

**UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY**

**Committee for Official Statistics**

**Minutes**

**Thursday 6 May 2010**

**Present**

**Members**

Professor Sir Roger Jowell (Chair)  
Mr Richard Alldritt  
Dr Colette Bowe  
Professor Angela Dale  
Professor David Hand  
Ms Jil Matheson  
Sir Michael Scholar

**Other Attendees**

Mr Richard Laux

**Secretariat**

Mr Rob Bumpstead  
Ms Amanda Charles

**Apologies**

Ms Moira Gibb  
Mr Duncan MacNiven  
Professor David Rhind

**Declarations of Interest**

None

## **1 Apologies, Minutes and Matters Arising**

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed the two new members of the Committee - Professor Dale and Professor Hand. Apologies had been received from Ms Gibb, Mr MacNiven and Professor Rhind.
- 1.2 The minutes of the previous meeting of the Committee held on 9 March 2010 were agreed as a correct record.
- 1.3 There were no matters arising.

## **2 Report from the National Statistician**

- 2.1 Ms Matheson provided an oral report in her capacity as National Statistician.
- 2.2 Recent weeks had been dominated by the forthcoming general election. All statistics which had a pre-announced release date during the purdah period had been released as scheduled. Election guidance for officials had directed Departmental statisticians to consult the National Statistician if they were in any doubt about the release of statistics during purdah. In each case where she was consulted the National Statistician had authorised the release of the statistics.
- 2.3 Briefing had been prepared by the Government Statistical Service (GSS) for new Ministers on statistical matters. The post-election period would be challenging for the GSS, with the prospect of resource cuts and new priorities to react to. The need for improvements to statistical planning across the GSS would become more important than ever. Of particular concern was the work in hand to improve statistical commentary. While the need for good commentary was accepted by many statisticians, others in producer Departments may view this as an unaffordable luxury.
- 2.4 The Committee heard that the United Nations have set 20 October 2010 as the first 'World Statistics Day', to celebrate Official Statistics and raise the profile of statisticians. The BBC were making a programme called 'The Joy of Statistics', timed to coincide with World Statistics Day, which will be partially filmed at the Royal Statistical Society (RSS).
- 2.5 As part of the Science Review Programme, a pilot capability Assessment (which includes statistical capability) is being conducted at the Department of Children, Schools and Families and the Committee will be kept informed about the outcome of this work.
- 2.6 Following the Greek deficit crisis European legislation enabling Eurostat to audit European Member States financial statistics was being drawn up. The Committee discussed the potential overlap with the Authority's Assessment function. It was noted that Eurostat methodological audits were unlikely to take place as a matter of routine. Instead, they would only take place if there was a concern about a particular Member State's statistics. The fact that there was already an established Assessment process was likely to have a positive influence on international confidence in UK figures.

## **3 Report from the Head of Assessment**

- 3.1 Mr Alldritt provided an oral report in his capacity as Head of Assessment.
- 3.2 The Assessment Committee had met earlier in the day and considered Reports numbered 42 to 47. A second 'Findings from Assessment' note was being developed. The Committee discussed the impact of assessment, in particular that the changes being made in order to gain accreditation as National Statistics were more than cosmetic, and were becoming embedded within the statistical system.
- 3.3 Discussions had been held with the Bank of England on the status of their statistics,

which would formally remain outside the scope of Official Statistics, but who were positive about ensuring similarly high standards as those set out in the *Code of Practice*.

3.4 In terms of monitoring activity, the interim report for the review of *Strengthening User Engagement* had been published on 31 March, along with *Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics: A review of the statutory arrangements. Barriers to Trust in Relation to Crime Statistics* would be published later in the month, after the election. The scope of the Retail and Consumer Price Indices Assessment had been widened to include issues of communicating inflation measures. The findings from this Assessment would inform whether further monitoring work might be required in this area. Scoping for the *Adequacy of Environment Statistics* review had also started.

3.5 A paper would be tabled at the next meeting of the Committee on what monitoring work had achieved thus far and where it might go next, both in terms of subject matter for monitoring reviews but also consideration of different ways of working. This might include alternatives such as round table events, and a greater role for Monitoring Notes.

#### **4 Post-election issues**

4.1 A draft letter from the Chair of the Statistics Authority to the new Minister for the Cabinet Office was circulated at the meeting. The letter set out some actions which, if implemented, would enhance the trustworthiness of UK Official Statistics. These actions included the explicit recognition of the National Statistician's role as professional leader of the Government Statistical Service; consultation with the Statistics Authority on budgets for statistics, and; limiting pre-release access to statistics to three hours.

4.2 It was agreed that the letter should be addressed to the new Prime Minister, with a copy to the responsible Minister.

#### **5 Priorities for Official Statistics [SA(COS)(10)10]**

5.1 Mr Bumpstead introduced a paper which set out progress against 26 priorities for Official Statistics detailed in a letter from the President of the RSS to the Chair of the Statistics Authority in January 2009. The National Statistician's Office were thanked for their contribution to the paper.

5.2 The Committee commended the paper. It was agreed that it should form the basis for a formal response to be sent to the RSS and also be available for comment on the Authority's website.

5.3 The Committee also commended the original agenda as set by the RSS. The top five priorities were agreed to be:

- i. meeting the needs of users and other stakeholders;
- ii. the need for proper planning;
- iii. communication and presentation;
- iv. the separation of statistical information from policy comment (including the reform of pre-release access), and;
- v. the need for a national address register.

5.4 The role of the Statistics User Forum was discussed in terms of meeting user needs. The requirement in nearly every Assessment Report to date that improvements to user engagement were needed, and the relatively small number of responses from users received as part of the assessment process itself, hinted that current mechanisms were not working as successfully as they might. The review of *Strengthening User Engagement* has recommended that the future of user-producer dialogue has to be via an internet solution.

5.5 Progress on housing statistics had been disappointing. It was agreed that the Committee would receive a more detailed paper on progress on this at its Autumn meeting.

**Action: The National Statistician's Office to provide a paper on progress with housing statistics for the 5 October Committee meeting**

5.6 The Committee also requested a paper for its Autumn meeting on the likely impact of cuts to statistics.

**Action: The National Statistician's Office to provide a paper on the likely impact of cuts to statistics for the 5 October Committee meeting**

## **6 Next steps towards *Strengthening User Engagement* [SA(COS)(10)11]**

6.1 The Strengthening User Engagement interim Report was published on 31 March 2010 and an open meeting to discuss the Report was being held at the RSS on 3 June 2010. The Committee were asked to consider the recommendations in the Report, which were of distinct types of activity, and consider whether thought needed to be given to their implementation.

6.2 The meeting discussed whether the recommendations in the Report might raise expectations beyond what is achievable in the face of cuts. One issue was the ability to resource the recommended web-based forum for user-producers interaction. It was agreed that for this to be effective users needed to see that their comments were considered, and how they affected decisions. This could take a significant amount of resource, although not every point necessarily required an intervention. It was agreed that a workshop could be held with organisations who are experienced at hosting such web-based fora to determine the feasibility and likely resource.

## **7 Web Dissemination: An Update [SA(COS)(10)12]**

7.1 Ms Matheson presented a paper which set out the areas which a GSS web strategy would need to address.

7.2 The Committee heard that there had been discussions with Google as a potential partner to deliver a coherent GSS website with the desired functionality but that certain principles, in particular integrity and equality of access were non-negotiable.

7.3 It was agreed that informal preliminary discussions with potential partners should be prioritised and that prior to this consultancy should be sought on how to enter into these kinds of negotiations.

**Action: Secretariat to discuss with Dr Bowe further steps**

## **8 GSS Activity and Governance Arrangements [SA(COS)(10)13]**

8.1 Ms Matheson introduced an account of GSS activity and governance. The paper was for information.

8.2 The Committee agreed that it would like to hear from Theme Leaders at future Committee meetings, regarding plans and priorities in their topic areas.

**Action: Secretariat to liaise with the National Statistician's Office**

## **9 Any Other Business**

There was no other business. The Committee would meet next on Tuesday 13 July at 10:30am in London.

## Committee for Official Statistics

### *Agenda*

**Thursday, 6 May, 2010**  
**Board Room, Statistics House, London, 13:00 - 15:00**

**Chair: Professor Sir Roger Jowell**  
**Apologies: Professor David Rhind, Mrs Moira Gibb, Mr Duncan MacNiven**

1	Apologies, Minutes and Matters Arising Declarations of interest	Meeting of 090310
2	Report from the National Statistician	Oral Report Ms Jil Matheson
3	Report from the Head of Assessment	Oral Report Mr Richard Alldritt
4	Priorities for Official Statistics	SA(COS)(10)10 Secretariat
5	Next steps towards <i>Strengthening User Engagement</i>	SA(COS)(10)11 Mr Richard Alldritt
6	Web Dissemination: An Update	SA(COS)(10)12 Ms Jil Matheson
7	GSS Activity and Governance Arrangements	SA(COS)(10)13 Ms Jil Matheson
8	Any Other Business	

**UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY**

**Committee for Official Statistics**

SA(COS)(10)10

***Priorities for Official Statistics***

*[This paper is an edited version of the paper presented to the May meeting of COS]*

**Purpose**

1. This paper considers priorities for change in official statistics. It takes as its starting point the set of issues which the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) drew to the Authority's attention in January 2009. An update on the progress made over the past 15 months in addressing each issue is also provided.
2. The intention of this paper is to inform debate about future priorities for the Authority in respect of official statistics, not to constrain that debate by what has gone before.

