

POPULATION AND MIGRATION STATISTICS (PAMS) COMMITTEE (SCOTLAND)

Report on the Seventeenth Meeting of the SCOTSTAT Board

Introduction

1. This note reports back to PAMS members on the business of the seventeenth SCOTSTAT Board meeting held on 22nd November 2010.
2. The agenda, papers and minutes for the meeting are available on the SCOTSTAT website
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/topics/statistics/scotstat/board/meetings>

Meeting report

3. The seventeenth meeting of the SCOTSTAT Board was held on Monday 22nd November 2010 at St Andrew's House. The Board was chaired by Rob Wishart, Chief Statistician, Scottish Government.
4. The agenda for the meeting was as follows:
 - Comprehensive Spending Review and priorities for Statistics
 - Annual Statistics Stakeholders Conference
 - Office of the Chief Statistician Business Plan
 - Parliamentary Order to update the Official Statistics (Scotland) Order 2008
 - United Kingdom (UK) Statistics Authority: Strengthening User Engagement Report
 - Scottish Government Statistics User Group Engagement Activity
 - Scotstat Website Development

5. Comprehensive Spending Review and priorities for statistics

Rob Wishart reported that the Scottish Budget announced the previous week had been for only one year. Statistics budgets were under pressure, as elsewhere, and this included the staffing budget. It was noted that statistics were mainly budgeted for within each portfolio and this meant that they had to compete with other priorities in each subject area. Decisions had still to be made of some of the major surveys and one option was on the Labour Force Survey (LFS) boost. Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics(SNS) would have to make some savings too.

A more substantial review of education statistics was to be published.

Consideration would have to be given to what were the priorities and why things were a priority.

6. Annual Statistics Stakeholders Conference

The Annual Statistics Stakeholders Conference had been held on Monday 1st November in Edinburgh. The theme was "Challenges and Opportunities in Statistics". Discussions at that conference had provided some feedback on priorities for statistics. The Scottish Government had to investigate legal requirements for statistics. The need

for local area statistics was highlighted as was the danger of losing these if the government was to retrench.

Consideration was given to improving the attendance at the conference which was down this year. It was felt that in the current economic situation people were reluctant to attend more general conferences and that those coming from further afield were also deterred. It was suggested that a series of smaller and/or more topic specific events around the country should be considered and also moving to a bi-annual event.

7. Office of the Chief Statistician's (OCS) Business Plan

Each statistics branch was supposed to produce its own plan and consult with users, but it was recognised that this did not always happen (GROS are certainly an example of where that does happen). The OCS plan was a high level document including work on areas for which the OCS was directly responsible such as SNS and Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), but also working more generally on issues such as developing methodology, working across the UK and implementing the Statistics Act.

Good progress appeared to be being made on most issues.

It was agreed that each Scotstat Committee should be looking at future priorities and they should be invited to put this on the agenda for their next meetings.

8. Parliamentary Order to update the Official Statistics (Scotland) Order 2008

The Statistics Act requires those organisations designated as producers of official statistics to be named in an Order laid before Parliament. Up till now, there have been a limited number of organisations beyond the Scottish Government. A second tranche of organisations who are considered to be producers of official statistics are now being designated. These include the Higher and Further Education Funding Council, the Reporter to the Children's Panel, Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). Others such as the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) are in the pipeline.

Certain requirements such as on statistical quality and having a designated responsible officer have to be met before an organisation can be a producer of official statistics. There are no plans to include local authorities in the list in the near future.

9. UK Statistics Authority: Strengthening User Engagement Report

This substantial [report](#), published in June 2010, contains a full discussion on how producers might engage with users of official statistics. One of the outcomes of this was report was a recommendation that there should be a better understanding of the uses which are made of official statistics. It was agreed that each Scotstat Committee should consider the report and document known uses of the statistics. In particular, expert users should be involved in documenting their use.

Several initiatives have been taken following this publication and its recommendations. The Royal Statistical Society are developing a user hub as part of their response. They have also begun working with journalists, both by holding workshops and by getting

involved in the training of journalists to increase their statistical understanding. It was suggested that some specifically Scottish efforts should be made.

Examples of user feedback on the use of statistics were presented such as those required for accessing the Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS) use of the General Household Survey and data access from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The possibility of a pop-up questionnaire on the Scottish Government stats sites was discussed and will be considered further, provided it is not too burdensome.

10. Scottish Government Statistics User Group Engagement Activity

This report was presented in a new format looking at activities across the branches under four themes:

- Actions to help users understand and make better use of statistics
- Actions to get a better understanding of users' needs and priorities to incorporate into plans
- Actions in response to user feedback
- Actions to reinvigorate or refresh user engagement practices and ensure that user engagement feeds through into plans and priorities

rather than providing a summary of the activity in each branch. This new format was generally welcomed as it is recognised that different branches operate in different ways in engaging with their users. This format will be repeated in the next report.

However, it is still fairly obvious that certain branches are not doing as much as others in user engagement. This remains a concern for the Board. This was to be raised with Senior Statisticians.

It was also agreed that the Centre for Housing Market Analysis should be contacted about the information on housing which they were requiring from local authorities as input to Housing Strategies.

11. Scotstat Website Development

Due to changes in the Scottish Government IT system, the Scotstat website will need to be rebuilt. Key features which it is planned will be retained include:

- User register
- Ability for users to highlight their areas of interest
- Platform to disseminate corporate and branch statistics plans
- Committee areas

New features could include:

- Calendar of events
- Improved guidance
- Improved links with the analysts network
- Latest news
- Feedback feature
- Improved non-administrator use of the register.

The Board was generally supportive of the proposals.

Other Business

Chris Mitchell from Fife Council announced that this would be his final meeting as he was retiring. He was thanked for his work. It was noted that this left only one person from a local authority representing a Scotstat Committee which was felt to be an inadequate number given the importance of local authorities as users of government statistics.

Conclusion

13. This paper summarises the issues discussed by the SCOTSTAT Board at its meeting in November 2010. I should be happy to provide further information if required.

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