Ed Humpherson, UK Statistics Authority Regulation, 20 January 2021**



## **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><b>Assessments: ONS Productivity statistics</b> Continuing engagement with users, early findings to be reported to Regulation Committee 11 February</p> <p><b>Compliance Checks:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Published letter to ONS on experimental estimates of GVA following double deflation</li> <li>Engaging with ONS regarding its Regional Household Final Expenditure statistics -publication expected in next few weeks</li> <li>Engaging NISRA on Northern Ireland's economic statistics – publication expected in next four weeks</li> <li>Engaging with HMRC on its Child and Working Tax Credits–publication expected in next three weeks</li> </ul> <p><b>Stakeholder Engagement:</b> 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><b>Exam Results Review:</b> Identifies lessons learned from 2020 exams process. Focus is identifying how public bodies ensure statistical model outputs command public confidence. Dedicated <a href="#">project webpage</a> is providing regular external updates. Currently reviewing comments from qualifications regulators, refining recommendations and preparing for publication of the report.</p> <p><b>Systemic Reviews:</b> Children and Young People: Review is on hold until the Exam Results Review concluded.</p> <p><b>Casework:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Media query about the quality of statistics on the DfE Skills Toolkit.</li> <li>Published letters:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>The National Education Union,</b> Concerns raised: Ad hoc analysis of teacher infection rates from ONS Covid Infection survey <b>and</b> Quoting local area attendance statistics ahead of publication.</li> <li><b>Wes Streeting MP</b> following concerns raised about the use of statistics on school funding by the Conservative Party.</li> </ul> </li> <li>Internally generated casework following delay to school attendance statistics for the last week of the Autumn term. Concerns raised informally with DfE.</li> </ul> <p><b>Compliance Check:</b> Graduate Outcomes: evidence gathering meeting held. Planning to complete and publish in March once the Exam Results Review is completed.</p> <p><b>ICO audit of DfE data protection:</b> 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><b>Rapid review:</b> gathering evidence and engaging with stakeholders for the ONS COVID-19 Infection Survey statistics rapid review.</p> <p><b>Assessments:</b> Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) reviewing evidence for meeting requirements.</p> <p><b>Casework:</b> Continues to focus mainly on COVID-19, primarily on evidence to support the vaccination programme. Our public interventions can be viewed on our <a href="#">COVID-19 webpage</a> and <a href="#">correspondence page</a>.</p> <p><b>Systemic Review: Mental Health</b> initial scoping for Northern Ireland review underway.</p>	<p><b>Assessments:</b> <b>Census</b> 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><b>Systemic Review:</b> <b>Loneliness:</b> 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><b>Cross Domain review:</b> <b>Ethnicity</b> Scoping of project ongoing. Organising internal event.</p>	<p><b>Assessment:</b> started desk research for Northern Ireland's Personal Independence Payment Stats and have user interviews scheduled for early Feb.</p> <p><b>Systemic Review: Poverty Statistics:</b> 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><b>Business, Trade and International Development</b></p>	<p><b>Crime and Security</b></p>	<p><b>Housing, Planning and Local Services</b></p>
		<p><b>Assessments:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Annual Business Survey</b> 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.</li> </ul> <p><b>UK Trade ESCoE</b> paper on the construction of a balanced trade asymmetry dataset scheduled for publication w/c the 8<sup>th</sup> of February. Paper will include details on the purpose of the work and the benefits to users.</p>	<p><b>Assessments:</b> 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><b>Compliance Checks:</b> MOD 'Deaths in service' statistics and of Scottish Government prison statistics ongoing.</p> <p><b>Guidance on data about sex:</b> 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><b>Assessment:</b> Awarded National Statistics designation to DfI's NI planning statistics</p> <p><b>Compliance checks:</b> 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><b>Agriculture, Energy and Environment</b></p>		
		<p><b>Compliance checks:</b> started desk research for CC of Defra's flood defence spending statistics.</p> <p><b>Systemic reviews: Climate change statistics:</b> 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><b>Systemic Review: Food statistics:</b> Initial scoping of review underway.</p>		
		<p><b>Travel, Transport and Tourism</b></p>		
		<p><b>Assessment:</b> Office for Rail and Road's Estimates of Station Usage statistics <a href="#">designated National Statistics</a>.</p> <p><b>Scoping:</b> currently scoping future domain projects and engaging with producers.</p>		

***Quality in ONS statistics***

**Purpose**

1. This paper provides the Board with an overview of current work on statistical quality in the ONS, in particular the focus of the new Quality Committee.

**Recommendations**

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to:
  - i. note the current and planned work on quality; and
  - ii. comment on any aspects of this work.

