

Minutes of the UK Statistics Authority Meeting 18th March 2008

Present

UK Statistics Authority - Non-Executive Members

Sir Michael Scholar (Chair-designate)

Professor Adrian Smith (Deputy Chair-designate - UK Statistical System)

Mr Partha Dasgupta

Ms Moira Gibb

Sir Alan Langlands

Professor David Rhind

UK Statistics Authority - Executive Members

Ms Karen Dunnell (National Statistician)

Mr Steve Newman

Interim Secretariat

Mr Dennis Roberts

Mr Robert Bumpstead

Mr Mike Hughes

Mr Allan Smith

ONS Officials

Ms Jil Matheson (Items 2 and 4)

Mr Glen Watson (Item 2)

Mr Colin Mowl (Item 4)

Observers

Ms Celia Reed (UK Statistics Authority)

Mr David Mencer (Central Office of Information)

Ms Suzanne Halls (Central Office of Information)

Apologies

Lord Rowe-Beddoe (Deputy Chair-designate - ONS)

Professor Steve Nickell

Minutes and matters arising from the previous meeting

1. The minutes were accepted as a true and fair account of the meeting.
2. At the previous meeting further work was commissioned on the Accounting Officer arrangements for the UK Statistics Authority. The Authority agreed that a single Accounting Officer model should be adopted with funds delegated to the Head of Assessment on the direction of the Board of the UK Statistics Authority.

Declarations of interest

3. There were no declarations of interest in any of the specific agenda items.

Census 2011

4. Mr Watson presented a paper which outlined the key issues facing the Authority in relation to Census 2011, specifically: the high level design and plan; the proposed timetable, including the production of the Census White paper, the principal issues and risks facing the programme; and the manner in which the programme is addressing the recommendations from the Statistics Commission's report on the Census from November 2007. The Authority discussed these issues and questioned Mr Watson further about the critical success factors for the Census. Mr Watson agree to set these out for the Authority.

Action: Mr Watson

5. The Authority sought factual clarifications and professional judgement from ONS Executives on a range of issues:

- the basis for, and potential effect of, the decision to post out Census forms, in particular in relation to resource and quality trade-offs, and to the operational risks involved;
- the detailed reasons for the previous Office for Government Commerce (OGC) Gateway review assessment, the action undertaken to address the issues identified, and the risks associated with the next review;
- the Authority's responsibility for the Census in relation to the Devolved Administrations;
- the plans and proposed methodology to be adopted for the Census coverage survey;
- the progress towards developing an Address Register merged from existing address products;
- the plans to tackle public concern over data security;
- the plans to ensure improved consistency between the Census results and the mid-year population estimates; and
- the extent, and impact of, the differences between England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland in relation to procurement, questions included in the Census, harmonisation of outputs and disclosure control. The Authority commissioned a further paper on these issues for their meeting in May and agreed to invite the Registrars General for Scotland and Northern Ireland to attend the meeting.

Action: ONS Private Office

6. The Authority noted that the production and publication of the Census White Paper would be a significant landmark in the run-up to 2011. The timetable would therefore need to provide sufficient time to ensure that Authority members were fully conversant with the principal Census issues before the White Paper was published. Mr Watson described a timetable which would require the Chair to submit the White Paper to Ministers at the end of June 2007. The Authority agreed that in the intervening period it would wish to seek further information and assurance on the following issues:

- harmonisation between England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland;
- the implications of different legal approaches to the post-Census enumeration survey;
- data confidentiality strategy;
- the principal design differences between the 2011 and 2001 Censuses.

7. It was agreed that the meeting of the Authority in May 2008 would take place in Titchfield and would focus predominantly on Census issues.

Public confidence in Official Statistics

8. The Authority reviewed the ONS News Release "Public confidence in Official Statistics" which had been released previous day (17 March 2008). The Authority agreed that its response to this would be made during the launch of the Authority, on 31st March/1st April.

Action: Chair

Engaging with Stakeholders

9. The Chair outlined options for the Authority's engagement with stakeholders. The Authority agreed that it needed a responsive, listening relationship with all its stakeholders, conducted through open meetings with them as well as through contacts by individual members of the Authority. It also noted the need to ensure that clear roles and responsibilities between the Authority and the ONS are established, to avoid confusion for stakeholders. The Authority agreed to return to these issues at a subsequent meeting on the basis of a note by the secretariat.

