



**UK Statistics
Authority**

Monitoring Report 4
Interim report

Migration statistics

April 2009

Contents page

1. SUMMARY	3
2. RECOMMENDATIONS	8
3. INTRODUCTION	12
4. CONTEXT FOR THE REVIEW	16
5. THE MIGRATION STATISTICS IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME	20
6. DELIVERY OF TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENTS	23
7. CO-OPERATION BETWEEN DEPARTMENTS	36
8. FUNDING	40
9. COMMUNICATION AND ENGAGEMENT WITH USERS	42
ANNEX A: LIST OF PARTICIPANTS	47
ANNEX B: COMPOSITION OF THE MIGRATION STATISTICS MONITORING REVIEW PROJECT BOARD	48
ANNEX C: OUTLINE OF HIGHLIGHTED ADMINISTRATIVE DATA SOURCES	49

1. Summary

1.1. In July 2008¹ the UK Statistics Authority initiated a review of migration statistics. At that time the statistics were already being improved in response to previous reviews^{2,3} and the recommendations of a report from the House of Commons Treasury Committee.^{4,5} The purpose of the monitoring review was therefore to report on progress, the adequacy of the plans for improving the statistics, and the extent and effectiveness of co-operation across government to deliver the improvements.

Importance of migration statistics

1.2. International migration is currently the largest component of population change in the United Kingdom – since the late 1990s it has exceeded the net effect of births and deaths and it increased substantially following the expansion of the European Union. However the statistical concept of migration also includes the movement of people within the UK. Such internal movements can have a substantial influence on the changing level and composition of the population in local areas. Accurate measurement of the net flows of people, both into and around the country, is thus essential to obtaining reliable population estimates. These estimates are at the heart of decisions around policy development, resource allocation and service delivery, both nationally and locally.

¹ UK Statistics Authority, Assessment Programme and Authority Monitoring Reports, 4 July 2008, <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/assessment-programme-and-authority-monitoring-reports.doc>

² National Statistics Quality Review Series Report No. 23, International Migration Statistics, 2003. <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/quality/nat-stats-qual-revs/qual-revs-by-theme/population/index.html>

³ Report on the Inter-Departmental Task Force on Migration Statistics National Statistics, 15 December 2006 <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/downloads/TaskForceReport151206.pdf>

⁴ House of Commons Treasury Committee, Counting the Population, 15 January 2008, Report HC 183-II; <http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.com/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmtreasy/183/183ii.pdf>

⁵ House of Commons Treasury Committee, Counting the Population, Eleventh Report of Session 2007-08, 23 May 2008, Report HC 183 <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmtreasy/183/183.pdf>

Difficulties faced

1.3. While the registration of new births and deaths is required by law, the same is not true for international migration – there is no systematic register that records all people entering or leaving the country, or where they settle. Information on immigration and emigration is therefore largely drawn from a sample survey conducted at ports, the International Passenger Survey (IPS). Nor is there any systematic registration of movement within the UK. Information about these flows is thus necessarily based on administrative sources intended primarily for other purposes (in particular the NHS patient registers).

Recognition of the problem

1.4. A National Statistics Quality Review of international migration statistics in 2003⁶ made a number of wide ranging recommendations that reflected the methodological limitations of the International Passenger Survey and looked to make better use of existing sources and to develop and exploit new sources that could ‘radically reshape the empirical framework for international migration estimation’. The then Statistics Commission made hard-hitting recommendations⁷ about the need to improve statistics of migration (both internationally and between areas of the UK) in 2005. In December 2006 the National Statistician’s Inter-Departmental Task Force made a series of fundamental recommendations for cross-government action to address the needs to improve migration statistics.⁸ In early 2008 the House of Commons Treasury Committee held an inquiry reviewing the concerns raised by local authorities and others about the adequacy of official population statistics.⁹ It concluded that official statistics on migration were inadequate for recording the changing levels of

⁶ *ibid*, footnote 2

⁷ Statistics Commission, *Census and population estimates and The 2001 Census in Westminster: Final Report*. Report No. 22, January 2005

<http://www.statscom.org.uk/uploads/files/reports/Census%20Report%20Final%2022.pdf>

⁸ *ibid*, footnote 3

⁹ *ibid*, footnote 4

population movement.¹⁰ Government ministers accepted the arguments put forward: the Minister for Local Government announced that there would be a cross-government programme to improve migration and population statistics, overseen by Ministers and a programme board, with the National Statistician having the statistical lead¹¹. The ministerial committee overseeing the improvement work is chaired jointly by the Minister for Local Government and the Minister for Borders and Immigration.

What is being done

1.5. The current programme of work to improve migration statistics is, in large measure, a programme to implement the recommendations of the 2006 Inter-Departmental Task Force¹². The Task Force recognised that the fundamental weaknesses of international migration statistics are due to the underlying means of collecting information about population movement. Substantial improvements could only be achieved through a radical solution that more effectively tracked the complex migration processes. In the absence of a population register, it was concluded that record linkage across different administrative sources, such as those for employment, benefits and international border control, had to be used to obtain better statistical information on migrants.

Timescale for change

1.6. It was clear that this new approach would take some considerable time and resources to put in place – the Task Force report suggested 5-10 years, that is to say completion of the programme somewhere between 2012 and 2017. The most recent information suggests that

¹⁰ *ibid*, footnote 5

¹¹ Statement by John Healey MP, Minister for Communities and Local Government made on 4 February 2008
http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/downloads/20_May_IMPS_Progress.pdf

¹² *ibid*, footnote 3

statistics on long-term international migration based on the e-Borders programme (see paragraph 6.17) may be available in 2013, in time for the publication of the mid-year population estimates relating to 2012. An integrated population statistics system remains the long-term vision and a project has been initiated by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to investigate alternative census and survey designs, alongside the potential use of administrative data.

And until then

1.7. The Task Force also recognised that, in the meantime, more modest improvements could be made to the existing system for estimating migration flows. It made several recommendations for improving the International Passenger Survey, on which estimates of international migration currently rely. These improvements have been taken forward and the most significant change to the sample survey – including a new survey design which should lead to more reliable estimates – was implemented in January 2009. Other changes to migration estimates have been investigated: for example, adjustments for student migration (a major issue for some local authorities with high student populations); improving the way international migrants are distributed at a local level (based on administrative data rather than on the 2001 Census); and building a package of local level indicators that will provide a migration profile for individual local authorities (to begin to be available from May 2009). These are developments that will either directly improve the estimation of migration or, as with the indicator suite, provide further information about local areas that could support decision making in the funding round in 2010.

Who is involved

1.8. A cross-government programme – the Migration Statistics Improvement Programme – is responsible for delivering the improvements, although most of the short-term improvements are

being developed by ONS. However, the work requires close co-operation and the most critical improvements cannot be delivered by ONS alone. A number of departments have said that they will be carrying out substantial work of their own that will contribute to the statistical improvements. However, the information available to this review is insufficient to indicate precisely what each department plans to contribute. We think therefore that more detailed information of this kind should be made publicly available by departments.

Progress so far

1.9. The developments undertaken to date within the Migration Statistics Improvement Programme will help to lay the ground for delivering the Task Force goals. However, the detail of what has been done, and the current state of progress overall, has not been made clear to users and this has led to some frustration. We would like to see the MSIP programme taking steps to communicate more effectively with users and to build on the quarterly joint release of migration information that has already been instituted.

Remaining risks

1.10. Despite these developments the risk remains that there will be significant discrepancies between the regular population estimates rolled forward from the 2001 Census (adjusting for births, deaths and migration) and the more up-to-date estimates derived from the 2011 Census, at least in some geographical areas. This may make cross-checking between data sources problematic and prompt questioning of the reliability of the Census results simply because figures differ from earlier estimates. ONS will need to find ways to explain clearly the reasons that such discrepancies are to be expected and this may require more public acknowledgement of the short-comings of the current regular estimates.

2. Recommendations

2.1. Our initial recommendations are set out below. These will be reviewed in the light of comments received and further evidence gathered before the final report is published. The recommendations are not of equal importance, and the delivery of some will require more resource and time than others (we will be interested in users' views on relative priorities, and will reflect these in the final report). The recommendations are largely directed towards the Migration Statistics Improvement Programme (MSIP) or ONS, but other producers of statistics, for example, in the devolved administrations, should consider the implications for their own work.