**Background**

3. Statistical quality is central to the work of the ONS and wider GSS. It is one of the three pillars of the Code of Practice alongside trust and value. Virtually all the work we do to develop our statistics is designed to address aspects of statistical quality. On the other hand, we have recognised that we not had sufficient governance on quality. To address this, we have created a new Quality Committee.
4. The concept of statistical quality is, however, multi-faceted. The GSS quality strategy recognises five key dimensions of quality:
  - i. Relevance. The degree to which statistics meet current and potential user needs in both coverage and content.
  - ii. Accuracy and reliability. Accuracy is the closeness between an estimated result and the (unknown) true value. Reliability is the closeness of early estimates to subsequent estimated values.
  - iii. Timeliness and punctuality. Timeliness is the time gap between the publication and the reference period of the estimate. Punctuality is the gap between planned and actual publication dates.
  - iv. Accessibility and clarity. Accessibility is the ease with which users can access the data. Clarity is the quality and sufficiency of the metadata, illustrations and accompanying advice.
  - v. Coherence and comparability. Comparability is the degree to which the data can be compared over time and domain. Coherence is the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but refer to the same topic, are similar.
5. There are a few key issues to bear in mind on quality:
  - i. the appropriate level of quality really depends on the statistics in question and users' needs. In many ways quality is 'fitness for purpose';
  - ii. new data sources and techniques can allow us to improve a number of aspects of quality simultaneously, though sometimes for a given data source and method there can be a trade off between the different elements of quality; and
  - iii. there is a risk that quality excessively focuses on accuracy, which is often easiest to measure.
6. Following work by Internal Audit and ARAC, we have concluded that previous approaches to managing quality in ONS were insufficient. We have therefore put in place a new set of governance.

**Discussion**

7. A new Quality Committee has been established to oversee work on quality. This draws on people from across the ONS and wider GSS. The committee's first meeting was in November 2020. The Committee is supported by the Best Practice and Impact team and a network of quality champions across the ONS.
8. The role of the Quality Committee is to be a focal point for quality issues. This provides stronger oversight on quality and means quality can be fully factored into

decision making in a way that was not possible before e.g. as part of budget setting and planning. The Committee will be guided by and oversee the implementation of the [ONS Quality Improvement Strategy](#) published in Autumn 2020. The Quality Committee is a sub-committee of the National Statistics Executive Group, but also given the focus on quality in Audit and Risk Assurance Committee will also need to have a reporting line there too.

9. The Quality Committee is overseeing a number of strands of work. The three main areas I would highlight are:
  - i. delivering a programme of quality deep dives, which are designed to investigate quality in particular statistical domains. We have piloted the approach in trade statistics, which will conclude in February. One challenge here is to sequence the deep dives to avoid duplication with other transformation work: there is no point in doing a deep dive on an area that is in the middle of transformation e.g. migration. There are also some areas e.g. Census that have existing, strong mechanisms to oversee quality and therefore where a deep dive would be superfluous. We expect each of the deep dives to come out with recommendations, and Quality Committee will need to consider how they are best taken forward e.g. overseen by the Committee or remitted elsewhere;
  - ii. the delivery of quality improvement plans for each statistical area. The first draft of these plans were received in December 2020. These are living documents designed to be updated in light of other developments such as the deep dives; and
  - iii. The roll out of a new 'statistical quality maturity model' self-assessment tool. This is designed to get statistics producers to identify challenges with their statistics. This has been piloted and will be rolled out across the business shortly. Part of the roll out is agreeing approaches for moderating
10. These are supported by a series of other quality initiatives including: regular surveys of staff attitudes to quality, new metrics for measuring and monitoring quality, overseeing the ongoing implementation of the Macpherson principles for best practice in modelling, contributing to the coherence work that ONS is leading and sponsoring work on data quality.
11. A key part of our work is to ensure we have good external scrutiny of our work. This includes involving people from across the GSS and also academics and other researchers. We have a number of standing committees of external experts, and our aim is that each of the major transformation programmes and deep dives should be supported by external experts. We are considering whether to bring external academics or experts onto the Quality Committee itself, but finding the right people is tricky as statistical quality is a fairly niche issue.
12. Work has started on all these elements, and we have met or on course to meet the initial milestones, and the next stage is to pull everything together into a single plan.
13. While this is a solid start, there are a number of risks, in part based on previous experience, that we need to manage:
  - i. it will need ongoing management focus throughout the organisation to ensure this remains a priority;
  - ii. quality processes can become 'tick box' over time unless we continue to innovate and develop. Previous systems have fallen foul of this problem; and
  - iii. those producing the statistics need to see benefit in flagging quality issues. There needs to be action e.g. fixes for IT or data problems identified. In the past previous quality approaches, there was a lack of follow through limited buy in.

