

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Regulation Committee

Minutes

Thursday 20 March 2025

Remote Meeting

13:00-15:00

Members Present

Professor Dame Carol Propper (Chair)

Peter Barron

Sir Robert Chote

Ed Humpherson

Professor Sir David Spiegelhalter

Other Attendees

Penny Babb (for item 5)

Oliver Fox-Tatum (for item 4)

Caroline Jones (for item 3)

Rob Kent-Smith

Marie McGhee (for item 5)

Helen Miller-Bakewell

Yente Meijers (for item 3)

Nicky Pearce

Gail Rankin

Siobhan Tuohy-Smith

Observing

Graham Brennan

James Renwick

Secretariat

Kate Beeslee

Sally Jones

Fran Wigley-Jones

Apologies

None

1. Apologies, Minutes and Matters Arising

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. No apologies were received.
- 1.2 Peter Barron was welcomed to his first meeting as a member of the Regulation Committee.
- 1.3 The minutes of the meeting on 6 February 2025 were approved, and actions were reviewed.

2. Update from the Director General for Regulation SA(RC)(25)11

- 2.1 The Director General (DG) for Regulation provided the Committee with an overview of the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) priorities and activities and highlighted some of the key areas of focus since the last meeting.
- 2.2 There had been several public outputs since the previous meeting. OSR had liaised with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) about the need for weekly excess death statistics to be clearer about which deaths were included in the data. ONS had been receptive to feedback. OSR had published a research report on how individuals use official statistics in personal decision-making which gave clear, actionable recommendations for producers. The Sullivan Review exploring the collection of data on sex and gender had been published on 19 March by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology. OSR had received 208 cases between April 2024 and March 2025.
- 2.3 Members discussed the update and agreed that, on mortality statistics, the pattern on death statistics would be clearer if distribution was given by date of death rather than date of registration. It was also noted that the Sullivan Report would be discussed at the Authority Board meeting the following week.
- 2.4 The Committee noted the update.

3. Economic Statistics Update – Trade Statistics SA(RC)(25)12

- 3.1 OSR provided an update on the review of ONS UK Trade Statistics which had been deaccredited in 2014. OSR recommended that the statistics were not yet suitable for reaccreditation and ONS had been given six months to review four new requirements. OSR had been working with ONS to identify the reasons for recent errors within data, which had delayed publication of the UK Trade Bulletin. Recommendation 5 in the report supported ONS addressing resourcing to mitigate future errors.
- 3.2 Members discussed the update and agreed that explicit reference should be made in the report to the recent error identified during quality assurance which had caused delayed publishing.
- 3.3 Members approved the report, plans for publication and agreed not to reaccredit ONS Trade Statistics at this point. The report would be published in April.

4. Economic Statistics Update – Wealth and Assets Survey Statistics SA(RC)(25)12

- 4.1 OSR provided an update on the review of statistics from the Wealth and Assets Survey (WAS) and shared preliminary findings. The review found that the statistics did not meet the needs of users and no longer complied with the Code of Practice for Statistics (the Code) and OSR recommended that accreditation of the statistics from the WAS should be removed.
- 4.2 The following points were raised in discussion:
 - i. there was need to be up front about limitations and uncertainties to ensure trustworthiness and alignment with the Code;
 - ii. an underlying problem was that resource had been moved from WAS statistics to the Labour Force Survey which had increased the risk around quality of WAS statistics; and

- iii. should ONS request deaccreditation, the report would still be published, but with relevant amendments.
- 4.3 Members noted the update, supported the draft report, and supported the OSR recommendation to formally remove the accreditation of the statistics if the ONS did not request removal of accreditation in advance of publication. The draft report would be updated following further engagement with the ONS. If significant changes were made then OSR would share the report again with the Committee via correspondence. If not, then the DG for Regulation will sign off the final report before publication.

5. Economic Statistics Update – Economic Statistics Review SA(RC)(25)12

- 5.1 OSR provided an update on emerging findings from the review of Economic Statistics produced by the ONS. Following additional engagement, the OSR had taken a firmer tone in the report and added an additional requirement.
- 5.2 The following points were raised in discussion:
- i. the review remained an important piece of work and initial reactions were sensible;
 - ii. there was need to reflect on how far the report should consider the internal structure of the ONS;
 - iii. members agreed the updated tone of the report was impactful, with good emotional intelligence;
 - iv. there should be a brief explanation around the lack of staff confidence in the executive summary in order to avoid comments that the issue had been hidden in the detail of the report;
 - v. it was important for the ONS to address limitations and early warnings; and
 - vi. issues around resourcing should be brought out in the pitch of the report.
- 5.3 Members noted the report and plans for publication. It was agreed that as discussions were ongoing with ONS should the content of the report change significantly it would be circulated to members in correspondence ahead of publication. .

6. Comparability SA(RC)(25)13

- 6.1 OSR presented emerging findings and recommendations from the review of the adequacy of UK-wide comparable statistics and data. The review was in response to the March 2024 Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee Transforming the UK's Evidence Base report which recommended that OSR 'review and publish a report on the adequacy of UK-wide comparable data, by themes, before April 2025'.
- 6.2 The Committee heard that the UK statistical system was getting stronger on coherence (understanding the differences between statistics) but arguably weaker on having UK comparable statistics. Members were asked to provide guidance on where OSR could add impact and drive change.
- 6.3 The following points were raised in discussion:
- i. the importance of understanding user needs for UK comparable statistics and the priorities of each of the four nations, noting that this would require strategic oversight to support decisions around when comparability is seen as beneficial, or when it is considered essential;
 - ii. members questioned if UK statistics comparability issues should be funded at a UK level, rather than by individual countries;
 - iii. the economic advantages of harmonisation could be highlighted more, drawing on examples from other countries, where available, of where harmonisation had led to economic gain;

- iv. members agreed that the concept set out for a potential Framework of Comparability in the appendix of the report was a good practical tool to help understand the current landscape of comparable statistics and should be built upon.
- 6.4 Members noted the update. A further draft report would be shared with the Committee with developed thinking and focus.

7. Code Update SA(RC)(25)14

- 7.1 OSR provided an update on the Code of Practice for Statistics (the Code). The Code consultation had received over 60 responses which had been reviewed to provide a clear steer on next steps. OSR sought the Committee's approval to move to the next phase and produce a findings paper summarising the consultation and next steps.
- 7.2 Members noted the update, and approved plans to move forward with next steps. The Code 3.0 would be developed with feedback received from the consultation and from Committee members and a further draft would be shared with Committee at the next meeting in June.

8. OSR Strategy Development and Business Planning SA(RC)(25)15

- 8.1 OSR provided an update on the OSR Strategy development, Business Planning and Spending Review (SR) submission. An update was provided on stakeholder engagement and options for growth which had been guided by the Zero-Based Review (ZBR). The Committee heard that the next part of the exercise would be to explore regulatory personas to develop how OSR would work in the future.
- 8.2 Members noted the update and agreed that when the Authority Strategy, and ONS and OSR Business Plans were published there should be a consistent way of graphically visualising how the new Strategy would manifest itself over the next five years across the two arms of the Authority, and where resources were being allocated.

9. Horizon Scanning/ Any other Business

- 9.1 The DG for Regulation raised recent developments in the United States of America Statistical System and how they should be observed when considering the UK Statistical System. It was important that the next Authority Strategy reinstated the benefit of having an independence in the Statistical System and the importance of the role of the OSR in serving the public good.

10. Any Other Business

- 10.1 The Committee would next meet on Thursday 5 June 2025.

Regulation Committee Actions and Supplementary Information

Date	No	Item ref	Action	Update / Status
20.03.25	4	Code Update SA(RC)(25)14	OSR to share the draft Code with Committee members by correspondence.	Ongoing:
20.03.25		Update from the Director General for Regulation SA(RC)(25)11	The Committee heard that OSR had written privately to the ONS to flag that planning was taking place around regulatory work for the 2031 Census.	
20.03.25		Update from the Director General for Regulation SA(RC)(25)11	The Committee heard that the ONS had discussed the quality of the WAS and had worked with OSR regarding quality issues. The Committee noted their concerns that concerns about the accreditation of these statistics had been flagged at working level, but senior managers decided against requesting deaccreditation.	