

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

National Statistician's Expert User Advisory Committee

Minutes

Monday 28 July 2025

London Boardroom/Hybrid

Members Present

Dame Kate Barker (Chair)
Professor Paul Boyle
James Brooks
Professor Paul Allin
Helen Boaden
Dr Sarah Cumbers
Ed Humpherson
Phyllis MacFarlane
Sarah Moore
Guy Nason
Emma Rourke

Other Attendees

June Bowman
Grant Fitzner (for item 3)
Nicola Fulton (for item 4)
Yente Meijers (Shadowing Ed Humpherson)
Esther Taylor (for item 5)
Neil Townsend (for item 4)

Secretariat

Kate Beeslee
Kerri Gourley

Apologies

Eva Aizpurua

1. Apologies, minutes, and matters arising

- 1.1 Members were welcomed to the meeting. Apologies were received from Eva Aizpurua. The minutes of the meeting on 10 February were approved and actions were updated. The Chair asked that due dates for action are specified in future.
- 1.2 Members each gave a short introduction about themselves and on action 05/24 Prof. Paul Allin highlighted that he was looking to bring together a group of stakeholders with an interest in homelessness through work with Shelter UK. He wanted to ensure work was not duplicated so would be keen for an update on the work ONS was undertaking.

2. Introduction from the new National Statistician's Expert User Advisory Committee (NSEUAC) Chair (oral update)

- 2.1 Dame Kate Barker introduced herself as the new NSEUAC Chair and invited Acting National Statistician Emma Rourke to discuss how the committee would be most useful. The following key points were made:
 - i. The National Statistician role was being separated into two roles and the implications for the organisation in terms of responsibilities were being worked through. It was also noted that the new Director General (DG) for the Economic, Social and Environmental Group (ESEG) would be starting shortly;
 - ii. members discussed how NSEUAC should interact with the ONS as the organisation was going through a period of prioritisation and it would be important for NSEUAC to be involved to help the prioritisation process;
 - iii. there were fundamental questions around Census 2031 which would need to be answered; and
 - iv. it would be important for NSUEAC members to be trusted partners for the organisation but also ensure they represented the experiences of users of statistics and provided constructive challenge.

3. Economic Statistics and Survey Plans [NSEUAC(25)03]

- 3.1 Grant Fitzner presented an update on the progress of the Economic Statistics (ESP) plan and Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan post Devereux Review. The following key points were made:
 - i. more statisticians were required within the organisation and the medium to long term goal of the organisation would be to get the skills balance correct;
 - ii. on the short-term deployment challenge a workshop had taken place assessing the feasibility and deliverability of the ESP
 - iii. when the new ESEG DG started decisions on governance would be made including more engagement with senior stakeholders;
 - iv. skills breakdown by location was discussed;
 - v. ONS office locations and disparity in pay between ONS and other Government Departments had caused recruitment challenges. However, recently the Manchester site had been successful in recruiting methodologists so the organisation was looking to build on this;
 - vi. following the Bernanke review in 2024 it was highlighted that the Bank of England was also looking to recruit in similar areas to the ONS;
 - vii. Government apprentices in Economic Statistics had been a good way of attracting good quality candidates;

- viii. it would be important have a sustainable level of staffing to ensure that the organisation had the resource to address arising issues;
- ix. culture and what tangible things had been done to improve culture within the organisation. It was noted that there were not any specifics in the plan on training related to cultural change and it was clear a broader cultural change plan would be required;
- x. there had been an ongoing process where staff were asked to speak about their experiences and this had highlighted the variety of experiences within the organisation;
- xi. as leadership was integral to driving cultural change Senior Civil Servants should be the immediate focus and it was highlighted that having committees with external membership would help to open up culture;
- xii. the use of technology was also discussed and what it can do to help engagement;
- xiii. it would be important to ensure that there was a reasonable level of consultation on decision making and would be helpful to see a diagram of the various ESEG advisory panels and where NSEUAC sits within this as this would help NSEUAC to be clear on its remit; and
- xiv. as recruitment was a challenge across the statistical system members agreed it would be useful if a small group of committee members could supply evidence on recruitment approaches within other organisations.

