



**Minutes of the
National Statistics Harmonisation Steering Group (NSH SG) Meeting
23rd March, 14:00 to 15:30 hrs
Via Audio**

Attendees:

Jen Woolford (Chair)	ONS
Alun Gwilt	ONS
Charlie Wroth-Smith	ONS
Emma Wright	ONS
Hersh Mann	UKDS
Kevin Moore	ONS
Mark Pont	UKSA
Steve Ellerd-Elliott	MoJ

Becki Aquilina (Secretariat) ONS

Apologies

Debra Prestwood	ONS
Kate Bedford	HSCIC
Richard Laux	UKSA
Pete Brodie	ONS
Sarah Martin	SG

1.0 Welcome and Introduction

1.1 Jen welcomed members to the meeting and informed the group that she has taken over from Jacqui Jones whom is currently on a secondment at the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Jen explained that she was involved with Harmonisation three years ago and is happy to resume the role.

2.0 Review minutes and actions from 10th December 2015 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 8; Steering Group to consider how to feed into the review of the Assessment Process to ensure harmonisation is a key consideration has been updated to discuss new compliance checks and Written Evidence for Assessments (WEFA) to view how Harmonisation can feed into those.

ACTION 1 – Emma to discuss how Harmonisation can feed into the proposed new compliance checks and WEFA with the UK Statistics Authority.

3.0 2016 Key Objectives and the ESS Peer Review Recommendations – Emma Wright

3.1 At the last meeting the Steering Group proposed 5 key objectives for the group to achieve in 2016. Emma gave an overview of the paper which reiterates the five key objectives and identifies actions to address the ESS Peer Review Recommendations. In order to meet the ESS

Peer Review Recommendations as well as the five key objectives for 2016 we should continue to improve Harmonised Principles for social surveys, continue to promote harmonised principles and continue to work with the Monitoring and Assessment Team (M&A) by;

- providing checks on harmonised principles for outputs undergoing assessments
- feeding into the review of the assessment process
- feeding into the stock take of the Code of Practice and
- regular catch ups with the M&A Team

The table that follows in the paper details what success will look like and reports on what progress has been made to date. Emma informed the group we are due to report against the ESS Peer Review Recommendations imminently.

- 3.2 It was noted there are some synergies with the Data Collection Transformation Programme (DCTP) and key objectives 1 and 2 (business harmonisation and admin data harmonised input variables). The Electronic Data Collection (EDC) Programme and the Admin Data Programme (ADP) of work is part of DCTP. The Harmonisation Team has forged strong links with both business and admin data programmes of work but these are mainly within ONS.
- 3.3 A suggestion was made to liaise with the Business Registers Group (BRG) as part of the work to harmonise business principles.

ACTION 2 – Charlie to include liaising with Business Registers Group as part of the work to develop harmonised business principles.

- 3.4 With regard to objective 5, a Project Initiation Document (PID) has been developed to scope the aims to improve the Variable and Question Bank (VQB) with enhanced metadata, citations and references. A number of work packages have been developed and a timetable is being worked out. The UK Data Service is a distributed service, and because of this, there will also be inputs from the Universities of Manchester and Edinburgh. Responsibilities for the work packages will be divided between these; colleagues in Manchester will be looking at geographical variables for census microdata. Hersh will provide an update once the timetable has been finalised. An early proof of concept demo will be available by May.

ACTION 3 – Hersh to provide an update to Becki once the timetable has been finalised.

- 3.5 Jen asked if the ESS Peer Review Recommendation would be added to the table to become part of the work plan, although it was noted there is a separate work plan that is more detailed which covers these areas. It was also noted that the paper does not convey why harmonisation is important but members were informed this is covered within the Steering Group Strategy.
- 3.6 Next steps are to continue to push forward on the key objectives for 2016, report back to the Steering Group and provide an annual report against the ESS Peer Review Actions. Emma suggested bringing in an overview of the work that is not reflected in this paper to the next Steering Group meeting including a progress report on building wider links across the GSS and the Business Register.

Business Governance

- 3.7 In line with key objective 1. Concrete progress on business harmonisation principles, there is a plan to set up a GSS Business Harmonisation Task and Finish Group (BHFTFG). The idea is to get interested parties from across the GSS into a group to look at business harmonised principles and gain some momentum. It was felt the NSHG is not the appropriated forum to agree business principles because of its size and because the makeup of the group is primarily from a social survey background. The GSS BHFTFG would run in parallel to the NSHG and it is

hoped that at some point during 2016 some harmonised business principles will be ratified through the proposed group, mainly via the FRIBS project which is based on European Legislation. Steering Group members were invited to consider if this is the correct path to take and if the governance should remain the same as the NSHG (the GSS SPSC).

