

Monitoring Brief

Monitoring Brief 1/12
31 January 2012

Monitoring Update – January 2012

This is the first in a series of progress updates, describing the ways in which the Authority's recommendations set out in a range of *Monitoring Reports* and *Monitoring Briefs* are being taken forward. The Authority will publish a further update in mid 2012.

Below are progress updates on the recommendations set out in the Authority's reports on:

- ***Volatility of the Retail Sales Index***
- ***Gender Pay Gap***
- ***Migration Statistics: The Way Ahead?***
- ***Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics - A Review of the Statutory Arrangements***
- ***Scotland's Major Population Surveys***
- ***Overcoming Barriers to Trust in Crime Statistics - England and Wales***
- ***Strengthening User Engagement***
- ***Communicating Inflation***
- ***Improving the reporting of road casualties***
- ***The demand for, and feasibility of, a UK-wide index of multiple deprivation***
- ***Review of an error in the published estimates of Output in Construction***

Volatility of the Retail Sales Index

The Authority published its Monitoring Brief *Volatility of the Retail Sales Index* in October 2008.¹

This note followed discussion in the media and elsewhere of unexpectedly large estimates of month-on-month changes for the volume of retail sales in Great Britain in May and June 2008. It provided two recommendations for improving the reporting of the results of the ONS surveys, both of which take account of the fact that all such figures derived from sample surveys are estimates.

Recommendation 1: None of ONS's estimates of the level or change in the Retail Sales Index (RSI) is accompanied by guidance to users on the accuracy of the published figures. We recognise the difficulties in calculating estimates of sampling variability for complex series of this kind, but we consider that even an informal indication of reliability, in numerical terms, would minimise misinterpretations. We note that ONS publishes a revisions analysis for this series, which we regard as helpful, although there is no reason to suppose that the low revisions reported correlate with low sampling variability.

Complete

ONS has calculated standard errors for the RSI to inform users about the accuracy of published figures and published a paper on this issue in its journal *Economic and Labour Market Review*.

Recommendation 2: We think that the presentation of the various estimates of change in retail sales could be improved to make their usability and interpretation clearer to users. For example, we believe that some users place too much reliance on month to month changes; in a highly volatile situation such monthly estimates are not good guides to longer term trends. This tendency to place too much reliance on a single set of figures strengthens the argument for a numerical indication of reliability. We welcome the publication of underlying trends in the September Special Background Note as a step towards informing users about underlying patterns in data.

Complete

ONS considered presentational issues as part of the review of all Economic and Labour Statistics outputs. ONS also considered presentational issues to meet the Requirements in the Assessment Report on RSI. A link to the *Economic and Labour Market Review* paper on the accuracy of the figures is now included in the background notes to the statistical release.

¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-briefs/volatility-of-the-retail-sales-index.pdf>

Gender Pay Gap

The Authority published its Monitoring Brief *Gender Pay Gap* in June 2009.²

This note discussed two different interpretations, from the Government Equalities Office and from the Office for National Statistics, of statistics on the difference between the earnings of women compared with men.

Recommendation 1: There is a need for a more extensive set of measures to present the differences between the earnings of men and women rather than using any single headline measure of the gender pay gap.

Complete

In November 2009 ONS published a position paper on how its statistical bulletins would present differences in men's and women's pay. In line with the findings in the Monitoring Brief it concluded that there is no one measure of the gender pay gap that is appropriate as a single measure of such a complex issue; and that ONS would headline on a set of measures to look at the differences in men's and women's pay.

ONS's release of *2010 Survey of Hours and Earnings* (published in December 2010) included a section on gender pay differences which presented a range of statistics on the earnings of women relative to men, in line with ONS's position paper.

The website of the Government Equalities Office (GEO) presents some facts and figures on the gender pay gap. This presents the gender pay gap for full-time employees, and for all employees, and quotes the data source.

²<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-briefs/monitoring---assessment-note-4-2009--gender-pay-gap.pdf>

Migration Statistics: The Way Ahead?

The Authority published its Monitoring Report *Migration Statistics: The Way Ahead?* in July 2009.³

The report reviewed progress in implementing plans to improve UK migration statistics. It concluded that the cross-government programme is doing much useful work to deliver specific improvements in the short to medium term. However, the longer term goal – for high quality migration statistics derived from an integrated statistical system that draws on administrative and survey/census data – will take some considerable time to realise, perhaps decades. The review also highlighted the importance of maintaining a national address register beyond the 2011 Census.

Following publication of the Monitoring Report, ONS put in place an action plan to address the review's recommendations. It has since made variable progress towards implementing these recommendations.

Recommendation 1: We recommend that ONS's quality assurance methodology is made clear to users and that a phase of quality assurance involving local government experts occurs before the final version of the estimates is released.

Complete

In August 2009 ONS published a quality assurance strategy⁴ explaining the approach it was taking to check the quality of the estimates and also highlighted how users could be involved in the checking.

ONS conducted a user engagement exercise to seek users' views of the impact on the planned improvements. It published a summary response on the feedback, followed by a detailed report. Users were largely in favour of the improvements.

ONS established reference groups comprised of a variety of experts to comment on methodology, sense check results and suggest publications. The members are mainly local authority experts who provide a detailed local perspective.

There are two types of reference group: Technical Reference Groups and Local Insight Reference Panels. Technical groups assist in the development of new methodology and provide knowledge of local trends and effects while Local Insight groups focus on local emerging impacts of the improvements made.

Recommendation 2: We recommend that ONS flag those local authority population estimates where there are higher levels of uncertainty, indicating the reason for the uncertainty.

