

Statistics Commission

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT – November 2007

Action: To note progress and consider the need for action.

Update on Statistics Board and future arrangements

1. The Cabinet Office issued an advertisement for non-executive directors of the Statistics Board in late September; the closing date was 17 October. We are currently assuming final interviews and announcements will be before Christmas. We understand that the first meeting of the shadow Board will be in January 2008. Whilst there will be only three months in which both the shadow Board and the Commission will be in operation, there may still be a few questions of co-ordination to consider. The secretariat will discuss with ONS.
2. On 18 October the Treasury Committee published the Government's response to its report on the appointment of the chair of the Statistics Board.
3. The president of the Royal Statistical Society has written to Baroness Noakes, and others in the House of Lords, concerning the future arrangements for parliamentary oversight of statistical matters and expressing support for a joint committee of both Houses. However, we have been told that there is not much support for such a committee within the House of Commons.
4. Proposals for the secondary legislation on pre-release access are being developed in both Whitehall and Scotland and the secretariat has been involved in some informal exchanges about their content. There may be a text issued for consultation before the Commission meeting on 22 November.

Proposals for a Code of Practice for Official Statistics

5. The Commission published its report (no.35) *Proposals for a Code of Practice for Official Statistics* on 2 October and sent out over 70 copies. We have received positive feedback from various individuals. The chief executive will also be participating in the session 'Shaping the statutory Code' at the GSS Leaders in Statistics conference on the afternoon of 22 November. The way forward on the Code is now a matter for the Statistics Board.

6. The Commission secretariat has been involved in some trial assessment work that ONS is undertaking. This makes some use of the Commission's draft of the Code but is close in style to the process of assessment against the European Code.
7. The chief executive will also attend (on 6 December) a meeting with Eurostat's Deputy Director General, ONS officials and others who were involved in drafting the European Statistics Code to discuss experience with European assessment work.

Peer review of ONS compliance with European Statistics Code

8. On 25 September, the chief executive attended, along with two representatives of the Statistics Users Forum, a meeting as part of the peer review of ONS under the European Code. The review team concentrated on the new governance arrangements, in particular the National Statistician's role and authority, the future Board's relationship with other departments and devolved administrations, the role of the media and the reasons for low levels of public trust.

Foreign workers

9. On 31 October the Government announced that it had underestimated the increase in the number of foreign nationals in employment since 1997, and revised the estimate from 800,000 to 1.1 million. The estimates are based on the Labour Force Survey (and are the difference between a 2007 estimate and a 1997 estimate, grossed up to tally with an estimate of the 2007 working population based on 2003 projections). They are thus dependent on a lot of assumptions. The new figure has been called into question by the opposition, and the Statistics Commission subsequently received a letter from Frank Field MP asking for clarification. The Government statement received considerable coverage in the press, and the Commission was contacted by various journalists on the day. Martin Weale appeared in news pieces on Channel 4 and *Newsnight*, he was also quoted at length in the printed press and *The Daily Telegraph* published a short commentary piece. The chief executive was also quoted, with variable accuracy, in *The Guardian*.

10. The chairman wrote to the National Statistician on 2 November asking ONS to resolve the confusion over the figures by publishing its best estimates of the number of foreign workers in employment and that quantity as a proportion of the total workforce, and how these two quantities have changed since 1997. The secretariat also contacted the Department for Work and Pensions and is preparing a note on the issue which will be posted on our website (see also SC/2007/34 to be considered at Item 7 of the agenda).

Commission report - Counting on Success

11. The Commission published its report no. 36 *Counting on Success: The 2011 Census – Managing the Risks* on 8 November and sent out hard copies to some 80 stakeholders. There was some coverage in the Financial Times on 9 November which picked up the arguments for 2011 being the last Census of a traditional kind.
12. In September, the chairman made a submission to the House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee's inquiry into the economic impact of immigration, stressing the needs for a better recording system for migration and better coordination between ONS and other parts of government. The secretariat has drafted a submission to the Treasury Select Committee's inquiry into 'Counting the Population' – SC/2007/32, Item 5 on the Agenda. The inquiry will consider in particular the uses of population estimates and the impact of any inaccuracies or inadequacies in population statistics as well as the role of and preparation for the 2011 Census and cooperation between ONS and its stakeholders.

