

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Minutes

**Meeting of Friday 17 April 2009
Board Room, Statistics House, Newport**

Present

UK Statistics Authority

Sir Michael Scholar (Chair)

Lord Rowe-Beddoe (Deputy Chair, ONS)

Professor Sir Roger Jowell (Deputy Chair, Official Statistics)

Mr Richard Alldritt

Mr Partha Dasgupta

Professor Steve Nickell

Professor David Rhind

Ms Jil Matheson (ONS - for Ms Dunnell)

Secretariat

Mr Robert Bumpstead

Mr Mervyn Stevens

Other Attendees

Mr Peter Benton (Census, ONS) (item 5)

Mr Richard Laux (Monitoring and Assessment, UK Statistics Authority) (items 6 to 9)

Mr Dennis Roberts and Ms Pam Davies (Prices Division, Sources Directorate, ONS)
(item 10)

Apologies

Ms Karen Dunnell

Ms Moira Gibb

Mr Steve Newman

Minutes of the UK Statistics Authority Meeting 17 April 2009

1. Apologies

- 1.1 Apologies had been received from Ms Karen Dunnell, Ms Moira Gibb and Mr Steve Newman.
- 1.2 The Chair informed the meeting that Sir Alan Langlands had, with great regret, tendered his resignation from the Board of the Authority following his recent appointment as Chief Executive of the Higher Education Funding Council for England. The Board expressed their good wishes to Sir Alan in his new role and their thanks to him for his service to the Authority.

2. Declarations of interest

- 2.1 In respect of item 10 - Governance of the Retail Price Index (RPI) - Professor Rhind declared an interest as a pensioner of Universities Superannuation Scheme and a trustee of the Bank of England Pension Fund. Other members of the Board who are recipients of RPI-related payments noted their interest.

3. Minutes and matters arising from the previous meeting

- 3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting on 20 March 2009 were accepted as a true and fair account of that meeting.
- 3.2 Mr Alldritt advised the meeting that the protocol specifying the appropriate roles of producers and assessors of Official Statistics was still to be completed.

4. Reports from Committee Chairs Office for National Statistics (ONS) Board

- 4.1 Lord Rowe-Beddoe reported on the meeting of the ONS Board held on 2 April 2009. In addition to considering the usual monthly management and financial information the Board had also received updates on Information Technology (IT) and property estate issues. The meeting had considered a paper which reported on progress and plans with regard to a methodological review of the Retail Sales Index (RSI) and had reviewed a draft of the ONS Section of the Authority's Annual Report for 2008/09.
- 4.2 Lord Rowe-Beddoe also reported on the session of the Public Administration Select Committee held on 26 March 2009 when he, Ms Dunnell and Mr Alldritt gave evidence with regard to the publication in February 2009 of ONS migration and labour force statistics.

5. Census 2011 User and Output Plans [SA(09)15]

- 5.1 Mr Benton presented a paper which outlined ONS plans for user engagement and delivery of outputs for England and Wales from the Census 2011. The key aims of the Census Outputs Strategy - which it was intended would be completed in June 2009 - would include: outputs free at the point of delivery; increased use of proven new technology (particularly the internet) to provide flexible outputs with various levels of aggregation; readier comparison with 2001 by the use of stable geography; publication of a pre-release output prospectus and greater harmonisation across the UK.
- 5.2 The three Census Offices in the UK would be using an open forum on a website to seek opinions from hard to reach groups as well as continuing to consult with well-established user-groups. The meeting noted progress and the strategic direction for the project.
- 5.3 The Board further discussed prospects for creation of a single, enduring National Address Register, and considered the present situation unsatisfactory. It was

Minutes of the UK Statistics Authority Meeting 17 April 2009

agreed to remit the matter to the Committee for Official Statistics (COS).

6. Engagement with the Government Statistical Service (GSS) [SA(09)16]

- 6.1 Mr Alldritt presented a paper which included proposals and a draft policy statement for the on-going development of the Authority's relationship with the Government Statistical Service (GSS). The meeting considered this initiative, considered textual amendments and agreed that a further draft of the paper be remitted to the COS.

7. Media Coverage of Official Statistics [SA(09)17]

- 7.1 Mr Laux introduced a paper which included an analysis prepared by the Monitoring and Assessment Team of how the media had reported various official statistics stories over the last six months. The paper included a draft Monitoring and Assessment Note giving guidance to the GSS on best practice for engagement with the media.
- 7.2 The meeting noted the paper and asked for further analytical work to be done in order that the Authority could consider how best to provide guidance and support to the GSS on media-handling of statistical releases. Consideration should also be given to the training implications of any such guidance.

8. Regulatory Regimes [SA(09)18]

- 8.1 Mr Laux presented a paper which asked the Authority to consider lessons for the Authority from the recent experience of other regulatory bodies and, the extent to which such lessons might affect decisions about strategy, resource allocation and the relationship of the Authority's Central Office with ONS.
- 8.2 The meeting agreed that the Authority should seek to learn from the experience of other regulators but should first learn lessons from its own experience of actual operational activity, which was still at an early stage. It was also agreed that the Head of Assessment should undertake a skills review for the Monitoring and Assessment activity and should initiate systematic discussions with other organisations with broadly similar roles.
- 8.3 Risks across the statistical system were also considered. It was agreed that work to assess risk across the GSS, led by the National Statistician, be considered by the Authority's Audit Committee.

