

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Committee for Official Statistics

Minutes

Tuesday 22 July 2008

Present

Members

Professor Adrian Smith (Chair)
Mr Richard Alldritt
Ms Karen Dunnell
Ms Moira Gibb
Ms Jill Matheson
Professor David Rhind
Sir Michael Scholar

Other Attendees

Mr Mike Hughes

Secretariat

Mr Rob Bumpstead
Ms Celia Reed

Apologies

Professor Paul Wiles

Declarations of Interest

None

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed members to the first meeting of the Committee for Official Statistics (COS)
- 1.2 The Chair advised the committee that this would be his only meeting as Chair since he would be relinquishing his position with the Authority at the beginning of September. The vacancy for Deputy Chair with responsibility for Official Statistics would be advertised shortly.

2 Terms of Reference SA(COS)(08)01

- 2.1 The Chair introduced draft Terms of Reference (TOR). These had been previously submitted to the Board of the Authority. Following discussion further amendments were agreed.
- 2.2 The revised Terms of Reference will be subject to the Chair of the Authority's approval.

3 The UK Statistical System SA(COS)(08)02

- 3.1 Mr. Hughes introduced a paper which described the UK statistical system and the Government Statistical Service (GSS), together with a revised Annex A to the paper.
- 3.2 The committee noted that the paper was helpful to those less familiar with the structure of the system. The list of departments and other bodies in which GSS staff work was discussed (Annex A). The complex structure of the official statistical system, which needed to be seen as including producers of official statistics beyond those that employ GSS staff, was further considered. The following points were made in discussion:
 - there was an important distinction between the product and the producer. Cabinet Office were responsible for specifying those non-crown bodies which may produce official statistics, not the statistics themselves;
 - local authorities were not included as producers of official statistics at this stage. However, local government statistics collected by the Department for Communities and Local Government were included;
 - the entry for the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) also included information about the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS). A separate entry for DIUS would be developed;
 - non-crown bodies were not listed. It would be helpful to incorporate information about non-crown bodies who produce statistics;
 - although the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) were not formally part of the GSS, they should be included as an important statistical producer, alongside bodies like the NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care (IC) and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).
- 3.3 The Committee requested the paper be further developed to include these aspects of the system, with a view to discussion at its next meeting and by the full Authority board.
- 3.4 The Committee noted the measures being taken by the National Statistician to strengthen planning and decision-making within the GSS structure (diagram in Annex B of the paper). Discussion focussed on the planning process, thematic groups and the need for dialogue between producer organisations and users. It was agreed the annex should be further developed to:

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- make clear in the diagram and/or in additional commentary the relationship between ONS (right side of the diagram) and the system committees (left-side);
- explain how the right side of the diagram could be applied to all departments and producer bodies;
- consider further how user groups, including the Statistics Users Forum (SUF) could be incorporated and shown in the structure.

3.5 The Committee discussed progress in establishing the new arrangements and understood that: the Inter-Administration Committee (IAC) was due to hold its second meeting in September; the Cross-Government Professional Issues Committee (CGPIC) was also due to meet in September, and; it was hoped that reformed Thematic Groups would be in place by September too. The Committee requested a progress report be presented at its next meeting.

Action 1 Secretariat to circulate revised Annex A

Action 2 ONS to further develop the paper as indicated in paragraphs 3.2 to 3.5 above for submission to the next meeting of COS and the Authority's Board.

4. Leadership of the GSS SA(COS)(08)03

4.1 Ms Dunnell introduced a paper which described the vision, objectives and priorities for her as Head of the GSS. A revitalisation programme for the GSS was intended to enable the service to better meet the planning, prioritisation and resource challenges it faced, particularly in light of the forthcoming Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR). The committee discussed each aspect of the paper in turn.

Annex A - Vision

4.2 It was agreed that the following points would be amended: 'Point A' to refer to a 'shared' professional community; 'B' to include 'meeting users needs wherever possible'; 'C' to 'E' to include reference to improving accessibility and presentation of statistics, and, improving consistency and coherence across the system.

4.3 The committee understood these objectives would form part of the National Statistician's objectives and agreed it would be desirable for them to be reflected in the objectives of the statistical Heads of Profession (HoPs) too.

Annex B - Objectives and Priorities to deliver the vision

4.4 The Committee agreed that the stimulation and coordination of the *professional statistical community*, capable of focusing on user needs in a joined-up way, was essential and that the recruitment and retention of experienced staff would be a central element of its success. The challenges faced by the GSS in this area were noted. ONS agreed to provide a copy of the GSS HR Strategy.

4.5 The leverage of the Authority and the head of the GSS over departmental *statistical plans* was considered. While the head of the GSS did not have authority to direct, the funding secured for the cross-government initiative to improve migration statistics was an example of how influence could be exercised.

4.6 It was particularly important to maximise the Authority's impact over the CSR process. The paper should therefore be amended to reflect an intention to ensure adequate levels of user engagement were introduced across the whole of the GSS before 2009/10.

4.7 It was also agreed that plans for the Authority's Assessment function to produce a

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monitoring report on horizon scanning should be (i) bought forward and (ii) revised, so as to focus on recommendations for substantive areas of new work rather than the horizon scanning mechanisms themselves.

- 4.8 The *methodology* section should be amended to include a human resource element, reflecting the top-level priority described in the head of the GSS's vision.
- 4.9 The issue of improving *public confidence in official statistics* (PCOS) was a central aim of the Authority, and should be tabled for future discussion by the Authority's Board.
- 4.10 While acknowledging that the *use of statistics in policy making and operational delivery* was primarily an issue for the Government and the GSS, the Committee noted that many public trust issues stemmed from the perceived misuse of statistics in these contexts. The National Statistician's plans to address the issue at a senior level through the recently established Heads of Analytical Research group were welcomed. It was agreed that communication with users and external commentators was a vital element to improving public confidence in statistics, and, recommended that this issue be referred to the Authority for further discussion.
- 4.11 Mr. Hughes described how ONS was leading the work to facilitate statistical *data sharing* between departments, working with the Cabinet Office according to the provisions of the Act. The Office was currently working on four different initiatives and it was hoped that the first set of proposals could be submitted to the Authority in September for discussion, prior to seeking Parliamentary approval of data sharing Orders in the autumn.
- 4.12 The committee considered the many statistical and other benefits that increased data sharing could provide. It was agreed that promoting and championing data sharing could be a principal function for the Authority's non-executive members. A paper further exploring this should be considered by the next meeting of the Authority's board in September.
- 4.13 Finally, the Committee considered the *international* dimension to leadership of the GSS. The benefits to the Authority and the UK system of effective engagement on the international stage were discussed, and, it was agreed it would be useful to include reference to these in the paper.
- 4.14 In summary, the Committee endorsed the National Statistician's proposals as amended.

Action 3 ONS to further develop paper as indicated in paragraphs 4.2 to 4.11 above and submit to the next meeting of COS.

Action 4 ONS to provide the GSS HR Strategy

Action 5 Secretariat to facilitate an Authority discussion on the use of communication with users and external commentators as a central element to improving public trust in statistics

Action 6 ONS to submit data sharing proposals to COS and Authority Board for discussion, including ways in which the non-executive members of the Authority could support the process.

5. Meeting the needs of users SA(COS)(08)04

- 5.1. Mr. Alldritt introduced a paper which proposed that the Committee should approach much of its remit from the perspective of users of statistics. Users should be defined in the widest sense, both existing and prospective, and from inside and outside of

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government. The paper emphasised the need to drive producers of official statistics to significantly increase the integration of identified user needs into their planning and production processes.

- 5.2. Members agreed that this was an important area for the Committee and that it was appropriate for the National Statistician to lead this work, reporting back on progress as part of her regular reports. This strategy fitted well with the wider leadership role for the National Statistician/Head of the GSS as discussed (item 4 above).
- 5.3. Part of this work included having available specific examples of how statistics information benefits the public good. The Committee agreed this was both important in its own right and potentially highly influential to discussions about resources and priorities. The Committee agreed that the National Statistician would invite HoPs and/or Chairs of thematic planning groups to submit specific examples of how statistical information led to public benefit, scope the need for further work and make recommendations accordingly. Progress will be discussed at the next meeting.