Commission report - Tax Records as a Statistical Resource

13. The Commission's report no. 37 *Tax Records as a Statistical Resource: A Review* was published on 14 November in time for the annual SUF conference on 15 November which had the theme '*Statistics on income, earnings and wealth. Where do they come from and why do we need them*'. Hard copies of the report were distributed to stakeholders with a covering letter.

Outstanding Commission reports

14. The Commission plans to publish two more reports (plus a less formal report on the History of the Commission, and also draft the text for a final Annual Report)

- before closing down, though the format and timing of any of these may be affected by staffing levels in the secretariat.
15. A progress update on the *Review of Statistical First Releases*, has been circulated (SC/2007/33, Item 6 on the agenda).
 16. There have been only minor editing changes to our 'exaugural' report *Official Statistics: Value and Trust* since the last draft was circulated. However material on international contrasts and parallels has been prepared for inclusion in an annex. We are aiming to give this high priority in the next few weeks and circulate a revised draft for final comment and then have it prepared by designers around Christmas with a view to final agreement and publication in January.
 17. The draft *History of the Statistics Commission* will be circulated to Commission members around the new year; we intend to publish this in some form towards the end of the Commission's existence.
 18. We will also aim to prepare the text and tables for a final Commission Annual Report for this financial year, though this will be less full than in previous years, not least due to the absence of forward looking material.

Scotstat, SUF and Health Statistics User Group conferences

19. Isabelle Low attended the first Scottish Government Annual Statistics Stakeholder Conference on 7 October in Edinburgh, organised by *Scotstat*, a network of users and providers of Scottish statistics. She noted that there was a lively debate about better and more use of statistics, in particular a discussion on the new, improved neighbourhood statistics website.
20. The Statistics User Forum held its annual conference on Thursday, 15 November, supported by Statistics Commission sponsorship. Sir Michael Scholar opened the conference and was followed by contributions from a wide range of speakers.
21. After formal consideration of proposals, the Commission is providing funding of £2,000 for the New Health Statistics Conference which will be held at the RSS on 30 November. The aim of the event is to bring together those who are new to health information and statistics with experts in the field. The conference will address a number of topics including how health data are collected and held by

different organisations and how users can access the various sources of data and what factors need to be taken into account when using the information.

RSS meeting on ONS consultation

22. The chief executive chaired an RSS public meeting on 18 October on the ONS consultation on its forward work plans – under the title ‘ONS statistical priorities and engagement with the Statistics Board’. There were speakers from SUF, the Bank of England, the Local Government Association and ONS.

Visit to US statistical offices

23. 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 (CNStat) and the US Chief Statistician at the Office of Management and Budget in Washington. A report of the visit has been circulated and we are planning to incorporate some of the material into the Commission’s *Value and Trust* report.

Visit from Chinese delegation

24. The chief executive gave a presentation in Cambridge to a delegation of 25 officials from the China National Statistics Bureau on the themes of statistical integrity, quality issues and oversight of the statistical system in the UK. This was well received.

Forecast outturn

25. As at 31 October 2007 outturn for the year to 31 March 2008 is forecast to be £1,250,000 compared to grant in aid available of £1,350,000. This may change depending on when staff leave the secretariat.

Update on wind up

26. Dilapidations costs for the Artillery Row premises have been agreed with the landlord at £24,000 - substantially less than originally quoted. All suppliers have now been notified of termination of contracts and work on other tasks continues to ensure a smooth wind up. The remaining secretariat staff will leave the

Artillery Row offices on 31 January 2008. Temporary accommodation will be provided in HM Treasury for the remaining two months.

27. We aim to produce one more Chief Executive's Report, ahead of the meeting on 17 January 2008.

Secretariat
Statistics Commission
November 2007

APPROACHES TO THE STATISTICS COMMISSION

Ref No.	Correspondent	Subject	Date	To whom if not chairman
1.	Philip Redfern	Philip Redfern forwarded to the Commission a short article he had written on population statistics to <i>The Times</i> and also copied to Sir Michael Scholar. <i>To note.</i>	19.09.07	chairman
2.	Senior Quality and Equality Officer, Commission for Racial Equality	The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) wrote to acknowledge receipt of the Commission's letter on the issues raised by Professors Ludi Simpson and Daniel Dorling on the CRE's use of official statistics in some of its statements. The Statistics Commission wrote to request clarification on whether some of CRE's public statements on non-white majorities in some British cities by 2016 are based on statistical evidence or matters of opinion. Due to the CRE's dissolution on 28 September it is likely that no response will be received. <i>The Commission's letters to CRE and Professors' Simpson and Dorling have been posted on the website. To note.</i>	19.09.07	chairman
3.	John Thurso MP House of Commons	John Thurso MP wrote to thank the Commission for publishing its proposals for a Code of Practice. <i>To note.</i>	09.10.07	chairman
4.	Frank Field MP, House of Commons	Frank Field MP wrote to the chairman to thank the Commission for its response to his query on benefit statistics . He also raised the issue of whether the datasets used by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and subsequently by the Commission are a full count of the total number of people on benefits who are of working age. In addition, he would like more information on DWP's explanation of the divergence. <i>The secretariat investigated the issue further and has now</i>	11.10.07	chairman

		<i>replied to Frank Field MP. To note.</i>		
5.	Rt. Hon. the Lord Jenkin of Roding, House of Lords	Lord Jenkin wrote to the chairman asking for recent developments since the enactment of the Statistics and Registration Service Bill. He also commented positively on the Commission's proposals for a Code of Practice for Official Statistics and inquired whether the Commission plans to provide some guidance to the Statistics Board about how to approach the next Census. <i>The chief executive has sent Lord Jenkin a copy of the Commission's report on the 2011 Census and the chairman will respond in more detail in due course. To note progress.</i>	16.10.07	chairman
6.	Sam Coates <i>The Times</i>	A journalist from <i>The Times</i> has contacted the secretariat with an FOI request, asking for information about dealings between the Commission and public affairs firms in the past five years. <i>The secretariat has provided the requested information . To note.</i>	28.10.07	secretariat
7.	Frank Field MP, House of Commons	Following the government's revisions of statistics on the number of jobs taken by foreign nationals since 1997 and the subsequent media attention regarding these issues, Frank Field MP wrote to the chairman asking the Commission to review the available evidence. <i>The chairman has written to the National Statistician asking ONS to resolve the confusion over the figures by publishing its best estimates of the number of foreign workers in employment and that quantity as a proportion of the total workforce. The secretariat also contacted the Department for Work and Pensions. To note progress.</i>	31.10.07	chairman

FOLLOW-UP TO PREVIOUS APPROACHES

8.	Idris Francis	Idris Francis contacted the secretariat with an inquiry about the way in which road accident and casualty statistics are represented. He argued the relevant authorities misrepresent the figures to conjure up the appearance of success. <i>The secretariat is currently considering the responses it has received from the Department for Transport. To note progress.</i>	03.07.07	secretariat
9.	Director, Transform Drug Policy Foundation	The Director of the Transform Drug Policy Foundation wrote to the chief executive expressing concerns about the general use of statistics by the Home Office with regard to pointing to the success of the drug strategy, and specifically in relation to the consultation on the last ten year strategy and the future of the next one. <i>The secretariat has drafted a letter to the Home Office to seek clarification on the issues. To note progress.</i>	20.08.07	chief executive
10.	Nick Gulliford, chairman, National Association of Community and Family Trusts	Mr Gulliford wrote to the secretariat asking the Commission to look into the issue of statistics and an index for family and social cohesion to be added to the seven indices already provided for measuring changes in deprivation by neighbourhood. <i>The secretariat is currently considering the response it has received from ONS. To note progress.</i>	09.09.07	secretariat

Note:

Copies of all correspondence referred to above are made available to Commissioners at Commission meetings.