

Title: Minutes of Meeting held on 20 January 2009

Confidentiality status: For information

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Authors: Science Secretariat

Background information: Minutes for ratification

Action for members: Discussion

Summary of Actions

1. **David Blunt** to compile a summary note detailing the lessons learned and measures implemented following the knife crime statistics release in December 2008. **To be complete by 18 April.**
2. **Alison Walker and Dave Elliot** to liaise to take forward the SDSSC's work on the BCS sample, reporting initial findings at the Committee's next meeting. **To be complete by 28 April.**
3. **Sara Skodbo and May El Komy** to report back to the SDSSC on the following areas: impact of the implementation of the Adam's stage of the Drug Harm Index; explanation of which costs are included in the harm measurement; clarification of how the incidence of drug use is calculated as a fixed proportion of overall crime and the implications of this. **Action complete.**
4. **Sheila Bird** to contact members of the cross-Government Drugs Research Strategy Group to remind them of the existence of the '21st Century Drugs and Statistical Science in the UK' report and its recommendations. **To be complete by 15 April.**
5. **Iain Williams** to send details of the Government Drugs Research Strategy Group to **Sheila Bird**. **To be complete by 10 April.**
6. **Members** to correspond via email to discuss ways of taking forward the SDSSC's future plan of work on statistical lacunae in Home Office press releases; and statistical issues related to localisation of analyses in time/place. **To be complete by 20 April 2009.**
7. **David Blunt** to provide the chair with the link to Home Office press releases from the Home Office website. **Action complete.**
8. **Sheila Bird** to draft protocol for the SDSSC's work looking at Home Office statistical press releases. **Action complete.**
9. **Iain Williams** to liaise with NPIA to ascertain the viability of the SDSSC's potential study analysing the DNA database. **To be complete by 24 April.**

Home Office Surveys, Design and Statistics Sub-Committee

Minutes of the sixth meeting of the Home Office Surveys, Design and Statistics Sub-Committee held on 20 January 2009.

Present - Professor Sheila Bird (*Chair, Medical Research Council Biostatistics Unit*)
Sue Brooker (*National Centre for Social Research*)
Dave Elliot (*Office for National Statistics*)
Professor Brian Francis (*Lancaster University*)
Professor Mike Hough (*King's College London*)

David Blunt (*Home Office Chief Statistician*)
Alison Walker (*Home Office Crime Reduction and Community Safety Group*)
Dr Chris Kershaw (*Home Office Head of Policing Statistics*)
Sara Skodbo (*Drugs and Alcohol Research Unit*)
May El Komy (*Drugs and Alcohol Research Unit*)

Dr Iain Williams (*Home Office Science Secretariat*)
Smita Kaur (*Secretariat*)

Welcome and Introductions

1. Prof Sheila Bird opened the meeting of the Surveys, Design and Statistics Sub-committee (SDSSC) by welcoming those in attendance.
2. Members agreed the following amendments to the minutes of the last meeting:

Page 5, p. 10 to read: 'Members commented that the proposed restrictions on the pre-release of statistics may prove an obstacle to academics whose work would benefit from access to data prior to their general release'.
3. Members agreed that the SDSSC's Response to UK Statistics Authority's consultation 'Official statistics serving the public good' be appended to the minutes.
4. Members confirmed the minutes of the last meeting.

Update of Actions

5. The Secretariat has ascertained initial statistics for the number of visits to the SDSSC webpage. These are currently being verified and will be circulated to members shortly.

6. The Secretariat updated the terms of reference for the SDSSC's work on the consideration of changes in the BCS sample affecting the reliability of trend estimates. This was circulated to members with the minutes of the last meeting.
7. Members provided comments on selected chapters of the Drugs Statistics report. Comments were gratefully received and the report was completed in October 2008.
8. The chair updated the Committee's response to the consultation '*Official Statistics: serving the public good*' incorporating members' comments.
9. Alison Walker and Dave Elliot have determined that the Committee's study on the effects of changes of the BCS sample on trend estimates could be undertaken by the ONS Methodological Consultancy Unit. Alison Walker and Dave Elliot are currently considering the logistics of commissioning this work.

