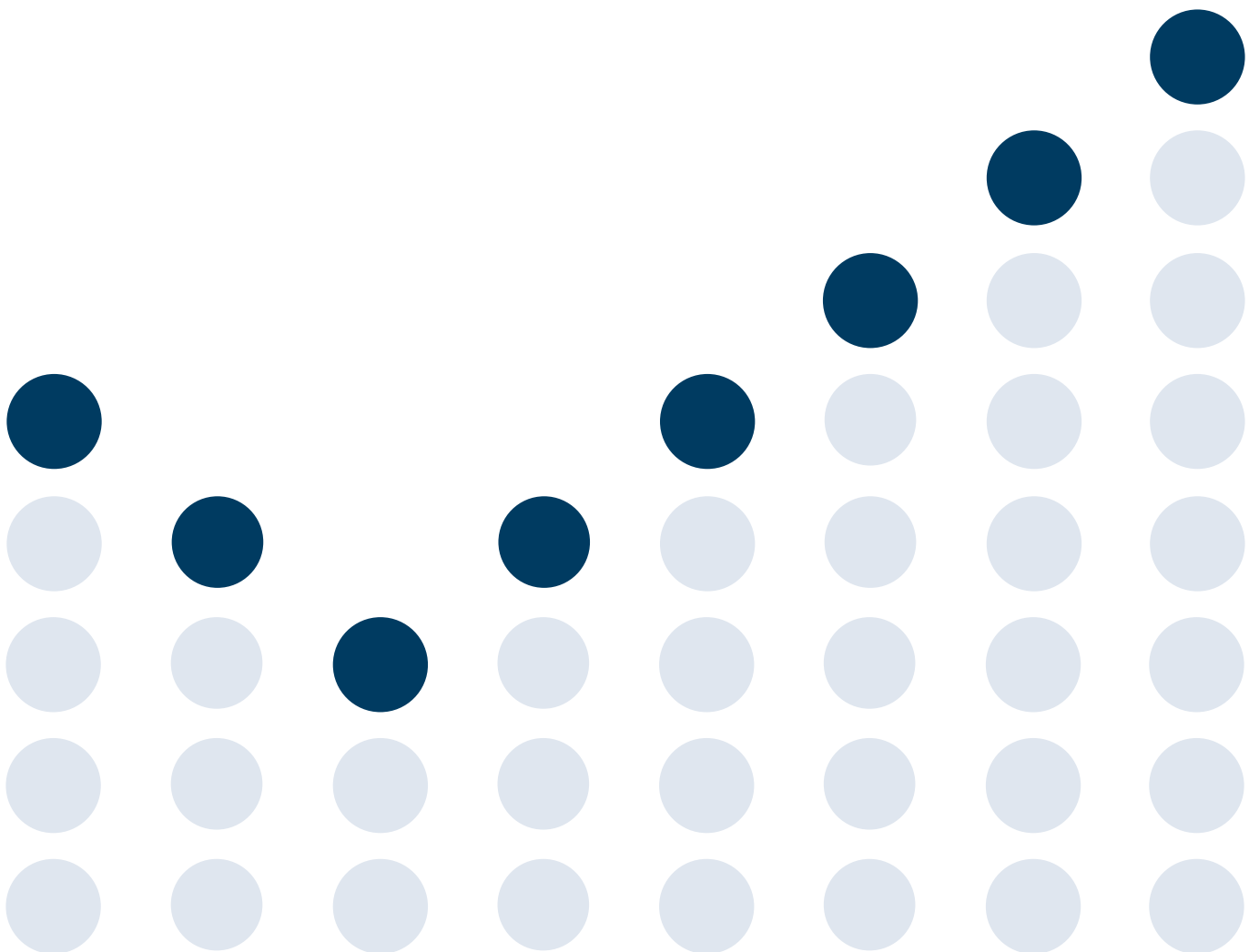




Office for  
Statistics Regulation

# Office for Statistics Regulation Annual Report 2022/23



# Director General for Regulation's Report

I look at our 2022/23 report in two quite different ways. Firstly, I see it as a demonstration of the progress we have made in ensuring that statistics serve the public good in the UK. The report shows lots of deliveries – 9 assessments reports, for example; 8 systemic reviews; 372 cases investigated; and many other deliveries. It outlines an impressive range of outcomes. As you read it, it is worth bearing in mind that this range of deliveries is achieved by a small team of around 40 people. They are a wonderful team and I hope you are as impressed by what they do as I am.