Action 7 National Statistician to lead GSS work to reflect user needs in statistical production as described in paragraphs 5.1 to 5.3 above and report progress to next COS meeting.

6. Any Other Business

- 6.1. Mr Hughes provided an update on progress with developing a taxonomy for the Publication Hub. A redesigned structural hierarchy would improve accessibility to the statistics catalogue and improve its search facility. The taxonomy would also be consistent with the reformed structure of planning groups. The Committee endorsed the ongoing work.
- 6.2. A question was raised about the extent to which the taxonomy needed a hierarchical structure rather than simply keywords or labels. ONS agreed to provide further technical advice on this issue, together with information from a recent presentation to the GSS which articulated the thinking behind the taxonomy structure.

Action 8 ONS provide technical advice re taxonomy questions and provide copies of the recent presentation to GSS.

- 6.3. Hard copies of the 2007/08 ONS Annual Report were distributed. Hard copies of the 2008/09 NS Annual work programme would be circulated to members too.

Action 9 Secretariat to distribute 2008/09 NS Work Programme.

- 6.4. The meeting confirmed the intention to publish minutes and papers, once these were agreed.

Action 10 Secretariat to arrange publication of papers on the Authority's website.

- 6.5. The date of the next meeting was 8 September at the Authority's London office.
[Subsequently re-arranged to 13 October, 13:00-15:00, London]

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Committee for Official Statistics

Agenda

Tuesday, 22 July, 2008

Board Room, Statistics House, London, 14.00 – 16.00

Chair: Professor Adrian Smith

Apologies: Professor Paul Wiles

1	Introduction and welcome from the Chair	
2	Terms of Reference	SA(COS)(08)01 Secretariat
3	The UK Statistical System	SA(COS)(08)02 Mr Mike Hughes
4	Leadership of the GSS	SA(COS)(08)03 Ms Karen Dunnell
5	Meeting the needs of Users	SA(COS)(08)04 Mr Richard Alldritt
6	Any Other Business	

Next Meeting: Friday, 10 October, 2008

Statistics House, London, 13:00 - 15:00

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY
COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

SA(COS)(08)01

Terms of Reference

Introduction

1. On 1 April, 2008, the UK Statistics Authority formally assumed its powers under the Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007). The Authority was given the high level objective of “promoting and safeguarding the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good”.
2. At its meeting of 21 February 2008, the Authority agreed to constitute a sub-committee for Official Statistics, to charge this committee with responsibility for oversight of the statistical system, and to report back to the Authority on its work.

Role and responsibilities

3. The role of the Committee for Official Statistics is to provide strategic direction and oversight for the official statistics system. It will consider the *Statistical Service* in its entirety. That is to say, the allocation of resource to statistical work, the production of statistics and the dissemination of those statistics.
4. The Committee will seek to ensure that official statistics are planned and produced in order to serve the public good and hence to inspire confidence and trust in them. The Committee's remit therefore includes:
 - promoting and safeguarding the impartiality, accuracy, relevance, coherence and comprehensiveness of official statistics;
 - promoting and safeguarding good practice in relation to official statistics in accordance with the Code of Practice;
 - monitoring and improving public trust and confidence in official statistics;
 - supporting the Head of the Government Statistical Service (GSS)/the National Statistician in developing and implementing policies in pursuit of these objectives.
5. Specific responsibilities of the Committee include, to:
 - i. advise the Chair and Board of the Authority on the coverage and comprehensiveness of official statistics, including the scope of official statistics and the capacity of the statistical system;
 - ii. advise the Chair and Board of the Authority on engaging with users and influencing producers of official statistics to ensure that official statistics meet the needs of the full range of users;
 - iii. advise the Chair and Board of the Authority on matters related to public confidence and trust in official statistics, including measurement and monitoring;
 - iv. provide an oversight and a challenge function to an annual statistical work programme produced by the National Statistician;
 - v. have regard to the vision, objectives and priorities of the Head of the GSS and provide support in the implementation of this agenda across Government Departments, including providing support in working with Permanent Secretaries;
 - vi. consider Assessment compliance reports (that is reports which designate National Statistics status) and promote the implementation of improvement actions that strengthen compliance and enhance the official statistics system;

SA(COS)(08)01 - Terms of Reference

- vii. commission, review, and revise other Assessment reports (that is reports which consider broad system issues but do not designate National Statistics status) and recommend these reports to the Chair and Board of the Authority;
- viii. (the Committee will *not* consider draft Assessment compliance reports or participate in decisions as to whether Assessments should confer National Statistics designation.)

Meetings

6. The Committee will meet at least quarterly.

Interaction with other committees

7. The Committee will:

- provide written reports to the Chair and Board of the UK Statistics Authority following each meeting of the Official Statistics committee (and oral reports if the meetings of both committees fall on the same day);
- provide other reports to the Chair and Board of the UK Statistics Authority, as agreed with the Chair of the Authority;
- co-ordinate its work with the UK Statistics Authority Board and other Board committees to avoid duplication.

8. The Committee will receive:

- written progress reports from the National Statistician in her role as Head of the GSS seven days before each committee meeting;
- monthly written progress reports from the Head of Assessment;
- other briefing from the Head of Assessment on ad hoc or emerging issues with official statistics such as the committee requires.

Membership

9. The members of the Committee as agreed by the Board of the UK Statistics Authority are:

- the Deputy Chair of the UK Statistics Authority with responsibility for official statistics – Professor Adrian Smith (Chair);
- other non-executive members of the Authority (3) - Sir Michael Scholar, Moira Gibb, David Rhind;
- the National Statistician and Head of the GSS - Karen Dunnell;
- other senior statistical producers (2) - Jil Matheson (ONS), Paul Wiles (Home Office);
- the Head of Assessment - Richard Alldritt

10. Secretariat will be provided by the staff of the UK Statistics Authority with support from the ONS secretariat as required.

Quorum

11. Committee meetings will be considered quorate when five members are present including the Chair or the Chair's delegated nominee.

12. Substitutes will not be permitted to attend Committee meetings unless with express invitation from the Chair.

Secretariat

2 July, 2008

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

SA(COS)(08)02

The UK Statistical System

Purpose

1. This paper describes the essential features of the UK statistical system, and highlights those elements of the system which might pose a particular challenge for this Committee.

Timing

2. For information only, at this stage.

Recommendations

3. The Committee for Official Statistics are invited to:
 - i. note the key features of the UK statistical system which are set below (and in the supporting Annexes), and the challenges they pose;
 - ii. consider the new governance arrangements which have been put in place to complement those devised for the Authority (Annex B);
 - iii. commission any further papers that may be required on this topic

Discussion

4. The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 provides only a partial description of the UK statistical system over which the UK Statistics Authority now presides. The Act incorporates several features retained from earlier statistical reforms but makes no mention, for instance, of the 'Government Statistical Service' which was launched 40 years ago and which, currently, acts as a lynchpin for the whole UK system. The Act also departs from tradition by creating the conditions for expanding the UK statistical system well beyond its historical or traditional borders. This paper provides further details about the new arrangements established under the Act and describes the extent to which that system might pose challenges for the UK Statistics Authority.
5. The UK Statistical system which has evolved since the Second World War can be characterised by four distinct features:

Decentralisation

- 5.1 Whereby Policy Departments retain responsibility for the production of statistics relating to their own areas of responsibility, has been a key feature of the UK statistical system since its inception. It has also been described as both a source of strength for the system (insofar as it keeps statisticians close to their policy customers and maintains statistical expertise across government) as well as a source of weakness (because it can create conflicts of loyalty by requiring government statistician to serve two masters – the needs of their departments, as well as the demands of their profession).

