

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Regulation Committee

Minutes

**Thursday 13 July 2023
Remote Teams Meeting
13:00-15:45**

Members Present

Penny Young (Chair)
Sir Robert Chote
Ed Humpherson
Professor Dame Carol Propper
Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter

Other Attendees

Michelle Alderson (shadowing)
Penny Babb (item 5)
Elise Baseley
Nisha Bunting (item 9)
Emily Carless (item 8)
Sarah Cobden
Catherine Davies (item 3)
Kirsty Garratt (shadowing)
Mark Pont
David Ross (Item 10)

Secretariat

Daniel Beck
Sally-Ann Jones

Apologies

Rob Kent-Smith
Helen Miller-Bakewell
Gail Rankin

Declarations of Interest

None

1. Apologies, minutes, and matters arising

- 1.1 Members were welcomed to the meeting and apologies were received from Rob Kent-Smith, Helen Miller-Bakewell, and Gail Rankin. The Chair particularly welcomed Kirsty Garratt and Michelle Alderson who shadowed the meeting.
- 1.2 The minutes of the meeting on 25 May were agreed, and actions were reviewed.

2. National Statistics Designation Review Update [SA(RC)(23)23]

- 2.1 Penny Babb introduced a paper presenting further designs of badges for official statistics in development, official statistics, and accredited official statistics, as part of the Designation Refresh project in response to the findings of the National Statistics Designation Review.
- 2.2 The Committee was invited to approve the concept of badges for official statistics and official statistics in development; consider the options presented regarding badges; and agree on the preferred designs to be included in the public consultation in the Code Stocktake over the autumn.
- 2.3 Members approved the concept of badges and agreed that a slightly modified Option C, containing a bar chart in the badge design, with a green lozenge was the preferred design. The preferred design would be included in the public consultation in the Code of Practice Stocktake scheduled in the autumn.

3. Update from the Director General for Regulation [SA(RC)(23)20]

- 3.1 Ed Humpherson provided an update on regulatory activity since the last meeting, highlighting the publication of the Data Linkage Report on 12 July, which was well received by stakeholders.
- 3.2 Members heard that the volume of casework had increased from 72 to 84 cases in 23/24, including a query about cancer survival rates, and were informed that OSR were engaging with the Head of Profession at Department of Health and Social Care about cancer survival statistics. Following OSR's letter in December to the Home Office about the use of Modern Slavery statistics, the Home Secretary had written to Sir Robert Chote to invite him to a meeting with a Home Office minister to discuss this matter further. OSR were continuing to monitor the Home Office's use of data on small boats.
- 3.3 The Committee was informed that OSR, after significant budget pressure, were now confident of meeting but not exceeding their budget. This included the deferral of some recruitment to achieve this.
- 3.4 Members discussed Assessment Report 374: Statistics from the People and Nature Survey to consider for National Statistics Designation. The Committee agreed the proposal by OSR to designate these statistics upon release in Autumn, subject to completion of remaining actions identified in OSR's review, which are all judged to be on course. It agreed to delegate the final report sign off to the Director General for Regulation. It was noted that OSR encourage statistical producers to ensure all data is released accessibly.

4. 2022 Population Census in Scotland [SA(RC)(23)21]

- 4.1 Catherine Davies introduced a paper which provided an update on National Records of Scotland's (NRS) actions to meet the requirements of OSR's assessment of the 2022 Census in Scotland, which had been published in April 2023.
- 4.2 Members were reminded about the history in relation to return rates for the Scottish census; and the requirements for National Statistics designation were outlined. The Committee heard how NRS would be undertaking a quality assurance exercise with Local Authorities in August. It was noted that NRS had engaged constructively with OSR on their plans to address the requirements of the assessment report. OSR reported that they were seeing good evidence from NRS of their compliance with the Code of Practice, but the final decision on National

Statistics designation would depend on the resolution of some remaining key issues, including the communication of uncertainty.

4.3 Members discussed the update. The following points were considered:

- i. The amount of work already undertaken by NRS to address recommendations from the assessment.
- ii. Potential questions OSR could be asked by stakeholders on the 2022 Census results.
- iii. The need for transparency by NRS regarding the confidence intervals of the data and sources of uncertainty, and that NRS should be clear about this in their release.
- iv. The challenge of assigning National Statistics Designation to a first-time output; and the likely problems of user confidence in the event that if OSR did not apply National Statistics Designation.
- v. The importance of targeted local authority engagement work undertaken by NRS as part of an evidence-seeking process.

4.4 The Committee was positive about progress to date and agreed that given the outstanding issues, a meeting would be scheduled early September to consider OSR's evaluation regarding National Statistics designation.