Delivery of technical developments

While the developments being taken forward by the MSIP are in line with the recommendations of the Inter-Departmental Task Force, we note a number of areas that need to be addressed:

- We **recommend** that ONS should, at the time it publishes revisions to population estimates, make clear in what sense these are an improvement and the extent to which they are likely to help reduce the gap in population count when compared with the counts obtained from the 2011 Census. [Paragraph 6.8 below]
- We **recommend** that ONS should engage users in a full discussion of changes to the methodology and their impact on the estimates, including a phase of quality assurance involving local authorities (particularly in hard-to-count areas) before the final version of the estimates is released. [6.10]
- We **recommend** that ONS should flag the level of reliability of individual local authority population estimates, possibly in a manner

similar to the method it already uses in its international migration estimates by Government Office Region. [6.13]

- We **recommend** that regular reports on progress on the development of the e-Borders statistics programme are made to the improvement programme board, and that they are published. [6.18]
- We **recommend** that a statistical system be put in place to record the numbers of migrants entering the UK under the Points Based System; and that the possibilities for further integration of the PBS data with migration statistics are fully investigated to determine whether useful additional data can be obtained from this source to improve the measurement of international migration. [6.20]
- We **recommend** that, in the light of the complex dependencies involved, discussions about matters such as the future of the Census beyond 2011, the longer term maintenance of a national address register, related developments (such as identity cards and a population register) and the best way to improve migration statistics, should now be taken forward together at the highest level. Discussions should involve the Statistics Authority and ONS and the relevant government departments – notably HM Treasury, the Cabinet Office, Department for Communities and Local Government, Home Office, Department for Work and Pensions, and the devolved administrations. [6.30]

Co-operation between departments

Close collaboration between government departments is critical to delivering improvements in migration statistics and we welcome the activities of the cross-government programme. We do identify however several areas for further progress:

- We **recommend** that ONS, the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Home Office should consider urgently how best to strengthen the top level of MSIP programme management, including

oversight of departmental activities, and report the outcome to the Statistics Authority by summer 2009. [7.11]

- We **recommend** the online release of project papers which, together with details of investigations currently underway and their progress, would help to build a higher level of confidence among users. It would be helpful to users if a regular report on the progress of major developments was published, including the schedule for delivery of objectives and the short, medium and long-term goals of the programme. [7.12]

Funding

The financial picture remains unclear with respect to individual departments' activities towards improving migration statistics:

- We **recommend** that each department should provide the programme with details of the work it is undertaking, together with the associated expenditure, and update this every six months. The MSIP should regularly publish information about the range of activities being undertaken by individual departments, and an outline of the relevant expenditure. [8.3]

Communication and engagement with users

ONS has recognised from its experience in revising the population estimates in 2007 that it should enhance the level of, and adapt its approach to, user engagement. The steps it has now taken are helpful but further progress is recommended:

- We **recommend** that ONS seeks further ways of engaging with users from a range of backgrounds to review methodological changes and priorities for the production and dissemination of population statistics. [9.8]

- We **recommend** that other government departments involved in the improvement programme also consider involving external experts in their development work and utilise the ONS “expert list” for this purpose. [9.8]
- We **recommend** that the Local Government Association, and other representative bodies where appropriate, work more closely with ONS to increase the opportunities for wider engagement with local authorities. [9.9]
- We **recommend** that the batch release of major migration outputs be accompanied by a stand-alone commentary. Such a commentary should specifically explain the nature of the various sources and their relative quality and reliability, and also highlight which of the associated releases provides the full detailed information that users may wish to refer to. [9.12]
- We **recommend** that a conceptual framework of migration statistics (as discussed in paragraph 9.11) be developed to provide further context to enable users to understand how the different sets of figures relate to each other, and to the process of migration more generally. [9.12]

3. Introduction

3.1. Together with registered births and deaths, international and internal migration data form the basis of estimates of population change between censuses. However, whereas data on the number of births and deaths are well-documented and reasonably predictable, the movements of people into and out of the country and between areas are less so. So as well as being the larger component of population change, internal and international estimates of migration are more difficult to estimate with confidence.¹³

3.2. The population estimates which are affected by this problem are among the most important official statistics in terms of their impact on public services and policy. As well as providing the denominator for many important official measures – such as gross domestic product (GDP) per capita – population estimates are used extensively for resource allocation across government. Sub-regional population estimates, projections and migrant information are also essential for the planning of local service delivery.

3.3. The UK Government, the National Statistician and independent commentators have all concluded^{14,15,16,17} that official statistics of international and internal migration are currently inadequate for the purposes for which they are required. In that sense, there is no disagreement about the nature and extent of the problem, nor is there

¹³ The official figures do not include counts of illegal migrants which are difficult to measure, although the Home Office has attempted to do so with the Migration Research Unit at University College London in Sizing the Illegally Resident Population in the UK, Home Office online report 58/04, 2004, <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/rdsolr5804.pdf>

¹⁴ Statement by John Healey MP, Minister for Communities and Local Government made on 4 February 2008, http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/downloads/20_May_IMPS_Progress.pdf

¹⁵ *ibid*, footnote 3

¹⁶ Institute of Community Cohesion, Estimating the Scale and Impacts of Migration at the Local Level, 1 November 2007, <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/aio/109536>

¹⁷ *ibid*, footnote 8

disagreement about the broad shape of the eventual solution – a solution that relies on the integration of administrative sources and survey information.

3.4. The UK Statistics Authority has a statutory function (section 8 of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*) to monitor the production and publication of official statistics. It may report any concerns it has about the quality, good practice or comprehensiveness in relation to official statistics. Following the concerns expressed by the House of Commons Treasury Committee¹⁸, the Statistics Authority initiated a ‘monitoring’ review to assess progress being taken by government departments to improve population statistics, and, in particular, progress against the plans agreed by Ministers following the December 2006 report of the Inter-Departmental Task Force on Migration Statistics¹⁹. The review aims to draw conclusions about the current adequacy of migration statistics; the adequacy of plans for improving migration statistics (including the prospective value of 2011 Census data on migrants); progress against those plans; any further steps that government needs to take; and any need to improve the communication of the statistics and their reliability to users and the public.

3.5. This interim report presents some initial conclusions following a review of:

- publicly available material on the work of the *Improving Migration and Population Statistics programme*²⁰ led by the Office for National Statistics;

¹⁸ *ibid*, footnote 5

¹⁹ *ibid*, footnote 3

²⁰ Office for National Statistics, *Improving Migration and Population Statistics programme*: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/default.asp>

- in-depth interviews with non-central government users from a range of organisations in local government, academia, the private sector and internationally (see Annex A for a list of participants), and
- examination of unpublished papers of the current cross-government *Migration Statistics Improvement Programme*.
- Improvements to migration statistics were also discussed with representatives of producer bodies and with users in central government through the review's project board (see Annex B for the composition of the project board).

3.6. Under the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*, the Statistics Authority can obtain information to enable it to undertake its statutory assessment work. However, the Authority does not have these rights in the context of other reviews and it relies, therefore, on the co-operation of government departments. The Authority is grateful that the unpublished papers of the Migration Statistics Improvement Programme board and working groups were made available to us. Papers for the ministerial group were not made available to us but we have been assured that issues raised there were fed into and acted on by the programme board.

3.7. Comments on the issues raised in this interim report are welcome: please make them to authority.consultations@statistics.gsi.gov.uk. A public meeting will be held at the Royal Statistical Society in April 2009 to encourage discussion of the issues underlying this report; users of statistics and methodological experts will be particularly welcome. The feedback from that event will inform the final report due to be published by July 2009.

3.8. Further evidence will be drawn from a literature review of published material recently commissioned by the Statistics Authority. The review

will consider in particular the extent to which the latest methodological advances are being utilised, including the strengths and weaknesses of the various methods that may be used to prepare migration statistics and the geographical distribution of population estimates within the UK, and the social, demographic, economic characteristics of migrants. The Statistics Authority will also complete and incorporate the messages from a formal assessment (under section 14 of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*) of the compliance of ONS migration statistics with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics²¹.

