

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Minutes
Thursday 29 April 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
Professor Jonathan Haskel
Ed Humpherson
Nora Nanayakkara
Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter
Professor Anne Trefethen

Also in attendance

Jonathan Athow
Nick Bateson
Iain Bell
Owen Brace
Robert Bumpstead
Sally-Ann Jones (Secretariat)
Alison Pritchard
Emma Rourke (for item 11)
Nicola Tyson-Payne (for item 12)
Philip Wales (for item 13)
Amy Williams (Secretariat)

Apologies

None

1. Apologies

1.1 There were no apologies received.

2. Declarations of interest

2.1 Richard 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 meeting

3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 25 March were agreed.

4. Report from the Authority Chair

4.1 Non-executive directors had met prior to the Board meeting. They had discussed the format of remote meetings.

4.2 The Chair reported on his recent activity since the Board last met highlighting that the Non-executive director recruitment process was ongoing, with interviews scheduled the following week. On 13 April Sir David and Professor Sir Ian Diamond had met the Minister for Constitution and Devolution regarding coherence of statistics. Sir David had attended the Regulation Committee on 15 April.

4.3 The Chair noted that the Authority Board Register of Interests had been published on the Authority website, and noted thanks to members.

5. Report from the Chief Executive [SA(21)22]

5.1 Sir Ian provided the Board with an overview of activity and issues since the last meeting, highlighting the following:

- i. Sir Ian had given a presentation at the Alan Turing Institute on 7 April regarding the role of National Statistical Institutes during a pandemic, which had been well attended;
- ii. the importance of evaluation in government and the need for clear evaluation plans to underpin Spending Review proposals;
- iii. the work by ONS to support levelling up through the development of strong analysis;
- iv. the work to develop the Analytical Function in response to the functional reform agenda to create a sense of 'one function' across the professions; and
- v. the findings of the review of enabling functions, which had been presented to Directors on 6 April and would be shared with all staff on 12 May. It was noted the implementation of recommendations would support the preparations for the next Spending Review.

5.2 Sir Ian noted his thanks to Jonathan Athow for his leadership on the work around hybrid working. The reconfiguration of the working environment to support collaborative and hybrid working and technological solutions were being considered as part of the preparations for a return to the office.

6. Report from the Director General for Regulation [SA(21)23]

6.1 Ed Humpherson provided an update on regulation activity highlighting the presentation he had given at the Analysis Function Board on 27 April. It was acknowledged that the Code of Practice (CoP) for Statistics and the Office for Statistics Regulation could support analysis more broadly, with specific examples including OSR's work on Reproducible Analytical Pipelines and the Exams Review. In addition, the principles of the CoP could be applied to the presentation and publication of quantitative analysis in the public domain.

6.2 With regard to OSR's role in levelling up, it was noted that OSR's programme of work supported it through its focus on regional economic performance and improved granularity of statistics.

6.3 The Board heard that 2020/21 had been a record year for the level of casework for with three times the usual volume processed by the team, predominantly as a result of COVID-19 related enquires. A review of 9.30 release times was ongoing.

6.4 The Board approved the OSR Business Plan.

7. Report from the Chair of the Regulation Committee

7.1 Professor Anne Trefethen reported on the Regulation Committee which had met on 15 April.

7.2 Committee members had considered:

- i. the review of population estimates, and projections produced by ONS;
- ii. the draft Authority Interventions Policy;
- iii. a draft report of the systemic review of Income-based Poverty Statistics; and
- iv. the final report regarding ONS Productivity statistics.

7.3 The Committee had also received a presentation from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) following a quality review of HMRC's official statistics in 2020 by OSR.

7.4 The Committee had approved OSR's Business Plan and programme of work.

8. Strategy Update [SA(21)24]

8.1 Robert Bumpstead and Nick Bateson introduced a paper which provided an update of progress of the Authority Strategy, 'Statistics for the Public Good'. The statistical system's response to the pandemic had shown its strengths and radically altered ways of working. The delivery of staff throughout the period of remote working had been outstanding and underpinned by an inclusive culture based on trust and flexibility.

8.2 There had been a number of significant achievements in the last quarter, notably a successful Census collection with a return rate which continued to well exceed expectations. The Integrated Data Programme Full Business Case had been submitted to HM Treasury and the COVID-19 Infection Survey (CIS) continued to be a key source of data for government throughout the pandemic.

8.3 The Board heard about the forthcoming opportunities, which included planning for the 2021 Spending Review, and evolving the workplace for a hybrid working environment.

9. Presentation: Estimating education and healthcare for Gross Domestic Product (GDP)

9.1 Philip Wales presented on the approach by the ONS in estimating education and healthcare output for GDP during the pandemic. The Board heard about the impact of the pandemic on public services in the UK and internationally and the impact for ONS's measurement of the public sector in GDP.

9.2 The Board noted their thanks for an excellent presentation.

10. Interventions Policy [SA(21)25]

10.1 Ed Humpherson introduced a paper which provided an update on the Authority Interventions Policy, following a draft to the Board in November 2020 and review by Regulation Committee at its recent meeting. The policy had been updated to provide clarity and reflect current practices.

10.2 Board members discussed the draft policy and approved it subject to a small number of drafting amendments.

11. COVID-19 Infection Survey and Surveillance Studies [SA(21)26]

11.1 Iain Bell and Emma Rourke introduced a paper which provided an update on the COVID-19 Infection Survey programme.

11.2 The survey had maintained performance, with swab testing targets consistently being met across the UK. The Board heard that discussions had been held with officials across government regarding the medium-term focus of population health surveillance.

12. Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme [SA(21)27]

12.1 Iain Bell and Nicola Tyson-Payne introduced a paper which provided an update on progress on Census delivery and wider transformation.

12.2 Iain Bell reported that the Census collection had met all targets with the day of this meeting (29 April) being the last day of the full field force operation. The preparations continued for the Census Coverage Survey and Non Compliance operation, which were on track for delivery as planned.

12.3 The Board heard that ONS continued to work with National Records Scotland ahead of Scotland's Census in 2022. The Authority Audit and Risk Assurance Committee would be updated on progress on processing and outputs dissemination. With regard to wider transformation, the approach to moving surveys online had been refreshed with a phased plan in place for business surveys. The introduction of telephone as a mode of collection alongside the electronic questionnaire for the Labour Market Survey was on course.

12.4 Board members welcomed the update and noted the progress.

13. Presentation: Central Government coordination of Digital and Data

13.1 Alison Pritchard presented on central government's coordination of digital and data with a focus on ONS's role and link to the Integrated Data Programme.

13.2 The Board noted their thanks for an excellent presentation.

14. Any other business

14.1 The Authority Board would meet next on 7 June 2021 by videoconference.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Agenda

29 April 2021, 09:15 to 12:45 via videoconference

Chair: Sir David Norgrove

Apologies: Nora Nanayakkara (10.00-11.30)

Attendees: Mary Gregory (item 8), Emma Rourke (for item 9), Nicola Tyson-Payne (for item 10), Phil Wales (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 25 March 2021
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)22 Prof. Sir Ian Diamond
4 10.20-10.30 10 mins	Report from the Director-General for Regulation	SA(21)23 Ed Humpherson
5 10.30-10.35 5 mins	Report from Committee Chair <ul style="list-style-type: none">Regulation Committee	Oral report Prof. Anne Trefethen
6 10.35-10.50 15 mins	Strategy Update	SA(21)24 Nick Bateson Robert Bumpstead
10.50-11.00 10 mins	Break 10 mins	
7 11.00-11.25 25 mins	Presentation: Estimating education and healthcare for GDP during the pandemic	Philip Wales
8 11.25-11.40 15 min	Interventions Policy	SA(21)25 Mary Gregory
9 11.40-12.05 25 mins	COVID-19 Infection Survey and Surveillance Studies	SA(21)26 Iain Bell Emma Rourke
10 12.05-12.20 15 mins	Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme	SA(21)27 Iain Bell Nicola Tyson-Payne
11 12.20-12.40 20 mins	Presentation: Central Government coordination of Digital and Data	Alison Pritchard
12 12.40-12.45 5 mins	Any Other Business	

Next meeting: 7 June 2021, 09:45-12.45, via videoconference

Chief Executive's Report, April 2021

Purpose

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

Summary

2. The Census operation is beginning to wind down with the response rate surpassing 95 per cent, putting us on track to deliver a truly brilliant Census. We continue monitor the pandemic, with our data being central to understanding the course of the pandemic as restrictions are lifted, as well as the wider societal and economic impacts such as disparities in deaths and the impact of long-COVID.

Review of recent activities

3. Important developments in recent weeks include the following:
 - i. On 26 March I attended the **Union Policy Implementation** committee chaired by the Duchy of Lancaster where I contributed to discussions around sharing of data across the union.
 - ii. On 27 March the [Namibian Broadcasting Corporation](#) covered the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the **Namibian Statistics Agency** and the Office for National Statistics, which will focus on strengthening statistical capability in Namibia.
 - iii. On 30 March I returned to the **Royal Statistical Society in Glasgow** to present ONS's work on informing the pandemic and its impact on the economy and society for Waves two and three. This followed a talk I gave in September, where I presented on our work during the first wave of the pandemic.
 - iv. On 1 April I attended a conference hosted by **CBS Netherlands** where I presented on the changing role of National Statistical Offices in a World of Big Data.
 - v. A draft of the **BASE** review findings was presented to the Directors at an away day on 6 April. The findings have been generally well received, with comments focussing on the pitch and presentation of the review. The recommendations will continue to be refined in the lead up to the planned publication on 12 May covering six main areas: effectiveness of the Enabling Functions; improving the process of managing demand across the organisation; future design of the Data Capability; future organisational structure in the context of post Census 2021; improving the ONS's planning architecture, and; further developing a OneONS culture. These six areas lend themselves to a programmatic view that will support the organisation's preparations for Spending Review 21.
 - vi. I provided a master class on evaluation to the new **ONS Evaluation Champions** on 7 April which covered the importance of evaluation in government, my evaluation journey, evaluation at ONS, evaluation methodology and the importance of proportionality.
 - vii. On 7 April I gave a presentation at the **Alan Turing Institute** on the role of National Statistical Institutes during a pandemic. The session was well attended and received a first of 100 per cent positive feedback from attendees.
 - viii. On 14 April I was invited to be 'Guest of Honour' at an online meeting between the **Nordic-Baltic Ambassadors** to the UK. The Ambassadors were keen to hear about my role as National Statistician and how it coincides with topical issues in British politics.

- ix. On 15 April I opened a bilateral event with **Statistics Korea (KOSTAT)**. Under the auspices of ONS' memorandum of understanding with our South Korean counterpart, topics covered included data stewardship, cross government data platforms, post-COVID economic trends and new statistical outputs. Future bilateral engagement will be planned around data governance and data science.
- x. ONS published new research and data on **population and migration** on 16 April. This covered the period since the pandemic when the International Passenger Survey was suspended. This was well received by experts in the field and shows progress on how we are developing new, administrative data-based ways of measuring migration and population.
- xi. The first stage of **Economics Statistics transformation** came to an end in April, which was the end point set out in the original business case. We have made significant progress in improving our statistics and insight, most notably our core national accounts, trade and investment and the introduction of our faster indicators suite. We are midway through a 10-year transformation and a new, refreshed programme has been launched to continue the work. Donna Leong joined ONS in a new post of Director of Economic Statistics Change to drive forward this transformation agenda.
- xii. **Levelling Up** work continues at pace across Government. The Prime Minister has appointed Neil O'Brien MP as his advisor in this area and the ONS are providing some resource to the central team in the Economic and Domestic Affairs Secretariat to support the central coordination.
- xiii. In collaboration with the GSS, Government Analysis Function and wider government, work to deliver a safe, secure and trusted service for the **Integrated Data Programme (IDP)** that drives the integration of Government data continues.
- xiv. We continue to receive letters of thanks from the public who have shown their appreciation for ONS's work during the pandemic, in particular the COVID-19 Infection Survey, as well as the Census.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond, National Statistician, 22 April 2021

Update from the Director General for Regulation

Purpose

1. This paper provides the UK Statistics Authority Board with an overview of OSR priorities and activities.

Discussion

2. Our main areas of focus in recent weeks have been:
 - i. **COVID-19 and vaccines:** We recently published two rapid reviews on COVID-related outputs: on NHS England vaccination statistics, and statistics on rapid asymptomatic testing in England published by the Department of Health and Social Care. We continue to meet with the relevant producers of these statistics, including NHS Test and Trace, to monitor progress against the rapid review recommendations. At Regulation Committee on 15 April, Sir David Norgrove and I agreed to host a meeting with Sir Simon Stevens (NHS Chief Executive) to discuss publication of better vaccine data, with a focus on vaccine uptake within ethnic minority groups. We will update the Regulation Committee and members of the Board once this has taken place.
 - ii. **Population estimates:** We presented a paper on our review of population projections to the Regulation Committee, including the draft report setting out the review's findings. As part of next steps, we will be liaising with stakeholders who raised population-specific issues with us (which led to the initiation of this review) and we will be publishing the report after the election period.
 - iii. **Assessment of UK Censuses:** As the Board are aware, we are carrying out an ongoing phased assessment of the UK censuses; this is progressing well. The formal phase 2 assessment for England, Wales and Northern Ireland will be taken forward, with the Scotland assessment pushed back to align with their census in 2022. Instead, the team will be carrying out a compliance check on National Records of Scotland's work on the census to align with the assessment for ONS and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). Meetings with these departments are underway. We have also received correspondence from Fair Play for Women about the approach to reporting sex in the England and Wales Census.
 - iv. **Business planning:** The Regulation Committee discussed a near-final draft of the annual OSR business plan and work programme for 2021/22. This sets out our aims for the year ahead including understanding the impact of the pandemic on official statistics, OSR's role in data and data gaps, granularity of statistics, and continuing our work on understanding and supporting the public good of statistics. The Committee was supportive of the plan and agreed it for submission to this Board.
 - v. **National Statistics Designation Review:** Last month I noted that we were collating feedback from Heads of Profession and other producers and analysts in Government on the review of National Statistics (NS) designation. Some common themes from the feedback include: the importance of applying the Code of Practice across all official statistics; greater recognition of the value of official statistics; the importance of external review and challenge of official statistics; the relevance of NS designation operationally; and a greater focus on producers rather than outputs. The steering group will meet again in May.
 - vi. **Review of release times:** We have initiated a review of 09:30 release times following discussions with Iain Bell on whether to formalise the exemptions on release timing granted during the coronavirus pandemic. We will seek the input of heads of statistics in considering the issues for market-sensitive and non-market sensitive statistics, as well as hearing the experiences and views of the analysts and

communications teams involved in managing the release of statistics. A paper will be presented to the Regulation Committee later in the year.

