
Director General for Regulation

Ken Roy
Head of Profession for Statistics
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Group
(by email)

18 June 2020

Dear Ken

User engagement in the Defra Group

Today we published the findings of our review of user engagement in the Defra Group¹.

The aims of the review were to develop a better understanding of the range of approaches to user engagement currently adopted within the Defra Group, and to identify the key features of effective and impactful user engagement.

We identified many examples of good practice and are encouraged by the extent to which teams are engaging with users. We found that many teams promote their statistics and tell users about changes to the statistics, that they have a good understanding of the types of users and uses and that they engage regularly with well-established networks of known users in a variety of ways. We also welcome that the Defra Group is taking a joined-up, strategic approach to user engagement to gain insight into users and uses and to encourage and foster user engagement within the department.

We also identified several ways in which user engagement could be improved or enhanced. Some teams could be more proactive in their engagement by seeking the views of users and other stakeholders and exploring a range of ways of involving them in the production and development of the statistics. Teams could enhance transparency and demonstrate their knowledge of the types of users and uses, and the extent of their engagement, by publishing information about users, uses and user engagement activities. As a whole, the Defra Group could be more strategic and impactful by encouraging and supporting teams in their user engagement and could continue to build its capability in areas like social media and web analytics to enhance communication with users and develop understanding of use.

We recognise that the last few years have been particularly challenging for the Defra Group in terms of resourcing, due to preparation for EU exit, and more recently, COVID-19. It is right that your short-term focus is on maintaining official statistics outputs and prioritising analysis that supports understanding of the effects of COVID-19 on food, farming and the environment. This means the coming year will not be a normal time for statistics production and there may limited scope or capacity for enhancing user engagement. While the recommendations in this report should be seen as a reference point for more normal times, some recommendations are achievable in the short term, and we encourage you and your teams to consult this report on an ongoing basis.

¹ By the Defra group we mean the Core Department and Executive Agencies, Forestry Commission and those Defra Arm's Length bodies that are designated as producers of official statistics: Environment Agency, Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Marine Management Organisation and Natural England.

I would like to thank all individuals in the Defra Group who gave up their time to contribute to this review for their open and positive engagement with my team. I look forward to future engagement with you and your statistics teams as you enhance your user engagement.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Humpherson', written in a cursive style.

Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation