

Better Statistics CIC

Suite 626, Kingsgate
High Street,
Redhill, RH1 1SG
www.betterstats.net

Professor Sir Ian Diamond
National Statistician
UK Statistics Authority
Newport
NP10 8XG

By email to national.statistician@statistics.gov.uk

11th March 2021

Dear Sir Ian,

I was pleased to have attended the recent launch of the GSS User Engagement Strategy and to have been mentioned by Mike Hughes of the RSS in his letter to you of 26th February. The Campaign Mike mentions in his letter began life because of our concern with the growth of the 'gig' economy and the belief that the official business statistics no longer accurately reflected UK enterprise. Subsequently we became concerned with a number of other aspects of official statistics and accordingly we have now created Better Statistics CIC, a Community Interest Company with the objectives of increasing public awareness and interest in accurate statistics, both public and private. Accordingly, as Mike Hughes has suggested, we have a particular interest in the future success of the new Strategy.

Whilst we welcome all elements of the strategy as recently proposed, we share Mike Hughes' observation that the focus is primarily towards those producing the data. For our part we are particularly concerned with that element of the strategy concerned to achieve "*Enhancing the public's understanding of social, economic and environmental matters.*" Indeed it is our wish to ensure that the public is more engaged with the statistics designed to measure those matters and to reduce the dissonance evidenced by the recent ESCoE Report "*Public Understanding of Economics and Economic Statistics*" by Johnny Runge and Nathan Hudson-Sharp. We certainly hope that we might contribute to the success of the new strategy through a rejuvenated Statistics User Forum, as also mentioned in Mike's letter.

Meanwhile, I have also written to Julie Stanborough following the launch and I had commended your comment that it was worth reducing the workload of the GSS to ensure a successful engagement strategy. Possibly the SUF could contribute to the process of reducing the workload?

Yours sincerely,



Tony Dent
Director, Better Statistics CIC

Professor Sir Ian Diamond | National Statistician

Tony Dent
Better Statistics CIC
Suite 626, Kingsgate
High Street
Redhill
RH1 1SG

23 March 2021

Dear Mr Dent,

As National Statistician and Chief Executive of the UK Statistics Authority, I am responding to your recent correspondence regarding the newly launched User Engagement Strategy for Statistics¹. I appreciate your support for the strategy and welcome the contributions of the Better Statistics CIC in raising public awareness and interest in statistics.

As I mentioned in my recent response to Mr Mike Hughes, teams within the Office for National Statistics (ONS) have been working with Paul Allin, Chair of the Statistics User Forum (SUF) on a revamp of SUF. This includes reviewing its online forum, StatsUserNet, to encourage a more diverse and inclusive membership and deliver a vibrant and cohesive community network. I look forward to this rejuvenated group continuing to support our producers of statistics by feeding in a wide range of users' needs, ideas and priorities.

As you know, user engagement is a key priority for me and other senior leaders across government. We are determined to continually review our priorities and ensure we have the time to engage effectively with a wide range of users of statistics.

Julie Stanborough and her project team will be keeping me closely informed on progress implementing the strategy. I know the project team will also welcome your support. I encourage you and your colleagues to continue to collaborate with us, play a part in the successful implementation of the strategy and help us ensure that our statistics meet society's needs.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Sir Ian Diamond

¹<https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/policy-store/user-engagement-strategy-for-statistics-ensuring-official-statistics-meet-societys-need/>

Better Statistics CIC

Suite 626, Kingsgate
High Street,
Redhill, RH1 1SG
www.betterstats.net

Professor Sir Ian Diamond
National Statistician
UK Statistics Authority
Newport
NP10 8XP

By email to national.statistician@statistics.gov.uk

25th March 2021

Dear Professor Diamond,

Thank you for your prompt reply to my previous letter. Please be assured that Better Statistics will collaborate with Paul Allin and the SUF in whatever way we can and that we are solely concerned to assist with the objective of meeting the needs of today's society. Moreover our concerns extend beyond official statistics, insofar as we hope to influence some of the data provided by commercial institutes, including opinion pollsters!

Nevertheless, we consider it a major weakness of the present and planned arrangements for user engagement with official statistics that they exclude the features of a high level external user body such as a Statistical Advisory Council (SAC) as set out in the United Nations guidance on user involvement with official statistics. Of course, we wish to collaborate with you and your teams, and we recognise their good will, but at the same time we wish to ensure that users are encouraged to become involved, and we feel that should be done by working with the UKSA rather than within the UKSA. This is entirely in line with the UN guidance that the SAC sits alongside the national statistical system, supported by it, but not formally part of it. Also, from the perspective of Better Statistics, we think it useful to engage users in more than Official Statistics, particularly in the present world where the distinction may often be blurred for the more casual user – although it would always be our purpose to clarify the difference.