- vii. **Casework and Interventions Policy:** As we enter a new financial year, we come to the end of the casework reporting period for 2020/21. As expected, it was a record year for casework with three times the usual volume processed by the team, almost exclusively driven by COVID-related enquiries (via casework complaints and internally-generated cases). We will shortly be starting work on the Annual Review of Casework report, which will be presented to the Regulation Committee in July ahead of publication. We also presented the revised Interventions Policy to the Committee this month, which is included in Board papers for discussion on the agenda this month.
3. The main challenge, as we emerge from lockdown restrictions, is strategic: how best to consolidate the progress OSR has made in terms of profile and impact, and what areas of statistical production to focus on over the coming year. We had a helpful discussion at the Regulation Committee and would welcome any suggestions or questions from Board members on strategic direction.

Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation, Office for Statistics Regulation, 21 April 2021

List of Annexes

Annex A Regulatory dashboard

Regulatory Activities April 2021 - AB

Health and Social Care	Economy	Population and Society	Agriculture, Energy and Environment	Children, Education and Skills
<p>Review: Scoping project on lessons learned for health and social care data during the pandemic.</p> <p>Assessments: Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) reviewed by Regulation Committee, designation letter planned for May. Started Assessment of General Pharmaceutical Services statistics published by NHS Business Services Authority.</p> <p>Systemic Review: Mental Health (NI): Continuing to gather evidence and developing key findings and recommendations</p>	<p>Assessments: ONS Productivity Statistics Report shared with Regulation Committee and now going through final checks before publication on 11 May.</p> <p>Systemic Review: Post Brexit ONS Economic Classifications – Holding preparatory meetings with ONS and CPS.</p> <p>HMRC Review Further errors detected by HMRC as a result of OSR's 2020 review. Compliance Check of ONS Foreign Direct Investment and Department for International Trade Inward Investment statistics published on 19 April</p>	<p>Assessments: Census User and producers meetings continue to be held as part of phase 2 of the assessment.</p> <p>Systemic Review:</p> <p>Loneliness Reworking current planned output to reflect positive developments in the loneliness space</p> <p>Population projections Draft letter and report taken to April's Regulation Committee.</p> <p>Migration Engaging with ONS on plans for future migration publications.</p> <p>Data about sex Approx. 40 responses received on our draft guidance, with only a few of those from statistics producers. Materials currently being reviewed.</p> <p>Casework: Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities report Looking at claims made by complainant and the statistics in the report more generally.</p>	<p>Casework: Awaiting reply from Defra HoP on the estimated impacts of EU exit on follow-up to fisheries casework.</p> <p>Compliance checks: Defra's flood defence spending statistics published, Defra HoP to speak to them regarding start date. Draft findings for CC of natural capital accounts.</p> <p>Systemic reviews:</p> <p>Climate change statistics Initial meeting held with head of ONS team to discuss their planned work. Currently scoping.</p> <p>Food statistics Initial scoping of review underway.</p>	<p>Exam Results Review: Following report publication, ongoing dissemination activities include presentations to a variety of fora.</p> <p>Casework: TEF Independent review and govt response has been published. Drafting OSR response to RSS.</p> <p>PISA 2018 - issues raised around transparency of quality information carrying out high level CCs across the four countries.</p> <p>Systemic Reviews: Children and Young People Planning underway to complete phase one of this review. Met with advisor to the new Children's Commissioner.</p>
Housing, Planning and Local Services	Crime and Security	Labour Market and Welfare	Travel, Transport and Tourism	Business, Trade and International Development
<p>Compliance checks: Household projections Summarising desk-based findings on National Records of Scotland, NISRA and Welsh Government household projections.</p> <p>Fire Incidents statistics Follow up meeting with Home Office on 21st April. Initiating compliance checks on Welsh Government Fire statistics</p>	<p>Assessments: Report for Home Office's police funding statistics will be published in May.</p> <p>Watching brief: Preparing brief on violence against women and girls. Discussing topic with UKSA Board members Nora Nanayakkara and Sian Jones on 29 April.</p> <p>Compliance checks: Indirect jobs supported by MoD expenditure – intro meeting with MoD team on 22 April.</p>	<p>Assessments:</p> <p>Living Costs and Food Survey. Carrying out desk research and arranging interviews with users and producers for early May.</p> <p>Northern Ireland's Personal Independence Payment Statistics. Report to be published on 13th May.</p> <p>Systemic Review: Poverty Statistics Report has been shared with producers and approved external peer reviewers. Working towards publication in May.</p>	<p>Accessibility of Transport Networks Meeting with stakeholders to inform project scope</p> <p>Tourism Engaging with ONS on the review of Travel and Tourism statistics, following suspension of the international passenger survey in 2020</p>	<p>Assessments:</p> <p>Annual Business Survey. Continuing to identify and engage with significant users of ABS data. Collating evidence for OSR Quality Assurance Review</p>

