NATIONAL STATISTICIAN'S EXPERT USER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Minutes
Tuesday 4 October 2022
Via Videoconference

Members Present
Professor David Hand (Chair)
Professor Paul Allin
Dame Kate Barker
Professor Paul Boyle
Robert Bumpstead
Professor Diane Coyle
Professor Sir Ian Diamond
Ed Humpherson
Professor Jane Falkingham
Professor David Martin
Professor Ann Phoenix
Stian Westlake

In attendance
Owen Brace
Roger Halliday (for item 2)
Liz McKeown (for item 4)

Secretariat
Fran Tovey
Simon Whitworth

Apologies
Dame Moira Gibb
Professor Ann Phoenix
Sir Bernard Silverman

1.   Minutes and matters arising

1.1   Members were welcomed to the meeting. Apologies were received from Moira Gibb, Ann Phoenix and Bernard Silverman. The minutes from the meeting of 26 July were agreed and all actions were reviewed.

2.   Discussion with User

2.1   Roger Halliday, Chief Executive Officer for Research Data Scotland (RDS) joined the meeting to reflect from his perspective as a previous producer of statistics, weaving in his reflections as a specific user. RDS processed and organised data to make it available for public analysis and research in secure ways for the public good. Roger gave examples of where thinking could be broadened to enhance how the Government Statistical Service (GSS) engaged with users. There were areas where data was not currently being utilised in the GSS, leading to gaps in understanding. Improved data would lead to improved understanding. GSS outputs should be for the public good and relevant to individual citizens, the Inclusive Data Taskforce (IDTF) would help improve this. Consistency in delivery across the GSS was important and broader thinking was needed around the range of outputs and investments made in data collection. Proactive user engagement was important, and evidence based stories should be communicated in a way that was relevant to the user.

2.2   Members discussed how it was important to not only look at areas which were working well, but also areas that could be improved upon. User engagement and understanding of user wants needed to be improved by using all available tools. Enhanced user engagement would mean products could be developed to a higher level. The meeting discussed how GSS data could be more available and accessible to the public and the extent to which a social media strategy was able to reflect public trends. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) had been working on enabling disclosure control being built into the answers to questions to make them more accessible and offered to share the open access work with RDS when it was available, after funding had been secured.

2.3   Members agreed that the right level of user engagement meant setting expectations on an ongoing basis and the GSS needed to be bolder in asking users what they would like.

3.   Website Transformation [NSEUAC(22)07]

3.1   Owen Brace presented a paper on the transformation of the ONS website estate, building on his previous update at the March National Statistician's Expert User Advisory Committee (NSEUAC) meeting. The ONS website and underlying structure were bespoke built, rather than off the shelf products and a lot of work had been done to make improvements. Feedback on core needs showed that the website needed quick and easy access, but one size would not fit all. It was being considered how best to engage with users on specific products and how best to present data.

3.2   Members discussed whether it was best to see a gradual and incremental improvement to existing systems, or a complete rebuild and agreed that the answer depended on resource and funding, but it was important to build a strong system with a good programme of delivery. The meeting discussed success measures and how website success could largely be measured by discoverability and ease of use. The website should play an important part in

the way UK data was looked at. The ONS had liaised with other National Statistics organisations to discuss lessons learnt and ensure that the ONS brand was successful and professional.

3.3 Members agreed that efforts to improve the website had largely been successful, but one size would not fit all. Users were categorised depending on how they interacted with data to provide accessibility in different ways to different audiences.

4. Inclusive Data Taskforce [NSEUAC(22)08]

4.1 Liz McKeown provided an overview and progress update on the IDTF Implementation Plan which was delivering against the eight inclusive data principles. There had been a lot of progress since publication and the IDTF was working jointly across the GSS and UK Nations to improve harmonisation and coherence. Accessibility was important to make it easy for people to connect with their local data. The IDTF Implementation plan was progressing will and needed to be agile to new and emerging priorities and engagement with a wide range of users was integral.

4.2 Members discussed how to address inequalities and users who found it difficult to navigate the user engagement system. The IDTF was working with cross civil society organisations to provide the richest possible data in order to look horizontally across different groups to consider how they were impacted. The meeting discussed how to prioritise data that did not already exist and where efforts should be directed, this was a challenging decision as presumptions may not reflect lived experiences. Insights would be drawn over time and approach to prioritising would eb refined.

