

UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

WITNESS STATEMENT OF PROFESSOR SIR IAN DIAMOND

I, Professor Sir Ian Diamond, Chief Executive of the UK Statistics Authority and National Statistician, will say as follows:

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The UK Statistics Authority's role, function, and responsibilities

1. The UK Statistics Authority (the Authority) is an independent statutory body established under the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 ('the 2007 Act'). It operates at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department and reports directly to the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly.
2. The 2007 Act established the Statistics Board as a body corporate (see section 1(1)). The 2007 Act also provided that there should be a National Statistician appointed by the Crown as an officer of the Board (see section 5). The National Statistician is the Chief Executive of the Board (see section 31).
3. The Board has adopted standing orders ('the standing orders'). The standing orders explain (at ¶1) that:

The Act created a 'Statistics Board' but by resolution at its first meeting on 2 February 2008 the Board agreed that it would operate under the name of the 'UK Statistics Authority'.
4. The 2007 Act sets out the Authority's objective as promoting and safeguarding the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good (see section 7 (1)). The public good includes:
 - a. Informing the public about social and economic matters
 - b. Assisting the development and evaluation of public policy
 - c. Regulating quality and publicly challenging the misuse of statistics
5. As a non-ministerial, independent statutory body, Ministers have no role in the decision-making of the Authority Board. Therefore, policy, operations and advice for statistics resides with the Authority in line with our statutory objectives. The Cabinet Office retains only a set of residual ministerial responsibilities for the Authority:
 - a. Appointment of non-executive members of the Board
 - b. Accounting for statistics business in Parliament (where this can only be conducted by a Minister)
 - c. Issue direction in the event of a serious failure by the Board

6. The Authority has a number of responsibilities. These are described as follows (at ¶3 of the standing orders):

The Authority provides professional oversight of the Government Statistical Service (GSS) and has exclusive responsibility for the Office for National Statistics, and for independent regulation.

7. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is the executive office established by the National Statistician as set out in the 2007 Act (see Section 32). In practice, the ONS operates as the Authority's statistical production function and is part of the GSS. The ONS is the UK's internationally recognised National Statistical Institute and largest independent producer of official statistics in the UK. The ONS is responsible for collecting and publishing statistics related to the economy, population and society at national, regional and local levels.
8. The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) is the regulatory arm of the Authority and provides independent regulation of all official statistics produced in the UK. Ed Humpherson has been Director General for Regulation from January 2014 to present. Following the Bean Review of Economic Statistics which recommended that the Authority's Monitoring and Assessment (M&A) function become a more separate regulatory office, the Office for Statistics Regulation was established in November 2016. Prior to this, the M&A function was led by the Head of Assessment, Richard Alldritt, from May 2008-October 2013.
9. An organisational chart of the Authority outlining how the ONS, OSR and the GSS relate to each other has been exhibited to the Inquiry [ID/1- INQ000130442].

Government Statistical Service (GSS) and the Analysis Function

10. The GSS is a network of all those involved in the production of official statistics in the UK. Official statistics are defined as those produced by organisations named in the 2007 Act or in the Official Statistics Order (SI 888 of 2018). Every public body with a significant GSS presence, such as those involved in the production or use of official statistics, has its own designated Head of Profession (HoP) for Statistics. HoPs must ensure their department complies with the Code of Practice for Statistics, lead the GSS and build statistical capability and capacity. Organisations that produce a limited number of official statistics, such as Arms-Length Bodies (ALBs), can appoint Lead Officials for Statistics, who are then supported by the relevant HoP (usually in the sponsoring department). They have the same responsibilities as the HoP to comply with the Code of Practice.
11. Official statistics are produced by statisticians operating under the umbrella of the GSS, working in either the ONS, UK government departments and agencies, or one

of the three devolved administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Each of the devolved administrations has its own Chief Statistician. The Concordat on Statistics sets out an agreed framework for statistical collaboration between the Authority, UK Government, and the Northern Ireland, Scottish and Welsh Governments [ID/2- INQ000130443]

12. The GSS is also part of the cross-government Analysis Function, which is a community of analysts across government which aims to improve the analytical capability of the Civil Service and integrate analysis into all facets of Government. The Analysis Function was established in 2018 by my predecessor John Pullinger.
13. The Government Statistician Group (GSG) is made up of statisticians and data scientists working in government who have passed a GSG badging exercise. The GSG sits within the GSS. This is a government profession group. The Analysis Function houses many government professions, including the GSG, the Government Economic Service (GES) and Government Social Research (GSR).
14. I, as the National Statistician, lead both the GSS and Analysis Function. In this role, for both functions, I provide professional oversight and accountability. I convene and attend the quarterly HoPs Group, the membership of which includes all HoPs for statistics in UK government departments, Chief Statisticians of the devolved administration and statistical directors within the ONS and is chaired by either myself or one of my deputies. These meetings are used to cascade, communicate, engage, discuss issues and galvanise collective leadership of the statistical system.
15. GSS champion networks aim to share best practice, improve awareness and create links between statistical teams across the GSS, and focus on a variety of specialisms including quality, geography and harmonisation. The work done by the champions feeds directly into the HoPs group meetings.
16. As noted, the GSS is a community of colleagues working in statistics across Government, to which I provide professional oversight and coordination. Line management of members of the GSS sits within their individual departments. For this reason, I would and could not assume to speak on the behalf of individual HoPs that might be classed as key members of the GSS for this response. Where the work of the GSS as a whole is relevant, I will highlight this.

National Statistician and Deputy National Statistician roles

17. I, as the National Statistician (October 2019 – present (March 2023 at the time of writing)), am Permanent Secretary, Chief Executive of the Authority and Head of the GSS and Analysis Function. I provide overall leadership for the ONS and the statistics profession across government. I advise ministers, the Cabinet Secretary and senior officials on the production, dissemination and use of statistics across

government. I am responsible for the work of our department and provide direction to ensure we deliver on our strategy 'Statistics for the Public Good'.

- a. My most recent predecessor John Pullinger CB, CStat was National Statistician from July 2014 to June 2019.
- b. Dame Jil Matheson DCB was National Statistician from September 2009 to June 2014.
- c. Dame Karen Dunnell DCB was National Statistician from September 2005 to August 2009.

18. I am supported by the Second Permanent Secretary and Deputy Chief Executive Sam Beckett (September 2020 – present). In assisting with the overall leadership of the ONS, Sam has responsibility for Economic Statistics (and is also Joint Head of the Government Economics Service). The Second Permanent Secretary and Deputy Chief Executive role was a new post created in 2020.

19. I am also supported by three Deputy National Statisticians:

- a. Deputy National Statistician and Director General for Data Capability, Alison Pritchard (October 2020- present). Previous post holders are:
 - i. Francesca Kay (January 2020- October 2020)
 - ii. Heather Savory (April 2015- November 2019)
- b. Deputy National Statistician and Director General for Economic, Social and Environmental Statistics (ESEG), Mike Keoghan (January 2022 - present). There was one previous postholder:
 - iii. Jonathan Athow (June 2015- October 2021)
- c. Deputy National Statistician and Director General for Health, Population and Methods (HPaM), Emma Rourke (July 2022 – present). Previous postholders include:
 - iv. Pete Benton (January 2022- July 2022)
 - v. Iain Bell (June 2017- June 2021)
 - vi. Glen Watson (from early 2015 -December 2016)

20. The Deputy National Statistician roles were created by my predecessor John Pullinger when he took up post in July 2014. They reflected priorities he set out on appointment: economic statistics, contributing to public policy and building data capability. The exact remit of each Deputy National Statistician has changed over time depending on the needs of the organisation, but overall have stayed true to these three main priorities.

21. Prior to 2014, there was one Director General with responsibility for day-to-day management of the ONS who reported directly to the National Statistician. Before he

became Deputy National Statistician for Population and Public Policy, Glen Watson held this role until early 2015.

22. With regard to scenario planning, in the event that I became incapacitated in an emergency situation, the Authority Board would meet and temporarily confer the responsibilities of National Statistician to a chosen individual; likely to be the Second Permanent Secretary or one of the Deputy National Statisticians. For example, the Board conferred responsibilities to another individual in 2019 when the then Deputy National Statistician for Economic Statistics, Jonathan Athrow, was conferred the responsibilities of National Statistician during the period between my predecessor John Pullinger leaving the role and my start date.
23. Prior to my appointment as National Statistician I sat on the following groups in a personal capacity: the Department for International Development (DfID) Research Advisory Group (Chair), 2017-2019, the Research Advisory Group, DfID (Member) 2010-2016, the Scottish Science Advisory Council (Member) 2010-2014, and the Welsh Government Chief Scientist's Advisory Group (Member) 2018- 2022.

Central Policy Secretariat

24. The Central Policy Secretariat (CPS) supports the Authority Chair, the Board, the Chief Executive and the senior leadership team in delivering the Authority's strategy 'Statistics for the Public Good'. In doing so, CPS staff provide secretariat functions to the Board, executive committees and the GSS, private office support for the Chair, National Statistician and senior leadership team, Parliamentary coordination in line with our statutory obligations, international relations and engagement, and policy and legal advice as necessary.
25. As a support function to myself and my senior leadership team, CPS, through my Private Office and the Policy Liaison Unit (PLU), operate as a link between the ONS and central government policy areas to understand the needs of policy makers and ensure that decisions are informed by the latest and most relevant evidence and analysis.

National Statistics Executive Group (NSEG)

26. I chair the National Statistics Executive Group (NSEG). It is the most senior executive committee in the ONS and was established in October 2014. Its predecessor was the ONS Executive Committee.
27. The role of NSEG is to support me as the National Statistician in the exercise of my functions as the Head of the GSS and Analysis Function, and Chief Executive of the Authority. It is an internal decision-making committee to help fulfil these functions. NSEG receives reports on:

- a. strategic risks
- b. key activities and decisions taken by its sub-committees
 - i. Portfolio and Investment Committee
 - ii. People Committee
 - iii. Analysis and Evaluation Committee
 - iv. Data Governance Committee
 - v. GSS International Committee
 - vi. Quality Committee
- c. financial performance to budget
- d. major projects and programmes
- e. other management information as required

28. I provide an update from NSEG following each of its meetings in my Chief Executive report to the Authority Board, and the GSS HoP representative who sits on NSEG provides an update to HoPs.

The ONS role in relation to Government

29. I, as the National Statistician, am the Government's principal advisor on official statistics.

30. As discussed at paragraphs 4 and 5, the 2007 Act sets out the Authority's objective as promoting and safeguarding the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. As a non-ministerial, independent statutory body, Ministers have no role in the decision-making of the Authority Board. Therefore, policy, operations and advice for statistics resides with the Authority in line with our statutory objectives.

31. As established by the 2007 Act, the Minister for the Cabinet Office has residual ministerial responsibility for the Authority. They will account for statistics business in Parliament, where this can only be conducted by a Minister.

Our role in Data Science policy

32. As discussed at paragraph 20, my predecessor John Pullinger created a new Director General, Deputy National Statistician post with responsibility for data capability. Since this role was formed, the ONS has strengthened its national role and support for statistical methods, data science, and data sharing.

33. In 2016, the Bean Review recommended that we create a Data Science Campus. In 2017 it was established to investigate the use of new data sources and help build data science capability for the benefit of the UK [ID/3- INQ000130444].

34. The Digital Economy Act 2017 amended the 2007 Act. It provided the Authority with powers to support our access to data for our functions around official statistics and

statistical research, safely and securely [ID/4- INQ000130445]. This was to enable the production of the analysis decision-makers need. The 2017 Act also created wider powers for any public authority to provide accredited researchers with access to deidentified data for accredited public good research.