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(21)24

Strategy and Business Plan Update

Purpose

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

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority 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). Nine months marks 15 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 statistical system's response to the pandemic has shown its strengths and has radically altered how we work. We have focussed on building and retaining a culture of delivery, built on Civil Service Values. We have championed an inclusive and welcoming culture and an empathetic management style, with equality of esteem and relationships built on trust and flexibility, the right learning opportunities, and a desire for change.
5. The delivery by our staff has been outstanding throughout this period of remote working as highlighted below. We have had to be ground-breaking in our ingenuity and use of technology, and our ability to connect virtually to deliver our valuable work for the public good. We will bring that learning and innovation into the planning for how we want to work at ONS in the future as part of our planning for hybrid working and a return to the office.
6. Last month the Board heard about the work of the International Development Team. The activities in this team are directly linked to the aims and objectives of the Strategy. We have continued "to work with, and learn from, our partners in the developing world to ensure statistics and data are at the heart of the UK's development policies and agenda and provide help to those most in need".

Discussion

7. Some of the highlights of progress against the strategy over the past quarter include:
 - i. Following a successful '**Census Day**' on 21 March, the Census collection has enjoyed a return rate which has continued to well exceed expectations.
 - ii. Following the receipt of an 'amber' status by an independent assurance team appointed by the Infrastructure Projects Authority, the full business case for the **Integrated Data Programme** was submitted to HM Treasury. Interim financial cover has been agreed via the Mains Estimate process. In the meantime, the Secure Research Service has been integrated into the programme to enable early progress of Analytical Lighthouse Projects alongside the development of Cloud technology services.
 - iii. The **COVID-19 Infection Survey** continues to be a widely-reported and a well-regarded source of key data on the path of the pandemic. In April The Times said the survey is "the most reliable measure of infection rates within government", and is "gold standard" according to the Daily Mail. The National Statistician, supported by Professor Sarah Walker and ONS colleagues, have discussed the findings on major

news programmes including the BBC's Today and Andrew Marr programmes, Sky News, LBC and Times radio among others. The additional 'vaccine surveillance' phase of the study has also been successfully launched, with extensive BBC News and print exposure. This coincides with the fortnightly antibodies publications gaining in media prominence and public awareness. The Health Secretary made the animated ONS chart showing the rise in antibody levels in the general population the centrepiece of a recent Downing Street media briefing. The news that half of UK population now has Covid antibodies was a widely reported headline just before Easter.

- iv. The Strategic Business Plan 21/22 is due to be signed off by the National Statistics Executive Group in May. The planning round was timed to incorporate wider ONS prioritisation activities, including the analytical and statistical output priorities and the BASE review. ONS Strategic Objectives have been updated and streamlined, with the original 12 objectives streamlined to eight. These objectives align with the Strategic Principles of Radical, Ambitious, Inclusive and Sustainable.
8. There are some exciting opportunities in the coming months, the focus will include:
- i. developing the next iteration of the Economic Statistics Transformation Programme;
 - ii. evolving the workplace as part of our planning for a hybrid working environment;
 - iii. development of the future health surveillance system; and
 - iv. planning for the 2021 Spending Review.

Conclusion

9. The first nine months of the new strategy have been successful for the statistical system. Over the next quarter it will be important capture the successes as enduring features of the UK statistical system.

Robert Bumpstead, Chief of Staff and Nick Bateson, Director of Finance, Planning and Performance, ONS, 20 April 2021

UK Statistics Authority Interventions Policy Review

Purpose

1. This paper provides an update on the Authority Interventions Policy, following a draft to the Board in November 2020 and review by Regulation Committee in April 2021.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are asked to provide further comments and confirm if you are content for this version of the policy to be considered final.