4. User Engagement Strategy [NSEUAC(25)04]

- 4.1 Sarah Moore introduced a paper on the early plans for the User Engagement Strategy Refresh. This had been recommended in the Lievesley Review that the ONS needed to increase User Engagement. The following key points were made:
- i. work had been ongoing across the Government Statistical Service and the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) related to best practice around user engagement;
 - ii. initial findings were that users wanted to be engaged early as this was integral to dealing with issues early and gaining a rapport with users;
 - iii. making engagement with the ONS easier would be crucial ensuring the organisation was accessible to the public;
 - iv. members questioned what success looked like to enable the ONS to assess how successful the strategy had been;
 - v. it was highlighted the strategy needed to be more specific highlighting how levels and means of engagement were changing. The strategy should outline things that are being done differently;
 - vi. although the UK Statistics Assembly was successful there were notably few people attending from the business community. The ONS conducted a large number of business surveys and it would be advantageous to get feedback on how these processes could be simplified;
 - vii. members would be keen to see a more holistic approach to user engagement with greater engagement with the business community as this would assist with building business survey response rates;
 - viii. OSR had conducted a small-scale piece of research on users of statistics which would be helpful to bring to a future committee as it would link to barriers to trust and improve transparency. It would also be useful to have a further item on Business Engagement come to the committee;

- ix. it was noted that this was the first stage of the strategy and the next step would be convening a delivery group or roundtable to get a realistic understanding of what users want;
- x. members agreed it would be helpful for the User Engagement Strategy to return to NSEUAC with specific next steps;
- xi. the Assembly was a good starting point for user engagement however it would be important to outline how the event would be carried forward to get the correct users in the room giving expertise on specific issues; and
- xii. it would be important to get users feedback on outputs the ONS was planning to stop to ensure decisions were well-founded.

5. Future of Population and Migration Statistics [NSEUAC(25)05]

- 5.1 Esther Taylor introduced a paper on the Future of Population and Migration Statistics following the recommendation to the UK Government and the subsequent response from the UK Government commissioning a mandatory, questionnaire-based census of England and Wales. The following key points were made:
- i. members welcomed the news that a Census in 2031 would be held as there was a view among some members that Administrative Data was not developed enough to provide all the outputs currently required. The role of the UK Statistics Assembly in influencing the Census decision was acknowledged;
 - ii. there had been ongoing engagement (including the 2023 consultation and UK Statistics Assembly) which would continue as a key part of the Census timetable. The 2025 topic consultation was due to take place in Autumn 2025 which would inform topics for inclusion on the questionnaire;
 - iii. members discussed the composition of the Census Taskforce and heard it would bring together experts from across ONS, working closely with prominent stakeholders and the Devolved Administrations;
 - iv. the practicalities of having administrative based research running parallel to Census was discussed and how the overarching governance would bring the two together;
 - v. OSR would be viewing the administrative based research separately from Census 2031, giving assessments on both;
 - vi. the contribution from the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) to the Census Consultation was discussed and they would continue to contribute to support with the aim of increasing responses and ensuring varied opinions were heard;
 - vii. the RSS was due to hold a series of round tables to look at statistical challenges across the system which could inform ONS' work, one of these was on the use of Administrative Data;
 - viii. a single platform for Census had been planned across the UK with the intention of Censuses taking place at the same time to help with collective engagement;
 - ix. members agreed that the committee should firmly represent users' views to the National Statistician; and
 - x. members agreed that it would be helpful to have an update on the parallel 2031 Censuses being run in Scotland and Northern Ireland at a future committee.

6. Any other business

- 6.1 Members heard that an Assembly Progress Report would be published on the UK Statistics Authority website to provide a specific update in the autumn, with a link circulated to attendees as a means of continuing involvement with stakeholders.
- 6.2 The purpose of the committee was discussed, and it was agreed that the Committee's purpose would be clearer once a new Permanent Secretary was recruited however it would be useful to see a diagram of the various advisory committees to define better NSEUAC's role in relation to the other advisory committees.
- 6.3 The next meeting was due to take place via teams on 22 September 2025.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

NATIONAL STATISTICIAN'S EXPERT USER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Agenda

