

Statistics Commission

MINUTES OF FORTY FOURTH COMMISSION MEETING

22 NOVEMBER 2007

Present:

Commission

David Rhind (chairman)
Colette Bowe
Ian Beesley
Joly Dixon
Isabelle Low
Janet Trewsdale
Martin Weale

Apologies

Sir Derek Wanless

Sir Michael Scholar for Item 2 only.

Secretariat

Richard Alldritt
Britta Moeller

1. Minutes of meeting 20 September 2007

The minutes were agreed.

2. Discussion with Sir Michael Scholar, chair designate of the Statistics Board

The chairman welcomed Sir Michael Scholar and thanked him for the opportunity to discuss some of the future governance arrangements under the new Statistics Board with Commission members. The following issues were discussed:

- (i) *Board recruitment* – Sir Michael Scholar reported the recruitment process for non-executive members of the Statistics Board was well under way and that he would be a member of the interview panel. The recruitment process is conducted by the Cabinet Office. Sir Michael expects the Board to be fully appointed and to have its first meeting early in the New Year. He noted that job descriptions for the Head of Assessment and the Head of the Board's secretariat were currently being drafted and he hoped the Board would be able to appoint staff early in 2008. He suggested holding a joint meeting of Board and Commission members sometime in January or early February 2008 and this was welcomed by Commissioners.

- (ii) *Board's work programme* – Commission members and Sir Michael discussed potential objectives and priorities the Board may wish to include in its work programme. Sir Michael stressed the importance of starting a rolling process of assessment quickly, perhaps with an aim to assess all National Statistics within the Board's first three years. The scope for different types of assessment was also discussed.
- (iii) *Media engagement* – The future relationship between the Board and the media was discussed, and Commission members emphasised the benefits of an active and transparent relationship with journalists as fostered by the Commission. Sir Michael's press interviews held in early September 2007 were widely welcomed.
- (iv) *Parliamentary arrangements* – Sir Michael noted that the arrangements for Parliamentary oversight of the Board's work were not yet resolved and the matter was ultimately one for Parliament itself.
- (v) *Relationship with the devolved administrations* – Sir Michael acknowledged the importance of building good relationship between the Board and the devolved administrations and reported on his recent visits to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.
- (vi) *Code of Practice and pre-release consultations* – Sir Michael welcomed the Commission's publication of its proposals for a new Code of Practice and said it would provide a good basis for the Board's consultation on a new Code. He also confirmed proposals for the secondary legislation on pre-release access were currently being developed in Whitehall and Scotland and would be issued for consultation shortly. Sir Michael said he thought it would have been better if pre-release arrangements had been a matter for the Board and reiterated his view that 24 hours pre-release access to official statistics was too long.

3. Chairman's report

- (i) *Commission reports* – The chairman reported that the Commission had published three reports over the past eight weeks – *Proposals for a*

Code of Practice for Official Statistics (on 2 October), *Counting on Success: The 2011 Census – Managing the Risks* (on 8 November) and *Tax Records as a Statistical Resource: A Review* (on 14 November). Hard copies of all three reports had been circulated widely, and the chairman noted the coverage of the Census report in the Financial Times, which picked up the arguments for 2011 being the last Census of a traditional kind.

- (ii) *Audit Commission lunchtime seminar and Whitehall & Westminster World event* – On 13 November the chairman spoke at a lunchtime seminar organised by the Audit Commission on the future governance arrangements and the role of the new Statistics Board in improving statistical standards. He noted the Commission's common views with members of the Audit Commission on a number of issues. He also reported chairing a recent event organised by Whitehall and Westminster World on the theme 'Can Statisticians serve the public good?' which had been well attended and received.
- (iii) *Visit to US statistical offices* – The chairman and chief executive visited the director and deputy director at the US Census Bureau, as well as the director of the Committee on National Statistics and the US Chief Statistician at the Office of Management and Budget in Washington. A report of the visit had been circulated.
- (iv) *Progress update on 'Value and Trust' report* – The chairman reported there had been only minor editing changes to the Commission's report *Official Statistics: Value and Trust* since the last draft was circulated. He confirmed the secretariat would now focus on getting the report finished, with a view of sending an advanced draft to designers by 17 December and final publication in January 2008. Material on international contrasts and parallels is currently being prepared for inclusion in an annex.
Action: secretariat

4. Chief executive's report – SC/2007/31

- (i) *Proposals for a Code of Practice for Official Statistics* – The chief executive noted the positive comments from stakeholders on the Commission's Code

proposals. He also reported he would be participating in the session 'Shaping the statutory Code' at the GSS Leaders in Statistics conference on the afternoon of 22 November.

- (ii) *Update on wind up* – The chief executive reported staffing levels of the Commission secretariat would likely be reduced to a maximum of four full time staff by the end of January 2008. He also confirmed all remaining staff will leave the Artillery Row offices on 31 January and move into temporary accommodation provided by HM Treasury for the remaining two months.

5. Draft submission to the Treasury Sub-Committee's inquiry into 'Counting the Population' – SC/2007/32

Commission members considered the draft submission to the Treasury Sub-Committee's current inquiry into 'Counting the Population' and suggested some editorial changes and more emphasis on the way forward on migration measurement, on the challenges to the Census in hard-to-count areas and on data security issues.

Action: secretariat

6. Review of statistical first releases (progress update) – SC/2007/33

Commission members noted good progress had been made on the first releases project and agreed the secretariat should aim to finalise and publish the report in January 2008. It was also suggested that the project board should revisit the criteria that relate to making metadata about revision history readily available. (Criterion 5 in particular.)

Action: secretariat

7. The number of foreign workers in the UK – recent public confusion – SC/2007/34

Commission members considered the draft note on the recent public confusion over statistics of migrant workers in UK employment. The chief executive reported work on the note was still in progress and some details needed to be clarified. It was agreed that a shortened note should be made available on the Commission's website in due course.

Action: secretariat

8. Forthcoming events diary – SC/2007/35

The events diary was noted.

Secretariat
Statistics Commission
November 2007