



Minutes of the National Statistics Harmonisation Group (NSHG) Meeting
9th December 2015
1100 to 1330 hrs
ONS, 1 Drummond Gate, London, SW1V 2QQ

Attendees:

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|---|-------|
| Emma Wright (Chair) | ONS |
| Andy Bates | ONS |
| Ann Blake (via audio - T'field) | ONS |
| Brian French (via audio - N Ireland) | NISRA |
| Charlie Wroth-Smith (via audio - T'field) | ONS |
| Dawn Camus | BIS |
| Jonathan Page-Swan | ONS |
| Justine McNally (via audio - T'field) | ONS |
| Karen Hurrell (via audio - Manchester) | EHRC |
| Kirsty MacLean (via audio - Scotland) | NRS |
| Lisa Carter | HMRC |
| Nafeessah Ameerudden (via audio - BIS) | BIS |
| Paul Benson | HSE |
| Rob Green | DCLG |
| Sean White | ONS |
| Thomas Sims | DWP |
| Mark Herniman (Secretariat) | ONS |
| Joe Ellison | ONS |

Apologies:

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|-----------------------|-----------|
| Angela Potter-Collins | ONS |
| Becki Aquilina | ONS |
| Becky Tinsley | ONS |
| Catherine Davies | ONS |
| Emily Knipe | ONS |
| Emily Poskett | DfID |
| Fiona Aitchison | ONS |
| Julia Wilson | Scot Gov |
| Karen Woolgar | BIS |
| Kevin Sams | HMRC |
| Lisa Walters | Welsh Gov |
| Marie Willoughby | MoJ |
| Martin Ralphs | UKSA |
| Martin van Staveren | MRS |
| Matthew Tranter | DfT |
| Pamela Spicer | ONS |
| Pete Betts | ONS |
| Richard Tonkin | ONS |
| Sarah Martin | Scot Gov |
| Steve Webster | HSCIC |
| Tim Gibbs | ONS |
| Tom Anderson | ONS |

1.0 Welcome and Introduction

- 1.1 Emma Wright welcomed members to the meeting and suggested we need to give some thought to the spacing of meetings throughout the year as the December meeting is not ideal, date wise. The Harmonisation Team will review the meeting timetable and propose a new one.

ACTION 1 – Harmonisation Team to review the NSHG meeting timetable and propose a new one.

- 1.2 The following people have left the NSHG and replacements are being sought; Amanda Howells (ONS EDC), Emma Emery (RSS) and Tim Vizard (ONS SSD). Emma thanked them for their contribution and support.

2.0 Review of the Minutes and Actions from the Last Meeting, NSHG (15:3) 18 – Emma Wright

- 2.1 There were no comments arising from the minutes from the 23rd September 2015 meeting and these were accepted as a true reflection of that meeting.
- 2.2 Action Update. Most of these were complete or were longer term ongoing actions.

- Action 1 – Secretariat to contact Fiona Massey for suggestions of a suitable topic lead for Economic Activity. Attempts are being made to combine this with a potential Census lead for the Economic Activity topic.
- Action 3 – Nafeessah Ameerudden to talk to BIS colleagues on the work on harmonisation improvements arising from FRIBS and report back to the NSHG. Mark Chandler from BIS has been contacted and we await an update on the harmonisation improvements to FRIBS.
- Action 4 – Jonathan Page-Swan to contact Sean White to discuss future links between ADD and IESS. Jonathan Swan will discuss with Sean White after the meeting.

3.0 Update on Harmonisation Work

a. GSS SPSC Meeting Report, Verbal Update – Emma Wright

3.1 Emma gave a verbal update explaining she had attended the GSS SPSC meeting on the 12th November, where the regular update reports from NSHG and the NSH SG were presented. There were no matters arising from the reports.

