

**Minutes of the UK Statistics Authority Meeting
11 July 2008
UK Statistics Authority Board Room, Newport**

Present

UK Statistics Authority – Non-Executive Members

Sir Michael Scholar (Chair)
Lord Rowe-Beard (Deputy Chair – ONS)
Ms Moira Gibb
Sir Alan Langlands
Professor Steve Nickell
Professor David Rhind

UK Statistics Authority – Executive Members

Mr Richard Alldritt
Ms Karen Dunnell
Mr Steve Newman

Secretariat

Mr Robert Bumpstead
Mr Mervyn Stevens

Other Attendees

Ms Jil Matheson (Director General, Statistics Delivery, ONS) items 1 to 4
Mr Jon Simmons (Deputy Director, i-Dissemination Programme, ONS) item 5

Apologies

Professor Adrian Smith (Deputy Chair – Official Statistics)
Mr Partha Dasgu

1. Chair's opening remarks

1.1 The Chair welcomed members to the meeting.

1.2 The Chair announced the following appointments to the Authority's staff:

- Richard Laux, Assessment Programme Manager, and;
- Robert Bumpstead, Head of Secretariat,

1.3. The Chair also advised the meeting that Professor Adrian Smith would be relinquishing his position on the Authority at the beginning of September when he takes up a Director General post at the Department of Innovation, Universities & Skills (DIUS). The consequent vacancy for Deputy Chair would be advertised shortly. The Authority were saddened to learn of Professor Smith's departure and recorded their thanks for his work.

2. Declarations of interest

2.1 Sir Alan Langlands informed the Authority of his appointment as Chair of the Health Foundation.

3. Minutes and matters arising from the previous meeting

3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting on 20 June 2008 were accepted as a true and fair account of that meeting.

3.2 Mr Alldritt advised the Authority that, although the Cabinet Office intended to lay the Pre-Release Access Order before the Parliamentary summer recess, it would not be considered by the House until October. The Authority agreed to consider its response to the Order at the next meeting in September.

4. Identifying and Managing Risk [SA(08)25]

4.1 Mr Alldritt presented a paper on the nature of the risks that the Authority faced and how they might best be managed. Following discussion it was agreed that:

- identification and management of the top-level risks to ONS would be overseen by the ONS Board;
- the Board of the Authority would also periodically review these risks;
- the Authority's Risk Committee should focus on generic mitigation strategies to protect the Authority's reputation, and, risks arising from across the Government Statistical Service (GSS) and the official statistics system as a whole;
- the Secretariat would convene the Risk Committee and draft Terms of Reference.

Action Secretariat

5. Publication Hub Update [SA(08)26]

5.1 Mr Simmons presented an update on developments with the Authority's internet (or 'virtual') publication hub and the main elements of the work programme for 2008/09. The Authority welcomed these proposals and was impressed by the rate of progress.

5.2. The next phase in development was a 'physical' Hub. A press conference hosted by the Authority would be held to release the Home Office's annual crime statistics publication on July 17. The event would be held at a neutral venue and Departmental statisticians would present the release. If successful, further such events could be held on other major statistical releases.

6. The Authority's Public Face [SA (08) 27]

6.1 Mr Alldritt introduced a paper which considered the strategic priorities of the Authority, and aspects of its engagement with stakeholders.

6.2 The Authority welcomed the draft and considered ways in which it could be further improved. The secretariat agreed to produce and circulate a revised version of the paper. **Action: Secretariat**

6.3 It was also agreed that a stakeholder event should be held in the autumn and that, in addition to reporting on the consultation exercise on the Code of Practice, this event would provide an opportunity to report on the progress the Authority had made in its first few months and to discuss direction in the medium-term. Further specific proposals would be drawn up **Action Secretariat**

7. Progress with Assessment [SA(08)28]

7.1 Mr Alldritt reported that the Consultation Document on the Code of Practice had been published on 8 July 2008. The consultation would remain open until 30 September.

7.2 Mr Alldritt proposed that, following the agreement at the last meeting of an initial Assessment programme, the first two Monitoring Reports of the Authority should concern:

- progress in improving migration and population statistics, and;
- a review of official statistics not currently designated as National Statistics.

