UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Minutes

Thursday 26 September 2024
Edinburgh Office

Hybrid Meeting

Members Present
Sir Robert Chote (Chair)
Dr Jacob Abboud
Professor Sir John Aston
Professor Sir Ian Diamond
Ed Humpherson
Professor Dame Carol Propper
Emma Rourke
Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter
Penny Young

Other Attendees
Pete Benton (for item 13)
Stephen Burgess (for item 10)
Kirsty Campion (for item 14)
Caroline Ellis (for item 1)
Grant Fitzner (for item 10)
Nigel Green (for item 13)
Mike Hardie (for item 10)
Sarah Henry (for item 11)
Alex Lambert (for item 11)
Alastair McAlpine (for item 1)
Liz McKeown (for item 11)
Sarah Moore
Jane Naylor (for item 12)
Victoria Obudula (for item 12)
Natalie Tarr (for item 14)

Apologies
Mike Keoghan
Tom Taylor

Secretariat
Sally Jones
Tom Marsh

1. Chief Statistician Scottish Government and National Records of Scotland

1.1 Alastair McAlpine, Chief Statistician, Scottish Government and Caroline Ellis, Statistician, National Records of Scotland introduced a presentation, which covered the following topic areas:

  i. an overview of priorities in Scotland, making better use of data to inform policy;
  ii. modernising and improving the statistics system for the benefit of Scotland and the UK;
  iii. empowering statisticians to innovate in delivering Scotland's strategic priorities;
  iv. the role of the Scots Stats Board, co-chaired by Professor Anahid Basiri and Professor Sir John Curtice, to provide advice and challenge to the Chief Statistician on the production of and dissemination of Scottish devolved statistics;
  v. addressing the challenges around data sharing and join up with the Integrated Data Service;
  vi. the role of the Devolved Chief Statistician in relation to the Lievesley Review; and
  vii. the opportunities for National Records of Scotland in relation to the future of population and migration statistics.

1.2 Board members welcomed the opportunity to discuss and continue to collaborate in areas of mutual interest including the future of population statistics, UK wide comparability and coherence of data, and addressing the continued challenges around data sharing.

1.3 The Board noted their thanks for an excellent presentation.

2. Apologies

2.1 Apologies were noted from Mike Keoghan and Tom Taylor.

3. Declarations of Interest

3.1 Dr Jacob Abboud informed the meeting of a declaration of interest. Dr Abboud had taken on the role of Independent Non-Executive Director Chair at MS Amlin Business Services.

4. Minutes and matters arising from previous meetings.

4.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 25 July were approved.

5. Report from the Authority Chair [SA(24)44]

5.1 Non-Executive Directors had met before the meeting.

5.2 The Chair reported on his activities since the Board last met:

  i. Sir Robert had delivered the keynote address at the 38th General Conference of the International Association for Research in Income and Wealth on the revision of the System of National Accounts in 2025;
  ii. the Authority's response to the Lievesley Review had been published on 4 September, including the announcement of the Authority's UK Statistics Assembly on 22 January 2025; and
  iii. Sir Robert would be attending the Statistical Dinner Club as a guest speaker on the future of the statistical system with reference to the Lievesley Review.

5.3 It was noted that Professor Denise Lievesley would be invited to attend a future Board meeting ahead of the Assembly in January, which would include an update on overall progress against all recommendations.

6. Report from the Chief Executive [SA(24)45]

6.1 Sir Ian provided the Board with an overview of activity and issues since the last meeting, highlighting the following:

  i. the spending review bid for the first stage of the Spending Review 2025 (SR25) had been submitted to HM Treasury (HMT). Discussions were ongoing with HMT colleagues to simplify the organisation's funding model;

ii. ONS engagement across the government missions through its strategic partnership with the Joint Data and Analysis Centre;

iii. Sir Ian, as part of his role of the Senior Leadership Analysis Group, had presented on topics including child poverty;

iv. communication and engagement plans for the publication of health statistics in October and migration statistics in November;

v. following the presentations at the July Board meeting, which had highlighted examples of legacy transformation, work continued at pace in this area with the Data Science Campus using Artificial Intelligence tools to improve the quality of ONS data coding;

vi. survey response rates continued to be an area of focus with work ongoing regarding career development opportunities for the field force to improve retention;

vii. a programme of work to stabilise the ongoing collection of the Annual Population Survey including engagement with users;

viii. the impact of the range of activities undertaken to support colleagues' well-being in response to the disorder across the UK in early August;

ix. industrial action continued with Public and Commercial Service Union (PCS) members taking part in action short of a strike in relation to hybrid working;

x. delivery progress of the transformation of the ONS website and content;

xi. ONS had asked the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) to reclassify Census 2021 gender identity estimates to official statistics in development. The Government Statistical Service (GSS) Harmonisation team would be working across the GSS to develop a harmonised standard; and

xii. Sir Ian had delivered a number of keynote speeches including at the British Society for Population Studies (BSPS), which had included reference to population registers.

6.2 The Board heard that Sir Ian would be meeting with the Australian National Statistician and the Australian Minster regarding the next Australian Census in 2026. Sir Ian would also be meeting colleagues from the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics as part of their study visit to ONS.

6.3 Board members discussed the report and noted the progress on the use of Large Language Models. As highlighted in the recent meeting by the ONS crime team with Ministers regarding the publication of crime statistics, the metric for the measurement of violence against women and girls would be supported by a range of other metrics. With regard to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC), Simon Hoare Member of Parliament had been appointed as Committee Chair. It was noted that following the Authority's response to the PACAC Report, Transforming the UK's Evidence Base, delivery progress would be reported to the Board. Work was being undertaken around population registers including some public focus groups. It was noted that death certification reform came into force on 9 September. Roll out had been smooth and successful for ONS, and across all other departments and the National Health Service. In May ONS had sent a paper to the Ministry of Justice and the Department of Health and Social Care seeking their position on ideas, which could address the limitation caused by long registrations delays for cases referred to the coroner.

6.4 The Board noted the report. It was agreed that a paper would be provided at the next meeting on population registers, ahead of the discussion already scheduled on the Future of Population and Migration Statistics at the November Board meeting.

7. Report from the Director General of Regulation [SA(24)46]

7.1 Ed Humpherson provided update on regulation activity, highlighting the work by OSR on the refresh of the Code of Practice for Statistics and public consultation. Regulation Committee had provided feedback on the draft consultation at its meeting on 19 September.

7.2 The Board heard that the current volume of casework was low. OSR's annual review of casework had highlighted its focus on encouraging intelligent transparency in the use of all statistics and data. The report was scheduled for publication at the end of the month.

7.3 The Board noted the update and highlighted the importance of raising awareness of the principles of intelligent transparency for key officials across government including special advisers. It was noted that a session on intelligent transparency was scheduled for the GSS Conference in October.

8. Report from the Chair of the Regulation Committee

8.1 The Chair reported on the work of the Regulation Committee which had last met on 19 September 2024.

8.2 The Committee had considered:

i. the proposal by OSR and agreement by the Committee to reaccredit the Crime Survey for England and Wales;
ii. the need for improvement on the quality of police recorded fraud and computer misuse statistics;
iii. assessment reports for ONS's Price Index for Private Rents and Business Investment statistics;
iv. cross-cutting issues arising from OSR reviews on the production of population statistics by ONS;
v. the draft Annual Casework Report 2023/24; and
vi. OSR's refresh of the Code of Practice for Statistics and draft consultation document.

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

9.1 The Chair reported on the work of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee which had last met on 12 September.

