

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY
Committee for Official Statistics

Minutes

Meeting of Monday 11 June 2012
Board Room, Drummond Gate, London

Present

Members

Mr Andrew Dilnot (Acting Chair)
Mr Richard Alldritt
Dr Colette Bowe
Dr Norman Caven
Professor Angela Dale
Professor David Hand
Professor David Rhind
Ms Jil Matheson (items 1 to 3)

Secretariat

Mr Rob Bumpstead
Mr Joe Cuddeford

Other Attendees

Mr Tim Andrews
Mr Richard Laux
Professor Valerie Isham, Ms Jill Leyland, Mr John Pullinger and Mr Hetan Shah (for item 3)

Apologies

Apologies were received from Ms Matheson for items 4 to 6.

Declarations of Interest

In relation to item 3, Professor David Rhind is Charman of the Nuffield Foundation, which provides funding for getstats.

1 Minutes and Matters Arising

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed as a correct record.

2 Update on the work of the Inter-Administration Committee [SA(COS)(12)15]

- 2.1 Ms Matheson introduced a paper which provided an overview of the Government Statistical Service (GSS) Inter-Administration Committee (IAC). The meeting heard that Theme Leaders had a formal role concerning comparability of statistics across the four administrations.
- 2.2 The National Statistician's Office had taken legal advice, which had clarified that statistics produced by devolved administrations (DAs) could be published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) with the agreement of the DAs. There were no legal restrictions to republishing statistics that were already in the public domain.
- 2.3 The meeting noted that DAs were ultimately responsible for decisions about devolved statistics. Where there was disagreement on issues of UK comparability which could not be resolved by the IAC, options included that the National Statistician could write to the DAs. In addition, the Statistics Authority could write to the UK Parliament, Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales, or the Northern Ireland Assembly.
- 2.4 The Committee considered the Inter-Administration Working Agreement on Statistics. The agreement broadly reflected the Statistics Authority's objectives regarding UK statistical coherence. It was agreed that paragraph 1.1 should be amended to reflect that the Statistics Authority was not part of the UK Government in the sense implied, but had a qualitatively different role under the terms of the Statistics Act. It was further agreed that the role of the Statistics Authority should be included in paragraph 6.5 of the agreement.

Action: National Statistician's Office to consider amendments to the Inter-Administration Working Agreement in light of discussion.

3 The Royal Statistical Society and the UK Statistics Authority [SA(COS)(12)17a and SA(COS)(12)17b]

- 3.1 Professor Isham noted the shared aspirations of the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) and the Authority and remarked upon the value of past and future collaboration. Mr Dilnot echoed these sentiments and outlined the overlap between the Authority's objectives and the work of the RSS and their complementary nature. It was noted that one of the strengths of the RSS was its tradition as a campaigning organisation.
- 3.2 Ms Leyland summarised priorities for user engagement work led by the RSS. The meeting heard that while central government users were often well catered for, it was more challenging to ensure that the needs of the wider user community were considered. Ms Leyland thanked James Tucker, who was on secondment to the RSS from the Authority, for his work with the Statistical User Forum (SUF). Forthcoming SUF roundtable meetings would be held to consider data on social care and statistics on the voluntary sector.
- 3.3 The Committee welcomed the work of the RSS and SUF with regards to user engagement. The meeting discussed the Open Data agenda, noted that a White Paper on Open Data was expected shortly, and suggested that SUF might also hold a meeting on this subject too.

- 3.4 The meeting considered how the views and comments of user groups could best feed into the Authority, and in particular Assessment work. It was noted that there had already been significant engagement in some areas, for example the Committee had previously received papers from the Housing Statistics User Group. It was agreed that further such engagement would be very welcome.
- 3.5 The Non-Executive Directors of the Authority were keen to further their personal engagement with the RSS and the wider user community.

Action: Secretariat to explore options for further engagement between Non-Executive Directors, the RSS and the wider user community.

- 3.6 It was agreed that it was important for both the RSS and the Authority to make the case for statistics, including making the case beyond the established user community.
- 3.7 Ms Leyland summarised the RSS's views on Monitoring and Assessment. The meeting understood that proposals for the next phase of Assessment would be considered by the Authority Board in June and July. It was agreed that the RSS would be consulted on the future work programme.

Action: Head of Assessment to consult with the RSS on the future work programme for Assessment.

- 3.8 The meeting considered the need for official statistics to inform the debate on Scottish independence. There was an important role for the Authority and the RSS in this regard. The issues were complex and required further consideration.
- 3.9 Mr Shah provided an update on progress with the RSS getstats campaign. The campaign had focussed on four areas: the political class, the media, education and business. The meeting discussed the need to improve the standing of statistics among the Senior Civil Service, the challenges associated with this, and the potential to use Census results as a vehicle for improving wider understanding of statistics.
- 3.10 The Chair thanked the RSS for a useful discussion. It was agreed that further meetings of this kind should be held annually. The Committee welcomed the RSS's offer to provide regular updates on its work.

4 Cuts to Official Statistics [SA(COS)(11)16]

- 4.1 Mr Andrews introduced a paper setting out the latest update from the National Statistician's Office on plans by producers of official statistics for ceasing the production of statistics, and on public consultations relating to statistics.
- 4.2 The meeting expressed regret at the loss of statistical compendia and agreed that this issue could potentially be explored in a Monitoring Brief.

Action: Head of Assessment to consider including a Monitoring Brief about statistical compendia on the forward work plan.

- 4.3 The meeting noted that the savings being made by some cessations appeared minimal. It was understood that the civil service recruitment freeze had caused difficulties in some departments, with the number of vacancies in key posts continuing to rise.

5 Activities of the Government Statistical Service [SA(COS)(12)18]

Mr Andrews provided an update of GSS activities from April 2012 to May 2012. The meeting welcomed the update.

6 Any other business

There was no other business. The Committee would meet next on 11 September at 10:30 in London.

Committee for Official Statistics

Agenda

Monday, 11 June, 2012

Board Room, Drummond Gate, London, 13:30 - 15:30

Acting Chair: Andrew Dilnot

Apologies:

1	Apologies, Minutes and Matters Arising	Meeting of 180412
2	Update on the work of the Inter-Administration Committee	SA(COS)(12)15 Ms Jil Matheson
3	Cuts to Official Statistics	SA(COS)(12)16 Mr Tim Andrews
4	The Royal Statistical Society and the UK Statistics Authority	SA(COS)(12)17a SA(COS)(12)17b Professor Valerie Isham, Ms Jill Leyland, Mr John Pullinger and Mr Hetan Shah
5	Activities of the Government Statistical Service	SA(COS)(12)18 Mr Tim Andrews
6	Any other business	

**Next Meeting: Tuesday 11 September 2012,
Drummond Gate, London, 10:30 - 13:00**

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY
COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

SA(COS)(12)15

The GSS Inter Administration Committee

Purpose

1. This note provides an overview of the Government Statistical Service (GSS) Inter Administration Committee.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Committee are invited to note the contents of this paper.