On a personal note I have just realised that you were at Southampton when my mentor, Professor Fred Smith was vice chancellor! In fact he was a great friend and advisor to me over many years. It is a pleasure to be reminded of his contributions to our statistics.

With all good wishes,

Yours sincerely,



Tony Dent
Director, Better Statistics CIC
Tel: +44 (0) 78 8508 8521

Cc: Professor Paul Allin, SUF & Mike Hughes, NSAG

Professor Sir Ian Diamond | National Statistician

Tony Dent
Better Statistics CIC
Suite 626, Kingsgate
High Street
Redhill, RH1 1SG

31 March 2021

Dear Mr Dent,

I am responding to your recent correspondence regarding the User Engagement Strategy for Statistics. Thank you for reinforcing your support for helping us ensure our statistics meet society's needs.

The user engagement project team have started exploring governance options for strategically overseeing the work of new and existing theme-based user forums (deliverable 1.6 of the user engagement strategy). I want to reassure you that they are actively looking at the potential benefits of having a high-level external user body, with features similar to the UN's Statistical Advisory Council.

The project team will continue to encourage users and potential users of statistics to be involved in shaping ideas and decisions on governance. Tegwen Green and Nancy Singh are actively reaching out to gather user opinion and are working closely with Office for National Statistics' (ONS) stakeholder engagement and external affairs teams to progress this. They have started engaging with members of user groups to explore and promote successful operational and governance approaches that could be modelled.

Tegwen Green and Nancy Singh are meeting with Paul Allin in early April and I know they are in the process of reaching out to you and Mike Hughes to ensure your knowledge, ideas and advice are captured and utilised in these early stages of formulating plans. Please do continue to keep engaging with the project team as the strategy progresses. The goal is to find workable governance solutions to recommend to the Analysis and Evaluation Committee in June 2021.

The main focus of the user engagement strategy is around official statistics, but the strategy's principles are indeed relevant much more widely and to all those conducting analysis across professions. This fits nicely with your aspirations too, in extending this engagement work beyond official statistics.

It is good to know that you, as I do, held Fred Smith in such high regard. I had many wonderful conversations with him, on a wide variety of statistical topics.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Sir Ian Diamond

Better Statistics CIC

Suite 626, Kingsgate
High Street,
Redhill, RH1 1SG
www.betterstats.net

Professor Sir Ian Diamond
National Statistician
UK Statistics Authority
Newport
NP10 8XP

By email to national.statistician@statistics.gov.uk

1st April 2021

Dear Professor Diamond,

Thank you for your thoughtful reply to my recent letter. I am sure that we all benefitted considerably from our association with Fred.

Better Statistics CIC, under our previous title of the Campaign for Better Statistics, was pleased to have been involved with the earlier consultation with Tegwen and Nancy and had made the point that, ultimately, the user community includes all our citizens. We were therefore disappointed that much of our evidence had been overlooked in the document outlining the strategy, in particular there is no real attempt made to define what is meant by the users that the strategy is seeking to engage, despite the previous correspondence on that issue.

To us this is a particular concern and I wonder if you would object to us publishing this correspondence on the SUF StatsUserNet website; including the previous exchange of letters between Mike Hughes and you. Such publication could open a more general debate on the issue of user representation and the merits or otherwise of a formal Statistical Advisory Council.

I understand that both Professor Allin and Mike Hughes would be pleased to have the issue more widely shared, if that would be okay with you. I am also confident that the GSS and all other users would benefit from a wider discussion.

With all good wishes,



Tony Dent
Director, Better Statistics CIC
Tel: +44 (0) 78 8508 8521

Cc: Professor Paul Allin, SUF & Mike Hughes, NSAG

Professor Sir Ian Diamond | National Statistician

Tony Dent
Better Statistics CIC
Suite 626, Kingsgate
High Street
Redhill, RH1 1SG

22 April 2021

Dear Mr Dent,

Thank you for your follow-up letter about the User Engagement Strategy for Statistics. I am very supportive of encouraging wider debate so I would be happy for our correspondence to be published on StatsUserNet.

I am sorry to hear that you feel some of your evidence was overlooked in the development of the strategy. However, the project team assure me that they did make specific changes to the document and their thinking, in light of the feedback you provided. I do agree that our user community includes all citizens. The strategy highlights this in its 'serving society's needs' tag line and more explicitly in the section labelled "Who are the users of our statistics?". As you know, the Government Statistical Service produces statistics for a range of different users and the strategy encourages engagement with all of these groups.

I know your initial feedback also raised some important points about governance and the strategic oversight of theme-based user groups. As you know, this is being explored as part of the strategy's implementation phases. I understand you met with Owen Brace, Tegwen Green, Nancy Singh and Susie Quick on 21 April 2021 to discuss your ideas around a Statistical Advisory Council approach to governance.

Please continue to engage with the project to ensure the success of the strategy.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Sir Ian Diamond