

**National Statistics Harmonisation Group (NSHG)
Annual Harmonisation Workshop Report
23rd September 2015
Meeting Room 3
ONS, 1 Drummond Gate, London. SW1V 2QQ
14.00 – 16.30**

Attendees:

Charlie Wroth-Smith (Chair)	ONS
Andy Bates	ONS
Becki Aquilina	ONS
Catherine Davies	ONS
Emily Knipe	ONS
Emma Wright	ONS
Fiona Aitchison	ONS
Joe Ellison	ONS
Jonathan Swan	ONS
Karen Hurrell	EHRC
Kevin Sams	HMRC
Lisa Carter	HMRC
Lisa Walters	WG
Mark Herniman	ONS
Nafeesah Ameeruddin	BIS
Palvi Shah	ONS
Paul Benson	HSE
Rob Green	DCLG
Sezen Barutcu	ONS
Tim Gibbs	ONS

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Charlie Wroth-Smith welcomed members and other delegates to the workshop and the agenda was reviewed and agreed. Charlie gave a short introduction.
- 1.2 The participants were given a workshop pack containing the following:
- Agenda
 - List of Attendees
 - Copy of Presentation Slides
 - Feedback Sheet
 - Harmonisation Flyer
 - Copy of Syndicate Discussion Topics

2.0 Workshop Objectives and Format

- 2.1 The objectives of the workshop were to:
- Review roles and responsibilities of NSHG members/harmonisation champions
 - Identify links with programmes across the GSS and discuss how harmonisation can benefit from these
 - Assess how NSHG members review the harmonisation principles
 - Consider how to raise profile of harmonisation
 - Identify new harmonisation research projects

- 2.2 The first half of the workshop consisted of an introductory presentation from Charlie (see **Annex A**) about the roles and responsibilities of NSHG members/Harmonisation Champions, followed by discussion in syndicate groups. The topics for discussion in **Syndicate Session 1** were:
- Review of the NSHG member role
 - The Census Transformation Programme and its benefits to harmonisation

The groups discussed the topics without the presence of Harmonisation Team members.

- 2.3 The second half of the workshop consisted of 3 presentations from Mark, Palvi and Becki in the Harmonisation Team (see **Annex A**), followed by discussion in syndicate groups. The topics for discussion in **Syndicate Session 2** were:
- How to review Harmonised Principles
 - Harmonisation research
 - Raising the profile of harmonisation

Each syndicate session was facilitated by 2 members of the Harmonisation Team.

- 2.4 The main points raised in each **Syndicate Session** are listed below. Syndicate groups were each allocated discussion time and time to feedback a summary of discussions after each session.

3.0 Syndicate Group Session 1 Feedback

Group A: Andy Bates, Fiona Aitchison, Lisa Walters, Tim Gibbs, Paul Benson

- 3.1 **NSHG Role:** Some people in the group were unable to comment as they were new to their role. Pensions was mentioned and how harmonisation has been effective in bringing the data collectors together to discuss issues. HSE also uses harmonised concepts such as Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) and definitions of diseases. Lisa talked about her role as a Harmonisation Champion and Andy talked about his role as an ONS Quality Champion, and about how they can help promote harmonisation. NSHG members are often not sure what the Harmonisation Team needs them to do. It was felt that more presentations and conversations about their roles would help.

- 3.2 **Census:** The use and benefits of Census varied depending on people's work areas. Lisa thought it had great potential in helping with the work the Welsh Government is doing to move to more online data collection and creating new questions suitable for online use. The group was unclear about whether crime/pensions data were collected by Census. It was thought that linking pensions data to administrative data would be of great benefit and would enhance Census data. Therefore it might be worthwhile speaking to Census to see if any administrative data related to crime/pensions was available. To link things correctly, National Insurance numbers would be required as pensions data often comes from business surveys which don't contain enough rich demographic information.

Group B: Catherine Davies, Jonathan Swan, Kevin Sams, Nafeessah Ameerudden

- 3.3 **NSHG Role:** Everyone in the group was new to their role. It would be interesting and informative to find out what has worked well for long-standing members and how they have grown into the role, especially when formulating their communication plans. It would be good to exploit common interests and co-locations, e.g. ONS Quality Centre overlaps with Harmonisation Team, hence having closer meetings would be useful. It would also be useful if the NSHG meeting produced key messages for the Harmonisation Champions to take back for sharing with their departments. There was discussion about how to generate and maintain momentum, i.e. referring to specific communication plans that have gone well. It might also be helpful if the various "Champion" groups from each department met together as one group to provide a forum for discussion. They could then produce various newsletters to keep people informed.

