

NATIONAL STATISTICIAN'S EXPERT USER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes Monday 5 December 2022 Via Videoconference

Members Present

Professor David Hand (Chair)
Professor Paul Allin
Professor Sir Ian Diamond
Professor Jane Falkingham
Professor David Martin
Professor Ann Phoenix
Stian Westlake

In attendance

Paul Johnson (for item 2)
Peter Levell (for item 2)
Lara Phelan (for item 3)
Debra Prestwood (for item 3)
Anna Price (for item 5)
Alison Pritchard (for item 4)
Mat Weldon (for item 4)

Secretariat

Fran Tovey
Simon Whitworth

Apologies

Dame Kate Barker
Professor Paul Boyle
Owen Brace
Robert Bumpstead
Professor Diane Coyle
Dame Moira Gibb
Ed Humpherson
Sir Bernard Silverman

1. Minutes and matters arising

- 1.1 Members were welcomed to the meeting. Apologies were received from Kate Barker, Paul Boyle, Owen Brace, Robert Bumpstead, Diane Coyle, Moira Gibb, Ed Humpherson, and Bernard Silverman. The minutes from the meeting of 4 October were agreed and all actions were reviewed.
- 1.2 Members agreed that papers for the National Statistician's Expert User Advisory Committee (NSEUAC) would be published on the UK Statistics Authority Website going forward.

2. Discussion with User (Paul Johnson)

- 2.1 Paul Johnson, Director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) joined the meeting to reflect from his perspective as a user of statistics. Paul discussed the challenges and opportunities around access to, and availability and useability of microdata. The IFS was a major consumer of both survey and administrative data and faced challenges in both. The IFS faced growing issues around nonresponse and measurement error in survey data, leading to the need for strong imputation assumptions. Clearer, easier, and more accessible data sets, and the capacity to link administrative data would help the IFS provide more timely answers to questions where there were currently constraints. The data priorities for the IFS were improving access to administrative data, linking administrative and survey data, and timeliness of data when there were big, immediate policy concerns. The Office for National Statistics were encouraged to support these matters, and the Covid Infection Survey, was provided as an example for a suggested model for rapid response.
- 2.2 Members discussed developments in the Integrated Data Service (IDS) and how this would improve accessibility of shared data. Members encouraged the IFS to have open and direct conversations with the ONS around data requirements to link survey and administrative data, and with the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) around funding and improving sample size and quality.
- 2.3 Members agreed that it was important to establish relationships and trust in advance across departments to ensure that key public statistics were being considered and data was being brought together on a timely basis.

3. Engagement to Increase the Inclusion of Traditionally Under-Represented Population Groups in ONS Data [NSEUAC(22)09]

- 3.1 Lara Phelan, Head of ONS Outreach and Engagement introduced a paper setting out the approach to engaging traditionally underrepresented groups, barriers that had been recognised, and the use of engagement channels that were being used to build dialogue and trust with users. The ONS Assembly was also looking at further engagement opportunities for the ONS.
- 3.2 Members discussed relationships with user groups and how audiences could be broadened by using social media channels such as Instagram, and neighbourhood forums. The Inclusive Data Task Force assisted with considering people outside of private households, such as those in nursing homes, or shared flats, and a lot of work was happening in the ONS to identify the hidden homeless. It was important for the work being done to be transparent and it was agreed that information about the ONS Assembly should be added to the ONS website.

- 3.3 Members agreed that there was a lot of qualitative research happening to identify unknown users and traditionally underrepresented groups and understand lived experiences but there was still work to be done. The difference between represented and representative groups should be considered and the ONS should continue to talk to people to feed into discussions.

4. Integrated Data Service [NSEUAC(22)10]

- 4.1 Alison Pritchard provided a progress update on the Integrated Data Service (IDS). The IDS would be fully cloud native which would future proof the legacy environment. Every data asset on the IDS should be linkable by analysts through the Research Data Management Forum. Digital Economy Act accreditation was expected by March 2023. Alison was joined by Mat Weldon who provided a demonstration of the IDS to members.
- 4.2 Members supported progress on the IDS and discussed how the IDS alone would not fix government challenges around departments choosing to share data. The approach would be data driven and building the correct data model required the appropriate meta data. The ONS was already working hard to answer important government questions at pace and data sets were continually updated. The vision was that the IDS would answer bite sized queries on government data almost instantly.

