

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Minutes

Thursday 27 September 2018
Boardroom, London

Present

UK Statistics Authority

Sir David Norgrove (Chair)

Professor Sir Adrian Smith (Deputy Chair)

Mr Jonathan Athow

Professor David Hand

Professor Jonathan Haskel

Mr Ed Humpherson

Ms Sian Jones

Dr David Levy

Ms Nora Nanayakkara

Mr John Pullinger

Ms Heather Savory

Professor Anne Trefethen

Also in attendance

Mr Nick Bateson (for item 9)

Mr Iain Bell

Mr Owen Brace

Mr Robert Bumpstead

Ms Sarah Henry (for item 8)

Ms Vanessa Holden

Ms Liz McKeown (for item 9)

Mr Darren Morgan (for item 9)

Apologies

Professor Sir Ian Diamond

1. Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Professor Sir Ian Diamond.

2. Declarations of interest

- 2.1 There were no new declarations of interest.

3. Minutes and matters arising from previous meetings

- 3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 July 2018 were agreed.

4. Report from the Authority Chair

- 4.1 The Chair reported on his activity since the last meeting, noting his correspondence with the Mayor of London about crime statistics, and his letter to the Leader of the Opposition about free bus travel. Sir David had also visited the London, Newport and Titchfield offices to deliver staff talks with Mr Pullinger.
- 4.2 Sir David also reported that he had been invited to submit further written evidence to the Lord Economic Affairs Committee, as part of its inquiry on the Retail Prices Index (RPI).

5. Reports from Committee Chairs

- 5.1 Sir Adrian reported on the work of the Regulation Committee. He noted that the Committee had considered a report on data linkage, and summarised recent discussions on regulatory strategy. The Regulatory Committee had also discussed the role of the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) in the context of forecasts, and the adequacy of data on skills.
- 5.2 Ms Nanayakkara reported on the work of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee. The Committee had welcomed three new members: Professor Sir Ian Diamond, and independent members Dr Julia Mundy and Mr Tim Watkinson. While members had noted several improvements in the past year (on financial delegations, and planning for the Spending Review in particular), Ms Nanayakkara reported that the Committee would need to continue monitoring progress against audit recommendations carefully, balancing the need for assurance against the burden posed.

6. Report from the Chief Executive

- 6.1 Mr Pullinger provided an overview of activity over August and September, in doing so highlighting:
- i. key developments on the Census;
 - ii. ONS's ongoing review of student loans classifications;
 - iii. the publication of new analyses on asymmetries in trade data; and
 - iv. his attendance at a conference co-hosted by the OECD and the International Association for Official Statistics, at which discussion had focussed on the importance of independence for statistics, and the role of National Statistical Institutes.
- 6.2 Mr Bell provided further detail on preparations for the 2021 Census for England and Wales. ONS continued to work with the Cabinet Office to develop the necessary legislation for the Census in England and Wales. October was expected to be a significant month for the programme, as the office undertakes an operational test on elements including the Field Force Management System.
- 6.3 In response to a question from Board members, Mr Athow explained that ONS was seeking to understand international experiences, and intended to make a decision in principle on the appropriate treatment of student loans in the National Accounts by December 2018.

7. Report from the Director General for Regulation

- 7.1 Mr Humpherson provided an update on regulation activity since the last Board meeting.
- 7.2 The OSR had published its report on data linkage, which encouraged statisticians to embrace the potential of administrative data, to enhance the public value of official statistics. In communicating its report, the OSR had targeted its messaging at producer bodies, hoping to effect change across the Government Statistical Service.

8. Data Acquisition under the Digital Economy Act – Status Report

- 8.1 Ms Henry summarised the status of data acquisition for statistical production and research under the Digital Economy Act 2017.
- 8.2 While there had been several successes in acquiring new data sources since the commencement of the Act, Ms Henry reported that the office had also faced some challenges. She discussed lessons learned, including: shared interest in developing an understanding of the strategic significance of linked data among senior stakeholders; and, clarity of process.
- 8.3 Board members thanked Ms Henry for her comprehensive update. They welcomed the steps being taken by ONS to resolve challenges in acquiring their data, and offered their support.

9. Towards a new strategy: Economic Statistics and Population and Public Policy

- 9.1 Drawing from the Board's discussion in July, Mr Athow and Mr Bell presented to the Board on possibilities for economic statistics and population and public policy over the period 2020–2025.
- 9.2 Board members welcomed the presentations, and discussed issues including resourcing, audience, and partnerships. Members would continue discussion at the next Authority Board meeting, where they intended to focus on possibilities in the context of data capability.