Monday 28 July 2025, 14:00-16:00

London Boardroom/ Hybrid

Chair: Dame Kate Barker

Apologies: Professor Paul Boyle

Timing	Agenda item	
1 14:00-14:10 (10 mins)	Welcome, previous minutes and actions	Meeting of 10.02.2025 Dame Kate Barker
2 14:10-14:20 (10 mins)	Introduction from the new NSEUAC Chair	Oral Update Dame Kate Barker
3 14:20-14:50 (30 mins)	Economic Statistics and Survey Plans	NSEUAC(25)03 Grant Fitzner
4 14:50-15:20 (30 mins)	User Engagement Strategy	NSEUAC(25)04 Sarah Moore
5 15:20-15:50 (30 mins)	Future of Population and Migration Statistics	NSEUAC(25)05 Jason Zawadzki
6 15:50-16:00 (10 mins)	Any Other Business	Dame Kate Barker

Next Meeting: Monday 22 September 2025, Remote

Supplementary Information

7	UK Statistics Authority Assembly Evaluation	Information Paper
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Introduction from the New NSEUAC Chair
Oral Update

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

NATIONAL STATISTICIAN'S EXPERT USER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

NSEUAC(25)03

Economic Statistics Plan Update

Purpose

1. This paper provides an update on progress of the Economic Statistics Plan (ESP).
2. Members of NSEUAC are invited to:
 - i. note the current position with mobilising implementation of the ESP, including emerging concerns with resourcing of the plan (human and financial); and
 - ii. note steps being taken to establish appropriate governance and assurance.

Background

3. The ONS economic statistics plan, [Restoring confidence, improving quality: The plan for ONS economic statistics](#), was published on 26 June 2025 alongside the Devereux Review and our [Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan](#) (SEIP). It sets out a five-year vision for sustainably improving the quality of UK's core economic statistics and implementing new international statistical standards. Successful delivery of elements of the SEIP, including the new Statistical Business Register, is a key dependency.
4. Whilst ESP is the key focus, it is not the totality of Economic, Social and Environment Group (ESEG) business. Priority work includes Crime and subnational statistics, both of which receive external funding.
5. The Plan is a live document. It will be updated annually to ensure it delivers its intended outcomes and meets the evolving needs of users and stakeholders.

Discussion

6. Current progress on implementing ESP can be considered across three strands:
 - i. **Resourcing:** Ensuring people and budgets are released to deliver the Plan; this includes sufficient capability to ensure statistical production can be carried out sustainably, with increased focus on quality and continuous improvement;
 - ii. **Systems:** Changes to the data, platforms, software and processes to improve the quality of our statistics; this includes improvements to data collection, moving off legacy systems and using Reproducible Analytical Pipelines; and
 - iii. **Delivery and assurance:** Developing governance, project management and assurance to provide the structure and accountability needed; this includes detailed implementation plans, aligning ESP milestones with Office for National Statistics (ONS) business plans, and establish appropriate governance structures and assurance to ensure effective review, monitoring, challenge and decision-making.

Resourcing

7. Delivering the Plan requires additional human and financial resourcing. An Executive Committee Task and Finish Group has identified significant resources which can be released to fund the plan. However, there are affordability

challenges which need to be carefully managed, particularly in 2025-26, given the flat cash budget settlement.

8. Securing sufficient staff for the ESP remains a key challenge. Staff are being deployed from lower priority areas in ESEG and wider ONS. However, staff movements will not be sufficient to deliver the Plan, due to a skills/capability mismatch. Alongside that, we are drawing on reserve lists and – where necessary – external recruitment to fill posts in our core economic statistics directorates. Funding constraints in supporting directorates remain a concern and, unless addressed, will impact our ability to deliver all elements of the Plan.
9. An update on progress with staff deployment will be provided at the meeting.

Systems

10. Many of the Plan's deliverables focus on building more resilient statistical systems, including moving from reliance on legacy IT system. A key focus will be making our statistical production workflows reproducible, mainly through automation, by building Reproducible Analytical Pipelines where they do not yet exist. This will be reinforced by improving ways of working in two key areas:
 - i. **Continuous Improvement:** Efforts are also focused on equipping production teams with the modern skills and tools needed to implement incremental improvements systems and processes at both modular, end-to-end pipeline, and statistical systems levels; and
 - ii. **Quality Excellence (QE):** Previously piloted within ESEG and Health, Population and Methods, QE enables production teams to identify operational pinch points and areas for improvement. Plans are underway to further exploit this capability across Economic Statistics Change (ESC), Methods and Quality Directorate (MQD), and Finance, Planning and Performance (FPP). The aim is to embed this method in priority areas to drive actionable improvements.

Delivery and assurance

11. Work to ensure a joined-up approach to delivery and maximising the impact of planned investments is in motion, with progress including an all-day planning workshop held on 23 July and development of a detailed implementation plan.
12. Further planning, coordination and delivery assurance work underway includes:
 - i. tracking progress through business-level milestones, updated monthly;
 - ii. reviews with theme leads, clarifying detailed scope and end to end plans;
 - iii. finalising a detailed roadmap for sequencing and implementing the International Macroeconomic Statistical Standards (IMSS) part of the Plan; and
 - iv. alignment with the Survey Enhancement and Improvement plan, enabling functions, and major programmes across ONS.
13. A proportionate governance structure and monitoring and assurance framework is being developed with Planning and Performance colleagues. While ESP is not a formal programme, programmatic principles will guide delivery and accountability.

Priority Outcomes and Strategic Risks

14. This work plays a key part in delivering Priority Outcome Two and bringing Strategic Risk Seven (Quality economics statistics) back into tolerance through its focus on delivering end-to-end quality improvements for our core economic statistics.

Conclusion

15. The ESP represents a critical step forward in delivering a modern, sustainable, and high-quality economic statistics system for the UK. The next few weeks will be pivotal in shaping detailed implementation of the Plan, establishing governance and assurance, and deploying staff into teams.
16. While early progress is encouraging, particularly in mobilising resources and aligning delivery across the organisation, challenges remain – most notably in building workforce capacity quickly and tackling affordability constraints in support areas, indicating the possible need for clearer prioritisation.

Lisa Evans, Deputy Director, Economic Statistics Change and Grant Fitzner, Acting Director General, Economic, Social and Environmental Statistics Group, ONS, 21 July 2025

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY
NATIONAL STATISTICIAN'S EXPERT USER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

NSEUAC(25)04

User Engagement Strategy Refresh

Purpose

1. This paper provides details of early plans for a user engagement strategy refresh, for feedback and comment at the National Statistician's Expert User Advisory Committee (NSEUAC).

Timing

2. Given the frequency of committee meetings, we want to bring the strategy to members at this point to ensure we gather input at an early stage.

Recommendations

3. Members of NSEUAC are invited to provide comment on the initial approach and plans for a user engagement strategy refresh, particularly:
 - i. views on what an effective user engagement strategy looks like for users;
 - ii. feedback on the conditions of success that we need to create; and
 - iii. advise what involvement they want in both developing this work and assessing its success.

Background

4. The UK Statistics Assembly was held in January 2025 following a recommendation in Professor Denise Lievesley's independent review of the UK Statistics Authority (the Authority), which cited: "engagement and communication with users of statistics" as a recommendation for development, and called for an Assembly which should "determine the UK's needs for statistics through a wide consultative process".
5. In the independent report written by this Committee following the Assembly, the following priority was identified to:
 - i. "Re-invigorate sustained and effective user engagement, in which official statistics producers take a lead in understanding the needs for statistics and curating relevant sources, to help answer the questions that the public, businesses, local government, the media and academics, as well as policy-makers have about the economic, social and environmental situation. This would also help understand and increase the value of statistics."
6. A high-level ambition for user engagement will be set out in the forthcoming update of the Authority's five-year strategy. We will develop a more detailed and specific Office for National Statistics (ONS) user engagement strategy and plan that sits beneath this and work with the wider Government Statistical Service (GSS) to ensure alignment across the statistical system. We are conscious of the need to join up across the statistical system whilst mindful that ONS cannot commit resources or make decisions on behalf of other departments.
7. This is a user engagement strategy; there are other strands of work alongside this strategy focusing on engaging with citizens and other stakeholders such as

data suppliers and privacy groups. Although this strategy will focus predominantly on producer engagement, we will work with the Office for Statistics Regulation to ensure there is alignment of this strategy with their work as part of the Authority.