3.9. This interim report examines five questions:

- What progress has been achieved in methodological development and do users feel the right areas are being investigated?
- How effective has the programme management been?
- How engaged and involved are those departments involved in the Migration Statistics Improvement Programme?
- Are there sufficient resources available to complete the work required to ensure that migration statistics are fit for purpose?
- How effective has information sharing with users been?

²¹ Code of Practice for Official Statistics, Edition 1.0, UK Statistics Authority, January 2009: <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

4. Context for the review

Public concerns about population statistics

4.1. Following the 2001 Census a number of local authorities were concerned about the financial impact on them of disparities between population estimates based on: 1) the 1991 Census and rolled-forward adjustment to account for births, deaths and migration, and 2) the 2001 Census. Investigation of the differences showed that the rolled-forward estimates were problematic (too high in most cases) but also that, particularly in a small number of inner city areas, the 2001 Census counts were likely to be too low. The attendant uncertainty led to public criticism of, and some loss of public confidence in, the official population and migration statistics.

4.2. Aspects of census methodology initially received much of the criticism. For example, the Statistics Commission highlighted concerns with the completeness of address lists – particularly in ‘hard-to-count’ areas – in their interim report on *The 2001 Census in Westminster* in October 2003²². Local authority population studies by the Office for National Statistics (ONS)²³ further highlighted problems with population estimates, including an over-correction in some areas for estimated levels of under-enumeration in the 1991 Census in England and Wales. The ONS studies also emphasised the known weaknesses in the estimation of population change due to international migration. Investigations also took place into the migration estimates themselves – a National Statistics Quality Review of the international migration statistics was started in July 2002²⁴. The report’s recommendations for improvements, published in September 2003, were accepted by ONS,

²² Statistics Commission, *The 2001 Census in Westminster, Interim Report*, Report No. 15, October 2003 <http://www.statscom.org.uk/uploads/files/reports/Census%202001.pdf>

²³ 2001 Census, *Local Authority Population Studies: Full Report*, Office for National Statistics, September 2004 http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_population/LAStudy_FullReport.pdf

²⁴ *ibid*, footnote 2

which began a programme to address the issues raised in the report in January 2004. The enlargement of the European Union in 2004, and the consequent increase in international and internal migration led to fresh demands for higher quality migration data at the national and local levels.

4.3. In evidence to the House of Lords Select Committee on Economic Affairs on the state of the monetary policy (December 2006), the Governor of the Bank of England, Mervyn King, said, 'we do not have the ability to measure accurately at present the size of the population'²⁵. In July 2007 a House of Commons debate highlighted the political impact of problems with the data for London, and there were a number of written parliamentary questions on the issue.^{26,27,28} The Statistics Commission report *Counting on Success: the 2011 Census - Managing the Risks* (November 2007)²⁹ further recommended that the 2011 Census should be the last traditional census, and that alternative methods should be found to measure the population and its characteristics, such as replacing the census with an administrative population register or developing existing administrative sources.

4.4. Following its inquiry into the adequacy of population estimates, the House of Commons Treasury Committee found that the estimates 'are not fit for purpose as they fail to properly account for internal migration'

²⁵ Cited in House of Lords Select Committee on Economic Affairs, The Economic Impact of immigration, First Report of Session 2007-08, April 2008, p.20

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld/ldconaf.htm>

²⁶ HC Deb 25 July 2007 c1014

<http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200607/cmhansrd/cm070725/debtext/70725-0030.htm>

²⁷ HC Deb 21 April 2008 c1699W

<http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080602/text/80602w0045.htm>

²⁸ HC Deb 2 June 2008 c735W

<http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080421/text/80421w0083.htm>

²⁹ Statistics Commission, Counting on Success: the 2011 Census – Managing the Risks, Report No. 36, November 2007

<http://www.statscom.org.uk/uploads/files/reports/Report%2036%20Census%202011.pdf>

(May 2008).³⁰ The Committee also concluded that the International Passenger Survey (IPS) was not suitable for estimating international migration and recommended that ONS replace the IPS with a new survey that was more comprehensive and more suited to accurate measurement of international movements affecting the size of the resident population of the United Kingdom.

4.5. The main steps taken since 2003 to improve migration statistics are summarised in box 1 below, concluding with the establishment of the cross-government Migration Statistics Improvement Programme.

³⁰ *ibid*, footnote 5, p.3

Box 1: Improving migration statistics – key developments

1. National Statistics Quality Review on migration statistics – reported in September 2003

- Wide ranging recommendations highlighting:
 - limitations of the International Passenger Survey (IPS),
 - extending the use of Home Office immigration control data such as landing cards,
 - improving the distribution of immigrant flows geographically through the use of household surveys and administrative data

2. Proposals by ONS for the Integrated Population Statistics System, July 2003

- combine census, survey and administrative data at an individual level to create a single, comprehensive population statistics database

3. Detailed implementation plan for responding to the NS Quality Review published by ONS in January 2004 included:

- improvements to IPS
 - new questions on short-term migration and intention to stay
 - examination of non-response
 - review of interview shifts to identify appropriate timings in various ports for interviewing particular migrant types
- methodological development of short-term migration estimates

4. Formalisation of development work within ONS through the Improving Migration and Population Statistics programme (2004), addressing recommendations from the Quality Review with three main areas:

- migration research (both international and internal within the UK)
- collaborative work with local authorities to investigate the potential for making greater use of administrative data sources to improve local estimates
- population definitional issues

5. Formation of Inter-Departmental Task Force in May 2006 by the National Statistician with publication of recommendations in December 2006 with an aim to produce progressive improvements from 2008 to 2012 across departments:

- Obtain more information about migrants as they enter or leave the country
- Obtain more comprehensive and timely information about migrants living in this country
- Use linkage to obtain better information relating migrants' intentions at entry to the UK to subsequent events, such as employment, having a child and when they leave the country
- Provision of more timely, robust key indicators of migrant numbers
- Bring together all the statistics collected across Government on migration and migrants in a single UK-wide report, as there is currently no single official source

6. Formation of Migration Statistics Improvement Programme across government (with Local Government Association representation) to jointly address Task Force recommendations through activities in five working groups (see Figure 1). Work plans focus on:

- Improving the data available on numbers entering and leaving the United Kingdom;
- Making effective use of new and existing administrative and survey data sources;
- Improving local population estimates and projections used in allocating resources and developing services;
- Improving the public reporting of population and migration statistics; and
- Establishing a wider range of timely indicators and analysis to inform the evidence base on migration and its impacts on policy and public services.

5. The Migration Statistics Improvement Programme

5.1. The current work programme is led by an inter-departmental board of senior civil servants from eight departments (alongside representatives of the Bank of England and Local Government Association). The board is chaired by the National Statistician. It met five times in the year following its first scoping meeting in February 2008 and the board has been seen to provide a positive and challenging oversight to the programme. The work of the programme is undertaken in five working groups, chaired by senior officials of the Home Office, Department for Work and Pensions, Office for National Statistics, and Department for Communities and Local Government. The UK Statistics Authority has been given access to papers for this programme for the period to February 2009 in order to review the approach taken and measure the degree of progress achieved by the departments involved.

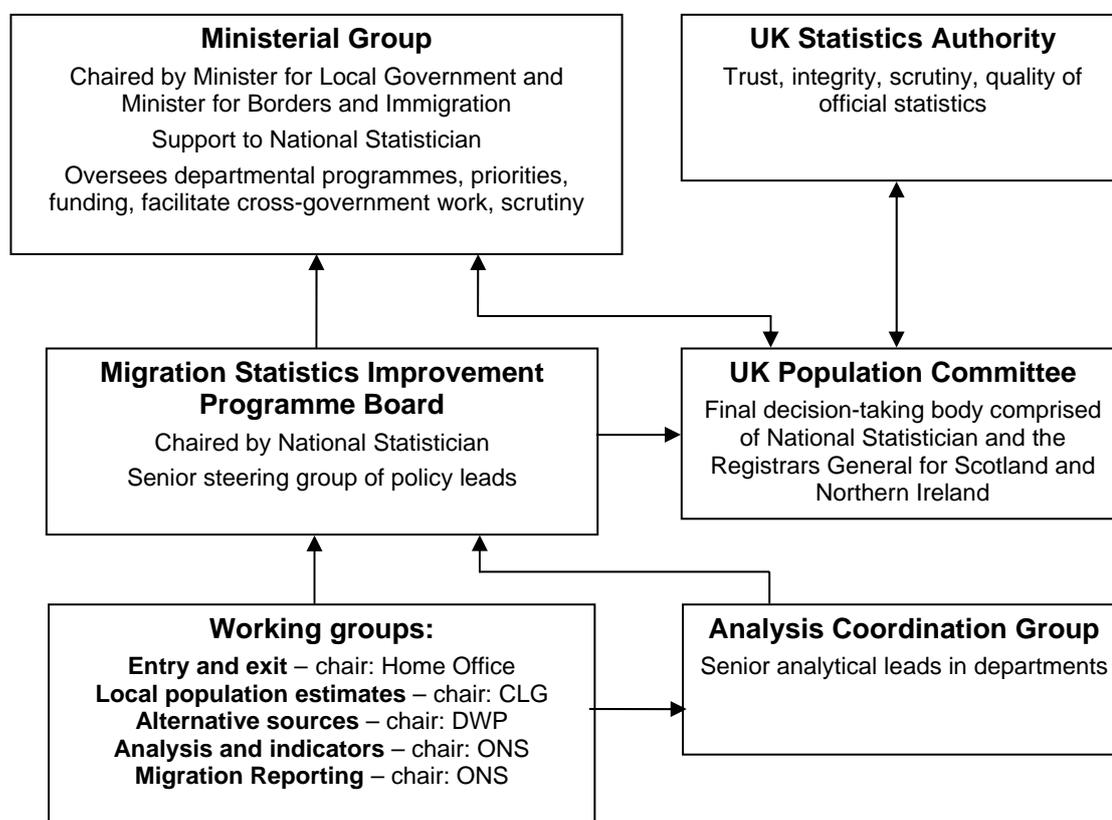
5.2. The governance structure of the programme is illustrated in Figure 1. A ministerial group, jointly led by Ministers from the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Home Office, oversees the programme. The group has met three times so far, with a remit to support and review the programme and to ensure appropriate progress is made. The ministerial group seeks to ensure that departmental priorities and resources are in line with the goals of the improvement programme and that cross-government co-operation is achieved.

5.3. The devolved administrations – represented by the General Register Office for Scotland, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, and the Welsh Assembly Government – participate in the working groups. A number of the methodological changes being investigated and implemented by ONS are relevant to the production of migration estimates for England and Wales alone and are not directly relevant to either Scotland or Northern Ireland. While the United Nations'

definition of long-term migration is applied throughout the UK, there are some differences in the systems and methods used to estimate international and internal migration, particularly at a local level. The methods used in Scotland and Northern Ireland are described in box 2 below.

5.4. All of the constituent countries of the UK are looking to utilise administrative systems, and consequently developments to aid record linkage and the development of an integrated system to produce migration statistics are of importance to Scotland and Northern Ireland. There may be significant differences in some of the administrative systems that will need to be overcome to enable cross-border migration to be measured adequately. The current governance structure enables learning within the programme to be transferred and applied within the devolved administrations themselves.

Figure 1: MSIP governance arrangements



Box 2: Estimating migration in Scotland and Northern Ireland**a) International migration****Scotland**

International migration to and from Scotland overall is estimated in the same way as for England and Wales. Measures of Total International Migration are produced by ONS for the General Register Office Scotland (GROS). The figures are based on the International Passenger Survey (IPS) and adjusted for visitor and migrant switchers and asylum seekers. The IPS figures are allocated to Scotland by applying the Labour Force Survey distribution. GROS then distributes the migrants to a local area level using the health administrative systems within Scotland – the Scottish National Health Service Central Register (SNHSCR) and the Community Health Index (CHI). Migrants into health board areas are distributed using SNHSCR (based on GP registrations), while CHI is used to distribute to council areas. The CHI totals are controlled to match the health board totals from SNHSCR. (<http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/migration/methodology.html>)

Northern Ireland

Estimates of international migration for Northern Ireland are not based on the IPS/LFS figures for three reasons. Firstly the IPS does not cover the land border with the Republic of Ireland; secondly responses to surveys are also unclear whether a move to or from 'Ireland' refers to the province and lastly achieved survey responses are very small and thus are not robust at the Northern Ireland level. Instead international moves at the local and Northern Ireland level are based on data from the Central Health Index which records registrations and de-registrations with family doctors. It is used by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) to estimate flows to and from countries outside the UK, with the exception of flows to the Republic of Ireland which are derived from the Quarterly National Household Survey in Ireland.

(http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/demography/population/migration/dev_est_mig.pdf)

b) Internal migration**Scotland**

Moves within Scotland are again based on the Scottish health administrative systems. SNHSCR is used at health board level and CHI for council areas and below. By using postcode information from CHI moves can be measured between two time points, but are adjusted to match totals at health board level obtained from SNHSCR.

Northern Ireland

In a similar way, moves within Northern Ireland are measured according to the Central Health Index, again based on re-registrations with family doctors.

c) Cross-border moves within the constituent parts of the UK

Moves to and from other parts of the UK are measured via transfers of health cards between NHSCR in Southport (for England and Wales), SNHSCR in Edinburgh and the Central Services Agency in Belfast. Flows are measured by the receiving country only.

d) Measurement issues

Issues related to the IPS and LFS flagged up within the main body of the report also impact the international migration estimates for Scotland but not for Northern Ireland. Moves to establish an integrated population statistics system are of relevance though to both Scotland and Northern Ireland. Establishing data linking for the common administrative systems such as for work and pensions and e-Borders, and reconciling differences between unique local sources, such as the School Census, are important to enable consistent statistics to be available across the constituent parts of the UK.

The two health systems in Scotland are linked and GROS is extending the information held on the SNHSCR to include the postcode of residence. This information will be transferred to GROS to enable a more flexible system to be established. GROS is undertaking research of the potential for using data from different Scottish sources such as HESA and SNHSCR for understanding migration patterns, as well as the feasibility of record linkage.

NISRA already brings together reporting on migration reporting using a variety of sources within its annual publication. It is also looking to extend its use of the range of sources by data linking and is aiming to report on this work in 2009.

[http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/demography/population/migration/NI_Migration_Report\(2007\).pdf](http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/demography/population/migration/NI_Migration_Report(2007).pdf)

6. Delivery of technical developments

- 6.1. The developments being taken forward by the Migration Statistics Improvement Programme are in line both with the recommendations of the report in 2006 of the Inter-Departmental Task Force and with the government response to the House of Commons Treasury Committee inquiry. These are summarised in box 3. The Authority sees the critical measure of success being when users feel satisfied that migration statistics are sufficiently robust for their various needs.
- 6.2. The users interviewed as part of this monitoring review (for a list of participants see Annex A) spoke of their support for the general direction of the improvement programme; in particular work to draw on administrative data sources to ensure the statistics are put on stronger foundations, and dissemination of more timely information on the production of migration estimates and data on migrant characteristics. However, users were less clear about the extent of real progress or when population statistics would be substantially based on the use of administrative data supplemented by survey information.
- 6.3. Some of the users interviewed expressed concern at the application of statistical methodologies for the distribution of UK-level international migration estimates to regions and local authority areas, and an apparent over-reliance on relatively small sample sizes of both the International Passenger Survey (sample size approximately 280,000 respondents per annum with around 2,500 migrant contacts) and the Labour Force Survey (sample size approximately 50,000 households per quarter). Others felt that the programme was proceeding on the right track but did not yet go far enough in securing high quality data.
- 6.4. This section considers and evaluates the extent to which the programme's developments are on course to improve migration statistics. Annex C provides an outline of the administrative sources highlighted in this report.