7.3 He also reported that issues raised with the Authority would be published on the Authority's website. A prototype issues log had been developed and would be circulated to members when ready.

7.4 The Authority was pleased to note all of the developments and agreed to the proposals with regard to the first two Monitoring Reports. Detailed project specifications for these two reports would be presented to the Authority's September meeting. **Action Mr Alldritt**

8. Census 2011 Update

8.1 Ms Dunnell gave an oral report on progress with the 2011 Census.

9. Any other business

9.1 Lord Rowe-Beddoe gave an oral report of the ONS Board meeting held earlier that day. Subjects that the ONS Board had considered included risk, the ONS Annual report and accounts, the current ONS budgetary position, and, working arrangements between ONS and the Authority.

9.2 The Chair reported that ONS had drafted a response to the Treasury Select Committee Report "Counting the Population". This would form the Authority's response. It was agreed that the Secretariat would draft a cover letter introducing the response and highlighting the Authority's plans to conduct an Assessment monitoring review of improvements in migration and population statistics. **Action: Secretariat**

9.3 The Authority noted the letter to Ms Dunnell from the Second Permanent Secretary at HM Treasury, John Kingman announcing the launch of a Value for Money Operational Efficiency Programme. The Programme would be communicated to ONS staff. **Action: Ms Dunnell**

Agenda – UK Statistics Authority Meeting
Friday 11th July 2008
UK Statistics Authority, Statistics House, Newport , 11:30 am - 3 pm

Chair: Sir Michael Scholar
Apologies: Mr Partha Dasgupta

Agenda

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|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | Minutes and matters arising from previous meeting | <i>Speaker</i> |
| | Declarations of interest | |
| 2 | Risk Workshop Discussion | SA(08)25 |
| | <i>To agree the nature and main areas of risk facing the Authority, and a structure for their management</i> | Secretariat/
Sir Michael Scholar |
| 3 | Developments with the Publication Hub | SA(08)26 |
| | <i>To note and comment on proposals for the next stage of the Hub's development</i> | Jon Simmons |
| 4 | The Authority's Public Face | SA(08)27 |
| | <i>To consider the Authority's strategic intent, positions and stakeholder engagement</i> | Richard Alldritt |
| 5 | Progress with Assessment | SA(08)28 |
| | <i>To note and comment on progress with establishing the Assessment function</i> | Richard Alldritt |
| 6 | Census 2011 Update | Oral Report |
| | <i>To review recent developments on Census 2011</i> | Karen Dunnell |
| 7 | Any other business | |

Next Meeting: Friday 19th September, 11.30 am to 3.00 pm
Board Room, UK Statistics Authority, Newport

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(08)25

Identifying and Managing Risk

Purpose

1. This paper is to stimulate discussion of the risks facing the Authority. The initial aim should be to identify the main areas of risk and their relative importance in terms of likelihood and potential impact. It was decided at the meeting on 20 June to approach this discussion afresh rather than start from existing ONS risk management material although clearly the two streams of thinking will need to be integrated in due course. A priority for the Risk Committee could be the development of such an integrated approach in order to set in place a sound strategy for the management of risk to cover all aspects of the Authority's remit.

Timing

2. Routine, but early agreement on the broad shape of the risks and the strategies to address them will help to inform the work of the Risk Committee and the Audit Committee.

Discussion

3. A paper on risk was considered at the March 2008 meeting of the shadow Authority and the minutes record that a fuller discussion of the issues raised would be needed. The paper [SA(08)11] is attached for ease of reference. Annex A to that paper sets out ten potential risks facing the Authority. These may serve as a useful starting point for discussion.
4. The points in the following paragraphs are intended to help focus discussion. A general theme is that it may be helpful to look at what form the potential negative consequences associated with particular risks might take. They could involve the end of the Authority, or reputational damage (with further consequences) or non-delivery against plans (again with further consequences). Looking for generic measures which would reduce the negative impact when risks are realised is one potentially helpful strategy.