- 3.4 **Census:** The main consideration was how to harmonise administrative data. When linking it with Census data, there needs to be a comprehensive list which people would want linked and which would add value, such as PAYE, benefits, etc. National Insurance numbers could be used as a universal linkage key, but there are issues about their usage. 'Fuzzy linking' has also been considered. The Harmonisation Team needs to engage with data owners to encourage them to consider harmonisation when changing systems or processes, so that data can be linked properly. Owners need to be aware of the additional knowledge gained from administrative data and cross-government consultation could also help promote its benefits.

Group C: Emily Knipe, Karen Hurrell, Rob Green, Lisa Carter

3.5 **NSHG Role**: 3 key areas for concern were identified:

- Resources – especially time
- Continuity – when there is no Topic Lead, the subject can drop off the radar and when a new lead is identified, everything seems to start from the beginning again. There needs to be a watching brief in keeping Topic Leads informed so that they are kept up to date.
- Communication – there needs to be more of an ethos of community within and between each topic so that people don't feel isolated or unsure of their role.

3.6 **Census**: Due to lack of time, there was not much discussion within the syndicate session. During the feedback session, the group discussed ensuring that Census Topic Leads liaise closely with NSHG Topic Leads. There is also a role for Departmental Champions to push forward the harmonisation agenda within their departments.

4.0 Syndicate Group Session 2 Feedback

Syndicate Group A – How to Review Harmonised Principles

Syndicate members – Rob Green, Fiona Aitchison

Facilitators – Mark Herniman and Becki Aquilina

4.1 Both group members were new so they didn't have much experience of the review process. However, they thought there should be an annual review at least, especially for surveys that are being updated each year. It was stated that there is a difference between reactive and pro-active reviewing. When it is known that new questions are being formulated, Topic Leads should get involved in the process from the start. In the past, priority has been assigned as high, medium and low. This could be more structured in the future. Having a continuity of outputs was good as was stability of question wording. It was noted that changes would be rarer for questions coming from administrative data. Questions should only be changed if there is a good reason, such as legal changes. It was suggested that perhaps topics should be reviewed regularly to see if anything new has arisen. The role of Topic Lead was described as two-pronged – they are responsible for looking after their topic, but are also responsible for any surveys they are involved with. As a result, they may be able to identify anything that might impact their surveys from other topic areas.

Syndicate Group B – Harmonisation Research

Syndicate members – Lisa Walters, Emily Knipe, Kevin Sams, Tim Gibbs, Catherine Davies

Facilitators - Charlie Wroth-Smith and Sezen Barutcu

4.2 The group suggested development of case studies showing the benefits of harmonisation, such as how time and money can be saved by using harmonisation. An example was given of the Welsh Government having to spend time, and hence money, on extra methodological work as the initial surveys they were trying to compare were not harmonised. The dangers of not harmonising need to also be highlighted e.g. loss of National Statistics accreditation. It would be helpful if a catalogue of administrative data across the GSS was provided and a database of variables set up in order to show how they could be linked. The Knowledge, Analysis and Intelligence (KAI) forum within HMRC is an area where harmonisation could be involved, as it is the equivalent of the ONS Research, Analysis and Statistics (RAS) forum. Information about harmonisation could also be included in ONS induction packs.

Syndicate Group C - Raising the profile of Harmonisation

Syndicate members – Karen Hurrell, Lisa Carter, Andy Bates, Jonathan Swan, Paul Benson

Facilitators – Palvi Shah and Joe Ellison

4.3 The group agreed the level of awareness of harmonisation in their organisation depended on various things, such as how active the Topic Lead was in promoting harmonisation in their topic area. The group thought the relevance of harmonisation was not always to the fore and assumptions about what could and couldn't be harmonised, e.g. administrative data, also had an impact. The group talked about promoting harmonisation by mentioning it in their day job. They also saw the need for pointing people in the direction of harmonisation resources such as the Variable and Question Bank (VQB), the harmonisation website and newsletter. Several barriers to harmonisation were mentioned. They ranged from a perceived lack of

resources in carrying out harmonisation, such as the costs involved in changing existing forms or systems; the actual process of harmonisation itself and what it involved; inertia of departments in taking on new things and giving harmonisation a low priority; and a low awareness of the benefits of harmonisation.

