

# Triennial Assembly: Proposed Contribution to the issue of USER Understanding of UKSA

Topic/ Theme: User Understanding of UKSA

## Proposed Mode – Pre-reading material for all Delegates

The suggestion for this contribution to the Assembly is based on the responses of 40 BSC associates to some questions we asked in a recent short survey - the answers to which surprised us. And we feel that if our associates don't really understand the structure of UKSA – then many others may not understand it either. We therefore recommend that UKSA should produce a note describing the Structure of UKSA to be sent to all delegates prior to the Assembly as pre-reading briefing.

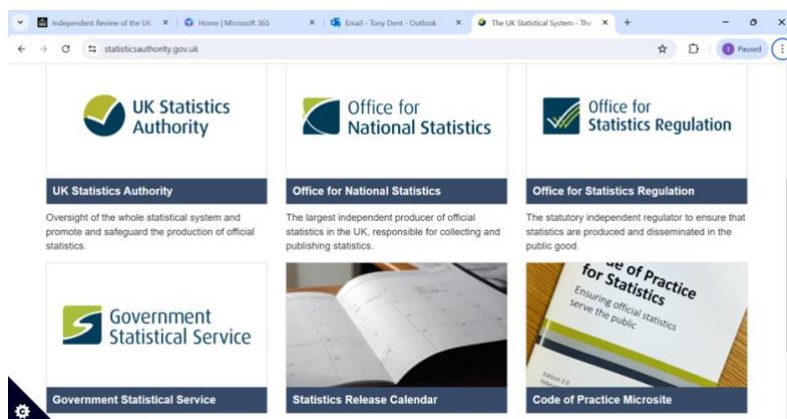
We also note, from the Lievesley report itself: *...However the UKSA, ONS and OSR should take additional steps in order to better clarify how the organisations work together in practice and how the OSR holds ONS to account.*

We are aware that the Office for Statistics Regulation published a [Guide to the System](#) last year but that document does not truly fulfil the requirement as indicated by the responses from BSC associates published below. For example, the phrase “*The ONS is the production arm of the Authority and the UK’s National Statistical Institute*” doesn’t recognise the role of the GSS in the production of official statistics. Further, the publication of the OSR’s [State of the Statistical System 2024](#) had seemed to imply that the ONS is subordinate to the GSS, as indicated by this extract from The Current Landscape:

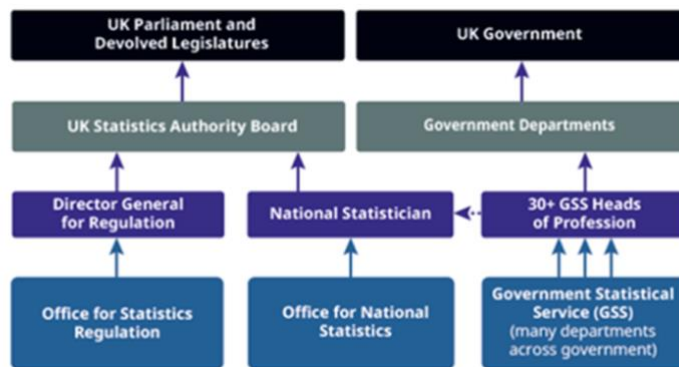
*“To be at its best, it is important that the Government Statistical Service (GSS) build on the development of its GSS Vision and GSS Strategic Delivery Plan and key appointments. In face of financial constraints, demand for central GSS support provided by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) outstrips supply. In our view, some services are delivered more cost effectively by the GSS centrally than by individual producer organisations.”*

For our part BSC were slightly more concerned with the ONS vision and strategic delivery and we had understood that the GSS and the ONS were separate organisations under the UKSA umbrella, a view endorsed by the two descriptions of the system as shown below:

### 1. Screen shot from <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/>



### 3. 2. Lievesley Report Figure 1: Overview of the UK Statistical System



Furthermore, the document “*Public confidence in official statistics*” describes the UKSA board as follows:

*“The Board of the Authority is responsible for oversight of the statistical system, which includes its executive arms, the [Office for Statistics Regulation \(OSR\)](#) and [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\)](#), as well as the [Government Statistical Service \(GSS\)](#), which is a community of all those involved in the production of official statistics in the UK.”*

We are not sure where that takes us - but a document with clear diagrams and more detail on specific roles with example publications could be very helpful. Brief descriptions of the various advisory committees and ‘touch points’ would also be helpful – SUN and other websites are a case in point!

#### **Background: Summary of BS Associate’s Responses.**

We give below the questions we asked, the responses, and a flavour of what some users did not understand from some of their verbatim comments. We hope this will help with the drafting of the document

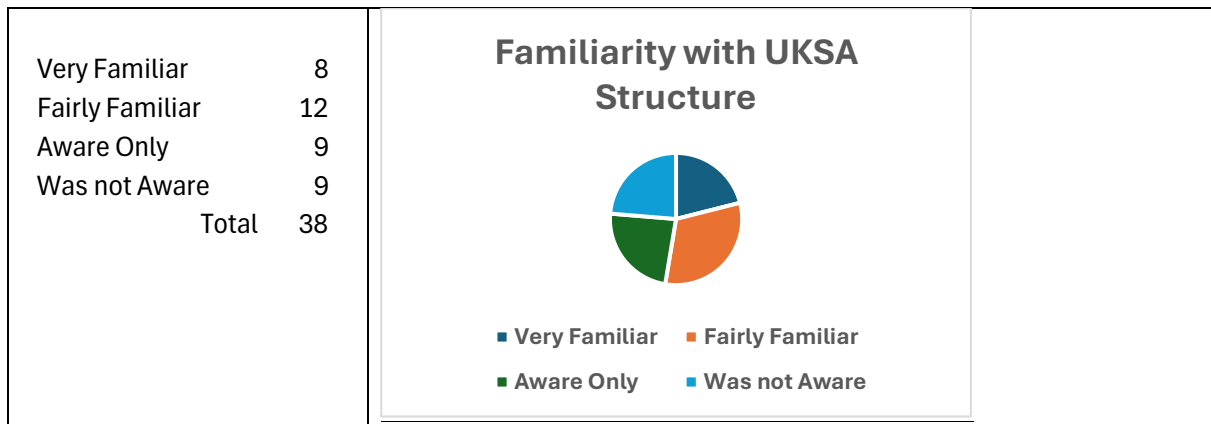
#### **1. Awareness of the Structure of UKSA**

Question 2 of the BS Online Survey was introduced by:

*The structure of the Authority consists of three primary “divisions” - the Office for National Statistics, the Office for Statistics Regulation and the Government Statistical Service.*

and asked:

*How familiar do you claim to be in respect of that structure?*



**Comments provided about the structure:**

I know about this structure but am not clear about how they relate.

I know nothing about this but would like to! I have heard of these but have no idea what they do.

I wish there was a better explanation

It's not always easy to tell the boundaries in responsibilities between the ONS, GSS & other organisations,

So long as there is no overlap in their terms of reference it makes sense to have individual bodies responsible for the different elements. If there is overlap, then the structure will be sluggish and inefficient

Was not aware of the Office for Statistics Regulation at all

Why does it take 3 bodies to do one job (at the taxpayers' expense)?

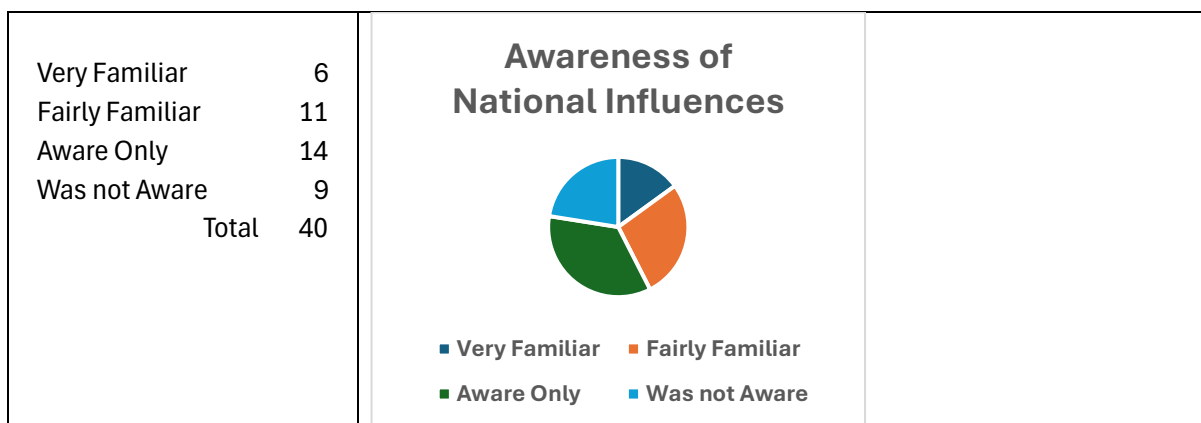
**2. Awareness of the role of the National Parliaments**

**Question 3 of the online Survey was introduced by:**

*Although the National Statistician is responsible for all UK official statistics, some of the data is subordinated to the various National Assemblies and this can lead to situations such as that recently experienced with the UK Census, whereby data for NI was conducted by NISRA (the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency), whereas the data for Scotland was collected 1 year later.*

**and asked:**

*How familiar would you say you are with that structure?*



**Comments provided:**

I think it's a dog's dinner and needs revision.

It is a problem that data from different countries within the UK may be on different definitions or use different methodology, making the production of UK data difficult. It can be wasteful, due to unnecessary duplication and also mean that data from devolved administrations are of lower quality than data for England.

Not desirable for the Scots to be out of line. The deviation seems to be on their part, since censuses have always been in the years ending in 1. But was this a result of covid? Do we think that they will continue to deviate, or was this a one-off? Do we have any contact with a Scottish opposite number?

**3. International Standards:**

**Question 4 of the survey was introduced by:**

*Many of our statistics are influenced by International Standards, in particular the majority remain aligned with the standards established by the European Commission. Now that the UK has left Eurostat, we are free to define matters differently although we continue to need to be aligned with any decisions by the United Nations and organisations such as the OECD.*

and asked:

***How important do you think international standards should be for the UK statistical system?***

**The importance of meeting international standards was unanimous:**

Very Important	25
Fairly Important	13
Total	38

**Although a couple of people commented that it was important that statistics should reflect our National needs:**