

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Minutes

Thursday 30 November 2023
London Office

Hybrid Meeting

Members Present

Sir Robert Chote (Chair)
Dr Jacob Abboud
Professor Sir John Aston
Professor Sir Ian Diamond
Ed Humpherson
Sian Jones
Alison Pritchard
Professor Dame Carol Propper
Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter
Penny Young

Other Attendees

Robert Bumpstead
Kate Davies (for item 10)
Alex Lambert (for item 9)
Darren Morgan (for item 9)
Emma Rourke (for items 8, 10)
Julie Stanborough (for item 8)
Tom Taylor
Jennet Woolford (for item 10)
Jason Zawadzki (for item 9)

Apologies

Nora Nanayakkara

1. Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies were noted from Nora Nanayakkara.

2. Declarations of Interest

- 2.1 There were no new declarations of interest.

3. Minutes and matters arising from previous meetings.

- 3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 October were agreed.

4. Report from the Authority Chair [SA(23)63]

- 4.1 Non-Executive Directors had met prior to the Board meeting. They had discussed the Census 2023 and consultation.
- 4.2 On behalf of the Authority Board Sir Robert Chote paid sincere tribute to the late Lord Rowe-Beddoe. David Rowe-Beddoe was a founding member of the Authority Board on the establishment of the UK Statistics Authority and was the Board's deputy chair with responsibility for oversight of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) between 2008 and 2012. As a crossbench member of the House of Lords, David continued to support the Authority, making a keynote speech in support of the new legislative framework for statistics within the Digital Economy Bill (now Act) in 2016. The Chair on behalf of the Board was very sad to learn of his passing and we extend to Lord Rowe-Beddoe's family and friends our deepest condolences. He would be fondly remembered.
- 4.3 The Chair reported on his recent activities since the Board last met. On 31 October Sir Robert had attended a roundtable discussion at the Electoral Commission alongside Rob Kent-Smith, Deputy Director for Regulation.
- 4.4 Sir Robert had attended a meeting at the Bank of England on 29 November with Huw Pill, Chief Economist and Executive Director for Monetary Analysis and Research at which the good working relationship between the BoE and ONS colleagues was noted.

5. Report from the Chief Executive [SA(23)64]

- 5.1 Sir Ian provided the Board with an overview of activity and issues since the last meeting, highlighting the following:
- i. on 23 November the publication of updated UK international migration statistics for 2012 to 2021 and provisional long term international migration statistics for year ending June 2023, with ONS providing media and government briefings to help communicate the data; and a blog by Emma Rourke, Director General for Health, Population and Methods.
 - ii. Sir Ian's attendance at the Covid-19 Inquiry on 10 October covering the role of the Authority during the pandemic, data and insights delivered;
 - iii. Sir Ian's membership of a Social and Behavioural Science Group for emergencies that had been set up by Sir Patrick Vallance, with membership including Professor Jennifer Rubin, Home Office Chief Scientific Adviser, and Professor Sarah Sharples, Department for Transport Chief Scientific Adviser;
 - iv. the approach by Sir Ian and the Senior Leadership Team in managing the financial position with a positive impact of the cost control mechanisms that had been put in place to ensure a balanced budget at year end;
 - v. the launch of the business planning and budget setting process had commenced with directorate planning in progress; and
 - vi. following agreement by Permanent Secretaries across the Civil Service to increase office attendance to better support collaboration, development and wellbeing of all colleagues. Office attendance would increase to 40 per cent of working time for all office-based colleagues. This would see colleagues required to spend 20 per cent of their time from January 2024, increasing to 40 per cent from April.

- 5.2 Board members discussed the update and highlighted the need for external engagement as part of the business planning process. With regard to hybrid working the ability to work flexibly had impacted positively on the recruitment of scarce skills. It was noted that the transition to 40 per cent office-based attendance could pose a challenge for recruitment and retention. People Business and Services were co-ordinating up to 400 discussions across the organisation to address any queries.
- 5.3 The Board noted the report and welcomed the new interactive tool launched on 24 October, which allowed users to create a population group profile, based on Census 2021.

6. Report from the Director General for Regulation [SA(23)65]

- 6.1 Ed Humpherson provided an update on regulation activity. The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) had published a review of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on 29 November, which found that ONS's approach to revisions was appropriate and well managed, noting that the more extreme criticisms that ONS had received were misplaced. OSR had written to the Welsh Government about improving transparency of Welsh Government's 20-mile per hour speed limit data.
- 6.2 The review of the Code of Practice for Statistics had included a range of external engagement including three public panel events, three analyst and four Head of Profession events since the launch of the review in September. An in-person event was scheduled at the Royal Statistical Society later that day (30 November) with the call for evidence continuing to 11 December. OSR had also hosted a roundtable on data sharing and linkage across government following publication of its report in July.
- 6.3 OSR's programme of work on sex and gender identity was ongoing, which included extensive engagement with statistical producers, with the aim of publishing OSR's updated guidance early in 2024, following consideration by the Regulation Committee.
- 6.4 Board members discussed the update, and noted the importance of transparent communication of statistics, with reference to the release by ONS on the quality of Census 2021 gender identity data on 8 November. A six-month review by Professor Alice Sullivan analysing the collection of research and statistics by all public bodies on sex and gender was ongoing.

7. Report from the Chair of the Audit Risk and Assurance Committee

- 7.1 The Chair reported on the work of the Audit Risk and Assurance Committee (ARAC) which had last met on 16 November.
- 7.2 The Committee had considered:
- i. the financial position with a high level of assurance provided by the finance team on the controls in place to reach a balanced budget at year end;
 - ii. an update on the strategic risk profile with a focus on areas of challenge;
 - iii. delivery of the Internal Audit programme of assurance 2023/24;
 - iv. Internal Reports on Resource Management and Financial Efficiencies;
 - v. resourcing of the Internal Audit team following a number of recruitments; and
 - vi. the mid-year fraud report.

8. Excess Mortality Methods [SA(23)66]

- 8.1 As this area of work is policy in development, the minutes from this item will be published upon completion.

9. Ambitious, Radical, Inclusive Economic Statistics (ARIES) Programme Update [SA(23)67]

9.1 Jason Zawadzki, Darren Morgan and Alex Lambert provided an update on delivery of the ARIES programme with a focus on the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the delivery of the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS), and legacy.

9.2 The Board heard that all programme major milestones had been achieved since January 2023. It was noted that the TLFS was ONS's strategic solution to the challenging respondent environment and the challenges of sustaining the LFS. The TLFS used an online-first multi-mode approach and aimed to enable Labour Market Statistics that were more timely, coherent, granular and responsive to user needs. The TLFS and LFS had been running in parallel with two key issues remaining to be addressed: under reporting headline employment data and capturing the Standard Industrial Classification and Standard Occupational Classification of a respondent's employment less accurately than a face-to-face interviewer. It was noted that the LFS had been designed to operate at a high response rate. Following testing ONS had tested that 37 per cent response rate was reasonable for the TLFS as opposed to 55 per cent for the LFS.

9.3 With regard to legacy transformation, there had been a number of complex challenges which had led to delays. In response to this issue the Executive Committee had agreed an approach, which would enable ONS to improve the pace of removing legacy.

9.4 Board members discussed the update. The following points were considered in discussion:

- i. the effective working relationship by ONS with colleagues at the Bank of England and HM Treasury in providing assurance to address the remaining challenges;
- ii. the duration of the parallel run for the LFS and TLFS, and the LFS decommissioning decision scheduled in January 2024 with the potential that the parallel run might need to be extended and LFS decommissioning delayed;
- iii. progress towards creating a more sustainable field force community in a challenging recruitment environment; and
- iv. concerns and a lack of assurance around the delivery of legacy transformation even with a revised strategic approach and commitment by the Senior Leadership Team, given the repeated delays over recent years.

9.5 The Board noted the update and highlighted the need for a discussion by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee on legacy, (already scheduled for March 2024). It was agreed that a further session would be scheduled on legacy with Sian Jones and Jacob Abboud with Jason Zawadzki; and a session on surveys for Penny Jones with Alex Lambert.

10. Census 2023 Consultation: Interim Analysis, Assurance and Methodology [SA(23)68]

10.1 As this area of work is policy in development, the minutes from this item will be published upon completion.

11. Any Other Business

11.1 The Board would next meet on 19 December.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Agenda

30 November, 11.15-14.00
London Boardroom, Hybrid Meeting

Chair: Sir Robert Chote

Apologies: Nora Nanayakkara

Attendees: Kate Davies (for item 8), Fiona Dawe (for item 8), Mike Keoghan (for item 7), Alex Lambert (for item 7), Darren Morgan (for item 7), Emma Rourke (for items 6, 8), Julie Stanborough (for item 6), Natalie Tarr (for item 9), Jennet Woolford (for item 8), Jason Zawadzki (for item 7)

NED Session: 10.30- 11.15

1 11.15-11.20 (5 mins)	Minutes and matters arising from previous meeting Declarations of interest	Meeting of 26 October 2023
2 11.20-11.30 (10 mins)	Report from the Authority Chair	SA(23)63 Sir Robert Chote
3 11.30-12.00 (30 mins)	Report from the Chief Executive	SA(23)64 Prof. Sir Ian Diamond
4 12.00-12.10 (10 mins)	Report from the Director General for Regulation	SA(23)65 Ed Humpherson
5 12.10-12.15 (5 mins)	Report from Committee Chair <ul style="list-style-type: none">Audit and Risk Assurance Committee	Oral update Dr Jacob Abboud
6 12.15-12.35 (20 min)	Excess Mortality Methods	SA(23)66 Emma Rourke Julie Stanborough
12.35.-12.40 (5 mins)	Break	
7 12.40-13.05 (25 mins)	Ambitious, Radical, Inclusive Economic Statistics Programme Update	SA(23)67 Jason Zawadzki Mike Keoghan Darren Morgan Alex Lambert
8 13.05-13.55 (50 mins)	Census 2023 Consultation: Interim Analysis, Assurance and Methodology	SA(23)68 Emma Rourke Fiona Dawe Jennet Woolford Kate Davies
9 13.55-14.00 (5 mins)	Any Other Business	

Next meeting: Thursday 25 January 2024, London Boardroom

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY BOARD

SA(23)63

Chair's Report, November 2023

Purpose

1. This paper provides the UK Statistics Authority Board (the Board) with an overview of the Chair's activity in October and November.