**Conclusion**

14. Quality of statistics is core to our purposes and enshrined in the Code of Practice. But it is also a complex and multi-faceted concept. We are taking steps to enhance the focus on and governance of quality and would welcome views on the emerging plan.

**Jonathan Athow, Deputy National Statistician, Economic Statistics**  
**Julie Stanborough, Best Practice and Impact Division, 22 January 2021**

# UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(21)05

## Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme

### Purpose

1. This paper provides an update on the programme, focusing on the final build up to Census 2021 as we prepare to go live with the media campaign on 12 February. It also provides a further progress report on the wider transformation.

### Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to note:
  - i. The programme retains an amber rating. Census digital build, end to end testing and preparations in house and with suppliers remain on track. The Programme Board has fully assessed the changed risk profile as a result of the new national lockdown and remain confident of our ability to deliver a high-quality census in March 2021;
  - ii. To further support confidence additional mitigations have been put in place, including the use of mass testing for the field force. We have met with the Government's COVID-19 Task Force and received a further view from the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) for England confirming the need to remain flexible on dates where practicable. A cross programme team are being utilised to support the enumeration of key groups who may not be in their usual residence during the main collection period, for example, students;
  - iii. We are currently live with pre main operation activities, with recruitment for the bulk of the field staff now underway. Ongoing engagement with Communities, Key Population Groups and Local Authorities continues online successfully;
  - iv. The national, local and key population group communications campaign is ready for go live next month. Resource has been committed to the monitoring and management of social media channels. Advice and guidance are provided for Board members on handling interactions online during live operations;
  - v. The final "go/no go" meeting will be held by the Programme Board on 9 February. The Board will be updated following this meeting and will receive weekly progress updates in Friday briefing packs; and
  - vi. Progress continues with the wider transformation with the delivery of administrative data from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC). Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) data is expected in April. We remain on track to produce Admin-Based Migration Estimates (ABME) and have Admin-Based Population Estimates (ABPE) for 2016-2019 as planned. Field tests on multi-mode uptake commence this month for Social Surveys and Business Statistics will see the annual International Trade in Services (ITIS) online this month.

### Programme Update

3. The programme remains at amber. Census delivery remains on track, and while the changing risk profile has resulted in additional mitigations it has not reduced our delivery confidence.
4. HM Treasury (HMT) have now confirmed sign off our Supplementary Estimate. This will ensure that the reprofiling of the budget (within the overall Programme Business Case) to allow maximum flexibility during operations, can be carried out.

## **Final Preparations for Census**

### Final Build and Test

5. Digital build and testing continue with digital build now 98.3 per cent complete and the remaining build on track for delivery by April as planned. The remaining items are for the Census Coverage Survey and Non-Compliance operations which are needed after the main Census Operation. Detailed metrics have been provided to Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) which also confirm business and systems acceptance, as well as non-functional, testing is on track. No concerns or issues have been raised and we are confident the full suite of in house and supplier delivered services will be ready and scaled in time.
6. Following the Prime Minister's January announcement of a further national lockdown, an additional COVID-19 readiness assessment of the changing risk profile and our ability to run a successful Census has been undertaken.
7. The Programme Board debated the assessment at length on 7 January and gave its full support to the continuation of preparations with the intention of going live as expected. The details of the assessment were shared with ARAC, including the additional operational mitigations being put in place. For example, the use of mass testing for the field force, creating flexibility to delay the field operation if required, moving all pre-March community events online, aligning campaign messaging, etc.
8. The Programme Board noted the need for additional work to be undertaken on the enumeration of specific groups who may not be in their usual residence. For example, students and second homeowners. As such, we have established an internal task force to establish appropriate guidance for the enumeration of these groups, which can be fed into operational and campaign communications. Further work is being undertaken with the wider programme to ensure administrative data can be used to support the processing and analysis of this data.
9. We have also met with the Cabinet Office to ensure Census 2021 is built into the thinking of the COVID-19 Task Force over the next six months and that all field force operations are in line with all other Government guidance. Further meetings with the Task Force are planned. Additionally, we have sought the views of the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) for England in light of the new variant. He has confirmed the need to remain flexible on dates, pushing back in time fieldwork where practicable.

### Questionnaire Guidance

10. Following additional work to inform the final wording on the sex question guidance, our methodology was presented to the Methodology Assurance Review Panel (MARP) in November and December. This included a definition of the concept to be collected by the sex question in Census 2021 and a discussion around draft guidance.
11. MARP were assured about the conclusions reached, noting that further consultation on precise wording of the draft guidance was still required. This consultation is currently ongoing.

