

NATIONAL STATISTICIAN'S EXPERT USER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Wednesday 3 December

Minutes

Microsoft Teams

Attendees

Dame Kate Barker (Chair)

Professor Paul Allin

Helen Boaden

Professor Paul Boyle

Ed Humpherson

Phyllis MacFarlane

Emma Rourke

Other Attendees

June Bowman

Neil Townsend

Apologies

Guy Nason

James Brooks

Sarah Moore

Secretariat

Kate Beeslee

Sally Jones

1. Welcome, Previous Minutes and Actions

- 1.1. The Chair welcomed the Committee to the meeting. Apologies were received from Guy Nason, James Brooks, and Sarah Moore. Neil Townsend attended as Sarah Moore's delegate.
- 1.2. Members requested that the minutes were written with more detail and published more quickly on the Authority website, well ahead of the following meeting.
- 1.3. Members discussed the governance slide and the distinction between the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and UK Statistics Authority governance. The diagram could be improved through showing how the advisory and statutory committees interact with the formal structure.

2. User Engagement Strategy

- 2.1. Neil Townsend introduced progress on the user engagement strategy. He noted that due to changes within the ONS, communication resources had been more focused on immediate requirements and the strategy had not progressed as much as they had hoped.
- 2.2. Members heard of recent examples of ONS user engagement, such as the launch of the Census 2031 Topic Consultation, extensive engagement from the Director General for Surveys and Economic and Social Statistics, working in partnership with the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) and Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) to hold a series of roundtables, and, a webinar series that had received a high level of attendance.
- 2.3. Members discussed the update. The following points were raised in discussion:
 - i. considering the extent of change within ONS, members understood the consequent delays to the user engagement strategy and response to the Assembly while urging that these were progressed as much as possible and kept stakeholders engaged;
 - ii. members expressed their support for local and subnational data and expressed concern around ONS' reconsideration of their subnational statistics portfolio in their prioritisation decisions;
 - iii. the update should be clear to users when they should expect the next round of engagement to promote transparency and maintain relationships with users;
 - iv. members appreciated the evident breadth of user engagement but suggested that this was fed back to this Committee more thoroughly;
 - v. the Committee thought they could be better utilised if given foresight of likely prioritisation decisions, to provide ONS with a user perspective and to support ONS with how best to engage users when communicating prioritisation decisions;
 - vi. ONS' greater focus on core economic statistics and government users of statistics provided an opportunity for the National Statistician, as head of the GSS, to engage with other initiatives and channels to represent other users; and
 - vii. there was scope to improve engagement with smaller businesses, members discussed the importance of the business sector as users of data and respondents to surveys.
- 2.4. ONS would consider how to feedback the user engagement work across the ONS to NSEUAC for their consideration and input. The Committee discussed the potential impact of the new National Statistician in shaping and championing the strategy.

3. Response to the Statistics Assembly

- 3.1. Neil Townsend updated members on the Authority response to the Assembly detailed recommendations. He informed members that although this had been planned for the end of 2025, following conversations at the National Statistician's Executive Group (NSEG), it had been pushed back to spring 2026 due to the volume of work required. ONS proposed to publish a response to the Assembly in December 2025, covering the

four high level priorities, with an update on the detailed recommendations published in the first half of 2026.

- 3.2. Members heard that the Assembly recommendations were advisory, and the Authority sought to be realistic and transparent about what could be achieved.
- 3.3. Members discussed the update. The following points were raised in discussion:
 - i. members expressed disappointment in the delay to publication on the detailed points, but acknowledged the workload pressures on colleagues;
 - ii. the Committee asked to see a draft of the December response before it was published to provide support and suggestions from a user perspective;
 - iii. resourcing should be considered across the GSS to maximise impact and ensure workstreams are best placed;
 - iv. the refreshed National Statistician role allowed for an outward look across the GSS to ensure GSS needs and goals are met while ensuring ONS had sufficient resources to support its recovery;
 - v. the Assembly showed significant support for subnational statistics, and the ONS decision to reduce this work was a risk; and
 - vi. while a lot of work had been done since the Assembly, the ONS could improve the way this was communicated back to users.
- 3.4. The Committee commended the success of the Assembly and appreciated the resource challenges in taking forward its recommendations. They urged the ONS to provide transparent updates on the timeline of future updates with users. ONS agreed to share the timetable of future updates with the Committee in their next update.