Ongoing

ONS is developing a means of flagging local authority population estimates. It published a paper on its work to date in May 2010, which set out its approach and outlines the main sources of uncertainty in population estimates. It provides examples of the types of local authorities that are subject to uncertainty in their estimates. In the longer term, ONS is looking to produce an approximate indicator of quality for each local authority population estimate.

³ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/reports/authority-report-4--migration-statistics-the-way-ahead.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/imps/mig-stats-improve-prog/comm-stakeholders/index.html>

This project is ongoing and due to complete as part of the Migration Statistics Improvement Programme (MSIP) 'Reconciling Administrative Data Sources and Population Estimates' workstream by end March 2012.

Recommendation 3: We recommend, as soon as practicable, the release of information to clarify how e-Borders data might be used in the estimation of migration statistics.

Ongoing

The future of the e-Borders programme is uncertain. Phase 2 of the Programme has started and includes a work stream to determine the statistics benefits of e-Borders. A previous update from MSIP (November 2010) stated that the programme was under review and the full benefits were unlikely to be realised before the end of the programme in March 2012.

The February 2011 MSIP update note said that e-Borders as currently specified would not be able to be used to produce direct migration counts. ONS told us that information on country of residence would not be provided by carriers to the UK Border Agency. ONS does hope to be able to use the e-Borders data to improve the weighting up of the IPS data. The project will not be completed in the lifetime of the MSIP which is due to complete by March 2012. It says that the improvements resulting from e-Borders are several years away. The Statistics Authority is disappointed that the potential of e-Borders to improve the estimation of migration statistics seems to have been given relatively low priority.

Recommendation 4: We recommend the online release of project papers which, together with details of investigations currently underway and their progress, would give users a better understanding of progress.

Complete

ONS published quarterly summaries about progress on the MSIP, as well as a number of research papers on the main areas of development. It also published minutes of the Programme Board meetings, together with some working group papers.

Recommendation 5: We recommend that each department involved in the Programme provides the programme board with details of the work being undertaken, together with the associated expenditure, and update this every six months.

Complete

ONS has developed a template for departments to report on their progress to the MSIP Board. The departments' reports to the Board are summarised in the Programme Board minutes and published on the ONS website.

Recommendation 6: We recommend that ONS, Home Office and the Department for Work and Pensions adopt a 'conceptual framework' in their releases of migration statistics, to enable users to understand how the different sets of figures relate to each other and to the process of migration more generally.

Partially complete

The first (and only) joint Migration Statistics annual report (2008) produced by ONS, Home Office and DWP contained a figure that went some way to illustrate the international movements and related data sources. The report included a detailed explanation of the sources of international migration data highlighted in the figure in an annex to the report. The figure did not refer to internal migration and associated data sources. ONS only presented the diagram in the annual report. The

joint report for 2009 was cancelled. ONS has not included the figure as a framework in the migration statistics quarterly reports or referred to it subsequently.

Eurostat is beginning work on a common framework for migration statistics. ONS sent it the framework proposed in the Authority migration report. This was received positively by Eurostat. The ONS project on a framework began in May 2011 in collaboration with Southampton University. It is due to complete as part of the 'Reconciling Administrative Data Sources and Population Estimates' workstream by the end of January 2012.

Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics - A Review of the Statutory Arrangements

The Authority published its Monitoring Report *Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics - A Review of the Statutory Arrangements* in March 2010.⁵

This report followed the Authority's independent review of the statutory arrangements for Pre-Release Access (PRA) to official statistics in the four UK administrations. The report allowed the Authority to put on record its considered views on the rules that should govern PRA to statistical reports.

The four administrations have subsequently carried out their own reviews of how PRA arrangements have worked since the various Orders came into effect, and as a result the statutory system for PRA across the four UK administrations remains unchanged. The Authority continues to contest the current arrangements for PRA, and notes that the Chairman of the Public Administration Committee expects⁶ to "return to the issue" in 2012.

Recommendation 1: All the UK administrations should seek to amend their Orders to adopt a maximum period of pre-release access of 3 hours, with a shorter period as the norm. Exceeding the 3 hour period would require special justification and be the subject of prior consultation with the Statistics Authority, which would report publicly on such cases. This shorter interval may necessitate a change to the standard time of day for releases, currently 9.30 am, and the Statistics Authority would support and facilitate such a change. A set of transitional steps, introducing the shorter period first for those statistics that are either of particular importance or of a kind where access is easier to control, might also be helpful to departmental statisticians.

No progress

Under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*, responsibility for determining the statutory rules and arrangements for pre-release access is the responsibility of Ministers in the UK Government and devolved administrations.

The statutory system for PRA remains unchanged.

Recommendation 2: In the public interest and to support the international reputation of the UK statistical system, the four UK administrations should work together to share a common understanding of the arguments and develop a common formulation for the Orders, beyond the adoption of the 3 hour limit.

No progress

No progress has been made in developing a common formulation for the Orders between the four UK administrations

Recommendation 3: One of the current grounds for pre-release access should be removed: namely, 'the making of statements about an official statistic at...the time of publication'. This practice, though common, distracts media attention from the statistical release and can give the impression that there has been collusion to align the statistical release with the ministerial statement. Reducing the practice to exceptional cases would substantially reduce the perceived need for pre-release access. We would therefore also recommend that

⁵<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/reports/pre--release-access-to-official-statistics--a-review-of-the-statutory-arrangements.pdf>

⁶ Hansard, 13 December 2011, column 670

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm111213/debtext/111213-0001.htm>

an interval of one hour should be respected, on a voluntary basis, between the release of statistics and the release of ministerial comment on those statistics.

No progress

No progress has been made in either reducing the practice of making statements at the time of publication to exceptional cases, nor to establishing an interval of one hour, on a voluntary basis.

Recommendation 4: The provisions in the Orders relating to the granting of pre-release access to journalists should be deleted. These are not necessary and create the anomaly of the news media having the statistical information ahead of Parliament.

No progress

The statutory system for PRA remains unchanged, including in respect of granting pre-release access to journalists.

Scotland's Major Population Surveys

The Authority published its Monitoring Brief *Scotland's Major Population Surveys* in March 2010.⁷

In 2009 the UK Statistics Authority assessed four major population surveys which are carried out by the Scottish Government: the Scottish Health Survey; the Scottish House Condition Survey; the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey; and the Scottish Household Survey. The purpose of this Monitoring Brief was to summarise the main areas of good practice and areas for improvement which the Authority identified during the assessments.

Recommendation 1: The Scottish Health Survey website included pages listing uses and user views. The findings of user consultations and plans for future user engagement are available on the website. The Authority regards this as good practice which should be adopted by the other surveys.

Ongoing

The Scottish Government has gone some way to meeting this suggestion in relation to its other surveys. The results of a user consultation for the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey have been published. Information about the uses of the Scottish Household Survey (SHS) is published through, for example, contact leaflets for household respondents and other correspondence to stakeholders for specific events and seminars. Also published is a summary list of uses to which access agreements to SHS special datasets and SHS follow-up survey facilities have been given

Recommendation 2: The Scottish Government's policy is to pre-announce the month of publication for statistical releases 12 months in advance and to pre-announce the actual date of release the month before the release. The list of forthcoming statistical publications is available on the Scottish Government website. However, the assessment team found that some survey managers were not clear about this policy and had delayed announcing a publication date until they were confident of the precise date on which the report would be published. The Authority's Code of Practice for Official Statistics states that producers should publish the timetable for statistical releases twelve months in advance of publication.

Ongoing

All survey managers are now clear about the policy, and improvement of practices is underway.

Recommendation 3: The Authority noted that there had been an inconsistent approach to the reporting of the Scottish Government targets in first releases across the different surveys. Although most national targets were included with appropriate signposting and commentary, some had been omitted from the survey publications. The Authority considers it helpful to users to report impartially and objectively about progress against targets which are based upon the statistics shown in statistical reports.

Complete

This was rectified for the 2008 Scottish Health Survey report and each report since then has reported impartially on all relevant targets.

⁷<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-briefs/monitoring---assessment-note-3-2010---scotland-s-major-population-surveys.pdf>

Recommendation 4: All four surveys involved contractor firms collecting and analysing the data, and in some cases, drafting the reports. In general, these arrangements worked well but in several cases there were problems with the quality of the data which the contractors sent to the Scottish Government. This led to delays in publishing the survey reports. The Authority suggests that the Scottish Government reviews the contractual arrangements with contractors to ensure that the initial quality assurance is carried out to the required standard.

Complete

The invitation to tender for the new contracts for all the surveys was worded in such a way to ensure that errors would be rectified promptly.

Overcoming Barriers to Trust in Crime Statistics - England and Wales

The Authority published its Monitoring Report *Overcoming Barriers to Trust in Crime Statistics - England and Wales* in May 2010.⁸

Distrust of crime statistics has been a recurring theme, with three major reviews in the last ten years. The Authority's review aimed to identify the barriers to trust, examine the steps taken to overcome those barriers and to make appropriate recommendations.

Recommendation 1: The Home Office should establish a standing non-executive board to review and report on arrangements for the production of crime statistics, in order to provide independent assurance of their impartiality and integrity, and to comment on methods and quality.

Superseded

In December 2010 the Home Secretary announced that the publication of crime statistics covering England and Wales would be moved out of the Home Office altogether in order to promote greater public trust and demonstrate their independence.

The National Statistician was invited to conduct an independent review to recommend the best future location for the publication of crime statistics and their associated data collection systems.

On 6 June 2011, the National Statistician published her *Review of Crime Statistics for England and Wales*. The review recommended the transfer of responsibility for the British Crime Survey (BCS) and for the publication of crime statistics to ONS, and the establishment of an independent advisory committee.

Recommendation 2: The National Statistician should publish a full and regular commentary on trends and patterns in crime. This would set an authoritative benchmark for further analysis of these data.

Superseded

This recommendation has now been superseded by the Home Secretary's decision to move publication of crime statistics from the Home Office to an independent body. The National Statistician's review recommended that ONS should take full responsibility for producing commentary.

Recommendation 3: The National Statistician, in conjunction with relevant government departments and the Welsh Assembly Government, should draw up proposals for the development of statistical publications on crime and the criminal justice system in England and Wales, and consult users inside and outside government. The aims should be to:

- i) make the publications as relevant as possible to the likely uses of the statistics
- ii) make it easier for the non-expert to understand the flow of offences and offenders through the criminal justice system.

Ongoing

The National Statistician's review recommended that ONS review crime statistics publications in conjunction with the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice and the Welsh government. It also

⁸ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/reports/overcoming-barriers-to-trust-in-crime-statistics--england-and-wales.pdf>

recommended that ONS should set up a strategic Crime statistics publication co-ordination group consisting of these bodies.

Recommendation 4: The National Statistician, the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice should produce the following:

- i) a conceptual framework for crime and criminal justice data, showing flows through the system, where and how data are captured, and where gaps, discrepancies or discontinuities occur**
- ii) a free-standing guide that explains the strengths and limitations of different types of crime data, the circumstances in which it would be appropriate to use one source rather than another, and the kinds of judgement that need to be made when no single source is ideal**
- iii) guidelines on the presentation and use of crime and criminal justice statistics in government documents and statements**
- iv) advice for the public about the interpretation of performance measures in the criminal justice system. This advice should be made available on all government websites where such data are displayed.**

i) and iii) complete

In relation to part (i), both the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice have produced diagrams depicting flows for crime and criminal justice data separately, but the complexities involved have made it difficult to produce a single diagram. A high level conceptual framework has been produced.

In relation to part (iii), the Home Office has developed guidance on the presentation of statistics in press releases and Ministerial statements. The Ministry of Justice has since adopted this guidance. The Monitoring and Assessment team has not seen this guidance.

ii) ongoing

In relation to part (ii), this will require review with respect to redeveloped publications.

iv) not being taken forward

In relation to part (iv), the National Statistician's review stated that this part of the recommendation was no longer applicable, as the government's Transparency Agenda now advocates that performance should be assessed at a local level. It recommended no further action.

There may be a need for such advice, in the future, to help to inform the public about the strengths and limitations of different types of performance measure.

Recommendation 5: The Home Office, in conjunction with the National Police Improvement Agency (NPIA), HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), the Ministry of Justice and other relevant parties, should:

- i) review the local data on crime and criminal justice that are becoming available across a variety of government websites and consider whether there are opportunities to consolidate, share best practice, and provide more comprehensive and consistent metadata (for example, definitions, explanations of how the data are derived, and discussion of strengths and limitations)**
- ii) supplement existing guidelines on the conduct of local surveys with good practice advice on the analysis, presentation and communication of results to the public.**

Ongoing

In relation to part (i), the National Statistician's review stated that since publication of the Authority's Report the landscape has changed in that new websites have been set up (notably the crime mapping website), and large scale reductions have been made in the number of government websites. The National Statistician's review recommended that the Ministry of Justice should conduct pilot studies for adding criminal justice data to the crime mapping website.

Not being taken forward

In relation to part (ii), the National Statistician's review noted that the Coalition government had abolished police targets at the national level and there was no longer a mandatory requirement for police forces to conduct user satisfaction surveys. It recommended no further action.

Recommendation 6: The Home Office should publish a description of the steps currently taken (i) to ensure that police crime records result from the consistent application of the Counting Rules and (ii) to quality assure the statistics deriving from those records. It should supplement the steps in (i) as necessary, for example by spot checks or periodic external audit, in order to provide public reassurance of consistency.

(i) Complete

(ii) Superseded

The Home Office has updated its Crime Statistics User Guide to include a description of the quality assurance of recorded crime data.

HMIC has recently started an inspection process for recorded crime. This recommendation is now overtaken by Recommendation 8 of the National Statistician's Review of Crime Statistics, i.e. that the HMIC audit of police recording of crime against the Home Office Counting Rules needs to be focused on risk areas in terms of statistical quality informed by statistical analysis.

Strengthening User Engagement

The Authority published its Monitoring Report *Strengthening User Engagement* in June 2010.⁹

This report allowed the Authority to highlight the importance it attaches to effective user engagement as a precursor to realising the value of official statistics, and to make recommendations aimed at strengthening the user voice. It looked at ways of enhancing communication between producers of official statistics and users with the aim of guiding the future development of the statistical service and helping users to engage with it and make the maximum possible use of it.

The review incorporated:

- research on the perceptions of opinion formers of official statistics,
- research on public confidence in official statistics,
- information about user engagement among National Statistical Institutes in other countries, and
- discussions with users and producers across the UK.

The review reached a number of conclusions, for example that while much user engagement does take place, it is often limited to central government users. The improvements that are needed included: better understanding of the use currently made of official statistics; better communication with a wider range of users; and better exploitation of the existing consultation structures and new and emerging technologies to ensure that user engagement is effective. The recommendations in the report addressed these conclusions.

In December 2010 – six months after the report was published – the Authority Board discussed progress made in implementing the recommendations in the report. The Board agreed that while some progress had been made in implementing the recommendations, more needed to be done, in particular with regard to recommendations 2 and 6. The Board plans to discuss further progress in implementation in June 2011.

Recommendation 1: All the bodies that produce official statistics should take steps to enhance their compliance with the Code of Practice, particularly in three areas:

- a. those aspects of the Code that relate to understanding the use and potential use of official statistics;**
- b. the publication of the documentation required by the Code;**
- c. ensuring that the commentary that accompanies official statistics helps the users understand and make effective use of the statistics**

The Statistics Authority will consider with the National Statistician whether further guidance is needed on how to meet these requirements.

Ongoing

In its July 2010 report on the findings from the first 50 assessment reports, the Authority noted that one of the greatest challenges to Code compliance was identifying the use made of the statistics and user engagement more generally. This reflected a review of the 2009 Assessment Programme which indicated that there had been no major improvements in compliance.

In October 2010 the Authority published a Monitoring Brief on the *Use Made of Official Statistics* which provided some examples of how official statistics are used by a wide variety of people and

⁹<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/reports/strengthening-user-engagement--final-report.pdf>

organisations. The Brief aimed to help departments to identify and document the use made of their official statistics.

To help departments improve the presentation of their statistics, in summer 2010 the National Statistician's Office (NSO) established the Presentation and Commentary Co-ordination Group (PCCG) to focus on these issues. The group has since worked with a number of departments to improve specific releases, identified through the assessment process.