**Recommendation**

3. Members of the Committee for Official Statistics are therefore invited to:
  - consider and comment on the progress made in respect of the original set of issues identified;
  - consider what further action should be taken in pursuit of these goals, and;
  - consider more generally which of these issues, or any other specific issues not mentioned here, should be priorities and shape the agenda and activities of the Committee for Official Statistics for the year ahead.

**Discussion**

4. The President of the RSS wrote to the Chair of the Statistics Authority on 5 January 2009 to submit a list of issues which the RSS considered that the Authority might address.
5. The Committee for Official Statistics considered these issues at its meeting of 13 January 2009, and the topic was further discussed at the Authority's Board meeting on 16 January. The Authority formally responded by a letter the following month, in which the Chair of the Authority welcomed the Society's views and set out responses to the issues raised.
6. This information, together with an update on progress made, has been collated and is presented in the annexes to this paper. Each issue is considered in turn and comprises:
  - i. the text about the issue raised by the RSS;
  - ii. the Authority's response to the issue, and;
  - iii. a summary update on progress made since.
7. The combined text is quite lengthy even in summary form. The updates provided are not intended to provide a full consideration of each of the issues raised, nor do they constitute a second formal response to the RSS although they could form the basis of such a response if that was thought appropriate. Rather, these updates are intended to be both a reminder and signpost for the issues concerned.

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8. The first seven issues raised were of a general nature and, it was agreed, of particular importance to both the RSS and the Authority. These topics are covered in more detail and are at **Annex A**.
9. The remaining issues were grouped by theme and nature and are at **Annex B** [*For brevity, the description of most of these issues has been omitted*]

**Secretariat, April 2010**

### **List of Annexes**

**Issues raised by the RSS, the Authority's Response, and Summary Progress to Date:**

- Annex A** General issues of particular importance
- Annex B** Other Issues

## **Annex A General issues of particular importance**

### **1. The Needs of Users and Other Stakeholders**

- 1.1 [RSS] While progress has been made in the last few years the GSS and producers of Official Statistics need to become more outward looking and engage with society in general. Without this they will neither provide data that truly “serve the public good” nor will they grow public trust as much as they should. It is important that independence is seen as an opportunity to put in place a new form of organisation where the needs of all users are identified and evaluated by the GSS and where the needs of potential future developments are properly assessed. We welcome the public statements that have been made recognising this, the importance placed on user engagement in the code of practice, and the papers presented to, and discussion at, the UKSA meeting of October 23. We look forward to real and significant progress.
- 1.2 We wish, however, to point out that engagement needs to occur at all levels including the very top, i.e. the UK Statistics Authority itself. Now that the Authority has recruited most of its staff and developed its organisation we hope to see it start on a programme of active engagement with all stakeholders, giving a clear lead to the GSS as a whole. It is good that the minutes of, and papers for, UKSA meetings are in the public domain. However, we would like to suggest that the Authority considers giving advance notice of topics it intends to consider, thus giving stakeholders the opportunity to submit issues and arguments relevant to these topics. The Authority might also like to consider whether part of its meetings could be open to the public.
- 1.3 It is also important to realise, and take account of, the fact that users have other demands on their time and priorities which may seem more immediately pressing than discussions with official statisticians. In part this arises from the normal pressures of day-to-day work but it also reflects the lack of general understanding of the importance of official statistics for society as a whole. This is not something which the UKSA can solve on its own but it will have a key role to play in generating a wider understanding of the importance of official statistics – not least as Authority members are people of some standing and influence. The RSS is of course willing to play its part in this, within the limits of its resources.
- 1.4 [Authority] We recognise and endorse the thrust of these points. You say that the Authority should start a programme of engagement with all stakeholders. We agree. The mechanisms by which this can best be done are something we want to consider carefully. We need to take account of, and not duplicate, the many forms of engagement that already exist across the Government Statistical Service and some that are at the planning stage. We also need to take account of the developing role of the Statistics Users Forum and the channels through which government user requirements, and indeed resources, are funnelled within government itself. With these considerations in mind, we are starting work on a Monitoring Review with the working title ‘Strengthening the User Voice’ which we expect to report in the second half of 2009. The work on this review will be guided by a project board under the chairmanship of Professor Sir Roger Jowell. We will write to you separately seeking a nomination from RSS and SUF respectively to sit on that project board.
- 1.5 You further suggest that we should give advance notice of topics the Authority intends to consider at its meetings, and thus give stakeholders the opportunity to submit issues and arguments. We would be happy to share agendas for forthcoming meetings of the Committee on Official Statistics with officers of the RSS – though we would note that these agendas are usually only known 2-3 weeks in advance and can be subject to change. We would also welcome any suggestions from the RSS on matters it believes

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the Authority should be discussing. We will ensure these are accommodated on future meeting agendas.

- 1.6 We will be looking further at the roles and membership of key committees in the course of this year, including whether there would be benefit in inviting the participation of a wider range of individuals (including some from the RSS) in those meetings. We will also be considering holding further events in 2009 at which stakeholders would be invited to meet members of the Authority Board. We are not at present proposing to hold any of our regular committee meetings in public.
- 1.7 [*Update*] The *Strengthening User Engagement* Monitoring Review was conducted in 2009 and an interim report published in March 2010. The project board included Martin Dougherty (RSS) and Andrew Dilnot (SUF), together with three other external users. The principal findings and recommendations of the report are included on the agenda of this meeting for further discussion.
- 1.8 The membership of the Committee for Official Statistics (COS) has undergone a number of changes over the past year. Most relevant is the decision by the Authority Board to invite three additional members to join the committee, two from beyond the Civil Service and all from beyond the ranks of the Authority. User interests have been represented on the Project Boards of all the Monitoring Reviews undertaken so far. The Migration and Monitoring Reviews both held open public meetings at the RSS to consider interim reports, chaired by an Authority non-executive directors. A similar exercise is planned for the User Engagement review.
- 1.9 The Secretariat has liaised with RSS staff to provide information about the agenda and discussions of COS and is putting in place arrangements to make this process more systematic. The minutes and papers of COS meetings are also made publicly available on the Authority's website (as are the papers from meetings of the Authority Board). Ad hoc meetings have been held throughout the year between executives of the Authority and the RSS and SUF. The Committee may wish to discuss what other arrangements might be adopted: for example, a joint meeting between COS and the National Statistics Working Party or another relevant group has been previously mooted.

## **2. The need for proper planning**

- 2.1 [*RSS*] Official statistics should serve society as a whole, should be relevant and evolve as society and the economy evolves. These are areas where the UK statistical system has failed in the past and still sometimes fails (for example the slowness in the 1980s and 1990s to develop statistics to reflect the growing importance of the service sector to the UK economy; more recently the well-aired problems with population and migration statistics). The decentralised and devolved nature of the system has also hampered coordinated planning. We welcome the fact that one of the initial reports the UKSA is undertaking is to examine long-term arrangements for longer-term planning; the RSS will be happy to assist in any appropriate way. It is, though, important that proper planning does not stifle creativity and innovation and that mechanisms are in place (eg a rolling five-year plan with annual review) to allow adaptation as needed.
- 2.2 [*Authority*] The Authority Board decided in January not to proceed immediately with a Monitoring Review on longer-term planning arrangements but rather to take the work forward in a different way (we will update our website shortly). The National Statistician is putting in place a new structure of cross-government groups to lead statistical planning which will include engagement with SUF user groups; and, as part of that, will lead a high-level 'horizon-scanning' exercise to look at the country's longer term statistical requirements. A report on this will then be submitted to the Authority Board and, at that point, we will consider whether to take any further steps to explore the issues that this

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exercise highlights. We will arrange for more information on the steps we are taking to be provided to you. We would also be happy to discuss how the RSS might best make an input to both the horizon-scanning and regular planning work.

- 2.3 [Update] Over recent months, there have been important changes to the way the National Statistician's Office coordinates GSS statistical direction (strategy) and medium term planning. For example, a new Statistical Strategy team has created a focus for GSS strategy and planning with early outputs such as the National Statistician's *Statistics Matter* statement. This statement, following discussion with the UK Statistics Authority Board, key users, Statistical Heads of Profession, and the Statistics Suppliers and Users Group, celebrates the strengths of the UK official statistics system and raises some high level strategic challenges for producers.
- 2.4 For the future, whilst there will continue to be a variety of ways of gathering and identifying issues of strategic concern, such as via the Head of Profession network, it is intended that GSS Theme Leaders will lead in identifying emerging needs following comprehensive user engagement, both with those inside of Government and externally. The outcome of the Theme Leaders' work will be collated by the National Statistician's Office in the second half of 2010.
- 2.5 The Statistics Suppliers and Users Group (STATSUG) continues to provide an important planning link between the official statistics producer and user communities. In addition, the GSS Planning and Communications Task Force (which evolved from the Advisory Committee of the GSS Leadership and Revitalisation project) provides practical support on matters such as identifying best practice case studies (used in the "Statistics Matter" statement and the GSS Chapter of the forthcoming UK Statistics Authority Annual Report and Resource Accounts), and in the targeting of GSS communications. Preparations have also just begun for a 'horizon scanning' event in early autumn to consider the country's longer term statistical requirements.

### 3. Communication and presentation

- 3.1 [RSS] Communication and presentation of statistics has also been a weak point of the UK statistical system in the past. Symptoms of this have included the much criticised ONS website, turgid and unhelpful press notices, and at times a failure to communicate adequately with users. We appreciate that a number of efforts are underway to improve matters - notably work to improve the ONS website - and that the draft code of practice covers this element in some detail. We do, however, suggest that this aspect of statistics is kept under close review by the UKSA and that in the not too distant future it carries out a review of the extent to which actual practice is living up to expectations. In particular it will be absolutely essential that the improvements in the website currently underway do not stop once present plans have been implemented but that adequate resources are available, both for ongoing "day to day" improvements and for the further major developments that will inevitably be needed.
- 3.2 [Authority] You suggest that the Authority should review progress in improving communication both via the National Statistics website and more generally. As you note, the Code of Practice covers this area in some detail; and that means that our programme of Assessment Reports, the first of which should be published in the spring and which should thereafter gather momentum, will also pay close attention to communication and presentation in each area of statistics. It is possible that there will also be broader messages requiring a co-ordinated approach – we have already demonstrated our commitment on such matters by making a major investment in the National Statistics Publication Hub. We agree that steadily improving communication is fundamental to the future of UK official statistics and we will certainly be planning to review progress on a regular basis building on, for example, our recently published Note on the Presentation

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of Statistics in First Releases and Elsewhere

3.3 [*Update*] Both the Monitoring and Assessment team (through its programme of Assessment reports) and the National Statistician's Office have been actively working with the GSS to help improve the communication and presentation of statistics. A GSS workshop in February based on the findings of the Assessments carried out in 2009 helped to emphasise the importance of such improvements and gave a steer on the way forward. This is to be followed up by a more in-depth workshop scheduled for the summer. In the meantime, a Task Force has been established under the auspices of the GSS Presentation and Dissemination Committee. Progress has been slow to date but following recent input and support from the National Statistician's Office, the Task Force is now looking to inject much more pace into the work, and is seeking to make visible and demonstrable improvements to a series of statistical releases over the coming months.

3.4 In addition, the work to improve the ONS website is making good progress. ONS is currently on track to deliver a new web site with much improved search and navigation facilities, better access to underlying data and a standardised approach to published content. An operational site with populated content and dataset access is scheduled for release in January 2011, with a further release planned for May 2011 which will deliver an enhanced web site with full data explorer facilities and full content authoring. The National Statistician's Office is also now leading on work to develop a web dissemination strategy for official statistics [see related paper on the agenda of this meeting]. In addition, over the coming months the National Statistician's Office will develop a new GSS Communication Strategy. This will be multifaceted, and will seek to cover both communications within the GSS and also between the GSS and external users and stakeholders.

3.5 The need to improve the commentary or narrative accompanying the release of statistics has been a consistent finding of the first year's 27 Assessment Reports. In *Findings of the 2009 Assessment Programme*, published as a Monitoring and Assessment Note in March 2010, this need is identified as one of three priority areas which it is recommended that all statistical producers should focus on. Producers have implemented or agreed to implement a total of 34 requirements in this respect in 2009, and this is the single most common area where Requirements have been needed to ensure Code compliance. The report stated that:

"In the context of supporting effective use of statistics, it would be beneficial to explain the statistics more fully, including trends over time and geographical patterns. Enhancing the narrative (commentary) accompanying statistics will help the user understand and make effective use of the data. That commentary needs to include appropriate details about the context in which the statistics are produced, the main features, and above all, their known limitations."

3.6 The subjects of the ONS website, and web dissemination of statistics generally, are considered in the *Strengthening User Engagement* Interim Report [see related paper on the agenda of this meeting]. Recommendations 3 and 4 state that:

- (r3) The Office for National Statistics (ONS) should give priority to improving the navigability and accessibility of its website, and should publish plans for doing so as soon as possible.
- (r4) The National Statistician should publish a plan setting out how the Government Statistical Service (GSS) should use web technology, and innovative ways of exploiting digitised data, to enhance the accessibility of official statistics and related advice.

#### **4. Separation of statistical information from policy comment**

- 4.1 [RSS] We consider that the mixing of policy and ministerial comment with statistical information and releases has been a major factor contributing to the low level of public confidence in UK statistics. We therefore welcome the initiation of the publications hub and look forward to seeing its full development. It is clear though from the recent incident regarding teenage admissions to hospital as a result of knife crime and the earlier incident at the presentation for media on immigration statistics at the Home Office in August 2008 that an educational effort is needed throughout government, and particularly with press offices, to ensure that this separation happens. We urge the UKSA to initiate this or to take other steps to ensure that the civil service as a whole undertakes this.
- 4.2 Selective use of statistics mixed with policy comment, in a way which does not add to public debate but confuses and constrains it, does not just occur when data are released (as one example, see the "fact-sheet" issued by the Home Office on the Tackling Knives Action Programme. We believe that there needs to be a concerted effort throughout government to use data in a form that enlightens rather than spins. As you are aware we have already written to Sir Gus O'Donnell on these lines and hope that the UKSA, within the limits of its mandate, will also press for this.
- 4.3 Pre-release access has also, we believe, been part of the problem. The Royal Statistical Society considers that the UK should seek to emulate best practice in other comparable countries where pre-release access to ministers and policy officials either does not exist or is limited to a few hours at most. We do not see the need for any pre-release access in the majority of cases and only the need for, at most, a short period such as two hours for a limited number of market-sensitive statistics. We are pleased to see that the UKSA has similar views. The proposed reduction of pre-release to 24 hours for UK statistics is a welcome improvement but does not, in our view, go far enough. The intention is that this will be reviewed 12 months after it comes into practice and we hope that review will result in further tightening. We regret the decision of the Scottish Executive to retain pre-release access of up to 5 days for Scottish devolved statistics. We hope that the UKSA will continue to press for tighter pre-release practices and offer RSS support in this.
- 4.4 [Authority] You argue that an educational effort is needed across government. We believe that Sir Gus O'Donnell's letter of 16 January to the chair of the House of Commons Public Administration Committee, which will be the basis of discussion at the highest level in the civil service, is helpful in laying the ground for progress in this area. In particular, the three lessons that Sir Gus highlights (the need to raise civil servants' and advisors' awareness of the importance the Government attaches to observance the Code of Practice; the need to develop principles relating to numerical information derived from administrative sources; and the need to involve statisticians at an early stage in the production of publications that contain official statistics) will do much to reinforce the message, and the Authority will be looking to build on those in the course of 2009.
- 4.5 [Update] Independent statistical briefings for the media have continued for high profile statistical releases on crime (involving Home Office statisticians) and on population and migration (involving statisticians from ONS, Home Office and Department for Work and Pensions). The separation of statistical commentary from political/policy comment has been well received by journalists and the National Statistician is keen to build on these successes. Other departments have been encouraged to consider whether similar independent press conferences might be appropriate and helpful for some of their major statistical releases. At least one other department is actively developing ideas for its own such press conferences.

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- 4.6 Following on from the intervention around knife crime statistics in December 2008 and January 2009, the Authority has continued to make interventions around the use of statistics through 2009 and 2010 where it felt these were needed. For example, interventions in respect of the use of gender pay statistics (Minister for Women and Equality); violent crime statistics (Shadow Home Secretary); migration statistics (Prime Minister). These interventions received significant media coverage and made observable impacts on the way that Ministers and other politicians subsequently made use of statistics - the interventions also, we hope, serve as a cautionary influence in general.
- 4.7 The Authority has vigorously pursued its objective to reduce pre-release access to the absolute minimum necessary. As planned, the Authority carried out its independent review of the statutory arrangements for pre-release access in the UK, and the Report was published in March 2010. The Report recommended that all four UK administrations should amend their Pre-Release Orders to adopt a maximum period of pre-release access of three hours.
- 4.8 The report received positive media coverage and an endorsement by the Shadow Minister for the Cabinet Office. The recent incident concerning the Prime Minister's early access to GDP figures, coinciding with the second televised 'Leaders Debate', provided another illustration of the inadequacy of the current arrangements, and attracted further media coverage (see also paragraphs 16.4 and 16.5 below). The Authority awaits a response to its Monitoring Report from the next Government. Separate reviews by the Cabinet Office and the Scottish Government of pre-release access arrangements are planned but have not yet been published.
- 4.9 The issue of pre-release was also highlighted in a letter sent to the leaders of all the main UK political parties by the Chair on January 29 2010, setting out the policy priorities of the Authority. It stated that "in order to attack the widespread belief that official statistics are manipulated by Ministers and their advisers before publication, the Statistics Authority should be asked to determine the pre-release access arrangements for all official statistics."

### **5. The need for statisticians to understand the subject they are measuring**

- 5.1 [RSS] This is an often overlooked issue but it is, self-evidently, crucial if statisticians are able both to make the best judgements in areas of uncertainty and to plan for the future. To some extent this will be easier for statisticians in policy departments since their day-to-day work is likely to involve the acquisition of some such knowledge but it should not be assumed that this is necessarily adequate. It is essential for statisticians in the ONS and other non-policy areas to be given the opportunity to develop appropriate knowledge and make the necessary expert contacts. (See also point 25 regarding ONS relocation.)
- 5.2 [Authority] We support this point which echoes a statement of practice in the Code of Practice . We would note however that, as you acknowledge, one of the strengths of the UK's decentralised statistical system is that statisticians in government departments are often very expert in their subject fields and those in ONS are expert in fields such as macro-economic analysis and demographics. However, we also recognise that at least some of the statisticians in government would benefit from further opportunities to expand their subject knowledge and develop links with experts. With that in mind, we would be glad to discuss further the role that the RSS itself might play in helping the GSS to meet this need, for example in helping the Authority identify suitable experts to provide advice.
- 5.3 [Update] Statistician's subject knowledge is critical to ensuring the relevance and impact

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of statistical outputs and is a recognised strength of the UK's decentralised system. Enhancing statistical capability is an important part of the National Statistician's Office work programme. For example, the GSS has recently joined forces with the Government Office for Science and the other analytical professions on a broadened Science and Analysis review programme, designed to complement Capability Reviews in assuring the effective use of evidence in departmental policy making. The first such review, of the Department of Children Schools and Families, will report later in 2010

5.4 This issue is a central concern of the Authority's User Engagement Report, and is fully discussed there. Recommendation 2 of the report states that "Statistical Heads of Profession in government should work with experts in the subjects to which the statistics relate, to find ways to explain more clearly in statistical releases the relevance and meaning of the figures."

