



Office for
Statistics Regulation

Statistics that serve the public good

Our focus for 2020/21

May 2020

Office for Statistics Regulation

We provide independent regulation of official statistics produced in the UK. Statistics are an essential public asset. We aim to enhance public confidence in the trustworthiness, quality and value of statistics produced by government.

We do this by setting the standards they must meet in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). We ensure that producers of official statistics uphold these standards by conducting assessments against the Code. Those which meet the standards are given National Statistics status, indicating that they meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and value. We also report publicly on system-wide issues and on the way statistics are being used, celebrating when the standards are upheld and challenging publicly when they are not.



Foreword by the Director General for Regulation

The coronavirus pandemic has driven unprecedented change in the world around us. It is clear that there has never been a greater need for statistics that serve the public good. Statistics and evidence are crucial to managing the current pandemic and understanding its impacts on the economy and society.

Statistics and data produced and published by government have had to adapt to the new environment at speed. All producers of statistics have been impacted whether through changes to working environment or new approaches to data collection, analysis and dissemination. As a regulator we also have adapted to this new environment.

We are publishing this business plan and associated work programme to share our focus for 2020/21. It does not aim to be a comprehensive document covering all we will do during the year - in the current circumstances that would be unrealistic. We plan to retain flexibility so we can respond to the changing environment of the pandemic and its impact on society and the economy.

There is much to learn from how the pandemic has impacted on statistics and data. We will look to the statistics system to build on the dynamism and innovation it has displayed during the pandemic as new areas of demand for insight emerge. We will challenge and continue to support producers to adapt to answer society's most pressing questions across all matters important to our society, not just those related to the pandemic. And we will look to continue to be flexible and responsive ourselves, building on how we have acted as regulator during the pandemic.

Against this background, our plan highlights our enduring vision and more specific aims for 2020/21 which will guide our priorities and judgements through the year.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Humpherson'.

Ed Humpherson

Director General for Regulation, May 2020

Our vision

Statistics that serve the public good.

Trustworthiness

Confidence in the people & organisations producing statistics

Quality

Data and methods that produce assured statistics

Value

Statistics that support society's needs for information

What we aim to achieve in 2020/21

Challenge official statistics producers to answer society's questions, focusing on appropriate timeliness, greater granularity and more use of data linkage	Challenge official statistics producers to offer insight, clarity of communication and coherence	Increase voluntary application of the Code beyond official statistics, particularly for government analytical outputs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use rapid reviews to support producers as they develop new outputs and approaches in response to the pandemic • Regulatory programme looking at outputs which draw on multiple sources or can offer detailed breakdowns • Systemic Reviews with a focus on society's most important issues which cut across policy • Continued advocacy for data linkage and use of multiple sources to answer society's most important questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regulatory work focuses on clarity of communication • Systemic Reviews looking at whether statistics across broader topics are coherent and communicated effectively • 2020 Insight programme: using intelligence to identify key themes in our work that we can learn from and address across the statistical system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to promote voluntary application of the Code through support of the established Community of Practice, workshops and published case studies • Support government to publish analytical outputs, such as management information and research outputs, in line with the Code • Sponsor the Voluntary Application Award, in partnership with the Royal Statistical Society (RSS), rewarding excellence in the voluntary application of the Trustworthiness, Quality and Value pillars of the Code 	
Focus on addressing data gaps and stepping in when statistics are being misrepresented	Increase the profile of OSR to support impact of our interventions	Clarify our role in regulation of data and AI	Build our evidence base on understanding of the public good
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and highlight gaps in statistics and data • Intervene where we identify significant or persistent issues with how statistics are being used or misrepresented • Systemic Reviews to encourage producers to address gaps in statistics • Develop automated tools and dashboards to provide intelligence on how statistics are used in social and mainstream media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater use of regulatory statements on website, so people can see our position on key issues • More regular contributions to Parliamentary inquiries and raising issues with relevant select committees • Develop our website • Strengthen our regulatory presence on Social Media e.g. through our new Twitter account launched in 2019 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish a statement on our regulatory role in the data and AI landscape • Work with organisations working on data and AI to further our knowledge, including their regulatory role and any gaps in regulation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the National Statistics designation • Further develop a framework for judging misleadingness • Utilise our research and data and automation capabilities to develop our understanding of what is meant by public good of statistics and existing evidence



Introduction

What we do

OSR is the regulatory arm of the UK Statistics Authority, a body established by the Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007).