Discussion

8. Effective user engagement is critical for ONS to enable us to enhance transparency and accountability, build trust and understanding with our users and establish strong relationships. These relationships will enable us to make informed decisions based on user needs and impact, and help us identify early risks, roadblocks, gaps or quality issues.
9. We want to ensure that this is a user-centric strategy, and based on insight gathered to date, propose that success for users would mean they:
 - i. are engaged early in planning and development, and always see the feedback loop closed including acknowledgement of unmet needs;
 - ii. find it easy to understand how to engage with us, and know who to contact and how to find relevant fora and feedback routes on releases;
 - iii. experience two-way, ongoing engagement rather than one-off transactions;
 - iv. clearly understand the purpose of the engagement; and
 - v. can contribute in different levels of detail based on their needs and interests, avoiding a 'one size fits all' model.
10. For ONS, success would mean:
 - i. our statistics are regularly cited and used in decision making and policy documents, with users promoting our statistics and the trustworthiness of ONS;
 - ii. processes are in place to gather feedback continuously from users both formally and informally, and that insight is used to inform better decisions;
 - iii. diverse users are recognised and appropriate methods and channels used to enhance two-way engagement and meet users where they are;
 - iv. co-design methods are used to involve user representatives in shaping strategy and approaches, helping us identify early risks, roadblocks, gaps or quality issues;
 - v. good relationships and partnerships are fostered, working towards common goals through combined effort for the public good and providing support for continued investment in statistics; and
 - vi. an increase in users feeling more satisfied with engagement since the last Assembly, through measuring the effectiveness of our engagement.
11. We want to ensure that users are involved in the development of this strategy refresh and are looking to engage users at an early stage. We are keen to understand what users want from engagement, and whether this need is consistent or varied across user types and sectors. We need to include users that are interested in the wider system as well as those interested in specific statistics.
12. We plan to start our external engagement on this strategy immediately but will need to adapt to meet any implications of the ongoing review into the Authority by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee and changes to senior leadership. Alongside this we are taking immediate actions to respond to Assembly feedback by:

- i. creating and implementing an ONS policy on a timely response to user queries;
- ii. consolidating email contact addresses on the ONS website; and
- iii. introducing more visible feedback mechanisms and increasing prominence of user engagement on the ONS website.

Conclusion

13. We welcome NSEUAC members' feedback on our plans for a user engagement strategy refresh, in this early phase of development. This feedback will inform our approach as we move forward.

Jessica Midgley, Communications and Digital Publishing Directorate, ONS, 21 July 2025

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

NATIONAL STATISTICIAN'S EXPERT USER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

NSEUAC(25)05

Recommendation on the Future of Population and Migration Statistics

Purpose

1. This paper provides the National Statistician's Expert User Advisory Committee (NSEUAC) with an update following the UK Statistics Authority's recommendation (the recommendation) on the future of population and migration statistics.

Timing

2. The UK Statistics Authority (the Authority) published a recommendation to the UK Government on 17 June 2025, and the Government responded on 15 July, commissioning a mandatory, questionnaire-based census of England and Wales.
3. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has established a taskforce to deliver the groundwork for a successful 2031 Census and will launch a topic consultation in the autumn.
4. The Authority coordinated with the National Records of Scotland and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency so that similar announcements about the future of the census in different parts of the UK were made on the same day.

Recommendations

5. Members of NSEUAC are invited to:
 - i. note the recommendation and Government response;
 - ii. note the consultation and engagement informing the recommendation; and
 - iii. comment on post-recommendation engagement plans (paragraph 21).

Background and recommendation

6. In 2014, the then UK Government set out its ambition that "censuses after 2021 be conducted using other sources of data". This ambition drove ONS's subsequent research and engagement into producing more frequent and timely estimates, using new methods and the best available sources of information.
7. In 2018, ONS published a White Paper (Help Shape Our Future: The 2021 Census of Population and Housing in England and Wales), which set out the vision for the population statistics system and included a commitment to make a recommendation on the future of the population statistics system.
8. In 2023, the ONS consulted on how its proposals for administrative-based statistics met user needs compared to a census-based system. This consultation provided evidence that whilst users are supportive of the use of administrative data, they require greater confidence in the maturity of data flows and a better understanding of the proposed administrative-based statistical design, particularly for producing individual-level data.
9. The recommendation was due to be published in 2024; however, the general election and subsequent new administration created an opportunity to review the

recommendation and understand the requirements of the new government as key users along with other stakeholders.

