



BSPS Conference

University of
Winchester

5th-7th September 2022



A personal review by Tony Dent, Director Better Statistics CIC

Introduction:

I had not previously heard of the BSPS until invited to attend this conference. I therefore had no previous knowledge of what to expect, but it seemed important to attend, particularly in the context that details from the 2021 census are now becoming available. In the event, there was relatively little discussion of the census, although many other topics were covered in what was a very busy 48 hours; offering a total of more than 50 separate events to be attended – 47 breakout sessions, 3 plenaries, a poster session and a quiz! To say nothing of the refreshment breaks, the meals and the various other opportunities to network.

So, this document provides only a brief insight into the meeting. For full details of the conference please see the [programme](#). From that you will note that there were a total of 185 different papers provided within the breakout sessions. It is therefore quite impossible to cover anything other than a small part of the event and I have concentrated on covering a few highlights, as I observed them.

The delegates:

Having registered and collected all the necessary documents I was struck by the numbers of overseas delegates attending the conference. Indeed the first delegate I spoke with was a post-graduate student from Sri Lanka. Although he was attending a UK University, an astonishing **22%** of delegates had journeyed to Winchester from institutions based overseas; including from as far afield as New Zealand and Thailand. Moreover **45%** of all institutions represented at the conference were not based in the UK.

The appendix provides a detailed analysis of the delegates list which can be summarised thus:

| | <u>Individuals</u> | | <u>Institutions</u> | |
|---------------------|--------------------|----------|---------------------|----------|
| | <u>No.</u> | <u>%</u> | <u>No.</u> | <u>%</u> |
| <u>UK</u> | 216 | 78.0 | 41 | 54.7 |
| <u>Overseas</u> | 61 | 22.0 | 34 | 45.3 |
| <u>Total</u> | 277 | 100.0 | 75 | 100.0 |

The Office for National Statistics was the dominant institution represented at the conference with 76 delegates from that organisation. 6 of the 7 organisations providing more than 5 delegates were also UK based, with the Max Plank Institute providing the most delegates from overseas.

| <u>Institutions with more than 5 delegates:</u> | <u>No.</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---|------------|----------|
| Office for National Statistics | 76 | 27.4% |
| London School of Economics | 19 | 6.9% |
| University of Southampton | 17 | 6.1% |
| University College London | 11 | 4.0% |
| University of St Andrews | 11 | 4.0% |

| <u>Institutions with more than 5 delegates - cont.</u> | <u>No.</u> | <u>%</u> |
|--|------------|----------|
| University of Oxford | 11 | 4.0% |
| National Records of Scotland | 10 | 3.6% |
| Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research | 6 | 2.2% |

It was notable that, despite the move towards integrating more administrative data into our National Statistics and the numbers of delegates from the ONS, there were no representatives from the Government Statistical Service in attendance.

The conference:

As mentioned in the introduction, there were 47 separate breakout sessions, organised so that 5 or 6 sessions ran simultaneously. It was therefore impossible to have attended more than a few of the 185 papers on offer. Nevertheless, comprehensive coverage of the conference is available, because abstracts of all the papers can be accessed through the links below, identified within 15 main strands:

[Ageing abstracts 2022](#)

[Critical demography and qualitative research abstracts](#)

[Data Science 2022 Abstracts](#)

[Demographic consequences of environment risks abstracts](#)

[Developments in official statistics abstracts](#)

[Ethnicity abstracts 2022](#)

[Families and households abstracts 2022](#)

[Fertility abstracts 2022](#)

[Health & mortality abstracts 2022](#)

[Historical demography abstracts 2022](#)

[Migration abstracts 2022](#)

[Population processes & data in crisis & conflict settings abstracts](#)

[Poster abstracts 2022](#)

[Regional and local demography abstracts](#)

[UK Census Longitudinal Studies abstracts](#)

However, if the reader wishes to review a presentation of any of the papers it is necessary to contact the authors to obtain copies of their presentations since they are not available on the website¹.