35. In 2019, the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) recommended that the Authority take a stronger leading role across technology, data science, data ethics and influencing improved sharing of data. This recognises the Authority's role in governance of the whole system [ID/5- INQ000130446].
36. In practice, therefore, the ONS and the Authority has been building on its leadership role within data policy in government for many years. We have developed a cohesive, cross-government approach to the innovative use of data and data science to produce statistics that support the needs of policy makers.
37. My predecessor John Pullinger and Deputy National Statistician for Data Capability, Heather Savory and then Francesca Kay, attended (or delegated attendance) to both the cross-government Data Advisory Board and the Data Leaders Network meeting.
38. The responsibility for data and data science within Government has been distributed between the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), the Government Office for Science (GO-Science) and the Cabinet Office, in particular the Central Digital and Data Office (CDDO), to varying degrees from 2009-2020.

Building statistical and data science capability

39. The Analysis Function aims to integrate analysts in all parts of government. By operating as a function, professional analysts will act as the catalyst for other professions contributing to analytical insight. This will be built on multi-disciplinary partnerships and developing capability.
40. Through the Data Science Campus we aim to build data science capability across the public sector, which aligns to the National Data Strategy. The Campus has provided data science learning across Government since 2018. We have also offered and developed varying pathways into data science, such as apprenticeship programmes for Data Analysts at Level 4 since 2017 and for Data Science at Level 6 from 2019, and graduate Data Science programmes from 2019.

Formulating and communicating expert advice to UK Government

The Code of Practice for Statistics and categories of statistics

41. As set out in the 2007 Act, official statistics should serve the public good.
42. The Code of Practice for Statistics sets the standards that producers of official statistics should follow. It provides a framework to ensure that statistics are trustworthy, of good quality, and valuable. The Code is based on a number of key

principles. For example, those producing statistics must demonstrate their integrity and professionalism; and statistics must be equally available to all and not be released partially or to selected audiences.

43. OSR sets this statutory Code, assesses compliance with the Code, and awards the National Statistics designation to official statistics that comply with the highest standards of the Code.
44. Beyond the Code, OSR also highlights the importance of intelligent transparency to support public confidence in statistics and the organisations that produce them. This would cover wider analysis including modelling. This is guided by three principles:
 - a. Equality of access: data quoted publicly should be made available to all in a transparent way.
 - b. Understanding: analytical professions need to work together to provide data which enhances understanding of societal and economic matters, including the impacts of policy.
 - c. Leadership: decisions about publication of statistics and data, such as content and timing, should be independent of political and policy processes, and should be made by analytical leaders.
45. An official statistic is:
 - a. Produced by a Crown body or organisation as defined in the 2007 Act.
 - b. Any set of statistics produced by a Crown body or organisation named under secondary legislation (the Official Statistics Order).
46. The term 'official statistics' includes two types of statistics produced by public bodies:
 - a. National Statistics: official statistics which have been assessed by OSR as fully compliant with the Code. The designation of National Statistics may be removed by OSR where there is clear non-compliance with the Code. There are 43 official statistics that have had the National Statistics designation removed, 13 of which have been redesignated.
 - b. Experimental statistics: a subset of official statistics going through development and evaluation and may have a wider degree of uncertainty. The status of experimental statistics is useful as it allows producers of statistics to involve users in the assessment of suitability and quality at an early stage.
47. The term 'non-official statistics' may be used to describe those produced by organisations not named in the 2007 Act or related secondary legislation, such as the public sector, charities, academia and commercial organisations. For these instances, OSR offers voluntary adoption of the Code, to encourage analysts to align