We are independent from government Ministers. We are separate from producers of statistics, including the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

In line with the Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007) our principal roles are to:

- Set the statutory [Code of Practice for Statistics](#)
- Assess compliance with the Code of Practice
- Award the National Statistics designation to official statistics that comply fully with the Code of Practice
- Report any concerns on the quality, good practice and comprehensiveness of official statistics

This document

This business plan sets out our priorities for 2020/21 drawing on our enduring [Vision](#). We also publish a [Regulatory Work Programme](#). Our work programme outlines our priority projects for the coming period. For 2020/21 we have intentionally retained flexibility in the programme to allow us to respond to changes in the external environment and manage uncertainty in our own and producer resource. We update the work programme on a rolling basis, and produce a [publications calendar](#).

Later in 2020 we will publish a strategy for 2020-25, which will be informed by the broader UK Statistics Authority strategy.

Our vision, philosophy and mission

Our vision

Statistics that serve the public good.

Our mission

To ensure that statistics serve the public good we focus our work on three areas:



Our philosophy

In a world of abundant data, we want people to have confidence in statistics produced by the public sector. Our vision and mission are underpinned by the three pillars set out in the Code of Practice for Statistics:

Trustworthiness is a product of the people, systems and processes within organisations that enable and support the production of statistics and data. Trustworthiness comes from the organisation that produces statistics and data being well led, well managed and open, and the people who work there being impartial and skilled in what they do.

Quality means that statistics fit their intended uses, are based on appropriate data and methods, and are not materially misleading. Quality requires skilled professional judgement about collecting, preparing, analysing and publishing statistics and data in ways that meet the needs of people who want to use the statistics.

Value means that the statistics and data are useful, easy to access, remain relevant, and support understanding of important issues. Value includes improving existing statistics and creating new ones through discussion and collaboration with stakeholders, and being responsible and efficient in the collection, sharing and use of statistical information.



What we aim to achieve in 2020/21

We have identified seven areas of focus for 2020/21 where achieving our aims will help us towards our longer-term vision and mission. For each of these areas we have set out what we aim to deliver, why we consider it important in the context of the pandemic, and how we will monitor our success.

What we aim to achieve

:

<p>We uphold trustworthiness quality and value of statistics and data used as evidence</p>	<p>Challenge official statistics producers to answer society's questions, focusing on appropriate timeliness, granularity and data linkage</p> <p>Challenge official statistics producers to offer insight, clarity of communication and coherence</p> <p>Increase voluntary application of the Code beyond official statistics, particularly for government analytical outputs</p>
<p>We protect the role of statistics in public debate</p>	<p>Focus on addressing data gaps and stepping in when statistics are being misrepresented</p> <p>Increase the profile of OSR to support impact of our interventions</p>
<p>We develop a better understanding of the public good of statistics</p>	<p>Clarify our role in regulation of data and AI</p> <p>Build our evidence base on understanding of the public good</p>

Challenge official statistics producers to answer society's questions, focusing appropriate timeliness, granularity and data linkage

Official statistics play an important role in answering society's most important questions. The most salient questions currently facing society concern the pandemic, its impacts and societal responses to it. Data and analysis have been crucial in informing government decisions and supporting public understanding.

This salience of data in the pandemic throws into relief a broader trend that has been evident for some time. In a world of increasingly abundant data, expectations are higher. Individuals have become accustomed to information on many aspects of society in near real time with increasingly detailed breakdowns. Official statistics need to respond to these demands for information by demonstrating trustworthiness, quality and value.

There have been many examples of producers of statistics reacting to this need in response to the coronavirus pandemic. We will continue to support their dynamic response, and moving forward, we will challenge them to continue to adapt to answer society's most pressing questions across all matters important to our society. With limitations in face to face surveys we expect to see a greater reliance on administrative data and data linkage. We will continue to push for greater data sharing, under appropriate conditions, and challenge producers to continue to uncover and fill gaps where information is not readily available from digital and administrative data.