The Government Statistical Service (GSS) Taskforce for Presentation and Commentary was established in March 2010. It held a workshop for 19 departments to raise awareness of the importance of commentary, and reviewed specific releases from NHS IC and ONS. It has since set up a network of commentary champions in ten departments who have submitted brief plans on how they will take forward improvements. The taskforce has also produced guidance with examples of good practice. There are plans to hold workshops in departments and to share findings and examples from the champions group more widely in the Government Statistical Service.

In October 2010 the Authority published a Statement outlining certain Standards for statistical releases with the aim of giving departments some pointers to improve commentary and presentation.

Recommendation 2: ONS should give priority to improving the navigability and accessibility of its website, and should publish its plans for doing so.

Ongoing

In December 2010 ONS published an update on its plans to launch an improved website on 30 April 2011. Planned improvements include quicker and easier to find information, including better search and navigation; easier to use information, by downloading data, charts and graphs; improved accessibility for users with sight or other impairments; and prompt release of outputs at 9:30 a.m.

The launch of the new website was delayed, with the new site going live on 27 August.

On 23 September, ONS issued a statement acknowledging the difficulties a number of people were experiencing in using the new website, A statement¹⁰ of 11 December 2011 described a number of improvements that had been made to the website's functionality, and other modifications that were forthcoming,

Recommendation 3: The National Statistician should lead consultations with appropriate experts on how best to use web technology, and innovative ways of exploiting digitised statistical data, to enhance the accessibility of official statistics and related advice.

Complete

The National Statistician's *Web-dissemination Strategy for Official Statistics* was published in July 2011¹¹. The strategy urges official statistics producers to achieve the widest possible dissemination and use of official statistics and data by better utilising the Web and associated technologies and by adopting consistent data and metadata formats and standards.

¹⁰ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/media-centre/statements/web-update-2.html>

¹¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/national-statistician/ns-reports--reviews-and-guidance/national-statistician-s-guidance/web-dissemination-strategy-for-official-statistics.pdf>

Recommendation 4: 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.

Ongoing

The RSS helped run a workshop at the 2010 GSS conference on engaging with the media. This workshop was very well received and there are plans to roll it out across the GSS.

Recommendation 5: 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 producers of official statistics. While the lead on these developments should rest with the Statistics User Forum and the RSS, bodies producing official statistics should actively support this initiative, coordinated by the National Statistician.

Nearing completion

The RSS has developed an online user engagement tool, StatsUserNet. Development is nearing completion, and the site will be open to public registrations in early 2012. Early adopters include the Health Statistics User Group and the Children, Educations and Skills theme, and the site will also be used to host discussions on the ONS's Beyond 2011 consultation. The site will be marketed and rolled out more widely during 2012.

Recommendation 6: All government departments and other producer bodies should work actively with the RSS Statistics User Forum (SUF) (and other user group structures), to help user groups represent the interests and priorities of their members.

Ongoing

Many departments have published user engagement strategies in an effort to develop user engagement. GSS theme groups have increased their contact with SUF to explore user engagement strategies. These are positive steps but their effectiveness might be enhanced if there were a more coherent and coordinated approach from the GSS. A number of user engagement strategies are being produced but without any coordination. This means that user groups are often making the same points at various consultations and workshops.

SUF has produced a document 'User Engagement Best Practice' which outlines at a high level what users want in terms of engagement, and elaborates using examples of good practice. SUF are collaborating with NSO to develop this using other examples of good practice.

Communicating Inflation

The Authority published its Monitoring Brief *Communicating Inflation* in December 2010.¹²

This Brief considered issues raised in public debate about official statistics on inflation. It identified two distinct uses that are made of the measures and considered the need to respond further to these. Aspects of the way in which the official measures of inflation are communicated were also considered.

Recommendation 1: Take forward the matters raised in the Assessment Report, including:

- a) establish an up-to-date official position on regional indicators; and**
- b) consult on the demand for indices for different household types.**

Ongoing

ONS has addressed all of the Requirements in Assessment Report 79 and the Head of Assessment has confirmed the designation of these statistics as National Statistics.

ONS has established an up-to-date official position on regional indicators in *UK relative Regional Consumer Price levels for Goods and Services for 2010*, which it published alongside the statistical release for *Consumer Price Indices July 2011*.

ONS plans to consult users on the demand for indices for different household types during the course of 2012, as part of its consultation with users about a strategy for consumer prices.

Recommendation 2:

- a) Carry out more analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the CPI and RPI as macroeconomic measures of inflation and as compensation indices;**
- b) As part of the analysis at (a), examine the benefits and disadvantages of using the preferred macroeconomic measure of UK inflation as a compensation index, and the practicality of using different measures for these distinct uses; and**
- c) Use the analysis at (a) and (b) to guide future development of the indices.**

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ONS has addressed parts (a) and (b) through publication of the following two articles:

- History of and differences between the Consumer Prices Index and Retail Prices Index, which was published alongside *Consumer Price Indices July 2011*.
- Implications of the differences between the Consumer Price Index and Retail Price Index which was published alongside *Consumer Price Indices August 2011*.

The findings from these articles have been taken into account by ONS in developing a draft strategy for consumer prices, which sets out its plans for the future development of the indices.

Recommendation 3: In the context of this analysis, consult users on whether the current proposals for improving the CPI while maintaining the RPI represent a suitable approach to developing improved measures of inflation, while continuing to meet users' needs for existing measures.

¹² <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-briefs/monitoring-brief-7-2010---communicating-inflation.pdf>

Ongoing

ONS plans to consult users about its draft strategy for consumer prices during the course of 2012.

