

**Minutes of the**

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

**28th June 2017**

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

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

**1.0 Welcome and Introduction**

* 1. Jen welcomed members to the meeting.

**2.0 Review minutes and actions from 28th March 2017 meeting – Charlie Wroth-Smith**

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

* 1. **Update on the third Business Harmonisation Task and Finish Group (BHTFG) held 21st April, followed by Business Harmonisation Definitions for approval by the Steering Group – Ian Sidney**
  2. At the April BHTFG members discussed and agreed the ‘Total turnover’ definition paper. Two further ‘employment’ definition papers were also discussed and were agreed via correspondence after the meeting.
  3. The Business Harmonisation workplan was discussed and revised resulting in the disaggregation of turnover becoming more prominent to align with the ONS Data Collection Transformation Programme (DCTP) priorities. Within the disaggregation of turnover, the group will be reviewing export, internet sales, retail commodity breakdown and various other items.
  4. The BHTFG are planning on reviewing definitions and guidance regarding capital acquisitions and changes in stocks both of which are highlighted as part of the ONS online business surveys transformation rollout. During the transform period, questions will be tested, including cognitive testing, and during this period questions will be harmonised where possible.
  5. A further ongoing project within ONS is the creation of a Question Bank to hold all business survey questions, metadata and guidance (around 80/90 surveys and 440 form types). The work has involved scraping PDFs and configuring them into electronically readable formats. The main aim of the project is to review which questions may be harmonised and which surveys may be rationalised. Alongside this it is hoped the Question Bank may identify areas where admin data may be used/supplemented. This has been more time consuming than initially envisaged. Members felt this would be a useful tool to be used across the GSS in the future.
  6. Definition for Total Turnover – to be approved by the Steering Group;

Ian presented a summary of the following paper and informed members the Harmonisation process has been adhered to and all relevant government departments were either involved or consulted. The proposed definition meets European Legislation;



* 1. A question was raised regarding when the definition, once agreed would become live. It was suggested that promotion and promulgation of the new harmonised business questions should be coordinated across the GSS. BEIS are happy to assist if planned events are to be held in London.

**ACTION 1** – Harmonisation Team to discuss and plan a coordinated approach to the promotion and promulgation of new business harmonised questions and definitions.

* 1. The Definition for Total Turnover was **approved** by the Steering Group
  2. Employment Variable; Number of Employees and Self-employed persons – to be approved by the Steering Group;

Ian gave a summary of the following paper;



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* 1. A question was asked if the work had taken into account the UN ILO definitions of employment and Ian confirmed that the Labour Force Survey definitions were taken into account in the overall discussions that took place which led to the proposed definitions of ‘Number of Employees’ and ‘Hours Worked’.
  2. It was noted that current feasibility studies and research is looking at the collection of agency workers. If the feasibility study is favourable, the BHTFG would then look at developing a harmonised question, but this is unlikely to happen in the next 12 months. At the moment the number of people employed by agencies is estimated but data is not collected at the place of work. A user need for this information has been confirmed by BEIS.
  3. The Employment Variable; Number of Employees and Self-employed persons was **approved** by the Steering Group
  4. Employment Variables: Hours Worked and Full Time Equivalent (FTE) to be approved by the Steering Group;

Ian presented a summary of the following paper;



* 1. The Employment Variable; Hours worked and Full Time Equivalent (FTE) was **approved** by the Steering Group

**4.0 Personal Well-being question for approval by the Steering Group – Charlie Wroth-Smith**

Charlie presented a summary of the following papers;



4.1 It was noted that the interim principle for Personal Well-being (PWB) has been tested on the Annual Population Survey (APS) for 6 years and integrated across 20 different government surveys. The question has remained the same over time but the supporting information has been revised.

4.2  **The Steering group agreed that the interim PWB questions should now be fully ratified.**

1. **Update from the NSHG – Charlie Wroth-Smith**

5.1 There is work ongoing to transform the ONS Methodology functions and the Harmonisation programme will now sit alongside the Good Practice Team (GPT) and the Quality Centre (QC), which will sit within their own Division. The Division will be outward focussed across the GSS looking at improving harmonisation and quality across all official statistics. There are plans to hold joint workshops between GPT, QC and Harmonisation to review what works well and share GSS contacts. At the same time the Harmonisation process will be reviewed to make it more effective.

5.2 The Harmonisation Team are also planning a workshop with Topic Leads/experts to review their roles and look at ways to make them more effective. One possibility to consider may be to move some functions back into the Harmonisation Team to control centrally.