Box 3: Work being undertaken on improving migration statistics**a) Short term – for inclusion in sub-national population projections for 2010 funding round (for England)**

- Use of aggregate HESA student data to improve flows and in turn improved local internal migration estimates
- Use of aggregate administrative sources in modelling the local distribution of international immigrants
- Refinements to previous package of improvements in 2007:
 - Improved emigration modelling methods
 - Revisited intermediate geographies – consulting local authorities
- Improved IPS – with increased sampling of emigrants, more ports included (Manchester, Stansted and Luton), the implementation of the redesigned port survey in January 2009 (which will impact on estimates from 2009), and inclusion of questions on switchers and short term migrants

b) Short term – supplementary information to assist funding decisions

- Develop an indicator suite of migration measures at a local level for first publication in May 2009, extending the range of indicators as become available:
 - Aggregate HESA data
 - Local short term migration estimates
 - Population churn measures
 - Possibly include aggregate School Census data for England
 - Possibly include aggregate migrant worker scan (National Insurance information)
 - Possibly include aggregate Work and Pension Longitudinal Study (WPLS) data
- Quality measures – reliability of mid-year population estimates starting with a feasibility assessment in 2009

c) Medium term (2010 – 2011)

Continue use of modelling, for example, local area distribution of migrants but now drawing on record level data on characteristics of migrants using where possible:

- HESA student data matched to patient register data (to correct for under-recording on GP registers)
- School Census
- Migrant worker scan
- WPLS
- Communal Establishment survey (in development)
- IPS data from redesigned survey (starting January 2009)
- Points Based System
- Landing Cards
- IDs for foreign nationals

d) Long term (post 2011 Census)

- Looking to develop a system along the lines of the proposed Integrated Population Statistics System in the Beyond 2011 project, based on integration of IPS data with e-Borders (from 2013)
- Supplemented with record linkage using:
 - School Census (linked with birth registrations)
 - Migrant Worker Scan
 - WPLS
 - with improved quality of data from GP registers
- Survey data from sources such as IPS and Communal Establishment Survey

Changes to methods

6.5. In 2007 ONS implemented new methods for allocating (or 'distributing') the numbers of immigrants measured at the UK-level to regions and local areas around the UK, using the Labour Force Survey (LFS) for regional patterns of movement and introducing a new intermediate level of geography. There was no change to the method used to distribute the estimates of international migrants between local authorities within intermediate geography areas and this lower level distribution continued to be based on the 2001 Census. The use of the LFS enabled the distribution to draw on the *actual* destination of the migrant – the IPS data is restricted to *intended* destination which is inevitably uncertain and tends to be biased towards large urban areas. Some users felt that the LFS is weakened by not capturing all groups of migrants – for example, as a household survey the LFS excludes those living in communal establishments and therefore some international students and migrant workers. Since the IPS and LFS do not have sufficiently large sample sizes to provide reliable information to enable estimates of migrants to be distributed to the local level, 2001 Census data are used. However this method means that no account is taken of more recent trends in migration, particularly since the enlargement of the European Union in 2004.

6.6. Our conclusion is that none of the above sources is ideal. ONS is currently looking at an alternative basis of distributing estimates of immigrants to a local level, using administrative sources such as National Insurance allocations and NHS patient register data, potentially in combination with 2001 Census data. ONS is also studying the application of Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data to improve the estimation of student movements, and it is investigating the possibility of linking the individual student records with general practitioner registration data. (See Annex C for further information on these sources.)

6.7. Some of the local authorities interviewed for this review were particularly concerned because they believe revisions to population estimates resulting from changes to the method for estimating migration may have had a negative impact on their 2007 financial allocations, despite not being, in their view, based on significantly improved population and migration data. These local authorities are also concerned that they may experience similar difficulties in future funding allocations.

6.8. We **recommend** that ONS should, at the time it publishes revisions to population estimates, make clear in what sense these are an improvement and the extent to which they are likely to help to reduce the gap in the population count when compared with the count obtained from the 2011 Census.

6.9. ONS has said³¹ that it will not be able to implement the latest developments in time for the initial release of the 2008 mid-year population estimates in August 2009, but intends rather to use the existing methodology followed by a revision to the 2008 estimates after a period of consultation.

6.10. We **recommend** that ONS should engage users in a full discussion of changes to the methodology and their impact on the estimates, including a phase of quality assurance involving local authorities (particularly in hard-to-count areas) before the final version of the estimates is released.

Local authority indicators

6.11. While the development of the statistical methodology is central to some of the activities in the improvement programme, there are other important developments being planned. One planned

³¹ ONS. Improvements to Migration and Population Statistics, February 2009.
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/downloads/msiwpfeb.pdf>

improvement is the creation of a 'local area migration indicator suite' which will provide a profile of migrant activity and characteristics for individual local areas. This will be released through the National Statistics Publication Hub on a quarterly basis, together with more timely estimates of national-level international migration using provisional IPS data. The package of local area indicators is planned to include some existing, as well as some new measures – for example, estimates of population churn³² and newly-developed estimates of local-level short-term migration. The initial release is planned for May 2009. A range of other measures such as data on nationality, ethnicity and English spoken as a foreign language, extracted from surveys and administrative sources, will be added in due course. ONS is currently consulting local authorities on the composition of these indicators.

6.12. The migration indicator suite has the longer-term potential to broaden the evidence base for decisions about local authority funding requirements. The usefulness of the suite will depend on the range and quality of the data contained within it. This will be a critical development, particularly if slower progress is made on improving the underlying methodology of the migration estimates by using additional sources such as HESA and e-Borders data. The extent to which progress can be made in this area will be affected by the length of time taken to secure access to these data, and full compliance with data security rules.

6.13. Irrespective of progress made in respect of the migration indicator suite, we **recommend** that ONS should flag the level of reliability of individual local authority population estimates, possibly in a manner similar to the method it already uses in its international

³² Population churn is a measure of the extent of change: the sum of in- and out-migration expressed as a rate per 1,000 of the population

migration estimates by Government Office Region.³³ It would then be for users to determine how to reflect the uncertainty within their own use of the data – whether this be setting or monitoring progress towards targets; comparative analysis; or supporting resource allocation, for example.

Progress in the use of administrative sources

6.14. By common consent among those users we interviewed, the exploitation of both existing and new administrative data sources is fundamental to the longer-term redesign of the system for the production of migration statistics. However, opinions vary among users as to which sources will ultimately prove the most valuable. For example, some experts are critical of GP registration records which have well-documented weaknesses in terms of their potential use for statistical purposes, while others see value in the extended use of these records, in particular ‘Flag 4’ data (the flagging of international migrants registering with the NHS). ONS has produced an assessment of the major sources (National Insurance number allocations, NHS patient data and Worker Registration Scheme information) and this assessment is being used to inform the developments being undertaken within the improvement programme.³⁴

6.15. It is recognised that there are weaknesses with many of the administrative sources as they currently stand in using them for statistical purposes, and extensive research is being undertaken into ways of utilising and improving them for the purpose of estimating migration. In addition, ONS is investigating both the use of aggregated administrative data in order to quality assure population and migration

³³ ONS, International migration IPS estimates by region, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=15054>

³⁴ ONS, Comparison of combined IPS (long and short-term migration) estimates with administrative sources, May 2008, http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/downloads/Reconciliation_Exercise.pdf

estimates – for example using pension claimant data to quality assure the estimates for the number of older people – and the scope for record linkage between different administrative sources for statistical purposes.

6.16. However, many difficulties remain to be overcome, not least because these sources have been developed with their primary administrative purpose in mind and are often not particularly suited to being exploited for statistical purposes. There are data linkage problems to be resolved (for example, ensuring the source provides comparable, complete and high quality information on which to link records), even after the legal and secure data sharing requirements are satisfied. This is particularly an issue for the complex DWP data on employment, benefits and pensions.

6.17. The e-Borders project has the potential to enable a fundamental improvement in the way international migration is estimated (see Annex C for further information about e-Borders). Some limited progress has been made within the Migration Statistics Improvement Programme to better understand how to exploit the e-Borders system to enhance migration statistics. The UK Border Agency (UKBA) has committed the e-Borders programme to meet the statistical requirements in relation to counting those entering and leaving the country. The improvement programme expects that the system needs to capture at least 95 per cent of passenger numbers to be able to use the data for the purposes of estimating international migration. This target is planned to be reached by December 2010. We are advised that, following its introduction, the system will take more than 12 months to identify long-term migrants, although short-term migration estimates should be available beforehand. It is anticipated that long-term migration statistics drawing on data from the e-Borders system will not be available until the publication of the 2012 mid-year estimates in 2013.

