
Director General for Regulation

Iain Bell
Deputy National Statistician
Office for National Statistics
(By email)

4 November 2019

Dear Iain,

Following our correspondence on 21 August, when we agreed the removal of National Statistics designation from the Migration Statistics Quarterly Report (MSQR), ONS published the first release of this important source of data and statistics on migration as experimental statistics. I am now writing to highlight some areas which I consider particularly relevant for the next MSQR release and for your wider work programme to improve migration statistics.

I recognise the efforts of your team over recent months and look forward to reviewing your next release of the MSQR later this month. I appreciate the openness and continued dialogue between our teams to provide us with updates on the methods developments for long-term international migration (LTIM) estimates.

Engagement and collaboration

It is incredibly important that users, topic experts and stakeholders – particularly other government departments whose data and statistics are integral in the MSQR - are given sufficient time and opportunity to feed into changes to the LTIM estimates. I understand that your creation of an expert panel, to review and advise on research work, has provided valuable insights and we are pleased to hear of plans for wider user engagement including stakeholder events in the new year. To further encourage engagement, you should ensure the call for feedback from users is prominent in the MSQR publication. Providing more information on key milestones in your development of the statistics would also support this.

Quality and re-assessment

The MSQR is currently classified as experimental statistics, that is statistics that are going through development and evaluation. While we anticipate there will always be development, we would like to see more clarity on how you will determine whether the estimates are of sufficient quality to meet the needs of users of these statistics and therefore will no longer be published as experimental statistics. When you are confident in the quality of the estimates, we would welcome the chance to re-assess the statistics with a view to regaining National Statistics designation.

To support re-designation, you have requested guidance on our approach to designation in a world where multi-source publications are increasingly common. We welcome innovation and will continue to have a focus on statistics that best answer the questions people want to know about – we encourage producers of statistics to draw on a range of sources to improve accuracy, add insight and provide the best information to answer important questions. Our [review](#) of National Statistics designation will also consider what the designation means, including as statistics develop.

Providing clarity on adjustments

Within your research paper '[Understanding different migration data sources](#)', you included a helpful worked example to support non-expert users understand how the preliminary adjustment was applied. Expert users have told us they would welcome further detail on the methods and data sources used as well as clarity on how you came to decide on the scale of the adjustments made. We are pleased you are planning to publish more technical methods information for expert users alongside the February MSQR.

I believe you are further considering how best to present and support users to interpret the adjusted estimates within the MSQR, particularly the post-2016 estimates where further EU adjustments are required. I welcome these efforts to improve the presentation of the statistics.

Managing the work programme

Your team has told us of how it has adopted a new approach to the management of the development programme to improve efficiency and drive forward work streams in a more focussed way. I consider this change a positive step. Continuing to assess and ensure the appropriate allocation and management of resources within ONS will be required to keep providing users with insightful statistics and analysis through the MSQR as well as delivering further short-term adjustments and meeting the challenge of developing a longer-term solution for improved migration estimates.

My team and I will continue to review this development and will support and advise you, as required, while you progress your plans for improvement.

Yours sincerely



Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation