

Statistics Commission

CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT – January 2008

Action: To note the position on outstanding business and agree the remaining work of the secretariat.

Membership of Statistics Board

1. The members of the Board were announced on 7 January 2008. The following were appointed alongside the chair designate Sir Michael Scholar: Partha Dasgupta, Moira Gibb, Sir Alan Langlands, Professor Stephen Nickell, Professor David Rhind, Lord Rowe-Beddoe (deputy chair), and Professor Adrian Smith (deputy chair).

House of Lords debate on select committee arrangements

2. Following a parliamentary question tabled by Lord Jenkin on the arrangements to be made for Parliamentary scrutiny of the Statistics Board, there was a short debate on the issue in the House of Lords on 29 November 2007. Lord Bach (speaking on behalf of Government) argued against a joint committee; he said he expected "the Public Administration Select Committee to be the proper committee to scrutinise the operations of the board and the wider statistical system".
3. The new president of the Royal Statistical Society, Professor David Hand, has written to the Leader of the House of Commons urging her to ensure that the Parliamentary committee charged with oversight of the new system has the terms of reference, the time and the capability to investigate issues across government and to hold departments and agencies to account as well as the Board and ONS.

Limiting pre-release access to statistics

4. On 10 December 2007 the Treasury and the Cabinet Office published a joint consultation on 'Limiting pre-release access to statistics'. The consultation document sets out the draft statutory Order to be made under the Statistics and Registration Service Act. Responses to the consultation are required by

- 3 March 2008. The secretariat has prepared a draft response to the consultation (see Item 4 on the agenda).
5. Sir Michael Scholar was quoted in the media as saying that the Statistics Board should decide the rules for privileged access to statistics, and that the maximum period of advance notice should be shorter than the government's proposed 24 hours.

Counting the Population – Treasury Select Committee inquiry

6. Following the Commission's written submission in response to the Treasury Select Committee's inquiry into *Counting the Population*, the chairman has been invited to give oral evidence on 16 January 2008. At the time of writing, the evidence session has not taken place, but we expect the inquiry to 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.

Reactions to the Commission's Briefing Note on foreign workers

7. Following confusion over the number of foreign (or migrant) workers in employment, the chairman wrote to the National Statistician on 2 November 2007 asking ONS to clarify the position and publish its best estimates of the foreign worker numbers and that quantity as a proportion of the total workforce, and how these two quantities have changed since 1997. After extended and helpful discussions with the Department for Work and Pensions, ONS and the Home Office, the secretariat prepared a note on the issue which we posted on our website on 10 December 2007. Our statement received considerable coverage in the press, and the Commission was contacted by various journalists over the next day – following a mention of the note by Frank Field MP in a parliamentary debate. As far as we are aware, our briefing note has not been faulted in terms of its accuracy or balance.

Official Statistics: Value and Trust – Commission Report No. 38

8. The Commission today published its Report No. 38 *Official Statistics: Value and Trust*. The report will be widely circulated under appropriate covering letters – still to be prepared.

Outstanding Commission work

9. The draft conclusions and a progress update on the *Review of Statistical First Releases*, have been circulated (Item 5 on the agenda).
10. There are several outstanding approaches which have not received as much attention as we would have wished due to other pressures. We will be contacting the correspondents to apologise and see if there is anything the secretariat can realistically plan to do in the time, and with the staff, available.
11. The draft *History of the Statistics Commission* will be circulated to Commission members shortly; we intend to publish this in some form towards the end of the Commission's existence.
12. We will also aim to prepare at least the main 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. It will draw on the Value and Trust report.

Meeting on Codes of Practice

13. The chief executive attended (on 6 December 2007) 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.

Visit from Chinese delegation

14. The chairman and chief executive welcomed a delegation of 15 Chinese officials from the Anhui Provincial Bureau of Statistics and gave a presentation on the UK statistical system and the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007.

Whitehall and Westminster World event and article

15. In November 2007, the chairman led an event organised by Whitehall and Westminster World on the theme 'Can Statisticians serve the public good?' which was well attended and received. On 21 December Whitehall and

Westminster World published a report of the meeting, highlighting in particular discussions on the lack of trust in official statistics and the role of statisticians and other civil servants in fostering public trust. A copy of the article will be circulated. The chief executive has had further discussions with representatives of SPSS (who sponsored the WWW event) about further follow up meetings etc.

Update on wind up

16. 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. More detail on the arrangements for February and March will be given under Item 7 on the agenda.

Secretariat
Statistics Commission
January 2008

APPROACHES TO THE STATISTICS COMMISSION

Ref No.	Correspondent	Subject	Date	To whom if not chairman
1.	Philip Redfern	Philip Redfern copied the chief executive into his letter to ONS in which he commented on the potential contribution of population registers to census and other population statistics . A few days later he wrote with similar comments in response to the Commission's recent report on the 2011 Census. <i>To note.</i>	13.11.07 and 21.11.07	chief executive
2.	Principal Research Manager, Joseph Rowntree Foundation	The Principal Research Manager of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation wrote to the Commission regarding progress on three problem areas in relation to statistical trends in poverty and social exclusion which the foundation had identified (and queried) in 2004 . He acknowledged there had been substantial progress on availability of data on low pay and the geographic coding of data by area, but that the problem with particular types of mortality data by social grouping still persisted. <i>The secretariat has written to ONS asking for clarification of its position on the issue. To note progress.</i>	13.11.07	chief executive
3.	Bill Martin	Bill Martin copied the chairman into his letter to ONS in which he follows up his concerns regarding the Historic Sector National Accounts (HSNA) which he had raised in March 2007. He acknowledged some corrective action by ONS had taken things forward, but serious concerns remained in relation to the quality of the historic household disposable income data and ONS's intention to suspend maintenance of the HSNA from next year's Blue Book. <i>The secretariat will follow up Mr</i>	20.11.07	chairman

		<i>Martin's letter with ONS and ensure that the correspondence is forwarded to the new Statistics Board. To note progress.</i>		
4.	R. A. Frownes	R. A. Frownes contacted the secretariat with concerns that the Carers UK survey responses concerning carers' priorities have been given lower priority owing to the nature of the questionnaire and analysis. <i>The secretariat has forwarded the letter to the Department of Health asking for comment. To note.</i>	27.11.07	secretariat
5.	Hamish Birchall	Hamish Birchall contacted the secretariat with concerns about the further delay of a Department for Culture, Media and Sport publication of the follow-up study into the impact of the Licensing Act on live music. <i>The secretariat has contacted DCMS to ask for the department's position on the issue. To note.</i>	05.12.07	chief executive
6.	Chairman, Migrationwatch UK	The chairman of Migrationwatch UK has written to the Commission asking for clarification on the calculation of the proportion of immigrants who come from EU countries to the United Kingdom . He believes the government is mistaken in suggesting that a substantial majority of immigrants come from the EU. <i>The secretariat has written to the Home Office and ONS to ask for their positions on the issue. The chairman and chief executive have also met with Sir Andrew to discuss the issue in more detail. To note progress.</i>	17.12.07	chairman
7.	National Statistician	The National Statistician copied the chairman into a letter to the Financial Services Authority in which she explained the inadvertent release of market sensitive data one day prior to their scheduled release . <i>To note.</i>	18.12.07	chief executive, Financial Services Authority
8.	Permanent Secretary, Home	The Permanent Secretary to the Home Office has written to the	20.12.07	chairman

	Office	chairman in response to the Commission's letter on the use of statistics in the consultation document <i>Drugs: Your Community, Your Say</i> published in July 2007. He stressed that in his view the consultation document presented a balanced and assessable overview of the current national drug strategy, and that it had not overemphasised the progress that had been made. <i>The secretariat is currently considering the response. To note progress.</i>		
9.	Carol Clarke	Carol Clarke contacted the secretariat with a complaint about a Government-conducted survey on the number of homeless people sleeping rough in the street. <i>The secretariat is currently reviewing the approach. To note.</i>	20.12.07	secretariat

FOLLOW-UP TO PREVIOUS APPROACHES

10.	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
11.	Director, Transform Drug Policy Foundation	The Director of the Transform Drug Policy Foundation wrote to the chief executive expressing concerns about the use of statistics in a Home Office consultation document on the department's drug strategy. The secretariat has written to the Home Office seeking clarification on the issues. <i>The</i>	20.08.07	chief executive

		<i>Commission's letter was quoted at some length in a Guardian article. The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs has also expressed concerns about the Home Office consultation document. The secretariat is currently considering the Home Office's response. To note.</i>		
12.	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
13.	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 secretariat has since published a detailed note on the issues which received considerable coverage in the press. To note.</i>	31.10.07	chairman

Note:

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