The Government Statistical Service (GSS)

- 5.2 The GSS was established in 1968 and is an umbrella community which is spread across more than 30 separate government departments and agencies and which provides the glue that binds government statisticians together, and counters the centrifugal forces of decentralisation. It is led by a cadre of professional statisticians,

coordinated by ONS from the centre, thereby ensuring that official statistics are managed in accordance with a professional framework. It consists of all those statisticians and other analysts across government, as well as their support staff, who are responsible for the collection, production, analysis and dissemination of official statistics, and who are ultimately responsible to the National Statistician, acting in her capacity as the Head of the GSS, through their own departmental Head of Profession. The Table in Annex A shows the size of the GSS and the extent of its statistical reach. The National Statistician's governance of the GSS is implemented through the new cross-government committee system illustrated in Annex B. Two other features of the GSS are also worth mentioning:

- 5.3 The operational viability of the GSS depends on a network of Heads of Profession known colloquially as 'HoPs'. Every UK Government Department or Agency which has a significant GSS 'presence' - in terms of either its production or use of GSS statistics - has its own designated Statistical Head of Profession, as do each of the three devolved administrations. As well as being accountable to their own Ministers and departmental line managers, and working closely with the heads of the other analytical professions in their departments, Heads of Profession for Statistics are responsible to the National Statistician for the professional competence and quality of the statisticians and statistics which they manage.
- 5.4 On personnel matters, the National Statistician fulfils her role as Head of the GSS with the help of the Statisticians in Government Team (SiGT). SiGT is a dedicated unit positioned within the ONS responsible for setting and maintaining standards across the GSS covering professional recruitment, qualifications, training, development and promotion.

Devolution

- 5.5 The decentralised organisation of official statistics in the UK was further reinforced ten years ago by the Devolution Settlement of 1998 which assigned responsibility for the production of official statistics between the UK Government, and the three separate administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, depending on whether those statistics relate to 'reserved matters' (i.e. matters reserved to the UK Government) or 'devolved matters'. Although all three of the devolved administrations have signed-up to the spirit of the Statistics Act, they have retained the right to mould certain legislative features to suit their own local circumstances – pre-release access being a case in point. Whilst some would argue that devolution has compromised the coherence of statistics across the UK, others would argue that it has made official statistical more relevant to the separate constituencies they serve. A new Inter-Administration Committee (IAC) has been established to oversee this area.

Designation

- 5.6 Since June 2000, when the concept of 'National Statistics' was first launched, each of the statistical products managed by each organisation affiliated to the GSS have been labelled and branded according to whether or not they comply with a professional Code of Practice. Clause 12 of the Act allows all official statistics which were labelled as 'National Statistics' before April 2008 to retain their designation unless, and until, their designation is re-assessed by the Authority's Assessment Team. It remains to be seen whether the compliance regime which prevailed under the previous non-statutory system will stand up to close examination by the Authority's Assessment Team.
- 5.7 As well as retaining the four historical features described above, the Act has also introduced an entirely new dimension by introducing the concept of 'official

statistics'. This concept extends the UK Statistics Authority's remit to cover not only those statistics produced by the GSS, but also all 'statistics' produced by Crown bodies, howsoever defined. In addition, the Act goes even further by extending the boundaries of the UK statistical system, and the UK Statistics Authority's remit, by giving Government Ministers the option to extend the definition of 'official statistics' to embrace, in addition, any statistics produced by any of the Non-Crown Bodies which come under their Ministerial jurisdiction. It is difficult at this early stage to determine what impact this latest reform will have on the system simply because, to date, very few of these additional producer bodies have been identified, and because very little is known about the kinds of statistics they produce. (Annex C provides further details of the different categories of official statistics which now come within the Authority's remit). Here again, it remains to be seen whether this expansion in scope will prove to be an operational challenge for the Authority.

James Denman, National Statistics Policy Group (ONS), July 2008

List of Annexes

- Annex A The size and extent of the UK statistical system**
- Annex B GSS Governance Structure**
- Annex C The different categories of official statistics**

Annex A - The Size and extent of the UK Statistical System

The GSS comprises some 6,500 persons, the vast majority of whom are Civil Servants, about half of whom work in the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The remainder work in 40 other UK Government Departments and Agencies, and in the two devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales, the majority of which have appointed their own Head of Profession for Statistics. About 80% of all professionals in the GSS work outside the ONS alongside their policy colleagues. Although the equivalent staff in Northern Ireland are not affiliated to the GSS, they work very closely with the GSS and share a common professional culture. Together, the GSS manages a wide range of censuses, surveys and data sources from which they produce some 1,600 individual statistical products, about 80% of which are labelled as Code-compliant 'National Statistics'. About four fifths of all official statistics designated as 'National Statistics' are produced by GSS members working outside the ONS in other organisations.

Department Administration Agency	HoP (□)	Number of GSS staff**	of which professional staff	Total Number of Products	of which 'National Statistics' Products	of which Other 'Official Statistics'
Audit Commission		1	1	-	-	-
Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR)	□	80	44	68	22	46
Cabinet Office (CO)	□	3	1	-	-	-
Children, Schools, and Families (Department for) (DCSF)	□	323	100	60	59	1
Communities and Local Government (CLG)	□	77	53	54	31	23
Competition Commission		2	2	-	-	-
Culture, Media and Sport (Department for) (DCMS)	□	12	5	5	3	2
Defence Analytical Services Agency (DASA)	□	200	75	26	22	4
Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Department for) (DEFRA)	□	129	46	69	65	4
Food Standards Agency (FSA)	□	6	5	-	-	-
Forestry Commission (FC)	□	7	3	15	5	10
General Register Office for Scotland (GRO(S))	□	100	17	80	72	8
Health (Department of) (DH)	□	48	48	15	6	9
Health and Safety Executive (HSE)	□	40	17	8	8	-
HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC)	□	650	125	81	79	2
HM Treasury (HMT)	□	27	22	4	4	-
Highways Agency		2	2	-	-	-
Home Office (HO)	□	106	24	35	28	7
House of Commons Library		1	1	-	-	-
Information Centre for Health & Social Care (IC)	□	300	52	59	42	17

Annex A - The size and extent of the UK Statistical System

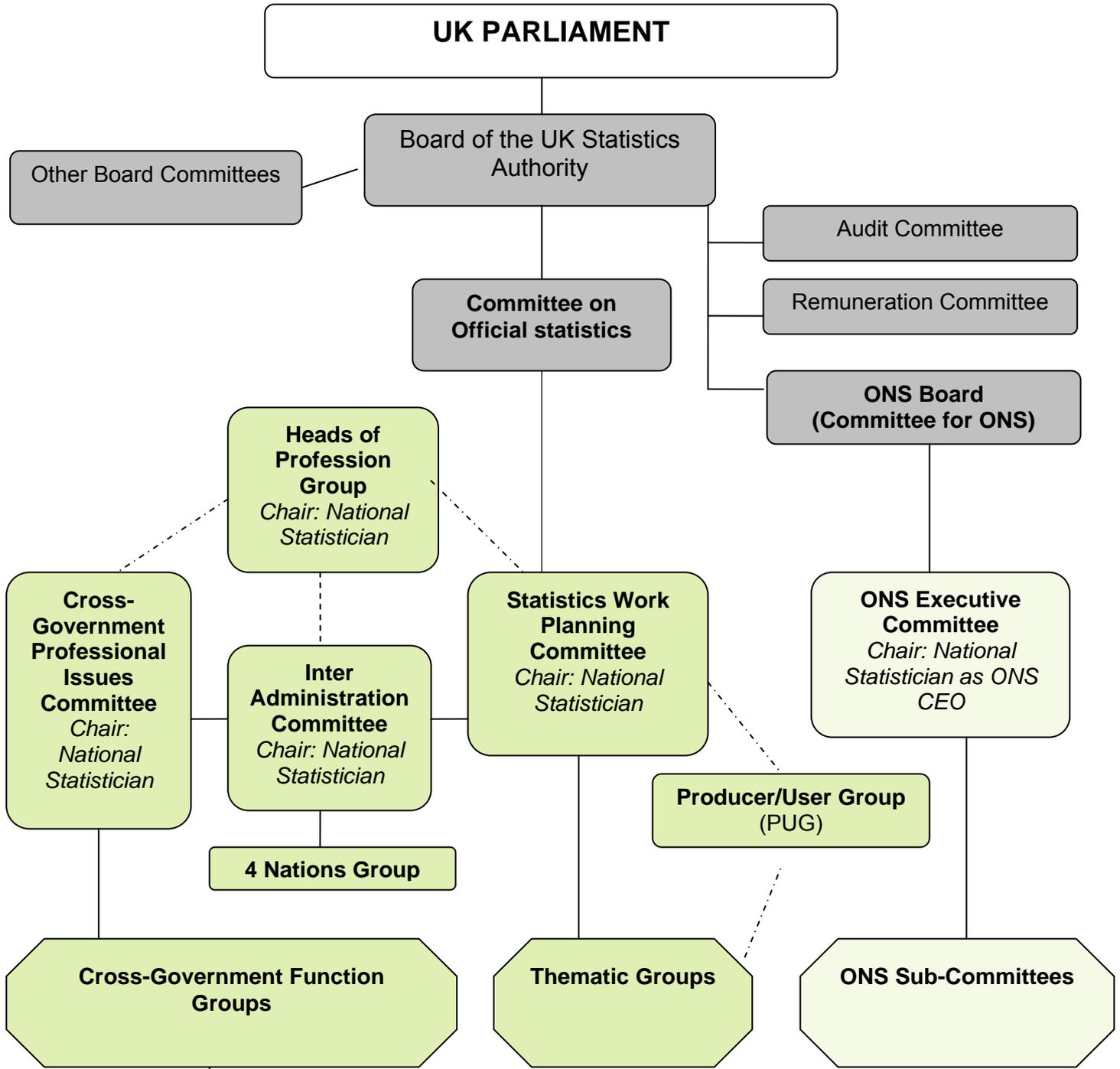
Information Services Division – Scotland (ISD(S))***	□	200	1	-	-	-
Innovation, Universities, and Skills (Department for) (DIUS)	□	(See DCFS)				
Insolvency Service		3	3	-	-	-
International Development (Department for) (DfID)	□	30	26	3	1	2
Local Government Data Unit		1	1	-	-	-
Ministry of Justice (MoJ)	□	65	28	9	5	4
National Audit Office (NAO)		3	3	-	-	-
Office for National Statistics*	□	3,374	219	376	267	109
Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted)	□	20	19	-	-	-
Office of Fair Trading (OfT)		5	5	-	-	-
Office of Manpower Economics (OME)	□	7	7	-	-	-
Office of Rail Regulation		3	3	-	-	-
Office of Telecommunications		1	1	-	-	-
Office of Water Services (OfWat)		2	2	-	-	-
Passenger Focus		1	1	-	-	-
Scottish Government (SG)	□	172	108	139	126	13
Transport (Department for) (DfT)	□	80	42	36	33	3
Valuation Office Agency		1	1	-	-	-
Work and Pensions (Department for) (DWP)	□	362	137	53	51	2
Welsh Assembly Government (WAG)	□	100	54	248	201	47
TOTAL (GSS)		6,544	1,304	1,443	1,130	313
Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)*	□	355	246	160	106	54
GRAND TOTAL		6,899	1,550	1,603	1,236	367

* Numbers exclude Field Staff in ONS and NISRA employed to collect data for social surveys

** All numbers include professional staff affiliated to other Analytical Groups e.g. Economists, Social Researchers, etc

*** See Scottish Government for Product totals

Annex B – GSS Governance Structure



- **GSS Human Resources Committee**
- **GSS Statistical Policy and Standards Committee** (+ Sub-Committee on Data Sharing and Confidentiality)
- **GSS Reporting, Presentation and Dissemination Committee** (+ Sub-Committee on Web Delivery)
- **GSS International Committee**
- **GSS Regional and Geography Committee**
- **GSS Methodology Advisory Committee**

LEGEND	
UK Statistics Authority Committees/Sub-Committees	
Cross-Government Committees	
ONS-only Committees	

Annex C - The Different Categories of 'Official Statistics'**1. Context**

The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 refers to two types of 'statistics' - 'official statistics' (all of which come within the UK Statistics Authority's overall 'monitoring' remit) and a subset of official statistics' called 'National Statistics' - labelled as such because they are deemed to be compliant with the Authority's Code of Practice for Statistics. Although the Act provides a definition of the word 'official', it makes no attempt to define the word 'statistics'.

2. 'Official statistics' - produced by Crown Bodies

In the context of the Act, this term covers all those statistical outputs produced by: (i) the Authority and its executive office - the ONS; (ii) other UK Government departments and agencies; (iii) the Scottish Administration; (iv) A Welsh Ministerial Authority; (v) a Northern Ireland department; and (vi) any other person acting on behalf of the Crown – all of which bodies can be described collectively as 'Crown body producers'. [Note: This definition covers a very large number of public bodies, and goes much wider, therefore, than the portfolio of statistical outputs produced by members of the Government Statistical Service (GSS)].

3. Official Statistics - produced by Non-Crown Bodies

The Act also allows Ministers to specify, through secondary legislation (i.e. via an Order), which of the various non-Crown bodies which come under their jurisdiction produce 'official statistics' so that their statistical products can also be subject to monitoring by the UKSA and be eligible for assessment as 'National Statistics'. This provision was designed to ensure a broad definition of 'official statistics' from the start, as well as a flexible one which can be adapted over time to suit changing circumstances.

4. 'National Statistics'

The Act allows this label to be applied only to a specific subset of 'official statistics' i.e. those that are deemed compliant with the Authority's Code of Practice for Statistics - currently the existing National Statistics Code; but, eventually, the Authority's own Code. In practice, and for some time to come, the label will comprise three basic types:

- **Legacy 'National Statistics'** - any statistical products which obtained their designation as 'National Statistics' before April 2008 in accordance with the arrangements set out in the *Framework for National Statistics (2000)* and which have retained their status, but which have not yet been formally re-assessed by the Authority for compliance with its Code of Practice;
- **Re-assessed 'National Statistics'** - any statistical products which have had their retained 'NS' status confirmed by the Authority after a formal re-assessment of compliance;
- **New 'National Statistics'** - any statistical products which have been nominated by Ministers (or by the National Statistician in the case of ONS) as first-time candidates for 'National Statistics' status; which have been subject to their first formal assessment by the Authority; which have been subsequently certified by the Authority as compliant with its Code of Practice for Statistics; and which, as a result, have been granted 'NS' accreditation by the Authority.

5. The UK Statistics Authority's remit and its Code of Practice

The Authority's overall duty to monitor and report on the production and publication of official statistics means that its remit extends across all official statistics wherever produced, and regardless of whether they are produced by Crown Bodies, or by those Non-Crown Bodies that have been designated as producers of official statistics by Order.

Annex C - The Different Categories of 'Official Statistics'

The standards of best practice set out in the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice (which will also encompass the principles and rules governing pre-release access set out in the Pre-Release Access Order 2008) will apply to all official statistics. However, only existing National Statistics, or statistics nominated for such status, will be formally assessed for compliance with the Authority's Code.

6. A Note on 'Experimental Statistics'

This is a label created and used originally by the ONS, but which has now been adopted by some other Government Departments. The label applies to a particular category of official statistics which fit the definition given in the existing *Protocol on Presentation, Dissemination and Pricing*. It refers, basically, to statistics which are being consciously 'groomed' for NS status when, and if, circumstances permit. Further information on the meaning of the 'Experimental' label can be found by clicking on the following link:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=173>

7. Those 'Experimental statistics' which had not become 'Legacy National Statistics' by 1 April have become, in the context of the Act, 'other official statistics' (albeit with the 'Experimental' label). In the fullness of time, they will have to join the queue of candidates for a formal assessment of compliance by the Authority.

8. Although the concept of 'Experimental statistics' receives no mention in the Act, this label will retain its legitimacy simply by dint of the fact that the Authority's proposed new Code Of Practice encourages producers of official statistics to continue using this concept.

9. Different Categories of Official Statistics

The foregoing means that, in practical (but not legal) terms, the term 'official statistics' will embrace four distinct categories of statistics produced by public bodies (the first two of which are already individually listed on the new 'About the UKSA' website):

- 'National Statistics' - which are certified as Code-compliant (see above) and which can, therefore, bear the NS Kitemark
- GSS-managed statistics that are not 'National Statistics' - a subset of which may be labelled by the GSS as 'Experimental'. [Note: This is the category to which the GSS Logo would previously have applied]
- Other official statistics produced by Crown Bodies but not under the professional management of the GSS [Note: The Home Office informed Parliament last year that an internal audit had revealed that only 12% of the Home Office's 'official' statistics were produced under the auspices of the GSS]
- Statistics produced by non-Crown Bodies, and listed by Ministers in secondary legislation (i.e. an Order) [Note: Those HoPs with an interest in, and most affected by, such Ministerial decisions are unlikely, at this early stage, to know what sort of 'statistics' these non-Crown bodies produce, nor how they are produced]

10. Notwithstanding the above, this will leave a large residue of 'numbers' produced by public bodies which will not be defined as 'official statistics' and which will not, therefore, come within the remit of the Authority.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

SA(COS)(08)03

Leadership of the Government Statistical Service

Issue

1. A vision, objectives and priorities for the Head of the Government Statistical Service for 2008-09 and beyond.

Recommendations

2. The Committee is invited to:
 - i. Endorse the National Statistician's vision outlined in Annex A;
 - ii. Endorse the objectives, and priorities set out in Annex B;
 - iii. Commission further analysis of the barriers to implementation, in particular of the ways in which the Authority might provide support;
 - iv. Commission further work to consider the implications for members of the GSS in departments and the devolved administrations.

Timing

3. Discussion at the first meeting of the Official Statistics Committee will inform subsequent Committee business, and will enable the Head of the GSS to make quick progress.

Discussion

4. The complementary roles of National Statistician, Chief Executive of the Office for National Statistics and Head of the GSS are undertaken by one person. The former two roles are addressed in the Statistics Act, and this is therefore a timely opportunity to refresh the role of the Head of the GSS in the context of efforts to 'revitalise' the GSS.
5. In the past the absence of statutory authority over statistical activities in government departments and agencies has made it difficult for successive National Statisticians to influence the governance of statistics or statistical standards outside their own Offices. At the same time, a range of organisational and managerial issues¹ have led them to focus on the operation of their own Office, arguably to the detriment of the wider statistical service.
6. Whilst the UK Statistics Authority (the Authority) has the remit to "promote and safeguard the production and publication of statistics that serve the public good", the Head of the GSS has an important complementary role to play in advising the Authority and co-ordinating the response of all producers of official statistics to the Authority's guidance.
7. Decentralised statistical systems have real advantages over more centralised ones in providing a responsive and policy-relevant service. But we all recognise that it is not as easy for the decentralised service within UK Government to promulgate and enforce consistent standards and plan on behalf of the wider user community. As the Head of the GSS I want to lead work to build on the strengths, to tackle the challenges facing the UK Government's statistical system and strengthen the relationship on statistical matters between the four administrations in the UK. The following statement (Annex A) summarises the role that I intend to play.

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¹ Successive National Statisticians have dealt with the Pickford Review (1989), the merger of CSO and OPCS into ONS (1996), the introduction of National Statistics (2000), and the Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007).

**Karen Dunnell, Head of the Government Statistical Service
July 2008**

List of Annexes

Annex A The role of the Head of the GSS

Annex B Objectives and priorities

Annex A - Statement by National Statistician on the role of Head of the GSS

The GSS comprises all those people and resources who contribute to the provision of official statistics in the UK.

My vision is of a self-aware and confident GSS network providing a cohesive service, comprising high quality statistics, analysis and advice, to meet the needs of decision makers inside and outside government. In order to realise this vision, my priorities are:

Leadership and management

- a. to lead and manage the GSS as a professional community
- b. to produce a government-wide statistical plan that demonstrably serves the public good

Improvement

- c. to improve the methods, standards and quality of official statistics, including their analysis and commentary
- d. to improve public confidence in official statistics through development of the service and its governance
- e. to improve the use of statistics and statistical analysis in policy making, alongside other analytical evidence
- f. to support all parts of the GSS in exploiting the statistical potential of data held elsewhere in government by making data-sharing a matter of routine
- g. to exert real and lasting influence over international statistical developments in line with agreed GSS perspectives

There is synergy between a number of these priorities, and clearly they will all require sustained effort if they are to be realised - not least to overcome the effects of inertia, as well as structural barriers. I shall address these priorities by:

- chairing the GSS committees that provide leadership to the service and develop statistical policy
- playing an advocacy role with opinion formers, representatives of external users, Heads of other Analytical Groups, Permanent Secretaries and Analytical Champions
- reinforcing the role of HOPs in their employing organisations, supporting them on professional matters, and raising common/strategic issues at the highest levels of government
- developing and promulgating standards and guidance, and supporting their implementation – in relation to user engagement, communication of statistics and the quality of the statistics, media contact, etc – consistent with the Authority's Code of Practice.
- co-ordinating recruitment and training, the sharing of specialist expertise, the development of statistical leadership, and international engagement across the GSS
- strengthening and focusing the support to the GSS from a dedicated ONS team.

Annex B - Objectives and priorities to deliver the vision

The Professional Statistical Community

Objective:

To lead and manage the GSS as a professional community

What success will look like

1. Sufficient numbers of effective and developed staff of all grades in place throughout the GSS – both Professional Statisticians and the wider GSS
2. Statisticians developing their skills and competences in order to improve the quality and effectiveness of official statistics and to maximise their potential
3. Future statistical leaders are identified and developed
4. Statisticians are easily able to move throughout the GSS in order to develop their careers and to ensure the spread of skills and knowledge throughout the community
5. Statisticians will have frequent opportunities to attend events in order to network with each other and other members of the analytical community, thus increasing their knowledge and improve their skills
6. The Head of the GSS and her support staff will regularly consult with, and take into account the views of, other government departments.
7. GSS members will understand and strive for an agreed common purpose and collaborate effectively with each other and other analysts.
8. The GSS is recognised across government and beyond for its professional standards and contribution to public policy making.

Current position

1. The areas above are those identified in a paper produced for the Independence Professional Matters Steering Committee as necessary for the strategic management of the professional cadre of the GSS.
2. The GSS Human Resources Committee (HRC) operates an annual work programme and is working towards developing areas 1 – 6 above.
3. The 2007 Ramsden Review of Professional Support Units recommended that the Statisticians in Government Team (SiGT) should be strengthened and employ a more strategic approach in developing the GSS. The Review recommended that the team should be headed by a more senior member of staff than at present in order to effect change across government. There was also a recommendation that the team be more outward facing, following the best practice of other units.

Deliverables/timescales/owners

1. Report on GSS HRC progress presented to HoPs each year and reported in GSS Annual Report
2. Work agreed, developed and monitored by GSS HRC, which meets up to 6 times a year and comprises representatives from a number of government departments. It is chaired by John Custance of DEFRA and supported by staff in SiGT.
3. Greater linkage with issues in ONS is required. Issues concerning statisticians are developed separately in ONS and GSS and further co-operation between the two is required. This should be co-ordinated by a Director on behalf of Karen.

Barriers

1. Different individuals and departments within the community have conflicting views about issues because of different cultures and situations. This may impact on the ability to agree policies
2. Departments within the GSS may not comply with centrally agreed policies if they feel that it is not in their interests to do so or if the policies are not appropriate for their needs.

3. The Head of GSS needs to engage with stakeholders.

Views/positions of other stakeholders

1. Principal stakeholders are Heads of Profession. Their views may vary, especially those from the devolved administrations or the NHS Information Centre

Resource implications

1. Whilst the GSS HRC work programme is addressing many of the recommendations of the Independence Professional Matters Steering Committee it is likely that additional resources will be required in order to deliver the proposals. In addition, further resources will be required to implement the recommendations of the 2007 Ramsden Review. Provisional estimates are that 3 additional posts are required in SiGT.

Leadership of the GSS – Statistical Plans

Objective:

To produce a government-wide statistical plan that demonstrably serves the 'public good'.

What success will look like

1. an approach to planning that enjoys the trust and confidence of its stakeholders, which will in turn lend legitimacy to the plans, decisions and direction of the statistical service
2. a regular and open engagement with all stakeholders, to provide the information necessary to determine user needs, both short-term and long-term
3. an effective prioritisation processes
4. evaluation and review procedures, to ensure that plans remains relevant

Current Position

1. The National Statistics planning process is characterised by the following:
 - a lack of strategic direction
 - the National Statistician having no authority to direct departmental resources other than for her own
 - it has proved virtually impossible to produce coherent plans across the disparate government departments
 - devolved administrations have and need their own planning and governance arrangements
 - confusion between planning within UK Government and inter administration issues resulting in neither set of issues being planned effectively
 - theme Working Groups have not played the role that had been expected, in this regard.
2. This has contributed to some high profile instances where we have 'failed' our stakeholders. Recent examples include:
 - the inability of producers of migration statistics to meet the needs of policy makers, resulting in the National Statistician setting up a special task force
 - the unannounced cuts by ONS to the sample size of the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings, which resulted in an outcry amongst users.

Deliverables/Timescales/Owners

1. New governance arrangements for the GSS. Senior cross-government committees will be introduced, chaired by the National Statistician, to provide strategic direction to statistical planning activity, and to influence departmental planning. These committees will be introduced during 2008/09.
2. A new top level Inter Administration Committee will be established to provide strategic direction on inter administration issues
3. New guidance on best practice to ensure adequate levels of user engagement across the GSS. To be introduced across the GSS during 2009/10
4. Complementary statistics plans aimed at providing:
 - a high-level strategic plan for the UK statistics system, published every 3 - 5 years which will focus on cross-cutting issues
 - annual statistics plans for each administration and for inter administration issues focusing upon short-term priorities, innovations and developments. New planning arrangements will be developed during 2008/09 with a view to delivering these annual statistics plans for the period 2009/10.
 - detailed departmental annual statistical plans within UK Government for 2009 signed off by the appropriate 'analytical champion'

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5. An approach to accounting across the GSS that will help us identify statistical service costs and thus prioritise our work – 2008-09
6. Develop stakeholder satisfaction survey/response mechanisms - 2009
7. Develop some metrics (2009) to determine the success or otherwise of the other key objectives:
 - anticipate and plan for the major challenges to be faced
 - provide value for money
 - produce relevant and trusted statistics
 - increase the influence of statistics in decision making
 - provide effective feedback mechanisms for stakeholders

All deliverables are the responsibility of National Statistics & International Division, accountable to the National Statistician and HoPs/Chiefs other than issues within devolved administrations.

Barriers

1. The decentralised nature of the UK statistics system, in which HoPs serve two masters - policy colleagues operationally, and the National Statistician professionally
2. A weak GSS brand throughout government, with statisticians having little influence within their departments, and the National Statistician's influence with fellow Permanent Secretaries being limited
3. The distance between ONS and policy colleagues

Views/Positions of other stakeholders

1. UK Government users want to see evidence of a priority setting process based on sound financial decisions - particularly the Bank of England and HM Treasury – and also want their needs to be given highest priority
2. Non-Government users have expressed for some time their view of the need for a more transparent process, where their views expressed are considered and discussed, even if not acted upon
3. The Authority has expressed a need to improve stakeholder engagement so there is a need for us to respond

Resource implications

The resource implications for improved planning processes are negligible. This is all about working smarter with the resources currently at our disposal.

Leadership of the GSS – Methodology, Standards & Quality

Objective:

To improve the methodology, standards and quality of official statistics, including their analysis and commentary.

What success will look like

1. All official statistics to meet known user needs, at an identified level of quality required for their purposes, and represent value for money
2. Programme of high level quality assurance by self assessment of methodology, standards (including classifications and harmonised definitions) and quality
3. Programme of in-depth quality assurance of methodology, standards and quality
4. Monitoring of (2) and (3) to identify and disseminate best practice
5. Maintenance, extension and promotion of methodological best practice and standards for official statistics
6. All official statistics outputs to have published quality output measures
7. All official statistics processes and outputs to have associated documentation

Current position

1. The status is not known on the prevalence of known user needs knowledge across the GSS.
2. A GSS self assessment checklist (GSSAC) has been previously developed and piloted. With some modification it could be used as a tool for high level quality assurance by self assessment of methodology, standards and quality.
3. National Statistics Quality Reviews were previously put on hold. A programme of in-depth quality assurance now needs to be initiated. The approach could focus on problems areas identified by GSSAC.
4. There has been little central monitoring and collation of previous reviews especially in relation to methodology, standards and quality.
5. Methodological best practice and standards are currently disseminated via the web.
6. There are no central records about the production and dissemination of quality output measures across the GSS.
7. There are no central records about the prevalence of process and output documentation across the GSS.

Deliverables/timescales/owners

1. Initiation of high level quality assurance by self assessment using GSSAC. GSSAC could include self assessment of known user needs, statistical methods and processes, standards, compliance with the code of practice, documentation, quality measures, methods of analysis, statistical commentary and possibly burden costs. The Quality Centre within ONS could initiate, oversee, monitor, collate, and disseminate best practice. To begin in 2008.
2. Further work is required in defining quality assurance, developing a programme of in-depth quality assurance of methodology, standards and quality, and collating official statistics information on the prevalence of process and output documentation.
3. Government departments and devolved administrations to produce and publish quality output measures as defined in the GSS Quality Guidelines.

Barriers

1. GSS commitment and competing priorities particularly in the face of weak user demand in some areas.
2. Staff resources
3. Delays in collating evidence to identify and disseminate best practice and lack of central expertise.

4. Failure to identify what best practice is, particularly where there are practical limitations to what can be achieved

Views/positions of other stakeholders

1. The UK Statistics Authority is likely to view the above proposals positively as they align with their own objectives. They may ask for evidence of reviews covering methodology, standards and quality of official statistics during designation assessments.
2. Other stakeholders are likely to view high level self assessment positively as a key activity in preparation for designation reviews. They may regard the in-depth quality assurance as an unnecessary overhead.

Resource implications

This has resource implications for all producers of statistical outputs but work aligns with preparation for designation assessments and the objectives of the UK Statistics Authority to promote and safeguard (a) the quality of official statistics, (b) good practice in relation to official statistics.

ONS has recently created a GSS Methodology Consultancy Service to support the GSS in improving methodology, standards and quality. There are also significant resource implications for the Quality Centre within ONS.

Leadership of the GSS – Public Confidence in Official Statistics

Objective:

To improve public confidence in official statistics through development of the service and its governance

What success will look like:

1. Improvements in the key indicators derived from the omnibus Public Confidence in Official Statistics (PCOS) module and Scottish Social Attitudes Survey- %s believing that our figures are accurate, %s believing that figures are compiled without political interference, and overall assessment of the range of statistical series asked about
2. Improvements in the assessments of official statistics and the quality of the service, provided by a panel of non-governmental opinion formers
3. Improvements in the assessments of official statistics and the quality of the service, provided by government departments in their Service Level Agreement reports
4. Improvements in the proportion of broadly positive press coverage
5. A fully operational, highly-functional Internet Statistics Publication Hub, and new style press conferences – and external recognition of this separation of statistical releases from policy comment, plus parallel arrangements in devolved administrations

Current position

1. Public confidence in official statistics is low, and the latest module shows results almost identical to those in 2004. Key aggregates (2008) are:
 - a. 20% believing that figures are compiled without political interference
 - b. 26% believing that official statistics are generally accurate
2. The views of opinion formers were explored by Market & Opinion Research International on behalf of the Statistics Commission on 2004. Whilst the results were not quantitative, they do lend themselves to a summary assessment, and were a key input to the PCOS strategy. Follow up activity could include establishing a panel of opinion formers, which would help explore changes over time.
3. SLAs will continue to be a feature, perhaps more important in future, of ONS' relationship with government departments. These SLAs involve an annual assessment of ONS' performance, in qualitative terms and also a quantitative score (together with an estimate of the 'trend').
4. Press coverage is not currently monitored. But by doing so, and classifying references as positive/neutral/critical, baselines could be established. This would also help identify the views expressed in specific media outlets, and views by topic.
5. Although a cross-GSS group developed a PCOS strategy in 2006 – founded on improved communication, better engagement with stakeholders, improved accessibility, quality improvement – it has not been systematically implemented in UK Government. Despite the changes in the organisation of statistics since 2006, the key elements of the strategy still appear to be relevant. It needs to be driven forward by the Head of the GSS and on her behalf

Deliverables / timescales / owners

1. An annual report to the Authority, summarising the latest information gleaned by the above means, and progress in implementing the strategy itself.
2. The Authority, and in the first instance, the Committee for Official Statistics, would take ownership of the results, and would provide strategic guidance on priorities.
3. The whole process should be coordinated by the Director of NSPG, on behalf of the Head of the GSS. The different strands in the PCOS strategy need to be owned by the relevant Deputy Director, and this work should feature in their Performance Agreement.