9.2 The Committee had considered:

i. the financial position of the organisation and the approach being taken to the Spending Review 2025;
ii. delivery progress of the Internal Audit programme of assurance 2024/25;
iii. an update on risk and assurance activities including the Authority's strategic risk profile;
iv. a risk deep dive on Strategic Risk 3, Quality Statistics;
v. progress on the implementation of audit actions in response to the Internal Audit Report on the Data Science Campus; and
vi. the annual self-review of effectiveness.

9.3 The Committee had also heard that the Authority's Annual Report and Accounts 2023/24 had been laid on 11 July.

10. Retail Prices Index [SA(24)47]

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

11. Transformed Labour Force Survey/Labour Force Survey [SA(24)48]

11.1 Alex Lambert, Sarah Henry and Liz McKeown introduced a paper which provided an update on the Transformed Labour Force (TLFS) Survey project; and the lessons learned exercise.

11.2 The Board heard that the project was amber red, which reflected the risks associated with meeting labour market quality criteria. The quality of the Labour Force Survey (LFS) had improved, but user concerns remained in relation to the quality of labour market data. Work continued at pace to address LFS quality issues with additional field force colleagues being transferred to support the later waves of the LFS from November.

11.3 In line with the agreed plans the project was focusing on labour market data and progressing improvement of the TLFS. Shorter TLFS survey tests would go live in October and the design recommendation for the TLFS would be considered by the Executive Committee (ExCo) in February 2025. User engagement had continued, including the second meeting of the Stakeholder Advisory Panel, and with key users at the BoE, HMT, Office for Budget

Responsibility (OBR) and Department of Work and Pensions. With regard to the coherence of UK data a workshop was scheduled with the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency in October to address the difference in timelines.

11.4 Board members discussed the update on the LFS/TLFS. The following points were considered in discussion:

   i.   progress of work to improve Standard Industrial Classification and Standard Occupational Classification data for the TLFS with numerous workstreams being undertaken in parallel to accelerate the pace of work;

   ii. the quality of LFS waves two to five with additional resources being allocated from November to address this issue;

   iii. the impact of the LFS data for the single month of June on the next round of labour market statistics scheduled for publication in October (with the next release covering June to August). Continuing to provide clear communications, increased transparency and explanation would be needed to provide clarity for users on the volatility of the data and how it should be used;

   iv. the importance of user engagement with transparent communications and consistent messaging of a clear timeline for delivery, including any delays; and

   v.   the issue of conflicting resource pressures, which would be considered by ExCo.

11.5 Sarah Henry introduced the findings of the lessons learned exercise, which had been undertaken by the Methodology and Quality team over the summer. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) had discussed the report. SLT Members had not been interviewed as part of the process but the feedback following discussion by the SLT had been reflected in the final report. The report highlighted issues around psychological safety, and the perception that positive messaging was needed at a senior level, which had impacted the ability of colleagues to escalate risks. It was acknowledged that although the project had been challenging the organisation had come together in response including support from the Board.

11.6 It was acknowledged that the lessons learned aimed to understand the challenges experienced in the delivery of the TLFS with the view to learning lessons across the organisation. Work was already underway in response to the recommendations. The Board heard reflections from Alex Lambert, Liz McKeown and Sarah Henry on the lessons learned, which informed the discussion.

11.7 Board members discussed the lessons learned summary report. The following points were considered in discussion.

   i.   the importance of accurate briefing and reporting to both ExCo and the Board to provide the required level of assurance;

   ii. the underpinning reasons for the anxiety amongst colleagues to raise issues while acknowledging that given the complexity and constraints of the project not all issues raised could be addressed;

   iii. the need to encourage candour from colleagues at all levels, and the ability to distinguish between someone raising serious delivery risks, which could also present as change resistance;

   iv. effectiveness of the mechanisms in place in relation to project and programme governance, continuity of oversight and leadership and the need for resilience within the programme to deal with changes;

   v.   the importance of technical leadership at the outset of a complex programme of work;

   vi. the need to improve stakeholder engagement on changes already in place for LFS and TLFS with weekly updates for the BoE, HMT and OBR, monthly technical sessions, and the creation of the Stakeholder Advisory Panel on labour market statistics to provide further external expertise and challenge; and

   vii. the impact of the work on the TLFS/LFS in raising awareness of the criticality of core economic statistics, as set out in ONS's Business Plan 2024/25.

11.8 Sir Ian highlighted that culture and reporting continued to be a key focus for the SLT, which had been a theme of the recent SCS Awayday. It also formed part of the remit for People Committee, chaired by Emma Rourke. Monthly SCS Monday Morning Colleagues sessions had been extended to colleagues at Grade 6 and Grade 7 to allow the opportunity for engagement, listening and discussion. Consideration was also being given to extending the membership of the ExCo.

11.9 Board members noted the report and highlighted the importance for the SLT to be assured of the impact of the lessons learned on the culture of the organisation, and the management of other major programmes such as the Future of Population and Migration Statistics and the Integrated Data Service. It was agreed that the broader lessons learned report would be shared with Non-Executive Directors and that an Internal Audit Review would be undertaken on programme governance.

12. Government Statistical Service Vision [SA(24)49]

12.1 Jane Naylor introduced a paper which provided an update on progress towards finalising and publishing a Government Statistical Service Vision – 'Strength in Numbers'. The Board had discussed the development of a vision for the GSS at its meeting in March 2024. Engagement had been undertaken across the GSS including several discussions by the National Statistics Executive Group.

12.2 The Board welcomed the ambition set out in the GSS Vision. The Board heard that Sarah Henry, Methodology and Quality Director, had responsibility for the GSS with ONS providing some central resources. The issues around resourcing would be an area of focus early on and linked to the current funding model in place. A similar funding model to the Analysis Function was perhaps an option. Alongside strengthening resources, it was noted that now was an opportune time across the GSS to exploit the interest in data sharing working in partnership with Heads of Profession. The induction programme would be strengthened to improve attrition of resources.

12.3 The Board noted the GSS Vision which would be launched at the GSS Conference on 8 October with Sir Robert and Sir Ian presenting. Engagement of the vision beyond the launch would include the Royal Statistical Society and Department Directors of Analysis. The refresh of the Authority strategy would include engagement across the GSS.

13. Integrated Data Service [SA(24)50]

13.1 Pete Benton and Nigel Green introduced a paper which provided an update on delivery of the Integrated Data Service.

13.2 Pete Benton informed the Board that discussions were ongoing with the Department of Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT) to ensure alignment with the emerging plans for a National Data Library. The programme continued to focus activities on datasets, users and analysis projects that would deliver the most benefit to policy and decision making. The current highest priority analysis project related to healthcare prevention.

13.3 The Board heard that the Critical Success Factors (CSFs), which had been agreed as part of the rescoped programme would need to be met for the programme to succeed. Underpinning milestones had been agreed to support delivery of the CSFs and a resourcing plan was near completion. The programme status was currently amber red.

13.4 Board members discussed the update. The following points were made in discussion.

   i. the potential relationship of the IDS with the NDL was unclear as discussions were at an early stage;

   ii. the progress of the work with the Research Accreditation Panel to simplify the accreditation process for analysis projects. A useability review had been commissioned to evaluate simplicity of access;

    iii.   the need to increase the number of high value use projects on the IDS to inform decision making; and

    iv.   the continued challenges around data sharing across departments.

13.5 The Board noted the update and the challenges facing delivery of the programme.

14.   Strategic Risk Profile [SA(24)51]

14.1 Natalie Tarr introduced a paper which provided an update on the Authority's strategic risk profile, which reflected the most significant risks to the successful delivery of the Authority's strategy.

