

**Minutes of the**

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

**3rd October 11:00 to 12:30 hrs**

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| **Attendees:** |  |  |  |
| Jen Woolford (Chair) | ONS |  |  |
| Charlie Wroth-Smith | ONS |  |  |
| Debra Prestwood (audio)  Frances Pottier | ONS  BEIS |  |  |
| Hersh Mann (audio) | UKDS |  |  |
| Ian Sidney (audio)  Mark Pont (audio)  Pete Brodie | ONS  UKSA  ONS |  |  |
| Stephanie Freeth | DCLG |  |  |
| Becki Aquilina (Secretariat) | ONS |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
| **Apologies** |  |  |  |
| Kate Bedford  Lynda Marshall | HSCIC  SG |  |  |
| Jamie Robertson | SG |  |  |
| Steve Ellerd-Elliott | MoJ |  |  |
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**1.0 Welcome and Introduction**

* 1. Jen welcomed members to the meeting and gave a brief introduction and background of the Steering Group for new members; Stephanie Freeth (DCLG), Frances Pottier (BEIS) and Debra Prestwood (ONS).

**2.0 Review minutes and actions from 23rd March 2016 meeting – Charlie Wroth-Smith**

2.1 The previous meeting minutes were agreed. Some actions were complete but others are ongoing. The action table has been updated accordingly (**Annex B**). Action 2; include liaising with Business Registers Group (BRG) as part of the work to harmonise business principles, and action 4; liaise with Siobhan Carey regarding relevant contacts at BEIS and DEFRA to become members of the Business Harmonisation Task and Finish Group (BHTFG) are ongoing and will be discussed further during agenda item 4. Action 6; members to alert Becki of upcoming events to be added to the 2016 Communication plan is also ongoing and will be discussed during agenda item 7.

* 1. **How can we raise the harmonisation agenda across the GSS? – Charlie Wroth-Smith**
  2. One of the roles of the Steering Group is to help raise the profile of Harmonisation across the GSS; the Harmonisation Team have traditionally spent a lot a lot of time presenting at various conferences and speaking to different teams across the GSS. The Steering Group were asked to consider the following questions;
* Who should we target?
* What key messages should we focus on?
* Are there any addition groups we should be involved in?
* How can Steering Group member help to raise the Harmonisation agenda?
  1. It was suggested that the Good Practice Team (GPT) have links across the GSS and working together would be beneficial; The GPT, Harmonisation, Quality and Geography have recently presented two successful workshops (ONS Titchfield and Newport) for Output Managers and intend to roll the workshop out across the GSS to individual departments.
  2. It was noted there may be some benefits in talking about business surveys and social surveys together rather than separately. It would make sense to consider both types more holistically because both have similar issues, such as ward names and county names being listed differently which makes it difficult for people to match.
  3. The reception of Harmonisation across the GSS is mixed. Some see the benefits and embrace the possibilities and some see it as an ONS led imposition. The National Statistics Harmonisation Group (NSHG) have 14 sub topic groups with around half topic experts/leads from ONS and half from other government departments. To minimise the perception of an ONS led steer, the Steering Group need to consider future non ONS led communication to strengthen the links with the GSS; it was suggested that perhaps a non ONS topic lead could present to HoPs.
  4. David Fry (DCLG) is the new Chair of the GSS SPSC. The next meeting will be 18th October and Pete and Jen are attending. It may be with worth discussing this issue at the meeting to gain a steer on how to communicate harmonisation better across the GSS.

**ACTION 1** – Jen and Pete to raise discussion regarding better communication across the GSS at the GSS SPSC meeting on 18th October.

3.6 DCLG organise two weekly seminars to talk about methodology and other issues. Home Office and DWP colleagues join the seminars. Stephanie offered to share the organisers contact details to Charlie so that arrangements can be made to present to the group.

**ACTION 2** – Stephanie to share the DCLG organisers contact details with Charlie.

3.7 The Steering Group were asked to consider harmonisation issues for other analytical professions and whether there is any visibility at all in the Government Social Research (GSR) Profession for example. There is a GSR HoPs meeting that could be presented to, although the group felt the GSR profession are familiar with Harmonisation.

3.8 In the past, Harmonisation has presented to various conferences, including the GSS, RSS and LARIA and it was noted there are hefty costs involved with presenting and holding stands which is not always justifiable. Jen asked if there were any cross government business groups that could be targeted. Frances Chairs the Construction User Group, attended by DCLG and ONS but it is mainly focussed on external users. There is also a Cross Government Sharing Group which is Charied by DfT. The next meeting is planned on the 12th October. Stephanie is attending the meeting and offered to look into the programme to see if presenting harmonisation is a viable option at a future meeting.

**ACTION 3** – Stephanie to look into the Cross Government Sharing Group programme to see if presenting harmonisation is a viable option at a future meeting.

3.9 ONS have recently organised a Devolved Economic Statistics Co-ordination Group called Nation. The first meeting was held 20th September and Debra has been invited to be a member. The group plan to meet quarterly and will rotate between Belfast, Edinburgh, Cardiff and Newport. The secretariat for the group is Trevor Fenton (ONS). Debra will be using this group for stakeholder engagement in developing thoughts and plans on harmonising/rationalising business surveys and variables.

3.10 The Harmonisation Team are also currently linking into Census activities to ensure harmonisation and comparability is considered across the UK.

**4.0 Progress on Business Harmonisation – Debra Prestwood and Charlie Wroth-Smith**

4.1 Debra gave a short overview of the current situation around thinking about harmonisation of business survey variables in ONS as part of the Data Collection Transformation Programme (DCTP).



4.2 Frances enquired about the membership of the GSS Statistical Authority Panel. Debra offered to forward a list of members to Becki to circulate to the Steering Group.

**ACTION 4** – Debra to forward a list of GSS Statistical Authority Panel members to Becki to circulate to the Steering Group.

4.3 A question was asked about how harmonising admin data on company/business surveys is possible. Resource within ONS Business Division has been allocated to appoint a person from January, whose main focus will be to look at the feasibility of harmonising admin data and talking to companies and data providers about what can be done in this area. Other areas of ONS are already looking at how admin data may be used to replace survey data to reduce burden. This aligns with the Bean Review recommendations.

4.4 The Harmonisation Team are in the process of setting up a GSS Business Harmonisation Task and Finish Group (BHTFG) which aligns with the work DCTP are doing to harmonise/rationalise business variables. The plan is to have business representatives across government departments to roll out business harmonisation across the GSS. The first meeting is planned in December 2016. Charlie asked the Steering Group to suggest potential members for the BHTFG. Frances suggested contacting colleagues from the Building and Materials Survey and the Innovation Survey. Also recommended were Steve Dempsy and Drew Hurd who are joint Chair of the Business Registers Group (BRG). Their interest would be users of business output data. Stephanie offered to check with colleagues because DCLG don’t conduct regular Business surveys but conduct one off business surveys occasionally.

**ACTION 5** – Stephanie to verify if DCLG conduct regular business surveys and suggest a potential DCLG as member of the proposed BHTFG if relevant.

4.5 A question was asked about the development of the Electronic Data Collection (EDC). The team have developed an electronic questionnaire which sits on a platform and talks back to the legacy processing system. The Monthly Wages and Salary Survey was piloted for 10 months, with up to 6,500 respondents. The pilot showed there wasn’t any mode effect which was good news. Since then, the Monthly Commodity Enquiry has been added and 10% of the Monthly Retail Sales Enquiry. There are plans to slowly roll out and ramp up the number of business surveys online. There is some software development to do around increased volumes and more sophisticated functionality around editing and validation. The plan is to add all business surveys by March 2019; the aim being to add 4 business surveys online by 2016.

1. **UK Statistics Authority Priorities and Views – Mark Pont**

5.1 Mark gave an overview of two developments that have been ongoing in the last 6 months;

- Since the Bean Review was published, the UKSA have been working to regenerate the Regulatory function of the Authority. They are hoping to establish an office which is more visibly separate from the Authorities’ role as a producer of statistics. There is a lot of confusion about the regulatory role and how that fits with ONS. A key part of that role is to have an external relations function to provide a clearer divide. The UKSA have a new working title; Office for Statistics Regulation and over the next few months will look at ways to launch the new Office for Statistics Regulation.

- The Code of Practice (CoP) stocktake began a year ago and has gathered views across the GSS in regards to whether the CoP needed to be rewritten and what could be done to further add public value to statistics. The stocktake report is being finalised and will be published in due course.

* 1. Hersh mentioned that the UK Data Service users are very interested in comparing variables from different sources and would like to know to what extent the Steering Group can influence data collectors outside the ONS. An example of this is the team at the Institute of Social and Economic Research who are behind ‘Understanding Society’. They are currently running a consultation on Harmonisation. They are concerned with harmonisation between ‘Understanding Society’ and the previous British Household Panel Survey (BHPS). UK Data Service users want to know if the measures are consistent with harmonised principles and if they may be compared with the Census, for example. Charlie suggested that Hersh, the Harmonisation Team, Mark Pont and a member from the BHPS have a meeting to discuss further.

**ACTION 6** – Charlie to arrange a meeting between Hersh, the Harmonisation Team, Mark Pont and a member from the BHPS to discuss how to influence harmonisation with data collectors outside of ONS.

**6.0 Horizon Scanning – All**

6.1 The Wellbeing Inequalities Sustainability and Environment (WISE) are involved with development goals (contact point is Sophie Elfar). It would be good to get involved in this area; there are different indicators below each goal.