3.2 The next GSS SPSC meeting will be on the 7th January and it is planned to present the revised Harmonised Principle for Benefits and Tax Credits for approval.

b. Review of the NSHG Workplan, NSHG (15:4) 19 – Mark Herniman

3.3 Mark gave an update of the workplan, explaining for the benefit of new members, the workplan contains the current programme of work and its progress. There were no comments or questions.

c. Verbal update on Admin Data & Business Harmonisation – Charlie Wroth-Smith

3.4 The Harmonisation Team is currently recruiting a new team member to replace Palvi Shah and from January 2016 a Research Officer will also be starting with the Harmonisation Team (replacing Sez Barutcu) whose combined focus will be to push forward the Harmonisation agenda on Business Statistics.

3.5 The Census Transformation Project (CTP) and the Admin Division (ADD) at ONS are developing a methodology of matching data where there is not a unique identifier. The Harmonisation Team plan to discuss seeking GSS SPSC approval for the methodology to become a harmonised method of matching data.

Post Meeting Note – The NSH SG met on 10th December and matching linking data was discussed. It was recommended that the Harmonisation Team continue to extend harmonised principles to admin sources. Alongside that, and not within the remit of this group, Emma Wright (ONS), and Charlie Wroth-Smith (ONS) will liaise with Shelley Gammon (ONS) who produced the guidance paper, and possibly the Good Practice Team (GPT) to review governance of the admin data matching guidance.

e. Update on Good Practice Team & Harmonisation, NSHG (15:4) 20 – Martin Ralphs

3.6 Martin was unable to attend the meeting so the Chair presented the update explaining that the Harmonisation Team is in regular touch with the Good Practice Team (GPT). A GSS Geography Champions network is now in place. The 16 champions from across the GSS will work within their departments to ensure the GSS Geography Policy is followed. Various events are being planned, for statistical producers potentially across the GSS, which will cover the work of the GPT, harmonisation and geography policy.

3.7 NSHG members were reminded of the UK Statistics Authority Assurance of Administrative Data guidance and that links to it can be requested from the Harmonisation Team.

Post Meeting Note - Members may be interested to know that the UK Statistics Authority are undertaking a "stock-take" of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, and are keen to gather the views of all those who regularly draw on the Code. Further information and a short survey monkey consultation are available at: <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/stocktake-of-the-code-of-practice/>as you know, harmonisation is included within Principle 4 of the Code: *Promote comparability within the UK and internationally by, for example, adopting common standards, concepts, sampling frames, questions, definitions, statistical units and classifications (including common geographic referencing and coding standards).*

4.0 Progress on the New IESS Framework, NSHG (15:4) 21 – Sean White

- 4.1 Sean explained the paper was an update on the progress of the Integrated European Social Statistical (IESS) framework and the programme is largely on track to the EU timetable. The framework is now in the last stages of sign-off with ESSC and will then go through the Council working groups where finer detail will be added and the implementing Acts for each survey will be passed as well. These Acts will cover the detailed topics and variables that will need to be collected and what the questions will look like. There will also be delegated Acts covering the possible addition of new topics.
- 4.2 Although the Global Activity Limitation Indicator (GALI) questions are European standard questions and are considered core social variables covering work related limiting illnesses, the UK has argued consistently against their introduction on all social surveys. Eurostat have now stated they are not going to specify the actual wording of the question so it is felt surveys can continue to use existing questions. Confirmation is being sought on this from the Labour Market Working Group (Labour Market Statistics (LAMAS)). It was suggested that an example model question should be shared with the NSHG.

ACTION 2 – Sean White to provide an example model of the GALI question for the NSHG, via the Secretariat.

- 4.3 The Data Transformation Programme is a key interdependence with regard to how the data is collected as, throughout the Regulation, reference is made to making more use of admin data and electronic data collection, in a bid to reduce costs and burden upon respondents. It was thought to be helpful for the NSHG to have access to the Regulation as the annexes set out the various requirements and lists of detailed topics for each survey.

ACTION 3 – Sean White to send a link to the IESS Regulation to the Secretariat for distribution to the NSHG.

- 4.4 Members suggested a further update on the IESS framework at some point in the future and Sean will be contacted when planning for the next meeting in March to see if an update is warranted by then.

ACTION 4 – Secretariat to contact Sean White in February 2016 to check on the status of a possible update on the IESS framework.

5.0 Revised Definition for Ethnic Minorities, NSHG (15:4) 22 – Karen Hurrell / Angela Potter-Collins

- 5.1 Karen introduced the paper explaining the background behind the revision to the current definition, which is contained in the 'Style Guide' and the benefits to using the revised version. Although, the

'Style Guide' is published by ONS it is intended for use across the GSS and is considered 'best practice' as guidance for publishing statistics. The 'Style Guide' can be found here: <http://style.ons.gov.uk/>

- 5.2 Members suggested it would be useful to know who was consulted with regard to the revised definition and what their response was.

ACTION 5 – Karen Hurrell to find out from Angela Potter-Collins who was consulted over the proposed revised definition and what their responses were.

- 5.3 It would be helpful if the revised definition was also published in the Harmonised Principle for Ethnic Group and on the ONS website in the guidance titled 'Ethnic Group Statistics: a guide for the collection and classification of ethnicity data'. User feedback could also be included.

ACTION 6 – Harmonisation Team to discuss with Karen Hurrell and Angela Potter-Collins, the revised definition for ethnic minorities being included in the Ethnic Group Harmonised Principle and onto the ONS website within Measuring Equality guidance and to include any user feedback.

- 5.4 The legal status of the revised definition may need to be looked into and it was agreed to discuss this with Angela Potter-Collins.

ACTION 7 – Harmonisation Team and Angela Potter-Collins to discuss the legal status of the revised definition for ethnic minorities.

6.0 Plans for the 2021 Census Harmonisation of Topics, NSHG (15:4) 23 – Ann Blake

- 6.1 Ann Blake presented the paper stating it was an update on harmonisation of the Censuses across the UK. The aim is to work together and achieve harmonisation on a number of aspects but each country will be able to retain decision making. ONS is considering how its topic groups for the census can be aligned with the NSHG topic groups and how this can be done across the UK. An update on progress was requested for the next meeting.

ACTION 8 – Ann Blake to provide an update on the plans for the 2021 Census harmonisation of topics for the March NSHG meeting.

- 6.2 Northern Ireland are looking at the timing of their publication of the consultation responses as there are elections coming up which may have an impact on this.
- 6.3 ONS are planning to publish their consultation response in the spring of 2016. The topic groups will be organised around the topics identified in the consultation document and discussions are taking place on how these groups can be combined and/or co-ordinated with the NSHG topic groups.
- 6.4 A lot of resource is available through the census for the development and testing of questions and this can be used to the benefit of the GSS harmonised questions and in some cases leads to the GSS harmonised questions being updated to align with the census version. This is done on a case by case basis and may be down to reasons such as differing modes of collection. It is important for these reasons that NSHG topic groups are involved in the census process.

7.0 Revised Harmonised Principle for Benefits and Tax Credits, NSHG (15:4) 24 – Thomas Sims

- 7.1 Thomas presented the revised Harmonised Principle for Benefits and Tax Credits, explaining the process for the revision started in 2012 and the main driver for this was the changes to the welfare system (the introduction of Universal Credit (UC) and Personal Independence Payments (PIP)). An additional potential benefit was to try and improve the capture of benefits and tax credits information on survey data, which generally has not been good.
- 7.2 UC is now live and currently there are only about 100,000 people receiving this benefit. Overall it is hoped that UC would be easier to understand by interviewers and respondents. NSHG members were asked to provide any comments on the revised principle by 18th December so these could be addressed and the revised principle presented to the GSS Statistical Policy and Standards Committee for agreement at their next meeting on 7th January 2016.