14.2 Natalie Tarr informed the Board of the recent change to the Authority's strategic risk profile. There was one risk operating outside of appetite, SR3, Quality Statistics. SR6, Our Communications had recently been brought back into appetite following the addition of new controls and enhancements to the ONS website and external communications, and plans were in place to ensure the longer-term stability of the website. As part of the mitigation for SR12, Technological Resilience, plans were in place to address legacy transformation. The risk score for SR1, Ensuring our Statistics and Analysis keep pace with the Changing Priorities, had increased but remained within appetite. With regard to SR8, Inclusivity in our Statistics and Analysis, the proposal was to reduce the risk appetite range to align with the organisation's ambition to be inclusive in our statistics and analysis; and to reduce the overall score. SR0, Independence and Trustworthiness and Impact had been effectively mitigated with the implementation of additional controls.

14.3 The Board heard that ExCo and its subcommittees regularly considered the risk profile, with a focus on the risks outside of risk appetite, and the interplay across the strategic risk profile. The Audit and Risk Assurance Committee discussed risk and assurance at every meeting and scheduled risk deep dives in areas of concern.

14.4 Members discussed the update. The following comments were made in discussion.

    i.   the assurance provided by the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee with a focus on SR3, and risk deep dives scheduled for legacy and strategic resourcing in November;

    ii.   support for reducing the risk appetite range for SR8, with further consideration needed by ExCo as to whether to reduce the score given the wider external context;

    iii.   the addition of media training as part of SR6, and

    iv.   the need to consider broadening mitigations to support corporate reputation as part of SR0.

14.5 The Board agreed that the strategic risk profile reflected the top-level risks for the Authority; and agreed the proposal to reduce the risk appetite range for SR8, Inclusive Data.

15.   Any Other Business

15.1 Sir Ian informed Non-Executive Directors of a whistleblowing case.

15.2 The Board would next meet on Thursday 31 October.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY
Agenda
Thursday 26 September 2024, 10:00-15:00
Queen Elizabeth House, Edinburgh
Hybrid Meeting

Chair: **Sir Robert Chote**

Apologies: Mike Keoghan, Tom Taylor

Attendees: Pete Benton (for item 11), Stephen Burgess (for item 8), Kirsty Campion (for item 12), Caroline Ellis (for item 2), Nigel Green (for item 11), Grant Fitzner (for item 8), Mike Hardie (for item 8), Sarah Henry (for item 9), Alex Lambert (for item 9), Alastair McAlpine (for item 2), Liz McKeown (for item 9), Jane Naylor (for item 10), Victoria Obudula (for item 10), Natalie Tarr (for item 12), Rhys Thomas (delegate for Tom Taylor)

NED Session: 09:15-10:00

1 10:00-10:05 5 mins	Introduction and welcome	Sir Robert Chote
2 10:05-11:05 60 mins	Presentation: Overview of Priorities in Scotland • Chief Statistician Scottish Government • National Records of Scotland	SA(24)44 Alastair McAlpine Caroline Ellis
3 11:05-11:10 5 mins	Minutes and matters arising from previous meetings • Declarations of interest	Meeting of 25.07.24
4 11:10-11:25 15 mins	Report from the Authority Chair	SA(24)45 Sir Robert Chote
5 11:25-12:00 35 mins	Report from the Chief Executive	SA(24)46 Prof. Sir Ian Diamond
6 12:00-12:25 25 mins	Report from the Director General for Regulation	SA(24)47 Ed Humpherson
7 12:25-12:40 15 mins	Report from Committee Chairs • Regulation Committee • Audit and Risk Assurance Committee	Penny Young Dr Jacob Abboud
12:40-13:00 20 mins	Lunch	
8 13:00-13:25 25 mins	Retail Prices Index	SA(24)48 Grant Fitzner Mike Hardie Stephen Burgess
9 13:25-13:50 25 mins	Transformed Labour Force Survey/Labour Force Survey	SA(24)49 Alex Lambert Sarah Henry Liz McKeown
10 13:50-14:00 10 mins	Government Statistical Service Vision	SA(24)50 Victoria Obudula Jane Naylor
11 14:00-14:15 15 mins	Integrated Data Service	SA(24)51 Pete Benton Nigel Green

12 14:15-14:40 25 mins	Strategic Risk Profile	SA(24)52 Natalie Tarr Kirsty Campion
13 14:40-15:00 20 mins	Any other business	

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Chair's Report, September 2024

Purpose

1. This paper provides the Authority Board with an overview of the Chair's activity in August and September 2024.

Review of Recent Activities

2. On 22 August, I met Claire Melamed, Executive Director of the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development Data (GPSDD). We discussed the work of GPSDD, noting the relationship they have with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) International Development team. The Authority's international strategy will be refreshed next year, and GPSDD will be consulted as a key partner in this work.

3. On 27 August, I delivered a keynote address at the 38th General Conference of the International Association for Research in Income and Wealth on the topic of the forthcoming revision of the System of National Accounts in 2025. I reflected on the opportunities and challenges that the revision will bring, implications for future revisions, and the work that ONS has done to support this work to date alongside international partners. My speech will be published in full on the Authority website shortly.

4. On 3 September, I attended the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) conference in Brighton. I co-chaired a session with Ed Humpherson celebrating excellence in official statistics, introducing the winners of this year's RSS Campion Award and Trustworthiness, Quality and Value Award which are sponsored by the Authority and Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) respectively. While at the conference, I also met with Sarah Cumbers, RSS Chief Executive, and Andy Garrett, RSS President, to discuss current priorities. We primarily discussed the implementation of the Lievesley Review and the UK Statistical Assembly, and engagement with the new Government on statistical matters.

5. This month, the Authority published its response to the Lievesley Review and announced that the UK Statistics Assembly, established in response to recommendation one of the Review, will take place on 22 January 2025. Our response has been well received by stakeholders such as the RSS. I hope to discuss the Review's implementation with our new Minister, Georgia Gould, in the coming weeks.

6. I also held my regular catch ups with the National Statistician, Director General for Regulation, Director of Finance, Planning and Performance and Committee chairs.

Looking ahead

7. Over the next few weeks, I am looking forward to meeting with OSR colleagues during our trip to Edinburgh; delivering the closing remarks at the Government Statistical Service Conference; and meeting with statisticians from the Department for Transport.

Sir Robert Chote, Chair,17 September 2024

Chief Executive's Report, September 2024

Purpose

1. This paper provides the UK Statistics Authority Board (the Board) with an overview of activity for August and September 2024.

Summary

2. As the country transitions under a new Government, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) is ensuring that decision-makers have access to reliable, timely data to shape immediate policy responses. Over the summer months, we've delivered critical datasets, analysis and synthesis products to guide both short-term and long-term planning and worked closely with colleagues in the Cabinet Office and No10 Data Science to ensure ONS' core outputs feed into work on the missions.

3. Throughout the summer, we have seen heightened media scrutiny on a range of our key economic and social indicators including inflation, employment rates and public sector finances. We have been proactive in reinforcing our commitment to transparency and continuous improvement to ensure that official statistics can be trusted.

Summary of activities

4. Parliament briefly returned for two weeks in September before rising again for conference recess. During that time new Committee chairs were elected, including Simon Hoare Member of Parliament (MP) for the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) who we are arranging an introductory meeting with. We have drafted our response to the PACAC report 'Transforming the UK's Evidence Base' and will send to PACAC once fully reconstituted – due to be at the end of October. Meanwhile, we are working with the House of Commons Library on providing new MPs with training on using statistics well and what the ONS and Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) can do for them.

5. ONS's strategic partnership with the Cabinet Office through the Joint Data and Analysis Centre (JDAC) continues to provide intelligence about the new Government's vision and needs of ONS at a pace and in ways we have not had before. As part of the Senior Leadership Analysis Group I have been asked to present at several ministerial meetings including one of the National Security Council and others on Child Poverty which has been a powerful way to highlight the value and use of data.

6. Early August saw ONS successfully publish the first tranche of updated outputs for our economic data up to the end of 2022 as part of our comprehensive Blue Book changes for this year. This was a significant milestone and met a key target for our users. Looking ahead, the complete Blue Book consistent data will be published on 31 October.