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Barriers

1. This is a challenging objective, and it has to be recognised that external events can negatively influence the public's views of official statistics. Nevertheless, the Head of the GSS cannot avoid the challenge.
2. Establishing a panel of opinion formers.
3. Adversarial political system and critical media

Views / positions of other stakeholders

1. The Authority is likely to view the above proposals positively, as they are consistent with the Authority's own objectives.
2. Other stakeholders, inside and outside government, are likely to welcome the opportunity to feed their views directly into the heart of ONS.

Resource implications

Little additional resource is required. The activities described above should be implemented at a working level by Stakeholder Management Branch as part of its new remit in relation to the ONS Stakeholder Engagement strategy (though recognising that this work on behalf of the Head of the GSS would have a GSS-wide focus).

Running the PCOS module in alternative years would cost, on average, about £15k per annum.

Leadership of the GSS – Use of Statistics in Policy Making and Operational Delivery

Objective:

To improve the use of statistics in policy making and operational delivery, alongside other analytical evidence

What success will look like

1. That policy makers will routinely use evidence and analytical expertise and techniques when devising and evaluating policies
2. That all policy departments will appoint a senior analyst or analytical champion on departmental boards
3. That Civil Service businesses will routinely use evidence and analytical expertise when evaluating the effectiveness of their operational delivery
4. That all analytical professions will work together to ensure clear messages reach the policy makers
5. That policy makers proactively seek enhancements in the evidence base and make such demands of the GSS

Current position

1. The capability reviews have shown that there is a mixed position in departments. Out of seventeen departments assessed, three have urgent development needs in the category 'basing choices on evidence' and three have development needs. Eleven have been assessed as strong or well placed
2. Some departments have appointed or are planning to appoint cross disciplinary heads of analysis
3. Support for the initiative from the Head of the Civil Service
4. Analysis and Use of Evidence is one of the core Professional Skills for Government skills required of all civil servants of Grade 7 and above. This requires staff to recognise the need for using evidence when devising policy or managing operational delivery and understanding that evidence
5. Heads of all Professions are currently considering the use of greater professional evidence
6. In Scotland a cross disciplinary heads of analysis structure has existed for some time

Deliverables/timescales/owners

1. The Heads of the Analytical Professions, including the National Statistician, are now meeting regularly to discuss how these issues should be tackled and propose ways forward. GSS HoPs should discuss the forward agenda of the Heads of Analytical Profession meetings.
2. The professional analytical support teams also meet regularly in order to support the Heads of Analysis
3. Annual conference developed for Heads of the Analytical Professions and analytical champions
4. Report produced on 2007 survey of analysts
5. Areas to be developed include improving the use of evidence in departments, improving the allocation of analytic resources and joining up across professions

Barriers

1. Permanent Secretaries need to be convinced of the importance of this work and appoint board level analysts or analytical champions
2. Some confusion in departments about the roles of different analysts
3. No additional resources in analytical support teams to develop this work
4. Policy advisors may not want evidence to get in the way of a good policy!
5. It is frequently the case that policy makers and/or analysts do not fully understand the

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full potential of the analytical contribution and processes to identify this are imperfect. So the contribution is often well short of what it might be

Views/positions of other stakeholders

1. All analysts are generally supportive of the initiative. We need to persuade policy makers and other non analysts of its importance. Better processes for collaboration will be needed

Resource implications

1. At present this work is being done within existing resources by staff in the existing analytical support teams. However because of the size of SiGT most of the work is carried out by staff in the other teams. Additional staff resources (at a senior level) would enable the statistician community to have more influence on the agenda.

Leadership of the GSS – Data Sharing

Objective:

To support all parts of the GSS in exploiting the statistical potential of data held elsewhere in government by making data-sharing a matter of routine.

What success will look like

1. Full exploitation of the existing legal and policy framework for sharing data for statistics.
2. Where the existing legal framework is found to be inadequate, an orderly flow of secondary legislation successfully laid before Parliament to allow data sharing between ONS and public authorities.
3. Culture of data sharing for statistical purposes embraced by Ministers and GSS, expressed through a common policy.
4. Ethical oversight of data sharing is in place and is contributing to public confidence in data sharing for statistics.
5. The Authority Report(s) able to reflect the above and that, in turn, is commended by Parliamentary Committees to whom it reports.

Current position

1. List of strategic priorities developed by GSS, approved by the Authority and presented to Minister for the Cabinet Office.
2. Political interest in improving migration & population statistics has created momentum amongst relevant Departments (eg the Department for Work & Pensions, HM Revenue & Customs, the Department for Children, Schools & Families).
3. Reducing administrative burden on businesses by sharing of HMRC data on a longer timescale but also capable of arousing Ministerial interest.
4. Other more routine data sharing (eg business data from ONS to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment In Northern Ireland and Bank of England; Joint Unemployment & Vacancies Operating System data from DWP to ONS) at different stages of development.
5. Governance of data sharing and confidentiality under review.

Deliverables/timescales/owners

1. Annual Report by GSS to the Authority and thereafter to Parliament(s).
2. High level Steering Group now established and chaired by the Director of the National Statistics and Policy Group . Other key members include Director of Sources and Director of Demography and Regional Statistics. Will fit into other plans for governance of GSS and Statistics Policy Committee.
3. Preparation of proposals to be jointly owned by Deputy Directors of the National Statistics & International Division (NSID) and of the Administrative Sources & Integration Division (ASID).

Barriers

1. High profile privacy and data security concerns
2. Political support is essential to help to foster a culture across government that data sharing for statistical purposes is a good thing.
3. Head of GSS needs to respond to emerging statistical and analytical needs by encouraging early consideration of data sharing.
4. Need to be wary of Government Departments being unwilling to cooperate unless data sharing is two-way.
5. Head of the GSS to ensure a co-operative approach to data sharing that serves the wider public good is not subsumed by competing departmental pressures and priorities.

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View/positions of other stakeholders

1. The Authority support is essential and expected to be forthcoming.
2. Principal other stakeholders are Government Departments across administrations (and their Ministers) who vary in attitude to data sharing. Successful working with key Departments like DWP and HMRC may create an improved climate.

Resource implications

1. No present need for additional resources for strategic activity in relation to data sharing as present level of activity able to be supported by NSID/ASID.
2. Operational aspects would bring resource implications in terms of determining Information Technology requirements, security standards, appropriate training etc
3. A new political imperative (on a similar scale to improving population & migration statistics) would place a severe strain on those resources

Leadership of the GSS - International

Objective:

To exert real and lasting influence over international statistical developments in line with agreed GSS perspectives.

What success will look like

1. Official membership of influential European and international statistical organisations/bureaux - United Nations Statistical Committee (UNSC), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Committee on Statistics (C/STAT), European Partnership Group (PG), Eurostat Statistical Programme Committee (SPC), and Director Generals of Institutes of National Statistics (DGINS).
2. Active participation in these organisations (plus others including International Monetary Fund (IMF), International Labour Organisation (ILO), and European Council) to provide a coordinated and strategic GSS input. This is achieved by engaging with stakeholders, promoting cooperation, ensuring effective contributions (including work on definitions, methodology and legislation), challenging the status quo, and contributing to shaping the future direction of international statistical policy.
3. Enabling an effective GSS contribution to statistical capacity building programmes in developing countries.
4. Championing the use of "international best practice" across the GSS, including the implementation of the European Statistical Code of Practice and its underlying principles.
5. Promoting the sharing of international information and experience across the GSS and encouraging the healthy exchange of GSS staff with international counterparts.
6. Recognising, understanding and solving statistical pressures and conflicts which arise between national, European, and global statistical systems.