Risk to survival

5. Given that the Authority is a statutory body, its survival in the future, in its current form, might not be seen as being at great risk. However, many bodies of a regulatory, or quasi-regulatory, kind are subject to reconsideration by government from time to time and it might be worth giving some thought to the circumstances under which the ongoing existence of the Authority might come under serious question. Of course, it might not necessarily be in the public interest to protect the Authority from reconsideration of this sort but it may nonetheless be worth addressing.
6. One consideration here is that the Act under which the Authority is established is seen by many observers as being confusing. To the extent that resolving that confusion through revisiting the legislation might be regarded as a serious option by a future administration, the ongoing existence of the Authority in its current form might be at risk. A strategy to contain that risk would be to use non-statutory means to bring as much clarity as possible to the different roles of the Authority, and the way these are presented publicly.

Reputational risks

7. At greater immediate risk is the reputation of the Authority, and by extension its capacity to carry out its functions effectively and, were that to be compromised, the tenure of its key office holders. Risk to reputation thus means more than just the risk that the Authority may not be seen as effective. It embraces the possibilities that the Authority's ability to pursue its goals could be undermined and that its senior office holders might be subjected to public criticism or replaced. We want to avoid that.
8. Whilst it is probably unfair to point to specific cases, history suggests that many public bodies that fall foul of reputational risks probably did not see the specific thing that caught them out as a high risk. The Financial Services Authority, whilst retaining a generally high reputation, suffered damage to its public reputation after public criticism that it had not kept adequate records in the wake of Northern Rock.
9. Such unforeseen grounds for public criticism, prompted by a particular run of circumstances, must be a real hazard for the Statistics Authority. Perhaps the most likely source of such circumstances would be the publication, or possibly non-publication, of official statistics by ONS leading to controversy. Another possible source would be a relationship (whether contractual or otherwise) between ONS and another body which was seen as questionable; or statements by, or attributed to, ONS which were seen as inappropriate or ill-informed. Equally, an Assessment report by the Authority which was seen as misjudged or of poor quality could start a run of criticism, as could an unfortunate phrase used in a media interview or select committee appearance. Authority members might want to consider these and other ways that a negative story might start, leading to a snowball of criticism and substantive damage to reputation.
10. Having identified some of the routes by which such risks might develop, the question of whether there are generic ways to limit such risks needs to be considered. Building an increasingly strong relationship of mutual trust with Parliamentarians, in all four administrations, and with the news media might be an example of such a generic approach.

Practical risks

11. As well as reputational risks, there are more day-to-day risks of not being able to deliver on plans due to problems with resources (financial, human or IT) or major external interventions – such a fire, flood or disease control. These could have major consequences leading to reputational damage. A major disease outbreak could disrupt the Census, leading to poor data and public criticism. Such criticism would be substantially stronger if the risk could have been averted by being anticipated and protective measures put in place. Criticism flowing from resource problems could be contained to some degree by showing that the risk had been anticipated and real efforts made to address the resource weaknesses.

Secretariat, July 2008

ANNEX 1

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(08)11

Top level risks facing the UK Statistics Authority

Purpose

1. This paper seeks the Board's input to the identification and management of the top level risks facing the UK Statistics Authority

Recommendations

2. The Board is invited to:
 - i. consider and comment on the list of risks identified
 - ii. remit the list of risks to the Risk Committee, who will, for each risk, draw up a mitigation plan and assess the residual exposure (i.e. likelihood by impact) post mitigation
 - iii. ask the Risk Committee to propose how it will report back to the Board

Discussion

3. Risk can be defined as the possibility of something happening that will have a negative impact on an organisation. The UK Statistics Authority will want to be confident that the risks facing it have been identified and are being managed appropriately to limit the potential damage. ONS officials have produced a preliminary list, at Annex A, of the key risks facing the Authority.
4. The next stage, provided the Board agree that the risks identified are a broad reflection of their perception of the risks they face, is for the Risk Committee to develop mitigation plans for each risk and to assess each risk's residual exposure, post mitigation. The Committee should also propose how it will report back to the Board on risks.
5. A summary list of top level ONS risks is presented for information at Annex B.

Sue Smyth, Strategic Reporting and Delivery Unit (ONS), 3 March 2008

Annex A

Preliminary list of top level Authority risks

1. The Authority does not establish a position of public trust in its ability to prevent spin of statistics
2. There are breaches in data confidentiality which undermine trust in statistics but beyond the remit of the Authority
3. The public expects the Authority to move faster on assessing National Statistics
4. The government undermines the Authority and ONS because they are no longer protected by a ministerial body
5. The Authority's influence is not strong nor wide-reaching enough to ensure improvements in official statistics
6. The devolved administrations follow their own agenda for statistics because the Authority fails to engage and/or maintain relations with them
7. Failure of ONS outputs to retain National Statistics status or high profile errors in key ONS outputs undermines the Statistics Authority's authority because of its responsibility for ONS
8. The Authority is unable to attract staff with the required skills for assessment work
9. The publications hub does not meet users' needs
10. Issues of data quality mean that the potential benefits of cross government data sharing cannot be realised

Annex B

Summary list of top level ONS risks

1. *Independence.* Independent status does not improve the reputation of ONS but increases its exposure and vulnerability to criticism.
2. *Census 2011.* Failure to deliver a successful Census operation and successfully produce Census results seriously damages ONS reputation.
3. *National Accounts.* Quality problems with regular quarterly releases and/or failure to deliver re-engineered Blue Book 2008 seriously damages ONS reputation.
4. *Migration.* Failure to significantly improve the quality of migration statistics causes serious damage to the integrity and credibility of ONS.
5. *Funding.* ONS does not deliver its commitments within available funding. ONS fails to deliver required efficiencies to resource new and existing commitments.
6. *Speed of change.* Inability to implement an extensive change programme quickly enough causes loss of reputation and/or failure to deliver.
7. *Skills and capability.* ONS fails to recruit/retain key personnel and to sufficiently develop the skills of its workforce.
8. *Staff perceptions.* The EMG sets a strategic direction which the workforce does not follow and/or the Senior Civil Service thinks is the wrong direction causing delays to change programme.
9. *System failure.* Failure to deliver comprehensive disaster recovery plans affects ONS ability to function, leading to IT based services being denied/seriously curtailed

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(08)26

Publication Hub Update

Purpose

1. This paper provides an update on the Publication Hub.

Timing

2. Routine.

Recommendations

3. For information.

Discussion

4. The i-Dissemination programme is continuing as planned, in the direction discussed by the Board in March. The 1st April website launch was delivered on time and the new websites have been well-received. Delivery of the full UK Statistics Authority sites are being steered by the i-Dissemination Programme Board as part of their oversight of the wider ONS website and backoffice development. Several Other Government Departments (OGDs) are actively involved in helping to develop the technical requirements and the Programme Board itself has both an OGD technical assurance representative and a Government Statistical Service (GSS) representative amongst its members.

5. The 1st April websites are transitional, and the plan is to launch significantly enhanced versions by the end of 2008. The full programme of work for 2008-09 includes:

- New National Statistics Taxonomy;
- New system-wide Statistical catalogue based on the revised NS Taxonomy;
- Revised Publication Hub front page, to include search and access to the new Statistical Catalogue;
- Reinforcing coherence and standards across the GSS, through new standard Statistical Release pages for ONS and departments;
- An enhanced release calendar, with full search capabilities and a back-office system to allow direct entry of planned outputs by OGDs;
- A new ONS website, including a full redesign, structured data store and new statistical release pages;
- Back office workflow management systems for ONS staff, including an end-to-end single source publishing process and greater standardisation of ONS outputs;
- New tools to enable users to directly access and download ONS data over the web;
- Press conferences with a NS/GSS emphasis.

6. As expected, this is a complex programme of work with lots of detailed technical issues, including new web hosting arrangements and complex interfaces between ONS and other GSS websites. These include security implications for linking between the ONS IT estate and external information providers. These are being actively addressed and there are no issues for the Board at this stage.

7. The design and feel of the site will build on what we have put in place, as that has been well-received. Content for the sites builds on our experience from discussions with users, formal user-testing and experience from other relevant websites, including leading National Statistical Institutes from around the world. Example wireframes for the new Publication Hub homepage and a Catalogue theme and topic page are attached. These do not contain real content or the final design but illustrate the typical functionality of the pages.