- with the recognised standards that the Code requires of official statistics and demonstrate to the public a commitment to trustworthiness, quality and value.
48. Some departments also use unpublished management information to inform decisions related to policy, operations and management. They may choose to release management information where it is in the public interest to do so, in ad hoc and regular releases or as part of official statistics releases. The release should be in line with the guidance I published on management information in October 2019 [ID/6-INQ000130447], following core Code principles:
- a. the publication should be accessible
 - b. data quality and limitations should be explained
 - c. there should be clear separation between the published data and any policy or political message
49. In an emergency situation, such as during the Covid-19 pandemic, there may be a greater reliance on the use of management information. This is to manage the tension between the need for timely evidence to inform fast paced decision-making and full quality assurance processes required for publication. I gave approval for specific ONS management information (such as the Covid-19 Infection Survey (CIS)) to be shared with Government decision-makers a short time before publication to assist with operational planning and decision making during the pandemic period.
50. In addition, during the pandemic, the ONS implemented a new process for ad hoc analysis to be commissioned and delivered safely, making clearance more efficient as a result.
51. Whilst operating at speed during the pandemic response, colleagues in the ONS and the GSS went above and beyond to ensure the information and advice they provided to decision-makers, whether management information or official statistics, was accurate and of high quality.
52. In March 2020, the ONS embedded a member of staff within the Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) Data Team which then joined the Covid-19 Task Force in the Cabinet Office. This was to ensure ONS statistics and analysis could be fed into decision making, and that ONS teams were aware of analytical priorities or gaps and able to respond. This was the main route by which statistics and management information were shared between the ONS and the UK Government. The success of this model led to the creation of the PLU.
53. The ONS also proactively offered and provided support to the UK Government for the daily press conferences on the development and presentation of the daily slides from 30 March 2020 to February 2022. ONS colleagues played a key role in designing

slides to clearly present data, creating an analytical pipeline and ensuring statistical best practice to help users best understand the content.

Public transparency regarding expert advice

54. As discussed at paragraph 44, any statistic that is quoted publicly should be made available to all in a transparent way.
55. To inform urgent operational planning and decision-making for the public good, management information can be shared with named individuals in Government, while being fully quality assured and, in line with the Code, published as soon as possible afterwards.
56. Analytical leaders across the GSS and Analysis Function should be listened to when advising their departments on the best way to communicate statistics and analysis. As mentioned at paragraph 53, ONS colleagues supported the preparation and presentation of data at the daily Downing Street press conferences during the Covid-19 pandemic, to ensure the public were as well-informed as possible and that statistics were presented in a proper manner.
57. Our strategy is clear that *"better data directly informs governments, Parliaments and society. Faster, more relevant data support critical decisions day after day"* [ID/7-INQ000130448]. It is the role of the National Statistician to advise the Government on statistics while also ensuring statistics serve the public good; the former responsibility does not inhibit the latter.

Sources and quality of data in relation to pandemics

Mortality

58. The ONS has published weekly and annual deaths for England and Wales by sex and age since the organisation's inception. The level of detail and narrative in the mortality releases was expanded to reflect user need during the Covid-19 pandemic.
59. Mortality statistics are based on information recorded when deaths are certified and registered, and we receive this information from the General Register Office (GRO). Accordingly, the information used in ONS mortality statistics normally comes from one of four sources:
 - a. details supplied by the doctor when certifying a death, for example, whether the body was seen after death, cause of death, when the deceased was last seen alive and whether a post-mortem was carried out.
 - b. details supplied by the informant to the registrar, for example, occupation of deceased, sex, usual address, date and place of birth, marital status, date of death and place of death.

- c. details supplied by a coroner to the registrar following investigation, for example, cause of death (following post-mortem), place of accident (following inquest); in the case of deaths certified after inquest, the coroner supplies the registrar with all the particulars that would have been supplied by the informant.
- d. details derived from information supplied by one of the other three sources, for example, age of deceased is derived from date of birth and coded cause of death.

60. We store data in a secure server and regularly review permissions so that only those that need access have it.

Mortality data by protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 and other kinds of inequalities and vulnerabilities