5.0 Summary of Workshop

5.1 Charlie summarised the outcomes of the workshop as follows:

- Members would like more direction with regards to their roles and responsibilities.
- The review process for Harmonised Principles needs to be considered carefully, so that a balance is struck between the need for stability and the need for changing questions.
- Good ideas for research need to be followed up quickly and the results put out to NSHG members as soon as possible to help support them in promoting harmonisation in their organisations.
- To further raise the profile of harmonisation, more information needs to be distributed to all interested parties and topic areas to keep them up to date with what is going on.

Emma Wright summed up the usefulness of the day and thanked everyone for attending. Attendees were asked to complete a feedback form (see **Annex B**).

6.0 Actions Arising from the Workshop

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
1	Provide NSHG members and Harmonisation Champions with more direction about their roles and responsibilities including: - discovering what has worked well for long-standing members - ensuring continuity when NSHG Topic Leads leave or are replaced - creating more of a community within and between NSHG Topic Groups	Harmonisation Team	Harmonisation Team is meeting on 2 November to discuss action plan and will request feedback from some new and long-standing NSHG members.
2	Produce list of key messages from each NSHG meeting for Harmonisation Champions to take back to their departments.	Harmonisation Team	
3	Invite various "Champion" groups from each department to meet and discuss common issues.	Andy Bates	Meeting for ONS Output Managers due late Nov/early Dec in Newport and Titchfield. Date to follow.
4	Engage with data owners to encourage them to harmonise when changing administrative data and to promote its benefits.	Harmonisation Team	
5	Ensure Census Topic Leads liaise closely with NSHG Topic Leads	Harmonisation Team	
6	Review the process for reviewing Harmonised Principles, taking into account stability versus the need to change questions.	Harmonisation Team & Topic Leads	
7	Follow up good ideas for research quickly and send results to NSHG members so they can use it to promote harmonisation in their organisations e.g. case studies showing the benefits of harmonisation and implications of not harmonising.	Harmonisation Team	

8	Explore idea of setting up a GSS catalogue of administrative data and database of variables to show how they could be linked.	Harmonisation Team	Kevin (HMRC) is investigating this.
9	Investigate new forums for promoting harmonisation e.g. Knowledge, Analysis and Intelligence (KAI) forum in HMRC, ONS induction packs.	Harmonisation Team	Kevin (HMRC) is investigating KAI.
10	Promote harmonisation in department by mentioning in the day job and referring people to resources such as the Variable and Question Bank.	NSHG Members & Harmonisation Champions	
11	To aid with action 1, send out an email to NSHG members and Harmonisation Champions with key information e.g. names of Topic Leads/Harmonisation Champions, web links to resources etc.	Harmonisation Team (Becki)	

Joe Ellison
Classifications and Harmonisation Unit
ONS Titchfield

Annex A - Workshop Presentations



MASTER NSHG
workshop.pptx

Annex B – Feedback Sheet Analysis

An anonymous workshop critique was handed out to all attendees.

The table below details the number of returned critiques against the number of attendees at the workshop.

Number of attendees	12 *
Number of critiques returned	10 (83%)

* Not counting the Harmonisation Team facilitators.

The table below details the statements on the critique and the level of response for each one.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The workshop met its objectives	1	9	0	0	0
I found the workshop interesting	3	7	0	0	0
The workshop was well structured	3	7	0	0	0
The workshop covered enough information in the available time	3	6	1	0	0
My knowledge has improved as a result of attending the workshop	2	8	0	0	0
I think the workshop is a worthwhile exercise	3	7	0	0	0

The following hand written comments were made on the Feedback Sheets:

“I think it would be useful if the Harmonisation Team sent out emails to ‘guide’ and assist people with their roles.”

“Only minor comment is that it may be worthwhile to circulate the workshop agenda as well as the meeting agenda to give people opportunity to think about the topics beforehand.”

“Interesting workshop. Hope you find the input useful.”

“Would be good to have a report at the next meeting on what has come about from workshop.”

“Well-organised workshop, but as noted, people seem to need more guidance & perhaps more regular workshops/support mechanisms.”

“Interesting and enjoyable event. Lots to think about, and certainly a growth area to make the most of the admin data already collected!”

Summary

The analysis of the workshop critiques would appear to indicate the workshop was received positively and was a worthwhile event. The hand written comments support the 'tick-box' comments and further suggest the day was well organised and produced some good thoughts and ideas.

The turnout of the workshop was more than expected. All who attended contributed well to the overall event.