Discussion

3. The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* presented an opportunity to review existing Government Statistical Service (GSS) operations and to develop more effective governance and planning mechanisms for the UK's official statistics system. The Authority Board decided at its meeting on 21 February 2008 not to create its own sub-committee on devolved administration matters. It felt that this aspect of the Authority's operations should be considered by the full Board of the Authority. To support the Authority's goals, the National Statistician established the Inter Administration Committee (IAC) as part of the new governance arrangements for the GSS, to develop a systematic mechanism for addressing inter administration issues.
4. At its meeting of 20 October 2008 the IAC undertook to replace the Concordat on Statistics which formed part of the then Memorandum of Understanding between the UK Government, Scottish Ministers, Welsh Ministers and the Northern Ireland Executive Committee with a new Inter Administration Working Agreement (IAWA). The Memorandum of Understanding, most recently revised in June 2011, sets out the principles which underlie relations between the UK Government and the devolved administrations. The IAWA, most recently revised in May 2012, is at **Annex A**.
5. The IAC is chaired by the National Statistician, with membership comprised of the Chief Statisticians of the three devolved administrations and other senior members of the GSS. Statistical Heads of Profession and Theme Leaders are invited to attend as issues dictate. The IAC's terms of reference are at **Annex B**. It works closely with the Authority, through the Committee for Official Statistics, to ensure adequate information flows exist in both directions to advise and inform on issues, with users, through the National Statistics Themes, to ensure effective mechanisms of engagement and empowerment and with other GSS Committees to influence and advise on GSS policy matters.
6. Since 2010 the IAC has strengthened its links with Theme Leaders following concerns about harmonisation and comparability across the four administrations. The IAC arranged to receive half-yearly reports from each Theme Leader. It also began to invite two Theme Leaders to each meeting to discuss the work of the Theme.

7. At its meeting of 16 February 2012 the IAC discussed how best to respond to the Authority's initiative to improve compliance with Principle 4 Practice 6 of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics that deals with comparability¹. It is planned that the Authority will refer requirements in Assessment Reports relating to certain aspects of comparability to the IAC. Hence, the IAC has decided that Theme Leaders will have a prominent role in improving comparability. At the same time and in order to reduce the burden on Theme Leaders, the IAC has also decided that it would be preferable to revert to an annual written report from each Theme supplemented by the appearance of three Theme Leaders at each meeting. This will improve accountability and facilitate the preparation of a separate annual report on the work of Themes highlighting progress on comparability issues.
8. The IAC plays a key role in ensuring that the devolved administrations are involved in any international changes such as the current changes being proposed to EU regulation 223/2009 (European Statistical Law), allowing members to explore any impact at an early stage.
9. The IAC has often considered issues around standardisation that have been identified by devolved administrations. In many instances this leads to an agreed solution for all parties and enhances working relationships.

Tim Andrews, National Statistician's Office, May 2012

List of Annexes

Annex A	Inter Administration Working Agreement
Annex B	Terms of Reference for the Inter Administration Committee

¹ Promote comparability within the UK and internationally by, for example, adopting common standards, concepts, sampling frames, questions, definitions, statistical units and classifications (including common geographic referencing and coding standards.) Make the reasons for any deviations from standard models publically available.

Annex A – Inter Administration Working Agreement

This document has been published on the UK Statistics Authority website.

To view this document go to:

<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/about-the-authority/uk-statistical-system/history/key-documents-about-the-uk-system/inter-administration-working-agreement-on-statistics---revised-may-2012.doc>

Annex B Terms of Reference for the Inter Administration Committee

Purpose

1. The Committee works within the context of an Inter Administration Working Agreement between the UK Statistics Authority and each of the Devolved Administrations, which outlines the ways in which the four nations work together and cooperate on statistical matters.

Role

2. The Committee's responsibilities include the following:
 - i. develop and promote a set of principles that will contribute to coherent, comparable and comprehensive 4 Nation statistics, taking due account of user needs, accessibility and metadata to assess comparability;
 - ii. promote policies, strategies and standards which facilitate the production of coherent and harmonised statistics across the administrations;
 - iii. consider and resolve inter administration issues that have not been able to be resolved elsewhere;
 - iv. liaise with, and support the work of, other GSS committees;
 - v. consider UK government statistics needed for devolved purposes in reserved policy areas, and devolved statistics needed for UK purposes. This could include cost sharing practices;
 - vi. strengthen the user voice (with an emphasis on those users requiring UK-wide and international statistics);
 - vii. share and promote good statistical practice across administrations;
 - viii. strengthen the links between Theme Leaders and the Committee, especially in respect of issues relating to comparability of statistics and the extent to which the devolved administrations are collaborating with Theme activities;
 - ix. identify international issues including meeting international requirements and arrangements for moving forward issues that would benefit sub UK international comparisons;
 - x. raise issues with the UK Statistics Authority and/or Ministers as appropriate.

Membership

3. Membership of the Committee consists of:
 - National Statistician - Chair
 - Chief Statisticians in Devolved Administrations

- Director General for Statistics, ONS
- Deputy Director (Delivery), National Statistician's Office
- ONS Director with stakeholder responsibility for DAs
- Statistical Heads of Profession for Statistics or Theme Leaders by invitation

4. The secretariat is provided by the National Statistician's Office (Delivery).

Meetings

5. The Committee meets quarterly.

March 2011

IAC Membership

Jil Matheson - Chair

Stephen Penneck - ONS

Guy Goodwin - ONS

Norman Caven - DFPNI

Kathryn Chamberlain – Welsh Government

Roger Halliday - Scottish Government

Tim Andrews - NSO

Kieron Mahony - Secretariat

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY
COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

SA(COS)(12)16

***Update on the impact of cuts on statistical inputs and outputs, and
monitoring statistical capability***

Purpose

1. This paper provides an update on plans by producers of official statistics for ceasing the production of statistics, and on public consultations relating to those statistics. The paper also reports the up-to-date position for staffing statistics in the Government Statistician Group (GSG) against which reports are being benchmarked.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Committee for Official Statistics (COS) are invited to note:
 - i. the latest position on reported cuts to official statistics and further potential cuts subject to public consultation and other official statistics issues being consulted upon; and
 - ii. the staffing levels for the GSG.