Recommendation 4: Include in the Consumer Price Indices statistical bulletin a fuller discussion of the uses and potential uses of the different statistics on inflation, and provide some signposting to further guidance on the suitability of the different indices for particular uses. Review the continuing user requirement for RPIX and for two separate measures that exclude indirect taxation, CPIY and RPIY, and the way these measures are described and presented in Consumer Price.

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The statistical release *Consumer Price Indices* includes some discussion about the uses that are made of the different price indices. ONS has also published a document, *How the Consumer Price Statistics are used*, which provides more information about the uses that are made of these statistics. ONS plans to include a link to this document in future releases of *Consumer Price Indices*.

ONS has invited users to provide feedback on their ongoing requirement for RPIX, CPIY and RPIY. The feedback suggests that the RPIX is currently little used. The CPIY and RPIY attract most attention when there are significant changes to taxes at Budget time.

Recommendation 5: Review the need for three separate monthly publications to release these statistics, and consider whether other arrangements would allow these statistics to be communicated more clearly.

Met

ONS reviewed the arrangements for releasing these statistics and made some significant changes. ONS now releases these statistics through two statistical releases and a single data file, that are all published on the same day. The headline statistics continue to be published in *Consumer Price Indices*, which is accompanied by more detailed information published in a *Detailed Briefing Note*. ONS also publishes a complete set of data tables, which has replaced the statistical release *Focus on Consumer Prices*. The new tables provide users with access to the underlying data much sooner than had previously been the case, and in a much more user friendly format.

Recommendation 6: Build on the recent improvements in the Consumer Price Indices statistical bulletin by (a) including additional commentary on specific external developments that have an impact on the indices; (b) drawing attention to any particular significance of the latest figures and (c) including a clear explanation whenever the difference between the CPI and RPI headline measures of inflation is significant.

Met

ONS has made a number of improvements to the way in which it presents the latest statistics in *Consumer Price Indices*. It has also published additional information about specific developments that are likely to be of particular interest to users. For example, in January 2011, it published an article that described the drivers behind the increased impact of the formula effect during 2010. In March 2011, within a week of the Budget, ONS published information about the impact on the CPI and RPI of the budgetary measures due to come into force between April 2011 and March 2012.

Recommendation 7: Support the news media in relation to the communication of the statistics by (a) producing additional published material for users and journalists on the differences between a consumer price index and a cost of living index; and (b) considering

ways of bringing to a wider audience the important messages about inflation statistics that are published in *Economic and Labour Market Review*.

Met

ONS has produced additional material for users and journalists on the differences between a consumer price index and a cost of living index in the two articles published in response to Recommendation 2 above.

ONS has discontinued publication of *Economic and Labour Market Review*.

It now publishes information about consumer price indices in stand-alone articles that are disseminated through the CPI Homepage.

Recommendation 8: Evaluate how effective the ‘personal inflation calculator’ has been in addressing perceptions of inflation. Also, consider, with users, whether there are any lessons for the UK from the German index of perceptions of inflation that might supplement the work that ONS has already carried out on the way in which inflation is perceived.

Ongoing

ONS plans to publish an article in February 2012 that will address this Recommendation.

Improving the reporting of road casualties

The Authority published its Monitoring Brief *Improving the reporting of road casualties* in January 2011.¹³

In March 2010 the House of Commons Transport Committee invited the UK Statistics Authority to investigate the extent to which the Department for Transport had sought an explanation for the divergence between the number of people killed in road traffic accidents and those seriously injured. In its report to the Transport Committee, the Statistics Authority made a number of suggestions to improve the published statistics.

Recommendation 1: More explanation should be given, in accessible terms, of the findings of relevant research. More of this research could be reported or referred to in *Reported Road Casualties Great Britain* to help explain and contextualise changes in trends.

Complete

The Department for Transport (DfT) continues to publish the results of analysis and research on road casualties in the *Reported Road Casualties in Great Britain* annual report or on the department's website. The latest report for 2010 was published on 29 September 2011 and included articles on:

- hospital admissions data and comparisons with police data and some analysis of the linked dataset;
- survey data on road accidents, including updated estimates of the total number of road casualties, based primarily based on the National Travel Survey (NTS) and results from an NTS follow-up survey to further understand responses on accident involvement; and
- initial figures for the Road Safety Strategic Framework outcome indicators which use police and hospital admissions data.

In early 2012, DfT also plans to publish a more detailed technical note on the work to link hospital and police data and to create the matched dataset.

Recommendation 2: Further analysis should be undertaken of the dataset created by matching records from the Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) and the police statistics.

Ongoing

DfT is continuing to analyse the linked dataset. DfT has contracted the NHS Information Centre to undertake the matching for the next three years to provide an updated linked dataset. It is hoped that this will minimise the previous problems with access and data protection. DfT is also working to enable a version of the linked dataset to be made more widely available to interested researchers.

Recommendation 3: Consideration should be given to more analytical work to improve understanding of:

- the serious / slight / no injury boundaries, and the impact of any changes in these
- regional differences in reporting and coding by police
- sub-population trends, such as age, sex, region, or deprivation.

¹³ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-briefs/monitoring-brief-1-2011---proposals-to-improve-the-reporting-of-road-casualties.pdf>

Complete

As noted above, DfT continues to undertake and publish analysis of police, hospital and other relevant data to improve understanding of the evidence base on road safety.

Paragraph 2.2 of the Monitoring Brief concluded that "... a considerable body of research has been undertaken, and the Department has probably taken the historical statistical analysis as far as it can." It also noted in paragraph 2.12i that "... the evidence remains inconclusive on the question of what lies behind the divergence in the trends between deaths and serious injuries" and "... this is likely to remain the cases and further analysis of statistical sources is unlikely to throw much more light on it."

