Office for National Statistics

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By email only

11 December 2018

Dear Ed,

At the Income and Earnings workshop on 4 June, I agreed to write to you with an update on the actions that ONS agreed to progress. The three specific actions were:

- Map out the publication cycles to identify where there are synergies and whether publications can be moved around

- Create a list of 10-20 key user questions on income and earnings statistics

- Establish a work strand across ONS, DWP and HMRC to generate evidence and insight and reconvene as a group with the next few months

I'm pleased to say that a [combined timetable of income and earnings releases](#) has been compiled and published on the ONS website. This provides a platform for assessing potential synergies and clashes of publications. Work has started on compiling a list of key user questions with their answers. These will be released in stages with the first set to be released in November 2018 following the release of the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings.

To take forward the recommendation on generating insight and evidence, ONS will be reconfiguring the existing Income Working Group to concentrate on horizon scanning and commissioning new analysis and insight. This will fulfil the role of the group recommended in the June Workshop. There will also be a joint working group between ONS and DWP to take forward work on bringing together household financial surveys and developing a common approach to the use of administrative data.

Alongside this work has progressed in other areas, including:

- Updated sets of experimental statistics from Real Time Information PAYE data were published on 26 July and 6 November with a further release announced for 29 January 2019. Work on developing these statistics further is underway including some collaboration between ONS and HMRC.

- The Households Below Average Income (HBAI) Stat-Xplore Database was published on Tuesday 26th June 2018. This should make the HBAI data more accessible to users and allow users to create new, user-defined analysis easily. Stat-Xplore is a free, online tabulation tool available at gov.uk where users can access DWP data via databases to create their own analysis. This first release of the HBAI Stat-Xplore database is a development version so the HBAI team are actively seeking feedback from users.

- DWP are aiming to improve the documentation of the HBAI dataset on the UK Data Service. They have sent a prototype document summarising at a high level what variables are uses to derive income around key users and have received positive feedback. The feedback will be taken on board, and made available on the Data Service later this year. DWP have also started a project with ONS to compare derivations of key income components, starting with benefit income.

- A further joint project between ONS and DWP looking at adjustments to high incomes. This has involved DWP sharing their expertise on their current method, and engaging HMRC for advice on possible options, ONS carrying out exploratory work on behalf of both Departments and both Departments coming together to scope out what an improved method might look like, engaging with key academics along the way. Progress on this work was shared as part of a roundtable on ONS's income statistics on 9 November with users from government, civil society and academia, with the feedback received at this event being used to shape the resulting discussion paper which should be published in early 2019.

- Finally, DWP have been working closely with HMRC on future developments of their children in low income families publication. This has a lot of overlap with DWP's children in out-of-work benefit households and also depends on HBAI data for parts of it calculation. DWP are trying to determine how to derive a high quality and coherent set of statistics given not all children not receive child benefits, Universal Credit is being introduced and the current methodology can introduce volatility.

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