Current position

1. The National Statistician is an official member of UNSC bureau, OECD C/STAT, European PG, Eurostat SPC, and DGINS.
2. The National Statistician actively participates - but with greater resources, more emphasis and priority could be given to challenging current thinking and influencing development in line with GSS wants and needs.
3. Some coordination of Commonwealth Statistical Conference takes place (re travel fund) and we have some interaction with the Department for International Development (DFID). ONS has no financial commitment to engage in statistical capacity building, and recent headcount/resource pressures have minimised commitments to get involved. DFID are considering how to call upon ONS expertise more effectively.
4. Some activity through Peer Review process and via GSS International Committee. More could be done here – possibly in the context of Assessment.
5. Improved coordination through GSS International Committee and some isolated examples of international exchange. More could be done here.
6. The National Statistician is aware of tensions, mainly through active participation in high-level international events. Issues are dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

Deliverables/timescales/owners

1. UNSC meets for one week every February in New York. OECD C/STAT meets for two days every June alternating between Paris and Geneva. European PG currently meets in Voorburg (the location of the Chair) around four times a year. SPC also meets around four times year, usually in Luxembourg. DGINS is hosted annually by National Statistical Institutes across the EU. Participation at these events usually involves the National Statistician, the DfID HOP, and the Director of NSID.

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Additionally, appropriate GSS representation is sought for DGINS. ONS International Relations Branch coordinates all briefing and logistics.

2. As above.
3. Deliverables: Guidance on how GSS can improve its statistical capacity building programmes. Timescales: TBC. Owners: National Statistician, HOPs and NSPG.
4. Deliverables: High level of compliance with ESCOP across GSS through good performance at Peer Review, and by means of Assessment. Timescales: TBC. Owners: National Statistician, HOPs and NSPG.
5. Deliverables: More exchange of staff across GSS staff internationally (and clear strategy for this). Continuing and strengthening GSS International Committee. Timescales: TBC. Owners: National Statistician, HOPs and NSPG (with some HR involvement).
6. Deliverables: Strategies to handle events and problems that arise. Timescales: n/a. Owners: National Statistician, HOPs and NSPG.

Barriers

1. Ensuring continuity of membership when National Statistician changes.
2. National work pressures preventing honouring of international commitments.
- 3, 5. Time. Financial commitment. Resource levels.
- 4, 6. No significant barriers.

Views/positions of other stakeholders

1. Other National Statistical Institutes welcome the UK's membership of, and active participation in, international statistical organisations. The UK statistical system is regarded as unusual (and of interest) in the extent of its decentralisation and devolution, and is well regarded for its commitment to quality, methodological development and (since the Statistics Act) its innovative governance.
2. DFID would welcome more engagement with GSS.

Resource implications

1. Travel and subsistence. Not significant.
2. As above.
3. Likely to generate net income but needs to be underwritten. Diversion of resources from national to international activity can be beneficial for staff morale, retention and development but - in an environment where there is little spare national capacity - may cause short-term deterioration to national work programmes.
4. Not significant.
5. Greater exchange of staff will incur up front costs.
6. Not significant.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY
COMMITTEE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

SA(COS)(08)04

Meeting Users' Needs

Purpose

1. This paper argues that the Committee should approach much of its remit from the perspective of the users of statistics - both existing and prospective, inside and outside government.

Timing

2. An early decision on the point at issue would be helpful in laying the ground to build a constructive dialogue with the user community and so develop their trust in the Authority and the new statutory regime.

Recommendation

3. The Committee is invited to agree that it will focus a significant amount of attention on whether the producers of official statistics are sufficiently investigating and documenting user needs and taking account of these identified needs in their internal planning processes - and being seen to do so.

Discussion

4. The draft Code of Practice says (Principle 2) "The planning, production and dissemination of official statistics should be managed so as to meet the requirements of informed decision-making by government, public services, business and wider community..". And under this principle:
 - "Under the guidance of the UK Statistics Authority adopt systematic statistical planning arrangements...that reflect the obligation to serve the public good"
 - "Investigate and document the needs of users of official statistics, the use made of existing statistics and the types of decision they inform, and the key areas of emerging demand and unmet need. Take these into account in the planning process and report the results."
 - "When changes are being considered to official statistics, consult users effectively..."

5. In March 2007, the Statistics Commission published a report entitled 'The Use Made of Official Statistics'. An extract from the summary follows:

"Were a balance sheet for official statistics to be prepared, the costs would be clear enough. The benefit, or value, would however be found to be much more diffuse and harder to treat in traditional accounting terms. Given this, it is possible that the vital asset that official statistics represent is undervalued in public sector planning processes. And we observe that little systematic consideration is given to how the public value could be maximised.

"Accounting (albeit informally) for public value potentially offers a new approach to determining priorities for official statistics – introducing a framework for measurement which has user requirements at the centre. We would like to see progress towards a statistical planning system which builds on this conceptual framework. This means planning would involve genuine engagement with many

users, taking account of their needs and reflecting them, as much as possible, in service delivery.

"We believe it is important to move away from a culture which seems, almost instinctively, to prioritise the use of statistics by central government, important as that clearly is, above the use by large numbers of local, voluntary and private sector bodies. Of course, these two constituencies often require the same information but there can be some significant differences of emphasis. For example, the local user may care more about having local information and less about completeness or consistency of national coverage.

6. Bearing these arguments in mind, the responsibility of the Authority for promoting the 'public good' can be seen to be essentially the same thing as ensuring that official statistics are collected and presented in ways that best meet the needs of users in terms of informing decision-making in all sectors of society.
7. Of course, complete knowledge of what would best meet user needs is an unrealistic goal and this argument is sometimes cited as a reason not to invest greatly in exploring the needs of users. However, evidence of the use made of statistics in public-interest decision-making, as set out elsewhere in the Statistics Commission report (example at Annex A), is a powerful way of demonstrating the value of official statistics to those in government departments etc who take decisions on funding statistical work. Such evidence is also likely to be influential in setting priorities, for example in terms of the balance of resources between collection of data and the communication of messages from those statistics to the users.
8. It is a matter for discussion as to whether sufficient work is currently invested across the statistical service in understanding the use made of statistics and the related needs of users. One option for the Committee would be to invite evidence that producers of statistics are fully exploring these matters and making recommendations accordingly.

Richard Alldritt, Head of Assessment
July 2008

List of Annexes

Annex A Example from the Statistics Commission report *The Use Made of Official Statistics*

Annex A - Example from the Statistics Commission report *The Use Made of Official Statistics*

Powergen

- Powergen is part of E.ON – a large power and gas company based in Germany. It is one of the UK's largest energy suppliers, the second largest electricity generator and owns the second largest distribution network. It is governed by a board of directors.
- The Customer Insight Team uses many official statistics (eg Census data, Expenditure and Food Survey data, Department for Work & Pensions benefit claimant information, Index of Multiple Deprivation) along with commercial and internal data sources.
- The data are used to monitor customer profitability and to model customer credit risk to the company. Census data on unemployment and morbidity are combined with internal data on energy consumption to indicate areas where people are at home because of unemployment (temporary state) and areas where people are at home because of long term limiting illness (more permanent state). The latter constitute more of a credit risk as ability to pay might be more limited. Such information is used to monitor trends to inform business decisions.
- Another example is the internal research carried out to try to target the 'fuel poor' to encourage their take up of energy efficiency measures (eg loft insulation). The research combined internal data (eg number of customers, individual energy consumption, comparative neighbourhood consumption data and past energy efficiency take up) with commercial and official sources (eg Census for information on central heating (amongst others), Index of Multiple Deprivation, benefits claimants and income estimate data). This found that take-up of promotional energy efficiency measures was weighted towards rural and/or more prosperous areas. The research provides a basis for trying to identify disadvantaged households where take up is low but need might be high.