5. Sex and Gender Update [SA(RC)(23)22]

5.1 Ed Humpherson introduced a paper updating the committee on OSR's review of gender identity and the census.

5.2 The Committee heard that OSR proposed to update its existing draft guidance on collecting and reporting data about sex in official statistics to incorporate the lessons from cases involving gender and gender identity. The latter had been shared with the Committee at the February and April meetings. The Committee was briefed on plans for stakeholder engagement including a more active convening role for OSR. The aim is to publish the revised guidance at the end of October.

5.3 Members discussed the update. The following points were considered:

- i. OSR's convening role in providing guidance for statistical producers would not include mandating a particular solution.
- ii. The guidance would support producers consider the factors they need to consider making decisions on the data being collected.
- iii. The importance of consulting fully with stakeholders prior to publication of the updated guidance.

5.4 The Committee agreed the approach noting the need for clarity, and providing real examples of statistical uses alongside the guidance to help statistical producers. A further update would be scheduled for the October meeting.

6. Surge Planning Risk identification and mitigation [SA(RC)(23)24]

6.1 Ed Humpherson introduced a paper setting out how the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) could prepare for a surge in casework, for example ahead of a general election, but also unexpected surges.

6.2 Members heard about OSR's plans in preparation for a surge in activity, including reallocating internal resource away from less important priorities, and in the case of a large surge, using wider Authority staff and considering further using contingent labour.

6.3 The Committee supported the proposed approach.

6.4 Within the context of a General Election, the committee discussed how OSR would respond if they were asked to look at a party's manifesto prior to publication, and how they were affected

by pre-election rules. OSR would consider this further. The Committee also discussed, with reference to OSR casework, about protections that could be put in place when seconding staff to reduce the risk of conflict-of-interest.

7. Annual Review of Authority Casework 2022/23- First Draft [SA(RC)(23)25]

- 7.1 Elise Baseley introduced a paper which provided a draft of the Annual Review of Authority Casework 2022/23 report.
- 7.2 Members heard about proposals to make available the Management Information database. It endorsed this in principle, assuming it was possible to explain changes in definitions and so on. It also heard about how OSR would be using a new database to record casework.
- 7.3 Members discussed the draft report and suggested that many of the bar charts could usefully be removed. The committee agreed that it would be more useful to consider a case as an issue, rather than an individual complaint. This would solve the problem of duplicate complaints obscuring the overall trend. The report would be reviewed by the Committee ahead of publication.

8. Lesson learned on PPI – next steps on Economic Statistics [SA(RC)(23)26]

- 8.1 Emily Carless introduced a paper which provided an update on the Enhanced Scrutiny of Economic Statistics Programme following the publication of the first pilot quality focused assessment. The programme had two main aims: providing assurance to stakeholders and the wider public on the quality of economic statistics and providing assurance to stakeholders and the wider public on the independence of economic statistics in the UK.
- 8.2 Members heard about OSR's forward programme of work which would broaden the range of methodologies tested.
- 8.3 The Committee noted the update.

9. Draft Assessment report – Weekly A&E waiting times in Scotland (Public Health Scotland) [SA(RC)(23)27]

- 9.1 Nisha Bunting introduced a draft Assessment Report on Accident and Emergency (A&E) Activity Statistics in Scotland, produced by Public Health Scotland (PHS).
- 9.2 The Committee approved the report for publication in July. Consideration of National Statistics status was scheduled for the October meeting.

10. Draft assessment report: Butterflies in England and the UK (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) [SA(RC)(23)28]

- 10.1 David Ross introduced an initial draft report on OSR's assessment of Department for Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Butterfly statistics, England, and UK.
- 10.2 The Committee welcomed the report. It commented on some of the technical challenges including spatial bias, species measurement, and recorded data vs filled in data using smoothing methods. It also sought reassurance that Defra felt accountable for the statistics methodology, given the unusual arrangements involving a number of voluntary organisations and volunteers.
- 10.3 The Committee agreed that OSR would continue to engage with Defra on the draft report, and if required, discuss this again in the proposed additional September meeting.

11. Annual Review of Effectiveness [SA(RC)(23)29]

- 11.1 Daniel Beck introduced the paper providing the results of the recent self-review of the effectiveness of the Committee. The Chair thanked members for completing the questionnaire.
- 11.2 Members discussed how it could increase its strategic focus further by identifying specific intermediate level themes. It also considered the potential for a Shadow Board, involving a wider range of players who could feed into discussions. It encouraged authors to provide clear

recommendations to underpin discussions. The scheduling of additional meetings as needed had been effective.

12. Horizon Scanning [SA(RC)(23)30]

- 12.1 Ed Humpherson facilitated a discussion on Horizon Scanning, and repeated that there should be more focus on intermediate level issues.
- 12.2 The Committee also discussed the possibility of individual members occasionally reflecting on their perspective on potential issues on the horizon.

13. Any Other Business

- 13.1 Ed Humpherson summarised OSR's interactions with Better Statistics, particularly in relation to the findings of the Sturgis review.

- 13.2 The Committee would meet next on Thursday 12 October