
Director General for Regulation

Iain Bell
Deputy National Statistician
(by email)

21 September 2018

Dear Iain,

I am writing to update you on OSR's recent review of progress against the recommendations from the [Migration roundtable events](#) we held in late 2017.

We are pleased to see how the actions taken by the cross-GSS working group have developed since the roundtable events and note the progress made against our recommendations (See Annex A). We recognise the complexity of this work against a backdrop of high expectations and the urgency placed on new, high-quality migration statistics and data.

We were pleased to find:

- the majority of action areas identified at the roundtables being covered by the refreshed cross-GSS migration statistics development plan (see Annex B)
- the enthusiasm and commitment to collaborative working of the GSS teams involved in this work; the teams are enthused by the ambition and pace of this work as well as its potential policy benefits

We recognise that this 2-year programme still has much to deliver. As work progresses I will be keen to see:

- GSS cross-departmental relationships mature further – the commitment, creativity and professionalism of individuals involved, supported by strong leadership from the relevant government departments will continue to be key to the success of the development plan
- outcomes of the planned feasibility research exploring use of administrative data in migration statistics
- the public consultation in Autumn 2018 – user involvement in the testing and development phase is critical to ensuring new migration statistics benefit the public, policy and wider decision makers

OSR will continue to monitor producers progress against the GSS development plan over the coming months.

I am copying this letter to John Pullinger, the National Statistician and to the Heads of Profession or work programme leads in relevant departments.

Your sincerely

Ed Humpherson

Annex A

International migration roundtables update

Introduction

In February this year, the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) published a [summary](#) from two roundtable events it held with producers and users of migration statistics to explore the extent to which available data and statistics on international migration are meeting the needs of society and what might be done to fill any gaps. OSR made four recommendations for producer departments which recognised the importance of these statistics as an essential public asset and reflected users' need for a timely response to the issues raised:

1. Review the cross-GSS migration development plan (to be coordinated by ONS) in early 2018, to incorporate the short and medium-term actions that will be taken to address users' identified needs from the roundtables, setting out the roles of the individual departments in producing new statistics, including those based on shared administrative data, and clearly setting out the proposed timings for delivering the required improvements
2. Enhance existing collaborative relationships with other departments as necessary to improve the public value of migration statistics produced across government, demonstrating the nature of the collaboration in both development updates and statistical research outputs
3. As required by the Code, involve users in the testing and development of new migration outputs, publishing an outline of their approach to engaging users in planned migration statistics developments by April 2018
4. As required by the Code, keep users regularly updated with progress against this and any other development plans (for example, quarterly), ensuring that plans and updates are accessible, and being open with users' about where their needs both can and cannot be met

GSS progress against recommendations

In response to the summary of findings from the Roundtable events, ONS published [an update](#) about its longer-term migration statistics development plans in May. The update provided users with a summary of progress made so far against certain actions on the development plan including analysis of Home Office exit check data and the publication of an article on labour in the agriculture industry. The refreshed plan gives details of future scheduled work, up until Autumn 2019, providing timelines for delivery and identifying the producers who were leading or contributing to the work.

In June and July, we spoke to producers involved in the development work at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC), ONS, Home Office, and representatives from the Devolved Administrations. Overall progress against the four recommendations is summarised below:

- **Recommendation 1** on reviewing the cross-GSS migration development plan has been met by the publication of the development plan in May which sets out planned development milestones, timelines and lead and contributing departments, as well as providing an update on progress made up to that point. Broadly this is very positive and our aim is to now keep abreast of producers' progress in meeting the commitments they have made
- **Recommendation 2** on enhancing existing collaborative relationships appears to be on a positive trajectory. Producers involved in the cross government strategic group meet monthly and there appears to be continued cross government working and commitment to the development programme by the producers we spoke with.

Producers described their continued collaborative working to achieve some ambitious aims and spoke positively about the management of the strategic group. All considered themselves appropriately cited on ongoing matters and were supportive of the whole programme of work and of the direction it was heading.

The focus of the group to date has largely been on securing data from Whitehall departments. Other producers, whose participation will be more involved later in the programme, still felt that while perhaps not playing an active role in meetings at present they had materials made available to keep them up to date on ongoing work. Representatives from the Devolved Administrations raised some concerns about clarity over how data access requests were being handled as they were not, in most cases, the data owners, though it seems ONS have taken steps to resolve these issues and we will continue to observe this area

- **Recommendations 3 and 4** required producers to involve users in the development of new outputs and keep users updated on progress. Users have been kept up-to-date with progress against the development plan primarily through the ONS published update in May. The publication of this update was publicised through social media and through other core channels such as the RSS stats user forum. We also noted that the Welsh Government also dedicated a [Chief Statistician's blog](#) on the topic, which further publicised this output providing wider reach to engage a larger user base.

As outputs from the development plan are realised, they have also sometimes been accompanied by an event or meeting where key users can learn about the output and have an opportunity to raise questions and speak with the producers involved in the work, for example, the quarterly migration statistics launch event in July, which was hosted jointly by ONS and Home Office. We are also aware of forthcoming user engagement events through the Autumn including the Migration Statistics User Forum conference.

While users have been kept updated on plans and progress, a clear indication of the approach to engaging users, the regularity of updates users can expect, or how users will be involved in the testing of new migration outputs has not yet been published, although ONS informed us that the development of a revised communication strategy is currently underway. During the next phase of development work the group plan to publish feasibility research on utilising linked administrative data to provide international migration flows and launch a consultation on user needs and views on the shape of an administrative data-based system. Engaging users as part of this development phase will be critical in ensuring new outputs are valuable and meet the needs of stakeholders.

Annex B roundtable actions to GSS plan mapping

This Annex maps the actions identified by producer at the roundtable events to activities in the cross-GSS migration development plan. It should be noted that the development plan includes a wider range of activities than are detailed here, full details can be access from the published [plan](#).

Roundtable actions	GSS plan				OSR comments
	Date	Output	Description	Departments	
DWP/HMRC said they would try to address barriers in accessing DWP/HMRC data (such as Migrant Worker Scan, NINOs and Real-Time tax Information), including exploring options such as the Administrative Data Research Network and the ONS Virtual Micro-data Laboratory - but needed ONS specifications quickly to meet the proposed timescales	Autumn 2019	Placing administrative sources at the core of Migration Statistics as part of the wider transformation to an administrative data-based population statistics system	Outlining approach to establishing administrative sources at the core of Migration Statistics, including next steps, taking account user needs and feedback from the consultation	Collaboration between all GSS partners	To be discussed further The immediate focus of the cross-GSS working group has been arranging for data to be shared from Whitehall departments (including DWP and HMRC) with ONS. Devolved governments are interested to know what access they will eventually get to more detailed, linked administrative data, as are other analysts. DWP and HMRC have said that they are looking at longer-term solutions for providing access to administrative data through options like the ADRN and data labs, once data has been shared with ONS. ONS is not yet definitive about future access to shared linked data.
HMRC prepares some additional analysis for Ministers and was happy to explore with ONS what additional statistics of value it	Autumn 2018	Administrative data at the core of migration statistics – feasibility research on utilising linked administrative data to	Exploring the possibility of producing migration flows over time from integrated data sources and identifying signs of activity within the system. This will bring	Lead – ONS Contributors – Home Office, HMRC, DWP,	Covered in GSS plan Being covered as part of the planned feasibility work.

