

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Regulation Committee

Minutes

**Thursday 14 December 2023
London Boardroom/ Hybrid Meeting
13:00-16:00**

Members present

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

Other attendees

Sarah Cobden
Catherine Davies (Item 4)
Marianthi Dunn (Item 5)
Claire Mokrysz (Item 6) (Shadowing)
Rob Kent-Smith
Helen Miller-Bakewell
Mark Pont
Gail Rankin
Elise Rohan
Vicky Stone (Item 4)
Siobhan Tuohy-Smith (Item 3)
Sarah Whitehead (Item 6)

Secretariat

Daniel Beck
Sally-Ann Jones

Apologies

Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter

Declarations of Interest

None

1. Apologies, minutes and matters arising

- 1.1 Members were welcomed to the meeting. Apologies were received from Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter.
- 1.2 The minutes of the meeting on 12 October were agreed, and actions were reviewed.

2. Update from the Director General for Regulation SA(RC)(23)42

- 2.1 Ed Humpherson provided an update on regulatory activity since the last meeting and a summary of the Office for Statistics Regulation's (OSR's) key achievements in 2023:
 - i) the improvement of OSR's capability, including building up the economics function, the Population and Society domain, and the commissioning of Professor Patrick Sturgis's external review of OSR's approach to quality assessing the COVID-19 Infection Survey;
 - ii) a high standard of core regulation;
 - iii) OSR's growing impact on how statistics are communicated through the concept of intelligent transparency; and
 - iv) strategic progress, demonstrated by the work on the State of the Statistical System 2022/23 report and the Data Sharing and Linkage for the Public Good report.
- 2.2 The Committee heard that the dominant feature of the later part of the year had been in relation to the work and challenges of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), and that OSR had maintained an appropriate regulatory stance with this working relationship. The Committee also heard that the three main challenges for OSR in 2024 were continuing the regulation of statistical producers including ONS, the next steps for the Review of the Code of Practice for Statistics, and the next general election.
- 2.3 Members discussed the update. They noted both the need for OSR to respond substantively to the outcome of the Independent Review of the Authority, and OSR's relationship with statistical producers. The Committee also heard that OSR had been invited to help the joint Cabinet Office-HM Treasury Evaluation Task Force.

3. Transformation of the Labour Force Survey SA(RC)(23)43

- 3.1 Siobhan Tuohy-Smith introduced a paper updating the Committee on the Transformation of the Labour Force Survey (TLFS) and ONS's progress against the recommendations set out in OSR's progress update published in July 2023. The Committee heard about OSR's proposed approach on the timing and evidence required for a future decision on accreditation of TLFS-based labour market statistics.
- 3.2 Members discussed the update. The following points were considered in discussion:
 - i) the relationship between user need and quality of TLFS statistics, and how this may affect accreditation;
 - ii) OSR's accreditation of both the source and the release of the TLFS data, and the need to avoid rushing an accreditation decision; and
 - iii) ONS's future plans to publish releases and their challenges in producing TLFS data.
- 3.3 The Committee agreed with OSR's proposed approach on the future decisions on accreditation, and that OSR would return to the Committee in February with a further update. Current expectations were that OSR would return to the Committee for an accreditation decision later in the spring at the earliest.

4. Regulatory Work on ONS Population and Migration Statistics Transformation SA(RC)(23)44

- 4.1 Catherine Davies introduced a paper providing an update on OSR's work surrounding the ONS's transformation of population and migration statistics. Members were informed of OSR's proposed approach to regulating the transformation in 2024 and the steer to invite ONS population leads to a future committee meeting.

- 4.2 The Committee discussed the update and the proposed approach. The following points were considered:
- i) the importance of assurance by the Methodological Assurance Review Panel (MARP) in the development of Dynamic Population Model (DPM) and the potential for OSR to seek further external assurance from a wider range of stakeholders on this issue as needed;
 - ii) OSR's need for further assurance on the data going into the DPM;
 - iii) the limitations of using the current mid-year population estimates as a marker of quality with which to compare the DPM;
 - iv) the importance of understanding the minimum viable product (MVP), ONS's commitment to an MVP, and how this would be benchmarked; and
 - v) uncertainty on the way forward with regards to UK harmonisation, and the need to find out what this would involve or be possible.
- 4.3 Members noted the update and agreed that ONS would be invited to provide a technical brief to the committee. The Committee endorsed OSR's suggested regulatory sequencing and the proposed rapid review.

5. Regulation of Economic Statistics SA(RC)(23)45

- 5.1 Marianthi Dunn introduced a paper updating the Committee on the progress of a range of regulation activities relating to economic statistics, including the Spotlight on Quality programme, the draft assessment report on Profitability of UK Companies and Gross Operating Surplus of non-financial corporations statistics (GOS) produced by the Office for National Statistics, and the next steps following the rapid review of Revisions of estimates of UK Gross Domestic Product (GDP).
- 5.2 Members discussed the draft assessment report on Profitability of UK Companies and GOS statistics, and noted both the positive response from the ONS on this issue and that the report showed the impacts of GOS on GDP estimates. Members discussed whether OSR used a templated structure for these reports, and how this was adapted for each report. Members also heard about the progress of the Spotlight on Quality programme. The four key workstreams for the programme included the Spotlight on Quality framework, assessments based on the new framework, the classifications process, and a review of how economic statistics addressed current and future user needs. Within this workstream, members heard of three key factors the review would examine to ensure that economic statistics were serving the public good: enhanced data sources and systems; organisational factors; and measuring the changing landscape of the modern economy.
- 5.3 Members discussed the update. The following points were considered:
- i) the organisational part of the review would cover 'capability', 'performance', and 'quality assurance';
 - ii) whether OSR could gather data on the level of experience of staff working within economic statistics; and
 - iii) that there should be a focus on being strategic and identifying high level issues.
- 5.4 The Committee agreed the recommendation to publish the Statistics on Profitability of UK Companies and GOS assessment report in January. It was noted by the Committee that the GDP revisions published in November was welcomed by users and ONS.