- 6.18. The UKBA's commitment to meet the statistical requirements is welcome and we **recommend** that regular reports on progress on the development of the e-Borders statistics programme are made to the MSIP board and that they are published. This will help the Authority to monitor progress and to oversee the development and improvement of migration statistics.
- 6.19. Other UKBA developments have encountered difficulties: for example a plan to scan landing cards completed by foreign passengers arriving in the UK has been abandoned. The scanned cards were seen as a potentially valuable and early additional source of information to support the improvement of migration statistics. While new landing cards are now being introduced, with a new question on intended length of stay, the latest information indicates that landing card data will not be provided to ONS due to coverage and data capture issues.
- 6.20. Progress on incorporating statistical needs into the new points-based immigration system – a method of controlling immigration of non-EU nationals for work, training or study in the UK on the basis of qualifying points – has been slower than originally assumed. The system is not seen by the improvement programme as central to improving the migration data underpinning population estimates, partly because it does not record EEA migrants, and also because it will not capture information about some non-EEA migrants such as asylum seekers. However, users of migration statistics are likely to find the information useful for other purposes. It is understood that the UKBA has yet to specify a statistical system to monitor the numbers and types of migrants entering the UK via the points-based system. We **recommend** that a statistical system be put in place to record the number of migrants entering the UK under the points-based system; and that the possibilities for further integration of the PBS data with migration statistics are fully investigated to determine whether useful

additional data can be obtained from this source to improve the measurement of international migration.

Data-sharing permission

6.21. Ensuring that ONS has sufficient access to data from other departments is central to the improvements that rely on the statistical use of administrative data. The MSIP will need to obtain data-sharing permissions for existing data systems, as well as ensuring that permissions are also granted for any new systems such as e-Borders. This process is expected to be time-consuming and allowances should be made within programme planning. However the granting of permission to share data is not an end in itself but should be seen as enabling the start of detailed development work.

6.22. A number of the users interviewed expressed frustration at the time being taken to obtain access to administrative data. The process of securing permission can be lengthy, partly because in most instances specific secondary legislation is required under the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*. There are potentially challenging steps to take, including seeking legal opinion, taking account of potential ethical, data handling and related security issues, and allowance for the required length of time for parliamentary consideration in advance of the secondary legislation being brought into force by Ministers. Following the Hannigan Review³⁵ of data handling procedures across government, higher security requirements are now in place and may further delay the granting of access. While we are convinced of the importance of linking administrative records, we also fully accept the need to ensure complete confidentiality and note that ONS has a strong record in this regard.

³⁵ Cabinet Office, Data handling procedures across government: Final report, November 2008, http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/reports/data_handling.aspx

6.23. The first data source to go through this process was the School Census in England. After a feasibility study to determine the usefulness and relevance of the data, ONS and the Department for Children, Schools and Families began the process to put in place the required secondary legislation to enable data sharing from the School Census. This work started in March 2008, with Parliament approving the Order in January 2009.

6.24. Enabling secondary legislation under the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* was not required for the sharing of data on National Insurance number allocations to migrant workers, since a legal gateway has been identified (under the *Social Security Administration Act 1992*) that can be used to obtain access to information held by HM Revenue and Customs. The 'Migrant Worker Scan' is a quarterly cumulative scan of details of all adult overseas nationals using HMRC's National Insurance Recording System. The scan is received by the Department for Work and Pensions and they combine it with benefit information. Internal security protocols have now been met and the data shared with ONS. Progress is expected to be made in using this new source of shared data from early 2009.

The 2011 Census and future censuses

6.25. The 2011 Census of Population is a considerable logistic and financial undertaking which, for England and Wales, is expected to cost £480 million³⁶. The Census will provide data to be used for resource allocation and many other purposes over the subsequent decade. The quality of Census data is therefore crucial.

6.26. In view of the points above, and while recognising that incremental improvements have been and are being made, we are concerned about whether there will be sufficient improvement in

³⁶ 2011 Census White Paper, <http://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011-census/2011-census-questionnaire-content/2011-census-white-paper--english-.pdf>

migration statistics in advance of the 2011 Census. We consider that it is particularly important to be able to compare Census data with data from relevant administrative sources, for quality assurance purposes.

6.27. Given that progress in improving migration statistics is long-term, there is a risk that significant differences between the population estimates rolled-forward from the 2001 Census and the census population count in 2011 may occur, at least in some geographical areas. This not only means that cross-checking sources will be, at best, problematic but that the reliability of some of the census results may be questioned because they differ significantly from earlier estimates.

6.28. Steps are being taken to increase the contribution that the Census can make to understanding patterns of migration. The 2011 Census will be the first to estimate the number of short-term migrants (a person who has stayed or intends to stay in the UK for between 1 and 12 months³⁷), and thereby require short-term migrants to complete a census form (although they will be excluded from the count of the usual resident population). These data will enable better comparisons with administrative data. Questions on migration have been also extended in the 2011 Census. Some users question the usefulness of these data, believing that the census is not the right vehicle to ask about migration intentions, while others feel that they provide opportunities to cross-calibrate the data with administrative sources. The Census will collect information on month and year of arrival as well as intention to stay, and will therefore allow a comparison of both methods.

6.29. Some commentators argue that the case for holding traditional censuses in future is weakening due to rapid population movements and the potential of administrative sources to give a more up-to-date

³⁷ The intention to stay question is not included in the Census rehearsal in Scotland in 2009

picture. Others point out that only a census enables the production of small area statistics and multi-dimensional analysis (such as ethnicity, by age and sex). In 2003, ONS proposed³⁸ an integrated system for producing population statistics underpinned by census and/or survey data, together with administrative data at an individual level. However, work on this system was deferred to prioritise improvements to migration statistics more generally. These proposals are now being revisited as part of a cross-government project, 'Beyond 2011', led by ONS to investigate alternative census and survey designs, and the potential use that could be made of administrative data sources in place of a future traditional census. An up-to-date address register³⁹ is regarded by both users and producers as being a necessary condition for the establishment and maintenance of an integrated system, and the developments being proposed by ONS in the 2011 Census programme were widely welcomed by those users that we spoke to. They considered that investment in creating an up-to-date register for the 2011 census should be sustained by the relevant government bodies in order to support future population statistics (although this is beyond the formal remit of both ONS and the MSIP).

6.30. The future of the Census is both a technical and a policy issue and it has major implications for the funding and priorities of ONS and the Statistics Authority in the years after 2011. We **recommend** that, in the light of the complex dependencies involved, discussions about matters such as the future of the Census beyond 2011, the longer term maintenance of a national address register, related developments (such as identity cards and a population register), and the best way to improve migration statistics, should now be taken forward together at the highest level. Discussions should involve the Statistics Authority

³⁸ Office for National Statistics, Discussion paper: Proposals for an Integrated Population Statistics System, October 2003, http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_population/ipss.pdf

³⁹ The National Gazetteer has been developed in Scotland to provide an accurate, up to date database of land and property data/assets for use by Scottish councils and other parts of the public sector. The Scottish experience could inform the development of an address register for the rest of the UK.

and the ONS and the relevant government departments – notably HM Treasury, the Cabinet Office, CLG, Home Office, DWP, and the devolved administrations.

7. Co-operation between departments

7.1. The critical developments needed to provide good quality migration and population statistics can only be achieved through the close collaboration of central government departments. The National Statistician endorsed this view in the Inter-Departmental Task Force in 2006⁴⁰. Progress in achieving a joined-up approach was slow at first but it took a significant step forward in April 2008 with the formation of the cross-government Migration Statistics Improvement Programme (MSIP).

Departmental engagement

7.2. The bulk of the day-to-day development work is undertaken by ONS, with some involvement of several other departments who hold relevant administrative data sources: Department for Work and Pensions (DWP); Home Office; Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) and Department of Health (DH). A central support role is also provided by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) as a major customer of the official migration statistics. DCSF and DIUS have been mainly involved in work to establish the legal basis for the sharing of the School Census in England and Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data, respectively.

