

**National Statistics Harmonisation Group
Annual Harmonisation Workshop Report
18th September 2014
Meeting Room 3
ONS, 1 Drummond Gate, London. SW1V 2QQ
14.00 – 17.00**

Attendees:

Emma Wright (Chair)	ONS
Becki Aquilina	ONS
Emma Bowditch	RSS
Hersh Mann	UK Data Service
Jacqui Jones	ONS
Jan Thomas	ONS
Jana Kubascikova-Mullen	ONS
Karen Hurrell	EHRC
Lisa Walters	WG
Marie Haythornthwaite	ONS
Mark Herniman	ONS
Paul Waruszynski	ONS
Steve Ellerd-Elliott	MOJ
Thomas Simms	DWP
Tim Gibbs	ONS

Apologies were received from Pete Brodie (ONS) who was due to chair the meeting and from other invitees.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Emma Wright welcomed members and other delegates to the workshop and the agenda was reviewed and agreed. Emma 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
- A-Z of Harmonised Principles booklet
- Harmonisation flyer
- NSHG newsletter no.8

2.0 Workshop Objectives and Format

2.1 The objectives of the workshop were to:

- Review the outcomes from the last workshop (September 2013)
- Present topical harmonisation issues as input to discussion
- Provide an opportunity to give longer time for consideration and strategic thinking
- Break into three syndicate groups to review harmonisation related items
- Formulate an action plan and future work programme.

- 2.2 Members were reminded of the actions from the previous NSHG workshop (2013) and updated on outcomes. All actions have been completed.
- 2.3 The workshop consisted of presentations (see **Annex A**), each followed by an overall group discussion and then further discussion in syndicate groups. The presentations were:
- View from the Harmonisation Steering Group – Jacqui Jones (ONS)
 - Harmonisation Case Studies – Karen Hurrell (EHRC), Paul Waruszynski (ONS)
 - Practical Approaches to Harmonisation – Becki Aquilina (ONS)
 - Harmonisation versus Standardisation – Becki Aquilina (ONS)
 - ESSnet Standardisation Project – Jan Thomas (ONS)

The presentations were well received and generated a number of discussion points, for example:

- The approach to harmonisation should be to increase coherence and consistency from the user viewpoint
- How the results shown in the Census case study could be improved in the future
- How the Harmonisation Team could potentially get user input through increased use of StatsUserNet

These discussions were expanded upon in the syndicate sessions.

- 2.4 The workshop then split into three syndicate sessions as shown below, facilitated by a member of the Harmonisation Team. The following topics were assigned to each group:

Syndicate Group A - facilitated by Jan Thomas

How does lack of harmonisation impact on quality and harmonisation improve quality?

Syndicate Group B - facilitated by Becki Aquilina

Ideas for further harmonisation case studies

Syndicate Group C - facilitated by Mark Herniman

How to engage stakeholders

- 2.5 The main points raised in each syndicate are listed below and the full transcript of the sessions can be seen at **Annex B**. Syndicate groups were each allocated 45 minutes discussion time and ten minutes to feedback a summary of discussions.

3.0 Syndicate Groups

Syndicate Group A (Lisa Walters, Jana Kubascikova-Mullen, Tim Gibb)

- 3.1 The group discussed how lack of harmonisation can impact on quality. It was recognised that harmonisation can restrict the ability to have a continued time series and can slow things down if principles have to be consulted on and agreed. However, non-harmonised data is less comparable therefore it is difficult to use alternative sources for quality assurance and to share experience with other users of similar data. Non-harmonised data also makes matching and linking difficult.
- 3.2 The group also discussed how harmonisation can improve quality. It encourages the re-use of tried and tested questions leading to more accurate responses, and enables users to trust the data source. It was mentioned that the new National Statistician John Pullinger wants people to debate policy rather than the statistics produced, and this is more likely to be achieved if data is collected in a harmonised way. Harmonisation can lead to an increase in sample size, reduction in costs and improvement in response rates. It also enables international comparisons.

3.3 **Post-syndicate discussion** - Harmonisation also helps to reduce respondent burden and could be linked to National Statistics accreditation and the Code of Practice. The pace of harmonisation was discussed in terms of whether the time taken to update principles can be speeded up. There is a process in place to implement interim principles before full ratification (a recent example is personal wellbeing) but there is a trade-off to be made between the quality dimensions of “comparability and coherence” and “timeliness and punctuality”.

Syndicate Group B (Thomas Simms, Marie Haythornthwaite, Emma Bowditch)

3.4 The Harmonisation Team is sending four case studies to the GSS Statistical Policies and Standards Committee (SPSC) October meeting. These are:

- Equalities and Human Rights Commission’s Measurement Framework
- Turnover (post meeting note – this has been replaced by Indices of Multiple Deprivation)
- Ethnicity
- Census Citizenship data

3.5 The group discussed further ideas for harmonisation case studies. Suggestions were:

- Income – combining ONS data with DWP/HMRC admin data.
- Geographic referencing – is harmonised via the GSS geography policy but the policy is not always correctly implemented and there can be difficulties due to changes in size of output areas.
- Census and/or survey definitions that could be harmonised e.g. communal establishment, number of rooms, household definition – why were proposed changes to the 2001 Census household definition not acceptable in 2001 but acceptable in 2011?
- Education – suggested by GSS SPSC
- Crime – suggested by GSS SPSC
- Tenure
- Census Quality Survey (CQS) – what questions worked well/didn’t work well e.g. general health didn’t work well as there were a lot of differences between the responses given on Census day and on the CQS.

3.6 **Post-syndicate discussion** - The workshop agreed it would be a good idea to pause the work on case studies until feedback has been received from GSS SPSC on the four case studies to be sent to the October meeting. Other potential case studies should be assessed to determine how many benefits have been realised as a result of harmonisation, in order to prioritise which case studies should be explored further. The Harmonisation Team would also like to produce some quantitative evidence of where harmonisation has led to improvements in data quality e.g. using administrative data (if possible) to demonstrate to potential stakeholders and users, improvements to response rates for harmonised questions. The Harmonisation Team will await feedback from GSS SPSC and guidance from the NSH Steering Group before taking any new case studies further.

Syndicate Group C (Steve Ellerd-Elliott, Karen Hurrell, Hersh Mann, Jacqui Jones)

3.7 The group discussed how to best engage different types of stakeholders of harmonisation. The Harmonisation Team requires support, priority setting and buy-in to the workplan and strategy from senior stakeholders (UK Statistics Authority, GSS, HoPs). This can be achieved by active high level engagement with these groups.

3.8 The Harmonisation Team needs to continue to create awareness of harmonisation and promote the benefits and incentives to existing and potential survey producers. This can be achieved by promoting current harmonisation initiatives. It was recognised that administrative data providers are a new type of stakeholder.

3.9 The Harmonisation Team needs to engage more with users (experts, information foragers, citizens) as they have the greatest influence on producers in terms of producing harmonised inputs and outputs. This is a different approach to the previous one and careful planning is required.

3.10 **Post-syndicate discussion** - When engaging with stakeholders, the Harmonisation Team needs to ensure it gives a balanced view by directly tackling objections whilst showing appreciation of the difficulties associated with harmonising. The workshop agreed it was important to be realistic and manage expectations in terms of what the Harmonisation Team can achieve. The workshop also discussed the fact that business surveys are much more tightly bound by regulation than social surveys.

4.0 Summary, Conclusions, Next Steps and Actions

4.1 Emma thanked all participants for their constructive input and commented that it had been a very useful day. The next steps will be to pull out the priorities which have emerged from the discussions and to circulate the notes of the workshop. As a result of the workshop, the Harmonisation Team's workplan will be updated and discussed at the next NSHG meeting on 10th December 2014.

5.0 Actions Arising from the Workshop

Action No.	Action	Responsibility	Status
1	Investigate whether there is an existing discussion board regarding administrative data research on StatsUserNet.	Harmonisation Team	
2	Investigate blogging to promote harmonisation	Harmonisation Team	
3	Consider using LinkedIn to promote harmonisation	Harmonisation Team	
4	Check that all benefits mentioned by quality syndicate group are in the 'Benefits of Harmonisation list'.	Harmonisation Team	
5	Cross check the case study list provided by the case study syndicate group, against the 'Benefits of Harmonisation list'. *	Harmonisation Team	
6	Assess potential cases studies for prioritisation. *	Harmonisation Team	
7	Create case study assessment/acceptance criteria. *	NSH Steering Group NSHG Harmonisation Team	
8	Tackle harmonisation objections and acknowledge issues as well as benefits within communications.	Harmonisation Team	
9	Link harmonisation to the GSS principles/strategy.	Harmonisation Team	
10	Link harmonisation to the ESS quality dimensions	Harmonisation Team	
11	Liaise with International Branch regarding the latest European regulations.	Harmonisation Team	
12	Investigate potential for producing quantitative measures of harmonisation benefits.	Harmonisation Team	
13	Consider how to communicate harmonisation at different levels – users/producers/senior managers	NSH Steering Group NSHG Harmonisation Team	
14	Add workshop report onto GSS website and draw attention to it across the GSS.	Harmonisation Team	

* As highlighted in section 3.6, the case study work will be paused until GSS SPSC has been consulted.

Annex A - Workshop Presentations



NSHG Workshop
2014.pptx

Annex B – Flip Chart Transcripts

Syndicate 1 – How does lack of harmonisation impact on quality and how does harmonisation improve quality?

Syndicate members – Lisa Walters, Jana Kubascikova-Mullen, Tim Gibbs

Facilitator – Jan Thomas

How does lack of harmonisation impact on quality

- Harmonisation restricts ability to have time-series continuity / scope
- Data less comparable
- Alternative sources can provide quality assurance
- Sharing experiences with other users of similar data
- Less easy to match / link with admin data
- Can increase pace (responding to change)

How does harmonisation improve quality

- Tried & tested questions
- Builds trust in data source
- Reduces variability / discrepancies
- Standard methodologies
 - Can't argue with
 - Good decision making
- Can increase sample size
- Can reduce money - so money can be better spent on other aspects
- International comparisons
- Clear questions = more accurate responses
- Improve response rates

Syndicate 2 – Ideas for further harmonisation Case Studies.

Syndicate members – Thom Simms, Marie Haythornthwaite, Emma Bowditch

Facilitator – Becki Aquilina

Current Case Studies

- EHRC
- Turnover
- Ethnicity
- Census Numbers

Possible Future Case Studies

1. Income – BY2011 – ONS & DWP / HMRC
Taking Admin Data Sets & creating harmony
Income & Earnings (Gross / Net / Benefits)
 - Success & etc
 - Lack of harmonisation
2. Geographic Referencing
Output sizes have changed
3. Communal Establishments
Definitions & Categories
Instructions (interviewer)
Links to house hold definition
4. Education (SPSC suggestion)
5. Crime (SPSC suggestion)
6. Survey Definitions
Links to Communal Establishments
No. of rooms ?
7. Tenure
8. CQS Results (Marie)
What questions did not work well (general health for example)
& others

Syndicate 3 – How to engage stakeholders.

Syndicate members – Steve Ellerd-Elliott, Karen Hurrell, Hersh Mann, Jacqui Jones

Facilitator – Mark Herniman

Stakeholder	What is needed	How to engage
Senior Stakeholders - UKSA -HoPs -GSS	Support Priority (SR15) Workplan – buy-in Strategy – buy-in	Active engagement with SPSC and HoPs
Survey producers -Existing -Potential	Awareness Benefits Incentives	By promoting current harmonisation initiatives
Administrative data providers (new)	?	?
Users (outputs) -Expert -Information foragers -Citizens	Engagement – but how? Support	Encourage users to influence the Survey Producers

Annex C – 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	10 *
Number of critiques returned	9 (90%)

* 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	3	5	1	0	0
I found the workshop interesting	3	6	0	0	0
The workshop was well structured	4	5	0	0	0
The workshop covered enough information in the available time	3	6	0	0	0
My knowledge has improved as a result of attending the workshop	6	3	0	0	0
I think the workshop is a worthwhile exercise	5	4	0	0	0

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

“Brilliantly run, very impressed with the team running the meeting and have a sense this programme of work is very well organised. Look forward to working more closely.”

“Productive day.”

“I felt the workshop was well paced and well organised. There are some good actions which have come out of the sessions so feeling very positive about harmonisation.”

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 less than expected (with members dropping out of the workshop at short notice and some not able to stay for the workshop after the meeting) but all who attended contributed well to the overall event.