

# **Summary of the preliminary results from the survey of opinions of the recommendations provided in the Lievesley Report on the future of UKSA.**

**Produced by Better Statistics CIC – May 2024**

## **Technical note:**

The survey reproduced each of the 19 recommendations in full and for each one asked respondents to state whether they agreed with the overall recommendation or not, providing the opportunity to provide the reasons for their opinion. The response of the Cabinet Office was also provided for respondents to comment upon.

45 persons had begun to complete the survey but only 20 persons went through all 19 recommendations, however, very few have given any reasons for their opinions. Possibly respondents were very cautious about the promise of anonymity!

The most interesting observation is that there is considerable differences of opinions on most of the recommendations – possibly emphasising the difficulty of the task Professor Lievesley had undertaken!

Nevertheless the majority who completed the survey are supportive of the recommendations as a whole with only 2 persons considering them to be unimportant.

## **Summary for each Recommendation:**

### **Recommendation 1:**

The UK Statistics Authority (UKSA) should lead the establishment and delivery of a Triennial Statistical Assembly.

This Assembly should involve key organisations inside and outside Government and across the four nations, with the remit of determining the UK's needs for statistics through a wide consultative process. This should include the private sector, government departments, local government, academia, think tanks and media representatives.

The UKSA will then respond to this by producing a proposal for the statistical priorities for the next three years, thus identifying data gaps and ensuring that users can hold the statistical system to account on the delivery of the programme of work. It will also enable other producers of statistics to complement the work of

**the official statistical system and factor this work into annual budget allocation processes.**

**To respond to the Statistical Assembly and to supplement its findings, an annual public lecture from the Chair of the UKSA should be delivered to provide an update on the work of the statistical system and priorities for the year ahead. This should build on the OSR’s annual State of the Statistical System report. The lecture would raise the profile of the Board, further user engagement and establish the UKSA’s leadership role in the statistical space.**

45 respondents provided an answer to the question:

Overall how much do you agree with this recommendation; would you say..



**Reasons for choice:**

I think it is an unnecessary complication that does not address the main issues requiring improvement.

I think that there is a need for a more structured and transparent way of gathering views on the production priorities of the Official Statistics system in the UK. Done well this process will also create clearer evidence of unmet need for products in different areas of the portfolio.

I'm all for something that promotes comparable UK statistics as opposed to parochial statistics. On the other hand it seems too much of a way for OSR/ONS to promote themselves rather than a way to gather and respond to feedback from their stakeholders.

Impossible to act on almost anything without the correct stats as a background.

It looks like a reasonable idea and is certainly inclusive. It's unclear how agreement would be reached on priorities and the extent to which decisions would be driven by consultation.

seems like a good idea, but will take lot of organisation and strong leadership to make it work . Is there the will to do it?

The assembly may not be the best means to achieve its objective, though the objective is highly laudable. The lecture is a great idea.

User engagement needs something new, not just trying harder, and these points are suitable. The triennial assembly is reminiscent of the CTP research conferences, but on a grander scale, so I think this is feasible, and I cannot think of a better formulation

to try. The chair annual lecture reflects the fact this does not happen and ought to but this has to be regarded as a minimum, and may need to be more substantial programme of engagement across the UK, not just in London.

**Cabinet Office response: Agree, with conditions**

**While the Cabinet Office welcomes improving the transparency and accountability of the UKSA through the establishment of a UK-wide Triennial Statistical Assembly and an annual Chair's lecture, external user engagement will always be balanced against the statistical needs of the Government - particularly economic - which take precedence.**

**As a Non Ministerial Department the delivery of such an Assembly would fall under the independent operational activity of the UKSA and is for the department to implement. Should this work be taken forward it will be delivered out of the UKSA's current funding envelope, for which there are resources for user engagement. The Assembly would be most effective if it was timed to take place ahead of a formal Spending Review.**

**The Cabinet Office will seek assurances from UKSA that steps will be taken to ensure that the Assembly has strong representation from the private sector and is not captured by special interest groups.**

**Responses:**

Disappointing that govt do apparently not recognise the real contribution that users can make . Reasonable point re interest groups

I'm with the Cabinet Office on this one, though I'm not sure the attitude of the government at the time the assembly gets convened will be the same.

In principle, the government's needs should not diverge from the UK's needs. The government is meant to represent the interests of the UK. So the tone of the first paragraph is a little worrying. It is also unclear why economic needs should take precedence over other government priorities such as health and wellbeing and responding to the climate crisis. And the tone of the final sentence is also worrying and inappropriate. The private sector also consists of many special interest groups, some of which have aims rather more in conflict with the needs of the nation than those of many NGOs and charities, for example.

Personally I think the cabinet office is right to emphasise the importance of the requests from an elected government

See my earlier comment; the proposed conditions suggest that decision-making may not reflect consultation.

Statistical needs of the government are important but not necessarily more important than those of the wider community.

The Assembly needs input from the widest range of 'Stakeholders'.

The government like any other party is a stakeholder and is putting its case for its interests. This is best done in writing like this, and although the tone has attracted attention I think it is appropriate. What comes next will want attention but so long as it is public I think this is fine. Timing of the assembly is speculative: given how spending reviews can be delayed it would be fortuitous if it aligned well with government review cycles (particularly in respect of spending through the GSS, not just ONS). The point about capture is salient but having a public assembly is a strong mitigation as suspicion of capture would be discussed by delegates, and UKSA would need to be open about how statistical issues arising were followed up.

This is perhaps slightly clumsily worded but it is entirely legitimate for the government to have clear priorities for the statistics that they need. It would not be great for a government to be elected on the promise of delivering a specific outcome and for the Official Statistics system to not prioritise the measurement of that outcome. One way of reading this response is a concern from within Government that a more open process for gathering priorities would run the risk of creating pressure for increased funding of Official Statistics and hence the need for the Cabinet Office to get some retaliation in early.

### Recommendation 2:

**The Review recommends that the expertise of the senior staff of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) would be greatly enhanced by the appointment of a Director General for Methodology who would be a focal point for the improvement and communication of data quality, and who would foster engagement with senior methodologists in other national statistical offices and in academia.**

33 respondents provided an answer to the question:

Overall how much do you agree with this recommendation; would you say..



Note: No-one strongly disagreed!

### Reasons for choice:

I believe this focal point to be much-needed. While there is much methodological expertise in ONS, it is somewhat dissipated and disjointed.

I take it that this is an attempt to ensure that good methodology has top priority - which it evidently doesn't at present. However, an awful lot would depend on the remit

and power of the holder - the way it is expressed currently implies a coordinator/communications person - which would not be helpful.

It's unclear to me how this post would be operationally distinct from Directorships with responsibility for specific areas of statistics.

Methodological issues, e.g. techniques for adjusting for missing data, are often ignored.

Much needed. Particularly if their brief includes ensuring transparency of methods and so far as possible of data.

Surprised there isn't one already.

The need to improve the quality of methods is a paramount need. Whether a duty it rector it what. Associated with this is an urgent training requirement.

There is likely to be an increased level of methodological debate over the coming years with the growth of new approaches to gather and analyse data. There will be different viewpoints on the pros and cons of different methodologies - both for specific series of Official Statistics and for the portfolio overall. As is the case now, it is unlikely to be possible for ONS and other producers to take methodological decisions that are welcomed by all - but having a very senior role with oversight of the methodological choices and of the related debates with users (and with wider stakeholders) does make clear sense.

This leadership is needed in how ONS is evolving and seems to be preceded in comparable NSOs. ONS is now a PSRE and so should have a chief scientist, and this person could also be deputised to attend SAGE in a less all-consuming incident than the recent pandemic, and deputise for the National Statistician in those circumstances too. But the main issue is in setting research priorities and development plans for statistical leadership to support the GSS. So we need to know what the person will do and appoint someone who has that capability.

**Cabinet Office response:** Agree, with conditions

**Personnel decisions are for the UKSA to determine as a Non Ministerial Department, though the Cabinet Office notes that such a post exists in many national statistics offices internationally, notably Canada which enjoys an excellent reputation.**

**The creation of such a post would be delivered out of the UKSA's current headcount and funding envelope.**

Fair enough.

It is such a fundamental role that more funds and head count should be allocated.

No comment

No comment

No comment

Okay

Seems reasonable.

This is one appointment, so it is not a big budget impact, but it is disappointing there is not a recognition that it may be expensive and an investment.

### **Recommendation 3:**

**The Government should amend the statistical legislation so that the Act reflects current practice, taking the opportunity to make clearer the practical operation of the UKSA.**

**For example, that the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) reports separately to UKSA, not via the National Statistician, and that the Director General of the OSR is an Accounting Officer and is expected to report separately to PACAC.**

28 respondents provided an answer to the question:

Overall how much do you agree with this recommendation; would you say..



### **Reasons for choice:**

Clarification on governance is always helpful.

I think that there is a reasonable case to be made that the OSR is a success. Certainly there are others linked to Official Statistics systems elsewhere in the world that see it as an important and attractive model. It is probably the case that its current positioning within the framework created by the 2007 Act has reached its ceiling.

Improves clarity.

Seems currently that there are 'too many cooks' and no head Chef. This multiplicity of inputs rather than helping would seem to impede the production of 'Better Statistics

The governance was left open to be established by SRSA. It does seem to be fixed and there are a couple of other points which could be legislated.

**Cabinet Office response:** Agree in principle

While there is a case to update the Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007) to better reflect current governance practices and further improvements, this is not a current Government priority and will be a matter for the next Parliament to consider.

In the meantime the UKSA leadership should take active steps to combat the ‘misunderstanding and confusion’ that the Review summarises regarding its governance arrangements and the relationship between ONS and OSR to assure users and stakeholders that robust systems are in place to regulate the ONS and the wider GSS.

Agree with it.

Not especially.

The misunderstanding and confusion extends so far that I think these issues need further elaboration. As we are less clear of some of those other issues, developing changes to the legislation should not be done in a hurry. But I see no evidence anyone is admitting to a problem here, so I am a bit concerned the government does not wish to help. PACAC may do.

The response is not surprising. In terms of future legislative change, there is probably a need for stakeholders and users to have a conversation about the wider set of changes to the 2007 framework that might now be useful (this might incorporate the conversation about access to private sector data). Those supportive of this change need to come to a view as to whether there is a case for very specific changes to the 2007 Act (in which case they might advocate for amendments to be added in the margins of any future data-focused legislation) or whether there is indeed a case for broader changes to the overall framework.

This is sensible because I believe there are wider legislative issues to be considered beyond the independence of the OSR.

Too many cooks!

**Recommendation 4:**

**The inconsistent application of Pre Release Access to official statistics across the UK statistical system has the potential to undermine trust.**

**The Cabinet Office and devolved legislatures should amend the relevant secondary legislation for each nation at the earliest opportunity to follow the approach to Pre Release Access taken by the ONS in line with the Code of Practice for Statistics.**

26 respondents provided an answer to the question:

: Overall how much do you agree with this recommendation; would you say..



**Reasons for choice:**

Although we have not had too many recent high profile instances where the continued existence of PRA has led to perceived abuse. Nonetheless given the wider principles of our system and given assumed best practice elsewhere there is no viable case for continued use of PRA across the Uk system.

It's true

It's all about Trust.

Level playing field, fairness, improved perception of fairness, transparency, consistency.

People obsess about pre release without on either side demonstrating political influence or benefit. Aligning the four nations makes sense, but we should be able to articulate why we have it at all, and I have never seen this done.

**Cabinet Office response: Disagree**

**Pre-Release Access for official statistics provides time for departments to have a considered policy and media response to publications of official statistics.**

**Robust processes are in place to deal with breaches of pre-release restrictions within UK Government.**

**At this time the UK Government has no plans to alter the current arrangements.**

I don't agree.

I don't think there is a public benefit from a "considered policy and media response". There is benefit from observing any dissonance between the figures and the assumptions/attitudes of the departments and their ministers.

I'm not surprised as I see this as a political matter which the independent review was not a suitable vehicle to engage with.

No comment

No comment

No comment



Pre-release Access offers the opportunity for spin ahead of general consideration by the public at large.

### **Recommendation 5:**

**The UKSA should build on existing work and lead discussions between the four nations and strengthen the Concordat to encourage more UK wide data by creating common standards and improving harmonisation where appropriate and mutually agreed.**

**HM Treasury should ensure that funding is available to support the harmonisation of key data.**

25 respondents provided an answer to the question:

Overall how much do you agree with this recommendation; would you say..



Devolution has led to divergence in the collection of agricultural statistics, making it difficult to assess the effects of farming on UK GHG emissions.

I'm not sure why the National Statistician does not work to ensure this anyway. It must be in everyone's interest and relatively straightforward

Stats must be consistent., otherwise they are of little or no value.

The broad thrust of the recommendation does make sense - but the devil will be in the details, both in terms of the consequent costs (which may not be small) and in the implementation. For this to work within the wider context of the political settlement within the UK (such as it is) we would need to be clear that in a number of cases the adjustments to ensure comparability would need to be implemented within Official Statistics collected for England (ie the imperative is not just on the 'smaller' nations).

This is a repetition of past concerns with no sense that it is saying something new. It is difficult but I feel governance is lacking and not a feature of the recommendation.

This is vitally important. Citizens in Wales, Scotland and NI are being let down.

UK harmonisation is vital, and has been somewhat neglected.

Would be really beneficial. The reality is that England, or England & Wales, data is often used in lieu of UK data, where sources are inconsistent. Not satisfactory. (Even Belgium do better, despite the two main regions barely speaking to each other!)

**Cabinet Office response: Agree**

The UK Government intends to publish a more detailed response to this recommendation later this year as improving comparable data between the four parts of the UK remains a priority. Any funding decisions will need to be considered as part of the next Spending Review.

It is fundamental that citizens in all parts of the UK should be able to compare their data with other parts of the country. Comparable data are also crucial to enable all administrations to identify, design, and deliver interventions which benefit people and communities across the United Kingdom. When this does not take place, as we saw with the UK Census in Scotland when it was carried out on a different timeline to the rest of the UK, not only did this contribute to lower uptake and higher costs but also much of the data are not fully comparable to the rest of the UK as it took place in a different year.

The Review sets out the current challenge: where data are collected through the delivery of a service (i.e. administrative data) differences in policies, definitions, timing and other aspects of methodologies can result in data that are not comparable. This can prevent statisticians, elected representatives, service providers, the media and members of the public having a clear idea of how services and outcomes compare across the UK.

The Cabinet Office welcomes steps taken by ONS in recent months to prioritise this area of work and recognises that there is no simple solution. The UK Government is committed to working with the UKSA (particularly ONS) and the Devolved Administrations to put in place a better system to increase the collection and publication of UK wide comparable data, including future legislative options if required.