Review of recent activities

2. On 31 October, I attended a regulators roundtable discussion at the Electoral Commission alongside Rob Kent-Smith, Deputy Director for Regulation. Other regulatory bodies in attendance were the Advertising Standards Authority, Ofcom, Information Commissioner's Office, Charity Commission, and the Committee on Standards in Public Life. The roundtable was arranged with a view to sharing our perspectives ahead of an upcoming general election and the steps we would be taking to maintain high public confidence during this time. There was a collective agreement to maintain closer links between regulators and another roundtable has been arranged for March.
3. On 8 November, I attended the Government Statistical Service Conference in Titchfield. This year was the first cross-site, hybrid conference with colleagues also joining from London, Edinburgh, Newport and Belfast. The conference consisted of keynote speakers and parallel breakout sessions discussing a variety of statistical and policy issues. Speakers included the National Statistician, Reema Patel from Ipsos UK, Richard Laux from the Cabinet Office and Zamila Bunglawala from the London School of Economics International Inequalities Institute.
4. On 21 November, members of the Board received an initial briefing on responses to the summer consultation on the future of population and migration statistics ahead of a paper scheduled for this meeting.
5. I also held my regular catchups with the National Statistician, Director General for Regulation, Chief of Staff, Deputy Chair, and the Chairs of the Regulation and Audit and Risk Assurance Committees.

Upcoming activities

6. On 29 November, I will meet Huw Pill, Chief Economist and Executive Director for Monetary Analysis and Research at the Bank of England.

Sir Robert Chote, Chair, 23 November 2023

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY BOARD

SA(23)64

Chief Executive's Report, November 2023

Purpose

1. This provides the UK Statistics Authority Board (the Board) with an overview of activity for November 2023.

Summary

2. November has seen continued navigation of both a challenging internal and external environment. This has focused on preparations ahead of our major **migration** release, accelerating the **Labour Force Survey** (LFS) recovery plan, and handling both stakeholder and media reaction following publication of our investigation into **gender identity** in the census. Internally, we have been managing the upcoming departure of Darren Morgan (Director of Economic Statistics Production and Analysis, and Head of Darlington site) from the organisation as well as implementing an updated approach to **hybrid working**, which will involve more attendance at our office locations.
3. The organisation is currently facing increased challenges in respect of delivering our strategic ambition in a financially constrained environment. Given increased media attention and criticism, and the current context (upcoming recommendation on population and migration; Sullivan review on sex and gender; and General Election build up), we must ensure trust in the organisation is effectively and robustly maintained.

Review of recent activities

4. On 23 November, we are publishing rebased mid-year population estimates for 2012 to 2020 and **mid-year population estimates** for 2021 and 2022. We are also publishing updated UK international migration for 2012 to 2021 and provisional long term **international migration** for year ending June 2023. Given the recent reshuffle and heightened political attention on migration, this will get significant attention and potentially criticism too. It is also the first release to disaggregate students. We will be conducting both media and government briefings to help communicate around the revisions and figures.
5. We also published the final summary of our recent investigations into the quality of census 2021 data from the **gender identity** question. The report describes our confidence in the figures at a national level, but greater uncertainty at more granular levels, particularly by language and ethnic group, where patterns in the data are consistent with some respondents not interpreting the question as intended. Tables were also published providing more detail on the write-in responses to the gender identity question. Overall, we saw balanced media coverage of the report. Several commentators issued helpful comments in which they agree correlation could be down to several factors.
6. The consultation on the **future of population and migration statistics** (FPMS) closed at the end of October. We have received over 700 responses. A high-level overview of the responses and main themes will be circulated to the Board for this meeting. A second phase of analysis will continue after the end of November.
7. In senior staffing moves, **Darren Morgan** has announced that he will be taking early retirement. His last official day will be 29 December. He has agreed to continue to help us deliver the new analytical apprenticeship programme for Newport. Given the enhanced risk in Darren's area, I am pleased that **Liz McKeown** will lead the directorate from January. Plans for her replacement will be confirmed soon. An advert for the permanent Communications Director post will be launched imminently.

8. As agreed at my recent visit to the National Situation Centre (SitCen) with the Chair, I am pleased that we have established a '**Crisis Surge Team**' of the ONS analysts who are available to be 'surged' into SitCen for short loans to increase analytical capacity at the centre of government in times of crisis, ensuring that high quality data presentations reach Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms and senior decision makers. The pilot pool of ten analysts, selected for their expertise in data processing, visualisation, and geospatial analysis, will be available for deployment as soon as they have received training on crisis response from the Cabinet Office.
9. A significant announcement was made this month on our **working approach**. This will see colleagues required to spend 20 per cent of their time in the office from January 2024, increasing to 40 per cent from April. This move is aligned to the wider Civil Service of up to 60 per cent, as agreed by my fellow Permanent Secretaries. The UK Statistics Authority (the Authority) are working towards 40 per cent due to estate capacity across our five sites. Clearly this is a change and challenge for some colleagues, and we are supporting them through this.
10. Following the challenges with the **LFS** last month, on 2 November we published a development plan with the aim of reintroducing the LFS dataset in December. This included increased incentives and changes to interviewer processes. This month, we continued to publish estimates of employment, un-employment and economic inactivity using alternative data sources. Media coverage this month focused more on the actual estimates, and our plans to increase response rates. The Office for Statistics Regulation also published their rapid review to which we have responded.
11. The steering group for the **Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS)** met this month (representatives from HM Treasury, Bank of England, Office for Budget Responsibility and others) to evaluate the progress towards decommissioning the LFS. The group will meet again in December ahead of a third data share as part of the quality assurance of the TLFS ahead of the planned LFS decommissioning in January. The Standard Industrial Classification and Standard Occupational Classifications appear to be a challenge in the new TLFS and the Data Science Campus are exploring how Large Language Models and machine could be used to classify survey responses. This work could improve the quality of LFS based estimates and substantially save time and resource in surveys directorate.
12. We have been notified that our **senior sponsor** for the Authority within the Cabinet Office has changed following the departure of Thalia Baldwin to the Ministry of Justice. She has been replaced by the joint sponsors of Steffan Jones and Laura Gilbert, joint Chief Analysts within Number 10 and the Cabinet Office. Both are highly respected across the centre of government, and I look forward to working with them greatly.
13. In an effort to be more prepared with our **business planning and budget setting** this year, we have launched our business planning process this month. Directorate planning has now commenced with feedback scheduled ahead of Christmas. This year we will aim firmly to sign off plans and budgets in March 2024.
14. We have made our initial return into His Majesty's Treasury for the **Supplementary Estimate**. This includes an agreed reserve claim for Public Sector Productivity work plus another for continuation funding for FPMS, alongside a request to rebalance between capital and resource budgets. On FPMS, the Treasury Approval Panel considered the updated business case. We await a decision from the (new) Chief Secretary.
15. The **Government Statistical Service (GSS) Conference**, where I gave the opening address, was held on 8 November and saw over 600 online and in person delegates attend. Attendees had the option to attend in person at Titchfield, Newport or Edinburgh, online or at a Head of Profession run hub. The theme of the event was Statistics and