9. Progress Report on the Assessment Programme [SA(09)19]

- 9.1 Mr Laux reported on progress on the initial programme of assessments. Fifteen assessments were at various stages in the production process. The assessment of statistics from the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System was at the most advanced stage and a draft report would be considered by the next meeting of the COS.
- 9.2 The meeting noted progress and confirmed that a review of the process in the light of operational experience should be carried during the Summer with the aim of increasing the efficiency of the process for all concerned. It was agreed that the pace of the assessment programme would need to be considerably accelerated after the summer review.
- 9.3 The Board considered resourcing and planning of the Assessment work and requested further information in due course.

10. Governance of the Retail Price Index (RPI) [SA(09)20]

- 10.1 Mr Roberts presented a paper which gave the historical context to the RPI and

Minutes of the UK Statistics Authority Meeting 17 April 2009

advised the Authority of its responsibilities under the *Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007)* for the governance of its production and development. The meeting agreed to establish a Prices Advisory Committee under the Chair of the National Statistician to advise the Authority on methodology and improvements to this measure.

11. UK Statistics Authority Annual Report - Drafts and Outlines of Chapters One and Two [SA(09)21]

11.1 Mr Bumpstead introduced a paper which included an outline of the Authority's Annual Report and Accounts for 2008/09 and drafts of the Chair's Report and Scrutiny chapter. The meeting welcomed the progress made and agreed that detailed comments should be sent to the Secretariat

12. House Price Indices - Update

12.1 Ms Matheson reported that - further to the letter that the Authority Chair had written to the Secretary of State for Justice in December 2008 with regard to the statistics on house prices issued by the Land Registry - ONS officials had met with the Chief Executive of the Land Registry. The National Statistician had subsequently set up a working group to look at the house price indices published by the Land Registry and the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). CLG had also requested that their House Price Index be assessed for designation as a National Statistic. The meeting noted these developments.

13. Any other business

13.1 There was no other business.

13.2 The next meeting is on Friday 15 May 2009.

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

Agenda

Friday, 17 April, 2009

Board Room, Statistics House, Newport, 11:15 - 15:00

Chair: Sir Michael Scholar

Apologies: Lord Rowe-Beddoe, Ms. Karen Dunnell, Mr. Steve Newman

1	Minutes and matters arising from previous meeting Declarations of interest	
2	Reports from Committee Chairs	Chair
3	Census 2011 User and Output Plans	SA(09)15 Mr. Pete Benton
4	Engagement with the Government Statistical Service (GSS)	SA(09)16 Mr. Richard Alldritt
5	Media Coverage of Official Statistics	SA(09)17 Mr. Richard Laux
6	Regulatory Regimes	SA(09)18 Mr. Richard Laux
7	Progress Report on the Assessment Programme	SA(09)19 Mr. Richard Laux
8	Governance of the Retail Price Index (RPI)	SA(09)20 Mr. Dennis Roberts
9	UK Statistics Authority Annual Report, Drafts and Outlines of Chapters One and Two	SA(09)21 Mr. Rob Bumpstead
10	House Prices Indices - Update	Oral Report Ms. Jil Matheson
11	Any other business	

**Next Meeting: Friday, 15th May 2009
Statistics House, London, 11:15 - 15:00**

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(09)15

2011 Census Users and Output Plans

Purpose

1. To outline the plans for user engagement and delivery of the England and Wales 2011 Census outputs.

Recommendations

2. The Authority is invited to note the:
 - i. progress towards developing the 2011 Census Outputs Strategy;
 - ii. need to secure additional funding beyond 2011/12 to be able to provide a full range of Census products and services, and;
 - iii. continued drive towards harmonisation across the UK.

Discussion

Current portfolio and ongoing customer service

3. 2001 Census outputs included a series of published reports, summary statistical tables at national, regional and local level, anonymised micro data for researchers and geographical products. They were disseminated using a variety of media including print, CD/DVD and on-line systems, as well as other non-web packages provided by partner organisations. The table in *Annex A* summarises the main products and how they are distributed.
4. The anonymised micro data samples are accessed via the Cathy Marsh Centre for Census and Survey Research (CCSR) at the University of Manchester and the Virtual Microdata Laboratory at the Office for National Statistics (ONS); both under strict licence conditions. Other methods for users to obtain aggregate Census information include through Census 'resellers' such as mapping software companies, market analysis companies and consultancies. ONS also produced a series of analytical reports in the *Focus on* series covering ethnicity, religion, health and many other topics.
5. Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own web dissemination sites.
6. The Census Customer Services team provide an on-going service supporting customer enquiries about all previous censuses, a commissioned table service for new analyses. The team responds to over 600 e-mail and telephone queries a month and has produced 1,800 commissioned tables for a wide range of customers since 2001.

Needs of different user communities in 2011

7. Different user communities have different needs and so a variety of methods to understand their requirements are used. Established methods include direct engagement, advisory groups, working groups, formal consultations and road shows. New approaches being tried for 2011 include web page blogs and wikki's and a new role for regional statisticians. The table in *Annex B* describes the type of users and how we will engage with them.
8. Census Advisory Groups and Working Groups have been established over a long period of time and reflect the interests of these groups as users, and as partners in making the Census a success. Current groups are:
 - Central Government Advisory Group.