6. Accident and Emergency Statistics in England Assessment SA(RC)(23)46

- 6.1 Sarah Whitehead introduced a paper providing the Committee with a draft assessment report on Accident and Emergency (A&E) Statistics in England, produced by NHS England (NHSE). Members were provided with the proposed arrangements for the report's publication in January and the expected timing for considering awarding accredited official statistics status in July 2024.
- 6.2 Members heard about the six requirements, across all three pillars of the Code of Practice for Statistics, that NHSE needs to address for the statistics to become accredited official statistics.

Members also heard how OSR had agreed a time frame with NHSE to improve the statistics going forward and that OSR plan to come back to the Committee in July to provide an update.

6.3 Members discussed the implications should NHSE not action all recommendations within the agreed timeline, and the increased exposure these statistics could face leading up to a General Election. They also heard how NHSE plan to provide site level breakdowns of data to analyse which hospitals can meet four hour and 12-hour targets.

6.4 The Committee agreed with the proposal to publish the report in January.

7. Review of the Quality of Police Recorded Crime Statistics- Draft Report SA(RC)(23)47

7.1 Gail Rankin introduced a paper providing the Committee with both an update on OSR's review of police recorded crime statistics in England and Wales, and an information draft of the quality phase of the review.

7.2 Members heard that OSR had spoken to eight of the 43 police forces in England and Wales, and that OSR were impressed with the levels of professionalism and ownership of data quality in the police forces they talked to. It was noted that OSR required the oversight of these statistics to be strengthened, with proposed recommendations in the draft paper for the Home Office and the ONS.

7.3 Members discussed the update and reviewed the information draft. The following points were discussed:

- i) the possibility of adding the additional detail shared in the information draft as an annex in the final report;
- ii) that the relationship and value of the Police Recorded Crime Statistics and the Crime Survey for England and Wales should be expanded;
- iii) that further engagement with the National Police Chief's Council data board was planned; and
- iv) that recommendations were being developed, and would be shared with the Home Office and ONS in January 2024.

7.4 The Committee noted the update and agreed that OSR would distribute an updated version of the report with members in February by correspondence prior to publication.

8. Business Planning and Risk- OSR SA(RC)(23)48

8.1 Rob Kent-Smith introduced a paper setting out the factors informing OSR's planning and emerging thinking in the development of the Business Plan 2024/25 based on the priorities set out in the 2023/24 plan.

8.2 Members discussed the development of the business plan, and shared views on the factors which could influence OSR's planning. The Committee considered the following points:

- i) the Director General for Regulation's New Year's message, and which stakeholders OSR would like to engage for feedback;
- ii) that the resource available in the team could be increased through agency staff, with a focus on skills needed, and were briefed on the kinds of staff available;
- iii) the role of OSR in relation to the use of generative Artificial Intelligence in official statistics production;
- iv) how OSR could improve the clarity and coherence of their communication for maximum impact, and how this was measured by Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) related to outputs and outcome;
- v) further action OSR could take to advocate and provide challenge to other organisations on data linkage and ethics, and weakness in coherence and comparability; and
- vi) OSR's transformation of the core regulatory model, and the need to maintain regulatory judgement in an objective way.

8.3 The Committee noted the update and agreed that OSR would share a paper on the use of generative Artificial Intelligence in Official Statistics production at an upcoming Committee meeting.

9. General Election Planning SA(RC)(23)49

- 9.1 Elise Rohan introduced a paper detailing OSR's approach to managing casework and supporting the statistical system during a general election.
- 9.2 Members discussed the proposed approach and provided views on the emerging topics for OSR position statements. The following points were considered in discussion:
 - i) the role of OSR position statements during a general election in relation to misinformation;
 - ii) the need to identify statistical issues on key topics likely to be discussed during a general election, and the advantage of doing this early in 2024;
 - iii) the range of statistical outputs that could become part of election debates throughout 2024;
 - iv) the distinction between output data and forecasted projections, and how to regulate both during a general election;
 - v) which organisations were likely to produce pre-election briefings, and on which policy areas;
 - vi) the letters the Chair of the Authority will write to party leaders ahead of the general election;
 - vii) if a general election is called after June, using the next OSR conference to highlight lessons learned from the previous election; and
 - v) OSR engaging with ministerial private offices and special advisors to help embed the importance and responsibility for intelligent transparency across the Civil Service.
- 9.3 The Committee noted the update.

10. Horizon Scanning SA(RC)(23)50

- 10.1 Ed Humpherson facilitated a discussion on Horizon Scanning, and invited members to identify any key themes and challenges OSR will face going forward.
- 10.2 The Committee mentioned the upcoming general election, ONS transformation, building OSR capacity, the Code of Practice for Statistics Review, and the use of Artificial Intelligence in statistics production.

11. Any other business

- 11.1 Gail Rankin provided an update on OSR's development of sex and gender guidance since the last meeting.
- 11.2 The Committee would next meet on Thursday 1 February 2024.