Our regulatory programme will focus on appropriate timeliness, greater granularity and more use of data linkage:

- We will use rapid reviews and regulatory statements to provide public views on new regulatory outputs produced in response to the pandemic. This will allow us to endorse new outputs while minimising the burden on stretched analytical teams.
- Our compliance check and assessment programmes will include outputs which draw on multiple sources or have the potential to offer detailed breakdowns. For example, regional household expenditure.
- Our systemic review programme will focus on society's most important issues which cut across policy areas such as statistics on children and young people – we will review whether the statistics system is sufficiently alive to issues for children and young people across all topic areas and make recommendations for improvement within the context of the core principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (the right not to be discriminated against, the right to life and development, the right for decisions to be in the child's best interest and the right to express their opinions in matters that relate to them).
- We will continue to strongly encourage data linkage and use of multiple sources to allow producers to improve quality and answer society's most important questions. We will highlight this through our regulatory work and work with others. We will also highlight concerns to relevant Parliamentary committees and by speaking at public events.
- We will inform our understanding of how statistics are used and what society's most important questions are through our automation and technology work programme.
- We will conduct a review of our own response to the pandemic to identify lessons we can apply to ensure we build on the dynamism and innovation displayed during this time.



Measuring our success

We will assess our success through the following measures:

- Publication of regulatory statements on key issues.
- Publication of a series of rapid reviews supporting new official statistics.
- Deployment of dashboard or other visual aid to collect, analyse and present text data that will provide our domain teams with insight into how statistics are used.
- Requirements and recommendations implemented by producers.
- Evaluation of outcomes against original project aims as part of project closure reports (phased to allow time for the impact of our work to be understood).

Challenge official statistics producers to offer insight, clarity of communication and coherence

We believe that official statistics must offer insight. To do this they should have a clear narrative helping users of the statistics to understand the key issues and what the statistics mean. This is more important than ever in helping people navigate the impacts of the pandemic on society. Statistics also need to be coherent, often drawing on a range of sources to provide a single narrative and supporting users to understand how statistics fit with other published outputs.

To support this our 2020/21 regulatory work programme will place emphasis on official statistics and other government analytical outputs offering, insight, clarity and coherence:

- Our regulatory programme will focus on clarity of communication. For example, are the key messages clear to readers of the outputs or is there potential for confusion or misinterpretation? Our assessments will include key outputs such as the Census.
- Our Systemic Reviews offer a tool which can help us look at statistics across a broader topic, to understand whether the statistics on the topic are coherent and communicated effectively. For example, in 2020/21 we plan to look at Climate Change statistics, which will remain a long-term issue facing the world, with a focus on whether policy-makers have the coherent evidence base to provide sufficient insight to address climate change and monitor whether policies are working.
- Through our 2020 Insight programme, we aim to improve our approach to gathering intelligence, so that we are better able to identify key themes in our current work that we can learn from and address across the statistical system. Our outputs will be determined by our findings and our audience.

Measuring our success

We will assess our success through the following measures:

- Publication of regulatory statements on key issues.
- Publication of a series of rapid reviews supporting new official statistics.
- Delivery of 2020 Insight programme outputs, beginning with Data Gaps.
- Requirements and recommendations implemented by producers.
- Evaluation of outcomes against original project aims as part of project closure reports (phased to allow time for the impact of our work to be understood).

Increase voluntary application of the Code beyond official statistics, particularly for government analytical outputs

Since our creation we have established a clear philosophy based around the importance of trustworthiness, quality and value. The fact that organisations have adopted these principles even though they do not have to is one of the strongest testaments to their power. Voluntary adoption can raise standards of analysis and dissemination among organisations that use it and demonstrate transparency to users of these statistics and data used as evidence. While we want to encourage adoption of the code philosophy as widely as possible, our focus for 2020/21 is on government analytical outputs, particularly management information. It is very notable that some of the most used datasets during the pandemic – like the daily management information used in briefings – have not been official statistics. For these datasets, we continue to advocate adoption of the principles of the Code, particularly on equality of access.

In 2020/21, we will:

- Continue to promote voluntary application of the Code through support of the established Community of Practice, workshops and published case studies.
- Support publication of government analytical outputs, such as management information and research outputs, in line with the Code.
- Advocate the equality of access so that any data used publicly by Government is freely and transparently available, in line with the Code.
- Sponsor the Voluntary Application Award, in partnership with the Royal Statistical Society (RSS). The award rewards excellence in the voluntary application of the Trustworthiness, Quality and Value (TQV) pillars of the Code and is for any producer of data, statistics and analysis which are not official statistics, whether inside government or beyond.