Of course, many of the individual papers were of little direct interest to me and I only highlight a few sessions to illustrate my primary interests and considerations.

For example, I was initially attracted to attend “*Economic Outcomes*”, part of the **Migration Strand** and one of the very first set of sessions from 1.30 pm to 3.00 pm on Monday 4th. There were 4 papers offered in this session:

1. Impacts of Syrian refugees on market structure and firm performance in Turkey
2. Intergenerational adaptation among the children and grandchildren of refugees

¹ In many cases the email address of an author is provided with the abstract. If that is not available you can contact Tony@Betterstats.net and I will endeavour to get the presentation sent to you.

3. The divergence of labour force participation on motherhood between migrant descendants and natives in Germany (*sic*)
4. The role of multigenerational migration histories and access to family networks in the earnings of stayers and movers at age 30 (*sic*).

The 4th paper in this session, like the 2nd, was based upon Swedish administrative data. I was told that the work is not readily replicable in the UK because our admin records do not provide the same level of detail. So, although not entirely lacking in interest, I felt the session had little to offer me personally.

Of rather more interest to me was the later session that day, from 4.45 pm to 6.15 pm. as part of the **Ethnicity Strand**. The session was entitled "*Ethnic inequalities during the pandemic: early results from the EVENS survey*".

One reason that this session was more congenial to me was because it concentrated on a single project, with 4 different aspects presented:

1. Introducing the Evidence for Equality National Survey (EVENS) for understanding experiences of ethnic minorities during the coronavirus pandemic
2. Complex articulations of ethnic identity
3. Local belonging, housing and ethnicity: descriptive results from EVENS
4. Ethnic inequalities in socioeconomic circumstances under the weight of Covid-19

The method applied for the survey EVENS used only online data collection and has been uniquely developed to compare and contrast the experiences of many different ethnicities, including the indigenous UK population. Results from this important survey are not expected to be released until 2023 and it was specifically requested that those attending the session should not reveal any of the preliminary observations provided to the meeting. Suffice it to say that I believe this will be a seminal study when published. Certainly I look forward to next year and viewing the results in more detail.

A further strand of interest to me was that concerned with **Data Science**, so I attended the session on "*Innovative sources of demographic data*" held at 2.45 pm on the Tuesday. Again there were 4 papers:

1. The value of culture for predicting migration: Evidence from Facebook data
2. Stop, in the name of COVID! Estimating the effects of COVID-19 related travel restrictions on migration using social media data
3. Urban exodus? Understanding human mobility in Britain during the COVID-19 pandemic using Facebook data
4. "*Tell me what you buy, and I will tell you who you are*": Geo-demographic characteristics of migrants through online retail data

I found this session less interesting than I had expected and was left with the thought that a lot of 'findings' from such work are likely to be quite ephemeral, insofar as they can result from circumstances that will change – indeed they may have already changed by the time the work is published!

Finally, bearing in mind the original reason for visiting Winchester I had attended “*Population statistics transformation*” a two hour session from 9.00 am on the Wednesday; from within the strand on **Developments in official population statistics**. Again there were 4 papers presented:

1. Administrative-Data Based Population Estimates for Scotland
2. Working towards transformed integrated population and migration statistics, an update
3. No turning back: Estimating international migration flows with administrative data
4. Demographic accounting: The statistical scaffolding for future population modelling.

For all of us with an interest in the calculation of population statistics between census years, this was a very important session - although I was unable to fully understand all that was being conveyed! Further, although I recognise the major weaknesses of the International Passenger Survey (particularly in respect of the historical use made of the resultant estimates) I personally would redesign it rather than cancel it. Properly designed and executed, it could be extremely valuable for a number of purposes.

Anyone with a specific interest in this strand can opt into receive the new population, migration, census and admin-based statistics [newsletter](#).

The ***Population Statistics Transformation strand*** also formed the primary content for **Sir Ian Diamond’s** plenary speech at 11 am on the Tuesday morning and there is no doubting his enthusiasm for the various changes undergoing investigation and his conviction of the benefits that the proposed changes will bring. In particular Sir Ian expects that much of our demographic and economic data will in future be more accurate and timely, with more granularity than is presently available. So much so that his expectation is that there may no longer be a requirement for a full census in future with corresponding cost savings.

I was particularly interested to hear Sir Ian’s admission that the ONS had previously inaccurately estimated the population of a number of cities, including Coventry. Those readers who attended the Better Statistics [launch event](#) last November will recall Sir Andrew Watson’s talk on the issue of the Coventry population figures and how the effect had been a significant loss of green belt land to build houses that simply are not needed². Previously the ONS had been more reticent about admitting to any error in their population estimates, for example when the Census confirmed that the ONS had been overestimating the population of Coventry for many years, the ONS told the BBC “*In the case of Coventry, for example, the census shows our Mid-Year Estimates have been giving a slight overestimate of the population*”. The fact is that from now on, the ONS intends to pay much more attention to the type of administrative data the CPRE had previously used as evidence to try to get the ONS to change their estimates in the past. Evidence that previously had been effectively ignored will now form a fundamental part of the process for producing local population estimates.

Other observations:

The conference was very well organised, although the nature of the very hilly terrain made it difficult for some of us to walk to our accommodation from the conference with a suitcase. Also the rain did not help - but I guess we can’t blame the organisers for that, nor the University. What I can say is that the standard of food and refreshments were excellent throughout the conference.

² Click [here](#) for a history of the dealings between the ONS and the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE).

Next year sees the 50th Anniversary of the BPS annual conference and I strongly recommend it for anyone with an interest in population studies. In particular it is well worth reading up the details of the various strands and the synopses of the papers to prepare your personal itinerary for the event. It is unfortunate that the society is not well known because I am sure that we would all benefit if British business, local authorities and other institutions were to show more interest in the subject.

I think the absence of a wider set of delegates highlights my only serious disappointment. I had found it difficult to strike up any conversation that was not either extremely specific to the topic under review or very general - e.g. the weather! Many people I spoke with responded with the comment that my idea for consideration³ was not within their field (e.g. *"I am a sociologist not a geographer"*), thus endorsing a common experience that many academics place them themselves in silos!

Then I saw the following quote from an abstract to a paper I had missed *"This talk provides context for the project and highlights how a multidisciplinary approach co-produced with policy partners can help us move towards healthy public policy - an End to Policy Silos?"*

Personally, I feel we are unlikely to see the end of policy silos until they are driven out of academia – and the ONS?

Appendix: Analysis of delegates by country and institution of origin.

Table1 - Distribution of delegates by country of origin:

| <u>Country</u> | <u>Count</u> | <u>%</u> |
|--------------------------|--------------|---------------|
| UK | 216 | 78.0% |
| Germany | 12 | 4.3% |
| Belgium | 10 | 3.6% |
| Italy | 7 | 2.5% |
| Austria | 5 | 1.8% |
| Sweden | 4 | 1.4% |
| USA | 4 | 1.4% |
| Netherlands | 3 | 1.1% |
| Poland | 3 | 1.1% |
| France | 2 | 0.7% |
| Norway | 2 | 0.7% |
| Spain | 2 | 0.7% |
| Brazil | 1 | 0.4% |
| Denmark | 1 | 0.4% |
| Finland | 1 | 0.4% |
| Israel | 1 | 0.4% |
| New Zealand | 1 | 0.4% |
| Switzerland | 1 | 0.4% |
| Thailand | 1 | 0.4% |
| Total Registrants | 277 | 100.0% |

³ I wished to discuss making further use of Ordnance Survey data for sampling the population in an unbiased manner.

Table 2: Number of delegates analysed by institution attended / represented.

| <u>Institution</u> | <u>No.</u> | <u>%</u> |
|---|------------|----------|
| Office for National Statistics | 76 | 27.4% |
| London School of Economics | 19 | 6.9% |
| University of Southampton | 17 | 6.1% |
| University College London | 11 | 4.0% |
| University of St Andrews | 11 | 4.0% |
| University of Oxford | 11 | 4.0% |
| National Records of Scotland | 10 | 3.6% |
| Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research | 6 | 2.2% |
| Université Catholique de Louvain | 5 | 1.8% |
| University of Antwerp | 5 | 1.8% |
| ISER, University of Essex | 4 | 1.4% |
| University of Leeds | 4 | 1.4% |
| University of Manchester | 5 | 1.8% |
| BSPS Personnel | 4 | 1.4% |
| University of Vienna | 4 | 1.4% |
| Stockholm University | 3 | 1.1% |
| University of Bristol | 3 | 1.1% |
| University of Warsaw | 3 | 1.1% |
| Bocconi University | 2 | 0.7% |
| Center for Demographic Studies, Barcelona | 2 | 0.7% |
| European University Institute | 2 | 0.7% |
| Federal Institute for Population Research (BiB) | 2 | 0.7% |
| Imperial College London | 2 | 0.7% |
| King's College London | 2 | 0.7% |
| London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine | 2 | 0.7% |
| Queen's University Belfast | 2 | 0.7% |
| Sapienza University of Rome | 2 | 0.7% |
| University of Bath | 2 | 0.7% |
| University of California, Berkeley | 2 | 0.7% |
| University of Cambridge | 2 | 0.7% |
| University of Exeter | 2 | 0.7% |
| University of Liverpool | 2 | 0.7% |
| University of Oslo | 2 | 0.7% |
| Analytics Cambridge | 1 | 0.4% |
| Better Statistics CIC | 1 | 0.4% |
| Centre on the Dynamics of Ethnicity (CoDE) | 1 | 0.4% |
| Chulalongkorn University, Thailand | 1 | 0.4% |
| CLS, University College London | 1 | 0.4% |
| CoDE University of Manchester | 1 | 0.4% |
| CPop, University of Southern Denmark | 1 | 0.4% |
| Federal Reserve Board of Governors | 1 | 0.4% |
| Federal University of Pará, Brazil | 1 | 0.4% |
| Hebrew University | 1 | 0.4% |
| INED | 1 | 0.4% |
| Karolinska Institute (Global Public Health) | 1 | 0.4% |

| <u>Institution (cont.)</u> | <u>No.</u> | <u>%</u> |
|--|------------|----------|
| Lancaster University | 1 | 0.4% |
| Local Government Association | 1 | 0.4% |
| Longitudinal Studies Centre, University of Edinburgh | 1 | 0.4% |
| Loughborough University | 1 | 0.4% |
| MPIDR/University of Oxford | 1 | 0.4% |
| NIDI/University of Groningen | 1 | 0.4% |
| Purple Words Copyediting and Proofreading | 1 | 0.4% |
| Radboud University | 1 | 0.4% |
| UCL Great Ormond Street Institute of Child Health | 1 | 0.4% |
| UCL Social Research Institute | 1 | 0.4% |
| UIT: the Arctic University of Norway | 1 | 0.4% |
| University Medical Center, Freiburg | 1 | 0.4% |
| University of Ca' Foscari of Venice | 1 | 0.4% |
| University of Essex | 1 | 0.4% |
| University of Essex/University of Manchester | 1 | 0.4% |
| University of Freiburg | 1 | 0.4% |
| University of Glasgow | 1 | 0.4% |
| University of Helsinki | 1 | 0.4% |
| University of Konstanz | 1 | 0.4% |
| University of Lausanne | 1 | 0.4% |
| University of Southern Denmark | 1 | 0.4% |
| University of St. Andrews | 1 | 0.4% |
| University of Strathclyde | 1 | 0.4% |
| University of Texas at Austin | 1 | 0.4% |
| University of Waikato | 1 | 0.4% |
| University of Warwick | 1 | 0.4% |
| Vienna Institute of Demography | 1 | 0.4% |
| WZB Berlin Social Science Center | 1 | 0.4% |