

Kenneth Gibson MSP
Convenor, Finance and Public Administration Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP
(by email)

28 June 2023

Dear Mr Gibson,

State of the Statistical System Report 2022/23

Today, the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) has published its *State of the Statistical System 2022/23* report¹. This is the fourth year in which OSR has published this report, which draws together the findings from their regulatory work. The report sets out the strengths of the UK statistical system, OSR's views on the current pressures in the system, and how statistics producers and others should be responding to these.

OSR sees a significant shift in government and public demand for statistics and data, from COVID-19 to other key issues such as the rising cost of living. The statistical system has responded well and has demonstrated its responsiveness to meet many of these data needs in new and innovative ways. But keeping pace with these demands will be difficult given the continued financial, resourcing and capability pressures across the statistical system. OSR rightly encourages increased collaboration across the UK statistical system to share learning and make the most efficient use of data and people.

The role of a statistician is evolving and needs to keep pace with the increasing use of data science techniques. The increasing availability of data and growing use of artificial intelligence needs to be seen as an opportunity, and a successful future statistical system will require a workforce that is sufficiently resourced and skilled. OSR sees this as an important area of focus for the system.

With the use of new and innovative data sources in the production of official statistics, statistics producers need to ensure they are managing any risks around quality. The report highlights the number of transformation programmes currently underway to improve statistical quality and that it is important that any risks during transition to new methods are well understood and mitigated against.

OSR sees good examples of user engagement across the statistical system. However, this is not consistent and has too limited range of stakeholders. Engagement with users can help statistics producers to understand the value of their statistics and whether they can reduce or stop production. This is becoming

¹ <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/state-of-the-statistical-system-2022-23/>

increasingly important given the current pressures on funding and resourcing and the demands for new statistics and data.

The statistical system is demonstrating a greater understanding of the need for intelligent transparency, namely taking an open, clear and accessible approach to the release and use of data, statistics and wider analysis. Everyone across government and in public bodies has a role in ensuring that the principles of intelligent transparency are fully embedded in their work, but OSR feel that more needs to be done to raise awareness of these principles beyond the statistical profession.

It can be difficult for statisticians to influence how statistics are used once they have been published, with social media a factor in some cases. We are encouraging statistics producers to engage more widely with people who use statistics, including media outlets, to help minimise the risk of potential misuse.

These issues are aligned with OSR's current business priorities. Of particular focus for us is continuing to embed the principles of intelligent transparency more widely in government.

If you would like to discuss this or any of the other issues highlighted in the report, I would be happy to meet.

Yours sincerely,

Sir Robert Chote
Chair