Office for Statistics Regulation

Statistics for the Public Good

Regulating for Trustworthiness, Quality and Value

OSR Annual Business Plan 2021/22

Contents

The role of the Office for Statistics Regulation

As an independent UK-wide regulator, we are in a unique position to take a broader look at issues of importance to society and to make the case for improved statistics across organisation and Government boundaries. This is supported by our ability to convene, influence and highlight best practice from other sectors.

This review forms part of our programme of systemic reviews which, underpinned by the Code of Practice for Statistics, are aimed at driving improvements in the public value provided by official statistics.

We want to ensure that statistics provide a robust evidence base for national and local policy development and decision making. We champion the need for statistics to support a much wider range of uses, including, by charities, community groups and individuals. They should allow individuals and organisations to reach informed decisions, answer important questions, make the case for change or hold government to account.

Office for Statistics Regulation

Foreword by the Director General for Regulation

We see this as a year of consolidation. This reflects the strong performance of the statistical system since the start of the pandemic. It also reflects my pride in the role OSR has played. Our core role is to stand up for the public's right to have trustworthy, valuable data on the pandemic and its impacts. We achieve this by driving improvements in statistics and data published by Government. We have had a significant impact over the last year in securing improvements to statistics and data on the pandemic.

To call it a year of consolidation is far from proposing a quiet year of limited ambition. On the contrary, to consolidate the performance seen during the pandemic will involve significant effort – to make the extraordinary become the norm.

While the pandemic is likely to remain a central issue in public and policy debate, other issues like regional imbalances and net zero may well gain greater prominence. We want to see the statistical system consolidate the huge gains it has made in terms of data collection and publication; consolidate the progress OSR has made on our role in data, for example, through the exams review; and through our research, we want to consolidate on the higher public interest in statistics and data in general.

So our focuses for the year ahead include:

  i.   the impact of the pandemic on data and statistics, including use of new sources, and the impacts of the pandemic on data collection;

  ii. granularity of statistics, including on how to form a better picture of regional performance;

  iii. research into the public good provided by statistics;

  iv. data gaps – ensuring producers identify and address significant areas not covered by current statistics;

  v.   our role in data.

Even more broadly than this, we have observed the increasing relevance of our Trustworthiness, Quality and Value approach. It's clear how important it is to have data and statistics that the public can have confidence in. It's clear the trustworthiness is not an option, but a fundamental part of communicating data. It's clear that honesty about quality is essential. And it's clear that value lies in serving a wide range of users.

So our year of consolidation can be summarised thus: We will continue to stand up for trustworthiness, quality and value.

Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation, May 2021

Office for Statistics Regulation

Plan-on-a-Page

Our vision: Statistics should serve the public good

The pillars of the Code of Practice:

Trustworthiness - Confidence in the people and organisations producing statistics.
Quality - Data and methods that produce assured statistics.
Value - Statistics that support society's needs for information.

Strategic Ambition	Our focus for 2021/22	Key deliverables
Build public trust in evidence	Evolving statistical production	The pandemic and the departure from the EU have led to significant changes to how data are produced and what is available. We have seen greater flexibility, including timelier statistics, and changes to data collection have accelerated. We will: • Consider implications of decisions made during pandemic - balancing quality with having what we need at the right time - and what this means for our judgement of quality of statistics, including contributing to the review commissioned by PACAC of health and social care data. • Review impact of pandemic on data collection, including for the UK National Accounts • Examine specific quality issues e.g. Living Costs and Food Survey • Continue assessment of Census 2021
Make greater data available in a secure way for research and evaluation	Consolidating our role in data	The statistical system of the future will be based around linked data sets, used for research and evaluation. We will develop our thinking on our role in regulation of data and develop our Code guidance to advocate for statistical models that command public confidence. We will: • Review progress by statistics system on data linkage since our 2019 report, and conduct follow up work around data access, data matching and linkage • Follow up our review of approach to designing statistics models for awarding 2020 exam results, supporting broader applications of the lessons learned to command public confidence in statistics models, whatever they are designed to measure • Follow up on our Reproducible Analytical Pipelines (RAP) Review
Enhance understanding of social and economic matters Improve clarity and coherence of communication for maximum impact	Granularity of statistics Public good Data gaps	To maximise our impact we focus on how official statistics can best serve the public good, and ensuring that statistics reflect society. It is important that the statistical system demonstrates leadership and identifies where new and enhanced statistics are needed to answer important questions. We will: • Review regional statistics to measure changes in regional performance • Establish framework for regulating statistics on inequalities e.g. access to transport services • Conduct primary research with the public to understand definitions of public good • Complete our review of the National Statistics designation • Monitor producer plans to meet emerging data needs from the pandemic, including a review of the impact of the pandemic on children and young people • Look ahead: Engage decision makers and examine how well statistics system is prepared to meet future needs more generally

Office for Statistics Regulation

Introduction

What we do

The Office for Statistics Regulation (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 annual business plan focuses on what we aim to achieve in 2021/22, and how our work will contribute to delivering the [OSR Strategic Plan, 2020 to 2025](#) and fostering the Authority's ambitions for the statistics system, as set out in the [Authority Strategy](#).