Background

3. The [UKSA interventions policy](#) was first published in October 2017. Since then our approach to casework has evolved and the volume and profile of our casework has increased. In November 2020 we provided the board with a draft update to the policy which aims to reflect the evolution in our approach to casework and provides clarity for those who approach the Authority with concerns.
4. In December 2020 we published the updated draft policy and invited feedback. Alongside this we also published a series of [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#).
5. The interventions policy aims to provide transparency on our approach to casework. We think it has four key audiences: Producers of Statistics; Members of the public/others writing in; public figures receiving letters; and members of OSR understanding the process.
6. Comments on the draft update were invited until mid-March. We highlighted the opportunity to feedback via a number of channels (OSR external newsletter, Twitter, and Heads of Profession (HoPs) weekly email). We did not receive any direct feedback on the proposed draft. The feedback we sought prior to publication (including from OSR and HoPs) suggested the updates were welcomed and clarified our approach. While we did not gain any further feedback on the policy, we did find it useful to be able to reference the FAQs in some of our responses to enquiries.
7. The main changes since the 2017 policy are:
 - i. the policy is now more focused on why we will intervene and when we will publish our judgment; and
 - ii. the policy now explicitly references use, production and transparency; it previously focused on misuse.
8. Regulation committee had two main comments on the policy in April:
 - i. to make clearer that it is not UKSA/OSR's role to take a view on the consequences of the data. We have updated a sentence to make this more explicit so it now includes: We do not seek to be a mediator in political debate *and it is not for us to take a view on decisions made on the basis of statistics*; and
 - ii. to make sure the policy is clear in our role in commenting on media use of official statistics in line with Sir David Norgrove's letter to Richard Holden MP on 17 June¹. The FAQs say that where an issue raised with us would more appropriately be

¹ <https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/letter-from-sir-david-norgrove-to-richard-holden-mp/>

covered by a different regulator, we encourage the correspondent to engage with them. We will also update the FAQs 'What issues do you consider' section to reflect the sense of Sir David's letter.

9. We plan to evolve the FAQs on an ongoing basis as necessary. In addition to the changes to the FAQs and updated interventions policy, we also committed to regularly updating the [issues log](#) (which is now updated on a Wednesday each week) and we now publish [quarterly management information](#), summarising the number of cases and time taken to close cases.

Conclusion

10. The interventions policy has been updated to provide greater clarity and reflect our current practices. We would now welcome your approval of this version as a final draft.

Mary Gregory, Deputy Director for Regulation, OSR, 21 April 2021

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

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

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to note:
 - i. the continued successful delivery and high impact of the CIS;
 - ii. recent successful milestones, including the successful rollout of the vaccine effectiveness project; further analysis to support urgent policy decisions; ongoing strategic development; and
 - iii. that the CIS programme remains at Amber, with considerable progress made in addressing key risks on the programme.

Discussion**Survey Performance**

3. The survey continues to maintain performance at its highest standard, with swab testing targets consistently being met across the UK. Sampling work is ongoing to ensure we maintain 150,000 tests per fortnight.
4. The Vaccine Effectiveness Monitoring work continues to scale up to 150,000 tests per month. Response rates are currently at 65 per cent with void rates of samples reducing from 40 per cent during the pilot down to 8.7 per cent as at 9 April. This is mainly due to an improved lancet in the kits alongside familiarity for both participants and our CIS Study Workers.
5. The re-competition of the CIS closed on 1 March. Evaluation concluded with internal approval on 17 March. Contract award is anticipated at the end of May.
6. The CIS Internal Audit has concluded with a moderate finding. Management actions are currently in drafting. The audit acknowledges the achievement of work to date and notes the steps that have been taken to improve governance mechanisms.

Impact

7. We have re-introduced the incidence measure using an updated methodology. This analysis has been welcomed by Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) and SPI-M who use the data for triangulation of other estimates and testing including as a Test and Trace indicator. We have also received positive engagement on the reintroduction of incidence through our shared mailbox including from the general public and academics. Additionally, we have published blogs on the future of the COVID-19 Infection Survey and how the results from the survey can be better understood, highlighting false positives and Cycle threshold rates.
8. ONS are scoping options to boost the inclusivity of published outputs for young people. As a first step, we are planning engagement exercises with [Planet DIVOC-91](#), an Academy of Medical Sciences project focused on youth voice and misinformation around the pandemic.
9. A primary focus of our analytical resource in recent weeks has been to support government roadmap decision making. Evidence and narrative against the four tests and associated behaviours for step two incorporated updated evidence based on the latest Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) and CIS data. This was a cross-office effort, with

analysis included on vaccine uptake and sentiment, new variants and antibodies, long-COVID, behavioural/compliance data, economic and mortality data.

10. We are continuing to collate and synthesize all evidence for the government's tests and the Social Distancing Review, which is also due to report in time for step three. This work includes new analysis exploring the impact of vaccines on positivity in the community in partnership with Oxford University.

Schools infection study

11. Round 4 of the Schools Infection Study (SIS) concluded on 1 April and initial results focussing on infection are due to be published on 22 April. The SIS data will be compared with the mass testing data for the SIS sample schools. Management information has been provided to the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to inform decision making. A full report of the Round four results is due to be published, in collaboration with London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and Public Health England (PHE) on 27 May. Round five of SIS is due to start on 6 May.
12. Questions to collect information about attitudes and behaviours towards mass testing in schools has been collected on the OPN during the Round four SIS field period to provide additional insight. Initial results were published on 6 April.
13. ONS are working with DHSC and Oxford University to deliver the Daily Contact Testing study. This is a clinical trial designed to test the impact of keeping children in schools using daily Lateral Flow Tests on both transmission and attendance rates. The trial commences on 19 April and in 200 schools in England, which have been randomly allocated to the study control and intervention arms.