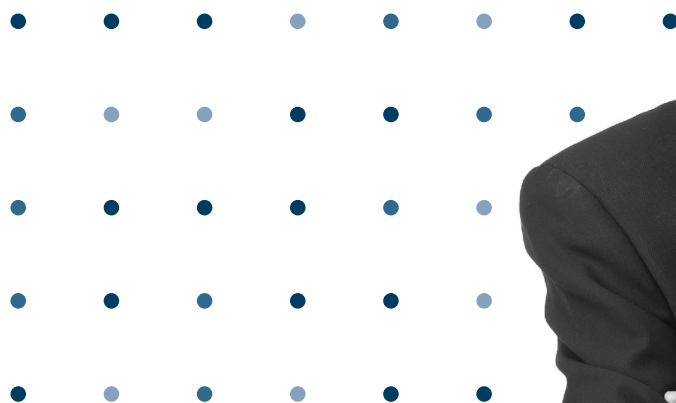
Secondly, and as the flip side of the coin, we are ambitious: there is more we can do to support the public good of statistics. We are not operating at the top end of our maturity model: we could be even more systemic and public-focused, and can secure more impact. And though the team here is brilliant, we can do more to provide opportunities for staff development and to make our work easier to access.

So as I look back on 2022/23, I am very proud of what we've done; and ambitious to do more, and do better, in 2023/24.



**Ed Humpherson**

Director General for Regulation





## Our purpose and vision

The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) is the Authority's independent regulatory function, established by the Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007).

With offices in England, Scotland and Wales, we provide independent regulation of all official statistics produced in the UK, and aim to enhance public confidence in the trustworthiness, quality and value of statistics produced by government.

We do this by setting the standards official statistics 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. Where our assessments conclude that the statistics comply in full with the Code of Practice, we accredit them as National Statistics. We also report publicly on system wide issues and on the way that statistics are being used, celebrating when the standards are upheld and challenging publicly when they are not.

Our vision is simple:

**Statistics should serve  
the public good.**

## Delivering the Authority priorities for 2020-25

The Authority Strategy set out four priorities for the statistical system for 2020-25:

- build public trust in evidence
- make greater data available in a secure way for research and evaluation
- enhance understanding of social and economic matters
- improve clarity and coherence of communication for maximum impact

As the independent regulator, we work through three delivery channels:



These channels map to the Authority priorities:

	We uphold trustworthiness, quality and value of statistics and data used as evidence	We protect the role of statistics in public debate	We develop a better understanding of the public good of statistics
Build public trust in evidence	✓	✓	✓
Make greater data available in a secure way for research and evaluation	✓		✓
Enhance understanding of social and economic matters	✓	✓	✓
Improve clarity and coherence of communication for maximum impact	✓		✓



## Delivering on the 2020-25 Strategy – Mid-Point Review

This year, we passed the half-way mark of the UK Statistics Authority strategy, *Statistics for the Public Good*. Here we reflect on how OSR has contributed to the Authority strategy and what this means for our plans as we work towards 2025.

We are delivering our core regulatory programme – which shows we are meeting the basic level of maturity – delivering a wide range of assessments and other compliance reports during the year. We are also responsive to emerging user concerns. For example, about ONS’s excess deaths statistics; or the exam algorithms in 2020; or about the population estimates, a set of concerns that first arose around the city of Coventry. But we can be more ambitious. There is a way to go to be better at anticipating these sorts of user concerns and being more skilled at doing deep dives into specific issues that are raising questions.

We are also increasingly systemic – addressing the ability of the system to meet user needs more widely; for example through our *State of the Statistics System* report and through our campaign on *Intelligent Transparency*. And some of this work edges into the wide space of a public culture of data and evidence use, for example, our recent work on statistical literacy. This is the start of a direction we are keen to develop further: it’s hugely important.

Feedback collated for a recent mid-term review of the Authority Strategy point to us needing to focus at the upper end of our maturity range – to be systemic and outwards focused. Themes raised in relation to our role included: supporting society’s key information needs; effective communication; innovation and collaboration; mis- and dis- information; widening our reach beyond official statistics; data sharing; and coherence for users.

Direct feedback we have had highlight similar themes. Stakeholders said we should; continue to do deep dives (done properly); challenge poor practice; increase our visibility; champion effective communication; and build partnerships with other organisations.

There is a strong appetite for us to continue to be more effective and impactful in our role.

# Our performance

Delivery of the key commitments set out in our 2022/23 Business Plan.

## How statistics are produced

We uphold trustworthiness, quality and value of statistics and data used as evidence

## 2022/23 Highlights

- We confirmed National Statistics designation for the [2021 Census in Northern Ireland](#) and the [2021 Census in England and Wales](#) (May/June 2022)
- Institute Of Chartered Accountants In England And Wales published an [Insights podcast](#) with our Director General for Regulation about the importance of data for the Levelling Up agenda. (May 2022)
- The Government Analysis Function published its [Reproducible Analytical Pipelines \(RAP\)](#) strategy, drawing on [our 2021 RAP report](#) and addressing our recommendation for a system-wide strategic direction for RAP.
- We published findings of our [assessment of Key Stage 4 performance statistics](#) for England, produced by Department for Education, identifying a range of strengths but requiring improvement in how the statistics are presented and explained (July 2022)
- Our [State of the Statistical System 2021/22 report](#) drew together the findings from our regulatory work to celebrate where the system consistently performs well and highlight areas for improvement – over 100 people attended the launch event. (July 2022)
- We published [Guidance for Models](#) on how the principles in the Code of Practice can help in designing, developing and using models to improve their Trustworthiness, Quality and Value (TQV) (August 2022)
- In our [follow up to our lessons learned for health and social care statistics from the COVID-19 pandemic](#) we identified four areas which support the production of statistics which serve the public good (November 2022)
- Our Head of Development and Impact explored in a blog [ways the Code of Practice for Statistics can assist producers of statistics and analysis increase their efficiency](#) while facing pressure on resources. (November 2022)
- Our [Review of Excess Deaths Reporting](#) identified recommendations for improvements to support users. (February 2023)
- In [Quality and statistics: an OSR perspective](#) we set out how we think about quality, the challenges producers face when communicating quality, and the environment and behaviours within organisations that support quality. (February 2023).

## Outputs

	Year ending 31 March 2023
Assessment Reports	9 reports published
Assessments closed*	10 closed
Designations as National Statistics	12 designations, of which: 3 confirmations of existing statistics and 9 new
De-designations	National Statistics status was temporarily suspended for 6 sets of statistics at the request of producers
Compliance Checks and Rapid Reviews	38 closed
Strategic Reviews including Systemic Reviews	8 reviews published

### Note

\*An Assessment is closed once we have reached a final decision on designation; the publication of the Assessment report is an interim stage.

## Outcomes

### Prioritise projects which improve public understanding of matters of greatest public interest

#### Focus on regulatory projects which are best placed to improve understanding and support society's information needs

**Fully delivered:** This year we've demonstrated an increased maturity in adapting in-year the program that we specified at the start of the year to be demonstrably more focused on the really key issues:

- On the Scottish Census where we adapted our assessment plans during summer 2022 to provide a stronger and more-timely intervention in order to facilitate better progress from NRS.
- In response to concerns about assurances on economic statistics following the UK's departure from the EU, we developed and are rolling out a new form of assessment focusing on quality.
- We responded rapidly and decisively to concerns raised about ONS' excess deaths statistics through a short review.

Other key topics covered have included: fuel poverty, covid infection survey, modern slavery, LFS transformation, regional GDP.

## Promote data sharing and linkage in a secure manner

### Highlight potential for, and positive examples of, data sharing and linkage in regulatory work

**Fully delivered:** Data sharing and linkage has become more embedded as a standard consideration in each of our regulatory projects and we have both championed and challenged producers. Key examples include: considering BEIS' alternate ways to use wide range of data in fuel poverty statistics, engaging with ONS on new data sources for inflation measures, promoting benefits of merging data in production of Key Stage 4 statistics, and DfE's onward sharing of data for analysis; assessment of Scottish Census drawing out aspects of using alternative administrative sources; recognition of good work on data sharing as part of compliance check of Welsh school workforce statistics.

## Widen our reach and influence

### Use regulatory work to affect wider improvements, drawing insights from regulatory outputs to drive improvement across the statistical system and beyond

**Fully delivered:** Our work on Intelligent Transparency, Uncertainty, the role of Evaluation in Policy, and State of the Statistics System (SoSS) report have resonated and informed improvements by producers. We need to do more to capitalise on SoSS in 2023/24 and the project team is already well established to deliver this, informed by our Insight Committee (advisory group of producers). OSR's international reach has also grown this year with requests to share our team's expertise, for example, around the Code and Analytical Leadership.

### How statistics are used

We protect the role of statistics in public debate

## 2022/23 Highlights

- We wrote to Department for Education (DfE) about [concerns with the evidence document that was being used for a White Paper on trust-led school systems](#). DfE published additional data and further methodological details in support of the new analysis presented in the White Paper annex. (May 2022)
- We published [Intelligent Transparency FAQs](#) in support of our regulatory guidance on for the transparent release and use of statistics and data (September 2022)
- Ensuring that uncertainty around estimates is communicated well is an important part of ensuring the appropriate use and interpretation of statistics.



We shared our initial findings on [approaches to presenting uncertainty in the statistical system](#) (September 2022)

- We published our [Annual Review of UK Statistics Authority casework in 2021/22](#) (October 2022)
- We wrote publicly to the Home Office Permanent Secretary on a number of [concerns we had about the transparency of Home Office statistics](#) and followed up these interventions with meetings with the Permanent Secretary, Chief Scientific Advisor, and senior analysts in the Department to secure commitments to improved data practices. (November 2022)
- Our think piece [Statistical Literacy – it’s all in the communication](#) and the accompanying research review cemented our position that how information is communicated is very important. (February 2023)

## Outputs

	Year ending 31 March 2023
Cases opened	372* (compares with 241 the previous year)
Time to close a case (days – median)	27** (compares with 11 the previous year)
Time to close a case (days – mean)	26 (compares with 20 the previous year)
Cases still open at year end	10 (equal to the previous year)

### Note

\* Included in this number are 187 duplicate cases opened with us and managed together from June-September 2022, concerning a twitter campaign on a BEIS consultation about weights and measures.

\*\* The increase in the median time to close a case from 11 days in 2021/22 to 27 days in 2022/23 largely reflects the more varied case topic areas that we dealt with. With COVID-19 we could often reuse or update responses to previous cases, with the more varied case load we have to build knowledge afresh. The high number of duplicate cases for the BEIS consultation also impacted the median time to close a case.

## Outcomes

### Prioritise projects which improve public understanding of matters of greatest public interest

#### Improve our understanding of how public consume information

**Partially delivered:** Through the year, we have gleaned some direct insight into how the public find and consume information from the survey of Public Confidences in Official Statistics. We published our first specific reports on the topic of Statistical Literacy and made recommendations on how to improve communication. We have also steadily built our knowledge of work going on outside of OSR, which focusses on public understanding and trust in statistics, such as by ESCoE and the Winton Centre. We are scoping research work on how the public use statistics for 2023/24.

## Intervene where there is greatest potential for misunderstanding and misuse

**Fully delivered:** We have shown that we are more than willing to step in publicly when we have concerns. We have also written and published statements on a number of high-profile topics such as the ONS excess death reporting, the differences between an asylum seeker and migrant, and financial sanctions after the Russian invasion on Ukraine.

## Promote data sharing and linkage in a secure manner

### Make statements about data sharing and its contribution to public debate

**Partially delivered:** We are preparing a report into data sharing and linkage across the public sector for publication in early Summer 2023.

## Widen our reach and influence

### Consolidate our position to support any public use of data and analysis by UK governments. Focus on system-wide change

**Fully delivered:** We have had great engagement from the analytical community and other stakeholders around our work on uncertainty and intelligent transparency. We published our report on approaches to presenting uncertainty, highlighting that this can be a challenge for producers but that showing uncertainty was essential in improving the interpretation of statistics. On intelligent transparency, we have held a series of engaging round table meetings, the latest focusing on the 4 biggest operational producers. The purpose was to find out if they experienced similar barriers to Intelligent Transparency and to gather any feedback to inform our ongoing campaign. We have hosted several successful analytical seminars, bringing together analysts from different areas to discuss topics such as RAP, data linkage, uncertainty, and intelligent transparency. These sessions were well attended with over 150 attendees at each session and 450 attendees at our RAP session, The audience were engaged throughout, and these sessions are proving an effective way to increase awareness of the core principles of Trustworthiness, Quality and Value.

## How statistics are valued

We develop a better understanding of the public good of statistics

### 2022/23 highlights

- In a blog [Exploring the value of statistics for the public](#) we explore the findings of the Public Confidence in Official Statistics (PCOS) survey. (April 2022)
- Our [policy for granting alternative release times in line with the Code](#) supported producers having some flexibility in the timing of the release of statistics where that would enable the statistics to better serve the public good. (May 2022)
- [Championing a statistical system that serves the public good](#): Sir Robert reflects on the State of the Statistics System report (July 2022)
- Our regulators blog about the [role of statistics in the Cost of Living Crisis debate](#). (July 2022)
- ADR UK and OSR, supported by independent researchers Kohlrabi Consulting, undertook a [deliberative dialogue exploring public perceptions of ‘public good’ use of data for research and statistics](#), engaging 68 members of the public in a series of UK-wide deliberative workshops (September 2022)

### Outputs

Our National Statistics designation refresh project has developed and tested ways to reframe the designation to enable clearer messaging and the greater accountability in the production of official statistics – the recommendations have been submitted to the Authority Board in May 2023. We are piloting material to support producers to effectively communicate quality and to develop a ‘Code culture’, and we are refreshing our assessment process.

### Outcomes

**Prioritise projects which improve public understanding of matters of greatest public interest**

#### **Understand what “public good” looks like**

**Fully delivered:** We have taken big steps in developing our understanding of public good of statistics. We are now finalising a first-draft definition of the public good provided by statistics.

#### **Develop OSR work to identify and evaluate our impact**

**Partially delivered:** We are at the stage where we have gathered a lot of evidence of impact but more robust recording systems will improve confidence that we are capturing and capitalising effectively the knowledge we have. We

have made gains this year in respect of the OSR culture around identification and evaluation of our outcomes and impact. We are in the final build phase of our new workflow system which will pose questions from 2023/24 at scoping and initiation of how outcomes and impacts will be measured and evaluated, with reporting at closure. We made good headway in developing an organisational Theory of Change in the first part of the year but that work has developed more slowly, reflecting limited resources. Our new Insight and Evaluation Manager is now in place and structuring our evidence base for evaluation.

## **Promote data sharing and linkage in a secure manner**

### **Understand value of data linkage and sharing and share this within and beyond OSR**

**Partially delivered:** As part of the data sharing and linkage review, we have engaged with a wide number of stakeholders. We will be following the publication of our report in Summer 2023 to engage and share what we have learned with our regulators and the statistical system.

## **Widen our reach and influence**

### **Improve understanding of our impact and influence**

**Partially delivered:** We have used social media metrics (Twitter and LinkedIn) to identify the audience that our work reaches. We have also seen our public good work referenced in the Scottish Government Health and Social Care Data Strategy, and voluntary adoption recommended for charities in the recent Pro Bono Economics report on civil society.

### **Encourage voluntary adoption of the Code of Practice for Statistics**

**Fully delivered:** Awareness and support for voluntary adoption seems to be steadily gathering momentum. We have launched the 2023 TQV award and we continue to support analysts in adopting TQV, giving advice to new organisations considering adoption. We most recently added Fable Data – a private company – to the VA list.

### **Use our understanding of public good to influence beyond official statistics**

**Fully delivered:** We have been accepted to two conferences (PERITIA conference on policy, expertise and trust as well as International Statistical Institute world conference), allowing us to widely spread our message about the public good. We also organised a government analysts event on the public good with speakers including the National Data Guardian and Data Science Campus.

# Our reflections on the state of official statistics

On 28 June 2023, we published the latest in our annual series of reports that set out the Office for Statistics Regulation's view on the current state of government statistics. The State of the UK's Statistical System 2022/23<sup>1</sup> highlights examples of statistical producers doing things well which we would like to see continue into the future, and the improvements we would like to see to ensure statistics and data better serve society's needs. Key themes include: public demand for relevant data and statistics; quality risks; producer resource challenges; communication and misuse; intelligent transparency; and UK comparability.

We also reflect on progress on the areas raised in last year's report.

## Our capability as a regulator

Our maturity as a regulator is at the heart of determining our success. To deliver the outcomes and impact we want to have we must be ambitious and continuously improve our capability – of our people; our processes and systems; our strategic approach; and our intelligence. We identified priority activities for 2022/23:

### **Prioritise making our opinions and judgements transparent and easy to find and improve the public's access to OSR**

**Partially met:** Publishing updates to our website has continued, our focus in recent months has been facilitating the transition to a new platform, which has limited other web development. Transparency, accessibility and smoother user experience are key goals for the new site and remain as priorities for 2023/24.

### **Develop our people to have the confidence and skills to drive improvement autonomously**

**Partially met:** Our focus this year has been on the OSR induction process, but we have not been able to make all the progress we planned in our other priority development areas - feedback, confidence to challenge, and line manager support. We rated strongly as an organisation in many aspects of the 2022 People Survey with an overall 74 per cent employee engagement score but for learning and development we understand there is more to do (64 per cent). A strong focus on building team capability will continue in 23/24.

### **Focus on embedding a culture and infrastructure for gathering and sharing insight**

**Partially met:** Already covered above.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/state-of-the-statistical-system-2022-23/>

# Resourcing

In 2022/23, we delivered an underspend of around 10 per cent on our £3.1m budget. This can broadly be attributed to vacancies. In autumn 2022, we escalated the difficulties in recruiting to key posts to be managed closely by our senior leadership team as part of our strategic risk profile. We made a number of innovations in how we manage our recruitment and promote our vacancies, which has led to a good number of posts being filled. Recruitment remains challenging, with a competitive labour market for the skills we are seeking, and we will need to continue to invest time in attracting the right people. As the same time, moving into 2023/24 we will need to absorb inflationary pressures within our baseline budget and live within our means, and so vacancy rates will need to be managed closely.

# Managing risk

Our corporate risks are focused in four areas that are critical to our strategic intention as an independent regulator to best serve the public good:

- Our relevance
- Our voice
- Our independence
- Our capability

## Our relevance

**Risk: We do not have credibility as a regulator.**

**Status: Green.** Robust mitigations in place. We have good evidence of how we have retained our relevance as a regulator in the last year – for example, with work around excess deaths, fuel poverty, modern slavery and statistical literacy. We identified that we needed to do more to engage strategically to support our scrutiny of the statistics system and broader landscape which requires horizon scanning and networking. Our Director General for Regulation is leading an engagement strategy and our engagement around our business planning cycle this year has been more extensive than in previous years.

## Maintaining our voice

**Risk: We do not say the right thing at the right time.**

**Status: Amber.** Robust mitigations in place but less than optimum. Overall, we are in a good position - our judgements are well received and we are calibrating our voice well. We would like to achieve greater visibility of our blogs, increase

the pace of our casework responses and develop a consistent OSR position and voice on the communication of statistics – we have a programme planned for 2023/24.