### Operations

12. We are currently live with pre main operation activities. 300 community field officers are engaging online successfully with local communities. All back-office operations are live to support these staff and the recruitment currently underway. 212 Area Managers, communal establishment and households, plus a further 25 support staff will be recruited and will start on or before the 26 January.
13. The first tranche of household Census field officers (2,700) are also being recruited.
14. Our engagement with key population groups continues to increase, we are addressing their queries and giving a range advice. We are supporting staff with improved



messaging around the criticality of Census 2021 in the current climate. We are also working closely with the supplier of our 'assisted digital' centres in the event COVID-19 restrictions prevent the opening of some centres. The campaign messaging will be altered to support respondents in this instance, directing people to support family and friends, to use paper questionnaires or complete over the telephone.

15. Additionally, we are further engaging with Local Authorities to ensure mutual support during the operation. In December we held a successful webinar with a question and answer session with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). This has provided more opportunities to collaborate on communications and raising awareness of the Census. For example, capitalising on offers to 'light up' venues and buildings for census, as well as providing free advertising space.

#### Social Media and Communications

16. Progress on the media campaign is positive and there are no significant issues prior to campaign go live next month. The media campaign is now in the final stages of build with the campaign on track. The TV advertisement has now been approved, radio scripts are in development and all media planning has been approved.
17. A review of all materials, including the students' campaign, has taken place to ensure appropriateness in the current COVID-19 situation. The Schools Campaign continues with 900 secondary and 5200 primary schools now signed up. Schools continue to sign up and online digital resources are being made available. Internal communications will also be used to ensure all staff within ONS can support the live operation and that support from the wider Civil Service can be leveraged.
18. Monitoring and managing social media and online activity during the Census will provide us all with a very different challenge from the last census.
19. Additionally, we have created an internal Census communications team that will employ a specialised set of tools to monitor social media. The tools will allow us to monitor when members of the Board and ONS Senior Leadership Team are directly asked questions on all open social media channels.
20. Full support is available for the Board regarding media coverage and social media communications
21. We will provide regular progress updates to the Board within the Friday briefing pack. This will contain latest headlines, Management Information with latest response rates, any specific actions currently being undertaken to address low response rates, a summary of any major incidents (if required) and refreshed lines to take. Additionally, we will provide the opportunity for a weekly call with Iain Bell and Pete Benton, Director of Operations.

#### Assurance and Go Live

22. Successful running of 'Mock Operations' has continued building to a final session at the end of January. Lessons learnt have been built into the operation, for example, around roles and responsibilities and the control of information during a major incident.
23. The Programme Board have two final "Go/No Go" points prior to the launch of the media campaign on 12 February. The last of these is on 9 February. We will inform the Board of the outcome following this meeting.

#### **Wider Transformation**

24. Progress has been made in the acquisition of admin data with the arrival of Customer Information System (CIS) and Benefits and Income Dataset (BIDS) data arriving in December. This data will be engineered as a priority behind the Census pipeline build.



These data once engineered will allow a 2020 Admin Based Population Estimate (ABPE) to be produced to provide evidence into the Census QA process

25. Delivery of DWP data up to 2021 is due April 2021, and we expect it to be available for the project to use in August 2021. We continue to work closely with colleagues in Methods, Data and Research (MDR) to ensure the pipeline to receive, and subsequently use, this data will meet the needs of the Programme.
26. The Population and Migration Statistics Transformation teams are on track to transition to Admin-Based Migration Estimates (ABMEs) by the end of February 2021. Admin Based Population Estimates (ABPEs) relating to 2016 are now available and we expect to have ABPE's relating to 2017 to 2019 available as planned. This will allow the first review of the stability of the ABPE's over time allowing a richer analysis of their quality, in particular how they can support the 2023 recommendation.
27. Social Survey Transformation continues to make good progress towards ensuring the Labour Market Survey (LMS) is one of the main sources for measuring employment and income statistics in replacing the Labour Force Survey (LFS). As such, we launched a knock to nudge trial in January in conjunction with a field test to measure multi-mode uptake. The first test of telephone capture will commence on 1 February.
28. Additionally, continuing the excellent progress the business statistics transformation team have made in moving surveys online, the annual ITIS survey was moved to online collection in January 2021 and the Low Carbon Survey will move to online collection from end of February. The team are also helping to support the Economic Statistics Trade and Investment project in transforming the Foreign Direct Investment survey.

**Iain Bell, Deputy National Statistician for Population and Public Policy and Nicola Tyson-Payne, Interim Director of Transformation, Population and Public Policy, 18 January 2021**

# UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

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

SA(21)05

### **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 work to generate further insight into transmission across different environments, completion of the first stage of the school surveillance study; and work to develop insights into disease genetic variance; and
  - iii. that the CIS programme remains at Amber, with considerable progress made in addressing key risks on the programme and the reduction in the level of risks and issues across the programme.