Monitoring COVID-19 in other settings

14. Care Homes: The next phase of our research plan is being developed for discussion with DHSC to identify priorities and funding by end April.
15. Universities: ONS evidence from CIS/university deep dives fed into Department for Education (DfE) submission for Step 1/2 of roadmap. Monthly ingest of student testing data is now coordinated with DfE; we are scoping evidence requirements on transmission and mental health with DfE, UUK, and Student Minds.
16. Large Events Research Programme: We have been supporting University of Liverpool in the development of the behavioural survey to be included across all events in a large events pilot, to allow comparison across large events e.g. football matches and entertainment venues. These surveys will be asked pre and post event and will be linked to testing and ticketing information. Additionally, the OPN team are working with Department of Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS) to introduce questions on attitudes towards events reopening.
17. Places of enduring transmission: ONS have provided a range of data about place to help inform a paper for SAGE on places of enduring or 'stubborn' transmission.

Opinions Survey on Behaviours

18. We continue to monitor behaviours and compliance with NPIs as we move forward with the roadmap and easements in the Devolved Administrations. Compliance remains high, but with a slight easing in avoiding physical contact and social distancing and more people are leaving home to travel to work, to socialise and for non-essential reasons. Next week we will have first metrics post step two of the roadmap.
19. We also continue to monitor take up and sentiment towards vaccinations with recent discussion on side effects and decisions in the UK and beyond on roll out strategy. Early indications show only a very small impact on overall sentiment and hesitancy, but with a higher proportion of those hesitant stating concerns about side effects.

Population Health Surveillance

20. Our strategic development continues apace with recent conversations with Chris Whitty, Jenny Harries, Patrick Vallance to discuss our medium-term focus which will strengthen our strategic offer. Similar discussions are being held with other senior leaders in the health policy system.
21. Collectively these conversations will inform our analytical plans through to winter and the themes for the strategy. We received a strong steer that drivers of smoking and obesity are significant public health concerns that we must give regard to in our future portfolio of analysis, and that we can draw from our unique data to inform.

Next Steps

22. An academic roundtable is planned for early May to share our vision and discuss the Longitudinal Study as a critical piece of the strategy with a wider variety of academic partners. We also have a similar session with the Royal Society later in April.
23. The impending successful conclusion of the re-procurement to support CIS delivery gives us the ability to re-focus on collaboration with our supplier to drive efficiency and innovation in our operations. This is to accelerate our adoption of new scientific techniques which increase value for money.

Iain Bell, Director General, Population and Public Policy, Emma Rourke, Director, Health Analysis and Pandemic Insight, 20 April 2021

Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme

Purpose

1. This paper provides a short update on progress on Census delivery and remaining build, with a summary assessment of progress with the wider transformation.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to note:
 - i. the programme retains an amber rating. While the Census continues to go well, there remains much to be done across the other parts of the programme;
 - ii. the Census collection operation has successfully met nearly all our quality criteria for return rates with more than 9 out of 10 households submitting a response and all Local Authorities (LA) having a return rate of 80 per cent or more to date. The final target is to minimise variability within LAs. We continue to adjust our field work to ensure maximum returns are received;
 - iii. we are now able to pre-process paper questionnaire data and by combining this with pre-processed responses submitted online we have been able to gain valuable insights into response characteristics, which has informed our response chasing activities in the field. The build for the statistical processing to start in September is progressing well;
 - iv. the first step of our dissemination capability, to build a minimal viable product from which we can release Census data, planned to be complete by the end of April. Further development continues to build enhanced capability for an improved user experience and the second step of build will be complete by December;
 - v. we continue to acquire data sources to monitor the changing population beyond Census day covering population changes, second homes, students, commuting among others; and
 - vi. business surveys transformation continues to progress and is on track to deliver a statistical production pipeline for Distributive Trades (DTrades), the Retail Sales Index (RSI) will be the first business survey to use this new cloud based technical infrastructure in the production of published statistics.

Discussion

Programme update

3. The programme remains at amber, while the Census collection operation has exceeded its targets, we continue to prepare for the Census Coverage Survey (CCS) and Non-Compliance (NC) operation. Additionally, work continues to build the statistical processing pipeline and outputs and dissemination tools and channels. Completion of the census operation build is now allowing focus to be diverted on the wider transformation and the capability required in the next two years as well as the build up to the 2023 recommendation. The programme on a page describes our current position.

Census Collection Operation

4. Census day, 21 March, was a success and at its peak 7,000 households per minute submitted a response to the online questionnaire. As of 16 April, 9 out of 10 households had submitted a response and all local authorities had a return rate of 80 per cent or more. Digital take up has been higher than expected with almost 90 per cent of returns completed online.
5. Our field operation is now well established and has been successful in improving response after Census Day. All non-responding households have been visited at least

once, through optimising our field force early we have been able to improve variability within LAs. We have identified problems impacting response and have mapped these against the final LAs where variability is high, creating actions plans to increase response and reduce variability.