8. Overall there is continuing high interest and support across the GSS and in the user community for these developments. We have adopted a user-centred approach to design, following Cabinet office best-practice including the adoption of AA-accessibility standards to ensure the website content can be viewed by the widest range of users. Our consultants have carried out a variety of detailed user-testing at various stages in the design process and will continue to do so, subject to resources. The overall strategy for the Hub has been approved through the GSS i-Dissemination Committee, with representatives from the major departmental producers including Devolved Administrations. The plans are also presented to Heads of Profession meetings at regular, but less frequent, intervals. Additionally, I have kept the Royal Statistical Society 'Statistics User Forum' informed of developments and have invited their comments on key aspects of these developments. It should be noted that users will only see the full benefit of the developments from 2009.

9. Although not part of the Statistics Act, the Publication Hub arises from a commitment made in parliament and agreed by Ministers in correspondence. There is therefore considerable interest in how it will develop. The design of the Hub has placed special emphasis on reinforcing the separation of the Authority's assessment and oversight function from the Producing department's responsibilities for the statistics being produced. The 'soft' approach, linking through to ONS and OGD websites where products are held, has been welcomed, not least by the Devolved Administrations who are now participating fully in these processes.

Jon Simmons
Deputy Director i-Dissemination
June 2008

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(08)27

The Authority's Public Face: Strategic Intent and Positions

Note: Draft annexes under discussion – not yet published

Purpose

1. This paper considers the strategic priorities of the Authority and the need to agree an initial set of 'positions' on specific points to support engagement with various interest groups.

Timing

2. Once agreed, these proposals will be taken forward over the course of the summer.

Recommendations

3. Authority members are invited to:
 - consider and comment on the strategic positions set out in the Annexes of this paper, intended as a basis for discussion;
 - consider the 'ambassadorial' arrangements proposed at paragraphs seven and eight, and;
 - note the on-going work on proposals for stakeholder events (paragraphs nine and ten).

Discussion

4. The Strategy Workshop held in Titchfield on 16 May considered, among other issues, how best to engage with the wide range of user and other stakeholder interests with whom an ongoing dialogue will be central to the achievement of the Authority's aims. Arising from this, two documents have been prepared for the Authority's consideration:
 - a broad statement of the *Authority's strategic intent*, what it is seeking to deliver in terms of maintaining and improving the statistical service as a whole, and so building trust. Subject to discussion, this is intended for publication on the Authority's website and use in other public statements (Annex A);
 - a set of short *position statements* on the Authority's initial positions on a range of important questions - to serve as guidance and an aide memoire for Authority members and staff and so help ensure that communication is focussed and consistent (Annex B).
5. In preparing these statements and proposed positions, we drew on work already undertaken by ONS and the Government Statistical Service (GSS). This included the conclusions of a cross-GSS/Statistics Commission group, which examined in 2006 the question of how to raise public confidence in official statistics following surveys which showed confidence to be low. These findings were presented to the Authority at its previous meeting [SA(08)24].
6. Other sources used in preparing these statements include: the text of the Statistics and Registration Act 2007 and explanatory notes; press-releases and speeches on behalf of the Authority since the Chair's appointment; HM Treasury consultation documents on statistical reform (1998, 2006); and the Statistics Commission's report *Official Statistics: Value and Trust* (2008).

The ambassadorial role

7. The Authority has previously considered how individual non-executive members might look out for the concerns of particular interest groups. Rather than seek to allocate sections of the stakeholder community to individual non-executive members, we suggest that individual members might each propose which groups of external interests they might make a point of engaging in discussion, by choosing say three areas from a common list, about the Authority's aims and work. The Secretariat would then check for any major gaps and seek to resolve those with Authority members. These roles could also be aligned with non-executive involvement in Assessment projects (see paper [SA(08)27] *Progress with Assessment*, tabled at this meeting).
8. We do not propose that there should be any public announcement on this matter but rather see it as a matter of internal organisation. Individual members would however be free to make public reference to their roles.
9. In this context, we suggest that the statements of intent and positions should be used by members as a resource in articulating the Authority's goals and work wherever helpful. In this sense members would play an 'ambassadorial' role on behalf of the Authority. Further briefing on generic or specific topics can be provided by the Secretariat on request, together with logistic support as required. Business cards are being produced for all members.

Stakeholder event

10. The Secretariat is also considering the possibility of organising an event for external interest groups in the autumn. This would primarily be for external voices to put forward issues that they want the Authority to examine. The intention is to organise a meeting of no more than a couple of hours in length, providing stakeholders with an opportunity to articulate their views and then meet Authority members in an informal setting. Parliament is a possible venue. Detailed proposals and a business case are being developed for submission to the Chair.
11. The Authority has previously decided there would be virtue in holding open, special meetings from time to time. The Secretariat is developing proposals for holding such a meeting, perhaps toward the end of the year.

Secretariat, July 2008

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(08)28

Establishing the Assessment Function

Purpose

1. This paper is a progress report on establishment of the Assessment function.

Timing

2. Mainly for information. The arrangements for project management of the two Assessment issues identified at paragraphs five and six will be the subject of specific proposals to be set out in a paper for the September meeting.

Recommendations

3. Authority members are invited to note the progress so far and comment on the proposal to invite one (or exceptionally two) non-executive members of the Authority to sit on the project board for each 'issue-based' Assessment report.

Discussion

4. At the time of writing it is hoped that three initial objectives will have been achieved by 11 July. These are:
 - i. publication in hard copy, and wide distribution, of the consultation document '*Official statistics serving the public good: consultation on the code of practice*', marking the start of the formal 12 week public consultation process;
 - ii. publication on the Authority's website of its initial priorities for Assessment, as decided at the Authority meeting of 20 June [SA(08)23]; and
 - iii. appointment of the Deputy Head of Assessment; and also sifting of applications for the first four Assessment team leader posts - two in Newport and two in London with a view to interviews before the end of July.
5. We are also making plans for establishment of two Assessment teams in Edinburgh. Suitable accommodation has been identified with the help of the Scottish Government and we are starting to make arrangements for furniture, IT and other essentials. Once we have that in hand, we will advertise the two senior posts, probably in September.
6. As soon as the Deputy Head of Assessment takes up post, work will begin on setting up the projects to undertake the first issue-based Assessments. Each Assessment issue will be run as a project, and be subject to some formal but flexible project management controls.
7. The first four issues selected at the Authority's meeting of 20 June were: 1) Communicating inflation and consumer prices; 2) Review of official statistics not currently designated as National Statistics; 3) Progress in improving migration and population statistics; 4) Barriers to trust in relation to crime statistics. Two further issues were also selected: 5) The mechanisms for identifying longer-term priorities for the whole statistical service; and 6) the adequacy of environmental statistics.
8. We propose first to set up the projects for 1) and 2) above, although Authority members may wish to consider this further. Any two of the first four topics might be selected. The first step in each case will be to prepare for consideration at an Authority meeting a full project specification including membership of the project board, detailed consideration of objectives and approach, staffing, contracts, consultants, budgets and any other matters

on which Authority agreement would be appropriate.

9. We also propose that one non-executive member, or exceptionally two, should be appointed to act as the Authority's formal representative on each project board. The precise role would be developed according to the particular issue and wishes of the member. If the member wished to chair the project board that would usually be agreed but it is not intended that this should be the norm. The appointment of the chair of each project board - a critical decision - would be addressed in the detailed project specification but we would retain the option of approaching a prominent external figure, and/or offering remuneration if circumstances indicated that would be appropriate.
10. The association of Authority members with projects would take account both of personal wishes and areas of expertise, as discussed in the paper considering the *Authority's Public Face*, on the agenda of this meeting [SA(08)26].
11. Work will be taken forward in parallel to draw up for the Authority's agreement an initial programme of 'designation' reports, in particular identifying one or two National Statistics series on which to conduct pilot Assessments against the draft Code. Some principles for selecting these were proposed in the paper considered at the 20 June meeting [SA(08)23]. It may be best for the pilot designation assessments to be on areas of topical interest but not the most high profile areas. Those might follow on after the pilot work.

Richard Alldritt
July 2008