We also publish a [Regulatory Work Programme](#). Our business plan for the coming year is ambitious. We aim to prioritise the issues that matter to people and be in a position to quickly respond to emerging needs.

Our work programme outlines our priority projects for the coming period, broadly maintaining a 6-month horizon. We update the programme every 4-6 weeks and we intentionally retain flexibility in the programme to allow us to respond to changes in the external environment and manage uncertainty in our own and producer resource. This agile approach was an important factor in allowing us to respond quickly to the pandemic in 2020.

We adopt a self-assessment model to measure our performance towards our vision for 2025. We have framed four maturity-level indicators against the Authority's strategic priorities and we monitor the dashboard every 3 months through our Programme Review Board and report to the Regulation Committee and Authority Board. Our reporting builds on evaluation of delivery against our annual areas of focus, and more detailed project closure and impact reports.

More information about our vision and the history, purpose and governance of the Office for Statistics Regulation be found [here](#).

Our Vision

Our vision is simple.

Statistics should serve the public good.

What do we mean by serving the public good? Statistics published by public sector bodies should be produced in a trustworthy way, be of high quality, and provide value by answering people's questions: providing accountability, helping people make choices and informing policy. And statistics are part of the lifeblood of democratic debate.

Statistics therefore should serve a very wide range of users. When they meet the needs of these users, they serve the public good.

But they do not always fulfil these ambitions. Their value can be harmed – through poor production, lack of relevance and coherence, and through misuse.

It is our role as regulator to minimise these problems. We have observed the increasing relevance of our Trustworthiness, Quality and Value approach to statistics regulation. By championing high standards, we uphold public confidence in statistics that serve the public good.

Authority Priorities for the Statistics System: 2020 to 2025

- 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.

Office for Statistics Regulation

What we want to achieve in 2021/22

We have set strategic ambitions for OSR for the next 5 years, built around the Authority's priorities for the statistics system. For 2021/22 we have identified five areas of focus where achieving our aims will help us towards delivering those ambitions. For each of these areas we have briefly set out what we aim to deliver and why we consider it important.

Our Strategic Ambitions	Our focus for 2021/22
Build public trust in evidence: In 2025, the statistical system will support people's ability to distinguish reliable from unreliable statistics and data.	**Evolving statistical production**: The pandemic and the departure from the EU have led to significant changes to how data are produced and what is available. We have seen greater flexibility, including more timely statistics, and changes to data collection have accelerated. We will consider the implications of some of the decisions being made and what this means for our judgement of quality of statistics.
Make greater data available in a secure way for research and evaluation: In 2025, the statistical system will be based around linked data sets. Sharing and linked datasets, and using them for research and evaluation, will no longer be the exception. It will be the norm.	**Consolidating our role in data**: We will be developing our thinking on our role in regulation of data and joining up data/data available for research. This will build on projects underway, including the exam grade adjustment review, and help us determine how far and how regularly we want to focus our regulatory work beyond official statistics. We will develop our Code guidance around statistical models to advocate for clear demonstration of model validity and ensuring models can command public confidence.
Enhance understanding of social and economic matters: In 2025, the statistical system will provide a much richer picture of the UK's changing economy and society. The system will avoid over-emphasis on the average, providing disaggregated and granular insight into how different communities, places and people are doing. **Improve clarity and coherence of communication for maximum impact**: In 2025, the statistical system will deliver clear, authoritative messages. It will be a core capability of statisticians to interpret, illuminate and caveat what the statistics say.	**Granularity of statistics**: We will clarify our expectations of producers to provide more granular data, including data broken down by key characteristics and geographies. It is important that statistics reflect society and that people can see themselves in the statistics available **Public good**: We will develop our understanding of what the public good means and the implications for statistics producers. This will support us to maximise our impact and think about how official statistics can best serve the public good **Data gaps**: We will provide challenge for the statistical system to build on the good work during the pandemic to identify where new and enhanced statistics and data are needed to answer important questions. This will be particularly important in understanding the longer-term consequences of the pandemic and our exit from the EU but is also an important principle of statistical leadership more generally.

