

Report on the First Meeting of the SCOTSTAT Board

Introduction

1. This note is intended to inform PAMS members of the outcome of the first SCOTSTAT Board meeting which I attended as the PAMS representative. It is my intention to produce a similar note after each meeting. If anyone would like copies of the papers from the meeting, I will be happy to supply these. The minutes are also now available (copy attached). In future, I would hope that the papers would be posted on the SCOTSTAT website.

Meeting report

2. The first meeting of the SCOTSTAT Board was held on Tuesday 22nd January 2002. The Board is chaired by Rob Wishart, Chief Statistician, Scottish Executive. The membership comprises representatives of each of the statistical Theme Groups, other Scottish Executive representatives from among the Senior Statisticians and the Central Research Unit and external representatives from the Scottish Parliament, Audit Scotland, the Royal Statistical Society and the voluntary sector. There was a full attendance at this first meeting.
3. The business of the meeting consisted of discussion on papers which largely covered administrative matters involved in the setting up of the Board and the statistical consultation structure which it supports. The papers were as follows:
 - Remit of SCOTSTAT Board;
 - SCOTSTAT Committee structure;
 - Cross-cutting issues;
 - Draft Scottish Statistics Work Plan;
 - SCOTSTAT Internet presence;
 - Topics for consideration at the next meeting (to be held in June).
4. Rob Wishart said that the Executive's objective was to improve links with users and providers of statistics. They hoped to have in place a comprehensive means of consulting with users and providers. There was general support for the new set up and a willingness to help to make it work.
5. Much of the discussion, under all the items of business centred on what were the most important issues for the Board and what were the priorities. Issues which were raised included – in no particular order:
 - dissemination – publication of data and availability of raw data for further analysis;
 - identifying the actual users of statistics and what they were being used for;
 - communication between Theme Groups;
 - data protection and freedom of information;
 - data collected and provided by bodies outside the public sector;
 - making better use of survey data;
 - value for money in data collection;
 - ways of responding to emerging issues quickly.

6. Following the discussion, the Executive undertook to rewrite the remit and role of the Board; provide details of Theme Group members and topics covered by each of the Groups; look at where sustainability fits into the Theme Groups and write to each of the Groups about the issues which arose at the meeting.
7. Attention was drawn to the proposed SCOTSTAT website. This will act as an electronic register for those with an interest in particular topic areas which the Executive will use to notify users of new publications and to consult on proposed changes. The register can also be used by others as a contacts list. The website will have pages for each of the Theme Groups which can provide links to existing sites or act as the site for Groups who do not have their own.
8. You are invited to register your interest in particular topics on the website (www.scotland.gov.uk/stats/scotstats). A press release will be issued launching the site and reporting the first Board meeting. Following the Board meeting, each Theme Group has been asked to register against each interest topic whether it plays a primary, key secondary, secondary or no role in a particular topic. GROS will take initial action on this for PAMS.

Further action

9. A report will have to be produced by the PAMS group for the next Board meeting. Guidance will be provided on the format and content of these reports, but it is expected that they will cover progress on the work programme of the Groups.
10. The Executive will produce further information on the issues for possible discussion at the next Board meeting and will consult Board members further before deciding on the agenda for the next meeting.
11. The Board members were anxious that some of the issues raised should be taken forward before the next meeting in June. Several action points were noted on the minutes and I hope that progress can be made in the next six months. PAMS members are reminded to pursue any live and outstanding actions from the PAMS meeting on 14th November 2001 as an aid to progress within our own Group.

**1st MEETING OF SCOTSTAT BOARD - 22ND JANUARY 2001
NOTE OF MAIN POINTS FROM MEETING**

Persons present:

Rob Wishart, Chief Statistician, Scottish Executive (Chair)
 Hervey Gibson, COGENT Strategies / Caledonian University
 Ade Kearns, Glasgow University
 Ron Mitchell, Inverclyde Council
 Jenny Boag, Falkirk Council
 Mary Smalls, ISD
 Susan Provan, Strathclyde Police
 Alan Campbell, Aberdeenshire Council
 Bob Sargent, SEPA
 Tony O'Sullivan, Communities Scotland
 Professor Gillian Raab, Royal Statistical Society
 Simon Wakefield, Scottish Parliament (SPICE)
 Mik Wisniewski, Audit Scotland
 Marion Lacey, SCVO
 Ann Millar, Scottish Executive, Chief Researcher
 Pete Whitehouse, Scottish Executive, Senior Statistician
 Jill Alexander, Scottish Executive, Senior Statistician
 Alan Fleming, Scottish Executive, Assistant Statistician (Minutes)

1. Rob Wishart opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.

2. Remit of SCOTSTAT Board (paper SCOTSTAT1/01 circulated)

Everyone was invited to comment on the section of the paper which listed the various roles and remits of the board.

The following were suggested as additional issues for consideration:

- Co-ordination between the Scottish Executive and other public bodies.
- Cost.
- Data protection guidance, particularly with regard to the encouragement of greater use of administrative data.
- Encourage wider analysis of surveys.
- Freedom of Information – helping data providers to understand Freedom of Information rules to enable them to release as much information as possible.
- Gathering intelligence about the uses of statistics (how much? / how often? / how?)
- Links with research committees.