Diversity: Using Statistics to build a more inclusive world, with 9 parallel sessions across the GSS.

16. The ONS was subject to a **Departmental Security Health Check** in recent months which showed that we had met or exceeded the previous assessment in 2022. By the end of the year we will have also completed migration away from legacy firewall infrastructure – this is the conclusion of a two-year project to improve the ONS security.
17. We also held a joint event with the House of Commons Library on 28 November to showcase several key economic outputs (Blue Book, Research and Development, Prices and TLFS). The session is aimed at providing an opportunity to explain upcoming transformation and methodological changes in these areas as well as in the case of Blue Book, explaining why we must revise previous estimates of growth. This is open to staff, MPs and Lords.
18. We successfully published **Pink Book 2023** on 31 October, a major piece of work for which collaboration was critical. It included improved estimates of education-related travel exports for which methodology improvements have been in train for a couple of years. Additionally, the Chancellor commissioned **Public Service Productivity Review** delivered against its first milestone with new experimental baselines for long-term growth estimates, and nowcasts for 2021/22 published on 17 November. This is aligned with the Autumn Statement and has a communications strategy, including a letter from myself to the Chancellor setting out this achievement.
19. The move to quarterly publications of the **Household Cost Indices** (HCI) is planned for 4 December (subject to final quality assurance). This will provide more granular information on how different types of household experience higher prices. Three events are planned on launch day to raise awareness of the HCIs among users.
20. The **Winter Covid Infection Survey** (CIS) went live on 14 November. To enhance efficiency, we have re-used the online platform developed for the previous CIS survey and our business surveys. We have had 146,777 responses to our consent survey, of which only 560 did not consent. As expected, the highest response rate is in older age groups, but the proportion signed up by region is now evenly split.
21. On the **Integrated Data Service** (IDS), we are focusing on increasing the number of users and relevant projects across government. The number of active IDS users has increased to 68 across 15 active analyses. This includes projects on the health drivers of economic inactivity and a mobility project. An additional 146 users are forecast from the successful migration of the Levelling Up Integrated Data Asset platform to IDS by the end of 2024, bringing the total to 214 users. There has been a large increase (from 36 to 62) in the number of datasets in IDS since September. This includes 14 datasets for the Mobility project and 9 migrated from Secure Research Service (SRS). An additional 50 datasets are forecast between now and February 2024.
22. The Data Strategy team within Data Acquisition has identified an initial list of the ONS **'Essential Shared Data Assets'** with a view to validating this list with key ONS stakeholders and Information Asset Owners ahead of providing a return to the Central Digital and Data Office with required information on governance and metadata.
23. Digital Services and Technology is preparing a proposal for phased implementation of **Microsoft365 Co-Pilot**, to be considered at the Data Governance Committee. This would involve integration of Microsoft 365 with OpenAI products such as ChatGPT to amplify both productivity and creativity. Further work is required to secure ONS data to ensure we comply with Central Digital Data Office guidance around the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools with official-sensitive data.
24. The **revised Welsh language scheme** has been officially published for a month, and the Welsh Language Team have begun on their programme of workshops with priority

business areas and teams to provide advice on compliance with the scheme. This includes Social Surveys, Business Surveys and communications teams. They have also begun exploring methods around translating market sensitive information.

25. We launched a new [interactive tool](#) on 24 October that allows users to see how a selected population group compares to the whole population of England and Wales across a variety of measures including health, education and employment. It is the first tool that allows non-technical users to extract insights from multivariate Census 2021 data, which was previously only available in spreadsheet form. Early indications based on social media engagement and customer feedback are incredibly positive.
26. November saw a bumper release of our **well-being statistics**, including our annual personal well-being statistics, estimating life satisfaction, happiness, anxiety and how worthwhile things in life are for people, with declines in all measures reported for in the year ending March 2023. As part of our Beyond Gross Domestic Product (GDP) programme of work, our UK Measures of National Well-being were updated, the first after our major review, with a total of 57 measures, giving a comprehensive understanding of how the nation feels.
27. Finally, we published our first insights into the public's awareness, opinions, and use of AI, ahead of the UK's **Global Summit on AI Safety**. The Opinions and Lifestyle Survey results showed only one in six adults can often or always tell when they are using AI, and has been extensively used across government as this fills a critical evidence gap in our knowledge of key emerging technologies.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond, National Statistician, 23 November 2023

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

AUTHORITY BOARD

SA(23)65

Update from the Director General for Regulation

Purpose

1. This paper provides the UK Statistics Authority Board (the Board) with an overview of Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) activities.