5. Insights from the Office for Statistics Regulation [NSEUAC(22)11]

- 5.1 Anna Price, Head of Casework at the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) provided insights from the OSR and summarised findings from the recent OSR review of the statistical system. OSR were currently in the planning process for 2023/24 and members of NSEUAC would be welcomed to provide feedback in the coming weeks on areas of focus and how to engage users to develop the OSR business plan.
- 5.2 Members discussed whether the use of official statistics was improving. OSR casework had increased in recent years, indicating that more people were aware of the OSR and where to go to highlight concerns, which therefore enhanced trustworthiness and people challenging misuse of statistics.
- 5.3 Members agreed that it was important to step back to assess strengths and weaknesses of measures in place by looking at public statistics to answer issues and questions. ONS data would continue to be published in the public domain at the same time it was made available to ministers, unless there were quality assessment reasons, where agreement to delay would be authorised by the OSR. Members were encouraged to adopt the standards of the Code for Statistics where relevant. Members welcomed all attempts to improve public engagement around the misuse of statistics and suggested podcasts and blogs to engage with younger audiences.

6. Forward Agenda

- 6.1 Members had provided a list of suggested ideas for future agenda items and names for suggested external speakers which the Chair would review with Secretariat to agree a forward agenda, exploring all areas of the community. The Chair would discuss suggestions with members out of committee. The Chair requested a report at the next committee meeting to assess the impact of

discussions at NSEUAC to learn what the committee was doing well and areas that could be improved.

6.2 Heather Joshi and Lucinda Platt were suggested as future external speakers.

7. Any other business

7.1 The next meeting would take place on Thursday 9 March 2023.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

NATIONAL STATISTICIAN'S EXPERT USER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Agenda Monday 5 December, 13:00-15:00 Virtual Meeting

Chair: Prof. David Hand

Apologies: Dame Kate Barker, Professor Paul Boyle, Owen Brace, Robert Bumpstead, Professor Diane Coyle, Dame Moira Gibb, Ed Humpherson, Sir Bernard Silverman

Timing	Agenda item	
1 13:00-13:05 (5 mins)	Welcome, previous minutes and actions	Meeting of 04.10.2022 Prof. David Hand
2 13:05-13:40 (35 mins)	Discussion with User	Oral Update Paul Johnson
3 13:40-14:05 (25 mins)	Engagement to Increase the Inclusion of Traditionally Under-Represented Population Groups in ONS Data	NSEUAC(22)09 Lara Phelan
4 14:05-14:25 (20 mins)	Integrated Data Service	NSEUAC(22)10 Alison Pritchard
5 14:25-14:45 (20 mins)	Insights from the Office for Statistics Regulation	NSEUAC(22)11 Anna Price
6 14:45-14:55 (10 mins)	Forward Agenda	Discussion
7 14:55-15:00 (5 mins)	Any Other Business	

Next Meeting: Thursday 9 March, 11:00, Virtual Meeting

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

NATIONAL STATISTICIAN'S EXPERT USER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

NSEUAC(22)09

Engagement to Increase the Inclusion of Traditionally Under-Represented Population Groups in ONS Data

Purpose

1. This sets out the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) communications approach to engaging traditionally under-represented groups in our data and increase inclusion across our data value chain.
2. It details our understanding of the key barriers to participation and our use of a range of engagement activity and communications channels to maintain open dialogue and build trust.

Recommendations

3. Members of the National Statistician's Expert User Advisory Committee (NSEUAC) are invited to:
 - i. offer their perspectives on our engagement strategy;
 - ii. suggest any further insights into the groups we reach out to; and
 - iii. recommend any further channels or formats for communications and engagement.

Background

4. Inclusion is one of the core principles that underpins the work of the statistical system, as set out in the UK Statistics Authority's strategy, 'Statistics for the Public Good'. The strategy states the need to ensure "our statistics ... reflect the experiences of everyone in our society so that everyone counts, and is counted, and no one is forgotten". This is vitally important to ensure our statistics fully reflect society, that we represent the needs of all communities, and that our statistics are understood by and inform all groups of the population.
5. In October 2020 the National Statistician established the Inclusive Data Taskforce (IDTF) to improve the UK's inclusive data holdings in a broad range of areas. The 2021 report of the IDTF sets out a series of recommendations, the first of which specifies the need to, "create an environment of trust and trustworthiness which allows and encourages everyone to count and be counted in UK data and evidence". In the response by the National Statistician to the IDTF report, one of the key initial activities was to, "build on the 2021 Census community outreach to improve our communications with under-represented groups".

Discussion

6. To create an environment of trust and trustworthiness in ONS data, our approach is to improve our interaction with different population groups and those currently under-represented in a range of ways.
7. The focus of our communications and engagement activity is those population groups that are historically under-represented in data and less likely to participate

in data collection without additional interactions. These underrepresented population groups include, but are not limited to, young adults, older people (80 years and over), the digitally excluded, some minority ethnic groups and gypsies and travellers. Research and insight will continue to inform our target audiences.

8. Building on the wide-ranging engagement with communities conducted as part of Census 2021, our strategy aims to:
 - i. identify and address motivational and practical barriers to participation, both in data collection and in access to and the use of data, and enabling participation and insights from groups currently under-represented in UK statistics and evidence; and
 - ii. develop long-term engagement activities with relevant groups and populations to maintain open dialogue and build trust.
9. Through our programme of community engagement, focus groups and listening channels, we are expanding ways of further bringing the citizen voice into our decisions, including through our fora, public research and consultations. This enables us to explore views on the collection, analysis, use and sharing of data.
10. We have identified a series of motivational and practical barriers to audience participation in our surveys and engagement with our data. Motivational barriers range from apathy to anxiety, with underlying factors influenced by lack of awareness or misunderstanding and not identifying or feeling included in our statistics. Practical barriers include accessible format needs, such as large print formats, low levels of English language or need for translations, or assistance with online completion.
11. We have drawn on our relationships with community networks to further understand ways of encouraging audience participation in our research. For example, as part of our research into administrative data, we have engaged with several organisations. And for delivering an accessible and inclusive publication we captured feedback via a round table with key stakeholders.
12. We are employing a range of engagement activities using direct and indirect channels, alongside a programme of qualitative research to involve specific groups.

Engaging Audiences Through Working with Representative Groups and Networks

13. Trusted community networks and faith leaders can be vital to engaging marginalised and underrepresented groups. Through the long-term contacts established with faith, community leaders and charities for the census, we have an extremely valuable extensive programme of national engagement to build relationships and understanding for the benefit of all ONS topics.
14. We develop community toolkits that provide tailored content to help faith and community leaders promote and explain the census to their community. We are further able to explain the releases by setting up webinars and meetings with community networks. Case studies are important as they enable us to give specific examples of the benefits of the use of data at a local level. For example, we worked with communities and charities such as the Hindu Council UK, Jewish Policy Research and the Salvation Army, to produce videos explaining how census data helps to build a picture of communities and how that picture can have a big impact on the support and services communities receive.

15. Our work alongside insight from ONS field interviewers, is enabling us to explore differences in citizens' awareness and views.

Engaging Audiences Directly with Inclusive and Accessible Materials

16. Of course, not everyone feels part of a community or represented by a faith or community leader, so it is important to engage directly with citizens to build dialogue with the public. We do this via community radio, television, media and social media, to engage audiences on use of data, safeguards and the public benefits. We are currently rolling out a programme of activity that brings to life the story of our data through the salient subjects that matter to people, such as the cost of living and public health.

17. We will be delivering activity to engage younger audiences in ONS data. We are also considering trialling a 'data awareness and literacy' offering to community organisations, which aims to increase awareness of ONS data, what is available, how to access it and provide ideas on using it locally. It will also cover how our data is used to inform debate and decision-making.

18. To ensure our messages and materials are accepted and used by audiences, we take time to gather insight and input from community and faith leaders on the cultural appropriateness of images and the 'tone of voice' in translated materials. For our current census data releases, we have increased the accessibility of our analysis by producing videos with bite-sized information, and blogs.

ONS Assembly

19. Through our quarterly ONS Assembly, which launched in the summer, we have established a long-term forum for increased engagement with charities and bodies representing the interests of underrepresented groups of the population. Assembly member organisations represent a variety of protected characteristics groups, covering both national and regional bodies. The Assembly provides a mechanism for regular, open dialogue on progress in delivering more inclusive data.

Lara Phelan, Outreach and Engagement, ONS, 28 November 2022

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

NATIONAL STATISTICIAN'S EXPERT USER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

NSEUAC(22)10

Integrated Data Service

Purpose

1. This paper provides members of the National Statistician's Expert User Advisory Committee (NSEUAC) with an update since the last meeting in July; with an overview on the Integrated Data Programme (IDP), which delivers the Integrated Data Service¹ (IDS).