Measuring our success

We will assess our success through the following measures:

- Number of organisations and sets of statistics, data and analysis signed up for voluntary application of the Code.
- Assessment of good practice in release of management information across government.
- Evaluation of voluntary application good practice case studies and demonstration of excellence evidenced in Voluntary Application award entries.

Focus on addressing data gaps and stepping in when statistics are being misrepresented

Statistics lie at the heart of many political and public discussions – of the economy, health, crime and many other topics. Daily we see the top news stories discussing the latest statistics on COVID-19 or the economy.

Public confidence in statistics can be undermined if statistics are not used appropriately. For example, if the statistics are being misrepresented and cannot support the claims being made. Public debate can also be harmed if statistics on an important topic are not available.



We want to see statistics that inform public debate, allowing debate to be focused on the relevant issues and not on the quality or accuracy of the statistics. To support this, in 2020/21 we will:

- Intervene where we identify significant or persistent issues with how statistics on a particular issue are being used. Our focus is on where we see statistics being misrepresented or where data are not made available.
- Monitor how statistics are used in public debate, developing automated tools and dashboards to provide intelligence on how prominently statistics are used in social and mainstream media.
- Use our systemic review programme to identify gaps and encourage official statistics producers to address these gaps, for example through the Social Care and Climate Change systemic reviews.
- Support analytical leadership across government, including through our systemic review on statistical leadership.
- Use our 2020 Insight Programme and the engagement and horizon scanning of our topic domains to identify and highlight gaps in statistics and data.

Measuring our success

We will assess our success through the following measures:

- 10 – 20 per cent of our interventions are self-identified (informed by our dashboards and horizon scanning).
- Delivery of 2020 Insight 'Data Gaps' project and related outputs.
- Responses to our casework correspondents' evaluation survey.
- Annual report for Regulation Committee evaluating the trustworthiness, quality and value of our interventions.
- Evaluation of responses to our interventions – for example, through social and mainstream media, Parliamentary debate, and engagement with users and producers of statistics and data.

Increase the profile of OSR to support impact of our interventions

We protect the role of statistics in public debate and provide an independent trusted voice for users of statistics and the individual citizen. It is important that we have a clear voice which is independent of statistical producers and government. We also seek to raise awareness that people can approach us with concerns about quality and misuse of statistics.

During 2020/21 we will seek to have a stronger voice demonstrably separate from that of the producers, including:

- Making greater use of regulatory statements on website, so that interested individuals can more readily see our position on key issues, for example on migration, COVID-19 statistics or the retail price index (RPI). We will also seek to make statements at a time which will have greatest value to users and producers of statistics.
- We will build on our recent work to develop a greater voice in public through more regular contributions to Parliamentary inquiries and raising issues with relevant select committees.

- We will develop our website so that it is more distinct from the UK Statistics Authority website, to reduce confusion and offer a stronger OSR brand. We will also review the structure and content to improve accessibility.
- Strengthening our regulatory presence on Social Media, for example, through building our new Twitter account launched at the end of 2019.
- We will maintain alliances with the wider range of organisations that lead on the use of statistics, data and evidence, such as Full Fact, Sense about Science and the Institute for Fiscal Studies.

Measuring our success

We will assess our success through the following measures:

- Social Media Dashboard.
- Delivery of website development project.
- Evaluation of responses to our regulatory statements and contributions to Parliamentary inquiries and select committees, focused on evidencing whether we used our voice at the optimum time, and in the best way, to have greatest value to users and producers of statistics (informed by our automation and technology programme).
- Responses to user evaluation survey of the new OSR web presence, with a focus on accessibility and our branding as a distinct independent regulator.

Clarify our role in regulation of data and AI

Our core focus is on official statistics – statistics produced by government which must comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics. But the greater abundance of data and new approaches to analysis mean that increasingly government bodies and other organisations publish a wider range of data outputs: open data, management information, data science outputs, and ad hoc analysis. These outputs aim to inform public understanding and public choices, and seek to serve the public good – thereby often playing the role of statistics.