7. The Public Sector Productivity Review continues to progress on improving the measures for reporting on the productivity of public services, with new systems development and selected public service areas being prioritised, as work ramps up towards delivering on the upcoming outputs and the final report for spring 2025.

8. The two advisory panels for consumer prices are both meeting in person at Marsham Street on 27 September. Topics for discussion will include, among other things, impact analysis for grocery scanner data, improving our treatments of energy and energy intensity in Consumer Price Index, and the possibility of producing seasonally adjusted measures of inflation in the future.

9. Economic and Microdata Insights I have been providing extensive support on labour market business as usual activities in addition to work on Labour Market Transformation. This has included the development of additional commentary for the labour market overview regarding

data coherence and reconciliation. Significant input has also been provided regarding the Labour Force Survey (LFS) sustainability plan, in particular in coordinating the response to OSR on the Annual Population Survey (APS).

10. We have instigated a programme of work to stabilise the ongoing collection of the APS. This includes necessary changes to our technical and operational processes and consideration of the sample sizes and the interviewer capacity necessary to meet the needs of our various users. We are accelerating this work by welcoming involvement from our user community, with plans underway for an initial workshop on October 2 2024, which we will work with OSR on. This will look to assess the quality of the APS and its implication for various statistical publications that are produced by ONS and other stakeholders.

11. Data Science Campus (DSC) are developing a classification microservice to improve the quality of ONS data coding (to Standard Industrial Classification/Standard Occupational Classification/ Classification of Individual Consumption According to Purpose, et cetera) using artificial intelligence (AI) tools and improve the efficiency of survey operations. This is a collaborative piece of work with colleagues from across ONS including, Data Growth and Operations, Methodology and Quality Division and Business Data Operations Division. We have published an open source tool with tutorials to demonstrate the approach, leading to wide-spread international interest and engagement with other National Statistics Institutes, the United Nations, International Monetary Fund, and other statistical bodies: ClassifAI – Exploring the use of Large Language Models (LLMs) to assign free text to commonly used classifications.

12. DSC have also built a new AI driven automation tool called 'ParliAI' to support the work on the ONS Parliamentary team, who have accepted our AI generated parliamentary summary email for regular use following a successful trial. ParliAI automatically ingests information from Parliamentary debates and written questions, summarises the text that refers to ONS, and then automatically writes and sends a report to colleagues using the GOV.UK Notify Application Programme Interface.

13. On the 9 September, Meghan Elkin, John Marais and Mike Keoghan met with Minister Jess Philipps and Minister Dame Diana Johnson to discuss the ONS' publication of Crime Statistics (the two main data sources are the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) and Police Recorded Crime (PRC)). Diana Johnson and Jess Philips were positive in what we do and are very supportive of our efforts to get the measurement of Violence Against Women and Girls correct and that any single metric needed to be supported by a raft of others. The meeting did also highlight how engaged we are with Home Office colleagues and how well we work together.

14. ONS Local presented to the National Statistician's Inclusive Data Advisory Committee. The purpose of the presentation was to update the committee on ONS Local's progress since we last presented last summer, to share some examples of what we're doing to support the inclusion agenda, and to ask the Committee for any advice. It was a joint session with Lucy Woodbine and Francis Markus from Greater Manchester Combined Authority who were presenting about work they're doing in Greater Manchester on inclusion, and where some of the key data gaps are. Overall, a successful presentation with lots of positive feedback from Committee members on how far we've come and the service we're providing. We also discussed the emerging importance of rural communities, particularly regarding poverty.

15. We have requested to reclassify our Census 2021 gender identity estimates to official statistics in development, which better reflects their innovative nature and the evolving understanding of gender identity. We are working to develop a harmonised standard for a future question and to share guidance on use and communication of outputs from existing survey questions. Further information is provided in our blog.

16. The results from the new Health Insight Survey (HIS), funded by National Health Service (NHS) England, were published on 12 September. The survey focuses on patient experiences at GP practices and other NHS services, providing data to inform improvements in local health services, national NHS policy and the delivery of primary care.

17. In Quality and Improvement, we have successfully delivered the Monthly Business Survey basic Reproducible Analytical Pipeline (RAP). This is a major achievement addressing complex requirements and a challenging deadline. It sets the precedent for further legacy transformation projects with RAP. We will be developing a short case study to share success.

18. Alongside our Official Development Assistance budget, we have signed a memorandum of understanding with Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, to do more to support population statistics in key countries of interest in Africa. This will facilitate their work to support sexual and reproductive health rights of women in these countries. An inception phase for this project began in August.

19. We hosted a two-day workshop with our delivery partners from Ghana and Rwanda, and the UK Health Security Agency for the Standards for Official Statistics on Climate and Health Interactions project. The workshop focussed on the development of specific indicators for climate and health interactions across a wide range of climate triggers and health outcomes. The feedback received here is a key step towards the publication of the Alpha version of the framework and will inform the initial development of the indicator calculators on our platform hosted by the United Nations Global Platform team.

20. Preparations have entered a critical stage for the 2024 Government Statistical Service (GSS) Conference being held on 8 October. The theme this year is "Beyond Numbers: Championing Interdisciplinary Collaboration with Statistics". The conference will be a hybrid event. The in-person aspect of the event will take place across three Government sites: ONS Newport, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs York, and Scottish Government Edinburgh. Keynote and parallel sessions have been confirmed at each location, and online attendees will be able to dial across the three sites.

21. "Strength in Numbers" the GSS Vision and Strategic Delivery Plan is near ready to launch, with final plans being considered by National Statistician's Executive Group this month and included for discussion at this meeting. GSS Head of Professions have been trialling elements of the plan with their departments over the summer to seek feedback on its principles, and communications are being planned.

22. UK Statistic Authority's pay proposals for the 2024 pay award for delegated grades have been approved by Minister Gould MP. We proposed a 5 per cent flat rate increase for all delegated grades, aligning to the award made for the Senior Civil Service. Negotiations with departmental trade unions will now commence on 18 September.

23. Elsewhere, the Civil Service People Survey launched on the 10 of September, results are expected in December. In August, we made changes to the ONS resourcing process to streamline and ensure clarity in accountability for resourcing decisions. Business areas are able to consider internal resourcing solutions and expedite recruitment activity.

24. Work is continuing at pace to deliver our website and content transformation. We have set up a cross-Office working group to shape our ambition and ensure a One ONS approach, including considering specific areas of focus such as coherence and how we best present uncertainty. Through internal and external user engagement, we have agreed goals for our data and insight, and the high-level "super" user needs that we need to meet. Our stakeholder engagement plan will ensure we continue to build in feedback, including for the public prototype of our website that will go live in November using the retail sales release. Following evaluation of the prototype, we plan to publish live releases early in 2025.

25. We achieved positive media coverage and stakeholder feedback when we launched our plans to include groceries scanner data in prices statistics in August. The launch provided an opportunity to communicate our progress on transformation, as well as communicate its relevance for citizens through bespoke explainer content. Reuters reported "Britain will gather prices data from over 1 billion units of grocery sales each month from supermarket scanners when it [ONS] introduces a new system for measuring inflation in the sector next year". Meanwhile, we put in place a comprehensive communications plan to support the release of our annual revisions to

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) estimates. Learning the lessons from the criticism we received last summer, we developed a range of content to build understanding of the revisions process as well as explain the specific updates, including digital, media and stakeholder activity. We also re-promoted our initiatives across the year to increase awareness of our focus on communicating uncertainty, such as our podcast and GDP videos. As a result, media coverage was uncritical with most accounts noting the revisions left the UK in the 'middle of the G7 pack' for recent economic growth. The Telegraph noted that last year's revisions turned out to be similar to those of other countries.