Good

Good, though the issue is much broader than service delivery.

Sooner the better.

This is a long winded way of saying there is no plan. What bothers me is a lack of a body suitable to come forward with a plan, hence my proposal for a new committee too the UKSA board.

This is one recommendation that chimes with a wider political imperative / agenda for the current government. This will bring governmental support - but (see earlier comment) there is no sense of a political commitment to cover the consequent

costs. Hence there is a risk that government will require ONS to deliver harmonisation in some policy areas by finding 'efficiencies' elsewhere in their budget.

This seems reasonable.

### **Recommendation 6:**

**The centre of government, led by Cabinet Office and HM Treasury, must actively work to resolve the systemic, often cultural, barriers to data sharing between departments.**

**All government departments, particularly those who own significant amounts of data, must prioritise data sharing for statistics and research purposes and support the development of programmes such as the Integrated Data Service to enable greater sharing of data across government for statistical and research purposes.**

24 respondents provided an answer to the question:

Overall how much do you agree with this recommendation; would you say..



I am very wary of the creation of data lakes/warehouses and data sharing without limitation of purpose and transparency. This would need careful consideration to ensure that data collected for one purpose are not being used for another incompatible/unexpected purpose, due to the implications for breach of public trust and concerns about surveillance society. Furthermore, large swathes of data being shared/stored, if breached, are likely to lead to greater negative outcomes for data subjects, and are likely to be the target of hacking/ransomware and other cyber security risks. Data sharing should be restricted to specific purposes, should be transparent, and data subjects must retain their information rights.

In my view the ISR has an important role in establishing better guidelines to ensure effective dissemination of data not only to government but to other interested registered parties.

Increasingly the statistics that are needed - either by citizens or by government - will in some way draw on multiple data administrative data sources.

This is obvious but not really very helpful. And again it reflects a view which has been expressed for some years now.

We need the opportunities to create value in this way. However, given confidentiality safeguards, I don't believe government departments should have more privileged

access to each other's data than the public at large. There should be a level playing field in the data service.

Would greatly improve efficiency and knowledge.

**Cabinet Office response: Agree in principle**

The Cabinet Office welcomes the Review's focus on data sharing within government and will set out a more detailed response to this recommendation later this year.

We are committed to push forward on this important issue with the support of other departments.

Good

Good.

If they really mean they are going to say something sensible I would be excited. I believe they will say something; I doubt it will be sensible.

No comment

No comment

**Recommendation 7:**

The IDS is critical in facilitating the greater use of administrative data and bringing greater efficiencies to statistical analysis and decision making across government and academia.

The Review therefore recommends that the ONS takes action to ensure that the purpose, scope and requirements of the IDS are clearly communicated and that the needs and concerns of departmental data owners are sufficiently understood.

23 respondents provided an answer to the question:

Overall how much do you agree with this recommendation; would you say..



Needs of the public for access, who are owners and have interest in this data must also be met.

Seems sensible.

The recommendation picks up on a sense that there is a lack of shared vision about the IDS and what it will enable in both the short and the longer term. The vision may be that the IDS evolves into the platform that is used for the majority of the production of official Statistics in the UK; equally it may remain a niche product for specific purposes. Good to be clear.

This does surface some of the governance barriers to the IDS. And it directs attention to them, even as it does not quite say how we resolve this.

Too much micro data is unnecessarily made unavailable for potential users who would add value to it.

TRUE

**Cabinet Office response: Partially agree**

**The Cabinet Office agrees that the implementation of the Integrated Data Service is one of a number of developments that has the potential to improve the government's ability to share data responsibly, effectively and efficiently between departments and across all parts of the UK.**

**Reviewing the progress against delivery of the Integrated Data Service will be considered as part of the wider work to respond substantively to recommendation 6 on data sharing later this year.**

**The Cabinet Office also urges the UKSA Board to increase their oversight of the delivery of IDS and ONS's stakeholder engagement on the programme across government.**

Again I think the OSR should play a fundamental part in this and that training on the use of Admin data is required.

Good.

No comment, other than noting the concerns raised earlier about limitation of purpose and transparency. The ability to share data should not translate into data sharing by default without appropriate justification.

No comment

This is perhaps the best response from government, identifying that governance has been lacking and that UKSA needs to take this more seriously.

**Recommendation 8:**

**Regarding the National Statistician role, Cabinet Office, working with the UKSA Board should:**

- Commission a review of the role of the National Statistician well ahead of the next recruitment campaign, examining the many component parts of the National Statistician role in order to decide whether to propose changes to the role and what this may look like. This should also identify where changes to the Act may be required to facilitate the delegation or sharing of the National Statistician’s responsibilities; and

- Examine the talent pipeline and talent development structures it has in place across the Government Statistical Service (GSS) to ensure that those with potential to be future applicants for the National Statistician post and other senior roles in the statistical system are identified and nurtured.

22 respondents provided an answer to the question:

: Overall how much do you agree with this recommendation; would you say..