Discussion

3. Since the last report to the Committee on 18 April 2012, the National Statistician has been notified of two further cessations of production of statistics. These are:
 - i. A decision by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to no longer publish quarterly statistics about adult overseas nationals registering for a National Insurance number (NINo) for the purposes of work, benefits or tax credits. The statistics will now be published annually. DWP state that quarterly changes in the series can be misleading – DWP NINo figures are sourced from operational systems rather than sources designed to measure migration. Caution is always advised in interpreting trends based on the latest quarterly figures. Instead annual changes give a more accurate picture of trends in NINo registrations.
 - ii. The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) has decided to cease production of the Northern Ireland Abstract of Statistics Online, a compendium output containing a wide range of statistics drawn from both government and non-government sources. The tables covered a large number of subject areas including population, social and welfare, education, crime and justice, the labour market, transport, tourism, agriculture, energy, the environment and the economy. All of the information included in the Abstract is second hand, having already been published by the original sources.
4. Further information about these two cessations including the outcome of consultations can be found at **Annex A**. Historical information about cessations by department up to February 2012 can be found at **Annex B**.
5. There have been three notifications of statistical consultations to the National Statistician's Office (NSO) since the last update to the Committee. One of these is notable. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), in partnership with Sports England are consulting on changes to the way sport is measured in the Taking Part and Active People surveys. The proposed change, to a single survey, will: ensure the right measurement is in place for the new youth and community strategy; underpin performance management of Sport England investment into sport National Governing Bodies and align with Payment by Results principles; deliver improved value for money and; use data collection methods that provide wider coverage of the population. It is

noted that the measurement will also continue to support the public health outcomes framework and local authority level data.

6. There are currently five live statistical consultations. Three of these were notified to the National Statistician since the last update (see **Annex C**) and two were previously reported to COS (see **Annex D**).
7. In addition to informing the Committee, notable information is sent to the UK Statistics Authority Secretariat in order to facilitate decisions about early intervention and/or the preparation of a Statistical Expenditure Report.

Monitoring Statistical Capacity

8. A summary of key changes underlying the GSG membership figures since 2000, and the reasons behind them, has been provided as background information to previous meetings; the graphs showing the overall trend in GSG numbers are reproduced at **Annex E** for information. It should be noted that, historically, this information has been collected for the purpose of maintaining communication links between the NSO and GSG rather than for workforce planning. This limits the usefulness of this data in accurately tracking historical changes to GSG membership.
9. Current data on GSG membership by department is also shown at Annex E and includes information about October 2011 (the baseline), January 2012, April 2012 and June 2012. Please note that direct comparisons should not be made between the historical graphs and current data in Annex E as they are compiled using different bases.
10. There continues to be a demand from departments for both Fast Stream and Main Stream new entrants and the GSS is running a North East regional recruitment scheme. Other regional schemes are planned.
11. NSO has recently become aware that there are also a number of vacancies for professional statistical posts of higher grades. These result from the earlier centrally imposed civil service wide recruitment freeze. NSO are now working with departments to fill these posts.

Tim Andrews, National Statistician's Office, May 2012

List of Annexes

- | | |
|----------------|---|
| Annex A | Cuts notified to the National Statistician since the last update |
| Annex B | Cuts previously reported to COS |
| Annex C | New consultations about cuts and changes to statistics |
| Annex D | Live consultations previously reported to COS |
| Annex E | Historical GSG membership data 2000-11, as measured by headcount; and Government Statistician Group staffing levels by department – April 2012 |

Annex A Cuts notified to the National Statistician since the last update

This table summarises cuts to official statistics that have been notified to the National Statistician as of 17 May 2012 since the last update was provided in April 2012.

Details	Description of statistics	Reasons for cessation or reduction	Details of consultation/ impact on users	Cost/benefits assessment	Status
<p>Statistics: Northern Ireland Abstract of Statistics Online</p> <p>Date of Cessation: 15/06/2012</p>	<p>Northern Ireland Abstract of Statistics Online is a compendium compiled by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). It contains a wide range of statistics drawn from both government and non-government sources.</p> <p>The tables cover a large number of subject areas including, among others, population, social and welfare, education, crime and justice, the labour market, transport, tourism, agriculture, energy, the environment and</p>	<p>All of the information included in the Abstract is second hand, having already been published by the original sources. The purpose of the Abstract is simply to provide the user with a hub where they can find general information on various subject areas in one central location.</p> <p>Historically, when the Abstract was printed in hard copy and before widespread internet access became available, it was a useful starting point to look for general statistics relating to Northern Ireland which may otherwise have been difficult to track down. However in recent years the publication of such statistics on government and other organisations' websites has greatly increased the ease with which the public can access this information first hand. This has, in turn, reduced the usefulness of</p>	<p>Approximately 500 NISRA customers were sent an email inviting them to take part in a survey seeking their views on the implications that the cessation of the Northern Ireland Abstract Online would have on them or their organisation. Background information about the survey and the Abstract Online was included in the email and a link to the e-survey and the Abstract online were provided. The National Statisticians Office was also informed of the proposed cessation and consultation process.</p> <p>There were only 18 respondents to the consultation survey. Of these, 12 respondents indicated that they currently use, or believe they may have a future need to use the publication. Seven respondents indicated that the cessation of the publication would not cause any difficulties for them. Eight respondents indicated that the cessation of the publication would cause some difficulties for them, however half of these were not aware that the information included in the Abstract Online was available elsewhere.</p> <p>Assessment of impact on users: Eight respondents indicated that the cessation of the publication would cause some difficulties for them, however half of these were not aware that the information included in the Abstract Online was available elsewhere. Seven respondents indicated that the cessation of the publication would not cause any difficulties for them.</p> <p>All of the information included in the Northern Ireland Abstract of Statistics Online is second hand, having</p>	<p>The publication is updated by two members of staff providing a time investment of approximately one hour each week per staff member. This time would be reinvested into other statistical outputs.</p> <p>Impact on quality: The cessation of the Northern Ireland Abstract of Statistics Online would have no impact in this regard.</p>	<p>Agreed</p>

Annex A - SA(COS)(12)16 - Cuts to Official Statistics

	<p>the economy.</p>	<p>the Abstract Online. Existing users will be directed to the original source of the information via website links.</p>	<p>already been published by the original sources. Therefore if the publication is ceased the users will still be able to access all of the relevant statistics from the websites of the government departments or organisations that originally published them.</p> <p>If the publication of the Northern Ireland Abstract of Statistics Online is ceased a notice will be placed on the website directing users to alternative sources of the relevant statistics. Therefore the cessation of the publication of the Abstract Online should have a low impact on users.</p>		
<p>Statistics: National Insurance Number Allocations to Adult Overseas Nationals entering the UK Date of Cessation: August 2012</p>	<p>Statistics are based on adult overseas nationals registering for a National Insurance number for the purposes of work, benefits or tax credits. Description of (proposed) change(s) Altering the quarterly frequency of the releases to an annual frequency from August 2012.</p>	<p>The DWP NINo statistics are only ever a supporting indicator of international immigration. The ONS official measures of international migration and the Home Office Control of Immigration statistics (both quarterly) are always the primary focus. Quarterly changes in the series can be misleading – DWP NINo figures are sourced from operational systems rather than sources designed to measure migration. Caution is always advised in interpreting trends based on the latest quarter figures. Instead annual changes give a more accurate picture of trends in NINo registrations and an annual August Release would allow for publication, as soon as possible, of the previous financial year figures.</p>	<p>A link was included within the “landing page” of the statistics to notify users of the 3 month consultation. Link to consultation questionnaire: http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/nial/nino_consult.doc Assessment of impact on users The three-month user consultation generated only 8 replies mostly from Local Authorities. Some of these related to the way in which data is made available (that is via the Tabulation Tool for which improvements are in hand). Only 4 respondents said that an annual release would limit the usefulness of the DWP NINo data.</p>	<p>None but this will free up development resource within the analytic space for new initiatives such as the data matching work with UK Borders Agency in support of compliance checking. Impact on quality The statistics will continue to be released as National Statistics</p>	<p>Confirmed</p>

Annex B Cuts previously reported to COS

Department	Statistics	Date of cessation
Department for Communities and Local Government	The Place Survey	July 2010
	Local Government Key Facts Card: England	November 2010
	Citizenship Survey	March 2011
	Official Statistics on Supporting People	May 2011
	Target Group Index statistics on arts attendance	31 October 2011
Department of Culture Media and Sport	Schools Providing Access to Extended Services Statistics	October 2010
	Parental experiences of services provided to disabled children Statistics	November 2010
	Diploma Learning England	November 2011
Department for Education	School Destinations of Secondary School Pupils Resident in London Boroughs	September 2011
	Behaviour in schools	1 April 2012
	Statistics on post-decision reviews on asylum applications, applications for asylum support, and asylum appeals.	25 th August 2011
	Basic Command Unit level recorded crime and detection statistics	April 2012
	Business Payment Support Service	Last publication July 2011
HM Revenue and Customs	RAF Pocket Brief	April 2012
	Civilian Staffing by agency, trading fund and location	February 2012
Ministry of Defence	Prescription Cost Analysis statistics	July 2012
	1. Health Visitors, District Nurses and Other Community Nurses 2. NHS Day Care 3. Community Psychiatric Nurses and	October 2010
NHS Information Centre		
Welsh Government		

Annex B - SA(COS)(12)16 - Cuts to Official Statistics

	Community Learning Disability Nurses	November 2010
	New Deal Statistics	Within weeks if that decision is made by Ministers
	Welsh Short Term Output Indices	Suspended for 2010/11 year.
	Local Authority Education Expenditure	2012/13
	Affordable housing provision – collection of information from registered social landlords	1 March 2012
	NHS staff vacancies	November 2010
Scottish Government	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Children Educated outwith Schools 2. Placing Requests 3. Teacher and Educational Psychologists Vacancies 4. Pre-Appeal SQA Examination Results 5. Expenditure on Schools 6. Budgeted School Running Costs 7. The Independent School Census 	
	Various changes to Scottish Government Surveys	2012 onwards
Department for Work and Pensions	New Deals and the Flexible New Deal programme statistics	March 2011
	Tax Benefit Model	8 June 2011
Office for National Statistics	Quarterly dividends inquiry	5 March 2012

Annex C New consultations about cuts and changes to statistics

This table summarises the consultations that have been notified to the National Statistician in the period 6 April – 25 May 2012 or have been discovered by the National Statistician's Office undertaking periodic trawls of departmental websites.

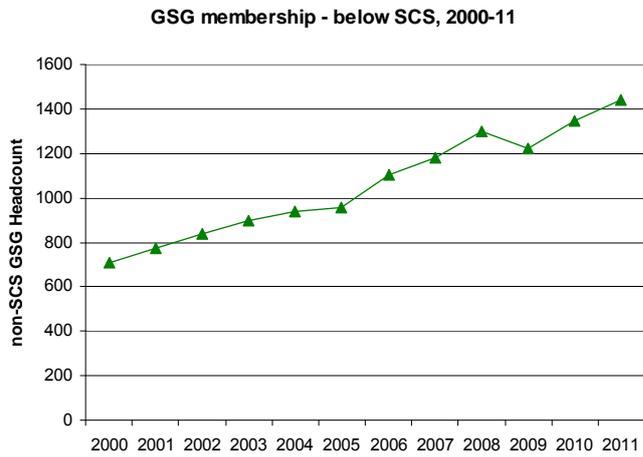
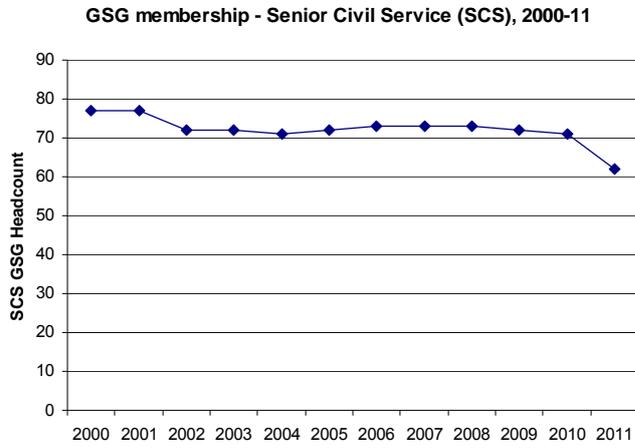
The list demonstrates that GSS statisticians are actively reviewing the need for continued statistics with users in order to improve efficiency, as well as responding to reductions in resources in the current public sector financial climate.

Details of consultation	Description of consultation	Consultation End
<p>Consultation on proposed changes to the Sport Participation Measurement</p> <p>Producer: DCMS</p> <p>Open date: 17 May 2012</p>	<p>The purpose of the consultation is to consult with users and other interested parties on proposals to change the way sport is measured in the Taking Part and Active People surveys with the preferred option being a single survey using both face to face and telephone interviews. DCMS is working in partnership with Sports England over this proposed change</p>	8 August 2012
<p>Consultation on smoothing and commuting adjustments in Regional Accounts</p> <p>Producer: ONS</p> <p>Open date: 16 May 2012</p>	<p>The purpose of this consultation is to gather and assess user opinions on the changes proposed following a methodological review of smoothing and commuting adjustments in the compilation of regional Gross Value Added (GVA) and regional Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI).</p> <p>We would appreciate feedback on the following proposals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the proposal to stop smoothing regional GVA and GDHI estimates at all geographic levels - the proposal to extend commuting adjustments in regional GVA to all regions of the UK 	10 August 2012
<p>Consultation on the Quarterly NHS Staff Earnings publication</p> <p>Producer: HSCIC</p> <p>Open date: April 2012</p>	<p>The Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC) publishes quarterly reports on the earnings of NHS employees in England. These are the standard publications for NHS Staff Earnings Estimates in England.</p> <p>They are consulting users on changes to the way earnings information for NHS Hospital & Community Health Service (HCHS) staff in England is processed, defined and presented. These changes are intended to give users a better understanding of what NHS staff earn and an appreciation of how the components of their pay make up their total earnings.</p>	29 June 2012

Annex D Live consultations previously reported to COS

Details of consultation	Description of consultation	Consultation ended
<p>Public consultation on new orders and export new orders in the monthly Turnover and Orders in the Production and Services Industries (TOPSI) publication and the Monthly Business Survey (MBS)</p> <p>Producer: ONS</p> <p>Open date: 19 March 2012</p>	<p>ONS collects and publishes monthly estimates of total new orders and export new orders as part of the monthly Turnover and Orders in the Production and Services Industries (TOPSI) publication. The key user of UK New Orders data is Eurostat, who collect it from member states under the Short Term Statistics Regulation. Currently, the UK has a legal obligation to provide new orders data under the regulation. Now Eurostat is removing this requirement from the regulation due to re-focussing priorities and problems experienced in collecting these data in some member states. In the UK, the estimates are primarily used as an early indicator of future turnover or business activity.</p> <p>The purpose of this consultation is to seek users' views on the proposal to remove monthly estimates of total new orders and export new orders from the TOPSI publication, and stop collecting source data by removing the relevant questions from the Monthly Business Survey questionnaire.</p>	8 June 2012
<p>Consultation on suspending Assets, liabilities and transactions in finance leasing, factoring and credit granting (SDQ7)</p> <p>Producer: ONS</p> <p>Open date: 5 March 2012</p>	<p>There is a need to improve the efficiency and relevance of ONS outputs while still meeting user needs.</p> <p>The survey that underpins the output: Assets, Liabilities and Transactions in Finance Leasing, Factoring and Credit Granting (SDQ7) is being re-developed so that it fully satisfies changing National Accounts requirements.</p> <p>This work is scheduled to be completed during the 2012/13 financial year.</p> <p>This consultation aims to determine the wider use of this information and whether users would be inconvenienced if ONS were to suspend publication of the output until the survey development work is completed.</p>	28 May 2012

Annex E Historical GSG membership data 2000-11, as measured by headcount



Government Statistician Group staffing levels by department: October 2011 - April 2012

Department	October 2011		January 2012		April 2012		June 2012	
	SCS (FTE)	Non-SCS (FTE)	SCS (FTE)	Non-SCS (FTE)	SCS (FTE)	Non-SCS (FTE)	SCS (FTE)	Non-SCS (FTE)
BIS	3	46	3	47	3	47	3	48
DCLG	2	50	2	51	2	51	2	48
DECC	1	21	1	24	1	25	1	27
DEFRA	2	29	2	28	2	27	2	26
DfE	2	91	2	90	2	92	2	91
DfID	1	28	1	30	1	32	0	32
DfT	2	33	3	33	3	35	3	34
DH	3	59	2	59	1	54	1	53
NHSIC	1	67	1	71	1	77	1	80
DWP	2	171	2	165	2	167	2	166
HMRC	3	103	3	112	3	110	3	109
HO	2	20	2	18	2	18	2	20
MoD	2	64	2	63	1	63	1	62
MoJ	1	55	1	54	1	53	1	56
UKSA/ONS	21	123	20	129	20	133	20	133
SG	1	119	1	119	1	117	1	117
WG	1	58	1	62	1	62	1	63
Other depts/ agencies	2	129	3	130	3	130	2	135
TOTAL	52	1266	52	1285	50	1293	48	1300

N.B. All data reported are rounded, full time equivalent figures. Data exclude staff currently occupying non-analytical posts.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

SA(COS)(12)17a

Issues the Royal Statistical Society wishes to discuss with the Committee for Official Statistics

Purpose

1. This paper informs the Committee for Official Statistics of four separate areas of work the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) wishes to discuss with the Committee (in addition to the future of user engagement which is the subject of a separate paper):
 - i. the future of monitoring and assessment;
 - ii. statistics to inform the debate about Scottish independence;
 - iii. the quality of statistical releases; and
 - iv. the getstats campaign.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Committee are invited to:
 - i. take note of RSS views on Monitoring and Assessment and, in particular the suggestions for an extension of the monitoring work;
 - ii. support the recommendation for an urgent Monitoring review of statistics to inform the debate on Scottish independence;
 - iii. exchange views on statistical releases;
 - iv. note progress on the getstats campaign and support the recommendations for future work; and
 - v. note other issues of RSS concern and provide a steer on a way forward and future engagement with the RSS.

Discussion

Background

3. We welcome this opportunity to meet with the Committee. The UK Statistics Authority and the RSS share many aspirations for UK official statistics. As background, we have sent you the RSS Vision for National Statistics (attached at **Annex B**) – written in 2009 to update the versions that existed prior to the 2007 Statistics and Registration Service Act. We do not think you will find much to disagree with.
4. As the UK's only professional and learned society devoted to the interests of statistics and statisticians, the RSS plays a critical role in nourishing the profession. The Authority and the RSS already cooperate on supporting user engagement and on the RSS Awards for Official Statistics. We are very willing to consider other cooperative initiatives where these might be useful and appropriate. Many government statisticians are RSS members and a number play an active role – we hope that the Authority will encourage even greater participation in the future.

The Future of Monitoring and Assessment

5. We understand that the first round of Assessments against the Code of Practice has just ended. We understand also that there is general agreement that Assessments in the future should be more flexible and focussed. We look forward to hearing what is planned. We hope that a lighter process will mean, among other advantages, that additional

resources within the Authority can be made available to extend the range of the Monitoring function.

6. Monitoring Briefs have, in our view, been very successful both when produced in response to an issue raised, or when they have investigated an issue of potential concern. Unlike the original Monitoring Reports, which were expensive and time consuming, they have proved to be a flexible and (we presume) more cost-effective means of analysing issues. We feel, though, that there is both scope and need to extend their function to cover other areas, notably whether needs for types of statistics on particular issues are being met, or whether sets of statistics meet broad user needs in terms of scope, quality, accuracy, timeliness and so forth.
7. As an urgent example we suggest that the Authority should investigate the needs that exist, or are likely to exist, to inform the debate around Scottish independence (see below). It would be important to talk to potential users of such figures throughout the UK and to take into account what other organisations plan to do. Further examples could be whether economic statistics need to evolve further to reflect changes in the UK's economic structure or the extent to which statistics derived from administrative files could be combined with data from the 2011 census to create additional micro-area statistics.

Statistics to inform the debate on Scottish Independence

8. It goes without saying that the independence referendum is of huge importance not just for Scotland but for the UK as a whole. Whatever the outcome, it is also likely to trigger a wider debate about the future of the UK and how its constituent parts should relate to each other. Statistics must be up to the job of informing the whole debate and helping there to be thoughtful and careful discussion of all the issues.
9. Clearly the 'watchdog' role of the Authority will be needed to intervene when statistics are misused by either side. More broadly, there will be a need both for ongoing comparative statistics and for one-off pieces of data and analysis. In our view this will require careful consideration by the Authority/National Statistician's Office/ONS (to set the UK context) as well as ScotStat of what data are needed, how they should be presented and disseminated, and alongside what sort of textual and other analysis. It would be sensible to review what other serious analytical organisations, such as the Institute for Fiscal Studies, are likely to put out and what they themselves will need in the way of data. We understand, for example, that the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) has a budget for additional staff, presentations etc.
10. The need is urgent since the campaign has already begun. As indicated above, we feel the best way to start is an immediate Monitoring review of all actual and potential needs.

The quality of Statistical Releases

11. We understand that the Committee will have reviewed some key statistical releases earlier in the day. Improving communication and dissemination of official statistics generally is an accepted need. As a major tool of communication, they are of crucial importance both to those who analyse and comment on the data (e.g. journalists, financial market and other analysts) and to those who simply wish to be informed. Achieving the appropriate combination of text (both narrative and descriptive), figures and charts is therefore a crucial, but not easy, need. We would welcome the opportunity of exchanging views in the light of the Committee's findings from the morning.