4.3 The meeting supported progress so far and endorsed plans for the next quarter, particularly around data gaps and the opportunity to be transformation in bringing inclusivity into the mainstream. A further IDTF update would be scheduled for the December NSEUAC meeting with a focus on the ONS Assembly which would formalise bringing together civil society groups, and user engagement with underrepresented communities and how that was being addressed.

5. Forward Agenda

5.1 The meeting discussed ideas for future items and members were asked to provide suggestions for future external speakers.

5.2 Martin Weal or Paul Johnson were suggested as guest external speakers for the next meeting and the secretariat team would liaise with both to discuss availability. Other names considered for guest external speakers were James Nazroo, Andy Haldane, Chris Dibben, David Ford, Tony Dent, Dawn Snape, Emma Gordon and Ronan Lyons. Members agreed that it was beneficial to hear the challenges that users were facing in order to advise the National Statistician how best to address them.

5.3 Members expressed their interest in hearing more detail about how the Integrated Data Service would work and Alison Pritchard would provide an update at the December NSEUAC meeting. Members also requested regular updates on Website Transformation and User Engagement. The Royal

Statistical Society has been exploring the idea of Public Statistics and members agreed that they would like to explore the topic at a future meeting.

5.4 The Chair asked members to consider issues of user engagement that were of particular concern to them and inform the Secretariat so that they could be collated ahead of the December NSEUAC meeting.

6.   Any other business

6.1 The next meeting would take place on Tuesday 5 December 2022.

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NATIONAL STATISTICIAN'S EXPERT USER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Agenda
Tuesday 4 October, 13:00-15:00
Virtual Meeting

Chair: Prof. David Hand
Apologies: Dame Moira Gibb, Professor Ann Phoenix, Sir Bernard Silverman

Timing	Agenda item	
1 13:00-13:05 (5 mins)	Welcome, previous minutes and actions	Meeting of 26.07.2022 Prof. David Hand
2 13:05-13:45 (40 mins)	Discussion with User	Presentation Roger Halliday
3 13:45-14:15 (30 mins)	Website Transformation	NSEUAC(22)07 Owen Brace
4 14:15-14:45 (30 mins)	Inclusive Data Taskforce	NSEUAC(22)08 Liz McKeown
5 14:45-14:55 (10 mins)	Forward Agenda	Discussion
6 14:55-15:00 (5 mins)	Any Other Business	

Next Meeting: Monday 5 December, 13:00, Virtual Meeting

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

NATIONAL STATISTICIAN'S EXPERT USER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Transforming Access to Data

Purpose

1. This paper provides an update on the transformation of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) web estate and underpinning technology, based on business and user need. This includes the ONS corporate presence and wider digital channels and the presentation and dissemination of data, statistics, and analysis.

Recommendations

2. Members of the National Statistician's Expert User Advisory Committee (NSEUAC) are invited to review and discuss the progress to date and the transformation activity under way to improve the current products and systems.

Background

3. Our users want increasingly rapid access to data and insight covering a breadth of cross-cutting topics, presented, and delivered through digital formats which meet diverse needs. Our ambition is that ONS data is clear, engaging, and accessible wherever and however it is needed.

4. Over the last decade, our Web Estate and its underpinning technology has developed organically rather than through long-term integrated development planning. As such, the majority of components within the web architecture have been built to bespoke requirements. This means that system relationships within our web estate is currently largely 'bespoke to bespoke', making integration challenging, operations inefficient and improvements (without transformation) limiting and not cost-effective.

5. In quarter four of 2021/22, we completed a detailed internal and external user research and strategic requirements review. We engaged widely with user groups and internal stakeholders. The synthesised feedback from this demonstrated that:

   i. quick and easy access to our data is a challenge, even for expert users;
   ii. content should be produced for different user groups, including time-poor users;
   iii. it isn't possible to bring information together meaningfully by theme; and
   iv. default content types aren't meeting user needs with limited dynamic or interactives.

6. This is not an exhaustive list but highlights some key areas to address through transformation of the Web Estate and Dissemination service.

7. Statistics for the public good should reach the widest possible audience. Public good is unlocked through getting data and insight into the hands of all of our users more quickly and easily. The synthesised feedback from user testing and stakeholder engagement conclude that we are meeting the needs of a narrow traditional audience only, with vast potential to do better. This is true both of our analysis and corporate web presence.