Clearly within the current framework the aggregation of requirements does make this a challenging role to recruit for. There is an underlying link to the early recommendation re ONS vs OSR - in that a clearer separation between 'production' and 'governance' roles might in some way help focus the skill set that the Head of 'production' needs.

Long overdue.

The former is of paramount importance. The present job role is ridiculous in the extent if the responsibilities covered, the second aspect is as maybe it seems to be potentially open to reducing competition.

This has been a long running problem and it does sound like it has been taken seriously. The action are the right ones to resolve this as best as it can.

This looks like a reasonable recommendation and could expand the pool of possible candidates.

**Cabinet Office response: Agree**

The Cabinet Office agrees that in recent years the role of National Statistician has been a challenge to appoint and welcomes this suggestion to review the role.

The Cabinet Office will undertake a proportionate review, with input from the UKSA

**Board, of the role in 2025 to explore if and how the role can be split.**

**The Cabinet Office will also work with GSS regarding the wider talent pipeline.**

It is difficult to understand what a "proportionate" review may entail.

No comment

OK.

There is a strong academic / civil service bias in the selection processes employed by the Cabinet office and the civil service as a whole which perpetuates a people like us bias in dejecting for many public posts and ignores the potential for talent beyond a limited circle of potential applicants. Ideas for in inclusivity ensure representation above talent.

They accept it entirely, and acknowledge it is their responsibility. A mea culpa I think.

### **Recommendation 9:**

**Within ONS a suite of actions relating to communications should be adopted, including:**

- **Urgently improving the website so that it meets user requirements more effectively;**
- **Ensuring that there is a better understanding of the levels of uncertainty around specific official statistics, particularly economic, to reduce public (and government) surprise to revisions; and**
- **Building partnerships with organisations that foster relevant communication expertise to improve engagement with the wider needs of users.**

21 respondents provided an answer to the question:

Overall how much do you agree with this recommendation; would you say..



I have argued this for years and the situation is simply ridiculous there should be sn open competition to develop a new architecture for the site as there is for an important new building.

If this is problematic, it is appropriate to address it. Searching for ONS outputs remains challenging.

The website is fine for me; what people get wrong is not 'uncertainty' in a statistical sense; I am organising the communication network personally. This has not resolved what needs to be done to improve the perception of communication and improvements will therefore depend on strategic external engagement, like my own.

There is clearly more that needs to be done on the communications front and I think that it could be argued that this area merits much more parity of consideration with the production side of ONS / GSS - assuming that the UK Official Statistics system retains a focus on producing for users beyond government.

The specific recommendations do, for me, signal the need for a much broader conversation about the communications strategy - for example whether the aim is for as much 'ownership' of the communications process to stay with ONS / GSS or whether there will be a continued move to use intermediaries / partners.

Website in particular, is fairly appalling.

**Cabinet Office response: Agree**

**The ONS's website is a vital tool for the general public and government officials alike. As the report highlights, the current website is sometimes hard to navigate and during periods of high demand users report that it is not as responsive as it needs to be. The Bean Review raised concerns regarding the website in 2016 and while some progress has been made it is regrettable that the website still does not yet meet user needs despite increased investment.**

**While funding arrangements are a matter between UKSA and HM Treasury, should additional funding support be sought during the next Spending Review the Cabinet Office would expect a detailed action plan be put in place to ensure value for money. We would anticipate the website is developed in a way that exploits modern infrastructure and AI technologies in full and that data are made available in modern machine readable formats at the point of publication via API.**

**The Cabinet Office agrees that statistical uncertainty does need to be better understood within government, the media and the wider population. The Cabinet Office would welcome clearer, more concise communications from ONS to accompany key statistical publications, particularly on high-profile economic statistics. The Cabinet Office supports ONS working with partners - such as the Bank of England and the Office for Budget Responsibility - to ensure that statistical and other uncertainties are communicated more effectively.**

It's a very good response.



No comment

No comment

OK.

The API point is well made. But they seem not to have any actual ideas beyond that as Bernanke also says uncertainty is not understood from communications.

This should be applied urgently.

### **Recommendation 10:**

**The Authority Board should look to appoint a Non-Executive Director with relevant communications experience to advise and support the UKSA.**

20 respondents provided an answer to the question:

: Overall how much do you agree with this recommendation; would you say..



I don't see the need for any non-executive to have such a definitive role. Communications must be an executive function.

See previous response

They have loads of people already with communications experience. They do not need a PR person who will act to stifle user dissent to protect the brand. If they do appoint someone from a psychology background that may be interesting, but I thought hard about who may be available and I look forward to seeing if they can find anyone suitable. Communicating this stuff is hard and UKSA is the leading edge in my view but could work better with the organisations I am bringing together in a network.

This is matter for UKSA. Not necessarily the only or best way to improve UKSA comms.

This may be useful, but the appointment of more senior staff members may not necessarily address the underlying issue.

### **Cabinet Office response: Agree**

**The Cabinet Office is currently conducting a campaign to seek a communications expert to join the UKSA Board.**

No comment

No comment

They don't know either.