Chief Statistician's Update:

10. David Blunt provided an update of key statistical issues since the last meeting.
11. The Home Office's latest crime statistics quarterly bulletin was published in October. This included a new presentation of the 'violence against the person' categories to better show the new PSA measure for most serious violence. It was also the first quarterly publication of the data following the clarification of the recording rules for 'GBH with intent'. Whilst 'violence against the person' figures overall were unaffected, the clarification meant that some categories of crime showed exaggerated increases as a result of the clarification rather than genuine increases in such crime. The quarterly publication was launched at a press conference with a Q&A briefing, hosted by the Minister and Home Office Chief Scientific Advisor Prof Paul Wiles.
12. In June 2008, the Tackling Knives Action Plan (TKAP) was launched to run until March 2009. A News Release and fact sheet were published on 11 December to coincide with a TKAP publicity event. This fact sheet published prematurely National Statistics data from NHS Information Centre, Leeds against the advice of the Department of Health (DH) and NHS Information Centre's statisticians as the data was not quality assured for publication and were released 3 months earlier than DH intended to release the data. Following the intervention of the National Statistician and the UK Statistics Authority, this received major news coverage and the issuing of new guidance from the Cabinet Office on how statistics should be handled in future.

13. In January 2009, the UK Statistics Authority launched their Code of Practice with a monitoring assessment of the Home Office TKAP press release and Fact Sheet of the 11 December. The Home Office was not forewarned by UKSA that the monitoring assessment and the Code of Practice would be published. This led to some initial handling difficulties.
14. David Blunt advised members that five working groups of Government Statistical Service Statisticians had been set up to write guidance on implementation of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics on (i) Handling of administrative data used for statistical purposes, (ii) Statistical Planning, (iii) Confidentiality, (iv) Publication and Presentation and (v) Quality, Methods and Harmonisation. The first is the most topical and relevant in relation to the TKAP presentation of data. It is also proving the most difficult in advising colleagues in the Home Office of what rules they need to follow. The statistics teams are being inundated with requests for advice. In addition, the Chief Scientific Advisor as Head of Government Social Research (GSR) is arranging to meet with the National Statistician to discuss how the Code of Practice affects the presentation of research data. He considered the Home Office TKAP data in the Fact Sheet to be "research" data.
15. David Blunt commented that, in agreement with the National Statistician, the recorded crime data would not show Most Serious Violence until the GBH with intent data was of good enough quality. In the meantime, from January, the violence against the person category would be broken down simply into "with injury" and "without injury". The issue of those crimes falling into a category of 'most serious violence' will be re-visited after HMIC have carried out an audit of police forces. An interim report is expected in time for the annual quality assurance process for financial year data to be published in July.
16. David Blunt also referred to a statistical release published on Boxing Day that included details of the UKBA having met its target of deporting over 5,000 foreign national prisoners in the year. Home Office statisticians advised that these figures could be released but with the necessary caveats that these data are subject to change and only have provisional status. The Chair of the UK Statistics Committee, Sir Michael Scholar, has written to Ministers suggesting they include future statistics on foreign national prisoners in the quarterly statistical releases to put the numbers into context.
17. In addition to this, the Home Office Chief Scientific Advisor circulated a note to all members of the Home Office Senior Civil Service advising that when dealing with any aspect of scientific advice, handling or policy, the relevant Head of Profession must be consulted; that their views are included directly in submissions to Ministers; and that the scientists must be present at any meetings with Ministers where their advice is presented.

[Action: David Blunt to compile a summary of actions taken since the TKAP criticism and to supply any new guidance and relevant correspondence to the Committee. **To be complete by 18 April].**

18. Chris Kershaw added that the Normington Review is currently underway looking at the data collection carried out by police. This is likely to reduce the volume of information produced by police forces. The Review is due to report in February.
19. The chair commented that consideration must be given to the distinction between “clarifying” and “changing” the definition of a statistical series, and that the handling of any “clarification” is a key issue as the practical impact of a “clarification” could in effect be a change in the series. This will have implications for PSAs and other targets. Further, with regard to the new crime statistics table, it may be advisable to present both tables in parallel in the first instance, to avoid confusion.

British Crime Survey (BCS):

20. Alison Walker provided an update of progress regarding the Committee’s work on whether changes in the BCS sample have had an effect on trend estimates. In addition to establishing that this work could be undertaken by the ONS Methodology Consultancy Unit, Alison Walker advised members that she and Dave Elliot are currently taking forward the initial stages as outlined by the terms of reference (see Annex 1).
21. Initial findings generated from this work should be available for the SDSSC’s next meeting on 28 April.

[Action: Alison Walker and Dave Elliot to liaise to take forward the SDSSC’s work on the BCS sample, reporting initial findings at the Committee’s next meeting. **To be complete by 28 April].**

Drug Harm Index (DHI):

22. Sara Skodbo and May El Komy (Drugs and Alcohol Research Unit) presented a summary of the Drug Harm Index to the Committee.
23. Covering Class A drugs only, the four main strands of the Drug Strategy are: preventing more young people from becoming problematic drug users; reducing the supply of Class A drugs; reducing drug-related crime and; increasing the number of drug users retained in/completing treatment. The overall aim is to measure reductions in the harm caused by illegal drugs.
24. Members commented that earlier iterations of the DHI had used only a small portion of the Offender Index and therefore did not give generalisable results. Concern was raised that as the measurement of harm is based on a fixed proportion of overall crime and therefore did not account for the particular nature of drug use.

25. The chair also commented that those working on measuring drugs harms should be careful not to assume that an increase in, for example, HIV diagnoses in a specific year means that drugs harm increased in that year, as the actual infection may have happened much earlier and diagnosis has been delayed. Confusing infection with the diagnosis of a drug-related disease would skew the outputs.
26. The chair also advised that, in over 90% of Hepatitis C Virus cases, injecting was identified as the main cause using capture/recapture methods even although the patient may not have reported injecting as a known risk factor. If the DHI measure only tests those who admit to injecting drugs, this could lead to an underestimation.
27. Members asked how costs are measured and whether figures are adjusted year on year for inflation. Prof Francis queried whether the costs of incarceration and the cost to family members due to potential loss of income were considered and that looking only at the harms caused by Class A drugs was at odds with the DHI's aims of measuring the impact of policy in the UK.
28. Sara and May agreed to look at the issues raised by the Committee and report back to them at a future date.

[Action: Sara Skodbo and May El Komy to report back to the SDSSC on the following areas: impact of the implementation of the Adam's stage of the DHI; explanation of which costs are included in the harm measurement; clarification of how the incidence of drug use is calculated as a fixed proportion of overall crime and the implications of this. *To be complete by 20 April 2009.*]

Migration Statistics:

29. Patrick Collier (Home Office Statistics) provided a summary of a tabled paper providing an overview of migration statistics produced by the Home Office. He advised members that the three main areas of the work of the Migration Statistics Team include: (i) migration publications and statistics; (ii) migration and citizenship statistics (in liaison with the Office for National Statistics and the Department for Work and Pensions) and (iii) removal enforcement and detection statistics.
30. Patrick Collier commented that currently, a key issue is defining data. Findings from statistical workshops have suggested that as migration statistics have a wide range of customers, they have multi-range requirements all of which must be considered when compiling migration data.

31. Members asked for an outline of the key challenges in the near future for the Migration Statistics team. Patrick Collier commented that this included the implications of 24-hour pre-release of statistical data and issues surrounding defining what constitutes an official statistic. In addition, European legislation can also needs consideration alongside domestic arrangements, illustrated with the EU's recommendation that statistics should be published every 5-6 weeks whereas the Home Office currently publishes quarterly. The chair commented that this discrepancy with EU legislation may be referred to UK Statistics Authority, citing that by published quarterly, the UK is able to provide a greater volume of information.
32. Members asked what impact the E-borders programme will have on the measurement of migration. Patrick Collier advised that E-borders will collect information from passports and so will provide counts of passenger travelling in and out of the UK to and from non-EU countries.
33. David Blunt commented that he could provide regular updates of the activities of the Migration Advisory Committee and the Migration Impacts Forum if it would be of interest to the Committee.

