



Minutes of the National Statistics Harmonisation Group (NSHG) Meeting
10th December 2014
1100 to 1300 hrs
ONS, 1 Drummond Gate, London, SW1V 2QQ

Attendees:		Apologies:	
Pete Brodie (Chair)	ONS	Andy Blinston	BIS
David Matz	Home Office	Angela Potter-Collins	ONS
Emma Bowditch	RSS	Becki Aquilina	ONS
Hugh Mallinson	DCLG	Caroline Smith	DWP
Jan Thomas	ONS	Debra Leaker	ONS
Karina Williams	ONS (via audio)	Emily Knipe	ONS
Kirsty MacLean	NRS (via audio)	Emma Wright	ONS
Lisa Walters	Welsh Gov (via audio)	Gerry Nicolaas	SRA
Martin van Staveren	MRS (via audio)	Jana Kubascikova-Mullen	ONS
Pamela Cobb	ONS	Jo Bulman	ONS
Palvi Shah	ONS	Julia Wilson	Scot Gov
Richard Tonkin	ONS (via audio)	Karen Grierson	BIS
Samuel Dickinson	DfT	Karen Hurrell	EHRC
Sarah Martin	Scot Gov (via audio)	Marie Haythornthwaite	ONS
Steve Cooley	ONS (via audio)	Maria Willoughby	MoJ
Tim Gibbs	ONS (via audio)	Mary Gregory	DECC
Tim Vizard	ONS (via audio)	Nicola White	ONS
Mark Herniman (Secretariat)	ONS	Pam Spicer	ONS
		Paul Waruszynski	ONS
		Pete Betts	ONS
		Sarah Ravenhill	ONS
		Tom Anderson	ONS

1.0 Welcome and Introduction

- 1.1 Pete Brodie welcomed members to the meeting, adding there were some new members. These were; Kirsty MacLean from National Records of Scotland – a new group to be represented on the NSHG, Samuel Dickinson from the Department for Transport (DfT) – replacing Lyndsey Melbourne, and Sarah Ravenhill from the Electronic Data Collection Team at ONS – another new group to be represented at the NSHG.
- 1.2 Pete explained that Lyndsey Melbourne from the DfT and Roger Morgan from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) had left the NSHG due to changes in roles. A replacement for Lyndsey was already in place and a replacement representative for DWP was being sought. Lyndsey and Roger were thanked for their contribution to the NSHG.

2.0 Review of the Minutes and Actions from the Last Meeting, NSHG (14:3) 24 – Pete Brodie

- 2.1 There were no comments arising from the minutes of the previous meeting and these were agreed as a true reflection of the 18th September 2014 NSHG meeting.

- 2.2 There were 15 actions from the 18th September meeting. Actions 1, 2, 4 and 12 were not complete when the meeting papers were distributed. However, since then actions 1, 4 and 12 have been completed. With regard to Action 1, National Records of Scotland have become a member of the NSHG, represented by Kirsty MacLean. With regard to Action 4, Kirsty MacLean has agreed to present a paper at the next meeting covering an update on the 2011 Scottish Census. With regard to Action 12, the Education topic lead, Karen Grierson, has reported back stating they are not yet at a stage to request potential resources to test new questions. This action has therefore been closed.
- 2.3 Action 2 is part complete and the Secretariat will progress this with Paul Waruszynski. The remainder of the actions were all complete.

ACTION No 1 – Secretariat to progress Action 2 from the 18 September NSHG meeting with Paul Waruszynski.