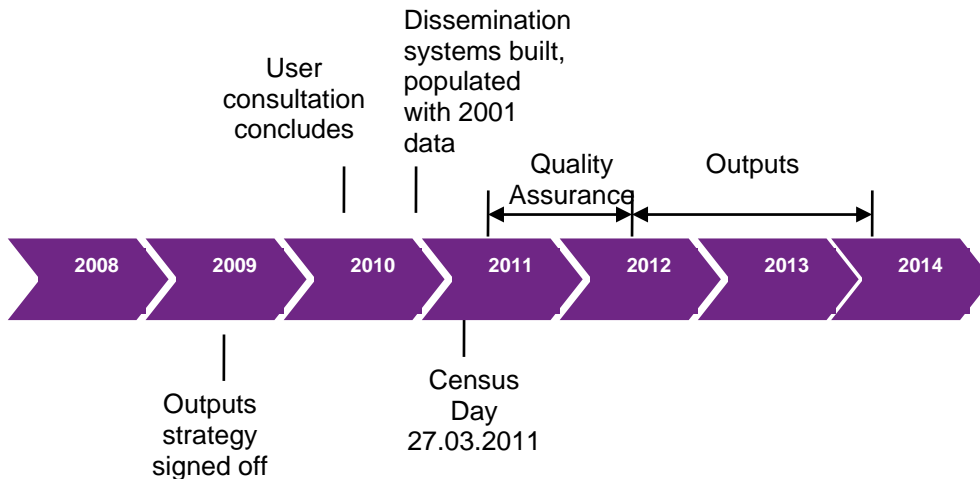
- Diversity Advisory Group (1) Diverse Communities.
 - Diversity Advisory Group (2) Disabilities.
 - Central and Local Government Information Partnership Advisory Group.
 - Academics Advisory Group.
 - Business and Professional Interest Advisory Group.
 - Census Advisory Group Wales.
9. The 2011 Census Outputs Project is seeking to consult widely with all users of Census data, including hard-to-reach groups. To that end, the three Census Offices have collaborated to provide an outputs consultation website (www.ukcensuoutputs.net) where users' views can be debated in an open forum.
10. Details of the consultation mechanisms and the issues on which to consult over the coming 12 months are being planned. We expect consultation topics to include: output content; geography; delivery mechanisms; visualisation requirements; funding and charging policy, and; uses of microdata and disclosure control policy.

Strategic aims for Census outputs

11. The 2011 Census will deliver systems and services to meet the critical success factors of the Census and the aims set out in the National Statistician and Registrars Generals' agreement. These aims include:
- i. outputs free at point of delivery;
 - ii. dissemination methods and media to keep pace with technological innovation e.g. on-line flexible table generation, on-line mapping and graphing of standard and user-defined output, use of Application Programming Interfaces (API) to allow other developers to incorporate our information into their own websites ('data mashing');
 - iii. more on 2001 versus 2011 comparisons, underpinned by a (now) stable geography;
 - iv. pre-release output prospectus and timetable that is adhered to;
 - v. concurrent release of statistics across the UK;
 - vi. joined-up and comparable UK outputs;
 - vii. common UK statistical disclosure control methods that minimise disclosure risk whilst maximising data utility;
 - viii. fully adjusted database so that all results reflect the coverage adjustment process;
 - ix. meeting the new EU regulation requirements, and;
 - x. research access to anonymised micro data.

Plan for 2011 Outputs and risks to successful delivery

12. Planning is at an early stage. High level milestones for the project are:



13. Key risks include linkage of the Census dissemination plans to the corporate web dissemination developments being taken forward in the i-dissemination project and the funding beyond the current spending review period. The former will be carefully managed within ONS and the latter will be the subject of a bid to Treasury, probably in 2010, for the 2012/13 through to 2015/16 funding needed to complete the Census and publish the results. The current Census business case identifies a need for around £30 million over this period, a lot of which will be associated with Census outputs.

Glen Watson, Census Director (ONS), April 2009

List of Annexes

- Annex A Census Products, Distribution Process and Media**
- Annex B Census Data Users and Consultation Methods**

Annex A Census Products, Distribution Process and Media

Product		On-line Distribution					Media		
		Open Access on-line			Access by subscription		Printed report	CD/DVD	Online
		NS ¹	NESS ²	NOMIS ³	CASWEB ⁴	SASPAC ⁵			
Reports:	National report for England and Wales	√	x	x	x	X	√	√	√
	First results on population in England and Wales	√	x	x	x	X	√	x	√
	Key Statistics for local authorities in England and Wales	√	x	x	x	X	√	√	√
	Report for Parliamentary Constituencies	√	x	x	x	X	√	√	√
	Report on the Welsh language	√	x	x	x	X	√	√	√
	Census 2001 Definitions volume	√	x	x	x	X	√	x	√
Local Statistics:	Area profiles	x	√	x	x	X	x	x	√
	Postcode headcounts	x	x	x	√	√	x	√	X
	Standard Tables: Ward and above in England and Wales	x	x	√	√	√	x	√	√
	Key Statistics: Health Areas, Urban Areas, Output Areas and above, in England and Wales	x	√	√	√	√	x	√	√
	Census Area Statistics: Health Areas, Postcode Sectors, Urban Areas, Output Areas and above, in England and Wales	x	√	√	√	√	x	√	√
	Origin-Destination statistics:								
Origin-Destination statistics:	Origin-Destination statistics	x	x	√	√	√	x	√	√
	Origin-Destination statistics: Moving Groups	x	x	x	√	√	x	√	X
Geography products:	Ward names and codes lookup list in excel format **	x	x	x	x	x	x	√	X
	Boundaries for all Output Areas in England and Wales	x	x	x	x	x	x	√	X
	Boundaries for all Output Areas in each local authority in England and Wales	x	x	x	x	x	x	√	X
	Output Area to higher areas & Postcode to Output Area lookup tables	x	x	x	x	x	x	√	X
	Urban area and settlement boundary CD	x	x	x	x	x	x	√	X
	2001 Output Area to 1991 ward lookup table **	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	X
	2001 Output Area to 2004 ward lookup table	x	x	x	x	x	x	√	X
	Printed maps of Output Areas	x	x	√	x	x	x	x	√
	2001 Output Area to Primary Care Organisation (PCO) lookup table	x	x	x	x	x	x	√	X

Notes - Census Products, Distribution Process and Media

¹NS - Office for National Statistics website (www.statistics.gov.uk).

