

Minutes of the SOC Revision Steering Group (SRSG) Meeting

11 July 2016

11.00 – 13.30

ONS, 1 Drummond Gate, London, SW1V 2QQ

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| **Attendees:** |  |
| **Members** |  |
| Pete Brodie (PB) Chair | ONS |
| Aashya Patel (AP) delegated by Michele Weatherburn | Dept for Education |
| Andy Darnton (AD) | Health & Safety Executive |
| Charlie Ball (CB) | Higher Education Careers Services Unit |
| Chris White (CWh) | ONS |
| Ciaran Devlin (CD) | Home Office |
| Clare Watson (CWa) delegated by Chris Daffin | ONS |
| Craiger Solomon (CS) audio | Welsh Government |
| Doug Rendle (DR) | HM Treasury |
| Mary Gregory (MG) | Dept for Culture, Media & Sport |
| Stephanie Freeth (SF) delegated by Rob Green | Dept for Communities & Local Government |
| **Classification and Harmonisation Representatives (CHU)** |  |
| Charlie Wroth-Smith (CWS) | ONS |
| Michaela Morris (MM) | ONS |
| Ria Sanderson (RS) | ONS |
| Steve Cooley (SC) | ONS |
| Kerry Smith (KS) Secretariat | ONS |
| **Apologies:** |  |
| Zoe Proctor (ZP) | Ministry of Defence |

1. **Welcome and Introduction**

PB welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending the first meeting of the Standard Occupational Classification Revision Steering Group (SRSG). As this was the first meeting of the SRSG, members introduced themselves.

1. **Overview – Pete Brodie**

The Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) was introduced in 1990 and aims to group and organise occupational information meaningfully and systematically. There was a major revision in 2000 and a minor revision in 2010. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) Classification and Harmonisation Unit (CHU), based in Titchfield, is responsible for ensuring SOC reflects ever changing jobs and technology. There is a need to balance how quickly information is updated in SOC to remain relevant and the need for continuity, therefore a 10 year revision cycle has been adopted. The steering group has been created to agree whether a revision to SOC2010 is needed, and if agreed to then oversee the revision process of SOC2010.

1. **Presentation on the findings of the consultation – Charlie Wroth-Smith**

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We are at the point in the revision cycle where we need to make a decision whether to revise SOC 2010, in order to publish in 2020. To help make this decision ONS held a 12 week public consultation. The 2 main questions being:

* do you think SOC2010 needs updating?
* If so, which particular areas need to be improved?

Responses were received from a range of different users, from local and central Government to charities and private businesses, with 78% of users saying it needed updating.

Charlie ran through the summary of key points that users felt needed to be considered in a revision. In addition to these points she pointed out that CHU keeps a log of problematic areas raised by users between revisions which would also need to be taken into consideration.

Questions/Comments from the key points slide:

* CB:

The higher education sector is going through a series of policy changes, with the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) weighing strongly on the minds of the sector. Part of the requirement of TEF will be a measure of employability or employment outcomes that is likely to have a bearing on the future of fees that institutions are allowed to charge. According to the Higher Education Careers Service Unit, some occupations don’t appear in the right classification, i.e veterinary nurse which requires a degree but is currently in major group 6 of SOC2010. It will cause issues for the sector if a solution can’t be found to gauge what a graduate job is, however they are aware it is not SOC’s job to tell them what a graduate level job is.

* AD:

Whilst we need to keep up with new jobs, there is still a need to be able to code jobs from the past so we need to be careful about removing job titles from SOC. CWS said there are similar issues when SOC is used for coding deaths data for job titles that don’t exist anymore. PB pointed out that continuity and complete coverage is important. MM said this would be covered by the research and would be taken into consideration if a revision goes ahead. Proposed changes would be fed back to the group.

* CS:

CS agreed that the more emerging sectors need further definition. Maybe we should consider a more frequent review than the current 10 year structure or a new way of thinking about how SOC evolves.

CWS explained the options for revising SOC:

* do not revise
* revise – minor update
* revise – major/significant update
* abolish SOC in favour of International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO)

A major/significant revision, which would include a change to the structure of SOC (as carried out in 2000), would require more evidence as not enough was provided in the consultation to support this.

ISCO is currently used in countries that don’t have their own classification system and whilst this would mean we would no longer have to map SOC to ISCO it is unlikely to suit the UK user needs.

There were no questions/comments on the options slide.

1. **Agreement on whether SOC needs to be revised**

The steering group were in agreement that SOC2010 should be revised in light of the consultation responses.

* CD:

Why does the UK have its own occupational classification rather than adopting ISCO? MM responded, explaining that we’ve had our own classification system since the 1900s. ISCO only has around 9000 job titles whereas SOC has around 30,000. There are job titles in ISCO that are not recognised in the UK, i.e. Tribal Chief and Witchdoctor. At an international level people are more restricted in what they can call themselves, i.e. the job title engineer can only be used if the person has a professional qualification and are therefore coded to ISCO major group 2. In SOC we have entries for engineer in both major group 2 (professional) and major group 5 (skilled trades). ISCO also only revise every 20 years.

* CWa:

Whilst replacing SOC with ISCO would be better from a Social Survey point of view, she appreciated for the wider user SOC was better and there was a mapping between SOC and ISCO available.

* DR:

As the question of replacing SOC with ISCO was not asked in the consultation, ONS would need to run another consultation to consider the impact of replacing SOC with ISCO.

1. **Agree minimum requirements for the SOC revision**

PB said that CHU within ONS would be responsible for any SOC revision with the Steering Group feeding in to the revision. CWS explained that the work goes out to tender for academic support, which has previously been conducted by the Institute for Employment Research (IER).

The steering group ruled out option 1(not revising) and option 4 (using ISCO), as it was agreed that both options would not meet user needs. The group discussed option 3 (major revision):

* CB:

The Higher Education Careers Service has created their own bespoke 5th digit. However he didn’t feel it was the responsibility of ONS to create a 5 digit SOC and if a 5 digit SOC wasn’t created they would continue to use their own.

* CS:

Is concerned that a 5 digit SOC could cause more confusion to users and give more opportunity for mis-classification. She didn’t feel that a 5th digit would add much value and it would be hard to justify the additional work involved.

* MG:

Is adding a 5th digit the only difference between a minor and major revision? MM explained that adding another major group would also constitute a major revision.

* CWh:

How much consideration has been given in terms of the scale of the revision to the derivation of the social class classification (National Statistics Socio-economic Classification – NS-SEC)? CWS explained that if SOC was revised then the NS-SEC would also have to be revised. However for the purposes of this group we are only considering a possible SOC revision.

* AD:

When considering using a 5 digit SOC do we need to think about how much space is still available using the 4 digit SOC, i.e only being able to go up to 9 in the unit group? MM said it would be possible to split the minor groups further. CHU have discussed this and have looked at the American O-NET system which is a different way of numbering when running out of numbers, however we would look at splitting the minor groups first.

* CWh:

Are there any plans to change the major groups? MM responded by stating that nothing has come up in the consultation to suggest a change to the major groups was needed.

The group agreed that option 2 (minor revision) would satisfy the needs of the consultation responses and would include:

* adding new job titles
* removing redundant job titles
* creating new unit groups where job titles have significantly grown in number and now require their own group
* combining unit groups where numbers have significantly reduced
* updating unit group descriptions within SOC volume 1 to include the latest available information on tasks and qualifications, and, where possible, skills and knowledge
* AP:

How would the issue of skills and knowledge requirements fit into the above? The Department for Education group SOC codes/occupations together that are similar in nature in regards to the skills, knowledge and qualification requirements. The next step is to design a curriculum around these groups, however the level of detail in SOC is not granular enough so they are having to use this in conjunction with other resources which give better details

regarding the skills, knowledge and requirements. Would a minor revision cover greater clarity around requirements? It was agreed that this would come under the unit group description in SOC volume 1 and would be looked at as part of the revision process. It would be added to the last bullet point in the minimum requirements of the revision. *(Post meeting note: the last bullet point above has been updated to include the skills and knowledge requirement)*

**ACTION 1 – Michaela Morris to add additional wording about skills, knowledge and qualification requirements to the last bullet point in the minimum requirements.**

1. **Agree Terms of Reference including frequency of meetings and format (e.g video conference)**

Members had previously been sent the Terms of Reference which Pete Brodie ran through. PB suggested that the revision process would be approximately a 4 year project so proposed bi-annual meetings (subject to change), however he suggested another meeting in 3 months time to ensure the steering group are happy with the requirements contained within the tender. PB confirmed that the SRSG would report to the GSS SPSC (Government Statistical Service Statistical Policy and Standards Committee) and that it would be preferable to time the SRSG meeting just before the SPSC meetings.

Any further feedback on the Terms of Reference should be provided to the secretariat by 25 July 2016.

**ACTION 2 – Secretariat to organise the next meeting in 3 months time.**

1. **Suggestions for new members for the steering group**

Representatives from:

* The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)
* The Gatsby Foundation
* Ofqual
* The Centre for Cities

The following organisations would be contacted again:

* Department for Work and Pension (DWP)
* Department for Business Innovation and Skills
* General Register Office for Scotland
* Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

**ACTION 3 – Michaela Morris to invite representatives from the above organisations to become members of the SRSG.**

1. **Any other business**

The outcome report will be published on the ONS website within 4 weeks of this meeting.

Future papers and minutes for the SRSG will be published on the GSS website.

**Annexes:**

A. List of Actions

**Annex A**

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| **ACTIONS FROM THE SRSG MEETING – 11 JULY 2016** |
| **Action No** | **Agenda Item No** | **Action** | **Responsible** | **Status** |
| 1 | 5 | Add additional wording about skills, knowledge and qualification requirements to the last bullet point in the minimum requirements. | Michaela Morris | Completed. The last bullet point in section 5 has been updated to include the skills and knowledge requirement |
| 2 | 6 | Arrange next meeting for 3 months time | Kerry Smith | Completed. The next meeting has been arranged for 27 October 2016 |
| 3 | 7 | Invite additional representatives to join the SRSG | Michaela Morris | Ongoing |