

## Population and Migration Statistics Committee (PAMS) (Scotland)

### Report on the Meeting of the SCOTSTAT Board February 2012

#### Introduction

1. This note reports back to PAMS members on the business of the SCOTSTAT Board meeting held on 9<sup>th</sup> February 2012.
2. The agenda, papers and minutes for the meeting are available on the [SCOTSTAT website](#)

#### Meeting report

3. The latest meeting of the SCOTSTAT Board was held on Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> February 2012 at St Andrew's House. The Board was chaired by Roger Halliday the recently appointed Chief Statistician in the Scottish Government.
4. The agenda for the meeting was as follows:
  - Statistics to inform the Referendum on Scottish Independence
  - Presentation by the Chief Statistician on priorities
  - News up dates
  - Role and future of Scotstat Board.
5. **Statistics to inform the Referendum on Scottish Independence**

This item was raised by the Board member from the Economic Statistics Consultation Group regarding the important role of informative, impartial and pertinent statistical information to inform the debate in the forthcoming Referendum on Scottish independence. Statistics would be needed which were as objective as possible and should be provided to those supporting all the different sides of the argument on an impartial basis.

Sandy Stewart from the Office of the Chief Economic Advisor described the increased demand which statisticians were already seeing for analysis. They were being asked for statistics on the economy as if Scotland were an independent country and there was a need to do more modelling work. There were policy requirements for national accounts, Scottish balance of payments and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for which a better model was needed. Information on public sector finances which was currently provided by Government Expenditure and Revenue Scotland (GERS) annually was needed quarterly or even monthly. A major issue was activity in the North Sea which skewed the data depending on whether it was included with Scotland or not.

Forecasting was also required so that scenarios could be considered. But there was a lack of capacity to do more modelling and a bigger team was required. There was a need

to provide easy comparability with the rest of the UK and the rest of the world and to identify gaps in the data.

Eurostat money would become available for an independent Scotland – if it remained in the EU. In the meantime it was hoped to use some resources from within the Government Statistical Service (GSS).

It was agreed that the Code of Practice on Official Statistics would be important and the role of the UK Statistics Authority in enforcing it. The Board agreed that the Scottish Government statistics group set a high standard of statistical integrity and supported the continuation of that.

It was agreed to keep this issue on the agenda and to keep the issue of the future of statistics in Scotland under review no matter what the outcome of the referendum. The Board could have a very important role to play if the Referendum resulted in a vote in favour of independence.

## **6. Chief Statistician's introduction and priorities**

Roger Halliday, the new Chief Statistician gave a short presentation introducing himself and setting out some of his priorities for the statistician group.

There was a new strategy developing within the GSS moving from being focussed on collection of data to analysis, dissemination and user support with more collaboration. Presentation should be visual and tailored for the audience. Use of admin data should be maximised.

Current strategic developments included establishing efficiencies, for example in surveys, working with public sector organisations, linking data, dissemination strategy and training and development activity.

## **7. Updates**

Sara Grainger gave an update on the long term strategy for population surveys. Surveys are now designed and sampled in-house and this has achieved substantial savings of around £2.8m per year. There are 20 core questions in all surveys so that data can be pooled giving greater analysis power.

There is now a draft framework on data linkage and a steering group has been established. A data linkage conference was being held on 26<sup>th</sup> March.

There was a discussion around the use of admin data and it was agreed that it was important to reduce the burden on data suppliers. More efficient ways of collecting data should be explored. Two areas were currently being investigated:

- investigating how platforms currently used to collect admin data can be made more efficient; and
- identifying opportunities for data collected by other means to be collected from admin systems.

Secure IT systems were expensive, but the Scottish Government wanted to see if there were ways of sharing these.

It was planned to include around another six public sector organisations/agencies within national/official statistics and there would be an announcement in the summer with an amendment to the Official Statistics (Scotland) Order.

**8. Role of the Scotstat Board**

This topic recurs on a regular basis!

There was a discussion about the role of the Board and how it could be made more effective. It was agreed to continue to meet twice a year, once to focus on strategic issues and once on the statistics group's work plan. This second meeting could be combined with a meeting of the Scottish Government Senior Statisticians.

**9. Other Business**

I asked that the issue of whether there should be a 2021 Census should be on the agenda for the next Board meeting.

**Conclusion**

- 10.** This paper summarises the issues discussed by the SCOTSTAT Board at its meeting in February 2012. I should be happy to provide further information if required.

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