
Emma Rourke | Acting National Statistician

Simon Hoare MP
Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

7 July 2025

Dear Mr Hoare,

During the evidence session with your Committee on 1 July, I committed to follow-up in writing with further detail.

I mentioned action we had taken on culture prior to Sir Robert Devereux's review at a corporate level. This included an organisational review of psychological safety across the Senior Civil Service (SCS) cadre of the Office for National Statistics (ONS). This was commissioned by PBS (People and Business Services) and undertaken by Labyrinth Coaching & Consulting (LCC) from January to March 2023 and explored concerns raised at an earlier SCS away-day. It offered an objective assessment of the current landscape in relation to psychological safety, to challenge where needed, and to work with the ONS executive to make recommendations to improve the experience of psychological safety for both senior leaders and for colleagues more broadly. The report is annexed to this letter. Actions taken as a result included:

- Creating a clearer system for managing prioritisation of activities.
- Streamlining our governance structure to clarify how decisions are made and communicated.
- An in-depth discussion on psychological safety and related behaviours at an all-SCS event.
- Additional focus given to our Speak Up framework, which we also refreshed in 2024.

Since late 2023, the ONS has offered a series of webinars, workshops and self-directed learning courses to Grade 6 and 7 colleagues to assist with leading and managing change. We also produced an internal 'Your Experience' report for 2024, which pulled together employee engagement insights, both qualitative and quantitative, from the People Survey and other employee surveys. This was shared internally across the ONS, and colleagues were encouraged to reflect on the themes (such as

leadership and managing change, organisation objectives and purpose, wellbeing, inclusion, and learning and development) and implement action to improve experiences both individually and as part of their teams.

This is not an exhaustive list but highlights corporate level work that was complemented by team level actions that drew upon People Survey results and other data relevant to individual ONS divisions and teams.

During the session, I also agreed to provide the number of SCS in the ONS who are badged statisticians. I can confirm that as of June 2025, there are 27 badged statisticians (30%) within the SCS, of these 22 are at SCS1, 4 at SCS2, and 1 at SCS3. There are a range of skills required throughout our senior leadership team, with many aligning to professions such as the Government Economic Service, Government Digital and Data, and Operational Delivery.

We also discussed several senior leadership appointments within the ONS that have taken place in the last few years, on which I said I would provide more information.

The Director for Operations role description is annexed for the Committee's information. This role was created on the direction of the then National Statistician, in response to the departure of the Second Permanent Secretary and considering a tight financial operating environment. The Cabinet Office confirmed that as Accounting Officer, the National Statistician had the ability to do this. This was a broadening of an existing role at the same substantive level, which is common practice across the Civil Service. The Operations Group brings together enabling and delivery functions across the organisation.

We also spoke about the Second Permanent Secretary role. To my understanding, this role was introduced in September 2020, working with the Cabinet Office. The addition of a Second Permanent Secretary provided support to the leadership of the organisation during an extremely busy time for the ONS, including delivering the 2021 Census and the associated demands of the Covid-19 pandemic response, such as the running of the Covid-19 Infection Survey.

I also wanted to clarify detail on the leadership of the data capability group. Alison Pritchard, Director General for Data Capability went on sick leave in February 2024. Pete Benton, who was Director General of Special Projects at the time, was asked in February 2024 to cover this position, initially on an interim basis, supporting the leadership team in the business area. Given this timing I can confirm that there was not the gap in operational leadership, as I had said at the session. Pete was then formally made Senior Responsible Owner for the Integrated Data Programme (IDP) from mid-April 2024 which encapsulated the full strategic and leadership role.

To my understanding, in March 2024, Nigel Green was brought in by the then National Statistician, with the agreement of the Cabinet Office, to support the IDP. Nigel is a fixed-term contractor working two days a week at Director General level. He has

operated as the delivery lead for the IDP, complementing Pete's strategic oversight as SRO. He does not have any line management responsibilities.

I hope this is helpful. I look forward to our next discussion on 8 July.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Authority, Sir Robert Chote.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Emma Rourke'.

Emma Rourke