26. We undertook a range of activities to support colleague well-being in response to the period of violent disorder that swept across the UK in early August. Messaging was delivered across business areas by Directors General/Operations and Finance, Planning and Performance Directors, highlighting personal safety and security advice, including for our field interviewers. On Reggie, we published a blog from Osama Rahman, Director Data Science Campus, on his personal experiences of growing up South Asian in the UK, alongside links to the support available via our substantial support offering. Sir Ian met with the Race, Ethnicity and Cultural Heritage (REACH) network and representatives from the All Beliefs Group, to listen to colleagues' concerns and take questions. We continue to remind our leaders of the importance of checking in with colleagues as individuals feel the ongoing impact.

27. The Statistical Business Register (SBR) project has agreed the delivery plan to bring user functionality online iteratively up to March 2025. This will allow users to begin testing samples and will also deliver the new Financial Services Surveys sample in October to enable Economic, Social and Environment Statistics to meet international commitments. In collaboration and agreement with Economic, Social and Environmental Group, the SBR can then begin to be used to select samples for surveys from April 2025 onwards using SBR functionality. Development beyond March 2025 will continue adding functionality alongside the planning to decommission the Inter-Departmental Business Register.

28. The Future Business Surveys and Statistics Account Management Proof of Concept (PoC) has made significant progress against its milestones with evaluation of the initial PoC recognising its successful impact. We have identified improvements to data quality through improved cross-survey validation and analysis and have identified potential future efficiency savings through streamlining internal processes and how we engage with businesses. Ambitiously, the scope of the PoC has now been increased to incorporate respondent engagement, reacting to feedback, and to collate evidence to inform our wider strategic business engagement approach.

29. A review of our strategic risk (SR) for security (SR 4) has been completed this month and shows ONS continue to operate within risk appetite with an average score of 5.6. Independent oversight from the Risk and Assurance team praised the "excellent engagement at all levels" and the "mature risk management approach and team in place."

30. As a result of the performance and stability work undertaken, we have continued to see sustained website stability and performance. During the busiest minute of the latest key economic release (GDP), website error rates were 0.009 per cent (compared to 48 per cent in January 2024).

31. There are 138 datasets now available on the IDS. ABC has been indexed and ingested onto the IDS with approval awaiting from one data supplier (NHS England) before making accessible.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond, National Statistician, 19 September 2024

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Report 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 Authority Board meeting have been:

   i. Code of Practice for Statistics (the Code) refresh and consultation: based on the outcomes of the Code Review, conducted in autumn 2023, we propose a series of updates to the Code to better meet the needs of its wide audience;

   ii. we will now seek feedback on our proposals via formal public consultation which will run from 21 October 2024 to 31 January 2025. We want to hear from a wide range of people in producer organisations, statistics stakeholders and users: anyone with an interest in ensuring that the proposed refreshed Code of Practice will support statistics to serve the public good;

   iii. Economic Statistics Review: the review is focusing initially on the adequacy of data sources, before moving to the extent to which Office for National Statistics (ONS) outputs meet user needs and the ONS organisational context. Our call for evidence closed on Friday 13 September, and in parallel, we have spoken to a range of external stakeholders to seek views. Our next steps include roundtables organised with Economic, Social and Environment Group to explore the emerging themes with relevant ONS staff; and

   iv. Crime: we have provided our draft report on the review of the quality and value of fraud and computer misuse statistics to the Regulation Committee (RC). The RC meeting took place after we wrote this update. We will provide an oral update during the Board meeting itself.

3. Since the last meeting we have published:

   i. State of the Statistical System: we published a statement highlighting [how Government can support the statistics system to be at its best now and in the future](). We highlight the importance of embedding transparency in the use and release of statistics and data. The statement asks for the removal of barriers and the support for opportunities for data sharing and linkage and requests that sufficient resource is in place to meet increased demand for statistics and insight;

   ii. Data Sharing and Linkage: we published an [update on the recommendations]() we made last year on enabling greater data sharing and linkage for research and statistics for the public good. There continues to be a failure to deliver on data sharing and linkage across government, and barriers to progress persist. Nonetheless, the report also highlights and welcomes examples of good practice: we have published [a blog]() about ongoing initiatives helping to overcome barriers; and

   iii. Gender Identity: we published our [final report]() on the review of the Statistics Collected on Gender Identity during the England and Wales Census.

Casework

4. Since the last Authority Board meeting, we have received five cases on topics including Ultra Low Emission Zone (ULEZ), sex offender treatment programme, energy prices and homelessness. We have closed ten cases on topics such as reoffending statistics, Sustrans, the National Referral Mechanism and exam statistics.

5. Our only public intervention since the last Board meeting was to [Jeremy Balfour MSP]() from Ed Humpherson in which we responded to concerns about data on transport in Scotland provided by Sustrans.

6. We have shared the annual casework report for 2023/24 with the RC and pending any comments plan to publish the report this month. Our report this year focuses on our role in the 2024 general election, how we have secured greater impact through partnerships, our approach to prioritising transparency of data over our remit, and our plans for improvements in the casework function.

7. We published a blog around [commenting on conference speeches](#) that sets out our expectations of producers during the political party conferences.

Wider reach

8. External events: since the last Authority Board I have met with a number of key external stakeholders for post-election catch ups to discuss how the new government's initiatives are likely to impact on data and statistics. I also attended the Royal Statistical Society conference and the Regulatory Policy Institute conference chairing and joining several panel sessions throughout the conferences. I was asked to present at the National Audit Office European Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions resilience webinar on disinformation and public trust in data. I explained our work, our role as a regulator and how misuse of statistics impacts public debate.

9. Last week I presented at the Universities Policy Engagement Network about our areas of research interest.

Issues on my mind

10. Dashboards: one theme across a number of sessions at conferences I have been attending recently is the growing interest in the role of "pull technologies". The pull approach allows users to interface with data through a portal and dashboard to extract their own insights and download data for their own use. As a regulator we are thinking about the implications of the use of this technology for producers - particularly around clearly communicating uncertainty and caveats, ensuring appropriate use of the statistics and communicating the quality of the statistics.

11. OSR 2.0: next week we are holding a series of internal workshops to progress our OSR 2.0 programme this will include defining our engagement approach for the next iteration of our five-year plan, and sessions on our organisational structure, the role of automation in regulation, how we enhance our partnerships and the evolution of our regulatory model.

Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation, OSR, 18 September 2024

STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(24)48

Transformation risks for the Retail Prices Index (RPI)

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

SA(24)49

Transformed Labour Force Survey – September 2024 Update

Purpose

1. A monthly update to the UK Statistics Authority Board (the board) on the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS) project.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to:

   i.   note the progress and risks/mitigations on the TLFS project which is reporting Amber-Red;
   ii. note the continuing focus on addressing Labour Force Survey (LFS) quality issues; and
   iii. comment on the completed lessons learnt exercise.

Background

3. Following the Board approval in July 2024, the project published plans for the extension of the parallel run, continued use of the LFS for Labour Market outputs and further development of the TLFS. Since then, in-line with the guiding principles reported at the last Board, the project is focusing first on labour market data and is actively progressing ambitious improvement of the TLFS, with testing planned into the autumn.

4. This has also been a time to reflect on the last nine years of Office for National Statistics (ONS) activities that have contributed to the TLFS to consider the lessons that can be learnt to support the project (and wider ONS activities) going forward.

Discussion

Progress and Plans Strategic Update

5. The reaction from users to the extension of the parallel run was positive. The project has reset TLFS workstreams and plans since July 2024, with key progress being:

   i.   development and initial quality assurance of three shorter TLFS versions which will be live in the field by the end of October 2024;
   ii. two updated fully integrated designs of the TLFS have been developed and are being evaluated as to their ability to meet non-labour market user needs;
   iii. additional data collection measures agreed to further improve LFS quality; and
   iv. continued user engagement, including the second meeting of the Stakeholder Advisory Panel and agreement of plans for the next TLFS data update.