²NESS - Neighbourhood Statistics website (www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk).

³NOMIS - Website provided by the Office for National Statistics, giving access to detailed official UK labour market statistics (www.nomisweb.co.uk).

⁴CASWEB - Service available to higher and further education users, which enables users to download census data.

⁵SASPAC - Specialist software for users of census statistics.

Annex B Census Data Users and Consultation Methods Exercised

User	Primary Method			Secondary Method		
	Advisory groups	Working groups	Direct consultation	Road shows	Web page blogs & wikki's	Regional Statisticians
European Union			√			
Parliament			√			
Office for National Statistics			√			
Central Government	√	√	√		√	
General Public			√	√	√	√
Local Government	√	√	√	√	√	√
Heath Service Administrators	√	√	√	√	√	√
Academics and educational community	√	√	√	√	√	√
Charities and the voluntary sector	√	√	√	√	√	√
Interested groups/ minority groups	√	√	√	√	√	√
Commercial organisations and businesses	√	√	√	√	√	√

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(09)16

Engagement with the Government Statistical Service (GSS)

Purpose

1. This paper presents initial proposals to support the further development of a policy for Authority engagement with the Government Statistical Service (GSS).

Timing

2. The GSS *Leaders In Statistics* Conference will be held in Bristol on April 20 and 21. It will be addressed by both the Chair of the Authority and the National Statistician, while the Head of Assessment will conduct a parallel session. The conference is attended by around 250 of the Government's leading statisticians and provides an excellent opportunity to articulate and disseminate the Authority's approach.

Recommendations

3. Members of the Authority are invited to:
 - i. consider and comment on the proposed approach to seeking further engagement opportunities as set out in paragraph 9;
 - ii. discuss the success criteria for an Authority-GSS engagement policy, and;
 - iii. review a draft note setting out a series of principal messages about the Authority that might be disseminated among professionals across the GSS (Annex A).

Discussion

4. The relationship between the UK Statistics Authority and the GSS is central to achievement of the Authority's statutory objectives. The Authority has a statutory responsibility to assess and re-assess Official Statistics produced by the GSS for compliance against the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, and to designate those that are Code-compliant as National Statistics. The Authority also monitors the production and publication of official statistics produced by the GSS, and reports and publishes its findings in respect of quality, good practice, and comprehensiveness.
5. The Authority relies on an on-going dialogue with the GSS, in particular with statistical Heads of Profession (HoPs) and professionals working in their departments, to support the Authority's assessment and monitoring work. HoPs have a particularly important task to communicate the role of the Authority and its work programme as it relates to and affects their own departments.
6. There is a natural keenness within the GSS to learn more about the work of the Authority and how it relates to the production and publication of statistics by the GSS as a whole and individual departments in particular.
7. Annex A sets out some principal messages about the relationship between the Authority and the GSS that HoPs may wish to use within their departments for dissemination among professional statisticians and others involved in the production and publication of Official Statistics.
8. Since the Authority's inception the Chair, accompanied by the National Statistician, has undertaken an extensive programme of visits to GSS departments, meeting Permanent Secretaries, HoPs and departmental statisticians. The meetings have provided an opportunity to discuss issues of common interest, explain the role of the Statistics Authority and learn about the work of the GSS. This programme of visits will be completed during the first part of 2009.

SA(09)16 - Engagement with the GSS

9. In addition, the Authority Chair has attended and addressed GSS events including the November 2007 *Leaders in Statistics Conference* and a meeting of HoPs in 2008.
10. There is also scope for further GSS engagement opportunities which may include the Deputy Chair (Statistical System), Head of Assessment and, where appropriate, the wider Monitoring and Assessment Team and Central Office staff generally. Such engagement opportunities might include attending lunches, seminars, briefing meetings, workshops, training events, and making keynote speeches where invited.
11. The prospect of the Deputy Chair (Statistical System) and other members of the Committee for Official Statistics (COS) attending a future HoPs meeting has also been raised at a recent meeting of the COS.

Richard Aldritt, Head of Assessment, April 2009

List of Annexes

**Annex A The Statistics Authority and the Government Statistical Service (GSS) *Draft Note:*
 M a k i n g C o m m o n C a u s e**

SA(09)16 - Engagement with the GSS

Annex A - The Statistics Authority and the Government Statistical Service (GSS) Draft Note:
Making Common Cause

This document will be published on the UK Statistics Authority website in due course.

Statistical System Overview documents are available at:

<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/uk-statistical-system/system-overview/index.html>

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(09)17

The Media's Coverage of Official Statistics

Purpose

1. To seek the Authority Board's endorsement of a proposal to publish a note setting out recommendations for ways in which producers might improve the way in which the media cover Official Statistics.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority are invited to:
 - i. comment on the draft Monitoring and Assessment Note which has been circulated previously to Authority Board members (Annex A), and;
 - ii. endorse the Monitoring and Assessment Team's view that it should be published as an Monitoring and Assessment note on the Authority website.

Background

3. The Monitoring and Assessment Team looked informally at the media's coverage of Official Statistics as a potential input to the 'Strengthening the User Voice' monitoring review - alongside the Survey of Opinion Formers, and a review of National Statistical Institutes's (NSI's) and other organisations' practices in engaging with users.
4. In the context of the media being a particularly significant and distinctive 'user' and an important mediator for the general public, the idea was to inform our thinking about (i) how to stimulate the media's active engagement with producers, and (ii) helping raise producers' awareness of the benefits of engaging with the media, and some ways of doing so.
5. A number of recurring themes emerged from this review activity, which have been included in the annexed Note in the form of suggested good practice for producers. The Note is coherent with the Code's principles relating to 'meeting user needs' and 'frankness and accessibility', and provides a general set of guidelines to improve the coherence and quality of communication with the media and, by proxy, with the general public by statistical producers:
 - i. understand your audience;
 - ii. package information in a clear, structured and interesting way;
 - iii. provide statistical experts to explain statistics, and;
 - iv. monitor the coverage of releases.
6. In addition, the Note suggests that the Authority itself will also consider how it might work with others on a fifth aspect - to promote editorial guidelines. An early discussion about this with the Royal Statistical Society would seem appropriate.
7. The Monitoring and Assessment Team consider that the publication of this material as a Monitoring and Assessment Note is likely to have greater impact, and potentially be more easily referenced, than if it was embedded in, for example, the National Statistician's guidance on the interpretation of the Code. In terms of its subject matter (communication, accessibility) it fits well with the previous Monitoring and Assessment Notes, which have all focused on quality of the statistical product in relation to the Code.

Monitoring and Assessment, UK Statistics Authority, April 2009

List of Annexes

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| Annex A | Monitoring and Assessment <small>Draft</small> Note Five: Media Coverage of Official Statistics |
| Annex (A)1 | Media Coverage of Official Statistics – Detailed Findings of an Informal Review |
| Annex (A)2 | Number of Key Messages in Media Coverage |

SA(09)17 - Media Coverage of Official Statistics

Annex A - Monitoring and Assessment Draft Note Five: Media Coverage of Official Statistics

This document including its Annexes A(1) and A(2) will be published on the UK Statistics Authority website in due course.

Published Monitoring and Assessment Notes are available at:

<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring-and-assessment-notes/index.html>

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(09)18

Issues Arising from other Regulatory Regimes

Purpose

1. The Authority will wish to consider whether there are lessons to be learnt from the recent experience of other regulators.

Recommendations

2. Members of the Authority are invited to :
 - i. commission the Head of Assessment to undertake a formal skills review, comparing the skill set required to undertake Monitoring and Assessment activity against the skills of the current team plus the resource available from the two contracts with external experts, and addressing any omissions by staff training, or additional recruitment, or new arrangements to bring in skills from outside (paragraph 10);
 - ii. agree that the Authority Board should invite the Audit Committee to consider the best way to review the risks facing the statistical system, and to put work in hand accordingly (paragraph 13);
 - iii. consider whether further steps should be taken in order to reinforce external perceptions of the separation between Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the Authority (paragraph 15), and;
 - iv. ask the Head of Assessment to initiate systematic discussions with other organisations with broadly similar roles, with a view to sharing experience of regulation, oversight and scrutiny (paragraph 17).

Discussion

3. The Monitoring and Assessment Team has had a number of discussions in recent months about whether there are any implications for us of the discussion in the media and elsewhere about the regulation of the financial services industry, of school inspections, and of child inspection; and of parliamentary interest in the governance of the National Audit Office (NAO). For convenience we use the terminology of 'regulation' below).
4. A number of themes emerged in discussion:
 - the width of the regulator's remit, and the depth of regulation;
 - the expertise of the regulators;
 - the identification and management of *risk*, by the regulatory body, and;
 - the alignment of *governance* arrangements with the regulator's strategic objectives.

Width and Depth of Remit

5. The Authority's statutory remit is relatively clear, and where it isn't - what is meant by 'Official Statistics', for example - the Authority is currently considering the circumstances in which it will comment publicly. The Authority's approach, as outlined in past papers to this and other committees, seems to be consistent with the views of the Public Administration Select Committee (e.g. SA(09)08, SA(COS)(09)07).
6. The main unresolved issue of 'width' relates to pre-release access to Official Statistics, which remains an issue for Parliament and Government to decide upon, with the Authority only having a role in overseeing the way that the Pre-Release Access Orders are implemented.
7. By depth we are referring mainly to the relative intensity of assessment. The development of the *Code of Practice*, and the process of assessment, all point to a

SA(09)18 - Regulatory Regimes

rigorous and objective, but relatively light touch, approach, consistent with the resources available to Monitoring and Assessment. At this stage it is probably too early to opine on this issue, but it is one that we will consider when we 'pause and review' the initial assessments, and certainly in the context of assessments of sets of statistics deemed to be high risk.

8. Other aspects of 'depth' include the extent to which Monitoring and Assessment is responsible for ensuring that recommended improvements are made, and judging whether the producers have suitably competent leadership. These remain grey areas, to be considered further.

Regulator Expertise

9. The Monitoring and Assessment Team includes analysts from a wide range of backgrounds. The majority of the Team have many years' experience working in the Government Statistical Service (GSS). However, the Team is aware that there are some gaps in its knowledge, and so is in the process of establishing arrangements with external organisations to provide: (i) macro-economic advice, on a call-off basis, and; (ii) general statistical advice, through a consultancy framework contract.
10. While we think that our current staffing profile and access to external expertise is sufficient, we see merit in undertaking a light touch but formal skills review, to help us identify whether any further action is required.