Discussion

2. Our main areas of focus since the last Board meeting have been:

Ongoing Work

- i. **Code of Practice (the Code) review:** We have now held all three public panel events related to our review of our Code and held three analyst and four Head of Profession sessions since the launch of the review in September. Later today we are holding an in-person event at the Royal Statistical Society to reach out to more stakeholders about the review. Feedback will help inform our decision whether improvements are needed to the Code. The call for evidence continues to run to 11 December.
- ii. **Sex and Gender:** Our engagement with statistics producers on our proposed update to our guidance on sex and gender identity is ongoing. This includes engagement with the chief statisticians in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales and round table events for key statistics producers (including the Office for National Statistics (ONS)). In addition to engaging with producers, we are offering face to face individual sessions in November and December with key organisations that are interested in the collection and use of data and statistics on sex and gender identity. This includes organisations and individuals who have expressed a public position on sex data issues and gender identity or transgender issues. We are on track to publish our updated guidance early in 2024.
- iii. **Data linkage round table:** Last week we hosted a roundtable on data sharing and linkage across government. This roundtable was based around our report, published in July, and how progress is being or can be made against the 16 recommendations within it. It was also a forum to discuss any current barriers, and whether there are opportunities to erode these. We had participants from organisations or initiatives pointed to in the recommendations, or who we know to support or to have an interest in their realisation. They include representatives from Administrative Data Research UK, ONS, Central Digital and Data Office and Department for Science, Innovation and Technology.

Published Work

- i. **Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Review:** We have finalised our review of GDP revisions and published this on the 29 November. Our report found that ONS's approach to revisions is appropriate and well managed, and our overall conclusion is that the more extreme criticisms that ONS received are misplaced.
- ii. **Labour Force Survey (LFS):** Following ONS's decision to replace its planned LFS-derived labour market statistics, [I wrote to Darren Morgan](#) advising that we would be undertaking a short review of the statistics against the Code. Our [rapid review](#) of these statistics were published this month, along with a [news story](#). Our report sets out several requirements for ONS to act upon in advance of the transition to the Transformed LFS and the need to consider lessons for the future.

- iii. **Official statistics (OS) in development:** This month we [published guidance](#) setting out our expectations regarding the production and handling of OS in development.

Casework

3. We have received 144 cases so far in 2023/24, including 14 cases since the last meeting. These cases include concerns around the Home Office crime tweet, all-cause mortality, vaccine efficacy comments and the housing maladministration rate. We also received a number of concerns relating to the newly implemented 20 mph limit in Wales.
4. We have closed 23 cases on: death by vaccination status, census custom data, local employment data, emissions, electric collar harm, Accident and Emergency statistics, and a number of other topics.

Wider reach

5. **Areas of research interest (ARI):** Last month we [published our areas of research interest](#). These are framed around our vision of statistics that serve the public good, and our mission of focussing on how statistics are produced, used and valued to achieve that vision. We set out research questions we are interested in learning more about, what we can offer researchers and how we decide who to collaborate with. In a presentation to over 100 researchers looking to make their work more policy relevant, [CLOSER](#) academic Rob Davies highlighted our ARIs describing them as 'very relevant' and encouraged attendees to engage with us. In addition, our ARIs were shared in the [CLOSER ARI tracker](#), where four of our questions were indicated as having 'the most potential for input from the (longitudinal research) community'.
6. **Transport for London (TfL) Analyst conference:** We arranged for the keynote presentation to the TfL Analyst conference to be given by the National Statistician. Alongside Sir Ian's keynote, which was very well received, OSR team members attended the conference promoting the Code and Trustworthiness, Quality and Value having good conversations with TfL analysts about what the pillars mean and how they can help analysts in their work. The TfL lead on promoting the Code also gave an excellent talk reinforcing some of our messages on working with data.
7. **Blogs:** We published a [blog](#) sharing our views on what statistics producers should think about when reviewing their outputs.
8. **Conferences and Speaking engagements:** Since the last meeting I have been asked to speak at a number of events including at Cambridge business school, a Royal Statistical Society health statistics event, and ADR UK annual conference where I promoted our Data sharing and linkage for the public good report. I took the opportunity at these events to highlight the barriers to data linkage and propose approaches to addressing them. I also attended and spoke at the Government Statistics Service in Edinburgh giving the closing remarks for a very interesting day.
9. I invited the Independent Press Standards Organisation to a joint seminar in what we plan to be a regular series to discuss similarities in cases and casework and what we can learn from each other.

Issues on my mind

10. As last month, two issues on my mind are:
 - i. **The Code of Practice review:** Following the successful sessions on the Code review, I am now looking ahead to reviewing the views and feedback we have heard. The [call for evidence](#) will remain open until 11 December and we will update in the new year.
 - ii. **Authority Review:** The review is still very much on my mind as we await the findings of Professor Denise Lievesley's review. We consider that our input to the review has been comprehensive and well received.

11. In addition, we are now starting to develop our annual business planning process. My key ambition here is to do more and better user and producer engagement on these plans. And we are also starting to consider how we will respond to casework in the General Election campaign.

Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation, OSR, 22 November 2023

Annex A Regulatory dashboard

Housing, Planning and Local Services

Monitoring the potential publication of new **RAAC data** sources in housing across the UK.
Assessments: Confirmed accreditation for **DLUHC's Statutory Homelessness in England** statistics.

Casework: Engaging with the Housing Ombudsman Service following complaints about its **maladministration rate**.

Compliance Check/Review: Initiating review of **Scottish Government Scottish Housing Condition Survey** statistics following temporary suspension of accreditation last year.

Beginning review of **Valuation Office Agency Council Tax Stock** and **Council Tax Challenges and Changes** statistics.