Action: UK Statistics Authority Secretariat

Blue Book 2008

10. Ms Dunnell described the progress made with the ONS Modernisation Programme to establish the context for the modernisation of UK National Accounts.

11. Mr Mowl presented a paper describing the scope of the Blue Book for 2008, risks and requirements associated with achieving this scope, and the risk mitigation plans associated with relocation of National Accounts production to Newport. Mr Mowl reported that the scope for Blue Book 2008 cannot be finalised until further technical testing and validation have been undertaken. The National Accounts Modernisation Programme Board will be taking a view on the final scope at their meeting on 2nd April.

12. The Authority raised questions on a range of issues:

- the contingency plans which the ONS have in place, specifically the possibility of reverting to pre-modernisation systems if necessary;
- the most likely scope to be delivered for Blue Book 2008 and the worst case scenario;
- the likely reaction of stakeholders to different scenarios;
- the impact on Blue Books beyond 2008;
- the reasons for the apparent tensions between different parts of the modernisation programme structure and the action taken to reduce these;
- the extent to which staff have been lost from National Accounts, the likelihood of further staff losses, and the measures being taken to mitigate these risks.

13. In discussion, the Authority:

- noted that as the Blue Book was one of the most valued outputs of ONS successful delivery was important to the reputation of the office;
- agreed that it will expect to see a set of proposals for action which it can support and monitor, once the scope of Blue Book 2008 is known.

14. The Authority commissioned a further paper for discussion at its meeting in April.

Action: ONS Private Office and UK Statistics Authority Secretariat

Risk Management

15. Mr Newman introduced a paper describing an initial view of the key risks facing the UK Statistics Authority.

16. The Authority agreed that it needed a full discussion of this paper, based on the conclusions from its Risk Committee, to develop further the Authority's approach to risk identification, assessment and management.

Action: Risk Committee

ONS Work Programme 2007/08 to 2011/12

17. Mr Newman introduced a paper describing, at a headline level, the resources available to the Authority over the period covered by its current financial settlement. The Authority agreed that in order to understand more clearly the outcomes that will be delivered within this settlement, and trade-offs which are available in deploying these resources, it would need to consider the work programme in greater detail. The Authority commissioned a further paper for consideration at its meeting in April.

Action: ONS Private Office

Transparency Policy

18. The Authority considered further its transparency policy and agreed to publish minutes and papers from its meetings on its website. Previous papers would be edited to remove personal and commercially sensitive information and published in April.

Action: UK Statistics Authority Secretariat

Launch arrangements

19. The Authority noted the progress being made on arrangement for the launch, including the plans for the Chair to undertake media interviews on the day before, and the day of the launch. The Authority noted that the services of Central Office of Information have been procured to provide it with a press office function and communications support for an initial period of six months.

Any Other Business

20. None

Agenda – UK Statistics Authority Meeting 18th March 2008
Boardroom, UK Statistics Authority, Newport, 11.30am – 3.00pm

Morning Session 11.30 to 1.00

Chair: Sir Michael Scholar

Apologies: Lord Rowe-Beddoe, Professor Nickell

1	Administrative Issues: Minutes of the previous meeting, actions Declarations of interest	
2	2011 Census	SA(08)09
3	Public Trust in Official Statistics	Oral report

Afternoon Session 1.30 to 3.00

4	Engaging with Stakeholders	Oral report
5	Blue Book 2008	SA(08)10
6	UKSA Risk Management	SA(08)11
7	Statistical Work Programme - Background paper	SA(08)12
8	Transparency policy	Oral report
9	Launch arrangements	Oral report
10	Any other business	

Next Meeting: Friday 18th April, 11.30am to 3.30pm
Boardroom, UK Statistics Authority, Government Buildings,
Cardiff Road, Newport, NP10 8XG

Top level risks facing the UK Statistics Authority

Purpose

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

Recommendations

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

Discussion

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

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

Annex A

Preliminary list of top level UKSA risks

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

Annex B

Summary list of top level ONS risks

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