Recommendations

2. Members of NSEUAC are invited to note:
 - i. progress on Secure Research Service (SRS) to IDS transition and anticipated differences between the services;
 - ii. activity to develop the IDS data catalogue with a greater volume of Office for National Statistics (ONS) data;
 - iii. progress against DEA (Digital Economy Act) Accreditation, necessary for IDS to process data; and
 - iv. full Public Beta release delivery.

Background

3. Whilst IDS will be optimised for members of the Government Analysis Function, the streamlined accreditation process, approved by the UK Statistics Authority Research Accreditation Panel, will ensure all accredited researchers on the platform will be trusted to access data with maximum self-service and minimum barriers between them and the data.
4. Although the Digital Economy Act (DEA) and management through Role Based Access Control requires the concept of projects to function, the primary objective remains accrediting users for future access and the growth of the data catalogue. Therefore, a backlog of prospective projects and specifications related to outputs and data is being maintained within the programme. Additionally, resource has been allocated to gather intelligence on key policy questions across government, as well as the wider analytical community, and what data it would be beneficial to acquire on a strategic basis to help answer those fundamental questions, initially in the areas of health, economy and energy.
5. During the early beta phase, the programme continues to build towards the strategic vision. We are also embedding tactical solutions into the design which, while increasing the pace of access to data and platform, can be automated later in the build. For example, person, project, ethical and organisational information has been streamlined from circa 107 questions across all forms, to 22. However, these improvements are still indicative of a tactical approach and not the automated model that will be in operation when the service is out of its Beta phase, and live.

¹ <https://integrateddataservice.gov.uk/>

Discussion

SRS to IDS transition (including anticipated differences between the services)

6. The IDS will transform how government collaborates on data. This requires maximum flexibility and efficiency with how data is shared and analysed, while balancing this against safeguards and proportionate use. The IDS is delivering foundational improvements for Government through a number of Technical, Data and Legal & Ethics components:
 - i. Technical:
 - multi-cloud allowing for data connectivity across departmental boundaries with multiple cloud providers; Amazon Web Services, Google Cloud Platform & Azure; and
 - fully cloud-native allowing for further development in analytical tooling, data science and data ingest.
 - ii. Data:
 - home of the Reference Data Management Framework (see paragraph 8) enabling consistent indexing across government data assets for linking purposes;
 - stimulates the creation of a much needed cross-government enterprise data model through consistent indexing; and
 - creation and maintenance of more critical national integrated data assets.
 - iii. Legal & Ethics:
 - compliance with the Digital Economy Act enables the DEA legal gateway for analytical purposes, heavily underused at present – and particularly so in a modern setting; and
 - handles ethics and propriety factors as a matter of course supporting public confidence and public acceptability with transparency as the use of data continues to grow.
7. Work in this area continues to focus on the early Discovery phase, having completed a full inventory against existing SRS data and projects. Ongoing plans to develop a Gap Analysis looking at all elements under Data, Projects and People in order to inform a strategy and approach for the end of January 2023.

ONS Data (including progress on Reference Data Management Framework)

8. There are currently 15 datasets available in the IDS, with a further 66 datasets in the pipeline over the next six months. This will ensure the IDS is future-proofed against additional user needs alongside responding to current project requests. Of those datasets currently available, nine are ONS, two are National Health Service Digital, while British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), Home Office, Ministry of Defence and the Valuation Office Agency own one each.
9. Energy Performance Certificate data is now available, working in collaboration with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. This is the first indexed dataset in the Levelling Up Integrated Data Asset, meaning this data can be used for Levelling Up geo-spatial analysis and more easily integrated with other data in the future.
10. The focus of the next two to three months is to increase the volume of data at pace and carry out refreshes in the data delivery plan. A revised Annual Survey

of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) dataset was delivered early November. Once DEA accreditation is in place, we will be able to proceed with non-ONS data priorities.