Wouldn't have been my approach, but OK.

Yes as stated it is an executive function. I am interested to see the job spec of this person and why it needs to be at board level.

## Recommendation 11:

**The Advisory Groups working with the National Statistician should become more formal: recruitment should be open and be clearly advertised to encourage applications.**

**The style, design and attendance at the meetings should also be reviewed to ensure that they facilitate frank constructive sharing of views and feedback.**

20 respondents provided an answer to the question:

: Overall how much do you agree with this recommendation; would you say..



I have seen Advisory Board roles advertised on LinkedIn and elsewhere and assumed that they were part of a formal recruitment process. If this is not the case, it seems sensible that it should be addressed.

I think that there is some potential confusion about the roles of, and interfaces between, the various groups around ONS / GSS. As is the case in other systems, it may be helpful to evolve a fresh 'map' of the landscape. More broadly, I think that there could be ways of being more transparent about where there are disagreements across the user base - either about priorities or about methodologies.

If any advisory group is truly required then yes it needs to be more open but presently I think there are too many such groups the distance of which reduces the authority of the board to take the responsibility it should. Also such groups need to be fully authorised by the board and not only tools for the National Statistician. No board should have an ethics committee in my opinion.

My experience is that advisory groups are not taken seriously

This is a point I have made myself. Independence from government needs to mean care in terms of who does have influence and this has not been taken seriously

enough. It looks like these things are working, and more stakeholders need to put themselves forward for these roles, but that may be in hand.

Yes, this.

**Cabinet Office response: Agree**

**The Cabinet Office supports increasing the diversity of challenge and rigour within ONS in order to drive the quality and timeliness of the official statistics it produces.**

**All opportunities to advise the National Statistician should be advertised transparently through the ONS website, and the appointments made fairly and on merit.**

Fine

Good

Good.

No Comment

No comment

We all seem to agree about this one.

**Recommendation 12:**

**To demonstrate the commitment to user engagement and remind producers of its importance, the reference to ‘consult users before making changes that affect statistics or publications’ in the UKSA Code of Practice should be reinstated so that users are consulted before producers make substantial changes to statistical data collection or outputs.**

20 respondents provided an answer to the question:

: Overall how much do you agree with this recommendation; would you say..



Change without consultation does reduce engagement and trust. Equally, however, consultation (generally about reductions to the portfolio) that comes after irreversible budgeting decisions can be (and be seen as) nugatory and will also reduce

engagement and trust. The aim needs to be that the overall planning process creates the space and time such that any consultations that are held can be meaningful.

Comes down to interpretation of "substantial". If it were necessary to go to consultation every time a revision is necessary, this could severely delay and hamstring the process. I understand the intent here, but we need a clearer indication of what constitutes "substantial"

The impact of changes is not always well understood by the statistics producers, even if change is warranted.

The OSR should oversee this and it should always be an open consultative exercise,

This seems a good issue to surface as a resourcing argument, but I am under no illusion that it is easily resolved.

**Cabinet Office response: Agree**

**The Cabinet Office agrees with this recommendation, though it urges users to be mindful that the UKSA must prioritise its work and make difficult decisions to stop work in order to allow for new statistics to be collected.**

Decisions should be evidence-based, and the requirement for new information to be collected does not mean that information currently being collected is redundant. It should not always be necessary to trade new for old.

Don't understand the clause! My bigger concern is the delay that consultation can introduce. There is a trade-off here between timeliness and accuracy.

Good

No comment

Very nicely put.

**Recommendation 13:**

**Internationally, the UKSA should:**

- **In consultation with His Majesty's Government, prioritise the establishment and signing of a Memorandum of Understanding with Eurostat in line with the option provided in the Trade and Cooperation Agreement; and**
- **Update its international strategy, Statistics for the Global Good, to provide more detail on how it will engage and lead within key global organisations, including the OECD and IMF.**

20 respondents provided an answer to the question:

Overall how much do you agree with this recommendation; would you say..



Formalising the approach to international relations, and following through, is sensible strategically. More information, and therefore oversight, is probably warranted given the economic significance, but I reiterate that I think this can sit in a new board committee as I wrote on my blog.

Seems obvious!

The UK is at a disadvantage in not being part of the global statistical system.

There is clearly a need for some guardrails about the way that the UK system interacts with the wider international forums. That having been said there is, I think, a need for some analytical work that seeks to get to the heart of the benefit that the international work has for UK users. My guess is that some of the international reporting has little if any wider value (given some of the variability between different implementations of different standards), equally some international reporting will bring value. It would be good to have an evidence-based view of which statistics fit in which category.

Urgently needed since Brexit.

### **Cabinet Office response: Agree**

**The Cabinet Office supports these recommendations. Given the UKSA's international standing there should be a continued emphasis on their role as a thought leader among our international peers.**

**As ONS develops its next international strategy post 2025 the Cabinet Office would expect to see significant engagement and alignment with other international departments and teams (where appropriate) across government.**

Good

I don't think they understand this part but they like the idea that we may be 'world leading'.

No comment

This may have a funding element that is not reflected in the Cabinet Office's response.

Weak. Talks about leading rather than co-operating and engaging.

## Recommendation 14:

**The UKSA should engage with the Cabinet Office to explore the consequences of mandatory completion of the Labour Force Survey.**

20 respondents provided an answer to the question:

: Overall how much do you agree with this recommendation; would you say..



All public surveys of this kind need to be voluntary. The ONS has singularly failed to take any appropriate steps to encourage public support for surveys of this kind and only when other suggestions to improve representation are tested and found not to work should this be considered.

I am not close enough to the history and the substance behind this issue.

I don't have sufficient information to comment.

This is a terrible idea under several headings.

Well worth exploring, given recent plummeting of co-operation rates.

**Cabinet Office response: Agree**

**As the largest household survey in the UK, the Labour Force Survey is the cornerstone of ONS statistics on UK employment.**

**Addressing falling survey response rates, and the subsequent reduction in the quality of data, must be a priority of the ONS.**

**As part of wider efforts to increase response rates the Cabinet Office is willing to explore all options with UKSA and key users within government, including the opportunities and risks of implementing mandatory completion of the Labour Force Survey.**

**Non-mandatory options to increase response rates will also be considered as part of these discussions.**

Good.

No comment

Perhaps this should be considered in the light of the proposals around increased data sharing and use of administrative data.

This is very measured and cautious, not least as the response may recover and may be due to wider distrust of government. It also stimulates ONS to think of alternative data sources which may obviate the need for such an action. This is still keeping the mandate as an option and I think that is pushing it on to the next administration which is cowardly.

Yes alternatives must be considered.

### **Recommendation 15:**

**The UKSA should build on its work engaging with Parliamentarians and Select Committees of both Houses and devolved legislatures further.**

**It should continue to seek out opportunities to proactively add insights and value to the work and interests of the Select Committees. Equally, Select Committees should actively seek to use ONS data and analysis**

20 respondents provided an answer to the question:

Overall how much do you agree with this recommendation; would you say..



From a governance perspective, closer links to Parliament as oppose to Government has the potential value of increasing the genuine level of independence of the UKSA (and, ideally of the GSS). There is, however, probably a need to be more transparent about the purposes of the different engagement - perhaps distinguishing between the Parliamentary engagement that is specifically about maintaining appropriate governance within the UK system and engagement that focuses on issues to do with production, communications or use.

The lack of engagement with parliament leaves the public at a severe disadvantage bit this is partly parliaments fault,

The recommendation could go further about limitations of current activity but I strongly agree. Again I would like oversight in a new board committee.

This is a reasonable proposal but to gain value from the effort, politicians and others would need to want to understand more and to want to use statistics appropriately.

**Cabinet Office response: Agree**

As a Non Ministerial Department, UKSA is accountable directly to Parliament. The Cabinet Office supports wide engagement between UKSA and parliamentarians, which should not be limited just to the Parliamentary Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee. All Parliamentarians should be encouraged to make the most of ONS data and analysis.

The Cabinet Office welcomes the suggestion of greater ties between the ONS and the House of Commons library.

Fair enough

Good

Good. Devolved administrations should not be forgotten, though.

It seems self-evident.

No comment

Suitably arm's length as a response. However, the idea of more support for the library suggests they may think it needs to step up which is interesting, if I am right.

**Recommendation 16:**

The Cabinet Office should look to supplement the existing sponsor team with resource to give the support and resilience required.

20 respondents provided an answer to the question:

: Overall how much do you agree with this recommendation; would you say..



I am not close enough to know the areas where current resources cause issues or risks for UKSA.

I don't have enough information to comment.

I don't know if this is important.

I'm not sure what support is required. I am confident that the cabinet office does not give sufficient effort to ensure the appointment of suitable people but does that require more people or a less narrow attitude to appointments,



**Cabinet Office response:** Agree, with conditions

The Cabinet Office appointed the Directors of Analysis in both No10 and Cabinet Office as co-senior sponsors in Autumn 2023 in order to bolster the expertise of its sponsorship of the department.

We agree that the current sponsor team could benefit from additional resource and see this as an opportunity to take a new approach to public body sponsorship and creatively draw on the analytical, digital, data and project management expertise housed within Cabinet Office.

A matrix approach will ensure that the sponsor team has the right level of resource and expertise without requiring additional departmental headcount.

I am not sure as to how the matrix of responsibilities actually works but personally I was extremely disappointed in the contribution of the Director of Analysis at the PACAC hearing.

It is difficult to understand how this would be effectively operationalised.

OK.

Sir Humphrey wrote this.

There is a potential sting in the tail here. It may be that the reference to Cabinet Office expertise is a nod to the wider functional standards agenda that the Cabinet Office is progressing across the wider public service.

They seem to have taken this seriously but it is not clear what we hope to get out of this while maintaining the independence of UKSA. It would be useful to compare with good practice in relation to similarly independent bodies, including in other countries.

### **Recommendation 17:**

**The Memorandum of Understanding between the UKSA and Cabinet Office as Sponsor Body should be reviewed by both organisations to ensure that it reflects the requirements in the HM Treasury Framework Document Guidance for Arm's Length Bodies mindful of the UKSA's statutory independence.**

20 respondents provided an answer to the question:

: Overall how much do you agree with this recommendation; would you say..



I am sure this is important but I think that it is important that the independence of UKSA should be emphasised that it is with regard to methods not objectives.

Independence - and perception of it - is central to the successful functioning of UKSA.

These MOUs / Framework Documents are important documents setting the guardrails around the roles and relationships between sponsor and sponsored. As a matter of good practice such documents should be current - although given the wider role and profile of UKSA it would be good to find ways in which this could be done with a level of wider engagement (rather than a standard document being drafted within the Cabinet Office).

This seems reasonable. What happens if there is disagreement?

This sounds like a good idea.

### **Cabinet Office response: Agree**

**The Cabinet Office intends to have reissued the Memorandum of Understanding / Framework Agreement by the end of 2024.**

Good.

No - part from that is quite a tight timetable, suggesting no ambition for anything difficult or worthy of debate.

No comment.

Okay - not sure what this means. Consultation?

This seems to be agreed although they don't say what we are aiming for.

### **Recommendation 18:**

**The UKSA should develop a framework to follow when considering ad-hoc commissions for statistics in order to be open about the opportunity costs of such work.**

20 respondents provided an answer to the question:

: Overall how much do you agree with this recommendation; would you say..



I don't have sufficient information to comment. My response would depend on whether these are paid-for commissions, or add-ons within existing resources.

The recommendation does touch on an important issue which is the balance between regular series of Official Statistics and one-off pieces of work. I am not sure that the recommendation sufficiently distinguishes between commissions that ONS (in essence) gives itself and commission from elsewhere. A level of transparency would, as minimum, be good - but there is perhaps a need for a wider conversation (perhaps within the future Statistical Assembly) about the optimal balance between regular and one-off work.

This is one of the points which has caused user confusion on both prioritisation and budgeting. It should also follow through to being described in the annual reporting function, but it seems important, and currently an omission. It ought to include some reference to MPM but perhaps that is implied.

Too much ad hoc seems to be done with little objective and little outcome. This will focus minds a bit.

Yes this should be led by the OSR

### **Cabinet Office response: Agree**

**The Cabinet Office supports the development of a priorities framework to better enable UKSA (specifically ONS) to effectively and transparently prioritise their work and to be clearer about what the potential opportunity costs are in accepting new projects.**

**The ONS must balance new requests from the Government with its ongoing vital production of core economic statistics and must do more to battle the perception - particularly within the economic community - that 'business as usual' work is being downgraded in favour of newer or bespoke projects.**

Agree

I strongly agree with this observation!

No comment.

OK. Would be helpful if ONS were not also under economic pressure to accept outside paid projects (e.g. from the research councils)

Perhaps a published MoSCoW matrix for definite, planned and proposed statistics would be beneficial, with some leeway for the requirement to produce new statistics in the face of new challenges e.g. Covid-19.

They understand this point well I think.

### **Recommendation 19:**

**The UKSA should step up efforts to build partnerships outside of government, particularly with universities and think tanks, given the clear economic and social benefits to this collaboration.**

20 respondents provided an answer to the question:

Overall how much do you agree with this recommendation; would you say..



I am unhappy about the emphasis on universities and think tanks. Partnership with other bodies and commercial organisations might prove more fruitful in opening up the improvements intended by this recommendation.

Not close enough to existing partnerships.

so long as it is not just academics but the wider world. And not restricted to the establishment by restricted access or tariffs.

This has been under-utilised in the past, and cross-fertilisation has benefits for all parties.

This is profoundly important and may be more valuable than the much more expensive triennial assembly. It would help if it was clearer that this should be connections for technical people at several different levels, and not run by the PR team which was the Owen Brace approach.

### **Cabinet Office response: Agree**

**The Cabinet Office supports expanding UKSA's partnership work, not just with universities and think tanks but with business and the private sector across the UK.**

**There is a great deal of innovation happening outside of government which the ONS**

should capitalise on and learn from.

**Better utilisation of sovereign data assets through private partnership could result in a range of tools and products that citizens would welcome. The ONS is encouraged to think creatively on how it can make full use of other data assets and work with new partners to create markets for the benefit of our citizens.**

Agreed

I approve. so long as these markets are not in the data assets themselves.

I do not support private partnerships as the likelihood is that money will flow from the taxpayers' purse to private organisations who will seek to leverage government methods and information for private gain with minimal risk. This is not an appropriate use of funds.

No comment

OK.

Sovereign data assets was not part of my reading of the recommendation so there may be more to this than I have understood. It sounds like they don't understand the rest of the recommendation or how much of a deficiency it is at the moment, so that will be one I am keeping an eye on personally.

**Finally, do you consider Professor Lievesley's recommendations to be:**

