

MINUTES OF GSS STATISTICAL POLICY AND STANDARDS COMMITTEE
Thursday 7 January 2016
ONS, 1 Drummond Gate, Pimlico, London

Present

Tricia Dodd	ONS (chair)
David Fry	DCLG
Emma Wright	ONS
Jill Pobjoy	ONS (audio)
Julie Brown	DfT
Markus Šova	ONS (secretariat)
Martin Ralphs	ONS
Mike Batley	DH
Pam Davies	ONS
Pete Brodie	ONS
Roger Halliday	Scottish Government
Steve Ellerd-Elliott	MoJ
Susan Williams	ONS (minutes)
Tim Knight	DWP

Apologies

Becky Aquilina	ONS
Peter Lumb	HMRC

1. Chair's welcome

- 1.1. Tricia Dodd welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made.

2. Minutes, Actions and matters arising from last meeting

- 2.1. Minutes from the last meeting (12 Nov 2015):
- i. Emma Wright (ONS) is missing from those present.
 - ii. Pam Davies works in ONS (not NSO).
 - iii. On point 2.1: it is the National Archive that is no longer funding Collaborate. DSTL are now looking at Jive8.

3. Points Arising from Scrutiny of SPSC Sub-Committees (Papers 1 to 5)

- 3.1. Markus Šova introduced summary reports 1 to 5.
- 3.2. Paper 1: Business Register Group (BRG):
- i. No update: the group has not met since the last SPSC meeting
- 3.3. Paper 2: Methodology Advisor Committee (MAC)
- i. Correction: The next MAC meeting is on the 24th May 2016
- 3.4. Paper 3: National Statistics Harmonisation Steering Group and National Statistics Harmonisation Group (NSHSG and NSHG):
- i. VQB stands for Virtual Question Bank: a web-based repository for information on harmonised questions.
 - ii. Jen Woolford (ONS) will now chair this group instead of Jacqui Jones (ONS).
 - iii. There is on-going work in the Government Digital Service (GDS) around data infrastructure for the UK. The Harmonisation team might need to link up to this.

- iv. This work has implications for the devolved nations, especially Wales and Northern Ireland.

3.5 Paper 4: *GSS Regional and Geography Committee*

3.6 Paper 5: *Publication and Dissemination Committee (PDC)*:

- i. Julie Brown introduced this paper before continuing with the main paper on the PDC workplan and ToR.
- ii. Departments have set up their own goals for improving their publications.
- iii. It was raised that some presentation features (especially on statistical bulletins) were due to compliance requirements for UKSA. These features may not be consistent with current good practice. Tricia noted that UKSA assessment procedures were recognising this.
- iv. Various promotions on the GSSnet: MoJ goals and objectives are now shared; names of presentation champions are available in a spreadsheet; linked examples of good practice for statistical releases. Other ways to promote this work may be in Show and Tell events.
- v. Communication will be improved for RAG rated publications, e.g. to notify the person producing the publication.
- vi. The Good Practice Team has produced a paper on the key issues present in Red/Amber rated publications.
- vii. Question asked on how to find resources to improve publications in times of austerity. Julie highlighted that spending time to create a template can bring efficiency savings later on. Julie also suggested that not much effort might be required as long as there is an effective headline / summary of key points, then the context of the report might not need to change much.
- viii. This work needs to interact with gov.uk work. Longer term it would be advantageous to have gov.uk meeting the needs of GSS.

4. Points Arising from Presentation and Dissemination Committee workplan and terms of reference (Papers 6 and 7)

- 4.1. Julie Brown introduced these papers following on from the Paper 5 update.
- 4.2. Key to the plan is the setting up of presentation champions in all departments.
- 4.3. The Statistical Products Working Group is now chaired by Kate Davies instead of Jacqui Jones.
- 4.4. A question was raised on how to engage HoPs. Successful case studies might be a good idea. MoJ is happy to share successes, and DfT is willing to conduct workshops on their experiences, making the case that a little bit of spending now can make savings later on.
- 4.5. Recent data science recruits are doing wonderful things with visualisation etc. Bill Oates comes to the PDC meeting and will be the conduit into the data science work. For example, Tableau is being used in DoH and PDC is considering how to promote and roll out its use, etc.
- 4.6. PDC is considering how the Competency Framework interacts with the PDC workplan.
- 4.7. There was a comment that the workplan was possibly too ambitious: were goals really needed? I would be good to include Open data – but not too much: what are departments really going to do with SR15 cuts?

4.8. Julie suggested that goals every year would help to keep it a priority. Another idea might be to hold a competition every year to identify the best department.

5. Points Arising from Policies, Standards and Guidance: thoughts about governance (Paper 8)

5.1. Martin Ralphs introduced the paper.

5.2. This paper was welcomed from all the SPSC.

5.3. It was highlighted that there is confusion in the governance arrangements. There will be overlapping/contradictory guidance and difficulties in locating who is responsible for keeping it up to date.

5.4. ONS did a stock take of this some time ago. There may be lessons to be learned.

Action: Martin to look up this paper

5.5. Resource is needed within departments to be involved with task/finish groups. GPT is happy to coordinate any activity.

Action: Tricia to send an email out to ask for volunteers

5.6. Pam suggested that there may be a cross-over with work being conducted in Rob Bumpstead's area.

Action: Martin to speak to Rob Bumpstead

5.7. It was also suggested that a typology for guidelines might be needed.

6. Points Arising from Harmonisation sign off of definition (Paper 9)

6.1. Emma Wright introduced the paper as being brought before SPSC for the ratification of the new questions around benefits/tax credits.

6.2. It was confirmed that stakeholders in Northern Ireland had been consulted on this work.

6.3. It was commented that the consultation had been very thorough.

6.4. The SPSC ratified the questions.

7. Points Arising from Overview of the success of QIF in the past few years (Paper 10)

7.1. Jill Pobjoy introduced the paper (via audio).

7.2. The Quality Improvement Fund was set up by UKSA in 2009-2010. A fund worth £250K pa was available every year until 2015-2016 when the funding dropped to £150K. There will be no funding in 2016-2017.

7.3. To be successful any QIF bid had to demonstrate innovation in quality improvement rather than be business as usual work. Northern Ireland and Scotland submitted more such bids than other departments.

7.4. The criteria to be successful changed throughout QIF's lifetime. Originally they focussed on assessment, then improvement and, most recently, looking towards the ideas in the GSS Admin Data strategy.

- 7.5. Although the QIF is ending there is a need to ensure that quality improvements are still being pushed across the GSS.
- 7.6. There was discussion around the feedback from QIF projects: were the project learnings of benefit for other departments and how should they be disseminated? How should the impact of closing down the QIF fund be assessed? What is the value of the benefit gained from the QIF projects? E.g A £20K QIF project (on weighting) for Scotland contributed to saving £3m per year.
- 7.7. Tricia would like to demonstrate the value of QIF work to NSEG although accepting that the committee understood the reasons for the withdrawal of funds. Action: Tricia to come up with proposals on how to do this.
- 7.8. A session at the GSS Methodology Symposium should be arranged looking at the projects/successes with a focus on re-using the findings. Action: Tricia to speak to the organiser about this.

8. Rotation

- 8.1. SPSC Members include a representative from one of the devolved nations and a mixture of representatives from big and small departments.
- 8.2. It was agreed that another representative for output areas in ONS should replace Jacqui Jones.

9. NSEG discussion

- 9.1. Tricia will be at the NSEG meeting and it will provide an opportunity to raise items with the National Statistician.
- 9.2. It was suggested that the issues raised in Paper 8 (Policies, Standards and Guidance) might be raised, especially concerning governance.
- 9.3. It was also suggested that Julie Brown's work (Paper 6 and 7) might be usefully promoted.
- 9.4. There was discussion around the SPSC role in GSS strategy. It was suggested that SPSC should go to NSEG with a proposal for Terms of Reference.

Action: To be discussed at next SPSC meeting.