6. With the project having sprinted over the last eight weeks to develop the shorter TLFS versions, the leadership team will regroup at a strategic planning event in early October 2024. This will focus on the strategic roadmap, options, key decisions required and phasing to manage the uncertainties and mitigate remaining technical risks, all within the context of the lessons identified on the project (see below). The first step on this roadmap will be the shorter TLFS test results and design decisions we will bring to Executive Committee (ExCo) in early 2025.

7. The project is currently formally reporting as Amber-Red within the Ambitious, Radical, Inclusive Economic Statistics (ARIES) programme and Surveys Transformation Programme. This reflects remaining material risks and uncertainties associated with meeting labour market quality criteria and project maturity as it pivots to the July 2024 changes, while balancing the competing demands of the continued delivery of the parallel run. It is valuable to draw the Board's attention to the following specific risks and mitigations:

   i.   UK Data Coherence – Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) are keen to progress with their transformed LFS by March 2025, which is misaligned with ONS's timelines. This would impact processing pipelines and require substantial legacy system changes in ONS. While overall impact on UK labour statistics from Northern Ireland is

minimal, the fallback that ONS resorts to publishing at Great Britain level is to be avoided. Engagement with NISRA is ongoing to address this;

ii. Complex Data Variables – as previously reported to the Board, the greatest quality challenge lies with the collection of complex data, such as Standard Industrial Classification and Standard Occupational Classification. Additional dedicated resource is developing and demonstrating several potential solutions, including respondent facing search options (Auto-Suggest, Search as You Type), a respondent friendly coding frame, the continued development of Large Language Models for better off-line matching, the linkage of respondent data to other data sources and the utilisation of generative artificial intelligence. Ongoing work is refining the exact quality requirements needed by differing users/outputs; and

iii. Conflicting Resource Pressures – the current operational need to improve and sustain LFS quality (e.g., re-weighting to the latest population projections) concurrently with TLFS continued development is stretching teams on multiple fronts. Recruitment, managed moves, prioritisation of activities and resources and sequencing of tasks are being used to address this issue.

LFS Quality Update

8. While we continue to run the LFS it is vital that we address key quality concerns. These quality issues are manifesting in several ways and require attention across our data collection, methodology and statistical publication/communication activities. Though the number of LFS achieved household interviews at wave 1 is now equivalent to pre-pandemic (2019) levels, the number of responses for waves 2-5 continues to fall short of their pre-pandemic position and is little changed from the levels seen a year ago (see Table 1).

Table 1: Number of achieved households, LFS main sample, excluding imputations, as released in quarterly person LFS datasets.

	July 2019	July 2023	July 2024
LFS Wave 1	2,735	1,627	2,831
LFS Waves 2-5	6,689	3,551	3,810

9. This shortfall in achieved response is continuing to feed through into elevated volatility, reduced precision and broader coherence issues with other data sources. On volatility, the single month estimate for June 2024 saw the unemployment rate fall by 0.7 percentage points, a significant fall which ran contrary to expectations. One month later, this fall almost entirely unwound as the single month estimate for July 2024 increased by 0.6 percentage points. As the headline unemployment rate is taken over three months, this single month fall stays in the statistics for three months, and in our estimates of quarterly change for six months. While we very clearly advise users of the increased volatility of single month estimates, including that the data are unlikely to be representative of the UK, expert users will routinely explore this data and June's unemployment figures had the effect of reinforcing LFS quality concerns to them.

10. A reduced achieved sample also means lower precision around our estimates, with headline estimates continuing to see elevated sampling variability compared with their pre-pandemic position. Coherence with other sources, especially on measures of employees also continues to present significant challenges, with much of the first half of 2024 seeing the LFS report annual falls in employment while sources such as Employee Jobs (business survey measure) and His Majesty's Revenue and Custom's (HMRC) Realtime Information have consistently reported positive, though declining growth.

11. In light of these ongoing challenges, additional commentary has been added to the Labour Market overview, guiding users through comparisons between the different sources and providing advice where possible on how to best align the different measures – this increased transparency and explanation has generally been welcomed by key users.

12. Through the remainder of this year, we are looking to refresh previous work on reconciliation between the LFS and Workforce Jobs. Through this we aim to improve our knowledge of how these compare with one another. We are hoping to publish an update by the end of the year. We are also considering how HMRC data can be incorporated into this reconciliation framework. This work will be complemented by our work to further reweight the LFS to the latest population totals with the reweighted estimates due to be published in December 2024, which we anticipate will also help coherence between sources. This will cover the period from January-March 2019 onwards, improving our understanding of the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the labour market. We are working towards publishing indicative impacts of this partial reweighting exercise in late November 2024, which has been endorsed by our stakeholders.

13. Operationally our plans for LFS are focussing on building on the quality improvements we have already delivered. As previously reported to the Board, a boost to the LFS sample is delivering consistent field operations to the required Wave 1 response of 850 interviews a week. This boost is now flowing through the longitudinal waves of the survey and is anticipated to grow LFS datasets this year by 26 per cent. However, it will take time for this effect to fully feed through, given the wave structure of the LFS. We are continuing to build on this work and for LFS, we will increase face-to-face interviewers allocated to LFS to support wave 2 plus cases returned to the field by Telephone Operations. An additional 50 interviewers on LFS by November 2024 will enable an additional 200 household interviews per week. Further expansion is a priority into next year and the Spending Review.

14. As part of our ongoing engagement, key users at the Bank of England, HM Treasury, Office for Budget Responsibility and Department for Work and Pensions have been made aware of our latest work and plans on LFS quality as described above. We have now formalised this technical engagement, which also covers TLFS developments, into a monthly meeting, chaired at Director level. We are also continuing to make use of our new Stakeholder Advisory Panel on Labour Market Statistics to provide additional external expertise and challenge.

Conclusion
15. The project has moved at pace to adapt to the parallel run extension and develop both the TLFS tests and updated integrated design. Significant effort is focused on improving Standard Industrial Classification/Standard Occupational Classification data and collective progress will be reported back to ExCo for design decisions in early 2025. Further measures have been taken this month to improve LFS and Annual Population Survey quality which remains a concern. A number of lessons have been identified in recent exercises and the aim is now to ensure these are reflected in the project going forward.

Alex Lambert, Director of Social Surveys, and Liz McKeown, Director of Economic Statistics, 19 September 2024

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

'Strength in Numbers' – Delivering a Vision for the GSS: Progress Update

Purpose
1. This paper provides an update on progress towards finalising and publishing a Government Statistical Service (GSS) Vision and Strategic Delivery Plan as well as an update on progress towards implementation and ongoing impact.

Recommendations
2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to:

   i. note the progress that has been made towards finalising and launching the GSS Vision;
   ii. agree to promote the GSS Vision through your channels post launch; and
   iii. note the progress that has already been made towards achieving 'Strength in Numbers' and provide a steer on areas of challenge.

Background
3. In March 2024 a paper was presented to the UK Statistics Authority Board covering the development of a vision for the GSS, with particular focus on analytical prioritisation and the future of the statistics profession. In June, the National Statistics Executive Group (NSEG) approved the GSS Vision and associated Strategic Delivery Plan and proposals to finalise the documents. Work has progressed to respond to comments received from NSEG, Heads of Professions (HoPs), Analysis Function and members of the other analytical professions. Most importantly, engagement sessions led by HoPs, have been held with around 18 departments to raise awareness and seek feedback on the GSS Vision from the key audience, the GSS Community itself. This paper summarises this feedback, outlines plans for launching the GSS Vision in October 2024 and ensuring ongoing impact of this work, highlights progress already made as well as current challenges to implementation.