Health and social care statistics will continue to be at the forefront of our programme in 2021/22 and we will be looking to the statistics system to demonstrate how they will seek to meet current and future needs emerging from the pandemic. Our work will

extend into other important areas, including the longer-term implications of the pandemic for our children and young people.

Evolving statistical production

The pandemic and the departure from the EU have led to significant changes to how data are produced and what is available. We have seen changes in the approach to data collection, and rapid turnaround of new outputs. There has been an increased need for producers of statistics to consider the trade-offs between timeliness and accuracy, and think about how new approaches impact on quality and coverage. We will consider the implications of these changes and what it means for our regulatory judgements. In 2021/22 we will:

- Build on the profile of issues in health and social care and our experiences of the past year to make the case for improvements. We will support producers to improve: data infrastructure; statistical leadership; understanding impacts post-pandemic; and building on benefits and opportunities realised in response to the pandemic. We will contribute fully to the review of health and social care statistics commissioned by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC).
- Examine specific quality concerns, for example – we will undertake an assessment of the Living Costs and Food Survey following concerns over the survey's ability to deliver good quality estimates.
- Look at the impact of changes in approach to data collection, including how producers are assuring themselves of quality and communicating to users. This will include looking at the impact of COVID-19 on the quality and relevance of the data informing the UK National Accounts and considering plans for developing migration statistics.
- Continue our assessment of the UK Trade statistics, and the quality of the supporting data, within the context of the focus the UK's EU exit brings.
- Deliver an Insight project on how producers describe uncertainty in the statistics they publish.
- Continue our assessment of the Census.

Our role in data

We will be developing our thinking on our role in regulation of data and follow up our work on joining up data and making data available for research. This will build on projects underway, including our review of the approach to developing statistical models to award 2020 exam results, and help us determine how far and how regularly we want to focus our regulatory work beyond official statistics. In 2021/22 we will:

- Review the impact of data linkage on the statistical system to understand how common and effective progress has been since our report in 2019. We are aware of some good examples of progress but we need to get a sense of the landscape.

- Follow up on the findings of our review of the approach to developing statistical models designed for awarding 2020 exam results, which identifies lessons for public bodies considering the use of statistical models to support decisions and publish our guidance on statistical models.
- Follow up on our Reproducible Analytical Pipelines (RAP) Review

Granularity of statistics

We will clarify our expectations of producers to provide more granular data, including data broken down by key characteristics and geographies. It is important that statistics reflect society and that people can see themselves in the statistics available. In 2021/22 we will:

- Review regional statistics to measure changes in regional performance. The Treasury Select Committee has expressed an interest in the regional GDP estimates being assessed for potential National Statistics designation during 2021-22.
- Establish a framework, strategy and priorities for our role in regulating statistics on inequalities. We will also explore topics that support inclusivity in society – for example, accessibility of transport networks, shining a light on where the granularity of data do not allow us to understand the lived experience.
- Use our automation programme to develop our ability to understand how statistics are being used, building on a pilot on policing in 2019.

Public good

We will develop our understanding of what the public good means and the implications this has for statistics producers. This will support us to maximise our impact and think about how official statistics can best serve the public good. In 2021/22 we will:

- Conduct primary research with the public to understand definitions of public good
- Complete our review of the National Statistics designation, presenting recommendations to the Authority Board and developing and user testing proposed solutions.

Data gaps

Within the context of the public good, we will develop our understanding of the important questions that decision makers are asking now, and are likely to be asking into the future, and we will consider how well placed the statistics system is to answer those questions. We have seen in the last year producers of statistics move quickly to address gaps raised by the pandemic but how far are they considering future data needs, and how sustainable is the infrastructure to build on the good work we have seen, and over a broader landscape of the economy and society? In 2021/22 we will:

- Monitor new COVID-19 data requirements and producer plans for meeting those needs: for example, on survival rates, long-Covid, impacts on births and maternity provision, divorce and families, adult social care, suicides, and mental health. We will look at how far there will be a sufficient evidence base to inform social and economic policy around the long-term consequences of the pandemic, including the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people into the future.
- Understand how well the current statistics and data meet the current and future needs of society and are delivering public value.
- Develop our focus on the issues of the less well heard voices and reach out beyond known users. We are good at listening to any user who approaches us but we are less good at searching out user perspectives, and we will develop our approaches to identifying issues of public concern.