- 61. As previously mentioned, the ONS has always published deaths by age and sex.
- 62. During the Covid-19 pandemic, we linked mortality data with Census data to publish mortality by ethnicity, disability and religion.
- 63. In April 2020 we began producing deaths involving Covid-19 by pre-existing health conditions in England; this publication, in line with our approach to measuring Covid-19 deaths, now focuses on deaths due to Covid-19 by pre-existing health conditions in England. This decision (to move from deaths involving Covid-19 to deaths due to Covid-19) was taken by the mortality team to reflect the evolving nature of the pandemic. Medication taken and previous medical conditions are not listed as part of the death registration process, unless directly attributable or a contributory factor to the death.
- 64. The ONS publishes avoidable mortality in Great Britain annually, which includes breakdowns by local authority geography and socioeconomic inequalities, using death registration data and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) international avoidable mortality definition.
- 65. We produce experimental statistics on deaths of homeless people in England and Wales. This involves the complete death registration records held by the ONS, for deaths registered in the calendar years 2013 to 2021, being analysed using multiple search strategies to identify all those deaths where there was evidence that the deceased was homeless at or around the time of death. Then, the results of the searches are used in a statistical modelling technique known as 'capture-recapture' to estimate a total figure, which allows for the likelihood of more deaths of homeless people being present in the data but not identified.

66. We produce number of deaths by underlying cause in our regular bulletins as well as through NOMIS (an ONS service that offers a wide range of current and historic data from surveys and administrative sources including on labour market and population statistics, broken down by areas collected by the ONS and other government departments) and for mental health would use International Classification of Diseases (ICD) codes F00-F99 Mental and behavioural disorders. The ONS has a separate release looking at registered deaths in England and Wales from suicide and has looked at these by sociodemographic inequalities. We can also produce the number of deaths that occurred in mental health establishments.
67. The ONS publishes some information on domestic homicides using police recorded crime data, whilst the Ministry of Justice publishes deaths during or following police contact.
68. We have published some experimental statistics on climate related mortality looking at changes in deaths from conditions associated with warmer and colder days.

Infections

69. The ONS was commissioned in April 2020 by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to deliver the CIS, a longitudinal study (a survey design that contacts the same individuals over time to detect changes) of the population prevalence of asymptomatic Covid-19 infection in the community. Prior to this the ONS had not published official statistics estimating infection.

Infections data by protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 and other kinds of inequalities and vulnerabilities

70. The ONS has published infection survey data by age, sex, ethnicity, disability, long-term health condition and deprivation, as well as work status, location and sector, household size, region and urban or rural status.
71. We have also used different survey sources to consider the impact of coronavirus on mental health and on crime such as domestic abuse.

Wider ONS work on inclusive data and statistics

72. The ONS established the Centre for Equalities and Inclusion in 2018; a multi-disciplinary convening centre, focusing on improving cross-cutting equalities data and analysis. At my request, an independent Inclusive Data Taskforce was established in 2020, comprising of senior academics and civil society leaders. They were asked to advise on how we can make a step-change in the inclusivity of UK data and evidence and created an ambitious blueprint for change, outlined in the report, *Leaving no one*

behind. How can we be more inclusive in our data? [ID/8- INQ000130449], published in September 2021.

73. The ONS's current strategy, 'Statistics for the Public Good', lists four key principles that underpin the work of the statistical system. One such principle is to be inclusive in our approach to design of data, statistics and analysis. This builds upon work before 2020, ensuring our statistics and workforce reflect experiences of everyone in society.

Inter-organisational cooperation

Relationship with the Devolved Administrations

74. The statistical system is a collegiate structure with a wide range of official statistics collected, produced and disseminated by statisticians and other civil servants across Government, all overseen by the Authority. Statisticians are embedded within departments, close to decision makers and data collection systems, with their structures each tailored to individual department needs. This approach works in line with devolution settlements, allowing official statistics to best meet the needs of the public and decision makers within devolved regions and capitalise on data sources in devolved policy areas.
75. As noted at paragraph 10, each Government department that produces official statistics and employs a considerable number of professional statisticians is expected to recruit a statistical HoP. In the case of each devolved administration, the most senior statistician is known as the Chief Statistician. They are still expected to follow the same recruitment principles and roles and responsibilities of a statistical HoP. In some instances, the Chief Statisticians may take on additional responsibilities, for example the Northern Ireland (NI) Chief Statistician is also the NI registrar general. Such additional responsibilities are not mandated by the Authority.
76. The Concordat on Statistics is an agreed framework for co-operation between the UK Government and devolved administrations, providing assurance they will work together to meet public need by producing coherent and comparable statistics at the UK and disaggregated levels, while recognising differing policy contexts.
77. The Concordat covers key areas of statistical production, including cooperation on:
- a. identifying user needs
 - b. the production of coherent or comparable official statistics to meet these needs
 - c. efficient and joined-up statistical infrastructure and data collection
 - d. international reporting
 - e. safe and timely data sharing