### **Discussion**

#### Survey Performance

3. The survey's performance remains strong and continues to exceed the critical requirement to deliver 150,000 unique tests per fortnight in England. With circa 352,000 participants now active in the study, performance in Scotland is also meeting targets (with the first tests recently completed in the Scottish Islands) and the scale of the survey continues to rapidly expand in both Northern Ireland and Wales.
4. Weekly publications have reflected the latest surge in the infection rate associated with the new variant, with notable variation across region and age. The upscale of the CIS has enabled meaningful sub-regional analysis which is progressing well and has been published since November 2020. Our ability to offer more detailed insights into the pandemic led to data from the CIS having an integral role in recent government tiering decisions. Additional analytical demands to support various government and SAGE subgroups are growing. Themes include excess deaths, transmission, occupation, age, and impact of tiering.
5. Audit and Risk Assurance Committee has been updated on the recent positive progress towards reducing the overall risk profile. Progressing the re-competition of the CIS remains a top priority on the programme. The Cabinet Office is now considering an Outline Business Case requesting approval to launch an open accelerated competition for CIS field data collection services.
6. Blood antibody testing continues to provide valuable results but is currently constrained to eight per cent of the sample (versus a 20 per cent target), principally due to a UK shortage of trained phlebotomists. To address this issue, protocol 7 is under development to move the study to finger prick blood testing.
7. In the most recent week, ONS did not publish the CIS due to delays in receiving data from one of the labs. This decision was not taken lightly but given the importance of these statistics we felt this delay to publication was necessary. This delay has had a knock-on consequence to production of our results and the significant quality assurance that is required. ONS are working with both the lab and colleagues in the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to resolve this as a priority and minimise the risk to the issue repeating itself.

### Impact

8. The CIS and wider health analysis has had measurable impact in recent months. The identification of the new variant, being able to demonstrate where this was present, and how fast it was driving the growth in positivity rates was highly influential on the decisions around tiering and more recently on national tier 4 status.
9. More broadly, the CIS continues to be used to inform national decisions and debate at SAGE, Pillar 4 assessments and in other fora. Analysis on household transmission has been conducted in conjunction with partners in University of Manchester and fed into SAGE subgroups on children. Additionally, analysis on breakdown by ethnicity and occupation has fed into the ethnicity subgroup of SAGE, whilst the collective assessment of the CIS and Schools Infection Study has fed into various subgroups of SAGE, Department for Education and central government influencing decisions on children and schools.
10. In addition to the CIS, the Health Analysis and Life Events division has published an academic article showing the hospital readmission rates associated with COVID-19 and have undertaken further work with SAGE on excess deaths, including international comparisons.
11. The outcomes from the CIS continue to have significant media coverage each week and most recently the team presented in a discussion on national radio and other media.
12. The dashboard, or Insight Tool was launched on 11 December and has received positive feedback from users, receiving over 45,000 unique views since it launched in December. The tweet announcing its launch reached over 129,000 Twitter feeds. Feedback from user testing has indicated it is useful for experts, journalists, and members of the public to help quickly find and understand key statistics that they can trust is unbiased. This product is being continuously developed, with a cross-organisational steering group directing expanding content and functionality.

### Schools Surveillance Survey

13. The Schools Infection Survey (SIS) successfully reported phase one on the 17 December. Analysis plans for reporting phase two are being discussed with Public Health England (PHE) and London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), with publication expected by end of February. With schools now closed across the UK, we have paused the next set of testing that was due to take place in schools at the end of January and are currently engaging with our research partners and stakeholders to agree how the study proceeds. Opportunities to collaborate with academics, beyond the partnership, are currently being explored with Bristol University.

### **COVID-19 Insight Tool**

#### Monitoring COVID-19 in other settings

14. Universities – Interest in movement of students, behaviours, and wellbeing (see paragraph 17 below re student behavioural survey), prevalence and seroprevalence in students by accommodation type. Following the December publication which included deep-dives into data from Exeter and Loughborough Universities, several universities have approached us offering to share data with us. We are exploring priorities for further work with Department for Education (DfE) and DHSC.
15. Care Homes – ONS are developing a weighting tool for DHSC to use with their pillar 2 Social Care dashboard, to correct for non-response. Further plans are on hold to enable discussion and understanding of DHSC's requirements.
16. Prisons – ONS continues in an advisory role only, meeting regularly with the study partners to discuss survey design and the development of a weight for analysis

purposes. Department of Justice, in collaboration with DHSC, have a publication plan for the dissemination of academic articles relating to the study and results.