6. We are continually adapting field operations, where response is below 90 per cent in a local authority, we may extend field operations to increase response rates.
7. Field work for communal establishments has been extended where response is lowest, particularly for university halls of residence. We are also refreshing our communications for students to maximise understanding of the importance of capturing them at their term time address. We are currently piloting the updated approach and will look to extend this across all Universities week commencing 26 April.
8. To support the small household extension and communal establishment extension for students, the electronic questionnaire (eQ) will stay open to respondents until 17 May. A further decision will be taken on 3 May to determine if a further extension is required of the eQ to support the student enumeration.
9. All digital features needed for the Census Coverage Survey (CCS) and Non-Compliance (NC) operations are built. Final preparations for both operations are being made, including updating the census website to ensure clarity for the public on these critical next steps of our Census journey.

Census data processing

10. Pre-processing of the submitted response data continues. The data on the characteristics of responding households has been successfully used to monitor data collection and support targeted field collection operations. This insight has been further improved by the additional linkage of administrative datasets to the list of non-responding addresses. Quality assurance on pre-processed data is also underway.
11. Data can then be prepared for statistical data processing. Data that has not been fully pre-processed by our automatic systems is also now being successfully dispatched for coding by our external supplier.
12. Statistical data processing is due to start in September following completion of the final pre-processing tasks and receipt of the last paper questionnaire data (by end-August). Further development is underway to ensure the new methods and functionality is in place ready to commence this processing and we are monitoring and assuring this development and good progress continues to be made.

Census outputs and dissemination

13. The build of output production and capabilities for the digital publishing of Census outputs is being completed in three steps. Step one meets our white paper commitments allowing us to publish analytical content using existing ONS website templates, ready-made tables on the NOMIS website and flexible table builder. This is now in final testing and will be live in the next few weeks, providing a minimum end to end solution.
14. The emerging design for step two, is being developed. We are exploring how we can exploit collaborative opportunities with internal partners and breaking the work into manageable parts that we can create and land quickly. Step 3 continues to be defined. This census work will be used as the foundation for transforming how the Office disseminates outputs in the future.

Assurance and Go Live

15. Although the Census operation is live there are an ongoing series of assurance check points in place, and these have allowed us to assess the need for any extensions to the field operation as described above.

16. As agreed, we will be keeping Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) updated with detailed progress on the processing and outputs and dissemination build.

Wider Transformation

17. The wider transformation programme continues to make good progress. We have stood up a new steering group covering analysis on the size and nature of the population to provide an overarching strategic view across the whole Office. This steering group will help to identify how best to use administrative data to describe the UK population and migration, enable seamless transition based on the new size and, nature and characteristics of the population. Additionally, it will provide an overview of ONS population and migration outputs building from now to beyond Census and to the 2023 recommendation.
18. The work on the 2023 recommendation continues and the series of eight lenses through which the evidence, data (both survey and admin), methods and public acceptability will be viewed is being refined.
19. As previously described, we continue to progress the acquisition of administrative data with our Methods, Data and Research (MDR) colleagues. Work on the new cloud-based technology to support transformation continues as the Distributive Trades pipeline has successfully moved into Beta. It is on track to deliver the end-to-end functionality of the RSI Statistical Production Platform (SPP) by the end of April 2021. The RSI will be the first ONS survey to use the new SPP cloud-based architecture and will provide many of the building blocks needed for future transformation of business and potentially social surveys in the future.
20. Building on the success of the moving surveys online project we have refreshed our strategy and developed a phased plan for moving the remaining business surveys online. Phase one is complete and saw a short business discovery to understand how we can collect complex data from businesses and better understand respondents' needs. Phase two consists of a triage, tranche and translate approach, where the remaining paper surveys are reviewed and grouped according to volume, dependencies and alignment to legacy work. However, all work is dependent on building increased capability from the Statistical Data Collection system. We are working with Digital Services and Technology (DST) colleagues to prioritise this build which, once complete, will see the surveys transition sequentially.
21. We are on track to introduce telephone as a mode of collection to sit alongside the electronic questionnaire for the Labour Market Survey (LMS). The introduction of this second mode of collection will allow us to assess the impact on response rates and whether it reduces the bias towards respondents with similar characteristics seen in the online response. The results of this will be compared against a knock to nudge trial held earlier this year, which increased response by up to 15 per cent, and will inform the future collection model for LMS and other social surveys.
22. In addition, more questions will be added to the LMS on income, with questions allowing us to better understand equalities added later this year. The addition of these questions and second mode of collection is a positive step towards support the replacement of the Labour Force Survey.

Iain Bell, Deputy National Statistician for Population and Public Policy, Nicola Tyson-Payne, Director of Transformation, Population and Public Policy, 20 April 2021