might be possible to produce through DEA		provide international migration flows as part of the wider transformation to an administrative data-based population statistics system	together the work on EU and non-EU nationals to explore the feasibility of different approaches to putting administrative data at the core of migration statistics	NISRA, NRS, Welsh Government (WG), NHS Digital	
Home Office said that it could in future produce an exit check analysis for Work, Family and other non-visit visa holders, but this would be dependent on the nature of future immigration systems	16 July 2018	Work and Family visa analysis – providing better evidence on travel and migration patterns of non-EU nationals	How non-EU nationals interact with the visa system, following analysis on student migrants published in August 2017. This will also compare results with IPS data on migration patterns of non-EU nationals	Collaborative piece between ONS and Home Office	Covered in GSS plan HO/ONS have met the commitments made in the GSS plan to deliver additional exit check statistics and carry out further exploratory work.
Home Office would continue to review what regional and local analysis could be produced from its data sources and statistics, as it has done on refugee settlement and asylum, and publish additional breakdowns where the underlying data allowed	2018 to 2019 onwards	Further development of Home Office immigration statistics outputs	This work will review the tabular presentation of Home Office immigration outputs; and investigate the feasibility of including new breakdowns of appropriate categories of statistics by geographic area, age and gender	Lead – Home Office	Covered in GSS plan
ONS committed to improving its qualification questions on the LFS which were now asked on a selective basis due to changes to the	Autumn 2018	Increase the fidelity and detail of the education and qualification information for migrants, which is collected within the	Current question routing within the LFS leads to only limited education or qualification questions once the respondent is identified as a migrant. The need to address this is accepted and	Lead – ONS	Covered in GSS plan This action is covered in the GSS plan. ONS are collating requirements from key users of this data and will include the migrant component in the

question routing – in an order that leads to fewer migrants being asked detailed qualifications questions		Labour Force Survey (LFS)	a suitable cost-effective approach will be identified as part of the detailed education question review that will shortly commence and will report this Autumn		review. The timeline for completion has extended and ONS will report to the LFS Steering Group later in the year.
ONS would also review where it could produce more analysis to explore EEA issues for selected sectors, such as construction and agriculture (where there is seasonal labour market variation), and in the medium term on international comparisons for individual countries, pulling together data from across sources and departments	9 June 2018	Construction paper – review of data sources available	Review of the data available on migration patterns within the construction sector. It will also identify any next steps that could be taken to build the evidence base	Lead – ONS	Covered in GSS plan ONS have delivered on this. They published an agricultural sector report prior to the publication of the refreshed plan and have published two construction sector reports in the last few months.
National Records of Scotland (NRS) said it would assess what analysis could be produced on migrants using its health administrative data and education administrative data in a way that was consistent with ONS plans for incorporating statistics	Summer /Autumn 2019	International migration and the Health and Education Sectors – building on information already available across the public sector	Understand how migrants interact with health and education services (users and employees) and how this information can help build robust migration statistics when combined with other public-sector data	Lead – ONS with the devolved administrations Contributors – NHS Digital, HMRC	Covered in GSS plan

from all three devolved administrations					
ONS would continue to work with DWP to look at what more it can do to answer stakeholders' key questions concerning migrants' participation, earnings, location and movement around the UK labour market using DWP and HMRC data	Autumn 2018	EU nationals travel and migration patterns – How do EU citizens interact with administrative systems in the UK and what can we learn about their movements to supplement existing analysis?	Drawing on ONS previous work looking into non-EU citizens, this will explore how EU citizens interact with different UK government tax and benefits systems in order to understand the broader migrant population and start to identify the steps required to move to a system where administrative data is at the core of migration statistics	Lead – ONS	Covered in GSS plan
ONS would work with the devolved administrations to identify how to integrate devolved regions data into the GSS development plans to ensure a UK wide perspective of international migration and where possible disaggregate this to local levels	Autumn 2018	Administrative data at the core of migration statistics – feasibility research on utilising linked administrative data to provide international migration flows as part of the wider transformation to an administrative data-based population statistics system	Exploring the possibility of producing migration flows over time from integrated data sources and identifying signs of activity within the system. This will bring together the work on EU and non-EU nationals to explore the feasibility of different approaches to putting administrative data at the core of migration statistics	Lead – ONS	Covered in GSS plan While it is not explicitly mentioned in this broad GSS activity we are aware of discussions between DAs and ONS (Data as a Service) to progress this