10. Any Other Business

- 10.1 There was no other business. The Authority Board would next meet on Thursday, 1 November at 10:30 in Titchfield.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Agenda

27 September 2018, 09:15 to 14:00

Boardroom, London

Chair: Sir David Norgrove

Apologies: Sir Ian Diamond, Professor Jonathan Haskel

Attendees: Ms Sarah Henry (for item 6)

09:15 – 09:45: Non-Executive Session

1 09:45-09:50 5 mins	Minutes and matters arising from previous meetings <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Declarations of interest	Meeting of 26 July 2018
2 09:50-10:35 45 mins	Report from the Authority Chair	Oral report Sir David Norgrove
3 10:35-10:50 15 mins	Reports from Committee Chairs <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Regulation Committee• Audit and Risk Assurance Committee	Oral reports Sir Adrian Smith Ms Nora Nanayakkara
4 10:50-11:35 45 mins	Report from the Chief Executive	SA(18)44 Mr John Pullinger
5 11:35-11:55 20 mins	Report from the Director-General for Regulation	SA(18)45 Mr Ed Humpherson
6 11:55-12:15 20 mins	Data Acquisition - Status Report	SA(18)46 Ms Sarah Henry

12:15 – 12:40: Lunch

7 12:40-13:55 75 mins	Beyond BSBD <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Economic Statistics• Population and Public Policy	Oral update Mr Jonathan Athow Mr Iain Bell
8 13:55-14:00 5 mins	Any other business	

Next meeting: 1 November 2018, Titchfield, 10:30 to 16:00

Chief Executive's Report, September 2018

Purpose

1. This report provides the Board with an overview of activity and issues for August and September.

Summary

2. So much for the idea that things are quiet in the summer. Following the discussion undertaken by the Board in July we have been actively pursuing development of our future strategy. We will be developing proposals for the Board to consider, including a forward look which will take us through the next spending review period and beyond.
3. There remain several risks to deliverables relating to challenges in the acquisition of data. RTI PAYE data is expected in December 2018, an assessment of whether PAYE employment data, already held by ONS, could be used as an interim solution is being investigated.

Review of recent activities

4. Important statistical developments in recent weeks include the following:
 - i. the Data Science Campus Advisory Board met for the first time. The Advisory Board will help the Campus to increase its impact, build our network of contacts and collaborations and strengthen the Campus's reputation and credibility;
 - ii. the Chancellor of the Exchequer appeared in front of the Lords Economic Affairs Committee and spoke about the Retail Prices Index. This follows recent interest in the future of inflation statistics from that committee and others;
 - iii. we published articles on an ageing population and on what it's like to be 18 in 2018. Improved information on impacts of a changing population will help policy makers in government make better decisions in a range of policy areas;
 - iv. ONS also published an analysis of asymmetries in trade data, which included an expanded analysis to include a range of additional bilateral partner countries with which we have some of our larger trade in services data asymmetries, and in which there is a high level of user interest, namely Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg. These, in addition to the US and Ireland with whom we are already engaged in deep analytical collaboration, will be the primary focus of our work in the future;
 - v. the ONS review of the classification of student loans, and implications for future decisions on student financial support, has also been picked up in the news. We are working to a decision in December to give us time to involve international partners. In addition, we are engaging with the HE sector to ensure they understand the nature and timing of our review;
 - vi. the Industrial Strategy Evidence Board were supplied with three evidence packs on areas where the UK has a comparative advantage in specific aspects of the Industrial Strategy grand challenges. These were clean growth, mobility as a service, and financial services for the elderly;
 - vii. there were several GSS contributions to the Annual RSS conference, this year held in Cardiff; and
 - viii. I signed a Memorandum of Understanding with my counterpart in the Republic of Korea. We have agreed to work with them over a minimum of 5 years on data science capability, using scanner data in the measurement of prices, and crime statistics amongst other topics.

5. Key developments on the Census have been:
 - i. whilst the White Paper continues the write round process, the operational elements of the Census have moved forward with work on service design and integration, procurement and labour market pilot continuing to timetable. The statistical test on labour market will progress separately;
 - ii. our procurements continue to progress, with the Contact Centre supplier starting with us on 24 September 2018. Treasury approvals are in progress for our other contracts with awards expected imminently.
 - iii. there has been a successful Project Assessment Review (PAR) which reported that the programme was Amber in line with the programme's reported status.