Transport, Environment and Climate Change

Continued engagement to support **Transport for London**, who voluntarily adopt the Code, in embedding practices into its data reporting.

Assessments: Defra **Butterflies'** team has published its latest outputs with improvements made based on our assessment meeting requirements. The **People and Nature Survey (PaNS)** requirements are near completion, we expect to confirm accreditation.

Casework: Various cases on topics including **Welsh Government's 20mph speed limit**, and **Salmon Stocks & Fisheries**.

Systemic Review: Exploring options for an OSR piece on **citizen science** at the request of Regulation Committee. **Transport Accessibility** presenting at a Royal Statistical Society webinar on disability/mobility in November.

Health and Social Care

Assessment: Approved the **A&E waiting times statistics** in Scotland as accredited official statistics. Drafting assessment report about **English A&E waiting times statistics** to present to the Regulation Committee at December meeting.

Casework: Continuing concerns about inappropriate comparisons across the **UK for NHS waiting times performance**. Investigating further concerns about **gambling statistics** in England.

Compliance Check/reviews: **Adult Oral Health Survey statistics**, published by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, confirmed as accredited official statistics.

Commenced check of **mental health statistics** in Wales published by the Welsh Government.

Systemic Reviews: Drafting report of the follow-up of **England mental health statistics**.

Commencing follow-up to the systemic review of **NI mental health statistics**.

Population and Society

Drafting paper for Regulation Committee, update on ONS's transformation of **population and migration statistics**. Continued engagement with the devolved administrations on **population transformation plans**.

Assessment: Phase 3 planning underway of **2021 Census**.

Casework: Ongoing cases on **ONS mortality statistics** and engaging with relevant ONS team.

Liaising with ONS regarding **England and Wales Census 2021 gender identity** data, alongside considering next steps for our review.

Systemic Reviews: OSR letter and report to acknowledge ONS' progress on **migration transformation**, set out our view of the current position and our expectations, now due to be published in December.

Children, Education and Skills

Assessments: Finalising assessment report on the **Achievement of Curriculum for Excellence Levels statistics** produced by Scottish Government. Have initiated assessment on the **Graduate Outcomes Survey** statistics produced by Jisc (previously HESA).

Compliance Check: Undertaking a compliance check of the **Higher Education Student statistics** produced by Jisc (previously HESA).

Crime and Security

Planning assessment of Home Office's **Crimes against businesses statistics**.

Systemic Review: Quality of **police recorded crime statistics**: continuing stakeholder engagement and evidence analysis. Started drafting report and recommendations.

Economy, Business and Trade

Reviewing the ONS **public sector classification process**, user engagement to understand risks. Developing a version of the framework used for the **Spotlight on Quality** to share with stakeholders.

Assessment: Drafting report for Spotlight on Quality on the **profitability of UK companies** and **GOS statistics** to present to the Regulation Committee at December meeting.

Confirmed accreditation of **Business Demography** statistics.

Casework: Providing supporting evidence on the update of the current Standard Industry Classification structure and user engagement for the casework on **local employment data**.

Compliance Checks/Review: Conducting rapid review of **revisions of GDP** and drafting report.

Labour Market and Welfare

Liaising with ONS after its decision to stop the **Household Financial Statistics Transformation (HFST)** project and what this means for NS confirmation of **ONS's Family Spending** publication.

Assessments: **DWP's Personal Independence Payment (PIP)** statistics, drafting the report for discussion at February Regulation Committee meeting. HMRC/ONS **Estimates of employment and earnings from PAYE RTI data** – ONS published its action plan for meeting the requirements.

Casework: Liaising with ONS, concern raised about use of earnings terminology in **ASHE** and **AWE** release and risk that growth in average earnings could be confused with growth in pay rates.

Compliance Check/reviews: Rapid Review of **ONS Labour Market data output** due to issues with LFS data published. Review ongoing of **ONS's and NISRA's Transformed Labour Force Surveys**

Research

Research: Continuing a **literature review** seeking to further understand and formalise our knowledge of the role statistics play in policy (both policy development and evaluation). Procuring a **research project** about the role of statistics in decision making by individuals to illuminate hidden ways in which statistics serve the public good.

Stakeholder engagement: Publishing [OSR's Areas of Research Interest](#) to **develop a clear statement on our interests** and create opportunities for future collaboration.

Continuing to develop our position on **what it may mean for statistics to serve the public good** and presenting on this topic (such as at the Government Statistical Service conference) to allow others to feed in their view as well.

Data and Methods

Developing tools to support regulators in their work on **police-recorded crime statistics, quarterly GDP estimates** and **monitoring RAAC (Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete)-related parliamentary discussions**. This work is going through the ONS Cyber Security processes to go into production.

Participated in the pre-AI Security Summit workshops hosted by the Royal Society.

Chaired a discussion on Large Language Model (LLM) skills for the cross-government Text Data Subcommunity

Planning underway for the **Data Linkage and Sharing** follow-on report.

Insight

We are in pre-planning stages of the next **State of the Statistical System Report**. We have used feedback from the previous team to improve the process for the next round.

Kicked off an Insight Project based on the theme of **Reducing Outputs**. The project team will collate and disseminate OSR work/guidance on the theme. This initial project will provide a framework for a series of projects on different themes.

Ongoing work on the **Gap Analysis** of the 5 Year Strategy. Engaging with OSR team on evidence at first team business planning event.

Policy & Standards

We've held further events for the **Code review** – including a public panel event and internal head of profession and analyst discussion sessions. The call closes on 11 December. A further public panel session featuring Sir Ian Diamond and a joint stakeholder in-person event is being held at the RSS at the end of November.