17. Ports and Airports – behavioural insights information of international travellers arriving from the UK are being collected as part of the International Passenger Survey (IPS). The IPS was suspended on 19 December, with a provisional restart date of 18 January. Management Information, based on provisional unweighted data, will be provided to JBC and Department for Transport (DfT) within two weeks of end of data collection. Weighted data and analysis will be published to align with the recommencement of IPS based Travel and Tourism releases.
18. Transport – ONS are working with Department for Transport and other partners to explore the risk of using public transport. We are considering options for providing the data required, including bespoke data collection, or adapting an existing survey.
19. Community Testing – ONS continues to support the Liverpool Mass Testing Pilot evaluation.
20. CIS-based longitudinal study – ONS is developing a proposal with Oxford University for a longitudinal study to understand the long-term impact of COVID-19, drawing an initial sample from CIS respondents.

#### Opinions Survey on Behaviours

21. The weekly Opinions Survey is again in high demand to help understand how people behave with the new lockdown. Compliance is high, higher than November and we will continue to monitor and compare with Spring. Wellbeing scores have fallen, and anxiety has shown a pickup one week into lockdown.
22. Wave 4 of the student behavioural survey is in the field, in partnership with the NUS. A new survey of the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable launches 18 January, with a Test and Trace behaviours survey to follow on 1 February.
23. Interim findings from qualitative research are available on four of six key groups with barriers to compliance with NPIs and riskier behaviour. We will publish in a couple of months.

#### Administrative Data and Linkage

24. Our “Public Health Data Asset” (PHDA) is now in place as a linked dataset to help understand risk factors and inequality associated with COVID-19. The PHDA links 2011 Census and death registrations together with health data from primary and secondary care. This has enabled the following analysis:
  - i. COVID-19 mortality risk by ethnicity, occupation, religion and disability;
  - ii. validation of NHS England’s “QCOVID” risk stratification model identifying the clinically vulnerable to inform shielding and the vaccine rollout; and
  - iii. analysis of COVID-19 risk and multigenerational households.
25. The first prevalence estimates of long COVID-19 and the clinical sequelae of COVID-19 has been produced using linked administrative data by ONS analysts working within the NHS Digital analytical platform. Our understanding of long-COVID will be augmented with a new question introduced to the CIS. We plan to link the CIS to the PHDA and transfer this work to the Data Access Platform (DAP) in ONS. This analysis fed directly into NHS England planning.
26. The next stage of the PHDA development will add CIS, test and trace and vaccine data. This will enable the analysis of infection, vaccine take up, long-COVID mortality and recovery from COVID-19 across the full range of Census variables. It will create the most comprehensive public health dataset currently available across government. We will continue to make the data available to researchers through the Secure Research Service (SRS).

27. Progress has been made linking CIS with Pillars 1 and 2 test data (collectively encompassing hospital, health and care workers and the wider population) and should be available for users by end of February.

### Analytical Spotlight

28. This month, the spotlight is on the work we have undertaken to understand the second variant as it emerged in December.

29. We became aware of the second variant following investigative work by our Oxford University partner Prof Sarah Walker and colleagues who were looking into the increase in positive cases in London. Swabs are tested for three genes present in the coronavirus: N protein, S protein and ORF1ab. The new variant genetically adapted to drop the S protein, known as S gene target failure. Our analysis observed the increased transmissibility and the main driver in an extraordinary growth in positivity in London and the South East from late November. We have published figures on the numbers of cases that are compatible with the new variant and 'other' cases in the weekly bulletin since 24 December. The new variant has been driving the recent increases in positive cases in London, the East and South East regions and there are signs of it recently appearing in other regions. We will continue to monitor and report on the new variant for England, its regions, and Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

30. It is worth noting that not all variants will be as easily identified, since it depends upon how they affect the genes that are tested. This includes the South African variant, which is currently not detectable in the testing process. All positive tests from the CIS are now sent to PHE for genetic sequencing as part of the COVID-19 Genomics UK Consortium (COGS UK) project.

31. As mentioned above this work was instrumental in informing government decisions over the Christmas period and the data now forms part of the weekly bulletin. Specifically, it formed part of the suite of information on the decision to go into national lockdown.

### Vaccine rollout

32. With the vaccine rollout of primary interest to both policy and the public, we are in the process of obtaining the vaccine data to link to the PHDA and working closely with system partners to agree a coordinated analytical plan. ONS has supported the publication of England vaccine statistics, working with DHSC and NHS England in the presentation of daily and weekly outputs. We have also scoped out our data collection and analysis priorities to help monitor the behavioural response, positivity between vaccinated and non-vaccinated population, physiological responses, and immunity.

### **Next Steps**

33. In the near term the survey is currently implementing Protocol 6, which includes additional vaccine related questions and improved integration into the NHS test reporting system. Protocol 7, focused on finger prick blood testing, not only offers significant efficiency improvements on the survey and reductions in respondent burden, but importantly offers the potential to significantly expand the proportion of respondents providing blood at minimal cost, enabling the CIS to play a new and key role in vaccine validation into the future. We will bring an update to the board on the totality of our vaccine work next month.