11. Alongside increasing the volume of data available, we are working to make existing SRS data indexable, increasing usability and realising the value of the service.
12. A metadata solution to improve data management has been identified and is currently being tested. We are making good progress with strategic initiatives, including automation of the ingest of data and data engineering processes.
13. The standardised components of the data pipelines, like malware, antiviral checks, decryption etc. will enable data engineers to take more control of the processes, removing additional technical effort from Digital Services and Technology teams on each ingestion.
14. The first automatic index matching algorithm will be live in the platform by February for our address index, which is a key part of the integration model, the RDMF. The automatic matching algorithm for the demographic index is being developed. We are meeting with the Digital and Data Board in February to seek support for a cross-government consistent matching service, which will be provisioned via IDS.
15. IDS builds upon the foundations provided by the SRS, and will, in time, replace the existing service. Work is currently underway to plan to transition SRS into IDS. This will, in time, cover a full transition of service including all datasets, making them indexable where appropriate, analytical tooling, projects and analysts in order to decommission the SRS within programme timescales.

Integrated Data Access Framework and Data Stewardship Model

16. Current data sharing across government is hampered by real and perceived barriers; and the IDS will tackle these through new initiatives to reduce friction to data access, including leveraging technology to make data accessible, including at source, and creating accessible and accurate metadata to act as a data catalogue for current and prospective IDS users
17. We intend to seek commitment for our approach to data access from departments before March 2023 with the overriding objective to reduce existing duplication, inefficiencies and constraints with how data is shared with ONS, and indeed across departments.
18. We intend to formalise this commitment via broad data processing agreements with agreements standardised across IDS stakeholders and a single agreement for each supplier, as opposed to a single agreement per data share.
19. The agreement will permit ONS to process data on behalf of data controllers, link the data to other data sets to create integrated assets; and support onward access to de-identified data to third parties via analysis and project spaces (see below).
20. We recognise that this will involve a cultural step change for government departments, including ceding an element of control of their data to ONS for the immediate term. Therefore, maintaining trust and transparency is paramount.

21. We are developing an Integrated Data Access Framework (IDAF) that outlines the policy, guidance and processes for data access and use via the IDS, and this will be overseen by a new cross-Whitehall data governance group, chaired by ONS.
22. We are seeking views from the Research Accreditation Panel (RAP) on our proposal to streamline accreditation processes so that IDS users can benefit from the full opportunities presented in the Digital Economy Act (DEA), including:
 - i. a cohort of 'enhanced users' for trusted members of the government analytical function based in central and devolved government offices. Enhanced users will have the opportunity to submit broader (macro) analytical scope to reflect policy areas of interest; and
 - ii. a cohort of external users from a professional analytical background. From a project perspective, these users will follow the well-established DEA project accreditation model.
23. For outputs from the IDS we will work towards a model in which trusted government users undertake their own statistical disclosure control, although this will not be in place for Full Public Beta.
24. We recognise this proposal amounts to a broader application of the DEA, but we see it as proportionate and necessary to derive full benefits of the IDS for trusted government users.

Progress towards DEA Accreditation for IDS Platform

25. DEA progress is being managed under a newly formed Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) established on 27 October. The team is utilising five dedicated Delivery Managers, with defined allocations across the Security and Data Capability controls required for DEA accreditation. The team confirmed their intention for DEA accreditation to the Research Accreditation Panel on 31 October.
26. We have received 153 documents that are ready for review, of which 96 have passed initial assurance checks, with 17 approved for inclusion in the DEA evidence pack. The MDT remains highly confident that we will have all required evidence submitted by 25 January 2023 and, unless something unforeseen happens, we will have secured DEA accreditation by March 2023.

Programme Update

Initial Public Beta and Full Public Beta release of IDS

27. The July NSEUAC paper detailed the successful launch of Initial Public Beta on 15 July 2022. Further updates are scheduled to build and enhance the service, with the most significant being the Full Public Beta (FPB) release, when accredited researchers outside government will have the ability to use the service. Improved functionality for FPB will include:
 - i. Safety:
 - enhanced access control to enable a broader range of users to safely access IDS;
 - assured data security through Statistical Disclosure Control (SDC) checking Output Control (OC) checking of all outputs; and
 - all high-priority security risks mitigated to within tolerance.
 - ii. Quantity:

- streamlined accreditation process to onboard researchers and projects safely and quickly;
- effective data curation process to ingest quality data and catalogue it precisely; and
- faster data ingestion pipelines accommodating a greater range of formats (E.g. Parquet file format).

iii. Quality:

- accurate data catalogue to enable users to easily search, identify and consider available data products;
- operational Service Wrapper including Customer Support Desk and key Service management functions (Incident Management, Change Management Etc.); and
- Key Performance Information to drive the continual improvement of the service. E.g.:
 - a. time to make data available;
 - b. data preparation efficiency;
 - c. time to accredit researchers;
 - d. time to accredit projects and volume of projects;
 - e. releasing data from the environment; and
 - f. number of service complaints.