Producers are working on implementing the new language and changes made following the **National Statistics designation review**. We are supporting by speaking at producer sessions and publishing updated guidance.

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Update on Excess Mortality, Registration Delays and Information from Coroners

As this area of work is policy in development, this paper will be published upon completion.

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ARIES Programme Quarterly Delivery Report

Purpose

1. This paper provides a status update for the Ambitious, Radical, Inclusive Economic Statistics (ARIES) programme. Our last report to the UK Statistics Authority Board (the Board) was 29 June 2023.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Board are invited to consider:
 - i. the excellent delivery against plan over the last ten months;
 - ii. our latest programme delivery confidence assessment, key challenges, and associated management actions; and
 - iii. challenges on the current Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the delivery of the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS).

Background

3. The ARIES programme brings together the four pillars of the UK Statistics Authority's (the Authority) strategy, 'Statistics for the Public Good'; Ambitious, Radical, Inclusive, Sustainable, with the transformation aims of Economic, Social and Environmental Statistics Group.
4. The transformation of our Finance Sector Accounts was added to the programme in September 2023. This decision was made as part of the prioritisation and rationalisation of change delivery across the Economic, Social and Environmental Statistics Group (ESEG) in response to Office for National Statistics (ONS) 2023/24 Business Planning and affordability challenges.
5. Investment approval has been granted by His Majesty's Treasury (HMT) for the period to March 2025. Our Full Business Case (FBC) was submitted to HMT at the start of Quarter 1 2023/24 and has now been formally signed-off for 2022/23. The programme is now preparing for a planned refresh of the FBC in Quarter 4 to gain sign-off for 2023/24.

Discussion

Overall Programme Status

6. In January 2023, five out of seven projects reported 'Amber/Red'. Currently we have two out of seven. This has been achieved through step changes in delivery capability and a general 'seasoning' of the teams. Last quarter we delivered five out of five key milestones on time and in full. Since January 2023, we have delivered 100 per cent (16 in total) of our major milestones (14 on time and in full, and two with a short delay). Each delivering measurable improvements in our economic statistics and how they are produced.
7. Apart from Digital Services and Technology (DST) support for Legacy Ingres, we have resolved all known affordability and resourcing issues for 2023/24. However, constant effort will be needed to ensure funding and resourcing risks do not materialise into major issues. Delivery of Prices, Crime, Business Statistics, and Public Sector has progressed well, successfully overcoming several issues.
8. The October ARIES Programme Board robustly debated the delivery confidence for the programme and assessed it as 'Amber'. Critically, the Board recognised two key challenges over the next quarter relating to Legacy Ingres and TLFS. The board assured

themselves that these were well understood with clear actions in place and had confidence in these actions being taken; agreeing to re-assess the position once these had taken effect.

Challenges on the current LFS and the delivery of the TLFS

9. The LFS is ONS's main continuous household survey. With a primary role to provide the official estimates of the UK labour market. It also collects non-labour market data (e.g. education, well-being, religion etc.) for a very significant user base across ONS, central and local Government, industry and the third sector.
10. Across all ONS household surveys response rates have been steadily declining for many years, which is a trend that has been observed by other data collection agencies nationally and internationally. The pandemic compounded this downward trajectory and led to a pause in face-to-face interviewing. Together with increasing confidentiality and security concerns, access to properties becoming harder and anti-government feeling growing, the respondent environment is undoubtedly now tougher than it has ever been.
11. The TLFS is ONS's strategic solution to today's tough respondent environment and the challenges of sustaining a resource intensive and out-dated survey such as the LFS. The TLFS uses an online-first multi-mode approach combined with an adaptive survey design which targets field resources only where they most add value. TLFS offers users larger data sets than the LFS with improved quality (reduced bias/improved representativeness) and greater efficiency. TLFS aims to enable Labour Market Statistics that are more timely, coherent, granular and responsive to user needs.
12. Given the critical nature of the estimates from the LFS and the substantial mode effects and questionnaire changes associated with introducing the TLFS, a parallel run to provide robust quality assurance was always recognised as an essential pre-cursor to any LFS decommissioning decisions. The original intention captured in the Spending Review business case was for the parallel run to complete in June 2023, but planning started throughout autumn 2022 to extend this by six months to provide increased assurance.
13. In February 2023, as business planning commenced, Surveys Directorate was faced with significant funding uncertainty, efficiency savings targets, a continued erosion of cross-Government income contribution on the LFS and headcount controls given wider financial pressures. Within this context, and given its imminent replacement by TLFS, the strategic decision was made to accept a level of risk in the delivery of the LFS this year, rather than recruit into the field community and increase headcount and cost pressure. While the financial uncertainty was resolved as business planning concluded in July, a high interviewer turnover rate (circa 35 per cent) and industry wide recruitment challenges, directly impacted the level of experienced resource available to support the LFS. A reduction in the LFS sample size in July, designed to better align resources and workload to increase response rates and reduce non-response bias, did not achieve the benefits anticipated and led to a reduction in achieved interviews, despite a rapid response project initiated to address the issue and improve field performance.
14. In October 2023, it was identified that the volatility and uncertainty of the estimates for July-September LFS data had increased to the point where the ONS no longer had confidence in headline labour market statistics. This increased uncertainty particularly impacted the 16-24 age group and was leading to a largescale drop in LFS based employment estimates. The LFS data was not supported by any other datasets, economic indicators or insights and similar size falls in employment had only ever been seen at the start off the pandemic, global financial crisis and the recessions in the 1980s and 1990s. The usual release of LFS data was suspended and rapid work led to the publication of Labour Market Statistics based on new alternative series using additional data sources. The ONS has subsequently also paused the release of LFS microdata to users.