Progress

8. Since the start of 2022, priorities for development have been service stability, security and improving ONS site search as well as improving access to ONS content from search engines, while we undertake a technical review of the web estate.

Search and Search Engine Optimisation

9. The design of the highly localised content for the Census has enabled wide reuse and embedding in google search results as "snippets" which allow our users to access ONS content without visiting the ONS website. These "snippets" can be used to power voice search results, powering Siri and Alexa queries, further enabling ONS's data reach and impact. An example is outlined below:
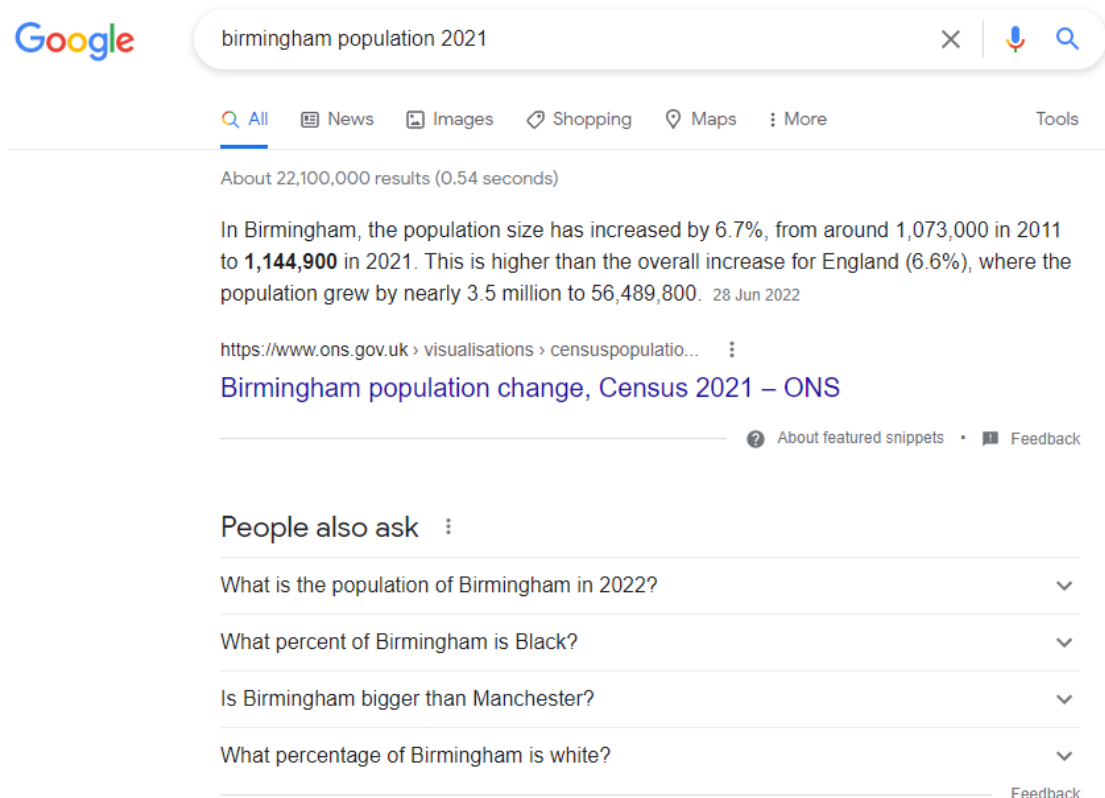
10. We have also developed a prototype to assess the impact of using Natural Language Processing on successful search results on the ONS website. This enables users to use their own terms for search, rather than knowing the ONS release title or survey name. This prototype showed a 30-percentage point improvement in successful search terms. We are now developing this prototype to bring into live service on the ONS website.

Innovative and Engaging Products

11. During the year, we have focused on the development of innovative and engaging rich content products. These were showcased for census first release but have already been used to support wider ONS releases.

12. One of our census first results releases was a "scrollytelling" interactive article 'how has population changed in your area?[1]'. This article included 331 localised articles, based on semi-automated narratives for each of the 331 local authorities. This clear and engaging format of census data made it the most read census product on first results day. Every one of the 311 local authority articles was viewed on the first day, and this enabled local media to re-use ONS information to provide tailored information to their users.

13. There was also strong social media engagement, particularly in response to the football pitch analogy to help users understand population density in their area.

14. We continue to innovate in response to user need. We recently developed a personal inflation calculator[2] and worked in partnership with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) to launch an embeddable version to extend our impact and reach. This received over one million views within the first 48 hours of launch and was covered throughout the day on the BBC live news coverage.