10. Most recently the 2025 UK Statistics Assembly highlighted the need to demonstrate capability and maturity of administrative data flows and quality to execute our vision to deliver a sustainable population statistics system that generates trustworthy data and meets the needs of our users.
11. At this point in our research, while our admin-based estimates provide confidence, we cannot yet provide the required coverage of individual-level data that our users need. Realising the 2014 ambition would also require a step change in the maturity of data sharing and quality across the public sector, which ONS cannot deliver on its own.
12. Following a review of all the evidence, and on the advice of the National Statistician, the Authority has recommended the following three actions:
 - i. that the UK Government commission and resource the ONS to conduct a mandatory questionnaire-based census of the whole population for England and Wales in 2031. This should support coherent UK outputs and maximise the benefits from the ONS' work with administrative data to date, enabling further delivery of such benefits in the future;
 - ii. that the UK Government commission and resource the ONS to develop statistical outputs using administrative data which provide more frequent estimates and are inclusive in representing society. This should include an administrative-based census of the population; and
 - iii. that the UK and Welsh Governments provide a commitment to the regular, reliable and ongoing flow of the critical administrative datasets required, ensuring that data owners deliver on that commitment, and invest in the required improvements to those sources and address the known points of friction that prevent data transfer.
13. The Authority's recommendation envisages a statistical system for population and migration that combines the strengths of data collection through a questionnaire-based census of the whole population with the increased value from administrative data, both to support the delivery of a census in 2031 and to deliver improved outputs each year.
14. The decision and power to call a census rest with government ministers. In the recent spending review the Government included provision for a prospective census in 2031 and on 15 July, the Government wrote to the Authority commissioning ONS to conduct a mandatory, questionnaire-based, whole population census of England and Wales. The Government's letter also spoke to the use of administrative data, the importance of inclusivity, UK coherence, and the efficient use of public money.
15. To deliver the groundwork for a successful census in 2031, the ONS has established a Census 2031 Taskforce for an initial period up to January 2026. The focus of the taskforce will be on developing and assuring a strategic design; mobilising on a critical path and building stakeholder trust and confidence.

Consultation and engagement

16. Extensive consultation and engagement activity informed the Authority's recommendation, including a public consultation in 2023 which received over 700

responses from a variety of organisations and individuals from the public and private sectors and beyond.

17. There has been a positive response to the recommendation, with many academics expressing the value of census on social media.
18. ONS plans to continue to engage extensively with all stakeholder groups as we progress the recommendation and seek to build trust and confidence in our plans with users and stakeholders across government, civil society and the public.
19. A vital part of our engagement will be a topic consultation planned for the autumn. This consultation will involve stakeholders in discussions about specific topics and future user needs. This will inform the selection of topics for inclusion in the census questionnaire, ahead of further engagement to support question and questionnaire design; while evidence from the topic consultation can also inform the ONS' long-term plans for producing admin-based estimates on different topics.
20. We are also engaging partners through a series of innovation events which seek to explore the scope to improve on the achievements of previous census programmes, by solving defined problems or pursuing clear opportunities, including making 2031 the most inclusive digital-first census yet.

Conclusion

21. At this point in our admin-based research, whilst our estimates provide confidence, we cannot yet provide the required coverage of individual level data that our users need. There also needs to be a step change in the maturity of data sharing and quality across the public sector.
22. The three-part recommendation seeks to empower the ONS to deliver a comprehensive and inclusive census whilst continuing to iteratively develop the ONS' work to further embed administrative data into its statistics. This approach supports the Authority's vision of building, and continuously improving, a sustainable population statistics system that generates trustworthy data and meets the needs of our users.
23. Engagement and consultation will be a core part of the next phase of ONS's work, including through the established Census 2031 Taskforce and the planned topic consultation.

Jason Zawadzki, Director, Population Transformation and Esther Taylor, Deputy Director Technical Engagement, ONS, 21 July 2025

Any Other Business

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

NATIONAL STATISTICIAN'S EXPERT USER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Information paper

UK Statistics Assembly Evaluation Report and Next Steps

Purpose

1. This paper provides a summary of the evaluation of the UK Statistics Assembly. It highlights learnings and makes some recommendations for future assemblies. It also sets out next steps.

Recommendations

2. Members of the National Statistician's Expert User Advisory Committee (NSEUAC) are invited to:
 - i. note the evaluation of the UK Statistics Assembly;
 - ii. consider recommendations for future assemblies; and
 - iii. note feedback from some Assembly attendees about the importance of action being taken in response to the Assembly recommendations and plans for sharing progress.