Risk Identification and Management

11. In the *Principles and Procedures for Assessment*, the Authority said that assessment activity will be "risk-based - prioritising those areas of statistical activity which are considered to present a risk to the quality and reputation of Official Statistics". This begs the question as to how these risks will be identified and prioritised.
12. In establishing the *Priorities for Designation as National Statistics* we invited Heads of Profession to offer views about the importance, and any concerns they were aware of, in relation to their non-National Statistics. A corresponding approach might be useful in evaluating the risks facing the statistical system (including risks in particular statistical domains).
13. The Authority Board might invite its Audit Committee, in the light of its new remit in relation to risk, to consider the best way to review the risks facing the statistical system, and to put work in hand accordingly - for example, by commissioning the National Statistician, as the Head of the GSS, to work with producers and external stakeholders to review risks. This would, inter alia, inform the next phase of assessment activity, and future monitoring reviews.

Governance

14. The two roles of the Authority - in respect of ONS, as a producer of statistics, and of Monitoring and Assessment, as the body responsible for advising the non-executives on scrutiny matters, including assessment - are well understood, and are reflected in the roles of the two Deputy Chairs, and in the high level committee structure of the Authority.
15. The Royal Statistical Society press release¹ supporting the publication by the Authority of Monitoring and Assessment 4/2009 ('*ONS' news release on UK and non-UK employment*') was helpful in commending the even-handedness of the Authority's functioning. However, the question remains whether others might, now or in future, perceive the current arrangements - including the co-location of Monitoring and Assessment staff with ONS staff in London and Newport, the use of shared services

SA(09)18 - Regulatory Regimes

(such as Information Technology and Human Resources), and the National Statistician having ultimate financial accountability for Monitoring and Assessment - as being appropriate and sufficiently independent.

16. More generally, this exercise has demonstrated to the Monitoring and Assessment Team the value to be gained from considering our regulatory activity in the context of relevant work elsewhere, in relation to both private sector activity and the provision of public services.
17. We note that the Cabinet Office held a conference of Independent Regulators in November 2006², and we propose to engage systematically with the bodies represented at this conference, and others, in order to ensure that the Authority's activity takes account of latest developments elsewhere. One issue we may wish to discuss relates to lessons we might learn from recent situations in which independent advice to government is strongly rejected.

Monitoring and Assessment, UK Statistics Authority, April 2009

¹ <http://www.rss.org.uk/main.asp?page=3066>

² http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/brc/conferences/independentregconf_0611.html

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(09)19

Progress Report on the Assessment Programme

Purpose

1. This paper reports the progress of the programme of initial assessments, noting emerging issues and ways that the Monitoring and Assessment Team will deal with them.

Timing

2. For consideration by the Authority at its April 2009 meeting.

Recommendations

3. The Authority is invited to note:
 - i. progress to date of the assessment programme, and;
 - ii. emerging issues from the assessments, and the way the Monitoring and Assessment Team is handling these.

Discussion

Background

4. The Authority agreed an initial programme of ten existing National Statistics for re-assessment against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics* in October 2008. At its February 2009 meeting, the Authority agreed the proposed timetable for those assessments, the procedures to be used in assessment, and the methods to be used to collect information from statistical producers, users and other stakeholders.
5. The programme has been amended slightly since agreement.
 - The assessment of emissions of carbon dioxide for local authority areas (produced by the Department of Energy and Climate Change - DECC) has been deferred in anticipation of assessing two new DECC outputs for first designation as National Statistics under section 16 of the Act - Energy Sector Indices and Fuel Poverty Statistics.
 - The Department for International Development (DfID) requested an assessment of its statistics on official development assistance as a proportion of the gross national income (ODA/GNI ratio) under section 16 of the Act, which we will undertake in parallel with the scheduled re-assessment of DfID's compendium publication 'Statistics on International Development'.
6. We are therefore considering an initial programme of 12 assessments, one of which relates to a set of statistics produced by each country of the UK and so is in effect four assessments in one - making a total of 15 distinct exercises.

Progress

7. Recent recruitment to the Monitoring and Assessment Team (four new staff during the period late March to early April) means that the work is now gathering pace. The assessment of statistics from the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System is most advanced. Written Evidence for Assessment (WEfA) was provided during the middle of March. The information contained in the WEfA and supporting documentation was analysed by the team during late March, along with views from users, suppliers and other stakeholders, and areas to explore further were agreed with the Assessment Programme Director. A follow-up meeting with the producer body to probe further was due to be held on 8 April. Further analysis and a draft report will follow later in April.

SA(09)19 - Progress Report on the Assessment Programme

8. The remaining 14 assessments have started. In 12 cases, this has involved writing an Assessment Specification Letter (ASL) to the producer body. In the cases of the two potential section 16 requests from DECC this has involved only initial informal discussions (one section 16 letter was received by the Authority on 6 April). In six cases, initial meetings have been held to outline the process and to agree both the scope and timescale for the assessment. This included agreeing a timetable for return of background documentation and of the completed WEfA. Initial meetings for the remaining assessments have been arranged for later in April. Background research is underway for all assessments. The detailed progress for each assessment is shown at Annex A.

Emerging issues

9. An important element of the first phase of "dress rehearsal" assessments is to 'pause and review' during the summer. We will then improve procedures in the light of lessons learnt. Some themes are already emerging, and are being dealt with on an ongoing basis.
10. It was soon apparent that producers have scarcely been engaged in the process of assessment, so getting buy-in and commitment to the process, including the return of information to us, is taking longer than expected. Given the delays caused by this to our programme, we are now formally starting all assessments (by writing an Assessment Specification Letter to producers) simultaneously, as early as possible. We will then agree delivery of information to the Authority to a slower timetable than previously anticipated. In practice, this means some producers will have long deadlines to return their WEfA, and in some cases, we may get WEfAs back long before we are able to analyse them. This will help us manage peaks and troughs in the work programme more effectively than a staggered approach.
11. We are seeing signs that the assessment process is more labour-intensive than we had envisaged, although it is too early to be conclusive about this. As part of the initial meetings we will further reiterate the need for producers to provide evidence that is as concise, specific and well-referenced as possible. We will further review the instructions for completion and return of the WEfA to ensure the process is as streamlined as possible as part of the pause and review.

Mark Pont, Monitoring and Assessment Team, April 2009

List of Annexes

Annex A Detailed progress against each Assessment

Annex A – Detailed progress against Each Assessment

Assessment	ASL sent	Initial meeting	WEFA due	WEFA back	Comments returned from users and others	Follow up meeting scheduled
Migration Statistics	y	17/4/09				
Road Freight Statistics	y	2/4/09	30/4/09			
Road Casualty Statistics	y	10/3/09	30/4/09			
Emissions of carbon dioxide for local authority areas			on hold			
Prison Population Projections	y	27/4/09				
Statistics on International Development	y	28/4/09				
Enrolments at Schools and in Funded Pre-School Education in NI	y	1/4/09	24/4/09			
Recorded Crime in Scotland	y	27/3/09				
Children looked after by local authorities (E)	y	14/4/09				
Children looked after by local authorities (W)	y	24/4/09				
Children looked after by local authorities (NI)	y	1/4/09				
Children looked after by local authorities (S)	y	27/3/09				
National Drug Treatment Monitoring System Statistics	y	9/2/09	w/c 9/3/09	13/3/09	20/3/09	8/4/09
ODA/GNI ratio	y	28/4/09				
Energy Sector Indicators			section 16 letter received			
Fuel Poverty Statistics			awaiting confirmation			
Statistics from the Household Assets Survey						
Average Weekly Earnings		awaiting confirmation			awaiting confirmation	

*Note: future dates given in italics

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(09)20

Governance of the Retail Price Index (RPI)

Purpose

1. This paper proposes governance arrangements for the RPI consistent with the statutory arrangements in the Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007).

Timing

2. Urgent if changes to the RPI are to be considered for introduction from January 2010.

Recommendations

3. The Authority is invited to:
 - i. establish a group to advise the Authority on RPI methodological issues;
 - ii. appoint the National Statistician as Chair of the advisory body;
 - iii. appoint other members of the advisory body, and;
 - iv. note the potential changes to the RPI methodology currently under consideration.

Discussion

4. Section 21 of the Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007) requires the Authority to compile and maintain the RPI and publish it every month. It further requires that:

“Before making any change to the coverage or the basic calculation of the retail prices index, the Board must consult the Bank of England as to whether the change constitutes a fundamental change in the index which would be materially detrimental to the interests of the holders of relevant index-linked gilt-edged securities.

If the Bank of England considers that the change constitutes a fundamental change in the index which would be materially detrimental to the interests of the holders of relevant index-linked gilt-edged securities, the Board may not make the change without the consent of the Chancellor of the Exchequer.”

5. Previous to the introduction of these arrangements changes to RPI methodology were determined by the Chancellor on the advice of the RPI Advisory Committee (RPIAC): that committee met intermittently between 1947 and 1994 but has not met since. The Director of the Central Statistical Office (CSO) was Chair of RPIAC: full membership of the RPIAC is at Annex A.
6. In December 2003 the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (referred to as the CPI in the UK) became the preferred measure of inflation and the target for Bank of England action. The CPI is underpinned by European legislation and any changes to it are implemented by EU ‘regulations’.

SA(09)20 – Governance of the Retail Price Index (RPI)

7. There are several differences between the methods for constructing the RPI and the CPI. Some of these are difficult to defend (e.g. where one methodology is clearly superior) while others result in presentational differences that can cause confusion for users. Because of the difficulties in making changes to the indices there has been little effort to harmonise and improve the measures in recent years. In practice the main changes desired at present are to the RPI as the CPI is technically superior to the RPI.
8. Any methodological changes to the RPI will require the approval of the Authority before being referred to the Bank of England (c.f. paragraph 4). To facilitate the working of the Authority and avoid overload of RPI issues on the Authority's monthly meetings I recommend that the Authority establish a body to advise it on changes. This advisory body would be akin to the previous RPIAC but might also look at potential changes to the CPI.
9. In the past the RPIAC made slow progress and a smaller body might be more appropriate to progress the substantial number of issues to be considered. On past precedent it would be appropriate for the National Statistician to chair the body. Other members should be drawn from the members of the Authority and external experts. In view of the pivotal role of the Bank of England and HM Treasury as well as their considerable expertise I recommend that the Bank and HM Treasury be invited to nominate members of the advisory body. Other potential members would be representatives of the Trades Union Congress, Confederation of British Industry and National Consumer Council, and two or three academics.
10. Changes to the RPI are best made with the standard annual update of the index in January. Working backwards, proposals from the Authority would need to be sent to the Bank in October for review and to allow time for the Chancellor to consider if necessary. If the proposed advisory body is established immediately it may be feasible to consider some changes where work is well advanced for implementation in January 2010 with the more major changes being investigated for implementation in January 2011.