Flexible Data

15. We are building the capability to allow users to build their own data tables based on the variables they are interested in, which will be first showcased as part of census releases. The ONS will continue to provide some static data sets, but this technology will open up the data for our users, enabling them to combine variables to explore and understand census data to a degree that hasn't been possible previously. This is supported by dynamic statistical disclosure control.

Corporate Presence

16. A further priority for this year relates to our corporate presence. We are working on updated careers pages within the ONS.gov domain which will launch in October 2022 to support recruitment and employer brand campaigns. The initial focus of this work will be Digital, Data and Technology recruitment. This capability will be reusable to support wider pages and improve our overall corporate presence.

Technical Review

17. We ran a deep technical review of the 'as is' infrastructure to design a multi-year transformation roadmap to achieve a strategic and modern 'to be' state. This will be presented to ONS investment committees in October 2022.

18. The deep technical review of our infrastructure has been designed to deliver a number of technical, user and business benefits. The areas covered in the deep dives included:

    i.   data visualisation;
    ii. data consumption and data explorer tools;
    iii. content and publishing workflows;
    iv. content management systems;
    v.   microsites;

[1] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/howthepopulationchangedwhereyoulivecensus2021/2022-06-28
[2] https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/articles/howisinflationaffectingyourhouseholdcosts/2022-03-23

    vi.   communications and notifications and commercial models; and

    vii. alignment to the Integrated Data Service (dissemination work).

19. We captured 190 high-level requirements relating to the deep dives. These requirements cover a broad range of topic areas including:

    i.   data structure and storage;
    ii.   automation;
    iii. geography;
    iv. charting tools;
    v.   content production;
    vi. robo-journalism;
    vii. content management system;
    viii. communications;
    ix. digital experience platform;
    x.   webchat;
    xi. discussion forum;
    xii. commercial models;
    xiii. NOMIS;
    xiv. and Search.

20. Several areas of the Baseline and Vision requirements have also been reiterated within our workshops, for example Automation.

21. Inputs into technical workshops included feedback from all user groups across all four nations, internal business areas and specialist groups, users with accessibility issues and citizens with lower digital confidence.

22. As part of this work, we have explored opportunities to align the Integrated Data Service and the ONS dissemination capabilities. Both areas are introducing new capabilities and services to reimagine the offer for both producers and consumers and there are opportunities to build and re-use across services.

23. This technology transformation will enable long-term strategic modernisation of our underlying systems to realise cost savings, reduce risks around quality and security and provide the necessary technology to deliver, and respond in an agile way, to evolving needs of our users.

24. Throughout the lifecycle of this technical transformation programme there will be requirements to procure technical solutions. As per Government Digital Service principles, we will be applying a 'buy before build' principle within evaluation and decision making, with an ambition to reach below 80 per cent 'off the shelf' products as a total proportion of the technical solutions. We are delivering within the technical Code of Practice and each technical solution will be subject to a Discovery, Alpha, Beta and Live phase.

Conclusion

25. Significant activity is under way to improve the current products and systems, but fundamental change is needed to address the longstanding issues with technology and unlock value for both our internal and external users. We are working with teams across the ONS to agree a delivery plan.

26. NSEUAC members are invited to comment on the progress to date and work to transform access to data.

Owen Brace, Director of Communication and Digital Publishing, ONS, September 2022

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

NATIONAL STATISTICIAN'S EXPERT USER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Inclusive Data Taskforce Update

Purpose

1. This paper provides the National Statistician's Expert User Advisory Committee (NSEUAC) with an overview and progress update on the delivery of the Inclusive Data Taskforce (IDTF) Implementation Plan, ahead of an item focused on engaging with traditionally underrepresented or marginalised communities at its December meeting.

Recommendations

2. Members of NSEUAC are invited to:

    i. note and comment on the breadth and depth of the response to the IDTF recommendations; the progress to date on them; the key priorities in the period ahead and the infrastructure we have put in place to monitor and evaluate delivery; and
    ii. provide any steers to focus a future item on the specific role of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Assembly and associated engagement activity in furthering the inclusivity of our data, statistics, analysis and insights.

