

**Minutes of the**

**National Statistics Harmonisation Steering Group (NSH SG) Meeting**

**28th March 2017**

**11:00 to 12:30 hrs**

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| **Attendees:** |  | **Apologies** |  |
| Jen Woolford (Chair) | ONS | Jamie Robertson | SG |
| Charlie Wroth-Smith | ONS | Mark Pont | OSR |
| Emily Knipe | ONS | Pete Brodie | ONS |
| Kate Bedford (audio) | NHS Digital | Frances Pottier | BEIS |
| Gareth James (audio) | ONS | Debra Prestwood | ONS |
| Hersh Mann (audio) | UKDS |  |  |
| Stephanie Freeth | DCLG |  |  |
| Nick Barford (audio) | ONS |  |  |
| Steve Ellerd-Elliott | MoJ |  |  |
| Ian Sidney (audio) | ONS |  |  |
| Becki Aquilina (Secretariat) | ONS |  |  |

**1.0 Welcome and Introduction**

* 1. Jen welcomed members to the meeting.

**2.0 Review minutes and actions from 9th January 2016 meeting – Charlie Wroth-Smith**

2.1 The previous meeting minutes were agreed. All actions were complete or in progress.

* 1. **Approving Harmonised Principles: Recap on approving ‘age bandings’ and approving future principles – Charlie Wroth-Smith and Emily Knipe**
  2. At the January NSH SG meeting, members reviewed the proposed addition age bandings, principle 5 and 6 for approval. There are currently 4 ratified categories for Age Bandings and the SG was asked to consider approval of two more categories (5 and 6) in addition to the existing 4 categories already in place. Principle 6 was approved and members asked for further evidence provided to them of a strong user need for both categories (4 and 5) and a summary of previous discussions at NSHG. This paper addresses those issues. A full list of existing and new categories for Age Bandings is at **Annex A.**
  3. The Harmonisation Team circulated an email to NSHG members to ask their departments if there was a continued user need for Principle 4 and the overwhelming response was that it was still being used. Responses also identified that ONS demographic outputs use quinary age bands (Principle 5) and will continue to use if it is not approved as a harmonised principle. It was noted that contacting stakeholders to assess which questions are being used within their departments was a good idea and should become part of the process.

**ACTION 1** – Harmonisation Team to add contacting stakeholders to assess which question are being used across the GSS to the Harmonisation Process

* 1. The Harmonisation Team emailed NSHG members to assess which harmonised age bandings their departments use
  2. The remaining issue is that Principle 5 is not collapsible into Principle 3 at the 15-19 compared to the 16-19 age bands. It was noted that most demographic outputs are at single year of age but when lower levels of geography are used they are broken into quinary age bands. It was suggested that the principles are presented as two alternative groupings; Principle 1-4 which are collapsible into each other should be renamed Principle age bands group 1 and Principles 5 and 6 could be renamed Principle age bands group 2. There is currently a note within the harmonised Principles for age bands that single year of age is preferred but if data quality does not allow this other groupings provided may be used. It was noted that the higher age bands (Principe 6) could be added to principle 4 and a suggestion was made to include a footnote that highlights the differences and provides some background of when you may want to use which principle. Principle 5 was approved under those conditions.

**ACTION 2** – Harmonisation Team and Emily Knipe to group principle 1-4 with the addition of older age bands (6) to Principle 4

**ACTION 3** – Harmonisation Team and Emily Knipe to group proposed Principles 5 and 6

**ACTION 4** – Harmonisation Team and Emily Knipe to include a footnote that highlights the differences and provides some background of when you may want to use which Harmonised Principle (Group 1 or 2).

**4.0 Update on Social Harmonisation – Beck Aquilina**

4.1 Becki gave a short presentation of ongoing initiatives and competing priorities relating to social harmonisation.



4.2 Some discussion took place around the Census and ONS Data Collection Transformation Programme (DCTP) which are both looking at revising questions. Although the harmonisation team are working closely with both DCTP and the Census and ensuring research papers and testing is shared, there is a risk that Census and DCTP (including the LFS) questions may differ and decisions may need to be made about which questions will become the harmonised version in the future. It was noted that the census is a sampling frame and the LFS is based on the census and aggregated up to the baseline census position. For this reason, it was felt there should be more room for give and take on the LFS. Both the Census and the LFS are working towards a predominately online questionnaire. There needs to be strong evidence of any divergence away from the census baseline (main categories). It would be useful if the critical timelines for each were identified and added as an agenda item to be discussed by the SG at the appropriate time. It was suggested that Ian O’Sullivan (social DCTP) is invited to become a member of the NSH SG.