### **6. Statistical coherence between the four UK administrations**

6.1 [*RSS*] Users often complain about the lack of comparability. Processes need to be put into place to ensure that there is harmonisation of statistical practice where this is justified by user need – but without infringing the autonomy of the devolved administrations. Where there are well-founded differences, the GSS should make efforts to “bridge” between the different statistics.

6.2 [*Authority*] We agree with this observation – which, again, echoes a statement in the Code - and would note that new arrangements for statistical coordination between the four administrations have been established by the National Statistician in recent months and will be developed further over the year ahead. The Authority Board will be looking at the effectiveness of the new arrangements in due course.

6.3 [*Update*] The National Statistician chairs the Inter Administration Committee (IAC), which is focused on ensuring that the four administrations cooperate on statistical matters and work together where appropriate to address issues such as statistical coherence, harmonisation, standardisation, user needs and accessibility. One of the IAC's roles is to promote policies, strategies and standards which facilitate the production of coherent and harmonised statistics across the administrations, where there is a clear user need and priority. GSS Theme Leaders also have an express role to consider the UK dimension and the need for comparable statistics for the four countries of the UK. They are asked to identify inter-administration issues such as comparability and harmonisation, and to put in place plans to address such issues. They are also required to provide reports to the IAC, and to attend the committee as required, ensuring that issues of comparability are identified and addressed appropriately. Where differences between the four administrations are well founded, or there is not a justified user need for comparability, the focus is on explaining those differences and the approaches taken.

6.4 Issues of UK comparability have been the focus of some Assessment Reports in regard to specific sets of statistics. For example, Assessment Report 18, published in November 2009, related to the National Child Measurement Programme in England, produced by the NHS IC. It suggested that the NHS IC should work with the other UK administrations to produce a sub-set of comparable UK-wide data on obesity in children. (At present the NCMP Report makes no reference to child obesity in other parts of the UK.)

6.5 A proposal is currently being developed by the Monitoring and Assessment Team to examine the issue systematically, under the working title of *Promoting comparability of official statistics within the UK*. This proposal, along with a short-list of other potential topics for future Monitoring work, will be considered at the next meeting of COS.

## **7. Defining National and other official statistics**

- 7.1 [RSS] The concept of “national statistics”, central to the new arrangements, has not been adequately developed. There is substantial variation between departments in the proportion of statistics that are badged as “national” statistics and some striking anomalies. We welcome the fact that monitoring report number 3 will review all official statistics not currently designated as national statistics and will also consider whether to notify the relevant minister that they should be considered for national statistics status. In addition to defining “national statistics” there is also a need to define “official statistics” given the increasing trend to outsource official statistics to agencies. It is, also, important that official statistics which are not “national statistics” are still produced to high quality standards. Finally, there is also a need to clarify the accessibility of information for all institutions that produce statistics including quasi-public bodies such as Northern Rock and the partially publicly-owned banks.
- 7.2 [Authority] We are taking a number of steps in this area. The Authority has now published its report *Priorities for Designation as National Statistics* which, as well as nominating certain sets of statistics as priorities to be brought within the ambit of National Statistics, lists a large number of other sets of official statistics which we will consider again if the responsible government departments do not seek their assessment in the meantime.
- 7.3 The question over official statistics (those that are not National Statistics) is not so much one of definition as properly identifying the point at which raw data or management information should be treated as official statistics – and thus handled in accordance with the Code of Practice. We will be producing a statement within the next few weeks on the Authority’s views on such questions and under what circumstances such figures might be released.
- 7.4 [Update] Positive responses were received from Ministers to the notifications mentioned at paragraph 7.1, and virtually all the sets of statistics concerned have now either been assessed or are currently in the programme for assessment. Many of the arm's length agencies referred to have been specified as producers of official statistics by virtue of an Order under section 6(1)(b) of the Statistics and Registration Service Act. A list of the statistics produced by these bodies has been published. The National Statistician's Office is currently compiling a list of undesignated statistics that are produced by government departments and other Crown bodies. This will expand on the list published in the *Priorities for Designation* report by including more comprehensive coverage of those official statistics that are not under the management of government statisticians.
- 7.5 With reference to paragraph 7.3, the Authority published its views on management information in a Statement released on 22 July 2009. The following month, the National Statistician issued good practice guidance on the use of administrative or management information by public servants.
- 7.6 Although the Act identifies the types of bodies that produce official statistics, it does not define what is meant by a 'statistic'. This remains a matter for judgement. The National Statistician has therefore issued guidance covering the criteria that might be taken into account in deciding whether to treat a particular set of figures as official statistics.

## **Annex B Other Issues**

### **8. Inadequacy of population and migration statistics**

- 8.1 [RSS] The problems are well known and we note that the UKSA will be reviewing this as its monitoring report no. 4.
- 8.2 [Authority] The National Statistician has initiated a cross-departmental programme of work to improve population and migration statistics and there is also now a ministerial group overseeing developments in this area. We are planning to publish an interim monitoring report on the progress being made, and the extent to which current plans meet user needs, at the end of March.
- 8.3 [Update] The UK Statistics Authority published the Monitoring Review, *Migration Statistics: the Way Ahead* on 9 July 2009, making six recommendations. The Migration Statistics Improvement Programme (MSIPB) welcomed the report, recognising the useful analysis of the progress and plans of the cross-government improvement work and the valuable user insights that it provided. The MSIPB agreed an action plan for taking forward the six recommendations and monitors progress of all the work of the programme at its quarterly meetings. The MSIPB wrote to the Authority in December 2009, reporting that good progress is being made and attaching an update.

### **9. The need for a national address register**

- 9.1 [RSS] The need for a national address register for statistical purposes is well established. Previous efforts to set up a definitive register have failed, as highlighted by the Treasury Select Committee in its report "Counting the Population". ONS is currently compiling a special register for the 2011 Census in England and Wales, buying information from the Post Office, Ordnance Survey, and the Local Government Information House. However, due to these three public bodies each defending their own intellectual property, this definitive register will not be available for any other purposes. The failure of public bodies to operate for the public good in England and Wales is in sharp contrast to Scotland, where a national address register is being created. There is a clear need for this issue to be tackled with vigour.
- 9.2 [Authority] We agree that the issue needs to be tackled with vigour. Although ONS is preparing the address information it needs for the Census, the longer term solution is likely to lie with some or all of the other bodies you mention. We believe that a single address register will be an important component in the delivery of many government objectives, and we will do all we can to encourage Ministers to take forward for the longer term the development work that ONS is currently undertaking.
- 9.3 [Update] The Authority Board and COS have considered the issue of the lack of a quality national address register on various occasions in 2009. The Chair wrote to the Rt. Hon John Healey MP, Minister of State for Housing and Planning on 8 July 2009, setting out the Authority's concern at the continuing situation and the urgent need for a resolution. In response to the Chair's letter there were several interventions from other bodies in support of the Authority's position, including letters from Dr Tony Wright, Chair, Public Administration Select Committee; the Demographic User Group; the Association of Regional Observatories, and the RSS.
- 9.4 Following a further letter from the Chair, a reply was received on 29 September 2009 from Lord McKenzie of Luton, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Department for Communities and Local Government, which said that the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) had 'concluded in June 2007 that it would not carry out any further work on a National Spatial Address Infrastructure' and that this position had 'not changed'. However it did note that discussions were continuing

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between Ordnance Survey and the Improvement and Development Agency, and that CLG and the Cabinet Office would 'take stock in light of these positive developments'.

9.5 The National Statistician's Office plan to provide the Committee with a further update on the situation at the next meeting.

**10. 2011 Census** [omitted]

**11. Housing market** [omitted]

**12. Measurement of inflation**

12. [RSS] Both the Consumer Price Index and the Retail Price Index have drawbacks. In addition there is a need to ensure that explanations of the various inflation series are communicated adequately to the public; this is particularly important at the moment. We welcome the fact that the communication of inflation is to be the subject of UKSA monitoring report no. 6 but would hope that this also looks at the compilation of the indices.

12.2[*Authority*] It is too soon to make a definitive statement on the scope of our forthcoming review of the communication of measures of inflation but it is likely that the review will look at the differences in coverage and methods of compilation between the different inflation measures currently produced and the extent to which these measures are perceived by users to meet their requirements.

12.3[*Update*] The Authority established a group to advise it on CPI and RPI methodological issues in April 2009. The Consumer Prices Advisory Committee (CPAC) is chaired by the National Statistician, comprises a range of external users and commentators including academics, journalists as well as civil servants, and is supported by the ONS. Following a public consultation undertaken by ONS, the Authority approved CPAC's recommendation that the measure of interest used in the calculation of mortgage interest payments in the RPI should be changed to use the Average Effective Rate (AER). This change was implemented for the February 2010 index, published in March 2010. The group continues its work.