**Iain Bell, Director General, Population and Public Policy and Emma Rourke, Director, Health Analysis and Pandemic Insight, ONS, 19 January 2021**

***Statistics in the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement***

**Purpose**

1. This paper provides a summary of statistical aspects of the new Trade and Cooperation Agreement<sup>1</sup> between the UK and the EU and outlines next steps.

**Timing**

2. The Agreement was published on 26 December and has been in force since the conclusion of the transition period, at the end of 2020.

**Recommendations**

3. Members of the Authority Board are invited to note the statistical provisions in the Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

**Background**

4. Over the course of UK-EU negotiations the Authority has engaged with the UK Government and HM Treasury (HMT) in particular to feed into discussions on arrangements with Eurostat and the provision of statistics necessary for the functioning of the Agreement.
5. The published agreement confirms the UK will not participate in the European Statistical Programme, or the Single Market Programme of which that now forms a part, and the vast majority of our obligations to provide data to Eurostat will end with the transition period.
6. The Agreement contains a number of mentions of statistics, the majority of which are narrow requirements to exchange specific data for operational purposes. Future statistical cooperation is covered in one key clause, as follows:

***UNPRO.5.2 Statistical cooperation***

*EUROSTAT and the United Kingdom Statistics Authority may establish an arrangement that enables cooperation on relevant statistical matters and includes that EUROSTAT, with the agreement of the United Kingdom Statistics Authority, provides statistical data on the United Kingdom for the purposes of this Part, including, in particular, data on the GDP of the United Kingdom.*

7. The focus on GDP data is because a ratio of UK to EU GDP will subsequently be used by the Commission to calculate UK payments for future participation in EU programmes (e.g. Horizon Europe).
8. It is important to note that the statistical elements of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement sit alongside the existing statistical obligations in the Withdrawal Agreement ratified last year, requiring data transmissions to Eurostat relating to the Northern Ireland Protocol, and to financial contributions for the years the UK was a member.

**Discussion**

9. The final form of the statistical cooperation clause matches our expectations from discussions with negotiators late last year. Although it leaves the detail of future arrangements with Eurostat up to further discussion, the drafting is helpful in how it sets the framework for such arrangements in particular by preserving statistical cooperation as a technical matter to be determined between technical bodies, in line with the principle of independence for official statistics.

10. While nothing should be taken as certain, the current proposals should be seen as a welcome development which is likely to provide sufficient scope for the Authority to shape the areas of statistical cooperation with the EU to match UK interests, in particular around economic statistics.
11. The National Statistician and the Director General of Eurostat, Mariana Kotzeva, met on 19 January for an initial conversation on establishing these arrangements with Eurostat. Both parties welcomed the opportunity to cooperate on statistical matters in support of the Agreement. It was noted that the Trade and Cooperation Agreement was still to be ratified, however technical discussions could commence as the Agreement was now in effect. It was agreed that officials from both organisations take forward working-level discussions on future cooperation.
12. In order to guide our approach to further dialogue with Eurostat and the development of an agreement, we have prepared a set of draft principles. The principles are intended to articulate our priorities and provide a starting point for discussions with Eurostat, as well as a lens through which we can consider Eurostat's proposals.
13. Our approach is being informed by workshops on future international cooperation held within ONS and across the GSS over the second half of last year, and we will continue to keep colleagues across the statistical system engaged and up to date on developments.
14. In keeping with the wider Trade and Cooperation Agreement, we do not expect an agreement with Eurostat to bind UK statistics into EU standards, but rather enable us to work together where UK and EU standards align.

**Will Laffan, Central Policy Secretariat, ONS, 19 January 2021**

# UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(21)07

## *Strategy and Business Plan Update*

### **Purpose**

1. This paper is the second quarterly update on progress against the delivery of the UK Statistics Authority strategy, Statistics for the Public Good.

### **Recommendations**

2. Members of the Board are invited to:
  - i. note progress against the delivery of the strategy; and
  - ii. consider areas of focus over the next three months.