**Dennis Roberts, Director Surveys and Administrative Sources (ONS),
April 2009**

List of Annexes

Annex A Members of the Retail Prices Index Advisory Committee 1992-94

Annex A Members of the Retail Prices Index Advisory Committee 1992-94

Chairman:

Mr. Bill McLennan (Director of the Central Statistical Office and Head of the Government Statistical Service)

Members

Mr. John Astin (Statistical Office of the European Communities, Luxembourg)

Sir Samuel Brittan (The Financial Times)

Mr. Julian R Calder (Central Statistical Office) - from July 1994

Professor David Currie (London Business School)

Professor Michael C Fleming (Loughborough University)

Mr. Kenneth H B Frere (nominated by the National Federation of Consumer Groups)

Mr. S G Brian Henry (Bank of England) - to April 1993

Mr. Tom Hoyes (nominated by Age Concern)

Mr. John Hughes (nominated by the National Consumer Council)

Mr. David Lea, OBE (nominated by the Trades Union Congress)

Miss Ruth Lea (Economics Editor, ITN)

Dr. Rita J Maurice (Statistical consultant)

Mr. Colin Mowl (H M Treasury)

Dr. John Muellbauer (Nuffield College, Oxford)

Professor John F Pickering (University of Portsmouth)

Mr. Lionel D Price (Bank of England) - from May 1993

Professor D Garel Rhys, OBE (Cardiff Business School)

Mrs. Bridget Rosewell (Business' Strategies Ltd)

Dr. Penelope Rowlatt (National Economic Research Associates)

Dr. Andrew Sentance (nominated by the Confederation of British Industry)

Professor Ralph Turvey (London School of Economics)

Mr. Reg Ward (Central Statistical Office) - to April 1994

Secretaries

Mrs. Marta F Haworth (Central Statistical Office) - from June 1993

Mr. Don J Sellwood (Central Statistical Office) - to April 1993

Assistant Secretary

Mrs. Margaret Dolling (Central Statistical Office)

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

SA(09)21

UK Statistics Authority Annual Report - Draft Chapters One and Two

Purpose

1. This paper provides draft text and outline content for chapters one and two of the UK Statistics Authority Annual Report and Accounts 2008/09.

Timing

2. A draft of the full Annual Report will be presented at the Authority meeting on 15 May 2009. The Audit Committee has formal responsibility for sign-off and will be asked to give approval at their meeting on 23 May 2009, before the report is published and laid before Parliament(s) in mid-July.

Recommendations

3. The Authority is invited to consider and comment on the:
 - i. draft *Chair's Report* at **Annex B** (this will form chapter one, section one of the report);
 - ii. outline *Background/Organisation of the UK Statistics Authority* sub-sections at **Annex B**, (chapter one, section two), and;
 - iii. the draft *Monitoring and Assessment Report* section at **Annex C** (chapter two, section two).

Discussion

4. Chapter one will comprise the Chair's Report, as well as more information on the establishment, organisation and achievements of the Authority organisation of the Authority, developing themes touched upon in the Chairman's Report.
5. Chapter two will comprise an introduction from the Head of Assessment and a Monitoring and Assessment Report.
6. These chapters are two of the six which together will form the joint Authority/Office for National Statistics (ONS)/Government Statistical Service (GSS) Annual Report, as agreed at the Authority meeting of 19 December 2008 [SA(08)48]. **Annex A** provides an overview of the contents of the Annual Report as a whole.
7. An outline of chapter three ONS was considered by the ONS Board at the meeting on 2 April, and a further draft will be circulated for comments via correspondence in the next few weeks. An outline of chapter four GSS was presented to the Committee for Official Statistics on 10 March and a draft will be considered via correspondence this month. Outlines of chapters five and six (accounts) were discussed by the Audit Committee on 2 March.

Alex Elton-Wall, Secretariat, UK Statistics Authority, April 2009

List of Annexes

Annex A Overview of Annual Report Contents

Annex B Chapter One (D raft)

Annex C Chapter Two (D raft)

Annex A Overview of Annual Report Contents

Volume One - UK Statistics Authority Annual Report 2008/09

Chapter One

- 1.1 - Chairman's Report (*4 pages*)
- 1.2 - Background/Organisation of the Authority (*6 pages*)

Chapter Two

- 2.1 - Scrutiny of Official Statistics - Introduction from Head of Assessment (*2 pages*)
- 2.2 - Monitoring and Assessment Report (*6 pages*)

Chapter Three

- 3.1 - Introduction from Chief Executive of ONS (*2 pages*)
- 3.2 - Achievements 2008/09 (*18 pages*)
- 3.3 - Priorities and Forward Plans 2009/10 (*2 pages*)
- 3.4 - Stakeholder Assessment (*2 pages*)

Chapter Four

- 4.1 - Introduction from Head of Government Statistical Service (GSS) (*2 pages*)
- 4.2 - GSS/Official Statistics Annual Report 2008/09 (*6 pages*)
- 4.3 - GSS/Official Statistics Plans for 2009/10 (*2 pages*)

Chapter Five

- 5.1 - Other information common across the Authority - i.e. remuneration report, headcount figures, etc. (*4 pages*)

(Total for Volume 1 - 56 pages)

Volume Two - UK Statistics Authority Resource Accounts 2008/09

Chapter Six

- 6.1 - UK Statistics Authority Resource Accounts (*60 pages*)

(Total for Volumes 1 and 2 - 116 pages)

SA(09)21 - UK Statistics Authority Annual Report, Chapters One and Two

Annex B - Chapter One (Draft)

This document will be published on the UK Statistics Authority website in due course.

Reports are available at:

<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/index.html>

SA(09)21 - UK Statistics Authority Annual Report, Chapters One and Two

Annex B - Chapter Two (Draft)

This document will be published on the UK Statistics Authority website in due course.

Reports are available at:

<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/index.html>