f. professional standards and statistical staff

78. Formal governance and oversight of the Concordat is provided by the Inter Administration Committee (IAC), chaired by me as the National Statistician, with membership which includes the Chief Statisticians of the devolved administrations. The IAC promotes statistical coherence across the administrations of the UK and resolves inter-administration issues should they arise.
79. The Concordat and IAC do not have specific provisions with regards to national resilience or emergency responses. The IAC has considered the coherency and comparability of health-related statistics, however this related to the overall landscape of this topic, and not specifically for the purposes of crisis response.

Engagement with Expert Advisory Groups

80. The ONS engages with expert advisory groups (expert partners) both within and beyond UK Government, such as academics. These are often represented through a network of advisory committees and panels on specific topics, such as the National Statistician's Data Ethics Advisory Committee and the National Statistician's Inclusive Data Advisory Committee.
81. To the best of my knowledge and following searches of the information held by the ONS, the National Statistician, Deputy National Statisticians and the ONS did not engage with any expert advisory groups (expert partners) between 11 June 2009 to 21 January 2020 on key preparedness and resilience functions. The ONS did however engage with such groups and academic partners once the ONS pandemic response was established from March 2020 onwards.

International Engagement

82. To the best of my knowledge and following searches of the information held by the ONS there was not involvement by the National Statistician or the ONS in past UK and worldwide epidemics or pandemics. Similarly, other than the interactions detailed in paragraphs 83, 87 and 138 to the best of my knowledge and following searches of the information held by the ONS, the National Statistician, Deputy National Statisticians and the ONS did not, between 11 June 2009 to 21 January 2020, engage with international organisations or expert advisory structures in other countries regarding emergency planning for the key preparedness and resilience functions or the Covid-19 pandemic.
83. In searching ONS records we identified that in April 2016, the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Task Force on Measuring Extreme Events and Disasters distributed a survey [ID/9- INQ000130450] which sought to: *'identify the role of NSOs (National Statistics Offices), the institutional cooperation,*

main challenges, main data sources and existing key statistics on extreme events and disasters. The survey also looked to: *'help to identify those official statistics which are needed by different stakeholders in different phases of disaster risk management.'* Following searches of ONS records I understand that the survey was passed to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to coordinate a UK response [ID/10- INQ000130451]. There is also record of CCS requesting input from the ONS to the same survey [ID/11- INQ000130452] It has not been possible to identify any content sent by the ONS to DEFRA or CCS to add to the returns, or their completed returns to the UNECE. In the case of the DEFRA return we have a record that the survey was returned to the UNECE but not of the survey response itself [ID/12- INQ000130453].

84. In searching ONS records we identified that in 2019, ahead of the UNECE Conference of European Statisticians (CES) plenary session, a Task Force on Measuring Extreme Events and Disasters established in 2015 (the UK was not a member of the Task Force) shared a document entitled 'Recommendations on the Role of Official Statistics in Measuring Hazardous Events and Disasters' for consultation [ID/13- INQ000130454].
85. The document set out recommendations that sought to clarify the role of national statistical offices and statistical systems in providing information related to hazardous events and disasters and supporting disaster risk management. Following searches of ONS records we have not been able to identify any feedback sent by the ONS on the document shared ahead of the plenary session.
86. We also identified that the ONS has been involved with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. This was endorsed by the UN General Assembly in 2015 and is being implemented by the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). The Framework has *'the overall objective to substantially reduce disaster risk and losses in lives, livelihoods and health and in the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities and countries.'* As part of this, the Framework outlines seven global targets to guide and assess progress against. Whilst the CCS based in Cabinet Office are the UK Government lead for this work, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and the ONS play a role in contributing UK data relating to the global targets, which also relate to several indicators of the Sustainable Development Goals. Cabinet Office, the ONS and UKHSA are working jointly on methodological issues to improve UK reporting to the UNDRR.
87. The ONS is also currently in the early stages of establishing a project sponsored by the Wellcome Trust to support national statistical offices, especially in low- and

middle-income countries, to build infectious disease surveillance capacity. This will draw on the ONS's experience of delivering the CIS and create an accessible toolkit to help countries with their pandemic responses and evidence-based policy decisions.