The following additional matters were raised:

- It would be useful to separate dissemination into (i) the publication of statistics and (ii) the availability of data for analysis.
- It is difficult to find statistics on the Scottish Executive website covering different areas.
- Members need guidance on how they are expected to communicate the information from the board to committees and the wider community.
- None of the listed remits were seen as sufficiently low priority that they should be excluded. However, it was agreed that the list should be put into groups.
- The role “providing advice on prioritisation on funds in order to support recommendations made by the Board” should be changed to refer to the issue of “value for money”.

It was agreed that the board should meet twice a year, with the next meeting in June. It was suggested that December was perhaps a less suitable month to have a meeting, so it would need to be early December, subject to the progress made in producing and commenting on the Statistics Plan.

Everyone was content with the membership of the board and no extra names were suggested. A Deputy Chair was not appointed although there was a suggestion that it may be

appropriate to have 2 co-chairs. Scottish Executive members will follow this up outside the meeting.

3. SCOTSTAT committee structure (paper SCOTSTAT2/01 circulated)

Comments were invited on:

- The structure.
- The way cross-cutting issues should be taken forward
- The way to deal with meetings between committees and the board.

The following points were raised:

- The board need to identify key official statistics and ensure that these statistics are of acceptable quality.
- There is a need to identify what areas/themes each committee is covering, what are the main reasons they are collecting statistics and which areas/themes are the most important.
- Each committee needs to have a concise guide as to the list of topics they are covering.
- The board needs to have a role in looking at newly emerging cross-cutting issues as well as existing ones to ensure there are no major initiatives which are being missed.
- Committees should be invited to raise issues they would like the board to consider.
- There is a need for the board to determine how useful statistics are before considering cost.
- It is not feasible for the board to examine in detail the annual reports which are produced by all 10 theme-based committees and therefore, key issues only should be identified by the secretariat for discussion by the board.

ACTION - It was agreed that the following were issues which the board needed to address:

- A template would be drawn up for committees to report on activities and areas of work.
- A suitable reporting format between boards and committees needs to be agreed.
- A list of membership of each committee will be provided to board members.

4. Cross-cutting issues (paper SCOTSTAT3/01 circulated)

The following comments were made:

- Important that these are dealt with efficiently across all relevant committees with as little overlap between committees as possible. In the case of social justice, rural issues, equality and SIPS, there will be a role for the social & welfare committee to ensure this happens.
- The Neighbourhood Statistics and Social Welfare committees both had a strong involvement in SIPS and should agree who has the main responsibility.
- There was a case for a group to consider cross-cutting surveys such as SHS
- Sustainability is an important issue which needs to be addressed and not only in the Natural and Built environment groups.
- Methodology, dissemination and usage could be rolled together and considered by one group.
- The board could carry out quality assurance on specific key statistics.

5. Draft Scottish Statistics Work Plan (paper SCOTSTAT4/01 circulated)

Board members largely agreed with what was being put forward in paper SCOTSTAT4/01 as to how the board will be involved in commenting on the draft Scottish Statistics Work Plan. Only one or two comments were made asking for clarification regarding the timetable for producing the annual work plan.

6. SCOTSTAT Internet presence (paper SCOTSTAT5/01 circulated)

Everyone was invited to provide feedback on anything on the SCOTSTAT web page which is not working or is not clear.

The following issues were raised:

- The SCOTSTAT web page should not create duplication with websites which already exist for some of the committees.
- It needs to be made clearer that the SCOTSTAT web page is part of the Scottish Executive website and is not a standalone website.
- It would be useful if the web page made some mention of what has newly been put on it.
- Each committee will have their own individual sections of the web page.
- It is not necessary to register in order to view the web page – registration is only necessary where someone wishes to see a list of persons who have registered an interest in a particular topic.

ACTION

- Board members to let Rob Wishart know if any more issues spring to mind in the future.
- It was agreed that a Press Notice should be released reporting on the first board meeting and the new Scotstat register – Scottish Executive to arrange.
- Scottish Executive to take on board comments about web page.

7. Topics for consideration at next meeting (paper SCOTSTAT6/01 circulated)

Paper SCOTSTAT6/01 gave a list of possible topics for discussion at the next meeting. Board members were invited to comment on this list and consider other issues which had been raised during the meeting. The following comments were made:

- The point was raised as to whether Neighbourhood Statistics should be discussed at the next meeting in view of the fact that there is a committee specifically set up to discuss it. The consensus was that, as Neighbourhood Statistics is a very important issue, the board should take the opportunity to discuss it at the next meeting.
- The topic of “dissemination” should also include communication.
- It was agreed that judgement would be reserved on whether the UK Code of Practice and Framework for National Statistics (issues for Scotland) would be brought up at the next meeting. The Scottish Executive will issue its own protocol on release practices within the next few weeks. Consultation will run until the end of April.
- It would be useful to discuss performance information, particularly on issues which the Scottish Parliament may be looking at in more detail.
- Reports of committee activity should be considered.
- The board should ensure that some of the key issues are moved forward between now and June rather than waiting until June before pursuing.
- Suggestion that the board might consider statistics practice beyond the UK – cited a relevant OECD paper.

ACTION

- Scottish Executive to consider what Neighbourhood Statistics issues the board should concentrate on, collect relevant information and liaise with Neighbourhood Statistics committee.
- Scottish Executive to circulate note on performance information activity before decision on how board should take forward deliberations in this area.
- Scottish Executive to produce more information on each of the potential issues for discussion including new issues raised during the course of this meeting. This should be circulated and further views sought on priorities.

ALAN D. FLEMING
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF ECONOMIC ADVISER
1st February 2002