During 2020/21 we will seek to clarify our role in regulation of data and AI:

- We will publish a statement on our regulatory role in the data and Artificial Intelligence landscape.
- We will further develop our understanding of the range of organisations working in the data landscape.
- We will work with organisations involved in data and AI to understand their position and any regulatory gaps.

Measuring our success

We will assess our success through the following measures:

- Published statement on our regulatory role in the data and Artificial Intelligence landscape.
- Evidenced support for regulatory role in the data and Artificial Intelligence landscape from the range of organisations working in the data landscape.



- Our role, and the networks and alliances we have built, are contributing to the Authority's strategic ambitions for the statistical system (as evidenced by case studies, Insight programme and engagement with users and producers of statistics and data).

Build our evidence base on understanding of the public good

Serving the public good is at the heart of the UK's statistical system. Statistics support key policy decisions made by public bodies, decisions on the delivery of health services, or supporting the economic but we also want to highlight the wider range of users of statistics – for example, businesses, charities, community groups, and the individual citizen – and ensure that producers of statistics develop a better understanding of these uses.

We can't deliver on our vision of statistics that serve the public good without a well evidenced understanding of what this means. In 2020/21 we will:

- Review the National Statistics designation.
- Further develop our framework for judging misleadingness.
- Utilise our research and data and automation capabilities, including through secondary analysis of published sources, to identify examples of statistics and data use for public good and answer the question: What do we mean by public good of statistics and what evidence is there already?
- Continue to strengthen our alliances with key organisations with a role in supporting public good of statistics.

The widespread availability and use of data provide new opportunities and challenges for official and National Statistics to remain useful and relevant. The current classifications of National, official and experimental statistics may not continue to make as much sense.

Following on from our Exploratory Review of the National Statistics Designation published for consultation in February 2020, we will deliver a fuller development programme in 2020/21, involving further research into the nature of, and customer needs for, the National Statistics designation. Our research will provide the basis for a recommendation to the UK Statistics Authority Board on the future nature of the National Statistics designation.

Measuring our success

We will assess our success through the following measures:

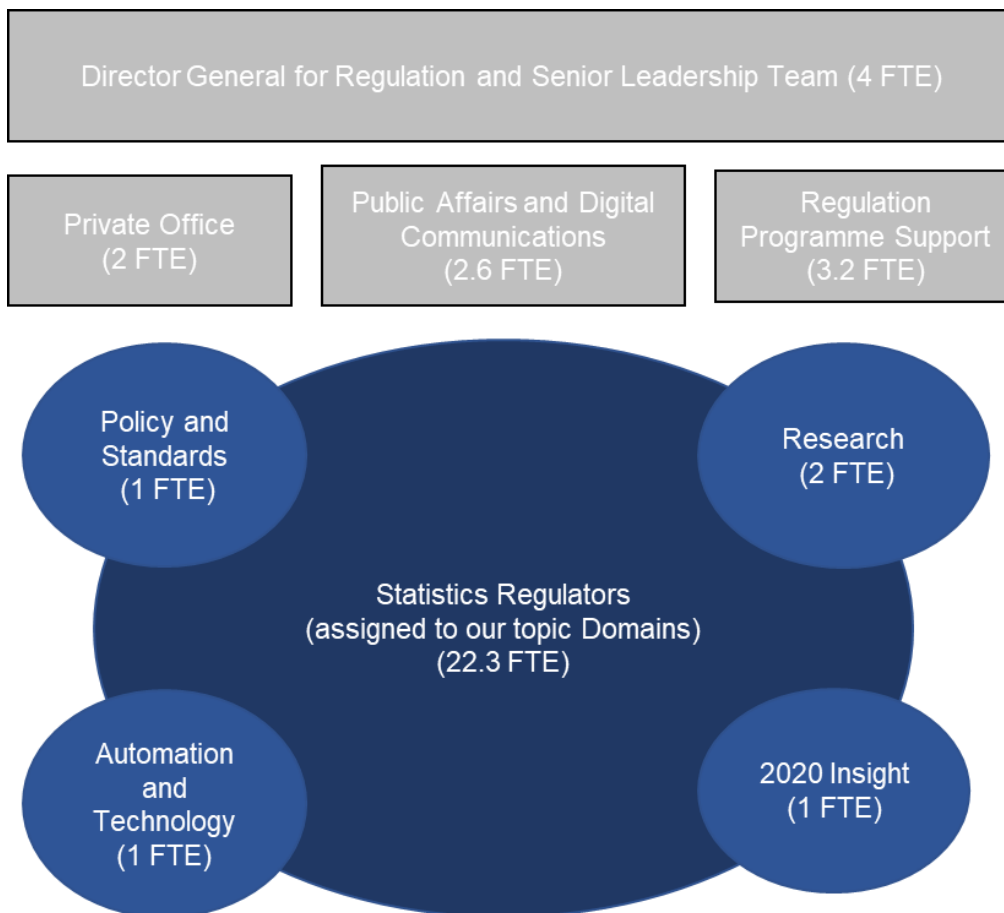
- Publication of our framework for judging misleadingness.
- Communication of the outcomes of our work on 'What do we mean by public good of statistics and what evidence is there already?'
- Recommendation on the future nature of the National Statistics designation agreed by the Authority Board.

Our structure

Resources

Our budget for 2020/21 is approximately £3 million, an increase from £2.7 million in 2019/20. This increase represents the full-year costs for the people we recruited during 2019/20 as part of our planned expansion.

Our team of 42 people* is based broadly equally across sites in London, Newport and Edinburgh (moving to the new Edinburgh Hub in 2020).



* Our team is demonstrating that it can operate highly effectively from home but our capacity will be reduced for at least part of 2020/21 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including where our Civil Servants are loaned out to support key priority work. Our work programme priorities will be adjusted accordingly and stakeholders kept informed through our website.

Domains

Through our ten regulatory domains, our statistics regulators engage with users and producers of statistics, identify risks around the potential misuse of statistics and intervene in a timely way, and manage programmes of work to deliver on our priorities. For a list of projects which are programmed for each domain please refer to our [Regulatory Work Programme](#). You may also visit the [domain pages](#) on our website where you can find more information on live projects and contact details. Our domains are:



- Agriculture, energy and environment
- Business, trade and international development (BTID)
- Children, education and skills
- Crime and security
- Economy
- Health and social care
- Housing, planning and local services
- Labour market and welfare
- Population and society
- Travel, transport and tourism

Functions

Complementing our domain activities, we have four key functions that help drive forward our ambitions. Common elements to these functions are that they are innovation-led and that they broaden our reach – both in the way we gather and process intelligence and the way that we share what we have learned with our stakeholders. Each of these functions are supported by our team of regulators, who contribute to delivering the associated projects.

- Research – Leading a better understanding of the public good is the foundation of our vision. We can't deliver on our vision of statistics that serve the public without a proper understanding of what this means.
- Automation and technology – Our Automation and Technology programme underpins all parts of our mission statement. There are two dimensions to our programme, providing intelligence to our regulators and exploring data use.
- Insight – Our new Insight function has strategic oversight of how OSR uses intelligence and data to deliver on its vision. Insight aims to support OSR in drawing together the findings and learning from all our different outputs and engagements, finding the common themes, identifying emerging issues, and filtering the priorities.
- Policy and standards - Our policy and standards function maintains the Code of Practice for Statistics and the associated policies and guidance, and leads on promoting and supporting adoption of the Code across the UK.

Senior Leadership Team

OSR is led by the Director General for Regulation, Ed Humpherson. The Director General is supported by a leadership team which includes:

- Deputy Director for Regulation - leads the London site and oversees our business and resource planning, including the wellbeing and development of our team. Also oversees our casework, automation and technology, and 2020 Insight programmes and leads engagement in Northern Ireland.
- Head of Newport Site - oversees our Assessment and Compliance Check programmes and engagement in Wales.
- Head of Edinburgh Site - oversees our Systemic Review programme and engagement in Scotland.

Support functions for the Senior Leadership team are:

- Private Office – A small Private Office supports the Director General for Regulation and coordinates our Casework Programme.
- Public Affairs and Digital Communications – This team oversees OSR’s communications strategy and provides the Director General and his team with expert communications support and advice. The team also lead our website, publishing and social media strategy.
- Regulation Programme Support – This team supports OSR business and resource planning, and management of our work programme. The team also provides local business support across all our sites.