

26th Meeting of the UK Data Forum

11 July 2018

Minutes

Attendees:

Guy Goodwin (Chair)	National Centre for Social Research
Daniele Bega (Secretariat)	Office for National Statistics (ONS)
Iain Bell	ONS
Andrew Garrett	Royal Statistical Society / ICON Clinical Research
John Marais	Ministry of Justice
Samantha McGregor	Economic and Social Research Council
Jane Naylor	Department for Exiting the European Union (DExEU)
Oliver Payne	Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS)
Giles Pavey	Department for Work & Pensions
Chris Roebuck	NHS Digital
Matthew Woollard	UK Data Archive
Nicky Zachariou	Cabinet Office

Apologies:

Paul Allin	Imperial College
Stefan Bender	German Data Forum
Sarah Henry	ONS
Suzy Moat	Warwick Business School
Erica Pufall	Wellcome Trust
Julie Stanborough	ONS
Sharon Witherspoon	Academy of Social Sciences
Teresa Williams	Cafcass

1. Welcome and introductions

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting. Members introduced themselves.

2. Minutes of the previous meeting/Matters Arising

No comments were made on the minutes from the previous meeting.

Guy Goodwin invited members to suggest amendments to the secretariat by correspondence.

All the action points arising from the previous meetings were followed-up:

- Use of Census as sampling frame and linkage to other admin data sources

Guy Goodwin discussed this issue with John Pullinger and invited Iain Bell to present the position from UK Statistics Authority at the UKDF meeting (Item 3).

- **Brexit**
Item 5 on the agenda provides an update from Jane Naylor (DExEU) and Oliver Payne (BEIS) on the progress made by the UK Government on data and analysis following Brexit.
- **Secretariat, UK Data Forum website and future meetings**
A new secretariat has been appointed. A discussion item (Item 6) has been included in the agenda to discuss the future of the UK Data Forum website. Invitations have been sent to members for 2018 meetings.

3. Census and administrative data / sampling frames / horizons

Iain Bell, Deputy National Statistician and Director General, Population and Public Policy at the ONS, provided an overview of the current work undertaken as part of the Census Transformation Programme (CTP). The CTP aims to make the best use of available data sources to enhance the provision of population statistics.

A White Paper will be delivered in the autumn to facilitate discussions around the formulation of the new Census and its questions, including topics such as gender identity, ethnicity and armed force veterans. The targets for response rates and follow-ups are very similar to the ones from the previous Census, with a much more ambitious plan to improve online completion. Online collection and the use of administrative data are likely to increase opportunities for validation and enhance the quality of the information collected. The expectation is that 2021 data will be higher quality than in 2011, where much of the data collection was on paper still.

Iain painted a bold picture of the future in relation to the use of administrative data, as part of a new data infrastructure, with linked datasets being able to provide better answers to a broader range of policy questions.

His vision for administrative data incorporated much of the learning from the LEO (longitudinal education outcomes) data approach and his time at the Ministry of Justice. Improved use of administrative data has been made possible by the powers introduced by the Digital Economy Act, with several projects currently underway to link data sources from various Government Departments. At the moment, the best example of progress has been with the use of wider data sources to improve migration statistics.

His expectation was that much progress would be possible between now and 2021, while recognising that improvements in the use of administrative data would be an on-going process. Members had several detailed questions but welcomed the overall direction of travel and wished to be engaged where they could help.

Iain recognised that there was more work to do in terms of working through how to engage the wider community and the strands of communication of ONS's work. He

clarified the ONS position in relation to the potential use of the Census as a sampling frame for surveys. Iain was dubious that this would work well, as the information captured by the Census serves a specific purpose. Using administrative data would be a more reliable solution to identify sampling frames and reach specific groups.

Guy asked whether there was a plan to make information from linked admin data sources and surveys available more widely to researchers via the Secure Research Environment. Iain thought that, where possible, information would be made available and emphasised the need to collaborate with the ESRC to prevent duplication of work. Iain and Sam confirmed that ONS & ESRC were already discussing how best to align work programmes.

UK Data Forum asked how members could help ONS. Iain explained the UKDF could:

- Help with the influencing of Government Departments, providing compelling cases to illustrate the benefit of the use of linked administrative data to answer complex questions for society;
- Help with the ongoing engagement with the user community.

Iain would give the communications issues (and the possible role of UKDF) some further thought and discuss offline with the Chair.

The Chair invited Iain and Sarah Henry to also come back to the equivalent meeting next year to update the Forum on progress.

Action: Iain and Chair to discuss communications and the role of UKDF in CTF and associated work

Action: Secretariat to invite Iain and Sarah to update Forum in 2019

4. Longitudinal Study Review/Refreshing ESRC Data Strategy

Sam McGregor introduced this item. Last year, the ESRC commissioned an International panel to undertake a strategic review of longitudinal studies.

The ESRC welcomed input from UKDF members on some of the recommendations from the review, published in May 2018, and how best to take forward from here. Input could be at a strategic level today or more detailed comments later direct to Sam.

The recommendations included:

- The creation of an administrative data spine from which to sample a new cohort and/or refresh existing samples;
- A new birth cohort with accelerated longitudinal design;
- Continuation of Understanding Society and an additional 'transition to adulthood' sweep of the Millennium Cohort Study;

- Competitive bids to an innovation fund, including an option for the other cohorts to develop innovative bids for this resource;
- Continuation and further development of a longitudinal resource centre (currently CLOSER).

Guy Goodwin thought that the recommendation for a data spine for surveys seemed, on the surface, consistent with the work that ONS are currently doing in linking administrative data sources. It is important though that this does not result in duplications, or different and inconsistent approaches, and that the spine provides relevant information for the community as a whole, for a variety of different users and uses. Sam noted that ESRC and ONS were talking and would continue to do so to ensure consistency.

The development of a new birth cohort is also important as the last research cohort of this type was the Millennium Cohort study. The time lag represents a risk around coherence and consistency across various longitudinal sources. There was some discussion around an accelerated approach but members felt the process around engagement with the community was more important, rather than necessarily their individual preferences. Engagement with the various organisations involved in the development of longitudinal studies is crucial including in ensuring the studies answer relevant questions for society.

Guy suggested the idea of developing the study around a ‘Brexit baby’, mirroring the Holyrood baby concept on Growing Up in Scotland, comparing demographic and socio-economic issues for children born as UK left the EU and growing up in the post-EU era.

Sam noted that ESRC are in the process of refreshing the ESRC Data Strategy, which comes to an end this year. The ESRC will be co-ordinating the work of a task and finish group in the next few months and would welcome participation and contributions from members, either as volunteers for the group or via a paper or presentation at its November meeting. Members of the Forum welcomed this and suggested they were also asked to comment on papers and particular issues in between meetings as ESRC saw fit.

**Action: Volunteers sought to join T&F group to help ESRC to refresh the data strategy. Please let Sam know.
ESRC to bring paper or presentation on progress to November meeting**

5. Brexit and Statistics

Jane Naylor joined the Department for Exiting the European Union from ONS in November 2017 as the Head of Profession for Statistics.

In her role, Jane is promoting best use of statistics across Whitehall, encouraging fact checking, validation of data sources and data sharing. Amongst various activities, DExEU are trying to identify information gaps and are looking to fill these gaps in

collaboration with other Government departments and potentially organisations outside of Government.

Oliver Payne at the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) is leading on a project to look into the future research infrastructure for the UK. The Government aims to continue maintaining mutual European collaboration on research and science after exiting the EU. Amongst various issues, BEIS are looking at future data sharing with Europe to ensure adequate protection of information.

Guy raised the ERIC on the European Social Survey, hosted at City, University of London; it was prestigious and he was pleased that BEIS and ESRC recognised the importance to the social science community.

Jane observed that there are many lessons to be learned from Brexit in relation to data. Their work will potentially provide something of a statistical legacy that the UK Government can rely on in the future, when building new systems and developing future requirements for data collection. It is important that this expertise is not lost.

Forum members noted how important it is that new data collections, whether via administrative systems such as to record the movement of people and goods across borders or via new business surveys, were set up properly and influence was asserted early on to ensure the right data was collected for statistics and research purposes, rather than poor quality data simply for operational uses. Jane mentioned that ONS were leading in this area and she was aware that some thought was going into this.

Opportunities could arise to stop some of the data collections for statistics produced for Eurostat purposes only, to adhere to new data sharing initiatives and to adopt more meaningful definitions/classifications for the UK. At the same time, there are also some risks that the ability to compare UK information with European datasets is lost. The Heads of Profession for Statistics Network provides a forum to understand the implications for various Government Departments and to develop a new framework.

6. UK Data Forum website

Daniele Bega introduced this item. The current web presence is via the ESRC's website. The content consists of terms of reference, meeting minutes and membership for the forum. The secretariat does not have the necessary permissions to publish content on the website and the information currently published is out-of-date. It was suggested to develop a Twitter account, in due course, to expand the reach of the forum and better communicate to a wider range of users.

Action: The Chair to discuss further with Sam and Sarah where the webpage should be hosted and how it should be supported

7. AOB and Agenda items for next meeting

The group discussed how to assess the key priorities with ESRC and ONS, the need to review the terms of reference for the group and to identify what they hadn't covered in recent years.

Action: The Chair to write to John Pullinger and Jennifer Rubin to provide a progress report on the work of the Forum and to engage on future priorities

At the next meeting, the UK Data Forum would bring together work on Data Ethics and look at the coherence across the various initiatives.

The Chair closed the meeting.

Next meeting

The next UK Data Forum meeting will take place at ETC. Venues, 1 Drummond Gate, Pimlico, London, SW1V 2QQ on 14 November 2018.