Background

3. The IDTF was commissioned by the National Statistician in October 2020 with the aim of supporting a step change in the inclusiveness of United Kingdom (UK) data and evidence. The IDTF launched its report and recommendations last September. They made 46 recommendations grouped into eight 'Inclusive Data Principles' which taken together, highlighted the need for systemic change and greater collaboration among those producing and using data in the UK, as well as with research participants.

4. The IDTF Implementation Plan was published in January 2022, outlining work being undertaken across the whole UK statistical system to improve the inclusiveness of data and evidence. Delivery of this plan is being coordinated by the ONS Centre for Equalities and Inclusion (CEI), ONS Statistical Coherence and Inclusion Division, which is also responsible for delivery of various planned activities. The CEI convening work includes establishing appropriate monitoring, evaluation and governance structures to ensure positive progress is made to deliver against the recommendations over the next three years.

Progress

5. The IDTF Implementation Plan covers over 200 activities being undertaken by 16 organisations to deliver against the eight 'Inclusive Data Principles'. A summary 'Accountability Framework (AF) of key deliverables' has been created to provide a clear view of progress towards achieving a real step change in inclusivity of data. This will enable efficient monitoring under the new governance for delivering this work (see Governance and Monitoring below).

6. Notable recent progress includes:

i.   publication of qualitative research to better understand the **lived experiences of disabled adults accessing and engaging with activities, goods and services,** to address key evidence gaps and feed into ongoing work in this area coordinated by Cabinet Office Disability Unit;

ii.   completion of analysis underpinning Phase 1 of the Equality Data Programme (EDP) partnership between ONS and the Cabinet Office to understand the **characteristics and circumstances associated with different life outcomes** to enable more targeted policy intervention to address disadvantage;

iii.   publication and continued delivery of the **Government Statistical Service (GSS) Harmonisation Plan** which has a focus on definitions of personal characteristics to make data more meaningful in the context of societal changes;

iv.   **re-prioritisation of areas for statistical coherence and production of UK wide data** resulting in 20 new projects, including ones on for example understanding economic inactivity across the UK;

v.   response to user requirements to understand impact of rising costs on different groups, through **production of a "personal inflation calculator"**, utilising innovative web-scraped data to understand how prices of everyday grocery items have changed, and moving to quarterly publication of estimates of inflation rates for different types of household in the UK on a Consumer Prices Index including owner occupiers' housing costs (CPIH)-consistent basis;

vi.   rapidly setting up new surveys to address the needs of Ukrainian arrivals in the UK and their sponsors, filling a critical evidence gap. This also **utilised translation to ensure accessibility**, translating both the survey materials and the results into Ukrainian. Work is now ongoing to roll-out this approach with other refugee groups with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC); and

vii.   publishing and subsequently updating **a subnational indicators explorer** providing a one stop shop for Local Authority level indicators with innovative data visualisation that has made our local statistics far more accessible to a broader audience.

Key planned activities for next quarter

7. Looking ahead, the next quarter's key analytical deliverables include:

i.   **Addressing data gaps through qualitative research.** This includes publishing qualitative research on the educational experiences of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in England, to feed into the Department for Education's SEND Review consultation response and proposals, and on the lived experiences of Gypsies and Travellers in England and Wales filling critical evidence gaps. Procuring two further qualitative projects on the experiences of domestic abuse survivors in the context of temporary 'safe' accommodation, and on the lived experiences of young migrants and refugees;

ii.   **Addressing data gaps through new data sources and analysis.** This includes publishing Census 2021 topic summaries on Ethnicity, National Identity, Language, Religion, Sexual Orientation, and Gender Identity; and Phase 1 EDP findings. The latter explores the characteristics and

circumstances associated with a range of different life outcomes across six themes: wealth, health, crime, life satisfaction, and digital exclusion;

iii. **Better understanding non household populations and vulnerable groups in society.** This includes publication of summary reports and recommendations on reviews of the UK homeless and adult social care evidence base and continuation of our work on Ukrainian arrivals in the UK, with survey materials and publications available in Ukrainian;

iv. **Delivering the GSS Harmonisation Plan to provide better support to statistical producers with new and revised standards and guidance.** This includes publishing research and findings on updating harmonised standards for Ethnicity, Disability and Mental Health, alongside a new Socio-Economic Background harmonised standard and updated Sex and Gender Identity data collection guidance;

v. **Addressing statistical coherence through delivering new UK wide data.** This includes releasing a set of publicly available statistics covering the whole UK on how far people can travel by public transport; and

vi. **Using new approaches to link and visualise data to generate new insights.** This includes starting Explore Subnational Statistics Beta development on the new Geo Journey area of the ONS website; and delivery of the Equality Data Asset prototype - this links Census and Companies House data initially, to enable enhanced analysis of the characteristics and circumstances associated with enterprise.