The getstats campaign: improving statistical literacy

12. One of the five aims for the Royal Statistical Society as set out in its Royal Charter is “promoting the public understanding of statistics and the competent use and interpretation of statistics.” Following a strategic review of the Society’s activities in 2009 it was decided to reinforce this strongly as a core activity by establishing a dedicated campaign to improve the public understanding of statistics. The getstats campaign was established in October 2010 and is funded by the Nuffield Foundation.
13. Externally, the campaign has focussed on four areas, seeking to complement and augment the RSS’s existing activities: the political class, the media, education and business. Further details and examples can be found in **Annex A**.
14. Although the campaign has had limited visibility within the Government Statistical Service (GSS) as a whole, recently there has been increased effort to increase awareness. The recent GSS conference hosted an RSS-led workshop session on getstats which focused on statistical literacy issues in the key audiences for the GSS: policy colleagues in departments, the press and media, and the general public. Feedback from the workshop session suggests there is a need for raising awareness and understanding of statistics in the civil service as a whole, at all levels.
15. In order to achieve this it is clear there are a number of getstats campaign tools and mechanisms which could be usefully applied within the GSS and the wider civil service. This would require the getstats campaign team to work with staff in the GSS to adapt materials which would aim to increase the statistical capacity for non-statisticians in the wider civil service, both at senior and junior levels.
16. As mentioned in the paper on user engagement, there are obvious and strong links between getstats activity and the work with statistics users. One of the key aims of the getstats campaign is to fill the skills gap in good presentation and dissemination of statistics. It is, in our view, desirable to explore a way forward for how the RSS and the GSS can work together in this area.
17. Finally it is clear the getstats work with media and journalists would be useful to help addressing Recommendation 5 from the Authority Monitoring Report No 7 on strengthening user engagement:

“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.”

In our view little progress has been made on progressing this recommendation; the recent getstats work on increasing the statistical literacy of journalists would be valuable to use as a basis for this work.

Other issues

18. Inevitably the RSS has other issues of concern regarding official statistics, at least some of which will be shared by the Authority. Not all of these are appropriate for discussion with the Committee but it may be useful to list them when considering future steps in Authority/RSS co-operation.
 - i. Planning to ensure that official statistics meet both current and future needs in the context of the Authority’s decentralised and devolved statistical system.
 - ii. Maintaining a coherent statistical service within government.
 - iii. The reduced number of high-level government statistical posts outside the ONS.

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- iv. The impact of 'open data' and 'big data'.
- v. Pre-release access and related issues.
- vi. The EU dimension and ensuring that users have a voice in priority setting at a European level (taking into account the role of the European Statistical Advisory Committee).
- vii. Issues with particular statistical datasets either because of their importance (Census, Wellbeing, National Accounts) or because of specific concerns (e.g. RPI/CPI).

Jill Leyland, Royal Statistical Society, 6 June 2012

List of Annexes

Annex A Progress on the getstats campaign
Annex B RSS Vision for National Statistics

Annex A – Progress with the getstats campaign

Information on the getstats campaign has been published on the Royal Statistical Society website.

To view this information go to:

<http://www.rss.org.uk/site/cms/contentChapterView.asp?chapter=25>

Annex B – RSS Vision for National Statistics

This document has been published on the Royal Statistical Society website.

To view this document go to:

<http://www.rss.org.uk/site/cms/contentCategoryView.asp?category=106>

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

SA(COS)(12)17b

Towards effective user engagement

Purpose

1. To demonstrate the synergy between the objectives of the Committee for Official Statistics and those of the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) for user engagement, and to seek the Committee's support for the future priorities for user engagement work led by the RSS.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Committee for Official Statistics are invited to:
 - i. endorse the programme of work set out, with any modifications that it might wish to suggest; and
 - ii. receive regular updates from the RSS.

Discussion

3. Understanding and meeting user needs is at the heart of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, though assessments of National Statistics against the Code of Practice carried out by the Statistics Authority show that this continues to be one of the weakest areas of Code compliance. It was therefore the subject of a major Monitoring Report published in June 2010 – 'Strengthening User Engagement' (Monitoring Report No 7), the recommendations of which are reproduced in **Annex A**.
4. Work with users of official statistics forms one of the core themes of the work of the RSS (the RSS Statistics User theme, hereafter referred to as RSS-SU) and has been well embedded within the organisation. The advantage of locating responsibility for facilitation of the user engagement process with the RSS is that it can provide a more arm's-length relationship with the Government Statistical Service (GSS). Users can feel that they are setting the agenda and that the priorities for user engagement activity are not being unduly influenced by producer priorities. It is largely this principle which underlay the decision not to transfer the work of the Statistics User Council to the Office for National Statistics when its future was under discussion ten years ago. More information on the background to RSS-SU and its recent activities is given in **Annex B**.
5. It is clear that the RSS and the Authority largely share the same goals for user engagement. In order for producers to meet their obligations under the Code of Practice, they must engage in an ongoing dialogue with the widest possible range of users – exactly the function for which the RSS-SU exists. Recommendations 5 (an online forum) and 6 (producer engagement with the RSS) of Monitoring Report 7 have largely been progressed through the work of the RSS-SU, with support from the Authority in the form of the secondment of a full-time member of the GSS to the RSS as User Engagement Programme Manager.
6. In the remainder of this paper we set out what we see as the current strategic priorities for the work of RSS-SU, based on consultation with user groups through the Statistics User Forum. We would welcome the views of the Committee on these and any other priorities which the Committee considers important for RSS-SU to address.

Engaging with producers of official statistics to secure changes in their policies and practices that will benefit users

7. It will continue to be important to identify strategic cross-cutting issues which RSS-SU should be taking up at senior levels in the GSS in a timely and effective way. We see our new on-line communications forum, StatsUserNet, as a prime means of identifying such issues in the future.
8. Based on these engagement mechanisms it is clear there are a number of key issues of current concern to users. Effective dissemination of statistics, particularly on the web, continues to be a major user concern, and we shall continue to lobby for improvements to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) website, the Publication Hub, and other means of dissemination such as statistical releases and news releases.
9. The Open Data agenda presents significant opportunities for users to gain access to a much wider and richer range of data than hitherto. Although an RSS meeting on this topic last September was a valuable 'tour d'horizon', at present there is no coherent user strategy for working with other players to unlock the potential of data to serve the public good. It should be a priority to develop such a strategy.
10. Disclosure control continues to be an area of great concern to a wide range of users. Evidence was presented to Statistics Suppliers and Users Group (StatSUG) in February this year highlighting cases where users have found disclosure controls to be excessive or poorly implemented. These examples are being followed up by the National Statistician's Office (NSO) and a small steering group is to be set up, with user involvement, to take forward any generic issues that emerge.
11. We would also like to give more priority over the next year or so to our relationships with the devolved administrations. This is important from two points of view. First, each has developed its own model for user engagement and we feel that all could benefit from drawing on these different experiences. Also, the availability of UK-wide data – or perhaps more importantly the availability of comparable data for the constituent countries – is one of RSS-SU's key priorities.