5.3 The Harmonisation Team are working closely with a number of key programmes across the GSS to encourage harmonisation;

* 2021 Census (Questionnaire and Question Design Team); the Harmonisation Team are involved in each census topic group and working closely with the Ethnicity group, liaising with users from local/central government and academics to try to understand what would be the impact if the Harmonised questions were to change.
* Race Disparity Unit (RDU); this is a prime example of how important Harmonisation is because there has been a number of occasions identified by the RDU whereby not all departments are using the recommended Harmonised question and there is a lack of comparability across government departments.
* Data Collection Transformation Programme (DCTP) for social surveys (including the LFS); the Harmonisation team are working closely with DCTP during their transforming stage and trying to align as many social surveys with the Census.

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

6.1 Becki gave an overview of the 2017 Communication Plan in particular what tasks were complete during the third quarter covering April, May and June. Members where reminded to promote Harmonisation to senior GSS manager meetings/seminars and workshops.



6.2 It was suggested that the harmonisation Team organise a business harmonisation promotional event for the Scottish Government.

**ACTION 2** – Harmonisation Team to organise a Business Harmonisation promotional event at the Scottish Government

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

**7.0** **Review of the Dashboard – Becki Aquilina**

7.1 Becki gave an overview of the dashboard document which highlights the stage harmonised principles are at on the Harmonisation Process Model. This is to help SG members anticipate what principles are due for approval and which principles need to be actively progressed further. The topic group tabs along the bottom of the document have been colour coordinated to a red, amber and green status. 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. These are;

* Definitions for Migration, Country of Birth and Citizenship
* EILR (under development)
* Qualifications (under development)
* Gender Identity (under development)
* Disaggregation of Turnover
* Gross investment
* Capital acquisitions

7.2 A question was raised if HoPs were informed once a harmonised Principle is approved. HoPs are informed via the weekly HoP update and this is part of the Harmonised Dissemination Plan.

7.3 The GSS SPSC have delegated the approval process to the NSH SG and it was agreed, once Harmonised Principles are approved the Dissemination Plan may be initiated.

**8.0 Horizon Scanning – All**

8.1 The following items to keep a watching brief on for the future were suggested;

- Transformation of short term business surveys

- Transformation of financial surveys

8.2 Members were asked to inform the Harmonisation Team if they become aware of issues that may need investigating in the future.

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

9.1Members were reminded to read and respond to the Code of Practice consultation which is being launched on July 5th

9.2 It was noted that the household reference person for the English Household Survey (EHS) is not always the best reference person for analysis. Charlie offered to contact the appropriate person within ONS and ask them to contact Stephanie Freeth (DCLG).

**ACTION 3** – Charlie to contact the appropriate person in ONS and ask them to contact Stephanie Freeth regarding the household reference person for analysis purposes.

9.3 Members agreed an update on the Code of Practice Consultation (OSR) would be good for the September meeting.

**ACTION 4** –Becki to add an update on the Code of Practice Consultation to the September agenda.

9.4 A request was raised regarding circulating the membership of the NSH SG

**ACTION 5** – Becki to circulate the NSH SG membership list to members

9.5 The next meeting is planned for the end of September.

**ACTION 6** – Becki to set up the next meeting towards the end of September, and send invites.

Becki Aquilina - GSS Harmonisation Team

**June 2017**

**Annex A**

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| **ACTIONS FROM NSH SG MEETING – 28th June 2017** | | | | |
| **Action No** | **Para** | **Action** | **Responsible** | **Status** |
| 1 | 3.6 | Harmonisation Team to discuss and plan a coordinated approach to the promotion and promulgation of new business harmonised questions and definitions | Harmonisation Team (Ian) |  |
| 2 | 6.2 | Harmonisation Team to organise a Business Harmonisation promotional event at the Scottish Government | Harmonisation Team (Ian) |  |
| 3 | 9.2 | Charlie to contact a suitable person in ONS and ask them to contact Stephanie Freeth regarding the household reference person for analysis purposes. | Charlie Wroth-Smith |  |
| 4 | 9.3 | Becki to add an update on the Code of Practice Consultation to the September agenda | Becki Aquilina |  |
| 5 | 9.4 | Becki to circulate the NSH SG membership list to members | Becki Aquilina | See membership list at top of these minutes. |
| 6 | 9.5 | Becki to set up the next meeting towards the end of September, and send invites. | Becki Aquilina | Complete – next meeting 28th September 2017 |