8. Alongside these analytical deliverables, work will continue: to take forward user and stakeholder engagement, including through the new ONS Assembly, to fully implement new governance arrangements and to progress with our monitoring and evaluation plans. These aspects are discussed below.

Role of the ONS Assembly

9. ONS has created a third sector Assembly in order to continue and build on the successful engagement conducted as part of Census 2021. This will provide a mechanism for increased engagement with charities and bodies that represent the interests of marginalised or under-represented groups of the population, as highlighted by the IDTF recommendations. Improving hearing the impact of policy or other interventions, is a key part of achieving success in delivering more inclusive data.

10. The member organisations represent a variety of characteristics such as age, disability and ethnicity. Most are national bodies with a few England or Wales specific. The Assembly is run as a virtual meeting and will meet on a quarterly basis. Another key part of the work on public engagement is the development of a 'social contract' or 'data charter' setting out what research participants can expect in terms of why their data are being collected, how they are kept confidential and their security arrangements, and how their data will be used and shared.

11. An in-depth discussion on engaging with underrepresented groups and the engagement mechanisms, such as the ONS Assembly, is planned for the December meeting of this Group. We welcome any suggestions in support of that discussion.

Governance and Monitoring

12. New governance has been set up to support the delivery of the IDTF Implementation Plan and to help us achieve the step change in the inclusivity of UK data and evidence. Dame Julia Cleverdon has been appointed as Chair of the new National Statistician's Inclusive Data Advisory Committee, alongside members from a range of organisations to provide independent insight and challenge in areas highlighted by the IDTF. The inaugural meeting of the Committee is being planned for 17 October. A new sub-committee of the GSS Analysis and Evaluation (A&E) Committee is being established to ensure appropriate cross-GSS oversight.

13. The aforementioned IDTF Accountability Framework, designed to streamline monitoring of progress against the planned commitments, has been created to enable monitoring and scrutiny. This will support the provision of strategic, concise updates on progress on the key areas for delivery, for discussion and decision by the appropriate governance bodies. The new framework will also provide Key Performance Indicators to be included in the ONS Integrated Performance Report. It will be complemented by the first published annual update on progress, planned for early 2023.

Evaluation

14. The approach to evaluating our response to the IDTF has been developed with evaluation experts in ONS using a Theory of Change and subsequently agreed by its Programme Evaluation Group. The evaluation will look to answer three main questions:

   i.   were the recommendations of the IDTF implemented successfully?;
   ii. to what extent have the implemented recommendations delivered their desired impacts?; and
   iii. to what extent can the observed results be attributed to the implementation of the IDTF recommendations?

15. To answer these questions, an impact evaluation will be undertaken using mixed methods to assess the expected outcomes. Use of varied methods will help to add insight and support analysis of how different factors contribute to outcomes. The four key outcomes the evaluation will be assessing are:

   i.   increased public trust in participation in government data collection and data sharing activities;
   ii. more members of the public are responding to surveys and engaging in data sharing activities with government bodies;
   iii. government departments produce higher quality data through a collaborative, systemic approach that capture a wider range of groups more robustly and consistently, providing insights into the full UK population; and
   iv. data users (including the public and organisations) report that they are able to access the data and evidence they need and that they are able to understand the data and evidence they are accessing.

Conclusion

16. This paper has provided an overview of the current work underway to address the IDTF recommendations and to deliver the Implementation Plan, published earlier this year. Our assessment is that overall good progress is being made against the IDTF's recommendations. Nonetheless it is important that across ONS and the wider GSS we keep emphasis on inclusivity in all that we do from

data collection, through analysis to dissemination and beyond and continue to drive tangible progress at pace. This will necessitate strong collaboration and partnering in order that the collective available resources are prioritised to areas where we can have most impact and we don't miss opportunities to make a difference.

17. Extensive stakeholder engagement was central to the IDTF's recommendations and remains critical to our response to them. A key part of that going forward will be utilising to full effect the role of the newly created ONS Assembly and we look forward to returning to this Group in December with more information on this and our wider approach to engaging underrepresented/marginalised groups.

Liz McKeown, Public Policy Analysis, ONS, 28 September 2022