AOB:

34. Iain Williams advised members that the report '21st Century Drugs and Statistical Science in the UK' had been presented to members of the cross-Government Drugs Research Strategy Group in December 2008. The Group were broadly happy with the report and felt that the majority of the recommendations could be incorporated into the Drugs Research Strategy.
35. The chair queried whether a formal response to the Committee's report would be received imminently. Iain Williams advised members that either the Strategy Board or the Head of Crime and Drugs Strategy would send a considered response incorporating the Drugs Research Strategy, in due course.
36. The chair invited members to comment on what measures could be undertaken to maintain the momentum of the report and to carry the recommendations forward. The chair agreed to contact members of the cross-Government Drugs Research Strategy Group to remind them of the existence of the report and its recommendations.

[Action: Sheila Bird to contact members of the cross-Government Drugs Research Strategy Group to remind them of the existence of the '21st Century Drugs and Statistical Science in the UK' report and its recommendations *To be complete by 15 April*].
37. Iain Williams agreed to send the chair details of the members of the cross-Government Drugs Research Strategy Group.

[Action: *Iain Williams* to send to *Sheila Bird* details of the Government Drugs Research Strategy Group. *To be complete by 6 April*].

38. The chair asked whether a draft of final version of the Drugs Research Strategy was available. Iain Williams advised that a final draft of the strategy should be complete by mid-2009.

39. The chair proposed that the SDSSC's future plan of work should include looking at the localisation of crime statistics, both geographically and over time. Chris Kershaw advised that some localised information should now be available on police websites.

40. The chair raised the possibility of arranging an away-day for members to visit forces to discuss first-hand the issues related to data localisation. Members agreed that dissemination of crime data was an area of interest for the group and would correspond to consider ways of taking this forward.

[Action: *Members* to correspond via email to discuss ways of taking forward the SDSSC's future plan of work. *To be complete by 20 April 2009*].

41. The chair added that another potential area of work would be to look at Home Office press releases over the past 12 months and analyse them for their presentation of statistical issues. David Blunt agreed to provide the chair with the link to Home Office press releases.

[Action: *David Blunt* to provide the chair with the link to Home Office press releases from the Home Office website. *Action complete*].

[Action: *Sheila Bird* to draft protocol for the SDSSC's work looking at Home Office statistical press releases. *Action complete*].

42. The chair also proposed considering statistical issues relating to the DNA database. Iain Williams commented that as the DNA database was held by the NPIA (an executive NDPB of the Home Office), any such study may fall outside of the SDSSC's jurisdiction but agreed to look into this further.

[Action: *Iain Williams* to liaise with NPIA to ascertain the viability of the SDSSC's potential study analysing the DNA database. *To be complete by 24 April*].

43. Prof Brian Francis declared a potential conflict of interest as he acted as an expert witness for the Information Commissioner.

44. In March 2009, Dave Elliot will retire from the SDSSC. The chair thanked Dave for all of his valuable contributions since the sub-committee's inception in 2007, paying particular recognition to his input into the committee's paper 'Sampling hard-to-reach populations in the absence of a suitable sampling frame'.

45. The chair thanked members for their contributions and closed the meeting.

Date of next meeting:

Tuesday 28 April 2009.

Terms of Reference:

Possible implications of changes to the BCS sample on trend estimates:

- To examine whether any changes to the design of the BCS sample over the last ten years have affected the reliability of trend estimates, focussing in particular on the redesign intended to yield viable sub-sample sizes for police force areas and the change introduced in 2007/08 which removes clustering from high population areas;
- To consider whether the BCS possibly under-reports the crimes committed against males and females aged 16-24 living in areas with high levels of crime and social deprivation and thus may have generated under-estimates in levels and trends in crime, and to consider the implications of this;
- The above stated stages will be conducted sequentially.