

# UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

## National Statistician's Inclusive Data Advisory Committee

NSIDAC(22)04

### ***Creating an Environment of Trust and Trustworthiness to Enable Greater Inclusion***

#### **Purpose**

1. This paper provides details of initiatives being undertaken to address the first recommendation of the Inclusive Data Taskforce to '*create an environment of trust and trustworthiness which allows and encourages everyone to count and be counted in UK data and evidence*'.

#### **Recommendations**

2. Members of NSIDAC are invited to:
  - i. Discuss progress and priorities for these initiatives
  - ii. Suggest possible new initiatives for improving trust and trustworthiness

#### **Background**

3. The IDTF commissioned a large programme of consultation to understand what people felt about inclusivity of UK data and evidence and to gather their suggestions for improvement. This included an open online consultation on CitizenSpace, round table discussions with central and local government representatives and those in the devolved nations, local government and civil society leaders, discussions with academics and learned societies, discussions with civil society leaders working in 15 equalities areas, discussions with members of the public with lived experience of equalities issues, and a paper-based consultation among those at greater risk of social exclusion.
4. These consultation activities highlighted the importance of clarity and transparency regarding research processes to build trustworthiness and support participation in data collection and sharing. Importantly, many had concerns about the potential misuse of data or the risk of data causing harm to individuals and communities, especially among already marginalised groups.
5. To have trust in statistics and data, it appeared important for people to be able to see a clear purpose for data collection, how information will be shared, kept secure and confidential. They also highlighted the importance of visible action from research, and confidence about the personal benefit or public good arising from their participation, to counter perceived research burdens, especially on marginalised groups.
6. Reflecting these findings, the Inclusive Data Task Force (IDTF) made trust and trustworthiness the focus of their first recommendation, describing this as '*crucially important for the collection and use of data and for inclusion in statistics*'. They focused both on 'trust' and 'trustworthiness' to emphasise that trust must be inspired by those collecting and using data, and this could be achieved by providing people with clear messages about what participation in data collection will mean to them with the benefits and risks clearly set out and

addressed. Trust underpins all the other recommendations and as such is key to a step-change in inclusivity.

7. Their recommendations to enhance trust and perceived trustworthiness included:
  - **Development of a ‘social contract’** with those providing their data setting out the purposes and intended uses of data collection, issues of confidentiality and anonymity, circumstances and safeguards related to any onward data sharing, and how feedback would be provided in timely and accessible ways.
  - **Development of long-term engagement** activities with relevant groups and populations to maintain open dialogue and build perceived trustworthiness.
  - **Identifying and addressing practical barriers to participation**, both in data collection and in access to and use of data and enabling participation and insights from groups currently under-represented in UK statistics and evidence.
  - **Increasing workforce diversity among those collecting and using data to inspire the trust of diverse communities across UK society.**
  
8. In this paper we highlight several new initiatives underway to enhance trust and trustworthiness, with the full list of key initiatives in this area summarised in the ‘Roadmap’ at **Annex B** in paper NSIDAC (22)02.

## **Discussion**

### ***A new ‘social contract’ with research participants***

9. The IDTF recommended the development of a ‘social contract’ with those who provide their data to enhance trust and trustworthiness in the collection and use of their data. They provided details of what it should include focusing on the purpose and use of data collection; confidentiality and anonymity; circumstances of any possible third-party data sharing; provision of free and timely feedback of findings to respondents. They also highlighted the importance of engagement with relevant groups throughout the research process from design to dissemination and assurances that ‘the public interest should prevail’ over organisational, political or personal interests throughout the production and dissemination of official statistics.
  
10. To progress the ‘social contract’ recommendation, we have taken stock of existing policy and practices, including collating information currently given to those who share their data with ONS; and identifying relevant policies applicable to the ONS, GSS, and to UK data producers more widely, such as GDPR legislation. This has highlighted a range of current practices and documents in use and highlighted the value of engaging directly with diverse groups of people to understand better what they most want to know when participating in data collection or agreeing to data sharing, how they would like to receive that information and any further ideas from them about what enhances trust and perceived trustworthiness in research participation.

11. The proposed approach for progressing work on the 'social contract' is to commission independent research with members of the public, including those currently under-represented in UK statistics or at greater risk of disadvantage, to hear their perspectives on these issues and to test different approaches with them. A possible output of this work might be a toolkit with practical resources such as a suite of materials for communicating key messages in formats suited to a range of needs along with guidance on how best to use them. These resources could be shared and used more widely across the UK statistical system. We aim to commission this work by the end of the year for delivery in the spring of 2023. We would welcome feedback from Committee members about the proposed approach and any suggested improvements.

### ***Improving measurement of trust***

12. To monitor changes in levels of trust and identify whether and with whom new initiatives may be having an impact, the Public Confidence in Official Statistics Survey (PCOS) is envisaged a key data source, as noted in NSIDAC (22)03. We are currently exploring ways to improve the representativeness and granularity of the survey to enable better insights into the views of different population groups and to ensure comparable data is available across all nations of the UK.