3.0 Update on Harmonisation Work

a. GSS SPSC Meeting Report, NSHG (14:4) 25 – Pete Brodie

- 3.1 Pete presented the report on the GSS Statistical Policy and Standards Committee (SPSC) meeting that took place on 16th October 2014. The meeting was chaired by John Pullinger, the National Statistician. Pete added the additional case studies to support the new harmonisation strategy, which were presented to the SPSC, were received well and it was agreed they were a good spread of examples that illustrate both the benefits of harmonisation and where harmonisation is not possible.
- 3.2 At the SPSC meeting some guidance was given on the role of the National Statistics Harmonisation Steering Group (NSH SG) in that it should aim to be very strategic. Some good comments were received from the National Statistician, in that the NSHG should feel empowered to lead across the GSS and that he (the National Statistician) couldn't understand why people aren't asking for harmonisation help as to him it's a 'no brainer'.
- 3.3 The NSHG welcomed the comments from the SPSC and were reminded that the previous National Statistician, Jil Matheson had indicated we should be moving into 'harmonisation by default', and it is encouraging to get this support from the top.
- 3.4 It was suggested that reasons why people are not asking for harmonisation help may be they are not aware there is help available and also may be due to resources particularly where these have been cut but the number of required outputs has remained the same. We should therefore be looking at how we offer the help and we should look at the possibility of having a 'harmonisation champions' network' so people can engage without coming to meetings. This was thought to be a good idea particularly as we are also looking at social media as an option for communicating.

ACTION No 2 – Harmonisation Team to look at setting up a 'Harmonisation Champions' network, to improve engagement on harmonisation matters.

- 3.5 The meeting was reminded the Harmonisation Team at ONS do meet regularly with the UK Statistics Authority, Good Practice Team. It was thought to be useful to have a standing report from the Good Practice Team presented at the NSHG meetings.

ACTION No 3 – Harmonisation Team to contact the Good Practice Team with regard to providing a standing report on matters of interest to the NSHG.

- 3.6 It was also suggested there maybe needs to be a change from having lots of interesting papers presented at the meetings (sharing information) to activities to enable others by demonstrating best practice and showing the benefits of harmonisation more. The meeting was also reminded there is an 'International' dimension to harmonisation and the need to sometimes harmonise at a UK and International level. Eurostat have come to the end of their 'Modernisation of Economic Trade Statistics' programme and there was supposed to have been a parallel one for social surveys. It was suggested, maybe the social and demographic side is a little bit further behind in European terms.
- 3.7 It was also stated there are sometimes pots of money available from the EU. The 'Framework Regulation Integrating Business Statistics (FRIBS)' programme has also helped with harmonisation work where they have suggested a reduction in the number of definitions of 'Turnover', for example, which will be a positive move for harmonisation. Funds may also be available from the 'Horizon 20/20', controlled by Eurostat, where they want to encourage statistical institutes to link up with academics to make joint proposals to do work. There may be an opportunity to get funding for resources through this. Any live bids for this funding should be shared so members are aware.

ACTION No 4 – If any members of the NSHG become aware of any live bids for funding from the EU, they should be sent to the secretariat so they can be shared with the group.

- 3.8 It was suggested there should be a link in with the Integration of European Social Statistics (IESS) and harmonisation work on European core social variables, where the National Statistical Institutes are getting together to propose current and future work. The Directors of Social Statistics meetings, within ONS are aware of this and Tim Vizard agreed to feed back anything he heard on this to the NSHG.

ACTION No 5 – Tim Vizard to feed back to NSHG anything he becomes aware of with regard to the harmonisation of European core social variables

b. Review of the NSHG Workplan, NSHG (14:4) 26 – Mark Herniman

- 3.9 Mark gave an update of the workplan, explaining for the benefit of new members the workplan contains the current programme of work and a table with progress against the programme of work which is updated on a quarterly basis. He added for next year the items reported against will be amended to reflect the revised Harmonisation Implementation Plan.
- 3.10 A question was asked with regard to the Data Markers and if the NSHG had done as much as it can with these. It was stated there were a couple of HoPs who didn't agree with aspects of the proposals but the HoPs did agree it should be published as guidance on the ONS web site.
- 3.11 The meeting was informed the Harmonisation Team have been invited to the UK Statistics Authority Monitoring and Assessment Team Workshop to do a presentation and a round the table discussion on how they can help each other. It was also suggested case studies demonstrating where harmonisation is not a good idea as well as when it is, are equally important, as there are sometimes very good reasons why harmonisation isn't always possible. This was agreed and will be included in the presentation to the UK Statistics Authority.

ACTION No 6 – Harmonisation Team to include examples demonstrating where harmonisation is not a good idea as well as when it is, in the presentation for the UK Statistics Authority.

c. Census update and Latest Plans, NSHG (14:4) 27 – Paul Waruszynski

- 3.12 Paul was not able to be at the meeting and no-one else from Census was available to present the paper. There were no comments or questions to take back to Paul.