6. Other activities and risks being managed during this period include:
 - i. finances for the current year remain on track and we are actively working internally and with the Treasury to firm up the path of spending through into next year and beyond, including for the census;
 - ii. we have delivered successful apprenticeship programmes in Newport and London but have not met our target for Titchfield. We are currently exploring how best to catch up and ensure that Titchfield too can benefit from the positive experiences we have had elsewhere;
 - iii. the challenges of survey data collection from households continue to increase and our field teams are showing great skill and determination to obtain the data we need. The current initiatives to help improve response rates have improved the position but we will need to continue to give our field staff and the managers support in order to sustain the momentum for improvement;
 - iv. our top risk being managed continues to be data access and the impact of delay on the delivery of transformation of both economic and other statistics. The Board will be discussing this in detail at its meeting this month; and
 - v. we have seen increases in staff absence rates in some areas. This is often a sign of the stresses faced by staff. The leadership team has been exploring with managers how best to support teams under pressure and ensure staff wellbeing.

Future look

7. As we move into the next phase of planning and delivery we will get useful information on staff engagement from the People Survey and from the GSS conference. This will complement follow up to recent work with the Senior Civil Service group in ONS on organisational culture and forthcoming work amongst GSS Heads of Profession and with the Analysis Function Board.

John Pullinger, 20 September 2018

Report from the Director General for Regulation

Purpose

1. This paper provides an update on regulation activity since the last Board meeting.

Recommendation

2. Members of the Board are invited to note the activities and proposed actions.

Discussion

3. Key activities since the last Board meeting include:
 - i. Data linkage: We published our data linkage report on 11 September. It highlights the value that is squandered because Government datasets are not linked and outlines how the barriers can be removed. The report aligns well with ONS work to bring data in from a variety of sources, including achieving better access to HMRC and ONS data;
 - ii. We accompanied the report with two blogs – one by me emphasising the key messages, and a guest blog by Jeni Tennison, CEO of the Open Data Institute. She was very positive about the report, and indeed the report has been widely welcomed by a range of people who work with data. We are now following up by approaching key data holding departments (HMRC, DWP, MoJ, DfE) directly;
 - iii. The report publication coincided with a public disagreement between the Scottish Fiscal Commission (the OBR equivalent for Scotland) and DWP, after the Commission complained that one of its requests for data had been treated by DWP as an FOI request. While we concluded that it is more a case of confused communication than deliberate obstruction, it nevertheless illustrates the often ridiculous outcomes produced by current data access arrangements;
 - iv. Casework – Jeremy Corbyn and Sadiq Khan: In August, Sir David wrote to Jeremy Corbyn on Labour Party statements about the impact of free bus passes; and to Sadiq Khan correcting claims he had made on crime statistics. The Jeremy Corbyn letter received a reasonable amount of social media coverage but none in the mainstream media. The Khan letter was picked up positively by several media outlets;
 - v. Accident and Emergency report: Over the last year we have made a number of public statements on weaknesses in and misuse of accident and emergency statistics. Each intervention secured some attention and impact. We consider that taken as a whole the interventions demonstrate a series of issues with accident and emergency statistics, and we have decided to consolidate them into a single report targeted at policy makers. The report emphasises the need for greater clarity on the purpose of A and E statistics and greater use of analytical expertise in designing performance measurement systems based on the statistics;

- vi. National Statistics designation: In August, we designated ONS's Regional GVA statistics as National Statistics, and in September we designated the House Price Indices for Great Britain and Northern Ireland;
- vii. Social Metrics Commission: On 18 September, the Social Metrics Commission launched its new measure of poverty. The measure produces broadly the same picture in terms of aggregate numbers in poverty, but leads to important changes in composition, with fewer pensioners and more working age adults classified as being in poverty. It is an impressive piece of work that may trigger a broader public debate on poverty;
- viii. The Commission said at the launch that it had used the Code of Practice as a guide to preparing its new measure, which represents another endorsement for the Code; and
- ix. Adult Social Care: At the September Regulation Committee, we discussed our review of statistics on adult social care. We shared our initial view that this was one of the weakest areas of statistical coverage we have seen, with many gaps in the available data and questions unanswered.

4. The main challenges are:

- Strategy: we are undertaking a strategic review, in parallel with the development of a new strategy for statistics production (which was discussed at the July Board). The main challenge is updating our approach to reflect an ever-more data rich environment;
- Debate around Brexit: I have mentioned in past Board meetings how the use of statistics around Brexit has been quieter than we anticipated. As discussions with the European Union may reach a conclusion, and with a Parliamentary vote in prospect, it is possible that some of the statistical debates will reignite; and
- Recruitment: I have mentioned in previous reports that we have had some difficulties recruiting staff. We have started to reduce this problem, with new members of staff starting in September and a new recruitment approach that has produced a greater level of response than we have seen recently.

5. The dashboard summary of regulatory activities is at **Annex A**.

Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation, 20 September 2018

List of Annexes

Annex A Regulatory Activities

Regulatory Activities August-September 2018

Economy	Business, industry, energy and trade	Health and social care	Labour Market and welfare
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classifications process: Met the following: Welsh Assembly Member, Adviser to Scottish Parliament Finance Cttee, Welsh Council for Voluntary Action, Welsh Local Government Association, Common Weal (Pro-Scottish independence think tank), IFS, Reform Scotland, Glasgow University Fiscal Academic, Scottish Government. • Assessment: Letter sent to ONS confirming designations of Regional Gross Value-Added statistics (I) and (P). • Advice given to Welsh Revenue Authority (tax statistics) and to ONS Total Public Sector Productivity statistics). • Casework: Scottish Government Oil and Gas Analytical Bulletin 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction Output and Prices: ONS working to identify the factors contributing to the “gap” between Construction Output and the corresponding New Orders series. We will attend the next Construction steering group on 11 October, where analysis relating to the “gap” will be presented. ONS plan to publish an article before the November Reg Comm meeting. • UK Trade: ONS to present a paper to the November Reg Comm to support the case for re-designation, focusing on their work to resolve asymmetries. OSR concerned however, that production errors are re-emerging, coverage of ONS’s recent article on asymmetries by the FT was mixed, and stakeholders have concerns over the quality of data for formulating trade decisions and policy. • Energy: Compliance check on BEIS Energy & Climate change stats complete, letter confirming National Statistics status published on 6 September. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessments: Undertaking assessments of cancer survival statistics (ONS) & avoidable mortality statistics (ONS and NRS). • Systemic review: Systemic review of Adult Social Care well underway, with extensive engagement with users and producers across all four UK nations. Update provided in meeting papers. • Casework: Published letter confirming NS status of ISD Scotland A&E waiting times; new casework following an anonymous letter from a member of the public about intensive care mortality statistics in Scotland - findings will be reported to the Scottish Parliament health and sport committee chair. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systemic reviews: Attended stakeholder meeting on 24/8 to discuss ONS/DWP/HMRC work plan to improve accessibility and coherence of income and earnings statistics. Expecting a letter from ONS outlining plans. • Compliance checks: Continuing CC on ONS’s Effects of Taxes and Benefits on Household Income release, met with Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Meeting ONS producer team to discuss findings. • Domain activities: Met Simon Clarke, new HoP at the Health and Safety Executive (HSE). Liaised with ONS on communication and handling around the transfer of Civil Service Employment Statistics to the Cabinet Office.
Crime and Justice	Housing, planning and local services	Children, education and skills	Culture and identity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systemic Reviews: Follow-up to justice review: held initial meeting with Scottish Government to improve of court statistics; meeting to discuss how to maximise statistical opportunities from digitisation of court systems. Initial scoping of policing review underway. • Casework: Wrote to Mayor Sadiq Khan about incorrect use of police recorded crime statistics. • Compliance checks: Letter setting out findings of our compliance check of the Northern Ireland Safe Communities Survey published 28 August; compliance check of prison population projections underway. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessments: Welsh Housing Conditions Survey Assessment ongoing, user views collected and awaiting evidence from WG. • Compliance checks: Further work on ONS Household Projections for England. • Systemic reviews: Continued dialogue with ONS about GSS work to improve housing statistics, including on plans to develop a User Engagement Strategy to inform their work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Casework: We have arranged a meeting between DfE, Office for Students and RSS to discuss the RSS concerns about the Teaching Excellence and Outcomes Framework (TEF). • Skills Systemic Review: Emerging findings report presented to September Regulation Committee. Next step is senior stakeholder engagement • Children and Young People: Meetings stakeholders to test the proposed scope. • Compliance checks: Confirmed re-designation of Children in Need stats. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessments: Letter to DCMS published on 21 August on pausing the Community Life Survey assessment. Assessment of DCMS Economic Estimates is progressing and now at report writing stage.
Security, defence and intl relations	Travel, transport and tourism	Population	Agriculture and environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No significant activity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Casework: Engaging with Transport Focus on National Rail Passenger Survey. • Compliance Checks: Continuing International Passenger Survey CC on handling of recent methods changes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systemic review: Reviewed producer progress against commitments. OSR update published 21 September • Compliance checks: HO immigration statistics compliance check: findings with HO to review before publication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compliance checks: started compliance checks of UK Sea Fisheries statistics (Marine Management Organisation) and Scottish Sea Fisheries statistics

Data Acquisition under the Digital Economy Act – Status Report**Purpose**

1. This paper sets out the status of data acquisition for statistical production and research under the Digital Economy Act (DEA), highlights the risks and describes mitigation plans.

Recommendations

2. The Board is invited to:
 - i. note the progress made to date and the plans set out in the Methods, Data and Research (MDR) Business Plan;
 - ii. note the risks associated with data acquisition; and
 - iii. support the recommended actions.

Background

3. ONS has ambitious plans for using non-survey data, to deliver our strategy for Better Statistics, Better Decisions. This includes:
 - i. improving our understanding of the modern economy, especially productivity, as called for in the Bean Review;
 - ii. delivering the benefits from the planned “administrative data census” alongside the ten-yearly count;
 - iii. providing a robust evidence base for migration policy;
 - iv. providing ministers and their departments with new statistics to support negotiating exiting the EU, delivering future public services and understanding the required future workforce;
 - v. providing a better understanding of socio-economic trends of interest to policy makers and the public including race disparity, inequality and social mobility;
 - vi. supporting the UK Research and Innovation strategy, through linking data for research purposes; and
 - vii. supporting Devolved Administrations in the delivery of their functions.

Discussion**The Digital Economy Act**

4. The Digital Economy Act 2017 gives ONS a right of access to data for statistical and research purposes. The Act received Royal Assent on 27 April 2017. Since then, the powers in the Act have been commenced in various stages by Commencement Orders made in July 2017 (effective 31 July and 1 October 2017) and March 2018 (effective 1 May 2018). The powers are now fully commenced across the United Kingdom.
5. The Act requires the UK Statistics Authority to prepare, consult and publish statutory documents underpinning the Statistics and Research powers, known as the Statistics Statement of Principles and code of practice on changes to data systems, and the Research Code of Practice and accreditation criteria. These documents were recently approved by Parliament as the Act requires. This represents the conclusion of the parliamentary process.
6. The UK Statistics Authority is the independent statutory accreditor of processors, researchers and their projects under the Research strand of the Digital Economy Act. This function will be overseen by a new Research Accreditation Panel with a majority independent membership, including an independent chair appointed by the National Statistician. The process for the recruitment of members of the Panel is underway. It is expected that the Panel will meet for the first time in late October/early November. The secretariat to the Panel will be provided by the

Authority's Data Governance team, supported by technical expertise from the ONS Research Services and Data Access team.

Working with supplier organisations to acquire data

7. Since the DEA received Royal Assent, there have been some notable successes in acquiring new administrative datasets (including Home Office Exit Checks, HMRC Migrant Workers Scan) and new commercial datasets (including Equifax and Laing Buisson).
8. Existing agreements with Department for Education (DfE), Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and Welsh Government now use the DEA as their legal basis. For these datasets, an Information Sharing Order (ISO) was previously in place. The DEA provides a legal basis for ONS to use shared data for statistics and statistical research rather than the narrowly defined uses under ISOs. Specifications for data acquisitions have also been developed for a range of departments, including HMRC, DWP, DfE, HESA, NHS Digital and DVLA.
9. ONS already regularly receives and uses hundreds of different datasets, from both public and private sector organisations. When appropriate arrangements for a dataset have been put in place with a supplier, regular delivery is routine and trouble-free.
10. However, the introduction of the legislation has raised expectations that ONS can acquire and use new datasets quickly. While the legal right of access is an important enabler, there are other challenges and difficulties associated with acquiring data for the first time. The Digital Economy Act includes mechanisms for the Statistics Authority to escalate and enforce the legal right of access to data either through notices (other public authorities, commercial organisations) or by reporting cases of non-compliance to Parliament (Government Departments). In practice, these mechanisms should be a last resort where collaboration and engagement have not succeeded, or where potential data providers are not providing good reason for non-compliance.
11. In all instances ONS work with the data sharing department collaboratively aiming to use permissive powers rather than required powers. Data as a Service (DaaS) division manage the communications with organisations. When things are not progressing to plan there is a clear escalation route. Through the divisional director of DaaS, the key account holder (usually director) is informed and resolution is sought with the relevant counterpart at the organisation. If this is not successful, wider ONS SCS colleagues are informed and further attempts are made to resolve any blockers. Ultimately it is raised to the National Statistician if there remain issues. Resolution is sought at permanent secretary level before using required powers.
12. The Data as a Service (DaaS) team in ONS work with both public and private sector organisations to acquire data. Although each organisation is different, the team have identified some common issues and lessons on how best to work with organisations to secure the provision of data for the first time. This exercise was based on recent experiences of working with different supplier organisations. The lessons, and our actions in response to each lesson, are in the following areas:
 - i. senior level support recognising the strategic significance for the UK;
 - ii. establishing and maintaining confidence between organisations;
 - iii. clarity in the process;
 - iv. recognition of shared interest;
 - v. managing the expectations of users within ONS, GSS and the wider research community; and
 - vi. importance of management information for data sharing.
13. The top priority datasets that are needed to support transformation of both economic statistics and population statistics and migration are owned by HMRC and DWP. ONS is in regular, daily, contact with both HMRC and DWP over the provision of these datasets.