### **Background**

3. In July we launched our new strategy, Statistics for the Public Good. The delivery of that strategy is primarily reported through progress against the business plans for Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). Six months marks ten per cent of the period of the strategy, and activities over the period have been well aligned to the direction set out in the strategy.
4. The biggest piece of evidence of a positive impact of our strategic direction come from the results of this years' People Survey. In October 2020 4,298 colleagues (85 per cent) from across the ONS and OSR responded to the annual Civil Service wide survey. This year, the score for the Organisational Objectives and Purpose was 85 per cent, seven percentage points higher than the year before, and two percentage points higher than the civil service average. To the question "I have a clear understanding of my organisation's objectives" 83 per cent responded positively, 12 per cent that they neither did nor didn't and only five per cent said that they did not. Developing the system's response to the People Survey will be a priority over the coming quarter.
5. Regarding progress by OSR against delivery of their business plan, five of the eight measures report as Green, with the remaining three Amber. The team have also been looking ahead to 2021 and have published a note on priorities for the coming year.
6. The progress report shows that across the 12 strategic objectives, only two are exceeding the target of 70 per cent Green (compared to nine last month). This downward trend is accompanied by an increase in Amber reports with pressure on resources, funding, unsuccessful recruitment campaigns, and availability of data listed as common causes. As we head towards the end of the financial year, the Amber rated objectives will be subject to detailed review and mitigation to ensure that we track towards our target. We will continue to report to the Board on progress and the key mitigations via our monthly Business Plan Update paper.
7. All five programmes are rated Amber or above for delivery confidence. Across the portfolio, five (of 38) milestones are currently reporting Red, with two complete. As reported to the Board, in recent months we are comfortable that the portfolio is on track at this stage.

### **Discussion**

8. Some of the highlights of progress against the strategy over the past quarter include:
  - i. Professor Sir Ian Diamond and Sir David Norgrove have been to several Whitehall departments and the Welsh Government to promote the strategy, and talk to colleagues across the Government Statistical Service (GSS) and Analysis Function – with strong feedback following those events;



- ii. we have highlighted areas of action following the results of the People Survey, and plans will focus on developing an inclusive organisation;
  - iii. we responded to the Royal Society call for evidence on future requirements for Maths Skills, in line with the drive in the strategy to enhance statistical capability of the UK population for the future;
  - iv. we published experimental estimates of industry level Gross Value Added using double deflation, a key recommendation from the Independent Review of Economic Statistics;
  - v. we launched an Inclusive Data Taskforce consultation, and accompanying communications from the chair of that taskforce Dame Moira Gibb;
  - vi. we issued over 975,000 (out of 1.4 million) business surveys online in 2020, with the aim of getting all business surveys online in 2021; and
  - vii. received positive results from the People Survey as highlighted at paragraph 4.
9. There are, however, some challenges ahead and over the next three months the focus will be:
- i. successful launch of Census advertising campaign, recruitment and ultimate delivery of the Census;
  - ii. enhancing statistics on COVID-19 vaccination rollout, and ensuring their communication builds trust in the statistics;
  - iii. continuing to focus on coherence and communication with respect to impacts of the end of the transition period, and as rates of COVID-19 begin to fall;
  - iv. developing the full business case for the Integrated Data Platform (IDP) in March, including a gateway review in collaboration with the infrastructure and projects authority ahead of submission to HM Treasury;
  - v. developing the revised business case for the Economic Statistics Transformation Programme;
  - vi. in response to the Spending Review (SR) outcome, developing a new programme of transformation for our Economic Statistics, formally closing and drawing lessons from the existing programme; and
  - vii. refreshing the Strategic Business Plans to ensure they remain ambitious for the year ahead, building on progress made over the past six, with particular focus on a review of the ONS enabling functions.

## **Conclusion**

10. The first six months of the new strategy have been successful for the statistical system. The next few months will see several challenges as the system delivers the Census, develops analytical products to inform the UK, and the regulatory aspects which sit alongside that.

**Douglas Cameron, Head of Strategy Group and Nick Bateson, Director of Finance, Planning and Performance, ONS, 22 October 2021**

# UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(21)08

## *Strategic Risks - Update*

### **Purpose**

1. This paper provides an update on the strategic risks and the reporting and oversight mechanisms to monitor progress.

### **Recommendations**

2. Members of the Board are invited to note the progress of the developing risk and assurance framework.

### **Background**

3. Following the last report to the Board, Director Generals and Directors have finalised the mitigations and actions for each of the strategic risks, ensuring that these are managed towards target score and the agreed risk appetite. Oversight of the risks and mitigations has been vested within a revised sub-committee structure of the National Statistician's Executive Group (NSEG), which will ensure that there are robust and resilient plans in place to mitigate the risks and identify opportunities where there is scope within the risk appetite range.

### **Discussion**

4. The profile of risk and progress towards target score for the organisation is broadly operating within its risk appetite, with six out of the ten risks at its target score.
5. Developing the strategic risks is one strand of work within ONS, which forms part of a much wider strategy to strengthen our assurance regimes, particularly within the first and second lines of defence across the key risk areas to ensure that the monitoring and oversight is effective and well supported by Management Information.
6. Ongoing reporting on progress against the management of strategic risks, and development of an integrated assurance framework, is provided to every Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meeting, and to the Board on a six-monthly basis.

**Nick Bateson, Director of Finance, Planning and Performance, ONS, 19 January 2021**