15. The TLFS team have regularly engaged and built an effective working relationship with Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) throughout the project and acted on their regular recommendations. The OSR have now conducted a rapid review of the LFS and latest labour market releases, while the ONS is taking this opportunity to reflect and learn from an exceptionally challenging last year across Surveys.
16. Focusing on the TLFS, all core labour market content and collection modes have been live on the TLFS since November 2022, with the final set of non-labour market content added in October 2023. The TLFS data collection operation is currently meeting core operational quality metrics and with a wave one response rate of 39 per cent, it is providing twice as much data from the most deprived areas of the country, three times as much quarterly TLFS data compared with the LFS (for the same cost), equalling circa 550,000 individuals annually. The parallel run and regular data sharing with users is achieving its aim of identifying any issues with the new survey and has enabled the latest set of fixes/improvements to be implemented in October, with the next set planned for December.
17. As reported previously to the Authority, the TLFS project has been successfully delivering and consistently addressing risks and issues for the last two years during its parallel run with the LFS and is now focused on addressing two remaining issues:
 - i. The parallel run has evidenced that the TLFS is likely under-reporting headline employment by circa 1.5 per cent. Analysis has demonstrated that a key factor is how a proportion of business owners and the self-employed are answering negatively to the key question 'Did you have a paid job, either as an employee or self-employed, in the weeks [...]?'. The survey was updated in October with extra questions to address this issue. Analysis and results from the latest data will be available from the end of November and Executive Committee (ExCo) will review the data in December and January.
 - ii. The parallel run has also demonstrated that an online survey captures the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) and Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) of a respondent's employment less accurately than a face-to-face interviewer, who routinely cleans ambiguous answers and achieves more granular classification. The main concern is the data quality on industrial classification. This has been assessed as adequate for headline productivity purposes, but outputs and external users that use lower-level standard industry classification are more an area of concern. Whilst this issue will not delay the decommissioning of LFS we have mobilised work to accelerate the achievement of desired quality levels for these complex concepts. This work includes looking to exploit existing research/prototype work in the ONS on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Natural Language Processing.
18. Having resolved potential SIC/SOC barriers to decommissioning, the TLFS project focus is now on the headline employment improvements. Early indications from raw survey data are positive, but the project is currently working through fallback plans should a level of unacceptable bias remain and there is a risk that LFS decommissioning could be delayed. While this work continues, internal and external stakeholder communications and engagement will be stepped up over the next couple of months as we are able to share more progress and data with our user community.
19. With the LFS decommissioning decision approaching in January, a level of understandable risk remains on this large and complex project. While the fallback position is that the parallel run will continue (at circa £1.5 million a month), the team are working hard to minimise this eventuality. LFS decommissioning alone will not however signal an end to the work that is required on the TLFS or with the field community. Continued development and investment in the survey is required for at least the next two years to address user feedback as further datasets are released and to ensure sustainability. Equally importantly, with surveys continuing to play a critical role into the

future, the ONS has put building the capacity and capability of the field community and improving response rates as a core priority in this year's business planning to ensure the quality of our surveys in the years ahead.

Challenges on Legacy Ingres

20. Since the successful delivery of the 'take on and validation' aspects of Business Enterprise Research and Development pipeline in May, progress on the reduction of Legacy Ingres for Common Software has been impacted by two issues. The first, raised with the programme in July, related to insufficient resources and funding within DST that has become apparent post ONS business planning. The second, confirmed as an issue in August via assurance activities, is the inherent complexity associated with the removal of Ingres. The combination of these two issues has led to significant delays in progress. It is now widely accepted that a change in delivery approach is necessary.
21. The ExCo have endorsed an approach to reduce complexity through increased standardisation. To enable this, we will look to explore an approach that temporarily relaxes some dimensions of quality, in a controlled manner, and adopt a more 'green field' approach to development. This is to be contrasted with the current 'brown field' approach which is typified by trying to minimise discontinuities therefore replicating complexity and potentially outdated methods. Examples of relaxing quality dimensions include pausing outputs, reducing frequency, using model-based outputs, having a greater tolerance for discontinuities (providing we can evidence them as improvements - different is not equivalent to error). This should allow us to improve our predictability and, hopefully pace of removing legacy. We have initiated a six-week proof of concept of the approach, due for completion in January 2024. Amongst several objectives, we will explore the use of AI to help us understand code complexity with a view to supporting simplification.

Conclusion

22. The programme continues to evidence a strong delivery record for a third quarter in a row. However, despite significant mitigation efforts over the last six months, the previously reported complexity risk associated with Legacy Ingres and the inherent quality risks of transforming the LFS have become issues. In response, the ONS has galvanised around these challenges, to find and implement practical solutions to some very tough problems. The effectiveness of these solutions will become apparent over the next quarter and shared at our next update to the Board.
23. The remainder of the projects are on track with good delivery forecasts, but continued management attention will be necessary to maintain that. We are clear on our key areas of concern and have management actions in place.
24. We recognise we cannot become complacent. Given the nature of the changes we are implementing we need to continue to tighten and improve our communications and engagement with users and stakeholders. We are also in the process of commissioning an external assurance review of the programme targeted for Quarter 4.

Jason Zawadzki, Director, Economic Statistics Change, ONS, 20 November 2023

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***Assurance of Methodology and Interim Analysis - Consultation on the
Future of Population and Migration Statistics in England and Wales***

As this area of work is policy in development, this paper will be published upon completion.