Progressing our 5-year strategic ambitions.

All of our identified areas of focus for 2021/22 will serve our 5-year strategic ambitions. In addition, we will resource some ongoing projects and integrated activities that will build our capability to move those ambitions forward over the medium term. Some examples include:

- Statistical leadership: Continue to build on our report: "Statistical leadership: Making analytical insight count" which looked at how statistical leadership can be strengthened across government. The report was intended to act as a starting point for further engagement. We are engaging widely across analytical and other professions, and plan to provide an update in 2022 on how the analytical community is responding to our recommendations.
- Initiate an Insight project on the role of statistics in evaluating policy impacts.
- Statistical literacy: Create a framework that will allow OSR to capitalise on opportunities that arise through our work and key collaborations, rather than making statistical literacy the focus of a single project.

Applying the Authority's Core Principles

We apply these principles in respect of our ambitions for the statistics system, and our ambitions for our own organisation and how we operate as a regulator. Our focus in 2021/22 will be:

Radical:
Statistics System: The Code requires that statistics producers should be creative and motivated to improve statistics and data. In our regulatory work we will recognise where statistical producers are taking opportunities to innovate and collaborate, and challenge where they are not.

Our capability: We will continue to grow our research and data and automation functions to support our own innovation and utilise our Insight programme to inform our development.

Inclusive:
Statistics System: We will place a strong focus on the granularity of statistics and data, and the ability to link data, to enable statistics to represent the experience of all in society. We will expand our work on the public good of statistics in 2021/22 to hear directly from the public.

Our capability: In our projects, we will aim to find ways to engage with and listen to the range of voices. We will continue our work to make our website, outputs and events accessible for all. We will continue to seek people to join our organisation from the widest range of backgrounds.

Ambitious:
Statistics System: Through our focus on granularity and data gaps, we will challenge the statistics system to anticipate the data, insights and understanding the UK needs and respond rapidly and transparently.

Our capability: We will develop our Insight programme and automated tools to support our own anticipation of data needs and emerging issues.

Sustainable:
Statistics System: We will focus in 2021/22 on quality and on ensuring the statistics system is well positioned to answer the questions of the future as well as the present.

Our capability: We will publish a prioritised work programme that we will review every 4-6 weeks to ensure that we are agile and able to focus on the issues of importance to the public good.

Office for Statistics Regulation

Our Structure

Resources

Our budget for 2021/22 is approximately £3.1 million. Our budget has been rolled forwards from 2020/21 but allowing for the recruitment of an additional Grade 6 - to extend our Senior Leadership Team to reflect the expansion in our organisation and ambitions in recent years - and an additional placement student.

Our team of 47 people (44.3 FTE) is based across sites in London, Newport, and Edinburgh. Our team is demonstrating that it can operate highly effectively from home but our capacity will potentially be reduced for at least part of 2021/22 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Our work programme priorities will be adjusted accordingly and stakeholders kept informed through our website.

Our Organisation

Director General for Regulation and Senior Leadership Team

4.9 Full Time Equivalent (FTE)

Topic Domains

Statistics Regulators – 25.7 FTE

Topic functions

Policy and Standards – 1 FTE

Research – 2 FTE

Automation and Technology – 1.8 FTE

Insight – 1 FTE

Central support functions

Private Office – 2 FTE

Public Affairs and Digital Communications – 2.6 FTE

Regulation Programme Support – 3.3 FTE

Office for Statistics Regulation

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. We work flexibly across our domains, drawing on support from across domains and from our statistical methods expert as needed. During 2020/21 our Health and Social Care and Population and Society domains worked closely together with a focus on statistics related to the pandemic.

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
- 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.

- 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 Insight function has strategic oversight of how OSR uses intelligence and data to deliver on our 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.

Office for Statistics Regulation

- 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 leads engagement in Northern Ireland. Domain sponsor for Health and Social Care and Population and Society domains.
- Head of Newport Site - oversees our Assessment and Compliance Check programmes and engagement in Wales. Domain sponsor for Business, Trade and International Development, Economy, Labour Market and Welfare and Travel, Transport and Tourism domains.
- Head of Edinburgh Site - oversees our Systemic Review programme and engagement in Scotland. Domain sponsor for Agriculture, Energy and Environment, Children, Education and Skills, Crime and Security, and Housing, Planning and Local Services domains.
- New Grade 6 currently being recruited.

Support functions for the team are:

- Private Office – 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.

Find out more about our team.