**ACTION 5** – Harmonisation Team to identify critical timeline for Census and DCTP and to add to the NSH SG agenda for discussion when appropriate.

**ACTION 6** – Becki to invite Ian O’Sullivan to become a member of the NSH SG.

4.3 A the January SG meeting, members suggested it would be good to view a document to show which stage harmonised principles are at on the Harmonisation Process Model. Becki gave an overview of the dashboard document produced by the Harmonisation Team. This would help SG members anticipate what principles are due for approval and which principles need to be actively progressed further. It was noted that a full review of all Harmonised Principles is underway and a number of principles will be forwarded to SG members in the near future. SG group members felt this was a really good document that sets out the current position for each topic clearly and suggested it would be useful as a regular agenda item for this group.



**ACTION 7** – Becki to add the dashboard document to future NSH SG meetings as a regular agenda item**.**

4.4 The Harmonisation Team are increasing being ask to become involved in many initiatives across the GSS, including promoting Harmonisation. This has had an impact on current resources but there may be an opportunity to gain further resource as a result of the Methodology Transformation Programme and we shall be able to meet the increasing demand across the GSS. In the meantime, our main priority is to ensure social harmonised principles are up to date and relevant, this is particularly important as we prepare for the Census as many question are used on the Census. Alongside this the team are also harmonising business principles. Members were asked to consider other priorities to become part of the core Harmonisation programme.

4.5 Members agreed the focus on the Census should be a priority and also agreed where labour market variables and concepts overlap between social and business statistics this should remain a high priority. Members felt it was important to be involved in discussions early on to steer towards harmonisation across the GSS which is easier to do rather than retrospectively deal with changes and to keep the work load focussing on engaging with the right people at the right time rather than invest more resource unravelling inconsistencies.

4.6 A suggestion was made about producing a prioritisation framework for Harmonisation work

**ACTION 8** – Harmonisation Team to produce a prioritisation framework document

4.7 It was suggested that communicating across the GSS could be set aside for the time being or that SG members could take on a more active role in promoting harmonisation.

**ACTION 9** – SG members to take on a more active role in promoting harmonisation across the GSS

4.8 It was noted that the UK Statistics Authority have begun conducting audits of different groups of statistics which may highlight areas of inconsistencies in inputs and outputs. It was suggested the Harmonisation Team liaise with the UK Statistics Authority as this work may flag further priorities.

**ACTION 10** – Harmonisation Team to liaise with the UK Statistics Authority regarding inconsistencies identified as part of the audits of different groups of statistics.

1. **Update on the second Business Harmonisation Task and Finish Group (BHTFG) held on 3rd February – Ian Sidney**

5.1 Ian gave a short presentation of progress to date in relation to business harmonisation and the priority list of business variables which were agreed at the second BHTFG meeting on 3rd February. Ian explained the BHTFG are close to finalising the total turnover definition and are planning to circulate to the SG for approval via correspondence during April.

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5.2 It was noted that short term turnover and employment variables remains a high priority for the business side of DCTP. Members felt the priorities presentation slide made a very strong point. The priorities list of business variables also covers the majority of variables that are covered by the planned implementation of FRIBS legislation. The priority list is a dynamic list and will be continuously reviewed as priorities change. Other changes such as the new business register and the DCTP will have an effect on the list. It was suggested that Ian and Nick have a discussion to re jig the priorities in line with other priorities, initiatives and transformations within ONS (via the Business Survey Redesign Workstream Coordination Group). The BHTFG should be informed of any changes in the priority list.

**ACTION 11** – Ian and Nick to discuss the priorities list of business variables in light of other priorities, initiatives and transformations within ONS.

**ACTION 12** – Ian to inform the BHTFG of any changes to the priority list of business variables.

5.3 It was noted that NHS Digital do not conduct business surveys but the workforce statistics include hours worked and full time equivalent. Kate suggested Ian contact her regarding those variables.