4.0 Proposal for Business Harmonisation Workshop, NSHG (14:4) 28 – Palvi Shah

- 4.1 Palvi presented her paper, explaining the proposal is about having a workshop to ‘kick start’ the harmonisation work on business surveys. Since the paper was written a very positive meeting has taken place with colleagues in Data Collection Methodology (DCM) working on the Electronic Data Collection (EDC) Programme for business surveys. They are looking to move all business surveys over to EDC mode by 2018. As part of this they need to re-write some of the questions and are interested in ensuring those questions are harmonised. Therefore it is now proposed that the workshop is run jointly with DCM.
- 4.2 There were no comments from the meeting but members not at the meeting were asked to direct comments to Palvi Shah in the Harmonisation Team.

ACTION No 7 – NSHG members to contact Palvi Shah with any comments or other suggestions for the proposal for the Business Harmonisation Workshop.**5.0 Progress on Harmonisation of Administrative Data, NSHG (14:4) 29 – Becki Aquilina**

- 5.1 Palvi Shah presented the paper as Becki was unable to attend the meeting at short notice, adding there is no proposal at this stage to form a sub-group for the harmonisation of Administrative Data but to maintain a watch on progress with this and to link in with the Integrated Project Teams (IPTs) and the various programmes going on across the GSS. Progress will be reported back as and when necessary via the NSHG.
- 5.2 A question was asked about the involvement with the IPTs and if there were going to be ‘producer’ representatives from across the GSS who may be affected by any Census developments. From the user perspective it’s important to ensure that developments take into account their needs and the impact on quality. It was thought the IPTs are a vehicle for the management of the Census and there are stakeholder engagement and user needs mechanisms within the programme.
- 5.3 It was suggested the area of administrative data is one where ONS and the GSS can actually make some serious improvements and there are many things the GSS could do to help producers with their administrative data collection and perhaps the methodology of administrative data should be harmonised as this would be a great benefit to producers. At the moment the Administrative Data Programme within ONS is producing a catalogue of what administrative data is out there. It was recognised that using administrative data would be easier if it were harmonised. It was also suggested the involvement of Local Government as well as other Government Departments would be useful. Administrative data is going to be key to the Census Transformation Programme as ONS look towards starting to produce population counts using administrative data before waiting for the 2021 Census. The NSHG used to have a representative from the Local Government Association (LGA) but after he left LGA a replacement could not be found. It was agreed to contact the LGA to see if they could find a representative, bearing in mind the work involving administrative data.

ACTION No 8 – Secretariat to contact the LGA to find a new representative for the NSHG.

- 5.4 The Royal Statistical Society (RSS) may be able to help as statisticians within Local Government may be members of the RSS. It was also thought this is partly about producer teams being aware of their various users, what their needs are and ensuring they provide the guidance and service required as much as possible. Local Government user needs should be taken into account with these projects as they are important producers of administrative data as well as users where the Census outputs are concerned. The RSS also has other various regional and topic related groups that could be candidates for a suitable representation.

6.0 Harmonisation and Consistency, NSHG (14:4) 31 – Jan Thomas

- 6.1 Jan presented her paper explaining it was a list of ideas about the objectives and outcomes of harmonisation from the user perspective that could be used in presentations to encourage the uptake of harmonisation. She added it could bring together some of the themes already discussed and any other ideas of this type of engagement/approach would be welcome.
- 6.2 It was suggested it may be helpful to draw out examples of misinterpretation of statistics in media articles where it's become high profile and response is needed from the UK Statistics Authority refuting a headline statement, particularly where the misinterpretation is due to a lack of harmonisation. Examples of how harmonisation has led to efficiencies would also be worth looking into as well. It was agreed these were both good ideas and worth looking into further.

ACTION No 9 – Harmonisation Team to look into examples of where harmonisation has led to efficiencies, for use in future presentations.

- 6.3 It was further suggested that examples from economic commentators and others should also be included. It was stated the benefits to rectifying inconsistencies are not just to users but sometimes to producers as well.

7.0 Harmonisation and Social Media – Twitter, NSHG (14:4) 32 – Steven Cooley

- 7.1 Steve presented his paper explaining harmonisation does not have a large web presence apart from the ONS website, the GSSnet web pages and StatsUserNet but it's important to engage with as many users as possible. It is hoped the use of social media such as 'Twitter' will help to develop a larger base of people to communicate and engage with. The purpose of the paper is to seek the views of the NSHG on whether social media such as 'Twitter' should be used.
- 7.2 It was suggested that many government users may not be able to engage, due to differing departmental policies on the use of social media. Despite this some government employees may well use their own personal 'Twitter' accounts for this purpose. Some discussion has taken place with the Social Media Team and harmonisation is a very broad subject that could involve a lot of different areas of GSS and having a 'harmonisation' feed would be beneficial. Although harmonisation is broad ranging and cuts across all topics, such a service would help to pick up on a whole different range of views and people. It would also be useful in engaging with users, as opposed to producers, and should be tried. The use of the new 'Stats Chat' community is also to be encouraged as it has a large and broad membership and may encourage other views and discussions. It was agreed it would be good to use a number of differing social media types.
- 7.3 The restrictions for using 'Twitter' were discussed, mainly around technical matters and the restrictions on the available characters for typing. We will need to think how we do this from a 'handling' point of view across ONS to ensure it's not just viewed as 'another Twitter account'. The target audience should also be considered and this was thought to be mainly for the benefit of 'users'.
- 7.4 Some thought should be given to the name of the feed/account so as not to turn off or discourage users from using it. It was thought the 'Harmonisation' name may work as a brand name as we have built up a good name through the roadshows but do accept it may not be the best name. The real benefits of harmonisation should be in the forefront when doing this and it's not just harmonisation for harmonisation sake. It was suggested the name should include 'Statistics' to help better with users looking for statistical related feeds.

8.0 NMSG Topic Lead Updates, NSHG (14:4) 33 – Topic Group Leads

8.1 Benefits and Tax Credits Verbal Report – Caroline Smith

8.1.1 Caroline was not able to be at the meeting but had submitted a report. There were no comments or questions.

8.2 Consumer Durables Verbal Update – Jana Kubascikova-Mullen

8.2.1 Jana was unable to be at the meeting and had nothing to report for this period,

8.3 Country of Birth and Migration – Pamela Cobb

8.3.1 Pamela presented her report explaining that she is only the topic lead whilst a permanent replacement is found, who has the time to properly commit to the role. There were no comments or questions.

8.4 Crime and Anti Social Behaviour – Nicola White

8.4.1 Nicola was unable to be at the meeting and had nothing to report this period.

8.5 Demographic Information – Emily Knipe

8.5.1 Emily was unable to be at the meeting but had submitted a report. On a related topic, the meeting was advised that updated results from the Sexual Identity project have been published and review of the question is planned for 2015. It is not proposed that the wording of the question is changed but the underlying assumptions are still relevant.

8.6 Economic Activity – Debra Leaker

8.6.1 Debra was not able to be at the meeting and had nothing to report this period. Debra is no longer able to be the lead for this group but we do have a few names from within the ONS Labour Market Division and Labour Force Survey for potential new leads.

8.7 Education – Karen Grierson

8.7.1 Karen was not able to be at the meeting but had submitted a report. There were no comments or questions.

8.8 EILR – Angela Potter-Collins

8.8.1 Angela was unable to be at the meeting but had submitted a report. There were no comments or questions.

8.9 Health, Disability and Carers - TBA

8.9.1 We do not currently have a topic lead for this group, therefore a report has not been submitted. Kate Bedford from the HSCIC has put us in touch with a possible candidate who is currently considering the role. The topic was thoroughly revised in 2011. It was suggested that if the potential lead falls through that Allan Baker from Public Health England may be able to suggest potential leads.

8.10 Housing and Tenure – Hugh Mallinson

8.10.1 Hugh presented a verbal report on the English Housing Survey (EHS). The survey is coming to the end of its current three year contract with NatCen and a review is looking at what will happen to it. There is an ongoing need for DCLG to make administrative savings to tackle the current budget deficit. The survey currently costs £4 million a year to produce. There are a number of options looking at how to reduce costs and a consultation will open in due course, once agreement from Ministers is reached. Proposals are currently being sought to look at a cheaper form of the survey that incorporates, as much as possible, the two existing elements of the survey.

8.10.2 DCLG is still the main source of information on fuel poverty for the Department of Energy and Climate Change. The current most active areas are; Fire Safety, second homes, energy efficiency

and the private rental sector, including issues with landlords and tenants. DCLG is also the main source of statistics on overcrowding and under occupancy. One of the most substantial changes to surveys was the introduction of questions to support the Armed Forces Covenant to track housing conditions of Servicemen and ex Servicemen. Other changes were the introduction of Well-being questions and questions on shorter tenancies in the social rented sector.

- 8.10.3 It was pointed out, with the coming of the 2021 Census, any revision to the Household definition would be of interest to DCLG and this group (the NSHG) is a good way of being updated on this. Sarah Martin asked if there was any current effort to look at harmonisation of questions between the EHS and Scottish Housing Survey. Hugh agreed to look into this.

ACTION No 10 – Hugh Mallinson to check if any harmonisation of questions is taking place between the English Housing Survey and Scottish Housing Survey and report back to the NSHG.

- 8.10.4 A question was asked, with the proposal to review the EHS, will the users or the technical advisory group be contacted as some use the EHS data and may be able to provide business cases as to why the EHS should continue in the future. A consultation document is being prepared for this and any names of individuals how are interested can be given to Hugh to ensure they receive the consultation.

ACTION No 11 – NSHG members are asked to send any names of individuals interested in the consultation on the EHS, to Hugh Mallinson.

- 8.10.5 The RSS would also be interested in receiving the consultation as they would ensure its circulation via the StatsUserNet website.

ACTION No 12 – Hugh Mallinson to arrange for the consultation document on the future of the EHS to be sent to Emma Bowditch so it can be circulated via the StatsUserNet website.

8.11 **Income – Richard Tonkin**

- 8.11.1 Richard reported there has been work going on between ONS Social Survey Division and the Department for Work and Pensions to improve the consistency of data between the Family Resources Survey and the Survey on Living Conditions which are used in conjunction to provide statistics for Eurostat and the EU SILC regulations. A guide will shortly be published covering earnings and income data sources, which explains the different concepts of different measures and the different sources. This has been a collaborative venture between ONS and a wide range of other departments and is currently undergoing quality assurance.

8.12 **Integrated Household Survey – Tim Vizard**

- 8.12.1 Tim presented his report, adding this will be the last topic report from the IHS and there is not a lot to update on now. There were no comments or questions.

8.13 **Pensions – Tim Gibbs**

- 8.13.1 Tim stated there was nothing to report for this period for this topic group. There were no comments or questions.

- 8.14 The Chair stated how important it was for the topic leads to report on progress of their respective groups and if there was nothing to report, this should also be done rather than just not responding to the call for reports.

9.0 Review of the 2011 Census Questions, NSHG (14:4) 30 – Ellen Hewitt

- 9.1 Ellen was not able to be at the meeting and paper was presented by Karina Williams from Data Collection Methodology in ONS.
- 9.2 A question was asked at if anyone in ONS has thought about the online version of the Census forms from the user's point of view and users being able to set up an online account. This would have clear benefits with any other surveys in the future that could be done online. This would be a reduction of burden on the users and also potentially gives a way of linking data. This has been thought about to some extent within ONS. A statistical population register could potentially be produced with such data.
- 9.3 Karina was reminded the ONS Classifications and Harmonisation Unit (CHU) has all the expertise for Standard Industrial Coding and Standard Occupational Coding and helped to develop the complex coding used in the last Census. This would be helpful and Karina will be in contact with CHU with regard to this in due course.
- 9.4 The paper outlines the preliminary stages of work taking place to explore the possibilities for the Census online questionnaire as this is a new concept for the Census. This research will support the next stage, which will be the development of the online questionnaire. This work will be participating in some of the IPTs mentioned earlier in the meeting.
- 9.5 From the migration statistics point of the view the last Census was a vast improvement in helping to identify migrants and there has been a whole range of outputs based on that. It would be good if there were some harmonised questions on 'year of arrival' and why people originally came to the UK. This would be useful in looking to understand complex issues such as people arriving for one purpose and ending up staying for other reasons.
- 9.6 On a related issue it was pointed out the Welsh Government are looking at those people who responded on surveys stating they do not use the internet. These people will be contacted to see what issues are stopping them getting online to complete surveys. This was thought to be an interesting issue and DCM and Welsh Government exchanged contact details during the meeting.

10.0 AOB

- 10.1 With regard to the promotion of harmonisation, a question was asked if there is a requirement to provide a link to harmonisation work when producing statistics as this would be useful. It was suggested producers should clearly highlight upfront in their outputs if they have used harmonised principles or not and if not why and link to the 'Harmonisation' web pages, in order to ensure it is clear how their output is different to other outputs on the same topic. The Quality and Methodology Information (QMI) reports published by business areas in ONS, provide users with a greater understanding of our statistics, their quality and the methods that are used to create them. These reports ask producers to compare their data with other similar data and explain any differences. It was felt it would be useful to share these reports with the NSHG

ACTION No 13 – Harmonisation Team to provide a link to the QMI reports produced by business areas in ONS and circulate to NSHG membership.

- 10.2 The Statistics User Forum Poverty Conference is taking place on the 10th February 2015 and will be announced soon on StatsUserNet and various other places.

- 10.3 A large scale review of all government surveys conducted in Wales has been carried out and a decision has been made to merge them all into one large survey. A consultation is going on at the moment about the topics to be used for the survey.
- 10.4 At the September NSHG meeting an action point from the June NSHG meeting was discussed in relation to possible 'gender identity' questions. After talking to the Demographic Information topic lead and the Ethnicity, Identity, Language and Religion topic leads it has been agreed ONS will not be doing any further work looking at these questions.
- 10.5 Also at the September NSHG meeting, a paper from the Migration Reporting Working Group (MRWG) was submitted on the Reporting of Migration Data detailing guidance for users. It was agreed at that meeting the paper required some rework. This was done and the paper was re-submitted by correspondence, for comment by 21st November, after which the paper would be considered to be agreed by the NSHG. No comments were received and paper has been agreed.

11.0 Next Meetings

- 11.1 The dates of the next two meetings are:

Wednesday 4th March 2015, 1100 to 1330 hrs at ONS Drummond Gate, Meeting Room 3

Wednesday 3rd June 2015, 1100 to 1330 hrs at ONS Drummond Gate, Meeting Room 3

Annexes:

- A List of Actions

ACTIONS FROM THE NSHG MEETING – 10 DECEMBER 2014				
Action No	Para	Action	Responsible	Status
1	2.3	Secretariat to progress Action 2 from the 18 September NSHG meeting with Paul Waruszynski.	Secretariat	
2	3.4	Harmonisation Team to look at setting up a 'Harmonisation Champions' network, to improve engagement on harmonisation matters.	Harmonisation Team	
3	3.5	Harmonisation Team to contact the Good Practice Team with regard to providing a standing report on matters of interest to the NSHG.	Harmonisation Team	
4	3.7	If any members of the NSHG become aware of any live bids for this type of funding, they should be sent to the secretariat so they can be shared with the group.	NSHG members	
5	3.8	Tim Vizard to feed back anything he becomes aware of with regard to the harmonisation of European core social variable, to the NSHG.	Tim Vizard	
6	3.11	Harmonisation Team to include examples demonstrating where harmonisation is not a good idea as well as when it is, in the presentation for the UK Statistics Authority.	Harmonisation Team	
7	4.2	NSHG members are asked to contact Palvi Shah with any comments or other suggestions for the proposal for the Business Harmonisation Workshop.	NSHG members	
8	5.3	Secretariat to contact the LGA to find a new representative for the NSHG.	Secretariat	
9	6.2	Harmonisation Team to look into examples of where harmonisation has led to efficiencies, for use in future presentations.	Harmonisation Team	
10	8.10.3	Hugh Mallinson to check if any harmonisation of questions is taking place between the English Housing Survey and Scottish Housing Survey and report back to the NSHG.	Hugh Mallinson	
11	8.10.4	NSHG members are asked to send any names of individuals interested in the consultation on the EHS, to Hugh Mallinson.	NSHG members	
12	8.10.5	Hugh Mallinson to arrange for the consultation document on the future of the EHS to be sent to Emma Bowditch so it can be circulated via the StatsUserNet website.	Hugh Mallinson	
13	10.1	Harmonisation Team to provide a link to the QMI reports produced by business areas in ONS and circulate to NSHG membership.	Harmonisation Team	