6.2 Recently the UKSA looked at health statistics across the UK and identified a lack of coherence and harmonisation. There will be some work across the various health bodies to try and improve coherence of health statistics which will include working groups on individual themes, for example alcohol related conditions. The theme groups have not been set up yet once they are we need to ensure involvement where relevant.

6.3 When the UKSA begin to assess statistical families of outputs rather than individual outputs there may be a further opportunity to get involved where issues around consistency are identified. Although it is early days for the UKSA to determine statistical families there may be opportunities in the future.

**7.0 2016/17 NSH SG Communication Plan – Becki Aquilina**

7.1 Becki gave an overview of the 2016 Communication Plan and explained for the benefit of new members, that the plan is to target effective communication across the GSS. The two key objectives are;

1. Make harmonisation part of the GSS voice

2. Increase contact to and from users

The Communication Plan is a living document to be extended over time and is a regular agenda item for the Steering Group. We are currently in the last quarter (Q4) of the plan and most communication tactics from previous quarters are either completed or ongoing. Members were asked to let Becki know of any upcoming events/meetings/committees so these may be added to quarter four (Q4) which spans October, November and December. A number of suggestions were made through the meeting, which will be added to the 2017 Communication Plan. Becki will produce a first draft of the 2017 Plan and circulate to Steering Group members for comments/approval.

**ACTION 7** – Becki to produce a first draft of the 2017 Plan and circulate to Steering Group members for comments/approval

7.2 Jen suggested looking at the Race Disparity Audits that are looking to publish data that departments hold on different outcomes by ethnic group and also by disadvantaged young white males. We may want to get involved and provide advice. Contact with Helen Patterson (ONS) was suggested to gain further information.

**ACTION 8** – Charlie to contact Helen Patterson to ask if harmonisation advice is required for the outputs related to the Race Disparity publication(s).

7.3 Pete suggested presenting to the Methodology Advisory Committee. The next meeting is planned during November so it may be too late to organise something for that meeting, but the committee meets twice a year. Emma Timm (ONS) is the contact for the Committee.

**ACTION 9** – Becki to contact Emma Timm (ONS) with a view to organising a presentation for the Methodology Advisory Committee.

7.4 Jen suggested adding an area for feedback to the Communication Plan to gain an understanding of whether (or not) presenting at seminars/meetings and conferences was successful.

**ACTION 10** – Becki to add an area for feedback on the Communication Plan.

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

8.1No other items of business were raised. The following items for the next meeting were suggested;

- Update on UKSA – Mark Pont

- Update on Business Harmonisation – Debra Prestwood and Charlie Wroth-Smith

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

- Plans for Race Disparity

- Survey implications in relation to Brexit

8.2 The next meeting will be planned in March 2017.

**ACTION 11** – Secretariat to set up the next Steering Group meeting for March and to send invites.

Becki Aquilina

ONS Harmonisation Team

October 2016

**Annex A**

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| **ACTIONS FROM NSH SG MEETING – 3rd October 2016** | | | | |
| **Action No** | **Para** | **Action** | **Responsible** | **Status** |
| 1 | 3.5 | Jen and Pete to raise discussion regarding better communication across the GSS at the GSS SPSC meeting on 18th October. | Jen Woolford and Pete Brodie |  |
| 2 | 3.6 | Stephanie to share the DCLG organisers contact details with Charlie. | Stephanie Freeth |  |
| 3 | 3.8 | Stephanie to look into the Cross Government Sharing Group programme to see if presenting harmonisation is a viable option at a future meeting. | Stephanie Freeth |  |
| 4 | 4.2 | Debra to forward a list of GSS Statistical Authority Panel members to Becki to circulate to the Steering Group. | Debra Prestwood |  |
| 5 | 4.4 | Stephanie to verify if DCLG conduct regular business surveys and suggest a potential DCLG as member of the proposed BHTFG if relevant. | Stephanie Freeth |  |
| 6 | 5.2 | Charlie to arrange a meeting between Hersh, the Harmonisation Team, Mark Pont and a member from the BHPS to discuss how to influence harmonisation with data collectors outside of ONS. | Charlie Wroth-Smith |  |
| 7 | 7.1 | Becki to produce a first draft of the 2017 Plan and circulate to Steering Group members for comments/approval. | Becki Aquilina |  |
| 8 | 7.2 | Charlie to contact Helen Patterson to ask if harmonisation advice is required for the outputs related to the Race Disparity publication(s). | Charlie Wroth-Smith |  |
| 9 | 7.3 | Becki to contact Emma Timm (ONS) with a view to organising a presentation for the Methodology Advisory Committee. | Becki Aquilina |  |
| 10 | 7.4 | Becki to add an area for feedback on the Communication Plan. | Becki Aquilina |  |
| 11 | 8.2 | Secretariat to set up the next Steering Group meeting for March and to send invites. | Becki Aquilina |  |