Discussion
4. The feedback from HoP led departmental sessions has been positive and amplified the issues already in the GSS Vision. There was support for a clearer GSS identity and future direction and a way of measuring progress and actionable steps. There was a strong desire for a more connected community right across the UK. The need to consider the evolving roles of statisticians/data scientists and the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) was raised by many. Another theme was the need for a more effective cross-government statistical dissemination platform. Many also called for a more comprehensive induction. The GSS Vision and Strategic Delivery Plan have been updated to reflect this feedback .

5. The key audience for the GSS Vision is the GSS Community and hence the focus for the launch and communication activities:

   i. the GSS Vision with a one-page summary will be published on the GSS pages of the Analysis Function website;
   ii. formal launch at the GSS Conference on 8 October 2024 with session led by HoPs;
   iii. senior GSS leaders to share GSS Vision through appropriate channels;
   iv. GSS Vision to be promoted in the GSS newsletter/Analysis Function newsletter/blogs/Departmental Directors of Analysis (DDaNs); and
   v. HoPs to run sessions within their departments on a six monthly basis to update on progress (in line with updates to NSEG) but also to test new priorities and/or future direction. This will ensure the GSS Vision is a live document, continues to be relevant and responds to the needs of the GSS Community.

6. Even before we have officially launched the GSS Vision, progress has been made towards achieving 'Strength in Numbers'. Here we summarise some key areas of progress.

Coordination, Cooperation and Leadership

7. GSS decision making is system-wide by default, focused on delivering in partnership across departmental boundaries. GSS governance is transparent and inclusive, with roles and responsibilities clearly set out between departments, the GSS and Analysis Function.

8. GSS leadership strengthened by creating the Deputy Head of the GSS role, held by Victoria Obudulu and NSEG membership refreshed.

9. During 2024 the Task and Finish Group on Prioritisation and Collaboration has developed a light-touch annual work planning approach that will set out a high-level overview of statistical activities in relation to a significant area of work with cross-Government responsibilities (such as labour market, children and education, and health and care). The plans will support transparency about our processes, methodology and content, coherence between different statistical outputs, and collaboration between producers. The plans will also be a vehicle to highlight and drive forward strategic cross-cutting priorities such as data sharing, AI adoption, UK-wide coherence and therefore enable the GSS to influence these wider initiatives. Government priorities can change rapidly, so these plans do not constitute a binding obligation for the year ahead but will be a living document. They will support departmental business planning, promoting efficiency and impact of our publications, helping avoid gaps in our support and the UK evidence base. They will also feed into GSS support for a Mission led Government and will be vital in planning for spending reviews supporting us to navigate these initiatives as 'one GSS'.

10. Plans will be both an input and output to the UK Statistics Authority Triennial Statistical Assemblies. Following discussion at NSEG, elements of the plans will be published on the Analysis Function website.

Capability and Community

11. GSS members can come from any background and work in supportive teams across the UK to reach their full potential, with clear progression routes and guidance from junior to the most senior grades. The GSS comprises a diverse, inclusive and vibrant community which people want to join and to stay and to build their career in.

12. An Application and Interview Support Task and Finish Group was established in April 2024, central resources are being identified to lead GSS induction and as part of the GSS Community workstream a GSS senior leader blog has launched, GSS newsletter refreshed and a GSS Regional Community page is planned.

13. The Royal Statistical Society (RSS) is collaborating with the GSS on a project to explore the evolving role of statisticians, in particular which aspects of statistical work will remain constant, and which will change over the next decade, along with the factors driving those changes. The findings from this scoping project will inform more in-depth reviews and contribute to developing and shaping the roles, responsibilities and skills expected of statisticians in the future, both inside and outside government. The RSS will host a roundtable session in October 2024 leading to a detailed report of the findings, which will pave the way for a more in-depth project. For the roundtable, the RSS has proposed inviting senior RSS members with expertise in official statistics, statistical literacy and education, data science, AI and public engagement. We are identifying attendees to represent the GSS, including senior members from People Advisory Group, Office for National Statistics (ONS), Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) and the UK Statistics Authority.

Setting Standards

14. The principles of the Code of Practice for Statistics underpin all GSS activities and outputs, and is supported by harmonised, coherent standards and shared practices that promote high-quality, trusted statistical production across the UK.

15. A new cross-government group has been launched consisting of 14 Executive Officers to Grade 7 colleagues from eight different departments working to build up a metrics system to measure progress we make delivering the GSS Vision. Metrics will be identified for the actions included in the Strategic Delivery Plan that sits below the GSS Vision. The data pipeline will be as automated as possible to enable light-touch maintenance going forward.

Transformation and Innovation

16. The high quality and innovative statistics the GSS deliver are created through an interconnected data estate and contribute to a unified evidence base, planning today to inform public and decision makers of what they need to know tomorrow.

17. 'Focus on' sessions are planned to better share methodological expertise across the GSS. The first session will be on Statistical Disclosure Control and run with HoPs as a pilot.

18. Challenges remain with the implementation of the strategy. Resourcing is the primary challenge. Whilst much of the progress towards implementing the GSS Vision has been led by volunteers from across the GSS there is also a need for a permanent central GSS support team to coordinate these initiatives, provide secretariat support, lead on recruitment and induction, et cetera. There is a need for sustainable funding for this central GSS support team that is ringfenced from other ONS funding. HoPs need to have visibility of and influence the priorities for this GSS central resource to ensure delivery of this GSS Vision for the community.

19. A challenge raised by many through departmental engagement is the future role of a statistician and whether there is a need for a separate data science profession. This will be considered within the work with the RSS but also needs to align with discussions held by DDaNs and the Analysis Function Board. These are yet to draw a clear conclusion.

Conclusion

20. This paper has set out the progress that has been made towards finalising, launching and implementing the GSS Vision and Strategic Delivery Plan. Progress has been made on specific actions; some 'quick wins', others more strategic in nature. We welcome steers on our plans, progress and the challenges faced.

Jane Naylor, Chief Statistician, Department for Business and Trade, 17 September 2024

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Integrated Data Service – September 2024 Update

Purpose

1. This paper provides an update on the progress of the Integrated Data Programme (IDP), responsible for the delivery of the Integrated Data Service (IDS).

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority Board are invited to:

    i. note the IDP update and delivery confidence assessment;
    ii. note the progress that has been made with indexed datasets and analysis projects; and
    iii. note engagement with HM Treasury on the Spending Review and discussions relating to the National Data Library (NDL).

Discussion

Programme Update

3. The May and June papers to the Board identified ten Critical Success Factors (CSF) that need to be met in order for the programme to succeed. Monthly outcome-based 'Maturity States' have been defined for each CSF with a milestone plan to enable their delivery. The August Programme Board agreed the milestone plan for August and September, and the September Board will review the plan for October to December.

4. The Infrastructure and Project Authority (IPA) conducted an Independent Peer Review of the IDP in June 2024 making nine priority recommendations. The review team returned to conduct a desk-based stock take on these recommendations in early August and concluded that significant progress had been made in all areas, including on the IDP plan. They made no further recommendations but noted significant challenges and uncertainties remained, particularly around ongoing data acquisition.

Service Maturity, Volumes and Analysis Priorities

5. Our decision in June 2024 to prioritise high value analysis by government analysts above the transition of users of the Secure Research Service will result in fewer active users of the IDS than previously envisaged in the short to medium term. However, our activities are focussed on the datasets, users and analysis projects that deliver the most benefit to policy and decision making.

6. The current highest priority analysis project, has the potential to enable a step change in the evidence available for planning healthcare prevention, prescribing, and hospital interventions. We are also exploring programmes of analysis with a number of Local Authority partners relating to devolution and local growth..