12.4 The formal Assessment of the Consumer Price Index and Retail Price Index began in April 2010. The Assessment team will investigate the way in which measures of inflation are communicated as part of that work. The Authority will await the findings from the Assessment Report on CPI and RPI before deciding how to take forward the planned review of communicating inflation.

**13. Retail sales series** [omitted]

**14. Adequacy of environmental statistics to inform current debate** [omitted]

**15. Crime statistics** [omitted]

**16. League tables** [omitted]

**17. Educational Statistics** [omitted]

**18. Adequacy of regional economic statistics** [omitted]

**19. Progress following the Atkinson Report (January 2005)** [omitted]

**20. Coverage of internet transactions** [omitted]

**21. Use of administrative records for statistical purposes**

21.1 [RSS] Following the provisions of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007, it should be easier for government statisticians to access records, such as tax and benefit records, to produce better statistics. Priorities and mechanisms need to be established. We welcome the fact that the draft Code of Practice covers this issue while noting that the relevant protocol needs some further work (this letter is finalised prior to the publication of the definitive Code of Practice).

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21.2[*Authority*] We would be pleased to discuss your concerns about Protocol 3 of the Code of Practice. More generally, you will be interested to know that in collaboration with DCSF, the first Data Sharing Order has been passed in Parliament to give ONS access to School Census data to improve migration data and further data sharing opportunities are being pursued.

21.3[*Update*] in 2009 the data sharing powers in the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 were used to meet priority requirements for access to data on students attending higher education institutions in England and Wales. The ONS Centre for Demography will be using this information to improve statistical estimates of the number and location of students. At the same time, data from the School Census is being used to quality assure the mid-year population estimates and data from the Migrant Workers Scan has contributed to improving the modelling of migration. All this work will feed into revisions to the series of mid-year population estimates (to be published in May 2010) as well as estimates for 2009 (to be published in June 2010).

21.4 In addition, ONS is carrying out feasibility work to assess whether it will be possible, in the longer term, to use administrative data, either alone or in conjunction with extended survey approaches or alternative Census methods, to meet ongoing requirements for both population and wider socio-demographic statistics (the 'Beyond 2011' project). Finally, the publication of a GSS guide, 'Stepping Stones to Data Sharing for Statistical Purposes', in July 2009 provides a framework for such work by offering a step-by-step description of the issues and actions that need to be considered.

**22. Classification procedures** [omitted]

**23. Adequacy of documentation** [omitted]

**24. Outsourcing compilation of official statistics** [omitted]

**25. Statistics to serve democracy**

25.1[*RSS*] Over the long term consideration needs to be given to the production of statistics that inform the electorate on political issues at times of elections as occurs in, for example, Norway. To take one possibility: if and when a referendum on Scottish independence occurs, authoritative and unbiased information on government spending in different areas of the UK and regional sources of government revenue raising (including but not restricted to oil revenues) would be examples of data that could inform citizens throughout the UK. We appreciate though that this would be a high-risk initiative and would therefore need careful preparation.

25.2[*Authority*] We understand your suggestion to be that we should consider whether, when a major election or referendum takes place, it would be in the public interest for special statistical publications to be produced that would inform the public objectively on the issues. There are, as you recognise, some major obstacles to such an approach and whilst you identify one international example, we suspect that such examples are relatively few and far between. Nonetheless, we would welcome further discussion about the scope, and need, for perhaps rather basic statistical products at the time of elections.

25.3[*Update*] The Monitoring and Assessment Team and the Secretariat are currently developing options for a range of potential work related to the 2010 election and statistics, and the role of statistics in serving democracy more broadly. In particular 'The availability of statistics for Parliamentary Constituencies' could be the subject of a future monitoring investigation.

25.4 A related development is the status of election statistics. These statistics are produced by the Electoral Commission which is not presently designated a producer of official statistics under the terms of the Statistics and Registration Service Act. To explore the

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possibility of including the Electoral Commission in a future Official Statistics Order, Authority staff have been engaged in discussions with the Cabinet Office (responsible for Orders) and the Head of Profession for statistics at the Ministry of Justice (MoJ have certain responsibilities in relation to the Commission). In this way, election statistics could be brought into the family of official statistics and be subject to the Code of Practice.

**UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY**

**Committee for Official Statistics**

SA(COS)(10)11

***Next steps towards  
Strengthening User Engagement***

**Purpose**

1. To discuss next steps in relation to the Authority's monitoring review on *Strengthening User Engagement* following the publication of the interim Report.

**Recommendation**

2. Members of the Committee for Official Statistics are invited to:
  - note the current planned activity in relation to this review;
  - consider next steps for taking forward the recommendations from this review, and;
  - consider the Committee's role in overseeing progress on the recommendations.

**Discussion**

3. The interim Report for the Monitoring Review on *Strengthening User Engagement* was published on 31 March 2010. The summary, conclusions and recommendations laid out in this Report are attached at **Annex A**.
4. The Monitoring and Assessment Team plans to hold an open meeting at the Royal Statistical Society on 3 June 2010 to discuss the findings and recommendations of the review. A draft agenda for this open meeting is attached at **Annex B**.
5. Below is a summary version of the recommendations as they currently stand (in full at the end of Annex A). We do not expect them to change significantly in the final Report but it is possible that they will be augmented or strengthened following the open meeting. The Committee may wish to consider what steps it would be appropriate for the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and other parts of the statistical service to put in hand in the coming months to progress the recommendations, and the role of the Committee itself in overseeing their implementation.

**Abbreviated Recommendations**

- i. All government departments etc should take steps to enhance their compliance with those aspects of the *Code* that relate to understanding the use, and users, of Official Statistics. Two examples:
  - 'Investigate and document the needs of users of Official Statistics, the use made of existing statistics ...'
  - 'Publish information about users' experiences of statistical services, data quality, and the format and timing of reports.'
- ii. Statistical Heads of Profession (HoPs) should work with experts in the subjects to which the statistics relate, to find ways to explain more clearly in statistical releases the relevance and meaning of the figures;
- iii. ONS should give priority to improving the navigability and accessibility of its website, and should publish plans for doing so as soon as possible;
- iv. the National Statistician should publish a plan setting out how the Government Statistical Service (GSS) should use web technology, and innovative ways of exploiting digitised data, to enhance the accessibility of Official Statistics and related advice;

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- v. government statisticians should work together, and with the Royal Statistical Society (RSS), to improve communication between statistical experts and journalists;
- vi. a high profile web-based forum (supported by an appropriate structure of meetings between users and producers) should be developed which would enable users of statistics to communicate more easily and openly with each other and with the producer bodies, and;
- vii. all government departments and other producer bodies should work actively with the Statistics User Forum (SUF) to help user groups represent the interests and priorities of their members.

And, the Statistics Authority will support the RSS's initiatives in seeking to develop new user-designed, user-managed websites that will provide direct access to statistical material.

### **Monitoring and Assessment, April 2010**

#### **List of Annexes**

- Annex A Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations from the Interim Report on Strengthening User Engagement**
- Annex B Draft Agenda for Open Meeting at Royal Statistical Society on Strengthening User Engagement**

## Annex A: Summary, conclusions and recommendations from interim report

### Summary and conclusions

1. In February 2009<sup>1</sup> the UK Statistics Authority announced its intention of carrying out a monitoring review to look at ways of enhancing communication between the producers of official statistics and the users - those organisations and individuals whose decisions and actions are influenced by statistics. The aim was both to guide the future development of the statistical service and to help users to engage with it and make the maximum possible use of it.
2. The review concludes that while there is already a lot of user engagement of one sort or another, there needs to be:
  - better understanding of the use currently made of official statistics and the value to society that flows from that use;
  - better communication with a wider range of users; and
  - better exploitation of the existing consultation structures and technologies to ensure that user engagement is effective.
3. Historically, the costs and burdens of the statistical service have received the same close scrutiny as other publicly funded services. But the value derived from having the service – essentially the benefit to government and different sectors of society from having access to official statistics – has been studied less closely. The question of how best to enhance the value for money of official statistics has not been addressed directly.
4. Enhancing value requires a good understanding of both the use and the potential use of the outputs of the statistical service. That information needs to be documented and used to further develop the service provided. This emphasis on understanding uses and engaging with users is one of the main features of the new Code of Practice for Official Statistics<sup>2</sup> introduced in January 2009. The Statistics Authority's initial assessments of compliance with the Code indicate that many of the bodies that produce official statistics need to do more in order to comply fully with the new Code in this respect<sup>3</sup>.
5. Once producer bodies have identified the uses and potential uses of statistical outputs, and the associated communities of organisations and individuals who use the statistics, they need to establish an ongoing dialogue with those communities. It is not sufficient to 'consult', in the sense of making plans available on a website for public comment. The dialogue needs to have substance, helping producers to inform users about the availability of new statistics; to tailor the advice which accompanies the statistics to take account of the likely uses; and to present the statistics in ways that capture interest and can be readily understood. The dialogue should also enable users to provide feedback on the range and quality of the statistics available.
6. Increasingly, access to statistics, and to statistical releases and reports, is via the web. It seems likely therefore that a web-based approach to communication between different users of statistics, and between users and producers, will offer the most viable and effective way forward, making the

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/reports-from-the-authority-s-monitoring---assessment-team---update-no--2.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> See Annex G for a summary of the practices in the Code relating to user engagement

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dialogue openly accessible and transparent. At present a relatively small number of dedicated individuals support a number of statistical 'user groups' which work to lobby government departments for action on their priorities. These user groups, and the Statistics User Forum (SUF)<sup>4</sup> that brings them together, have played an important and beneficial part in the evolution of UK official statistics. However there is a need to engage more directly and effectively with a broader base of organisations and individuals, including the many users of statistics within government, who depend on statistical information.