7.3. The Home Office and the UK Border Agency have played an active role on the programme board and ministerial group, as well as in the working group on migration reporting. The Home Office has taken a central role in the “entry and exit” working group but, as noted previously, progress has been slower than expected. The programme’s work during 2008 on UKBA entry and exit systems tended to be focussed largely on specifying requirements for the

⁴⁰ *ibid*, footnote 3

statistical aspects of the systems. There was also close liaison between Home Office statisticians, UK Border Agency staff and ONS. This enabled some detailed investigation into the ways that the e-Borders system might be utilised to improve migration statistics.

7.4. The UK Border Agency is investigating the feasibility of conducting a large-scale survey of migrants. The survey is intended to provide richer information on reasons for migrating to or from the UK, on migrant work and education, and the economic and social impacts of migration on the UK. The Statistics Authority welcomes this proposal, particularly as it has the potential to become a regular survey, adding to the evidence base supporting the official migration estimates.

7.5. One data source of particular interest to users is National Insurance (NI) data on overseas nationals held within DWP and HM Revenue and Customs. The potential for linking NI data with benefits and employment information is widely supported by users. In recent years there has been substantial in-house development by DWP of its own data sources and those data it holds jointly with HMRC. DWP have increased the frequency, and improved the timeliness, of releases of statistics using NI data for overseas workers – with publications now released four times a year and within five months of the reporting period. Another area of development has been the Work and Pension Longitudinal Study (WPLS), which enables benefit and employment information to be linked. There is much further work to be done to assess the coverage of the WPLS and HMRC data. As part of the ‘Beyond 2011’ project, DWP and ONS are assessing the extent to which these could be used to form the ‘spine’ of an integrated population statistics system from which data from other administrative and survey sources would be combined to estimate internal migration. Similarly, the e-Borders system has the potential to provide a “data spine” for the estimation of international migration.

7.6. Early work to improve understanding of the nature of the data and related linkage issues is being carried out by DWP and ONS, and further progress is expected in the second half of 2009. We welcome the close liaison between DWP and ONS in delivering these developments.

7.7. One area where there is potential for greater engagement with the MSIP is the redevelopment of NHS patient information by the Department of Health (DH) and its agencies. Data from GP registers play a central role in providing estimates of migration within the UK. We understand that the work to redevelop the patient register database is underway and that ONS has worked closely with DH in this area. However in order to ensure that the overlap between the developments are fully understood and new opportunities realised, it would be helpful if DH (or its agencies as appropriate) were to participate more actively in the MSIP.

Programme management

7.8. As discussed earlier in this report, work to improve migration statistics was initiated following the 2001 Census and subsequently driven by the findings of the National Statistics Quality Review of International Migration Statistics and the Inter-Departmental Task Force. The recommendations for change have been wide ranging – from addressing fundamental problems with data collection sources through to finding innovative ways to model migration within the UK. While ONS has worked to address these issues, its approach has tended to be evolutionary rather than driven by a robust programme and project management strategy.

7.9. Our research suggests the project management arrangements adopted by ONS in the Improving Migration Statistics (IMPS) programme from 2004 did not adequately focus on assessing progress, identifying where delays were emerging, and ensuring the

timely delivery of objectives. While the more recent programme, the Migration Statistics Improvement Programme (MSIP), seemed initially to suffer from a similar lack of robust programme management, we have seen evidence of real improvement in this regard during 2008 with more specific timetabling and specification of major activities. We further welcome the recent public release of programme board papers on the ONS website.⁴¹

7.10. MSIP project management has been described by ONS as 'light touch', which may simply reflect the limited resources for this available within the ONS Centre for Demography. The cost (see paragraph 8.1) and complexity of the programme – to deliver a wide range of methodological developments against a tight schedule involving a number of departments – suggests to us the need for stronger programme management arrangements.

7.11. We **recommend** that ONS, the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Home Office should consider urgently how best to strengthen the top level of MSIP programme management, including oversight of departmental activities, and report the outcome to the Statistics Authority by summer 2009.

7.12. We further **recommend** the online release of project papers which, together with details of investigations currently underway and their progress, would help to build a higher level of confidence among users. It would be helpful to the programme and to users if a regular report on the progress of major developments was published, including the schedule for delivery of objectives and the short, medium and long-term goals of the programme.

⁴¹ Migration Statistics Improvement Programme Board papers, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/improvement-prog.asp>

8. Funding

8.1. The amount required for the redevelopment of the migration statistics system was estimated in a response to a parliamentary question⁴² in April 2008 by the National Statistician to be £48 million over five years (2008/09 to 2012/13). The total for development of migration statistics includes committed funds of £12 million from ONS over 4 years and £3 million provided to ONS by other departments over three years. On top of these funds are departmental contributions through work “in kind” (where their own programmes of work will contribute to this improvement of migration statistics).

8.2. ONS has provided information demonstrating sufficient financial resource to cover its part of the development work for the current funding period (which runs to 2010/11) and a strong expectation that the required funding will be in place for the final two years of the programme. The position with respect to other departments is less clear. An outline of departmental expenditure for 2008/09 was recently provided to the MSIP Board, amounting to substantially less than might be expected from the total estimate provided in the 2008 parliamentary answer. Policy departments which hold the administrative data necessary to take forward the programme, and which have committed to ‘work in kind’, should provide more details of their planned activities and associated costs. This information is vital to understanding the range of work that can be delivered to improve the sources and methods used to estimate migration, and an assessment of the resources required and the time involved to complete delivery. In the absence of explicit commitments, we are concerned that other funding pressures will undermine the planned progress in migration statistics.

⁴² HC Deb 21 April 2008 c1701W,
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080421/text/80421w0084.htm>

8.3. We **recommend** that each department should provide the programme with details of the work it is undertaking, together with the associated expenditure, and update it every six months. The MSIP should regularly publish information about the range of activities being undertaken by individual departments and an outline of the relevant expenditure.

9. Communication and engagement with users

9.1. Issues relating to the effectiveness of communication arose in a number of areas of the development programme, and they have been discussed above in sections 6 and 8. Section 9 looks in particular at users' views about ONS's approach to communicating developments in improving migration statistics, and how departments communicate the changes they are making to ensure delivery of more coherent reporting of migration statistics.

Nature of communication with users

9.2. Consultation by ONS with local government organisations has tended to occur via the Local Government Association (LGA) and specialised groups such as the Central and Local Information Partnership (CLIP) Census and Population sub-groups. These groups, however, do not represent all local government interests. The LGA's primary focus is English local authorities, while CLIP is made up of a group of local authority members who represent their own authority's perspective and may not necessarily reflect the priorities and views of the wider local government community.

9.3. Previous communication activity with users has been characterised by high-level presentations of ONS's developments, usually at conferences and seminars, or to specific stakeholder groups. Users have told us that they find this approach to be unsatisfactory – they feel that information has usually been disseminated at the end of a development phase, with little opportunity for an exchange of views or a chance to influence the development work. This has led to problems when, with little warning, substantial revisions were made to data. There were instances of this kind in relation to the revisions made to population and migration data in 2007.

9.4. More recently, only very general information has been made publicly available about the work of the Migration Statistics Improvement Programme (MSIP) via the ONS website. As indicated above, users do not understand the nature of the work being undertaken, details of the developments being considered, the progress being made, or when they can expect to see improved population and migration estimates. With minimal information released from the MSIP, the work of the programme appears to users to take place behind closed doors. We see this as running counter to the longer-term ambitions of the programme.

Developments in communicating with users

9.5. ONS has accepted and acted on the criticisms regarding the handling of revisions to the mid-2006 population estimates published in 2007 and it has begun a series of meetings with treasurers, planners and demographers in local authorities to discuss the implementation of the new methodology for the mid-2008 population estimates.

9.6. The recent formation by ONS of reference panels looking into long-term migration, short-term migration and student migration, on the advice of the Central and Local Information Partnership (CLIP), are welcome steps forward. However, these panels are in a formative period and do not yet have a clear remit. Confidence in the estimates would be increased if a quality assurance role for local authorities was established, so as to review the planned modifications to methodologies. This would be especially desirable for areas that experience particular population issues, such as high student populations, but such developments need to be balanced with the limited level of technical resource available in some of the smaller local authorities.

9.7. Several of the users we interviewed felt that ONS involved academic and local government experts too late in the development process to be able to influence changes, and felt it was largely a ‘rubber stamping’ exercise. ONS is looking to address this criticism through collaborations such as with academic experts on the published list and with local authority experts. ONS and the devolved administration in Scotland in particular will also be working with the ESRC Centre for Population Change.

9.8. We welcome the steps taken by ONS to extend the early involvement of experts and users in academia and local government, and **recommend** that ONS seeks further ways of engaging with users from a range of backgrounds to review methodological changes and priorities for the production and dissemination of population statistics. In addition we **recommend** that other government departments involved in the improvement programme also consider involving external experts in their development work, and utilise the ONS “expert list” for this purpose.⁴³

9.9. We further **recommend** that the Local Government Association, and other representative bodies where appropriate, work more closely with ONS to increase the opportunities for wider engagement with local authorities.

Joined-up releases of regular publications

9.10. The ONS, Home Office and Department for Work and Pensions have brought together their (previously separate) publications on migration topics into a joined-up release. This was widely welcomed by the users interviewed, and it was seen to be a helpful development. However, one problem noted was the potential for an overwhelming

⁴³ ONS Specialist List of External Experts, February 2008, http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/downloads/ONS_Use_of_External_Experts.pdf

volume of material to be released simultaneously. One user suggested that it would be helpful to provide a summary.

9.11. The Code of Practice for Official Statistics emphasises the importance of providing clear information about published statistics to ensure appropriate interpretation is made.⁴⁴ User understanding of the range of migration statistics may be enhanced by relating each of the sources to the underlying processes of international and internal migration through a conceptual framework, and explaining clearly how newly-published estimates update the “bigger picture”.

9.12. A clearer separation between regular outputs and development reports would make the releases more comprehensible for users. We **recommend** that the batch release of these major migration outputs be accompanied by a stand-alone commentary. Such a commentary should specifically explain the nature of the various sources and their relative quality and reliability, and also highlight which of the associated releases provides the full detailed information that users may wish to refer to. We further **recommend** that a conceptual framework of migration statistics be developed to provide further context to enable users to understand how the different sets of figures relate to each other, and to the process of migration more generally.

Annual migration report

9.13. In 2006 the Inter-Departmental Task Force recommended the production of a single UK-wide annual report. Departments and devolved administrations are currently developing such a report. It is intended to provide an assessment of recent trends in migration and estimates of the current number of migrants in the UK. The recommendation for such a report was generally viewed to be a

⁴⁴ Principle 8, Code of Practice for Official Statistics, Edition 1.0, UK Statistics Authority, January 2009, <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

positive development by the users we interviewed, although there was some concern that its production might deflect resources away from the more urgent work to improve the estimation methods and might further delay the release of the underlying data. Some users suggested an over-arching interactive release from which it could be possible to 'drill down' to the local area information or specific topics of interest. The MSIP Migration Reporting working group should consider these concerns in their preparation of the annual migration report and in determining the timing of its release.

Annex A: List of participants

Name	Organisation
Professor David Coleman	University of Oxford
Richard Cooper*	Nottinghamshire County Council
Keith Dugmore	Demographic Decisions; Demographic Statistics Users Group
Jan Freeke	Glasgow City Council
Anne Green	Institute for Employment Research, University of Warwick
Gill Green	Audit Commission
Damian Highwood	Westminster City Council
John Hollis*	GLA, Data Management Analysis
Nick Holmes	Welsh Local Government Data Unit
Professor David Martin	University of Southampton
Nicola Morton*	London Councils
Professor Phil Rees	University of Leeds
Professor Ludi Simpson	University of Manchester
David Thorogood	Eurostat

* A member of the Central and Local Information Partnership

Annex B: Composition of the Migration Statistics Monitoring Review Project Board

Name	Organisation	Position on board
Professor David Rhind	non-Executive Director, UK Statistics Authority	Chair
Richard Alldritt	Head of Assessment, UK Statistics Authority	Member
Richard Laux	UK Statistics Authority	Member
Duncan Macniven	Registrar General for Scotland, General Register Office for Scotland	Member
Guy Goodwin	Office for National Statistics	Member
Janet Dougharty	Department for Communities and Local Government	Member
Tim Allen	Local Government Association	Member
Professor John Salt	Migration Research Unit, University College London	Member
Penny Babb	UK Statistics Authority	Project Manager
Cathy Kruger	UK Statistics Authority	Secretary

Annex C: Outline of highlighted administrative data sources

Migrant Worker Scan (MWS)

DWP are responsible for the allocation of National Insurance numbers (NINo) to migrant workers from overseas. When a migrant enters the country and registers for a NINo (either for work or benefit purposes) their age, sex, postcode of residence, country of origin and year of arrival are supplied to HM Revenue and Customs. DWP receive a quarterly 100 per cent extract of these data (the MWS) to link with employment information. There are no records of departures.

Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study (WPLS)

The WPLS links data on employment and benefits which can be used to provide individual client histories back to 1998 for all individuals on the PAYE scheme. The WPLS is a rich source and could potentially be linked with records detailing NINos allocated to overseas nationals to identify work and benefit flows. It has the potential to identify histories of migrant workers and in particular identify those who have left the UK.

GP registers

The NHS Central Register (NHSCR) provides a comprehensive system to assist with NHS patient administration in England and Wales. A move is assumed if a patient who is already registered with a GP re-registers with another GP in a different (former) Health Authority area. These data form the basis of estimating internal migration. Parallel systems are used in Scotland and Northern Ireland – see box 2 in the main body of the report.

Flag 4 registrations

When a person whose previous address is outside the UK registers with a GP in the UK for the first time, a flag is added to the record at the NHSCR. The flag is removed when the person registers with a different GP. In Scotland the process of identifying migrants from overseas does not use Flag 4

registration. A count of overseas migrants is provided through a related system called the Community Health Index – see box 2.

School Census

The School Census (formerly the Pupil Level Annual Census) provides a snapshot of data on school pupils in state education every term in England, while the equivalent censuses in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland are annual. The information collected includes ethnicity and counts of pupils whose first language is not English on arrival at school. There is no single Unique Pupil Number and it does not contain information on all pupils: for example, it excludes those educated in the independent sector. The School Census will be useful to understand changes to the school-age population and to quality assure mid-year population and internal migration estimates.

HESA student data

The Higher Education Statistics Agency collects data about students attending all publicly-funded higher education institutions in the UK shortly after the end of each academic year. The data include all students that have been registered at an institution at any point during the preceding academic year, including those who fail to complete their studies and leave their institution early. From January 2009 students' term-time postcodes are included. The data will inform both internal migration estimates of students and international migration of foreign students.

Workers Registration Scheme (WRS)

The WRS was introduced by the Home Office just prior to the accession to the EU of the A8 countries (the Eastern European countries which joined in May 2004: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia). The system is used to monitor the impact of the EU Accession on the labour market and to restrict access to benefits among A8 nationals. It produces a cumulative figure of the number of workers applying to the WRS from the A8 countries – it does not record departures.

Points Based System

The Points Based System is a scheme being phased in from 2008 to manage the flow of non-EEA nationals coming to the UK to work or study. The PBS will collect a range of additional demographic data about migrants which will be linked to their application. It is intended to capture granted 'leave to remain' information. The PBS excludes EEA nationals and asylum seekers and is less useful for measuring outflows.

Landing Cards

All non-EEA nationals seeking to enter the UK from outside the common travel area (UK, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, and the Republic of Ireland) are required to complete a landing card on arrival at a point of entry to the UK. The statistics are used to measure the number of passengers granted entry to the UK by both category of entry and nationality. A landing card is completed for each journey; a person who makes more than one journey is counted on each occasion. No information is available on when individuals leave the UK, although landing cards now collect information on intended length of stay. Not all landing card data are captured – the system focuses on 'controlled' arrivals, which are non-EEA arrivals intending to stay for at least six months, and excludes those intending to stay for less time. Landing cards are likely to be phased out once the e-Borders system is fully rolled out.

e-Borders

The e-Borders system is currently under development with the primary aim of securing the UK borders. It will eventually record all people travelling in and out of the UK (except across the Irish land border). This provides the statistical benefit of being able to count people into and out of the country. Carriers arriving in the UK will be required to provide passport details to the UK Border Agency in advance of travelling. The system is being rolled out over a number of years, aiming to achieve 95%-100% of passenger numbers by December 2010.