ACTION 9 – Secretariat to remind NSHG members to review the revised Harmonised Principle for Benefits and Tax Credits and provide any comments by 18th December 2015.

Post Meeting Note – After the meeting members were inform by email that any comments were to be received by the 17th December 2015 as this would give more time to prepare the revised Harmonised Principle for the next GSS SPSC meeting.

8.0 Presentation – Update on Actions arising from the NSHG Workshop – Mark Herniman

- 8.1 Mark presented the work the Harmonisation Team had progressed relating to the feedback received from the NSHG Workshop held in September 2015. The topic leads were thanked for their valuable contribution to this piece of work which, it is hoped, will better define individual roles of NSHG members and help the NSHG to work more efficiently. There was also some support for an annual topic lead meeting after one of the quarterly meetings, which the Harmonisation Team will look into further.

ACTION 10 – Harmonisation Team to look into holding an annual topic leads meeting and report back to NSHG.

- 8.2 A copy of the presentation slides are at Annex B.

9.0 NSHG Topic Lead Updates, NSHG (15:4) 25 – Topic Group Leads

9.1 Benefits and Tax Credits – Thomas Sims

- 9.1.1 Thomas had nothing further to report after the submission of the revised Harmonised Principle.

9.2 Consumer Durables – Jana Kubascikova-Mullen

- 9.2.1 Jana was unable to attend the meeting and had nothing to report for this period.

9.3 Country of Birth and Migration – Pamela Spicer (interim lead)

- 9.3.1 Pamela was unable to attend the meeting and had nothing to report for this period.

9.4 Crime and Anti Social Behaviour – Fiona Aitchison

- 9.4.1 Fiona was unable to attend the meeting but had submitted a report. There were no comments.

9.5 Demographic Information – Emily Knipe

- 9.5.1 Emily was unable to attend the meeting but had submitted a report. There were no comments.

9.6 Economic Activity – TBA

9.6.1 The Harmonisation Team is still trying to identify a potential new lead for this group, through the Labour Market Analysis Team at ONS.

9.7 Education – Karen Woolgar

9.7.1 Karen was unable to attend the meeting but was represented by Nafeessah Ameerudden. There was nothing to report for this period.

9.8 EILR – Angela Potter-Collins

9.8.1 Angela was not able to be at the meeting and had nothing further to report.

9.9 Health, Disability and Carers – Steve Webster

9.9.1 Steve was not present at the meeting and had not submitted a report.

9.10 Housing and Tenure – Rob Green

9.10.1 Rob had nothing to report for this period.

9.11 Income – Richard Tonkin

9.11.1 Richard was not able to attend the meeting but had submitted a report. There were no comments.

9.12 Pensions – Tim Gibbs

9.12.1 Tim was not able to attend the meeting but had submitted a report. There were no comments.

10.0 Any Other Business

10.1 There were no items of AOB.

11.0 Next Meetings

11.1 Dates of the next meetings are:

Wednesday 9th March 2016, 1100 to 1330 hrs at ONS Drummond Gate, Meeting Room 3.

The March meeting will go ahead as planned but future dates will be subject to review as discussed at para 1.1 of these minutes.

Annexes:

A. List of Actions

B. Presentation Slides – Update on Action from the NSHG Workshop.

ANNEX A

| ACTIONS FROM THE NSHG MEETING – 9th December 2015 | | | | |
|---|-------------|--|--------------------|---------------|
| Action No | Para | Action | Responsible | Status |
| 1 | 1.1 | Harmonisation Team to review the NSHG meeting timetable and propose a new one. | Harmonisation Team | |
| 2 | 4.2 | Sean White to provide an example model of the GALI question for the NSHG, via the Secretariat. | Sean White | |
| 3 | 4.3 | Sean White to send a link to the IESS Regulation to the Secretariat for distribution to the NSHG. | Sean White | |
| 4 | 4.4 | Secretariat to contact Sean White in February 2016 to check on the status of a possible update on the IESS framework. | Secretariat | |
| 5 | 5.2 | Karen Hurrell to find out from Angela Potter-Collins who was consulted over the proposed revised definition and what their responses were. | Karen Hurrell | |
| 6 | 5.3 | Harmonisation Team to discuss with Karen Hurrell and Angela Potter-Collins, the revised definition for ethnic minorities being included in the Ethnic Group Harmonised Principle and onto the ONS website within Measuring Equality guidance and to include any user feedback. | Harmonisation Team | |
| 7 | 5.4 | Harmonisation Team and Angela Potter-Collins to discuss the legal status of the revised definition for ethnic minorities. | Harmonisation Team | |
| 8 | 6.1 | Ann Blake to provide an update on the plans for the 2021 Census harmonisation of topics for the March NSHG meeting. | Ann Blake | |
| 9 | 7.2 | Secretariat to remind NSHG members to review the revised Harmonised Principle for Benefits and Tax Credits and provide any comments by 18 th December 2015. | Secretariat | Complete |
| 10 | 8.1 | Harmonisation Team to look into holding an annual topic leads meeting and report back to NSHG. | Harmonisation Team | Complete |

Presentation Slides – Update on Actions Arising from the NSHG Workshop



Update on Actions Arising from the NSHG Workshop

Objectives of sprint 1

1. Learn how to work in sprints
2. Get feedback from topic leads on their role
3. Improve framework for NSHG members/topic leads:
 - Understand roles and responsibilities
 - Communication
 - Induction

Key tasks during sprint

- Interviewed all topic leads gaining feedback on their role
- Reviewed primary and secondary principles to see if out of date
- Reviewed and improved key documentation

Key Points from the Topic Lead Question Sessions

The key things raised were:

- Current 'Harmonisation Process Roles and Responsibilities' document for topic leads is too long, not all content is relevant and lacks plain English. The term used the most was 'daunting'!
- There was support for a re-titled shorter version which was more relevant and concise

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- Guidance sent to new leads (via email) was, overall, thought to be helpful and relevant but some of the detail of the attached documents was possibly a bit overwhelming
 - The format of the current 'NSHG Topic Group Highlight Report' was, overall thought to be good but the term 'Product Name' was not easily understood. The document could be streamlined to two main reporting areas.

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- The majority of leads were happy with the 'Harmonisation Process' saying it was logical and sensible
 - Most also suggested a shortened process for amendments to existing principles
 - All topic leads were happy, as SMEs, to be sent harmonisation related queries

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- Most leads said their departments were aware of their harmonisation role
 - Departments were generally supportive of the role but in several cases this was 'pending resources'
 - About half of leads said they make their departments aware of information from the NSHG but the methods vary

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- Support areas needed from the Harmonisation Team included;
 - What is expected from leads
 - Harmonised process
 - Identifying group members
 - Stakeholder buy-in
 - Admin support
 - Topic Leads were generally supportive of bi-annual meetings

Main results

- NSHG members and harmonisation champions have same role
- Concentrate on face to face contact with topic leads – less emails sent with lots of links and text
- Induction to be improved
- Vacant topic lead roles should be filled within three months – should be treated as high priority

Improved communication

- Annual 'meet the topic lead' session – opportunity to network, share knowledge and discuss challenges
- Regular 'touch base' telephone call (face to face if deemed necessary) to discuss progress, concerns etc
- Face to face induction meeting within a month of new topic lead being appointed
- Face to face meeting to go through harmonisation process model when topic lead going to start process

Revised documentation

- New summarised guidance notes for:
 - Topic leads
 - NSHG members
 - Harmonisation team
- Responsibilities grid produced
- Updated topic group members list

Future

- Parked document – lots of good ideas generated in the sprint
- Census topic groups – how to work with NSHG topic groups
- Sprint two started – review harmonisation process