## **Maintaining our independence**

**Risk: We are perceived by stakeholders not to be able to operate independently as a regulator.**

**Status: Amber.** Robust mitigations in place but less than optimum. We have good evidence of increasing visibility and public confidence in our role as the statistics ‘watchdog’. We will inevitably be making sensitive judgements that leave us vulnerable to our independence being questioned but we are confident in our evidence-led approach grounded in the Code. There are current pieces of work that review aspects of ONS’s statistics that may lead stakeholders to be interested in, and seek assurance on, the degree of separation between the Authority’s production role (ONS) and us as the regulation arm (OSR). We are looking at how we describe and evidence separation, which will be useful in the light of the proposed Cabinet Office review of the Authority. And we are also ensuring our recruitment policy is consistent with our independence, in particular so we can be sure we remain able to recruit from a range of backgrounds.

## **Building our capability**

**Risk: We do not have the skills, tools and resources to regulate and uphold the Code.**

**Status: Amber.** Robust mitigations in place but less than optimum. We have made good progress in many areas. Main area of concern is building capability through effective management and training due to various constraints on the team in the last year. The appointment of our new Deputy Director in April 2023 provides us with the leadership we need to prioritise developing a clear programme around our capability. While within the Authority we received a ‘green’ status for our financial management in 2022/23 we have zero appetite to spend beyond our budget and we are mindful of closely managing our expenditure to absorb inflationary pressures in the coming year.

The work of OSR has not been the subject of the Authority’s internal audit programme in 2022/23. We value the insights of Internal Audit and our Senior Leadership Team met with the Head of Internal Audit (IA) for the Authority early in 2023 and we have agreed that IA will consider how OSR could be better covered in their programme so that relevant planned cross-Authority audits are widened to cover OSR rather than just relying on one planned audit a year – for example, on topics such as human resource management or statistical quality. IA will also consider if there will be a stand-alone audit of OSR in 2023/24 with the topic and scope linked to our strategic risk profile.

## Looking ahead

In preparing our business plan for 2023/24 we engaged with stakeholders a lot, probably more than we have for previous business plans.

We want to support the ongoing transformation of the statistical system. We also want to set higher expectations for the way statistical producers communicate publicly. And we want to build partnerships with other organisations that focus on how statistics and data are used in public debate, supported by wider voluntary application of our Code pillars beyond official statistics.

Our conclusion from the engagement we have undertaken is that stakeholders support our vision for OSR but want to see more from us, in particular as a fully outward-focused organisation.

Our business plan therefore has a much greater outward focus than past business plans. We want to move beyond supporting good statistical production. We want to address a wider range of factors that support public confidence in statistics: defining the public good of statistics; understanding statistical literacy; better communication of statistics; supporting user engagement; and continuing to step into public debate to clarify how statistics should be interpreted.

## Further Information

Our vision and our OSR Strategic Business Plan 2020 to 2025 set the context for what we aimed to achieve in 2022/23: <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/office-for-statistics-regulation-strategic-business-plan/>

Our focus for the year was set out in our [OSR Annual Business Plan 2022/23](#) Our [OSR Annual Business Plan 2023/24](#) provides more information about what we want to achieve in the coming year.

The legislation which established the UK Statistics Authority requires strict separation of the functions of production and regulation, where those involved in the production of statistics are not involved in the assessment of statistics against the Code.

Our work is overseen by the Authority's Regulation Committee. The Committee is chaired by Penny Young, Non-Executive Director, Statistics Authority. Other members are also non-executive members of that Board, together with the Director General for Regulation. No producers of statistics, including ONS executives, are members of the Regulation Committee.

The Regulation Committee reviews and approves our strategy, annual business plan, and budget, and approves all key regulatory decisions on assessment against the Code of Practice for Statistics.



For more information about our organisation: what we do and why; how we work and the tools we use; and our broad ambitions for future development, please refer to our published vision statement:

[www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/osr-vision/](http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/osr-vision/)