These conclusions were supported by some further analysis undertaken by DfT of reporting by severity by police force area. Although this showed there were some regional differences in trends, these may be the result of a variety of factors and there were no clear patterns.

DfT is not therefore planning to undertake extensive further analysis of past data, but will make the most effective use of resources by focusing on future improvements. In particular, the roll-out of a new police data collection system for road casualty statistics - Collision Recording and Sharing (CRASH).

Recommendation 4: Consideration should be given to the type of information that might be gleaned from the pilots of the new police system for recording details of accidents using mobile devices at the accident scene, to help estimate the effects of the discontinuities that are likely to arise in the reported road casualties statistics when the new technology is introduced across the country.

Ongoing

The pilots for the new police accident recording system (CRASH) are now expected to start early in 2012. DfT plans to use the pilots and monitor roll-out of the system to look at the implications for quality and consistency of the new system, including the use of mobile devices.

Recommendation 5: DfT should work with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), the Home Office, and police forces to develop a strategy for communicating to police forces the use and value of road casualty data and the importance of the quality of the data that police officers gather.

Ongoing

DfT is currently working with ACPO (through its Police Liaison Unit), the police and local authorities to identify good examples of the value and use of road casualty data and the most effective way to communicate the importance of the data to forces both at senior and operational level. DfT is also working with these organisations and the National Policing Improvement Agency in the development of guidance, training and a communications strategy and plan for the CRASH project. CRASH includes training, online help and a drop-down menu to support the correct coding of severity.

The demand for, and feasibility of, a UK-wide index of multiple deprivation

The Authority published its Monitoring Brief *The demand for, and feasibility of, a UK-wide index of multiple deprivation* in July 2011.¹⁴

Each of the four UK administrations produces an index of multiple deprivation (IMD) – a ranking of small areas from the most to the least deprived, based on a range of statistical data about domains such as income, employment, health, housing, education, access to services, and crime. These IMDs are intended for use in relation to each administration. However, there is no corresponding IMD covering the UK as a whole, so areas in different countries of the UK cannot be compared.

This Brief reports the UK Statistics Authority's views about the demand for, and feasibility of producing, a UK-wide index of multiple deprivation. The Statistics Authority recognises that the existing IMDs are used in each administration, but notes that there is some user interest in a UK-wide index. It might be that the UK Government itself will wish to draw on published information in order to compare different areas within the UK.

At the recent meeting of the Four Nations Working Group on Deprivation, held on 21 November 2011, the group discussed the suggestions in the UKSA Monitoring Brief and agreed the following actions.

Recommendation 1: Work with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to extend the scope of the published guidance about comparing IMDs between administrations to be applicable to a wide range of potential uses.

Ongoing

The Four Nations Group is currently reviewing the guidance on comparing IMDs across countries and plans to make the following changes:

- i. The focus of the guidance will be broadened to be appropriate to a wider audience and to capture the full range of potential uses. It is currently very focused towards policy makers and using the Indices of Deprivation for allocating resources consistently across the UK. The Four Nations Group believes that in practice, the IMDs are rarely used for this purpose since the majority of funding decisions are made within each nation for that area alone, and not made on a UK-wide basis.
- ii. The key purpose of the IMDs will be made clearer. As part of the introduction, the Four National Group plan to make it clearer that the purposes of the IMDs are to identify small area concentrations of deprivation within each nation, and not for UK-wide comparisons. Additional guidance outlining options for UK-wide comparisons at a higher geography will also be provided.

Recommendation 2: Provide access to high-level guidance and metadata on existing sources of data available across the UK that might be used as indicators of multiple deprivation.

Ongoing

As part of its review of the guidance, the Four Nations Group plans to make the following changes:

¹⁴<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-briefs/monitoring-brief-6-2011---indices-of-multiple-deprivation.pdf>

- i. Clearer signposting to the underlying data included in each of the IMDs will be added to the guidance paper. Each of the IMDs is intended to provide the best measure of 'multiple deprivation' within each nation; however the individual indicators used to construct the IMDs can be used to provide an indicator of individual 'aspects' of deprivation. The data behind the indicators have been published where possible, subject to confidentiality constraints.
- ii. Links to other data sources that can be used for UK-wide comparisons will be provided. The Four Nations Group reports that most of the interest it receives for UK-wide comparisons is focused not at the small area geographies included in the IMDs but at higher geographies such as local authorities. As a result, links to other data sources that can be used for UK-wide comparisons will be included. For example, analysis which has resulted in a listing of local authorities with their closest local authority neighbours in terms of similar characteristics produced by ONS, and Urban Audit produced by ONS on behalf of Eurostat. These products contain a range of indicators some of which may be suitable proxies for measuring deprivation.
- iii. The Four Nations Group will continue to review the available guidance, particularly following the publication of the Census 2011 results.

Recommendation 3: The Welsh Government, the Scottish Government and NISRA should consult users about the demand for more comparable statistical information on multiple deprivation – including a 'poverty index' – in the UK, and publish the results

Ongoing

The Welsh Government will be carrying out a full review of the Welsh IMD in 2012. This will include a formal consultation with questions on the demand and use of a UK-wide Index, and will ask users to rank the priority of this against other work on the existing Index, to try to establish how important a UK-wide Index is to our users.

The Scottish Government carried out a consultation between July and September 2011 exploring the best timing for the next update of the Scottish IMD. As part of that it asked users about the demand for related outputs including a UK-wide Index and Poverty Index. Findings show that:

- i. Just under a quarter of respondents were in favour of investigations into a UK-wide index. The majority of respondents deemed it to be a low priority. Given resource constraints and limited interest from respondents the Scottish Government does not intend to pursue this further.
- ii. 35 per cent of respondents supported the idea of a UK Poverty Index, 39 per cent did not believe it should be investigated. The majority of respondents considered this a low priority. In light of this the Scottish Government will not pursue this at present but may consider it again when Universal Credits replace the current benefit system.

A summary report outlining the findings from the Scottish Government consultation is published at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/SIMD/ConsultationResp211>

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) is considering the timetable for their next index and consultation.

The Department for Communities and Local Government consulted with users in 2010 and as part of that consultation asked whether there was demand for a comparable set of indices of multiple deprivation across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. This found that 28 of the 98 respondents were in favour of a comparable set of indices (this was 41 per cent of those expressing an opinion on this issue). Twelve respondents commented that this was a lower priority than delivering the best possible set of English indices, and nine felt it was not a priority. On this

basis, the department concentrated on producing the best possible set of indices for England, and undertook to continue to work with the devolved administrations to identify common ground between the separate indices and consider user needs.

Given the significant challenges in producing a UK-wide Poverty Index – specifically resource constraints, different small area geographies, different policies and data availability across administrations – the Four Nations Working Group on Deprivation does not intend to pursue work to develop a UK-wide Poverty Index in the short term. This may be reviewed this in future when Universal Credits replace the current benefit system as it may then be easier to compare across the four nations at higher geographies.

Review of an error in the published estimates of Output in Construction

The Authority published its *Review of an error in the published estimates of Output in Construction* in September 2011.¹⁵

This report followed an error in the Statistical Bulletin on Output in Construction published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on 12 August 2011, and covered how this error occurred and how the episode was handled. The review comprised a brief account of the facts and a set of observations intended to help avoid similar occurrences in the future.

Recommendation 1: ONS needs to be confident that fully robust quality assurance procedures are universally in place across the department, with this process documented and formally signed off in each case.

Ongoing

In line with the recommendations from an internal review, ONS has reported to us that it is making good progress towards a system of process walk-throughs and certification of quality assurance. ONS has devised detailed procedures for walk-throughs and certification (who, when, what etc), and walk-throughs for a number of key outputs have already been completed. ONS has reported that its current intention is to complete this substantively for the full range of ONS outputs by the end of March 2012.

Recommendation 2: Whatever is now decided, in the light of this sequence of events, to be the appropriate role of senior managers, that role needs to be fully enforced with effective management disciplines. In relation to quality assurance, managers may have to accept less freedom to define their own roles on the basis of their personal understanding of what is needed and the prevailing culture of the office.

Ongoing

Two workshops have been held with senior managers (in June and September). The role of senior managers' sign-off has been documented and disseminated. ONS has reported to us that in future, senior managers will have to certify that appropriate quality assurance of statistical output processes is in place.

Recommendation 3: ONS should ensure that where such alert and responsive expertise is not fully evident, appropriate guidance, training and managerial support is provided.

Ongoing

ONS has reported to us that the need for further contextual information and checking has been emphasised and is now being built into quality assurance procedures. Additional support on this is being provided by a team of analysts. Training of all output managers is also being devised (pilot February, roll out March and April).

Recommendation 4: Further progress in moving away from out-dated spreadsheet technology to more robust processes must be given high priority.

Ongoing

ONS is currently listing all its output related spreadsheets and preparing a prioritised plan for their eventual removal from the regular statistical production process. In the meantime, a best practice

¹⁵<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/statement---authority-s-review---construction-statistics.pdf>

guide for the use of spreadsheets has been developed, has been incorporated into guidance, and will be included in the output manager training noted under Recommendation 3. A short term plan to audit the use of the guide is also in place.

Recommendation 5: There appears to have been insufficient staff available, and weakness in terms of staff experience in the specific field of construction statistics, responsibility for which was transferred relatively recently to ONS. This is an issue for ONS management to tackle as a matter of urgency.

Ongoing

ONS has reported that the staffing of the construction branch has been strengthened as follows: two staff, which were new to the area at the time of the error, are now both fully up to speed; a member of staff experienced in construction statistics has re-joined the area; and an additional analytical resource has been brought into the team through a further experienced member of staff.

More widely, ONS believe that the recently agreed changes to ONS recruitment controls will be extremely helpful in strengthening its research, analysis and statistics skills across the office.

Recommendation 6: Any substantive error should be announced as soon as is reasonably possible.

Ongoing

ONS reported to us that this is accepted and has been adopted as ONS practice.

However, we have observed that recent practice could be further improved. In relation to the recent error in the Index of Services for August 2011, published on 1 November, ONS was unable to announce the error for some hours due to technical issues with the website. We understand that the journalists who discovered the error were informed directly, as was the Bank of England; other users on the contact list that the release was originally sent to were informed later.

Recommendation 7: Once a statistical Bulletin has been placed on the website, it should be possible for users to refer back to the document (both the statistics and commentary) in its original form, regardless of whether changes were subsequently needed; and that where there is an error that has to be corrected, the correction should be clearly marked, so that there is a clear audit trail.

Ongoing

ONS has reported that in the case of errors in future, there will only ever be a single current Bulletin, to avoid any potential confusion. The corrected Bulletin will make very clear any changes that have been made and why, and will provide a full explanation of how the corrected version relates to the earlier withdrawn data. The previous version of the Bulletin, including the error, will be made available upon request.