**ACTION 13** – Ian to discuss hours worked and full time equivalent with Kate Bedford (NHS Digital)

5.4 Francis Pottier was unable to attend the meeting but would have an interest in the business Harmonisation update and priorities list of variables. Ian will make contact with Frances to get her perspective from BEIS.

**ACTION 14** – Ian to contact Frances Pottier and provide an update on business Harmonisation

**6.0 2017 NSH SG Communication Plan – Becki Aquilina**

6.1 Becki gave an overview of the 2017 Communication Plan in particular what is planned for the second quarter which covers April, May and June. Members where reminded to promote Harmonisation to senior GSS manager meetings/seminars and workshops.



6.2 Members were asked to send any further communication approaches to Becki or Charlie to be added to the Communication Plan.

**ACTION 15** – Members to send any further communication approaches to Becki or Charlie to be added to the Communication Plan

**7.0** **Horizon Scanning - All**

8.1 The following topics were identified;

- Ongoing alignment between DCTP and the Census

- Code of Practice Stocktake

**8.0** **AOB, items for next meeting and next meeting dates – Jen Woolford**

8.1The following items for the next meeting were suggested;

- Update on the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) – Mark Pont

- Communication Plan

- Standing agenda item for the Dashboard workplan

- Critical timelines for Census and DCPT

- Update from the NSHG

- Update on Business Harmonisation – Debra Prestwood and Ian Sidney

- Methodology Review and changes in the organisation; how is it working?

8.2 The next meeting is planned for mid July (after the NSHG on 11th July).

Becki Aquilina - ONS Harmonisation Team

**March 2017**

**Annex A**

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| **ACTIONS FROM NSH SG MEETING – 28th March 2017** | | | | |
| **Action No** | **Para** | **Action** | **Responsible** | **Status** |
| 1 | 3.2 | Harmonisation Team to add contacting stakeholders to assess which question are being used across the GSS to the Harmonisation Process | Harmonisation Team |  |
| 2 | 3.4 | Harmonisation Team and Emily Knipe to group principle 1-4 with the addition of older age bands (6) to Principle 4 | Harmonisation Team and Emily Knipe (ONS) |  |
| 3 | 3.4 | Harmonisation Team and Emily Knipe to group proposed Principles 5 and 6 | Harmonisation Team and Emily Knipe (ONS) |  |
| 4 | 3.4 | Harmonisation Team and Emily Knipe to include a footnote that highlights the differences and provides some background of when you may want to use which Harmonised Principle (Group 1 or 2). | Harmonisation Team and Emily Knipe (ONS) |  |
| 5 | 4.2 | Harmonisation Team to identify critical timeline for Census and DCTP and to add to the NSH SG agenda for discussion when appropriate. | Harmonisation Team |  |
| 6 | 4.2 | Becki to invite Ian O’Sullivan to become a member of the NSH SG. | Becki Aquilina (ONS) | Complete |
| 7 | 4.3 | Becki to add the dashboard document to future NSH SG meetings as a regular agenda item**.** | Becki Aquilina (ONS) |  |
| 8 | 4.6 | Harmonisation Team to produce a prioritisation framework document | Harmonisation Team |  |
| 9 | 4.7 | SG members to take on a more active role in promoting harmonisation across the GSS | SG members |  |
| 10 | 4.8 | Harmonisation Team to liaise with the UK Statistics Authority regarding inconsistencies identified as part of the audits of different groups of statistics. | Harmonisation team |  |
| 11 | 5.2 | Ian and Nick to discuss the priorities list of business variables in light of other priorities, initiatives and transformations within ONS. | Ian Sidney (ONS) and Nick Barford (ONS) |  |
| 12 | 5.2 | Ian to inform the BHTFG of any changes to the priority list of business variables | Ian Sidney (ONS) |  |
| 13 | 5.3 | Ian to discuss hours worked and full time equivalent with Kate Bedford (NHS Digital). | Ian Sidney (ONS) and Kate Bedford (NHS Digital) |  |
| 14 | 5.4 | Ian to contact Frances Pottier (BEIS) and provide an update on Business Harmonisation. | Ian Sidney (ONS) | Complete – video conference 21st April |
| 15 | 6.2 | Members were asked to send any further communication approaches to Becki or Charlie to be added to the Communication Plan | SG members |  |