28. Following a period of programme replanning, the IDP Programme Board endorsed the updated Programme Plan, with Full Public Beta now scheduled for 24 March 2023.

Full Business Case Refresh

29. A Full Business Case Refresh was submitted to HM Treasury (HMT) on 30 September with a Technical Review to support the Treasury Approvals Process (TAP) having been undertaken since then.

30. The main focus of the questions was on the programme risks to delivery of Full Public Beta in March and future steps in relation to the commercial approach, financial options and benefits realisation. An official outcome from HMT will not be known for a month or so.

Conclusion

31. As SRO I am pleased at the progress by the programme including achieving key milestones and an Amber delivery confidence assessment as endorsed by the Programme Board on 26 October; engagement with super early adopters; positive findings by the tech review team and HMT approval of the business case. All of which demonstrate wider stakeholder understanding and support for the programme.

Alison Pritchard, Deputy National Statistician for Data Capability, ONS, 28 November 2022

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

NATIONAL STATISTICIAN'S EXPERT USER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

NSEUAC(22)11

The Perspective of Statistics Users: Insights from the Office for Statistics Regulation

Purpose

1. This paper summarises findings from the Office for Statistics Regulation's (OSR) recent reviews of the statistical system and its casework function and explains what these findings mean for users of statistics.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Committee are invited to discuss the key themes outlined below and provide suggestions for areas of focus for the OSR during 2023/24.

Background

3. This year, OSR has published several reports which provide rich insights into the user experience of the statistical system in the UK:
 - i. **The State of the UK's Statistical System 2021/22**¹: This report, the third in an annual series, draws together findings from OSR's regulatory work to provide a deep insight into the UK's statistical system. We celebrate areas where the system consistently performs well and has improved. We also highlight continued and emergent areas for improvement to support the appropriate use of statistics by a wide range of people;
 - ii. **2022 update: lessons learned for health and social care statistics from the COVID-19 pandemic**²: The pandemic has continued to evolve over the last year – from the Omicron wave in Winter 2021 to changes in policy across the UK as governments seek to manage COVID-19 as an ongoing public health risk. This report, a follow-up to our 2021 review³, identifies progress made against our previous recommendations and sets out how we think producers can continue to publish statistics which meet user needs in the context of increased demands;
 - iii. **Annual Review of UK Statistics Authority Casework 2021/22**⁴: Casework is generated when someone raises a concern with OSR, or when we identify a concern ourselves, regarding the production and use of statistics. This report draws together our casework from financial year 2021/22. It focuses on the issues and themes in the 241 pieces of casework we investigated and provides an insight into areas of concern for users of government statistics; and

¹ <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/the-state-of-the-statistical-system-2021-22/>

² <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/lessons-learned-for-health-and-social-care-statistics-from-the-covid-19-pandemic-2022-update/pages/7/>

³ <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/improving-health-and-social-care-statistics-lessons-learned-from-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

⁴ <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/annual-review-of-uk-statistics-authority-casework-2021-22/>

- iv. **A UK-wide public dialogue exploring what the public perceive as ‘public good’ use of data for research and statistics**⁵: This report describes a research project we carried out in collaboration with Administrative Data Research UK to further our understanding of public perceptions of the public good. We held a series of workshops with members of the public and as a result identified five main themes which represent the views of our participants. We are currently working to understand how the findings feed into our regulatory work – for example, our first finding identified that members of the public want to be involved in meaningful engagement to inform decision-making concerning the use of data for statistics.

