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**John Pullinger CB CStat | National Statistician**Ed Humpherson  
Director General for Regulation  
Office for Statistics Regulation  
(By email only)

16 January 2019

Dear Ed

I am writing to thank you and the Office for Statistics Regulation for your recently published review, 'Joining up Data for Better Statistics', which provides a crucial insight into current data linkage activity across government and future opportunities.

Data linkage can achieve radical benefits for public policy decisions and research so long as it is done in a trustworthy manner that builds public confidence. As you note in your report, there is already significant data linking work going on across government but there needs to be more co-ordination and collaboration. Working with a range of other organisations, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) is taking a lead on enabling data linkage across the whole of government. ONS has built a programme of data linking work, and I have set out the details, along with future plans, key actions and timelines in Annex A. In particular, I would like to draw your attention to the enabling work on:

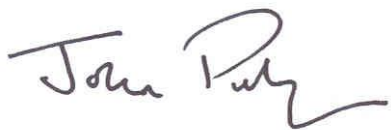
- providing robust, independent governance structures, such as the National Statistician's Data Ethics Advisory Committee and the UK Statistics Authority Research Accreditation Panel, to ensure that data linkage activity across government is carried out with sufficient oversight and for the public good.
- forming the Data Architecture Network to set strategic direction across the whole of government on data architecture, which underpins robust data linkage, and developing a Data Strategy that will be a key step in enabling the data linkage infrastructure to serve the Government Statistical Service (GSS) in the future.
- upgrading the Secure Research Service (SRS), for use by accredited researchers. This will allow access to a secure cloud-based portal from researcher's desktops and along with the Digital Economy Act will make it easier for departments to share data and therefore create more opportunities to link data. To ensure security and transparency ONS has developed the Five Safes Framework in which all researchers must work in line with 'keeping data safe' statements.

Annex B draws together some highlights of the good practice already taking place across the GSS. These examples, alongside other resources published on the GSS website, will provide a central repository of guidance on data linkage: <https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/guidances/methodology/data-linking/>.

Building on the above, ONS will continue to work with others to provide strategic leadership to promote a common approach to data linking across government, and develop the infrastructure required to capitalise on the opportunities that data linkage offers. These are significant initiatives, but it is important to acknowledge that there is still work to do. To this end, the programme also outlines future actions and I hope that we can continue to work together to achieve the outcomes we need.

Once again, thank you for your report. I hope that this response has helped to clarify current steps being taken by ONS and the wider GSS.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Pullinger". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

**John Pullinger**