### ***Extending engagement with the public***

13. To increase our engagement activity with the public on data and build trust, the ONS has developed a programme of activity across three themes; **Transparency** – through our actions, policy and operations, including further demonstrating our transparency commitment to the public; **Listening** – expanding our listening channels and further bringing the citizen voice into our decisions, including through our formal fora, our public research and consultations; **Engagement** – building our dialogue with the public through community and stakeholder outreach, and via the media, social media and public events. Our new ONS Engagement Hub plays a central role in co-ordinating our engagement with audiences and partnership activity with other government departments and stakeholders, as well as in the community and with Local Authorities and universities. We would welcome the support of Committee members

14. Throughout 2022 we have delivered a range of communications and engagement activities to engage audiences on use of data, safeguards and the public benefits. We are building on this by further bringing to life the story of our data through the subjects that matter to people such as public health and the cost of living. We will work with community champions, faith leaders and trusted voices to reach those audiences who are typically under-represented in our statistics, using the networks we established through our Census engagement work. We will also develop online activity to reach younger audiences who are less likely to be aware of ONS and have lower trust levels (as indicated by the ONS Quarterly Brand Tracker, July 2022).

15. As part of our engagement programme, we have recently created an ONS Assembly, establishing a long-term forum for increased engagement with charities and bodies representing the interests of marginalised or under-represented groups of the population. Assembly member organisations represent a variety of protected characteristics groups, covering both national and regional

bodies. The Assembly builds on wide-ranging engagement with the third sector conducted by ONS as part of Census 2021. It will provide a mechanism for regular, open dialogue on progress in delivering more inclusive data and in support of the recommendations of the Inclusive Data Taskforce. Agenda items will include seeking members' input on ONS policy and delivery, considering the impact of ONS activity on citizens and exploring public acceptability of data. The first meeting of the Assembly was held on 2 August 2022 and it will take place quarterly. We invite the Committee to view the Assembly as a possible means of engaging directly with community leaders in their work on inclusivity.

### ***Understanding and addressing barriers to participation in research***

16. Over the past year, ONS have undertaken a review of relevant literature and engaged with our research and operational teams to understand where inclusivity obstacles may lie in data collection, both for ONS surveys and more generally. Based on the findings, we are now progressing key work-streams in areas where potential inclusivity issues have been identified, with further areas of interest still emerging. The workstreams will involve deeper dives and further investigation to identify areas for improvement in our data collection processes as well as action plans for achieving it.
17. Initial phases of the project identified several barriers to participation, but limited data to understand the scale of the problems or the demographics of those affected. We have therefore begun a consultation exercise with our field force and telephone interviewers to gain further insights into perceived inclusivity obstacles they encounter during their work. Following this we will collect data from interviewers on the reasons people give for refusing to participate in a survey. This will provide a better understanding of the reasons for refusals and demographic variations associated with this. Research is also underway exploring differences in awareness, views, and reluctance to take part in our surveys across demographic groups.
18. We are also exploring why people drop out of longitudinal studies. ONS survey data, and findings from other research in ONS, have identified that attrition (respondents dropping out at subsequent waves of a longitudinal survey) in longitudinal surveys is high generally, but particularly so for respondents who rent, compared to owning their own homes. This has been seen across a number of our longitudinal social surveys (Attrition 2019 Report) and the SLC Attrition report found that housing tenure was a consistent predictor of attrition. We are therefore developing a research proposal to understand obstacles to participation renters may face compared to those who own their own home.
19. Participating in a survey can place a psychological or emotional burden on respondents, and being asked to take part in a survey could also cause anxiety and stress for some individuals. This may be particularly so for those with mental health challenges. Poor mental health can negatively influence an individual's decision to participate in social surveys, as well as their participation in the survey itself. To understand this better, we are developing a research package to shed further light on the relationship between mental health and the decision to take part in a survey.
20. ONS has also launched a programme of qualitative research to provide further insights into the lives and circumstances of priority groups identified by the IDTF

as under-represented in UK data and evidence. During 2022, we have undertaken qualitative work focusing on: the lived experiences of Gypsies and Travellers; access to and engagement with private sector goods and services among disabled adults; and educational experiences of children with special educational needs and disabilities. Further work will be underway shortly on experiences of temporary safe accommodation among survivors of domestic violence, and the well-being of young migrants and refugees.

21. Each of the qualitative projects has yielded important insights into issues of trust and trustworthiness, perceived discrimination and stigma, difficult past experiences engaging with public services, obstacles relating to effective communication, views about participating in data collection and concerns about uses of research and potential harms. These findings will be used to improve our approaches to inclusivity throughout the research process, with lessons to be shared more widely, complimenting the substantive findings about people's lived experiences from each project.

### **Conclusion**

22. This paper has provided details of several current areas of work addressing the IDTF recommendation to create an environment of trust and trustworthiness which allows everyone to count and be counted in UK data and evidence. We welcome discussion with and feedback from the Committee on progress made in these areas and any further suggestions on current work or alternative approaches.

**Dawn Snape, Statistical Coherence and Inclusion Division, ONS, 17 October 2022**