7. There are clearly challenges for statistics producers in adopting a new approach to user engagement. It is not just a matter of asking more people what statistics they would like to see collected. Input from users is important at all stages in the statistical production process – from planning what statistics to collect; deciding how they should best be produced and disseminated; deciding how the statistics (and the messages from them) should be communicated to the outside world; and helping decision-makers use the statistics in ways that deliver value.
8. Achieving this level of engagement has implications for existing resource allocation – more communication may mean less resources for producing statistical outputs. However the Statistics Authority believes that the benefits of increased dialogue with users justify some rebalancing in resource use. Given the power of statistics to influence actions and decisions in all sectors of society, and the relative paucity of current knowledge and documentation about those aspects, the case for such re-balancing is strong. Indeed without a clear understanding of the needs of users of statistics, a question hangs over the business case for all the resources currently employed.
9. Government and other users' needs for statistics can increase in times of pressure on public expenditure when statistical information can help to inform the hard choices that public bodies have to make. This strengthens the case for focusing on understanding the potentially competing user requirements. Pressure on resources is not a reason to withdraw from dialogue and stick with the current range of outputs.
10. The Statistics Authority recognises that positive steps have been taken in recent years, including better dialogue with the various user groups that are represented on SUF (which is itself supported by the Royal Statistical Society, the Economic and Social Research Council and the Statistics Authority) and other initiatives such as ScotStat. There have also been some real improvements in online access to official statistics. But there is evidence from the Authority's assessments of statistics against the Code, and from discussions with users and opinion formers as part of this review, to suggest that there is still some way to go. The statistical service needs, for example, to further support the work of the current user groups to ensure that the benefits of these networks are fully realised.
11. One essential step in improving both the service and user engagement will be to enhance the accessibility of official statistics – including promoting awareness that they are available. Users and potential users need to know what statistics are available on the topics of interest to them and how to set about finding the figures and advice relating to them. The vast range of

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.rss.org.uk/main.asp?page=1612>

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statistical information now available means that this is becoming increasingly challenging but it is clear that the answer has to lie with well designed websites and close co-operation between producer bodies to adopt a shared approach to the design of products for those websites.

12. The context in which the statistical service is operating is important in considering the steps to take. Public confidence in official statistics continues to be low. The latest figures<sup>5</sup> are no better than when measurement started in 2004. We believe that public attitudes are strongly influenced by wider attitudes to government and public institutions and that there is no easy route to solving the problem of confidence in the statistical service, in isolation from those wider issues. However, steps which help to ensure that statistics are presented correctly in the news media could improve the general public's understanding and use of those figures. Producer bodies need to work to improve relations with the media in a number of ways outlined in this report.
13. The best approach is likely to lie not in one or two big changes in current practice but in a combination of many measures tailored to different circumstances. The common thread to these measures should be the added value that can be derived from supporting the use of statistics. Any measure that supports the beneficial use of official statistics should be regarded as an integral part of the service. We consider that the implementation of our recommendations will improve the value – and thus the trustworthiness – of the official statistics system, and will over time reinforce confidence in that system.
14. The collection and publication of official statistics has to be managed as a service, with all that that implies, and we think it should be managed more as other services are managed. The commercial world operates on the basis of identifying and meeting the needs of its customers; and businesses put considerable resource into ensuring that they know what their customers, and potential customers, think about the service they receive. The UK statistical service must do the same.

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<sup>5</sup> see Annex A; also <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/study/public-confidence-in-official-statistics>

## Interim recommendations

15. The Statistics Authority invites views on the following interim recommendations, which we will be discussing with user representatives and other interested parties before completion of our final report.
  1. All government departments and other bodies that produce official statistics should take steps to enhance their compliance with those aspects of the Code<sup>6</sup> that relate to understanding the use, and users, of official statistics. Two examples of requirements in the Code that need to be met:
    - ‘Investigate and document the needs of users of official statistics, the use made of existing statistics and the types of decisions they inform.’
    - ‘Publish information about users’ experiences of statistical services, data quality, and the format and timing of reports.’The Statistics Authority will consider with the National Statistician whether further guidance on how to meet such requirements is needed (paras 57 and 87)
  2. Statistical Heads of Profession in government should work with experts in the subjects to which the statistics relate, to find ways to explain more clearly in statistical releases the relevance and meaning of the figures (para 64)
  3. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) should give priority to improving the navigability and accessibility of its website, and should publish plans for doing so as soon as possible (para 69)
  4. The National Statistician should publish a plan setting out how the Government Statistical Service (GSS) should use web technology, and innovative ways of exploiting digitised data, to enhance the accessibility of official statistics and related advice (para 71)
  5. Government statisticians should work together, and with the Royal Statistical Society (RSS), to improve communication between statistical experts and journalists. This might include supporting statistical training for student journalists; supporting courses or events and visits for journalists to statistical offices or departments; and increasing opportunities for journalists to talk directly to statisticians in government (para 77)
  6. Given the great diversity of users of statistics, a high profile web-based forum (supported by an appropriate structure of meetings between users and producers) should be developed which would enable users of statistics to communicate more easily and openly with each other and with the producer bodies. While the lead on this should rest with SUF and the RSS, bodies producing official statistics should actively support this initiative, coordinated by the National Statistician (para 85)

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<sup>6</sup> See Annex G

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7. All government departments and other producer bodies should work actively with SUF (and other user group structures), to help user groups represent the interests and priorities of their members (para 91)
  
16. In addition, the Statistics Authority will support the RSS's initiatives in seeking to develop new user-designed, user-managed websites that will provide direct access to statistical material, including official statistics, in an easily accessible, user-friendly way. The Authority will also support any equivalent initiative from other respected bodies or consortia (para 73).

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## Annex B: Draft Agenda for open meeting

**Draft Agenda**  
**Strengthening User Engagement Open Meeting**  
**3 June 2010, RSS**  
**9:30-13:00**

9:30-10:00	<b>Registration and coffee</b>	
10:00	<b>Introduction</b> <i>Professor Sir Roger Jowell (chair of SUE project board)</i>	
10:10	<b>Presentations</b>	
	<i>Richard Laux / Cathy Kruger</i>	Presentation of the report and recommendations
	<i>Ipsos Mori</i>	Research on perceptions of opinion-formers on official statistics
	<i>Jil Matheson / Caron Walker</i>	National Statistician's perspective
	<i>Andrew Dilnot / Martin Dougherty</i>	SUF/RSS perspective
	<i>Tbc (potentially ScotStat)</i>	Example of good user engagement from the GSS
11:20	<b>Questions and panel discussion</b> <i>Hosted by Liam Murray</i>	<i>Potential panel participants: Richard Alldritt, Jil Matheson, Andrew Dilnot, Rob Clements, Martin Dougherty</i>
12:20-12:30	<b>Concluding remarks</b> <i>Professor Roger Jowell</i>	
12:30-13:00	<b>Lunch</b>	

**UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY**

**COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS**

SA(COS)(10)12

***Web Dissemination: An Update***

**Purpose**

1. This paper reports on the development of a web dissemination strategy for official statistics.

**Recommendations**

2. The Committee is invited to note the work under way to prepare a web dissemination strategy for official statistics, including the plan to bring emerging thoughts to the next meeting.

**Discussion**

3. The UK's decentralised approach to official statistics means that key information is disseminated to users via a large number of disconnected departmental and specialist websites. Whilst many of these sites provide good examples of dissemination practice, such as online tabulation tools and metadata, inconsistency of approach can make finding the right statistics difficult for users, even when using advanced search engines such as Google.
4. For example, simple searches on the terms "free school meal statistics", "inflation", and "house price statistics" throws up numerous results but with no obvious link to summary messages, or micro data - **Annex A** contains the results of the three searches listed above when conducted via Google, data.gov.uk, the Publication Hub, National Statistics Online, and the Statistics Authority's site.
5. Attempts to improve visibility and accessibility through the National Statistics Release Calendar and the Publication Hub have been successful in providing a gateway to official statistics, i.e. links to the relevant pages on departmental sites. However, the Hub does not contain direct links to the published datasets and, of greater concern, does not have a sufficiently high profile on search engine results.
6. As technology has advanced, so has the user thirst for flexible information, i.e. for information that can be sliced and diced according to users' own needs, and for merging with other sources and layers of reference data, such as geography. This is all in preference to traditionally static tables and commentary. Office for National Statistics (ONS) sites such as the Neighbourhood Statistics (NESS), Labour Market (NOMIS) and Stats4Schools each support this need.
7. In respect of providing micro data for research purposes, demands are currently being met via the UK Data Archive, Virtual Micro data Laboratory in ONS and the Secure Data Service (funded by the Economic and Social Research Council).
8. In parallel, Sir Tim Berners-Lee's data.gov.uk initiative seeks to address broader user demand for access to Government data and through the emergence of user developed applications (apps) provides unlimited potential to build on this approach.
9. But, we are still failing to do some of the basics sufficiently well. In particular, in ensuring that users can find the right statistics, quickly and easily.