Ensuring that the RSS-SU addresses the interests of as wide a range of users as possible, whether they be individuals or corporate bodies

12. On 15 February 2012 a paper was presented to the Committee for Official Statistics on the RSS's plans for setting up an online forum using social media software, StatsUserNet, which was about to be launched [SA(COS)(12)01]. We believe that we now have firm proof of concept for StatsUserNet, and that it has the potential to play a pivotal role in future user- producer communication, in addition to the other engagement work we will continue to undertake. There has been a great deal of demand for new communities from user groups and producers of official statistics, which we expect to continue. Long-term strategies for marketing and for ensuring an adequate level of support are now priorities for development. There will be a continuing need to have a strategic input to guide the development of the website as well as keeping up to date with issues being raised via the site and judging how best to take them forward. There are also a range of operational tasks in maintaining the site and ensuring that new features are implemented as they become available in subsequent releases of the software, for which additional resources will be required.
13. RSS-SU and the NSO collaborated to organise an event in March which brought together GSS Theme Group leaders and User Group leads to evaluate current approaches to user engagement and to set a way forward. The outcomes of this event (see **Annex C**) provide a wide-ranging agenda for RSS-SU, and for producers. Probably

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the most challenging of the points for users are those which involve working across user groups and beyond the existing user community – for example, evaluating the impact of user group activities on official statistics outputs; communicating to producers the positive impact of successful user input; communicating to producers instances where user views have not been taken into account, and the impact on the user community.

14. Although the main emphasis to date of user engagement activity by both the Authority and RSS-SU has tended to be on meeting the needs of the ‘professional’, knowledgeable users, there has also been a growing realisation of the importance of meeting the needs of the citizen user for official statistics. We recognise that these concerns are not separate from those of the ‘professional’ user, and that there are considerable synergies between the two. For example both rely on good presentation and dissemination of official statistics, particularly through the web. There is thus much common cause between RSS-SU and the RSS getstats programme, which is discussed in our other paper [SA(COS)(12)17a].
15. We recognise the continued importance of face to face events in addition to the ongoing communication activity via StatsUserNet. In 2011, we held focused events in roundtable format rather than the ‘traditional’ style of Statistics Users Conferences. For 2012, we have identified two areas where such events would be valuable: the statistical evidence base for social care (following on from the Dilnot Commission), and official statistics and the voluntary sector (following on from the Authority Monitoring Brief 5/12) – the latter would be a possible precursor to the setting up of a user group in this area. These are in the course of preparation.
16. If the Committee would find it useful, the RSS would be happy to provide regular updates on its work on user engagement and for the Committee to have more regular input to its priority-setting in this area, while of course recognising that the two organisations will continue to have distinctive, and on occasion different, public voices.

Jenny Church, Royal Statistical Society, 6 June 2012

List of Annexes

- Annex A Recommendations from Monitoring Report No 7: Strengthening User Engagement (June 2010)**
- Annex B The work of the Royal Statistical Society with users of official statistics**
- Annex C Improving user engagement event – 20 March 2012**

Annex A – Recommendations from Monitoring Report No 7: Strengthening User Engagement (June 2010)

This document has been published on the UK Statistics Authority website.

To view this document go to:

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

Annex B The work of the Royal Statistical Society with users of official statistics

Background

The RSS took on the role of support to users of official statistics from the Statistics User Council in 2004 and since then, work with the user community has formed one of the Themes of its work (hereafter referred to as RSS-SU). Although this is a relatively recent addition to the RSS 'family', it can be argued that in fact the pursuance of the interests of users of official statistics by the RSS goes back very much farther than this - many eminent statisticians of the nineteenth century were users of 'official' statistics.

The strategic objectives of RSS-SU are

1. To engage with producers of official statistics to secure changes in their policies and practices that will benefit users
2. To ensure that the RSS-SU addresses the interests of as wide a range of users as possible, whether they be individuals or corporate bodies

These are delivered through a network of user groups each covering a particular area of statistics (either sectoral – e.g. crime, health – or cross-cutting, e.g. gender, neighbourhood statistics – or organisational – e.g. local authorities) with the Statistics User Forum (SUF) as an umbrella body bringing together representatives of all user groups.

Since September 2009 a full-time member of the GSS has been working at Errol Street on secondment from the Authority as User Engagement Programme Manager. This additional input has enabled considerable progress to be made towards the theme's objectives. In addition, the Authority has provided financial support to a number of conferences and events organised by RSS-SU.

RSS-SU recent activities

These are set out according to our strategic objectives listed above.

To engage with producers of official statistics to secure changes in their policies and practices that will benefit users

This objective is pursued through the network of user groups within their specific spheres of activity, and for cross-cutting issues through regular meetings with the National Statistician and her heads of profession strategy group – this latter forum is known as the Statistics Suppliers and Users Group (StatSUG).

Ensuring sensible restrictions that protect confidentiality but allow information to be used appropriately is one of the SUF's five key priorities. SUF recognises that effective data collection depends on confidence in the protection of personal data, but there is strong concern in the user community that some applications of disclosure control are overly cautious or unjustifiable, compromising the utility of datasets. Evidence was presented to StatSUG in February this year highlighting cases where users have found disclosure controls to be excessive or poorly implemented.

Improvements to the ONS website were identified as a major issue for users in Monitoring Report 7 (Recommendation 2). The re-launch of the ONS website in late August 2011 was eagerly awaited but fell way short of the functionality that users had been led to believe it would deliver. RSS-SU have since been providing detailed feedback on the problems users have been experiencing with the site, and have also been working with the ONS to test enhancements. We are not convinced that the ONS have fully realised the huge reputational damage this episode has caused them, nor that sufficient priority has been given to putting things right.

To ensure that the RSS-SU addresses the interests of as wide a range of users as possible, whether they be individuals or corporate bodies

StatsUserNet was conceived to fulfil the widely recognised need for improvement in communication between users, and between users and producers, of official statistics. The site was successfully launched in February 2012. To date, it has over 700 members from a wide variety of sectors including central and local government, academia, business, the voluntary sector, and the general public, the majority of who were previously unknown to the RSS.

Several topic-based communities are already up-and-running or in development, and have been host to discussions on high profile areas such as inflation measures, the 2011 Census, and national well-being. There has been a great deal of demand for new communities from user groups and producers of official statistics. We expect this to continue.

Although StatsUserNet will, we hope, become the major vehicle for regular and ad hoc user-user and user-producer communications, the role of user groups will remain important in the foreseeable future. It is therefore important that real as well as virtual user groups and networks should exist within major statistical areas of current concern bringing together producers and users to discuss (and, hopefully, resolve) live issues. After a successful meeting last November between producers and users of inflation statistics, a new user group has been set up to cover this area.

It is widely acknowledged, for example through the assessment process, that the effectiveness of engagement with users differs considerably across the GSS. RSS-SU and the National Statistician's Office collaborated to organise an event in March which brought together GSS Theme Group leaders and User Group leads to evaluate current approaches to user engagement and to set a way forward. This built on the work that RSS-SU had already done in drawing up best practice guidance for user engagement, and was the first time a meeting of this sort had been held. A number of areas were identified for follow-up work (see Annex C).

Annex C Improving user engagement event – 20 March 2012

Key points for users

- i. Be proactive in reaching a wide range of users, including non-experts
- ii. To develop and communicate clear priorities, balancing the needs of the range of users
- iii. Evaluate the impact of user group activities on official statistics outputs
- iv. Communicate to producers the positive impact of successful user input
- v. Communicate to producers instances where user views have not been taken into account, and the impact on the user community
- vi. Use online approaches, in particular StatsUserNet, to enable more continuous user/user and user/producer communication, to raise profile and to follow up on events
- vii. Establish virtual communities on StatsUserNet in instances where establishing a formal user group is impractical or overly resource intensive
- viii. Collaborate with other user groups on issues of common concern
- ix. Proactively provide feedback on official statistics outputs, beyond formal consultations
- x. Raise the profile in the GSS of user groups and StatsUserNet (largely through the RSS)
- xi. Seek to involve producers in user group activities
- xii. Collaborate with producers on organising events which reach beyond existing membership
- xiii. Take a role in educating the user community on the breadth of uses of official statistics and approaches for influencing their development

Key points for producers

- i. In addition to formal consultations, explore a variety of different approaches for engaging more continuously with users, such as face-to-face meetings, user groups, and online discussions.
- ii. Explore opportunities for collaboration between business areas, and departments, that have users in common.
- iii. Ensure that engagement is on topics that are intuitive to users. These may not reflect organisational structures in departments.
- iv. Publish details of consultations in advance to give users early notice.
- v. Be more proactive in encouraging user input to consultations (for example through user groups and social media), and publish a summary of how user input has been taken into account.
- vi. Be open and transparent, explaining limitations and how user input has changed outputs.
- vii. Encourage participation in user groups. Provide information on users and user groups on producer websites.
- viii. Work with users to establish user groups and online communities (e.g. on StatsUserNet), and participate in existing groups.
- ix. Consider ways to identify, and communicate with, currently unknown users (e.g. through inviting users to sign up to mailing lists).
- x. Provide users with the opportunity to feed back from the point of access (e.g. a prominent email address, a link to the relevant area of StatsUserNet, or an option to say whether they found what they were looking for and whether it was useful).
- xi. Improve the communication of statistical outputs in terms of content, accessibility and dissemination.
- xii. Produce GSS guidance for user engagement, and publicise examples of good practice.
- xiii. Ensure user engagement is part of induction training and provide on-going training. Share best practice.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

SA(COS)(12)18

Activities of the Government Statistical Service April 2012 to May 2012

Purpose

1. This paper provides the Committee for Official Statistics with an update of Government Statistical Service (GSS) activities from April 2012 to May 2012.

Recommendations

2. The Committee is invited to note the summary of GSS activities for this period.

Discussion

3. Following consideration by the Committee at its May 2010 meeting [SA(COS)(10)13], it was agreed that regular updates would be provided to all future meetings. Throughout this recent period the GSS has been involved in the activities set out below.

Transparency Agenda

4. An Open Data white paper 'the Right to Data' is still being developed through the Cabinet Office white paper steering group. The latest version of the paper has been circulated to the steering group and it is planned for it to be published in June 2012.

Review of the National Statistician's Guidance on Official Statistics

5. Guidance on identifying official statistics was produced for the GSS in 2010. Many producers have still found it difficult to interpret the guidance correctly and following a number of recent issues work is underway to review the guidance.

Review of arrangements for arms length bodies

6. Guidance for HoPs on engaging with arm's length bodies (ALBs) was launched following the recommendations from the ALB taskforce in June 2010. The National Statistician's Office (NSO) is to carry out a light touch review of the guidance over the next few months and will report back any recommendations to the Heads of Profession (HoPs) Steering Group in the autumn. The review will consider issues such as the degree of day-to-day engagement between departments and their ALBs and whether or not all significant outputs are covered by the arrangements.

Quality Assurance Framework

7. Following discussion at the HoPs meeting on 19 March 2012 the National Statistician's Office are continuing to develop a framework for quality assurance taking into account the feedback from HoPs.

Capability

8. Discussions are on-going with Civil Service Learning to develop an online learning curriculum for the Government Statistician Group (GSG) profession, which will link the elements of the new competence framework with appropriate learning activities (online and face-to-face) as outlined in the revised Framework of Statistical Training. This will also dovetail with the generic Civil Service Competency Framework due to go live in April 2013, thus providing a one-stop shop for all the skills and competencies required of a government statistician.

9. Statistical assessment centres for the 2012 second round are underway with consequential Fast Stream assessment taking place in June. Successful candidates will be allocated to departments in July. Departments are already making strong bids for the 2013 Scheme.
10. The demand for statistical officer recruitment has not abated, and regionalised assessment centres are being run to meet the demand.
11. Some departments are also carrying vacancies for higher grade professional statisticians and are now seeking to recruit following the Civil Service wide recruitment freeze (the freeze is still in place but more exemptions are now being granted by ministers). The NSO is working with Departments to support them with these recruitments.

International

12. The National Statistician is attending the Conference of European Statistics and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Committee on Statistics being held in Paris in the first week of June. The UK is presenting papers on the future of the Census and implementation of Fundamental Principles.
13. Currently organisational changes are being planned for the European Statistical System (ESS) which will involve more power for decision-making at the ESS Directors Group level. These changes will mean that there will be a greater need for internal UK coordination and a new monthly report, which will be primarily for ESS Directors meeting attendees, has been developed.
14. Cross GSS consultation is essential for the EU regulatory agenda including a major resistance to basic law for European statistics, ESS five year work programme, demographic statistics for EU voting rights, and harmonisation of data and metadata exchange. All is being closely monitored.

Government Statistician's Conference May 2012

15. The Government Statisticians' Conference, was held in Birmingham and offered an eclectic mix of plenary, panel and workshop sessions and also some very informative 'show and tell' displays from government statistical departments. The event was well attended with over 300 delegates with a good mix of grades. Speakers included Andrew Dilnot, Enrico Giovannini, the Head of IStat (the Italian Statistical Office), Penny Young, the Chief Executive of NatCen and Dave Ramsden, Head of the Government Economic Service.
16. This year's workshop programme covered a far reaching range of topics including the Census, riot statistics, national well-being and data visualisation. There was also a session on international work around the GSS, supported by an international engagement stand. There were some very innovative sessions such as social media and speed networking. Early feedback on the conference has been very positive with 98 per cent of delegates finding the event interesting and worthwhile and 93 per cent claiming to have developed new knowledge and ideas during the event. The NSO will run a programme to repeat the most popular workshops across departments over the next couple of months.

Tim Andrews, National Statistician's Office, May 2012