- 3.8 The group felt it is important to consider how the Business Survey Change Portfolio Board (BSCPb) and the Design Authority fits in and how the Governance would work. Further considerations are that the BSCPb is ONS centred and the BHTFG will be a GSS group, including departments where it is relevant (will not be as broad as the NSHG). The group felt it seemed sensible to have a separate parallel group for business harmonisation but it was noted that the experiences learned from harmonising social principles should not be lost. Members were informed that the Harmonisation Team will be involved so the learning will be transferred.
- 3.9 Members were asked to recommend interested parties for the BHTFG. Siobhan offered to forward contacts from within BIS that are working on business surveys and also recommended a contact from DEFRA. It was also recommended that Charlie liaise with Debra Prestwood (Chair of the BSCPb) for further interested parties.

ACTION 4 – Charlie to liaise with Siobhan regarding relevant contacts at BIS and DEFRA to become members of the BHTFG.

ACTION 5 – Charlie to liaise with Debra Prestwood regarding relevant contacts to become members of the BHTFG.

4.0 2016 NSH SG Communication Plan – Becki Aquilina

- 4.1 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 approaching the end of the first quarter (Q1) of the plan and most communication tactics 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 two (Q2) which spans over April, May and June.

ACTION 6 – Steering Group members to alert Becki of upcoming events to be added to the 2016 Communication Plan.

- 4.2 The GSS Presentation and Dissemination Committee was suggested as a communication tactic. Charlie informed the group that two members of the Harmonisation Team will be shadowing the Good Practice Team (GPT) in the very near future and the GSS Presentation and Dissemination Committee is one of the areas already highlighted to gain more information about whilst shadowing the GPT.

5.0 Review of the Terms of Reference (ToR) – Charlie Wroth-Smith

- 5.1 Charlie explained that the Terms of Reference was produced two years ago and with the change of the Chair for the Steering Group, it seemed like a good opportunity to review it. There were no comments on the current ToR. The membership of the Steering Group was discussed. Siobhan informed the group that she will be standing down from the Steering Group because she is overstretched on a number of Committees. Siobhan recommended inviting another HoP or someone from DEFRA as an alternative. Siobhan offered to stay on for another Steering Group meeting so that a handover could be done.

ACTION 7 – Charlie to investigate who the new HoP for DEFRA will be and invite to become a member of the Steering Group.

5.2 It was noted that the group requires representation from Devolved Administrations. The Chief Statistician at the Scottish Government, Roger Halliday, recommended Sarah Martin (SG) as a member of the Steering Group but Sarah has yet to attend a meeting. It was noted that the NSHG has good representation from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and it is important to have representation from the Devolved Administrations. Becki offered to contact both Roger and Sarah to review Scottish Government membership on the NSG Steering Group.

ACTION 8 – Becki to contact both Sarah and Roger at the Scottish Government to discuss NSH SG membership.

5.3 It was noted that the NSHG and the NSH SG both report to the GSS SPSC as sub groups. The Harmonisation Team merged the two reports into one for the last update to the GSS SPSC meeting. It was suggested that Emma discuss the matter with Tricia Dodd (Chair of the GSS SPSC)

ACTION 9 – Emma to discuss the reporting and governance structure of the NSHG and the NSH SG with Tricia Dodd.

6.0 UK Statistics Authority Priorities and Views – Mark Pont

6.1 Mark gave an overview of the UK Statistics Authority priorities and views. Regarding the Assessments, the UK Statistics Authority has had a greater focus on harmonisation over the last 9 months and this has been working well. A lot of work has been around coherence and comparability, particularly across the four countries of the UK but also within particular topic areas. Health is one of the key areas being looked at by the UK Statistics Authority, and they recognise that health statistics in England are produced by a range of different organisations. For this reason, it is not always obvious to the user who produces what. A better statistics, better decisions summit is being planned for June/July to talk about some of the challenges that users of health statistics face. A work plan will be developed after the summit. Jen is on the organising committee for the health summit and will consider how to engage with the Harmonisation Team as part of that process.

ACTION 10 – Jen to consider how the planned Health Summit can engage with Harmonisation

6.2 Another main area of focus is around Quality Assurance of Admin Data (QAAD) and trying to embed this within the GSS culture. Part of this is trying to get statisticians to better understand the quality assurance that happens to admin data so they are able to make better decisions about what to use and what not to use. There is active ongoing engagement with the Admin Data Division and the quality assurance of admin data. The UK Statistics Authority are planning on conducting a review over the next few months which will look at how it has gone over the first year; the extent to which different producers and providers are understanding issues and what further support they need.

6.3 Housing is another key area of focus that has been identified during the assessment process. Again, lots of statistics are produced by different organisations and although each do a good job in their individual area, there is no framework in place that brings all those different statistics together to paint an overall story about the housing market within the UK. The exploratory stage is likely to begin within the next couple of months and it is possible that issues of coherence, comparability and harmonisation will emerge during this stage.