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10. Projects are underway to address some of this need, for example the significant redevelopment of the ONS website. The ONS's approach to Census dissemination, as set out in the 2011 Census Output Strategy, recognises the web as the primary dissemination route, meeting the common needs of users and incorporating the flexibility for users to create their own products. Other Government Statistical Service (GSS) departments also have their own information and web dissemination strategies and several, e.g. the Department for Work and Pensions, and Ministry of Defence (Defence Analytical Services and Advice), have enabled online tabulation capability. However, across Government, current practice remains dominated by multi-layered sites, containing largely static and pre-tabulated tables.
11. Externally, other bodies have also been considering their web dissemination direction, including the BBC and the Royal Statistical Society. The Guardian's on-line datablog is a good example of a recent development. With all these organisations there is the potential for partnership arrangements to help ensure official statistics are made available to all users in an easily accessible and reusable way.

### Next steps

12. There is a significant amount of activity and interest in the dissemination of statistics. Given user concerns and the inconsistent approach being taken to disseminate official statistics there is a need for an overarching and shared vision to which supporting departmental and specialist programmes can be linked. The National Statistician has therefore initiated work to develop a web dissemination strategy (under the leadership of the National Statistician's Office Strategy Team) and will involve key players in the Statistics Authority (including the Communications Office and Monitoring and Assessment team), the ONS (including the Web Development Programme team), the wider GSS and user representatives (via the Statistics User Forum).
13. The work is at the scoping stage at the moment and, once initial stakeholder engagement is complete, emerging thoughts on future direction will be brought to the next meeting of the Committee for Official Statistics.
14. In the meantime, issues to be discussed with stakeholders include:
  - i. How and in what form users expect to access official statistics?
  - ii. What are the relevant current and emerging technologies, and where should we be devoting our efforts?
  - iii. What are the opportunities to be working with others inside and outside of Government, and internationally?
  - iv. How much 'provenance' control should we seek to maintain when freeing information for wider exploitation?
  - v. What are our expectations for statistical metadata, narrative and commentary, in a world of enhanced access to "Linked Data" and micro data?
  - vi. What strategy will ensure we best meet our broad range of user needs?
  - vii. What opportunities exist to make efficiencies in our dissemination approach?
  - viii. How do we achieve and maintain commitment across the producer community?
  - ix. What risks and issues must we manage to ensure our Strategic intent can be delivered within reasonable time, quality and cost?

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### Conclusion

15. There are some good examples of web dissemination practice across the official statistics producer community and strong global leadership in areas such as accelerating knowledge of Linked data on the semantic web (**Annex B**, paragraph 10).
16. However, across the GSS, the approach to dissemination is as varied as the number of Departments, and user frustration persists.
17. As such, a GSS web dissemination Strategy, developed in partnership with key stakeholders, presents the best opportunity to ensure that official statistics producers deliver the right statistics, in the most accessible way, to make the most positive impact.

**Jason Bradbury, Caron Walker, National Statistician's Office, April 2010**

### **List of Annexes**

- Annex A: Examples of topic searches – illustrating the user experience**  
**Annex B: Progress with ONS website redevelopment and Data.gov.uk**

**Annex A: Examples of topic searches – illustrating the user experience**

- 1) The following three paragraphs illustrate the outcome of three random searches for official statistics on Google, Data.gov.uk, the Publication Hub, National Statistics Online and the Statistics Authority website.
  - i) A Google search on “free school meal statistics” brings up numerous options, but there is no simple way to access UK-wide statistics on the subject. Data.gov.uk provides more up to date links to source data, whilst a search of “free school meals” on the Statistics Authority website finds only references to school statistics rather than free school meals (most commonly in Assessment Reports). A search on the Publication Hub is more successful at identifying the relevant products by country, and a search of the ONS website provides links to metadata for Northern Ireland and Scotland datasets. In summary though, the plethora of website, makes the job of finding and extracting relevant data time consuming and complex.
  - ii) To take a second example, a Google search on “UK Inflation” provides a direct link to National Statistics Online, and a further two clicks finds the latest press release. Searching via data.gov.uk on “Inflation” is less effective. The text search brings up three options: Aerospace and Electronic Cost Indices; Consumer Price Indices; and Consumer Price Inflation, but clicking through from Consumer Price Inflation provides minimal metadata and links to out of date information. Searching the Publication Hub immediately identifies the latest Consumer Price Inflation release, whilst a search of the Statistics Authority site finds a dated Issues Log and links to Monitoring and Assessment reports.
  - iii) One final search, this time of “house price statistics”, finds that the first page of Google results are dominated by private sector and media information. Fourth on the list is a link to the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) information on House Market and House prices. Further down the Google results, the first reference to National Statistics Online is an article on an improved House Price index, dated 2002. Neither the Publication Hub, nor data.gov.uk appears on the first page. Scottish Government House price information appears on the second page of the search, but it is not until the third page of the search that the Land Registry’s site first appears. Other early “hits” include commercial sites and bank house price indices. When searching data.gov.uk for House Prices three results are returned: “Annual Abstract of Statistics”, “House Price Index”, and “House Price Index” – the last two of which, whilst apparently the same, are actually quite different. The last of the three provides the most current link to the information produced by DCLG. A search of National Statistics Online provide links to Economic and Labour Market Review (ELMR) articles from 2009, whilst a search of the Publication Hub, again finds recent DCLG releases, but nothing from Land Registry. Finally, a search of the Statistics Authority site finds assessment reports and links to board meeting papers where there was a reference to House Prices.

## **Annex B – Progress with ONS website redevelopment and Data.gov.uk**

### ONS website redevelopment

- 1) The current ONS web site is constantly criticised in users' feedback. They report that it is hard to find information and that the site is poorly organised. The internal business processes to deliver information to the site are also complicated, resource intensive and inconsistent. The objective of the Web Development Programme (WDP) is to deliver a new, fit for purpose, ONS web site and the associated business and system changes. The benefits the new web site are:
  - improved search and navigation allowing users to find the information they are looking for
  - better access to the underlying data and a standardised approach to published content
  - improved web site design and compliance with accessibility standards
  - timely release of outputs at 9.30 am.
- 2) The programme team is engaging with users to ensure the development meets their needs. For example, the Programme Director recently addressed the Statistics Users Forum (SUF) and his presentation was well received. He is planning to provide a demonstration of the new web site to SUF members in May.
- 3) The programme is proceeding well and is on track to deliver the new web site in early 2011. An operational site with populated content and dataset access is scheduled for release in January 2011, with a further release planned for May 2011 which will deliver an enhanced web site with full data explorer facilities, full content authoring and web site maintenance

### Data.gov.uk

- 4) The future plans for the data.gov.uk directory, in terms of providing data in a 'Linked Data' format, reflect some of these more sophisticated demands and are intended to provide the facility to reuse and join up data.
- 5) The government's 'Making Public Data Public' project can be viewed as a project with two streams of work:
  - Short term - make information available in any form, and make it findable via a central directory located at <http://www.data.gov.uk>
  - Longer term - publish information in the semantic web environment using Linked Data.
- 6) Considerable progress has been made with the short term stream, and ONS Information Management Solutions and the National Statistician's Office have contributed to its early success by synchronising the content of the Publication Hub with the data.gov.uk directory. This has been achieved by enhancing the RSS ('Really Simple Syndication') feed from the Hub Release Calendar (RSS feeds are a family of web feed formats used to publish frequently updated items such as newspaper stories, blogs, etc). This enhanced feed includes all the release metadata held in the Publication Hub for items that have been publicly released. In this way new statistical releases on the Publication Hub are quickly picked up and replicated in the data.gov.uk directory, providing an alternative route for customers to find relevant data. The National Statistics quality mark is shown in the data.gov.uk directory alongside all entries received from the Publication

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Hub that carry the National Statistics designation. Only designated entries received from the Publication Hub display the quality mark.

- 7) As noted above, the Publication Hub does not contain direct links to published datasets, but rather to official release pages, from which datasets are usually 'sign-posted'. The simple synchronisation has therefore pointed users of data.gov.uk in the right direction towards statistical datasets, but it has not contributed to the main goal of the project which is to create a directory that points directly to available datasets. This would involve either:
  - having all publishers of official statistics separately contribute dataset metadata to the data.gov.uk directory, or
  - providing metadata to the Publication Hub so that it can be synchronised with data.gov.uk in one common mechanism (which is already in place).
- 8) A proposal to extend the Publication Hub in this way is to be brought before the GSS Presentation and Dissemination Committee in due course, once high level cost estimates have been obtained from ONS.
- 9) In the longer term, a key element of the advice of Sir Tim Berners-Lee to the government is that public data should be published using an open format called Linked Data, which makes it searchable and 'linkable' on the semantic web. The semantic web can be viewed as a parallel universe to the existing world wide web (www). Whereas the www is a huge network of linked documents that are easily retrievable by humans from any location to any web browser, the web of linked data uses the same technologies to achieve a network of linked data about "things" e.g. people, places, artefacts, datasets, facts. The web of linked data is intended to allow semantic information to be obtained by software systems that traverse the links looking for things that have related meanings.
- 10) The data.gov.uk project has begun to experiment with publishing some data in this format. The potential advantages of publishing aggregate statistical dataset metadata are clear – enabling users to find and link information irrespective of where or how they are stored. However, whether this format is suitable for representing the content of datasets remains an open research issue. ONS has taken a global lead in investigating this question. Issues that remain outstanding include: how to assert the provenance of linked data information; version control; assuring the completeness and integrity of data.
- 11) In respect of provenance, a Unique Resource Identifier (URI) provides the crucial element in addressing the open issue of provenance. It identifies the 'thing' being named and creates an association between the 'thing' and the authority that created or owns it. Key questions are over which organisation should have the authority to determine URI names for published statistical information, and whether a common pattern for the URI name would be desirable for all official statistics? In practice, the adoption by producers of official statistics (generally the Heads of Profession) of "statistics.gov.uk" for all official statistics releases and datasets, or acceptance of a more unified government approach with the use of data.gov.uk (e.g. adopting statistics.data.gov.uk for official statistics) is being considered.

**UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY**

**Committee for Official Statistics**

SA(COS)(10)13

***GSS Activity and Governance Arrangements***

**Purpose**

1. Future meetings of the Committee for Official Statistics will receive regular updates on the activities of the Government Statistical Service (GSS). As a precursor to those updates, this paper presents a brief summary of GSS activities in 2009/10.

**Recommendations**

2. The Committee for Official Statistics is invited to:
  - i. note the summary of activities of the GSS in 2009/10, and;
  - ii. note that regular updates on GSS activities will be provided to future meetings.

**Discussion**

3. The GSS is spread across more than 30 government departments, agencies and the devolved administrations of Scotland and Wales. It works closely with the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) to ensure, as far as possible, the coherence and compatibility of statistical activities. The National Statistician, in addition to being the Chief Executive of the Authority, is also the Head of the GSS. There are more than 7,000 staff working in Official Statistics of whom just over 1400 are members of the Government Statistician Group. Statisticians and their staff work alongside their policy colleagues within government departments and across the devolved administrations. For information, **Annex A** provides a recap of the governance arrangements for the GSS.
4. During the last year, the GSS published statistical releases and reports covering some 1,500 main subjects including the economy, population and migration, the environment, crime, health and many more. These key statistics provide extensive insight into the present state of UK affairs and how they have changed over time. In producing these statistics, in advising and supporting policy colleagues, and through its other activities, the GSS has delivered benefits including:
  - i. improving services to the front line;
  - ii. increased or new cross-departmental cooperation;
  - iii. user consultation/engagement resulting in change;
  - iv. delivering value for money, and;
  - v. reducing the burden on data suppliers.
5. The following are among the achievements of the GSS in 2009/10:

***Responding to the Flu Pandemic through NHS Daily Pandemic Reporting - Department of Health (DH)***

6. From July 2009 to March 2010 DH produced daily reports on the number of patients admitted to NHS hospitals with confirmed or suspected H1N1 virus. Information was broken down by age band, comorbidity, number in critical care and mortalities. The data helped identify groups most likely to suffer severe reactions, which helped identify priority groups for vaccination. The weekly summary helped reassure the public that the NHS was monitoring the situation and responding accordingly. The legacy of such a detailed dataset will be useful to inform planning for future pandemics/epidemics.

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### Supporting Policy on Social Price Support for Vulnerable Customers - Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC)

7. This project involved statistical analyses to inform how best to allocate a fixed amount of money to reduce fuel bills of those most vulnerable to the effects of living in cold homes. By linking data on benefit receipt to fuel poverty data, the project sought to identify the most vulnerable groups, and how to ensure best value for money in allocating the support. It will enable implementation of new policy, re-targeting of existing funding and policies, and an expected reduction in expenditure on Fuel Poverty Benefits by targeting support, in the form of reduced energy bills, to the most needy.

### New more Timely Quarterly Statistics on Young People Not In Education, Employment, or Training (NEET) in Wales - Welsh Assembly Government (WAG)

8. In response to a need for more timely data as the recession developed, the Welsh Assembly Government developed a new series of quarterly statistical outputs bringing together data on young people not in education, employment or training (NEET). The new statistical outputs combine presentation of the official, more robust data source (which takes into account administrative and survey data) with rolling 12-month quarterly estimates from the Annual Population Survey and the latest information from Careers Wales. The new output has been based on a similar quarterly briefing produced by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).

### New Statistics on UK Armed Forces Casualty Outcomes - Ministry of Defence (MoD)

9. Statistical data on casualties are now linked with that of other MoD departmental health systems to better understand outcomes for injured Armed Forces personnel and to inform MoD policy. Analysts are providing new insights into care and treatment pathways and outcomes, such as whether individuals go on to recover full or partial fitness and deployability. Quarterly statistics on Outcomes for Amputees was first published in February 2010 with plans for further new products in 2010/11.

### Improving Understanding of Benefit Entitlements and Benefit Uptake Rates in Northern Ireland – Department for Social Development Northern Ireland

10. The Benefits Update Programme is an annual exercise that, with the assistance of the statisticians and other analysts in the Analytical Services Unit, identifies and targets vulnerable groups in the community to make them aware of their benefit entitlements. For the 2008/09 reference year exercise, approximately 25,000 clients were contacted and encouraged to have a full benefit assessment through the Citizens Advice Bureau. Additionally, the adoption of an outreach programme aimed at older people directed them to the Agency for benefit assessment. Additional benefit paid as a result of the exercise amounted to £11.9 million. Of this, £5.7 million was paid to those specifically targeted, representing an average weekly benefit of almost £50 per person. The remaining £6.1 million was paid to those who were made aware of State Pension which represented an average weekly benefit of £40 per claim.

### Improved Information on Municipal Waste Management - Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

11. Detailed data on the waste management activity from all UK local authorities are provided by a web based collection system. It is a successful collaboration between all four UK countries, which produces more timely, detailed and frequent results, including tonnage of material collected, material type, and disposal method. Data collected are used for setting targets and the subsequent evaluation of a range of policy measures and performance targets on waste and recycling, such as the Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme and Local Government Performance Framework indicators. It reduces the burden on data suppliers by replacing a number of different earlier collection exercises, provides value for money and crosses departments.

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12. Other key activities for the GSS in 2009/10 included the development of numerous sets of guidance to support Official Statistics producers.
- (i) National Statistician's Guidance on implementing the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*. The following guidance was published during Autumn 2009:
- Presentation and Publication of Official Statistics;
  - Use of Administrative or Management Information;
  - Confidentiality of Official Statistics, and;
  - Quality, Methods and Harmonisation.
- (ii) A Statement of GSS Heads of Profession (HoP) Roles and Responsibilities was developed in the light of the new statistical legislation.
- (iii) Guidance on Identifying Official Statistics was published in February 2010, designed to assist producers of statistics in arm's length bodies and their associated HoP, in deciding whether their products are Official Statistics, and therefore under the remit of the *Code of Practice*.
13. Additionally the Leadership and Revitalisation Project established in October 2008 to deliver the National Statistician's long term vision for the GSS published its report before Karen Dunnell retired in August 2009. The main achievements towards the vision were:
- The GSS is stronger as a professional community through the production of the National Statistician's Guidance on the *Code of Practice*, improvements in recruitment of statisticians such as GSS 'badging boards' for staff working in Official Statistics, and an increased focus on the development of skills and competencies;
  - There is an increased focus on cooperation and working together across the GSS which is particularly apparent in the work on data sharing, where the idea of data sharing for statistical purposes has been widely embraced, and;
  - There is a strengthened focus on quality through the development of the self assessment tool for the assurance of methodology and standards, which was trailed widely across the GSS.
14. During 2009/10 the National Statistician also appointed 11 Theme Leaders for the following topics – agriculture and environment; business and energy; children, education and schools; crime and justice; economy; government; health and social care; labour market; people and places; population; and, travel and transport. These Theme Leaders have been tasked with engaging with users and producers for their own themes in order to understand user needs, identify and influence the potential for statistical development and innovation, and consider long term strategic priorities. They also meet as a group to consider issues which are more cross cutting, and to share information and good practice on, for example, consulting and engaging with users.

**Caron Walker, National Statistician's Office, April 2010**

### List of Annexes

**Annex A      Governance of the Government Statistical Service**

**Annex A      Governance of the Government Statistical Service (GSS)**

1. Every government department or agency with a significant GSS presence, in terms of either its production or use of GSS statistics, has its own Statistical Head of Profession (HoP), with professional accountability to the National Statistician. Each of the devolved administrations has a Chief Statistician.
2. The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* and accompanying secondary legislation has expanded the UK statistical system to encompass arm's length bodies (Non Departmental Public Bodies and Executive Agencies) sponsored by government departments, but producing Official Statistics. The arrangements for working with and supporting these bodies is currently under consideration.
3. To enable effective decision-making in the GSS, a new framework of committees was agreed by HoPs in November 2009. These arrangements have the **Heads of Profession Group** as the top-level forum for decisions; chaired by the National Statistician, it meets quarterly. Among its main activities are to:
  - provide high-level advice to the National Statistician;
  - consider and endorse professional policies and strategies placed before it, and;
  - provide the GSS with professional and strategic guidance and leadership.
4. The newly constituted **HoPs Steering Group** has been established to improve the effectiveness of the main HoPs Group. It is intended to act as a sounding board for the National Statistician and to facilitate cooperation across the GSS on emerging strategic issues before wider engagement.
5. The **Inter Administration Committee** addresses all matters which have a bearing on the statistical relationship between the UK government and the three Devolved Administrations. Other committees include: the **Statistical Policy and Standards Committee** whose role is to develop, promote and implement statistical policies and standards for official statistics; and the **Human Resources Committee** which leads in developing and implementing the GSS Human Resources Strategy to recruit and retain sufficient numbers of people to meet current and future statistical work force needs. The **Theme Leaders Group** focuses on longer-term planning, engagement with users and horizon scanning.
6. The HoPs Group and its subsidiary committees set up Task Forces when appropriate which are mandated for a limited period of time to conduct initial research into particular issues and make proposals to their parent body.
7. A diagrammatic representation of these arrangements is below:

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