Background

3. The first UK Statistics Assembly was organised by the UK Statistics Authority (the Authority) in partnership with the Royal Statistical Society. It was arranged in response to a recommendation in the Independent Review of the Authority by Professor Denise Lievesley CBE. It was held on 22 January 2025 and chaired by Professor Cathie Sudlow. The agenda featured 15 distinct discussion sessions on various topics and cross-cutting themes.

Discussion

Evaluation criteria

4. Evaluation was conducted against success criteria developed by the Assembly Delivery Group and shared with the Authority Board, which included:
 - i. deliver the first Assembly so responding to the recommendation from the Lievesley independent review;
 - ii. ensure attendance is high and more importantly broad and diverse;
 - iii. ensure event, report and actions are cross-cutting and relate to the wider statistical system;
 - iv. ensure published report produced by NSEUAC reflects Assembly conclusions, feeds into annual lecture by Authority Chair and next five year strategy, with majority of recommendations accepted by the Authority Board;
 - v. positive feedback from attendees and Assembly facilitates future user and stakeholder engagement; and
 - vi. learnings from the process make future assemblies and engagement more impactful.

Evaluation findings

5. The Assembly exceeded its attendance goal with 863 registrations and 556 attendees, including 330 in-person and 226 online.
6. The event featured 15 discussion sessions on various topics and cross-cutting themes. The variety of discussants, particularly from outside the Government Statistical Service (GSS), provided different perspectives that stimulated a wide-ranging and rich set of comments. The international session provided further viewpoints and was well received. While there was high satisfaction with the topics discussed and that they related to the wider statistical system, not just the Authority, some attendees would have liked to discuss other themes or more granular topics. Participants particularly valued the networking opportunities.
7. The event was well organised and facilitated participation. There were some problems with sound and picture for online participants in some sessions. Some attendees felt time constraints limited fuller contributions. The communications ahead of the Assembly were good with detailed information on the Authority website demonstrating transparency.
8. The Assembly Delivery Group effectively supported a collaborative Assembly design process and agenda setting, ensuring inclusivity and diversity. We received over 60 responses to the call for contributions which directly shaped most of the breakout groups, demonstrating an excellent example of user involvement and co-creation.
9. The majority of attendees who responded to a feedback questionnaire said they are likely to participate in future assemblies or similar activities.
10. An independent report from the Assembly, authored by Professor David Hand and supported by members of NSEUAC, was published promptly in March 2025.
11. Due to diverse and high attendance, a positive atmosphere, networking opportunities, insightful sessions, and the pace and quality of the published findings, the first Assembly was considered a success.

Areas for improvement

12. Call for contributions: we should state if respondent submissions will be shared or published and hold the call for contributions earlier to allow more time for finalising the agenda and discussion questions.
13. Registration and pre-assembly arrangements: trial ticket scanning to reduce queues; provide more printed programmes; clarify attendee preparation and expectations.
14. Content: focus sessions more tightly and allow more discussion time; align discussions with needs and values criteria; emphasise solutions over current state.
15. Attendee experience: address challenges of combining experts and lay users; address perceptions around broader diversity of attendees; improve opportunities for individual contributions in larger groups; enhance digital engagement for non-attendees; balance focus between England and the wider UK; provide clarity on how views and points raised will be acted on.

Recommendations

16. As part of the wider user engagement strategy refresh that is recommended in the independent report, consider a plan for the frequency, format, diversity of attendees (including 'newer voices' to the statistics and data system) and running of future, system-wide assemblies and theme-based 'mini' assemblies, considering how these integrate with other engagement activities from the Authority, the GSS and the Office for National Statistics (ONS).
17. Adopt the delivery group 'co-design' method in developing and strengthening approaches and plans for future assemblies and user engagement more broadly.
18. Explore options for improving the online experience at future assemblies (and at other hybrid events), as well as taking on board points 12 to 15 in this paper.

Next steps

19. The annual lecture by Authority Chair (timings to be confirmed) will include the Authority's response to the independent Assembly report recommendations and will be preceded by a published update. This will focus on the report's four high level priorities and the immediate actions. So that users can assess progress, it is planned that we subsequently publish a progress update on a six-monthly basis that covers the response to the Assembly from the whole statistical system, including the ONS and GSS.
20. GSS and ONS leads have been nominated for each of the high-level recommendations from the Assembly report.
21. A refreshed user engagement strategy is being planned and is an agenda item at this NSEUAC meeting: see paper NSEUAC(25)04.

Nicola Fulton, External Affairs, ONS, 9 July 2025