- 6.4 A question was raised about summits becoming the standard approach to identified statistical concerns around topics. The UK Statistics Authority is increasingly looking to engaging with people rather than write a report. The Health topic was an area identified that struck most concern, particularly because a lot of public money is spent on health care. A similar but lower level model will be used for housing and other areas of concern.
- 6.5 It was noted there is no particular focus from the UK Statistics Authority on business statistics other than a number of ongoing assessments.

7.0 Horizon Scanning – Jen Woolford

- 7.1 Noted from this meeting are as follows;
- Business Statistics, harmonisation around the Data Collection Transformation Project
 - Admin Data
 - Health Statistics initiative
 - Housing
 - The Bean Review
 - Joined up Business Information (open business register linked into GDS Cabinet Office)
 - Overall GDS Registers work (Occupation and Industry coding)

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

- 8.1 No other items of business were raised. The following items for the next meeting were suggested;
- update on improving the NSHG Framework
 - follow on discussion and progress on business Harmonisation
 - demo of the improved VQB
- 8.2 The next meeting will be planned in July and will be a face to face meeting to be held in London.

ACTION 11 – Secretariat to set up the next Steering Group meeting for July in London and to send invites.

Becki Aquilina
ONS Harmonisation Team
March 2016

Annex A

ACTIONS FROM NSH SG MEETING – 23 rd March 2016				
Action No	Para	Action	Responsible	Status
1	2.1	Liaise with UKSA on WEFA and Compliance Checks and how harmonisation can feed into those	Emma Wright	
2	3.3	Charlie to include liaising with Business Registers Group as part of the work to harmonised business principles	Charlie Wroth-Smith	
3	3.4	Hersh to provide an update to Becki once the timetable to improve the VQB has been finalised	Hersh Mann	
4	3.9	Charlie to liaise with Siobhan regarding relevant contacts at BIS and DEFRA to become members of the Business Harmonisation Task and Finish Group (BHTFG)	Charlie Wroth-Smith	
5	3.9	Charlie to liaise with Debra Prestwood regarding relevant contacts to become members of the BHTFG	Charlie Wroth-Smith	
6	4.1	Steering Group members to alert Becki of upcoming events to be added to the 2016 Communication Plan	Steering Group Members	
7	5.1	Charlie to investigate who the new HoP for DEFRA will be and invite them to become members of the Steering Group	Charlie Wroth-Smith	
8	5.2	Becki to contact both Sarah and Roger at the Scottish Government to discuss NSH SG membership	Becki Aquilina	Email sent to Roger on 30/03/2016 Sarah Martin is on maternity leave – Roger will nominate another SG Rep.
9	5.3	Emma to discuss the reporting and governance structure of the NSHG and the NSH SG with Tricia Dodd	Emma Wright	
10	6.1	Jen to consider how the planned Health Summit can engage with Harmonisation	Jen Woolford	
11	8.2	Secretariat to set up the next Steering Group meeting for July in London and to send invites.	Secretariat	Complete – next meeting will be 18 th July (1100-1230)

Annex B

ACTIONS FROM NSH SG MEETING – 10 th December 2015				
Action No	Para	Action	Responsible	Status
1	3.1	Emma to forward Martin Ralph's paper on the Governance of Guidance to Jacqui/Jen	Emma Wright	Complete
2	3.1	Emma and Charlie to liaise with Shelley and possibly GPT regarding the admin matching guidance	Emma Wright and Charlie Wroth-Smith	Complete
3	3.1	Steve to review the admin matching guidance paper with a view to widening across the GSS	Steve Ellerd-Elliott	Outstanding
4	4.1	Steering Group members to alert Becki of upcoming events to be added to the 2016 Communication Plan	Steering Group Members	Ongoing
5	4.2	Emma to continue to push for online harmonisation training via ONS Learning Academy	Emma Wright	Ongoing
6	4.3	Steve to speak with contacts at StatsUserNet to see what more they can do to help promote Harmonisation and better ways to liaise with LAs	Steve Ellerd-Elliott	Complete – route through the Crime and Justice statistics network
7	4.4	Harmonisation Team to contact David Bailey regarding admin data and Public Sector Finance	Harmonisation Team	Outstanding
8	5.2	Steering Group to consider how to feed into the review of the Assessment Process to ensure harmonisation is a key consideration	Steering Group Members	Update action to discuss new compliance Checks/WEFA and how Harmonisation can feed into those
9	5.2	Becki to email Siobhan to encourage the prominence of harmonisation within the review of the Code of Practice with Richard Laux	Becki Aquilina	Complete
10	6.1	Becki and Emma to align the objectives for 2016 with the Plan to Address the ESS Peer Review Recommendations and bring back to the next meeting of the Steering Group.	Becki Aquilina and Emma Wright	Complete
11	7.1	Steering Group members to continue to raise harmonisation alongside ONS Transformation and OGDs spending reviews	Steering Group Members	Ongoing
12	7.2	Becki to set up next meeting and send invites	Becki Aquilina	Next meeting will be 23 rd March 2016 – invites to follow shortly