14. DaaS actively support supplier organisations through the process to acquire data. For many organisations, this is the first time that they have needed to consider how to provide large datasets outside of their own organisations. In larger organisations, we are often engaging with data gateway type teams. These teams are used to providing either aggregated or deidentified data which does not meet the specification of data that can be linked. ONS supports both their internal decision-making process, providing the justification for the supply of data and the technical teams handling the request. The 'set up' of these supplies is complex and unique to each data supplier but the process for resubmitting data, or supplying it regularly is expected to straightforward, not least because the agreements with each supplier addresses the long-term nature of our requirements.

Research Support

15. In addition to ONS's priority datasets, the research community have an expectation of increased access to administrative data, via ONS, under the DEA and partnership with UKRI. The ESRC Strategic Hub has been established, in part, to work with ONS to identify the datasets of most value to researchers, and where analysis will have the greatest impact.
16. In advance of the Strategic Hub becoming active, ONS have engaged existing researchers to understand datasets of interest, and many Departments to identify datasets that could be most easily made available for research use, from a practical, political and sensitivity perspective.
17. Although Departments have different attitudes to research-use of data, and different risk-appetite regarding use of particular datasets, all are supportive in principle of the new legislation.

Technology and Security

18. ONS has introduced a new data environment (the Data Access Platform) with 'security by design' at its core. New technologies provide a step change in the processing power and make collaboration across sites possible as never before. As with the change in legislation, Data partners, including other Government Departments, have assessed the security environment operated by ONS and have been assured that it provides the required security to enable the safe and secured management of their data.

Implications for our public commitments

19. It is becoming clearer that it takes longer than originally expected for ONS to acquire new, large, datasets. The extended timescales are leading to increased concerns in ONS around data acquisition under the DEA, and this is impacting on delivery confidence around transformation plans.
20. The service to external researchers, following the UKRI investment in ONS, differs from the service they were provided under the ADRN and addresses the reasons why that service struggled. Researchers will be directed towards data that is already available and we will be clearer about the process, likely timescale and their role in securing access to data that is not yet available. The 'Strategic Hub', part of ESRC, will help ensure that the requests for data are realistic and aligned to policy. The arrangement will be kept under senior review.
21. The cost to organisations of extracting and providing data to ONS might be high in some cases. ONS has paid the cost of data extraction in some cases, especially when working with commercial suppliers and smaller organisations. The UKRI funding for the SRS includes provision for refunding extraction cost in some cases.
22. Underpinning the Digital Economy Act's statistics and research framework is the presumption of transparency. This is reflected in the commitments in the accompanying Statistics statement of principles and Research codes of practice, which include regular transparency reports about the data being accessed, by whom, for what purpose and duration, the level of granularity or aggregation and, crucially, an important narrative around the public good

arising. Proposals for the content and format of these reports will be overseen by the Data Governance Committee. We expect the first of the regular transparency reports to be published later this year, with the first 'annual report' published in mid-2019 reporting on the first full year since the Digital Economy Act powers became fully operational.

Conclusion

23. The DEA offers opportunities to improve statistics using administrative and transactional data. However, while the legal right of access is an important enabler, there are other challenges and difficulties associated with the acquisition of data, especially first-time around. New high priority datasets have been identified, working across ONS, and we are actively managing discussions with the owners of these datasets to set up and maintain their supply, learning as we go. We continue to make improvements to our approach and processes in line with the lessons we have learned from our experience to date.

Sarah Henry, Methods. Data. Research, ONS, 20 September 2018