7. Management Information about the performance of the service is in the process of being automated. Improved definition of the business processes and the journeys of datasets, users and analysis projects through those processes will enable development of more transparent management information through the autumn.

Public Engagement on the Use of Integrated Data for Research and Statistics

8. The ethics and public good of the research carried out through the IDS are assured through the UK Statistics Authority's Research Accreditation Panel (RAP). This independent, transparent oversight of the service and specific analysis projects will become ever more important as we increase the breadth of datasets and analyses.

9. We are currently working with RAP to broaden the scope of analysis projects to wider 'programmes' that enable faster and more flexible use. In parallel, we are partnering with the

Public Engagement on Research and Data Initiative (PEDRI)) to develop a public engagement strategy to develop trust in the service as it grows.

Look Ahead

10. Alongside ongoing planning and delivery, and continued negotiation of data sharing agreements, we are actively engaging across Government ensuring alignment with the Government's five Missions, including the projects mentioned above.

11. We are also in discussion the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology (DIST) at all levels to ensure alignment with emerging plans for a NDL as set out in the Labour Party Manifesto, which will "bring together existing research programmes to help deliver data-driven public services - with strong safeguards- to ensure all of the public benefit".

12. This is reflected in our discussions with HM Treasury for the one-year Spending Review this autumn and the expected review for future years in the spring.

Programme Delivery Confidence

13. The Programme's delivery confidence remains at Amber-Red and we expect this to return to Amber in the autumn as we:

    i.   baseline the Service Operating Model and Service Standards;
    ii.   baseline and deliver against the plan for October to December;
    iii. deliver high value datasets and analyses;
    iv.   clarify the relationship to the NDL; and
    v.   agree the Spending Review settlement for 2024/25.

Pete Benton, IDP Senior Responsible Owner, Nigel Green, IDP Programme Director General, and Jason Yaxley, IDP Programme Director, 19 September 2024

Strategic Risk Profile update

Purpose

1. This paper provides the UK Statistics Authority Board (the Board) with an update on the strategic risk profile following liaison with strategic risk owners and discussions at the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) on 12 September 2024.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Board are invited to:

    i.   review analysis of the wider strategic risk profile, including exposure scores against risk appetite and approve the updated risk appetite range for Strategic Risk (SR) 8; and

    ii. review the analysis of the strategic risk owned by the National Statistician, overseen by the Board – 'Independence, Trustworthiness and Impact' .

Background

3. The strategic risk profile demonstrates the most significant risks to the successful delivery of the UK Statistics Authority Strategy and priority outcomes, owned by the UK Statistics Authority senior leadership. The latest version of the strategic risk profile and appetite ranges were signed off by the Board at its February 2024 meeting alongside an update on the UK Statistics Authority Strategic Risk Profile.

Discussion

Independence and trustworthiness risk

4. Despite the increased handling risks related to the general election and transition to a new Government, the organisation navigated this period well, effectively implementing additional controls including an election coordination group, guidance and briefings, review of release calendars and manifestos meant we navigated the period with minimal incident. We have launched a Missions Working Group to ensure we are coordinated across the office to the emerging needs of the new government, prioritising resource effectively whilst maintaining our independence.

5. Executive Committee (ExCo) and the Board have provided increased scrutiny and challenge over key risk areas and areas of delivery challenge which has supported improvements in our control frameworks and our ability to address issues that could impact our reputation and trustworthiness.

6. Following the delays due to the pre-election period we remain committed to publishing the Future of Population and Migration Statistics recommendation, and our response to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee report on Transforming the UK Evidence Base, with the response to the Lievesley Review published on 4 September 2024.

7. Office for Statistics Regulation continues to use a full range of regulatory tools and makes no distinction between Office for National Statistics (ONS) and other producers, with clear mitigations in place to safeguard its independence.

8. Results from the Public Confidence in Official Statistics (published in May 2024) demonstrates consistently high levels of awareness and trust in official statistics.

Wider Strategic Risk Profile

9. The Authority has largely been operating within the Board agreed risk appetite ranges. SR6 'Our Communications' has recently come back into risk appetite (June 2024) however, SR3 'Quality statistics' continues to operate outside of appetite.

10. SR1 'Ensuring our statistics and analysis keep pace with changing priorities': the Strategic Outputs Committee (SOC) approved a recommendation to increase the risk score, reflecting the conscious trade-off to protect the quality of our core statistics, taking increased risk where our appetite allows to ensure we are operating within resource constraints, limiting our ability to respond to new priorities for analysis.

11. SR3 'Quality Statistics': actions on the route to green plan have largely been completed, however, we are seeking assurance that statistical output areas (and enabling areas where there are dependencies) have sufficient resources, capability, and improvement plans in place to reduce our risk exposure and protect the quality of priority outputs. There is little improvement to key metrics (although there have been no major errors since December 2023) with a large number of quality risks scoring above appetite (160) and a lack of assurance these can be mitigated. Key themes include resourcing and skills, as well as poor-quality data and legacy systems.

12. SR6 'Our Communications': the addition of new controls, key enhancements to our website and external communications led to this risk returning within appetite in June 2024. A plan has been developed to ensure the longer-term stability of the website which is overseen by the Legacy Oversight Group reporting to Portfolio Investment Committee (PIC) and ExCo to ensure that the new website is fit for purpose in meeting user needs.

13. SR8 'Inclusivity in our statistics and analysis': following a deep dive in August 2024, SOC approved a reduction in likelihood following significant steps taken to strengthen the approach to inclusive data both within ONS and cross government and successful progress towards the delivery of the Inclusive Data Taskforce commitments. To align with the organisation's ambition to be inclusive in our statistics and analysis, we recommend that the risk appetite range is reduced from 12-20 to 9-16 to reflect our cautious to open risk appetite to inclusivity.

14. SR12 'Technological resilience': following executive challenge, development of a set of realistic plans for achievable legacy reductions have been delivered. Plans for this financial year address the biggest risks and maintain the risk at the top end of appetite with a new 'Legacy Oversight Group' in place to assure the delivery of plans, which will report to PIC and ExCo quarterly.

15. Strategic resourcing continues to be an area that is reported as impacting a number of the strategic risks. Key concerns include turnover rates for critical roles; capacity and capability to deliver new or emerging priorities and ensure quality; and the impact of this on our workforce. An extraordinary People Committee in August 2024 agreed a new, simplified and streamlined strategic resourcing process with greater flexibility, and control for Directors. A new and improved strategic resourcing dashboard is being created which better meets the insight requirements of the business to make informed strategic resourcing decisions.

16. Existing controls such as demand management, prioritisation and business planning (including situational appraisals, intelligence gathering and insight from the Missions Working Group) will be key in managing budget constraints. The Risk and Assurance team are assured that the processes and controls needed are in place, but this remains a difficult challenge for the organisation and strong leadership will be key to ensure prioritisation is accompanied by stopping or reducing activities as required, which in turn could have positive impacts for the resourcing concerns previously mentioned.

Conclusion
17. Controls are operating effectively overall, as supported by stable or improving metrics and assurance activities with the organisation managing all but one of its strategic risks within appetite (SR3). It is noted that this risk and SR1 (which has seen an increased risk score) are citing resourcing issues as prevalent causes. The executive has responded to this with new processes being introduced to help overcome the challenges, which will need to be monitored to ensure they deliver the improvements required, especially as we enter the next Spending Review period with potential for further budget reductions over the next year. We must ensure

we are able to respond at pace and make difficult decisions in line with the agreed processes which exist. The Board is asked to approve the reduction in risk appetite for SR8.

Natalie Tarr, Head of Assurance, Kirsty Campion, Head of Risk, ONS, 17 September 2024