4. Any Other Business

- 4.1. The Chair highlighted the benefit the Committee could provide to ONS in its prioritisation conversations, and the Committee agreed it should hear from ONS Senior Leadership at the next meeting to provide insight to the decisions taken.
- 4.2. A potential gap in ONS membership at the Committee was identified and June Bowman would consider who would be best to sit on the Committee.
- 4.3. Secretariat would circulate the list of future speakers for members to provide input and suggestions.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY
NATIONAL STATISTICIAN'S EXPERT USER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Agenda
Wednesday 3 December 2025, 10:30-12:30
Microsoft Teams

Chair: Dame Kate Barker

Apologies: Guy Nason, Sarah Moore

Timing	Agenda item	
1 10:30-10:40 (10 mins)	Welcome, previous minutes and actions	Meeting of 27.10.2025 Dame Kate Barker
2 11:25-12:00 (35 mins)	User Engagement Strategy	NSEUAC(25)08 Neil Townsend
3 12:00-12:20 (20 mins)	Response to the Statistics Assembly	NSEUAC(25)08 Neil Townsend
4 12:20-12:30 (10 mins)	Any other business & Forward agenda	Dame Kate Barker

Next Meeting: Thursday 5 March 2026, Microsoft Teams

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

NATIONAL STATISTICIAN'S EXPERT USER ADVISORY COMMITTEE

NSEUAC(25)08

Response to the UK Statistics Assembly

Purpose

1. This paper outlines our plans to publish an update on the UK Statistics Assembly and our progress on the user engagement strand.

Recommendations

2. Members of the National Statistician's Expert User Advisory Committee (NSEUAC) are invited to:
 - i. note and comment on the publication plans (paragraphs 6 to 8); and
 - ii. comment and advise on the work regarding user engagement (paragraphs 9 to 14).

Background

3. The inaugural UK Statistics Assembly was held in January 2025 with the [independent report](#) published in March 2025. The Authority Chair [welcomed the report](#) and committed to a detailed response. In September 2025, we published an [update](#) on the four high level priorities and committed to publish more detail on our plans.
4. One of the high-level priorities identified in the Assembly report is user engagement. A paper on our plans was presented to this committee in July 2025 [NSEUAC(25)04] and a subsequent update was requested.
5. The last NSEUAC meeting included a discussion about the future role of NSEUAC and one of the roles agreed for the committee was advising on progress following the Assembly.

Publication plans

6. The Authority is planning to publish an update on progress on the Assembly recommendations by the end of 2025. For each of the four high level priorities, it is proposed we set out plans under three headings:
 - i. work that has been delivered and/or is firmly planned with allocated resources;
 - ii. work that is under consideration but not yet committed to, including where there is potential for partnership and/or for taking forward outside the Government Statistical Service (GSS); and
 - iii. work that we have no plans to take forward at present due to either misalignment to strategic priorities, technical/ethical issues or resource constraints.
7. Given the Assembly recommendations were advisory, it is important that we take this opportunity to be transparent with users and manage expectations.
8. By the end of March, we plan a response to the detailed recommendations made following each of the 15 Assembly sessions. This should follow the same format as above – categorising recommendations into (i) going ahead, (ii) considering but cannot confirm at present, or (iii) no plans to take forward.

User engagement update

9. Work on a refreshed user engagement approach is progressing and some of this will be highlighted in the December publication. All producers are constrained in terms of

resources, so we are seeking to align to existing work wherever possible, in line with a steer from the Acting National Statistician.

10. Our ambition for user engagement has three strands:

- i. coordinate user engagement across government departments producing statistics via existing GSS networks;
- ii. strengthen practice where necessary building on the wealth of existing guidance ensuring it remains relevant to both producers and users, and encourages dialogue that ensures the feedback loop; and
- iii. promote user engagement channels and opportunities across all audiences to ensure broad participation and clarity of how users can engage with official statistics.

11. We have collated examples of good practice and innovative thinking from across the GSS, this will form the basis for sharing practices and ideas, and driving conversation on engaging with users across the GSS. Examples of this good practice include the extensive joint working across departments producing environment and health statistics (focusing on the user and the topic, rather than the producer) and the Home Office conducting specific engagement with seldom heard groups on the sensitive topic of stop and search statistics. Overall, the evidence from departments shows that in many cases user engagement is integral to the business-as-usual statistical process. However, there are further opportunities for learning from one another that we will take forward.

12. We have not progressed development of our refreshed user engagement strategy as quickly as we would have liked. Changes at the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the resulting communication and engagement activity have meant central resources have been focused on immediate requirements over recent months. We will work with the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) to ensure the strategy will be developed in line with the updated Code of Practice for Statistics. We have also discussed with Statistics Heads of Profession our proposed strategic approach and principles, as well considering the wealth of existing guidance. Looking forward, we will want to ensure that the Authority Chair and permanent National Statistician can input before the strategy is finalised.

13. At the July meeting, members of NSEUAC highlighted that the refreshed user engagement strategy needed to take into account the current ONS landscape. Recent examples of impactful ONS user engagement that recognises our need to rebuild confidence and prioritise user engagement activity include:

- i. we have launched the Census 2031 topic consultation which starts the work to shape the next census to meet user needs. In parallel the GSS is consulting on whether additional tick-box response options are required for a new ethnicity harmonised standard;
- ii. our new Director General for Surveys and Economic and Social Statistics, James Benford, has engaged extensively with stakeholders particularly economic statistics users in his first few months in office. This is both to understand user needs and concerns and explain our Economic Statistics Plan (ESP) and Survey Improvement and Enhancement Plan (SIEP). We will be publishing a detailed update on these on 4 December 2025 and are committed to being transparent on progress and challenges, including through James' new regular blog;
- iii. we are working in partnership with the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) and the OSR on a series of roundtables to enable RSS members and other appropriate experts to provide independent advice and constructive challenge on the key issues facing the statistical system. The first of these considered improving survey representativeness (covering both social and business surveys) and involved stakeholders such as academics, representatives of the business community and other survey delivery organisations. The second roundtable on 25 November will discuss Census 2031, and other events are planned for 2026;

- iv. our Bringing Data to Life webinar series is targeted at non-expert users and so enables us to engage a wider audience. To date in 2025, over 7700 unique individuals have registered for our 13 events, with 557 people attending each event on average. We are currently planning our second series for 2026;
- v. we have launched a pilot of an ongoing feedback process for suggested improvements. This is being run for Household Cost Indices initially but if successful, we will look to roll out this feedback approach to other statistical topics; and
- vi. we are engaging users to inform our website and content transformation and continue to promote, improve and increase usage of StatsUserNetwork.

14. Our next step for developing our refreshed user engagement strategy will involve engaging with users on what they want from user engagement. We are working with the RSS to focus their next roundtable event (probably late January 2026) on user engagement to share our thinking and gain a more precise details of users concerns and asks. As users of official statistics represent a broad range of sectors and level of statistical knowledge, we will also undertake wider engagement activity on our approach.

Future reporting

15. We propose to report back regularly to NSEUAC on progress on responding to the Assembly report, both across the range of topics and more specifically on user engagement.

Neil Townsend, Communications and Digital Publishing, ONS, 24 November 2025