Discussion

4. Serving the public good is at the heart of the ambitions of the UK’s statistical system and is the primary focus of OSR’s work. While statistics of course support decisions made by governments and public bodies, they should also serve the needs of a wide range of people beyond the public sector – for example, businesses, charities, community groups, and individual citizens. At OSR, we believe that statistics should enhance public understanding on important issues and support people to reach informed decisions and hold governments to account.
5. Looking across OSR’s work this year, including the reports highlighted above, three themes emerge from the perspective of users of statistics: user engagement, misuse of statistics, and coherence and comparability.
6. User engagement: It is essential that producers engage with users of statistics to ensure that statistics are valuable and to support prioritisation, particularly in the context of resource pressures. We have identified three key aspects which are important for user engagement:
 - i. Understanding user needs: To ensure that statistics provide the information people need, producers must have a good understanding of their users – who they are, what they care about and how they consume information. We recognise that engaging with users to understand their needs requires dedicated resource. However, we consider that this engagement is essential to ensure that statistics provide value for users and to support producers to prioritise appropriately. For example, in the context of increased pressures on producers, we are supportive of producers reviewing their existing statistics to decide which should be continued or stopped. This requires engagement with users to understand their needs so that producers can make informed decisions. Where user needs cannot be met, we expect producers to be transparent about the reason for this;
 - ii. Sharing plans: The transparency of development plans for statistics continues to be an issue. Some statistics producers are not making their plans for their statistics publicly available. Of those plans that are published, some are out of date or lack detail about the developments, making it difficult for users to know what to expect from the statistics of interest. We would like to see development plans published as standard to enable users to understand upcoming changes and help drive priorities for development;

⁵ https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Public_perceptions_of_public_good.pdf

- iii. Reaching a wide range of people: We have found that, because of the increased public appetite for data and statistics about COVID-19, some producers have a greater appreciation for the need to reach a range of different users. This includes members of the public who might be accessing statistics for general interest, to make decisions about their lives or to enhance their understanding of a topical issue. This was often a big change for producers, many of whom were used to communicating with other audiences (usually other parts of government or experts, such as academics). As a result of developing this understanding of the varied users of statistics, some producers have identified that one product does not necessarily suit all. We want to see producers learning the lessons about communication from the pandemic – for example, by using a variety of mediums, tailored to user needs, to communicate their statistics. Those mediums might include statistical summaries and reports, open data or data tables, infographics, dashboards, blogs and/or engagement on social media.
7. Misuse of statistics: Public confidence in statistics can be undermined if statistics are not used appropriately – for example, if statistics are misrepresented and cannot support the claims being made. The misuse of statistics can also contribute to misinformation and disinformation.
8. Through our casework, we can see that the public is concerned about the misuse of statistics. In 2021/22, our most common type of casework (41 per cent of all cases) involved concerns about the inappropriate or incorrect use of statistics in public debate (whether deliberately or not). Most of these cases (83 per cent of cases relating to misuse) were raised with us by external stakeholders, such as members of the public, parliamentarians, members of the media and academics. Most often the concern related to use of statistics by a public figure or in a press release from a public body.
9. We recognise that combatting misuse is challenging and that it will not be possible for producers to eliminate misuse. However, producers need to be proactive in minimising the risk of misuse by making it easy for people to find and understand objective, clear information. We also want to see producers being proactive in considering how their statistics might be misused to mitigate the risk of misuse. Finally, we consider that departments and organisations should empower statisticians and analysts to communicate directly with users, to challenge misuse and support understanding.
10. Coherence and comparability: To provide clarity and insight, statistics need to be coherent – for example, by drawing on a range of sources to provide a single narrative or supporting users to understand how statistics fit with other outputs on the same topic.
11. Our review of lessons learned during the pandemic identified that users of health and social care statistics often need to compare statistics, for example between geographical areas. We also found that users of health and social care statistics, such as parliamentary researchers and health think tanks, have a strong interest in comparable UK-wide data. While users do appreciate that comparability is not always possible due to differences in policies and operations in the four nations, they told us that it can still be hard to determine exactly what is and is not comparable across the UK. We know from our regulatory work that this is an issue for statistics on other topics beyond health and social care.

12. There remains more work to do to improve cross-UK comparability of statistics. We encourage producers in the four nations to continue to collaborate to publish comparable data where possible. This includes considering methodologies and definitions used, as well as the presentation of the statistics. Where UK-wide comparability is not possible, producers should clearly notify users that this is the case to aid user understanding and support appropriate use.

Conclusion

13. Our work this year has identified three themes from the perspective of users of statistics: user engagement, misuse of statistics, and coherence and comparability. To make improvements across these three areas, we consider that producers of statistics will need to continue to innovate, collaborate with each other, engage directly with a wide range of users and champion the transparency of data and statistics. We welcome the Committee's advice on areas OSR should focus on, and how we can continue to engage with the Committee, as we develop our priorities for 2023/24.

Anna Price, Office for Statistics Regulation, 5 December 2022