EU Exit and Engagement

88. The Authority's European Union (EU) Exit Programme was initiated shortly after the 2016 referendum to lead the statistical aspects of the UK's exit from the EU, leveraging opportunities to transform statistics consistent with the Authority's strategy at the time, Better Statistics, Better Decisions, while mitigating the risks.
89. The programme operated as a central co-ordinating function, working closely with relevant colleagues from the Authority, the ONS and the wider GSS. The work of the EU Exit Programme did not extend to the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) or Scientific Advisory Entities.
90. The programme's work encompassed both statistical analysis in support of the Government's policy-making process, as well as developing the plans, policies and legislation necessary to ensure the effective functioning of the statistical system post-exit. The programme also provided information and support for EU nationals working in the statistical system.
91. The EU Exit programme concluded that the UK's decision to leave the EU was not expected to greatly impact the suite of statistics the UK statistical system would want to produce. This was largely because of the overlapping nature of UK, European and other international statistical systems:
 - a. Eurostat (the statistical office of the European Union) operates under a federal system: it relies on the national statistical institutes to coordinate collection of data on its behalf so that it may produce European statistics. European statistics are only those necessary for the performance of the EU's activities, and Member States retain sole competence to produce statistics as they see fit for national purposes, including where those statistics overlap with EU statistics law.
 - b. Much of the European framework for statistics set by Eurostat is derived from standards set by other international bodies such as the UN and the OECD, of which the UK continues to be a member.
 - c. Both before and after the UK's withdrawal from the EU, the production, dissemination and regulation of UK statistics operates under the UK's existing statistical framework, the basis of which lies in the 2007 Act.

92. Similarly, statistical work within the European Statistical Programme is generally resourced by individual member states, not through Eurostat. Nevertheless, statistical authorities in EU and European Economic Area (EEA) states may bid for small amounts of grant funding, often for pilot studies or development work that would not otherwise have been a priority. The ONS received such grant funding for specific work in the years prior to the 2016 referendum.

Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE)

93. SAGE is an advisory group. Its advice is limited to scientific matters and is a cross-disciplinary consensus view based on the best available evidence at the time.

94. I first attended SAGE in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic on 13 March 2020 (the fifteenth meeting), outside of the Inquiry's reference period 11 June 2009 to 21 January 2020. Before then, neither I, nor to the best of my knowledge, my predecessors or deputies, had attended SAGE.

95. In relation to other scientific advisory entities, such as Scientific Pandemic Infections Group on Modelling (SPI-M) and its Operational sub-group (SPI-M-O); the secretariat for both is an analytical team within DHSC (and its predecessor organisations) made up of individuals from across the government analytical community, including the GSS. As I understand, this has been the case throughout the period 11 June 2009 to 21 January 2020.

96. To the best of my knowledge and following searches of ONS records, it has not been possible to identify any evidence that I, my predecessors, or deputies engaged with other scientific advisory entities in the period 11 June 2009 to 20 January 2020.

97. I would note that SPI-M and SPI-M-O receive statistical research and evidence from academic experts. This is often more technical or experimental in its nature than that provided by statisticians in government, and often need translating into policy-relevant insights, or adapted for a layperson. This may mean that, during non-crisis times, this research become available through peer review journals. As expert groups are providing analyses independent from policy, it is right that these sources of evidence do not, necessarily, follow the same processes as those analyses provided by government.

With key officials in science

98. As referenced at paragraph 14, the National Statistician role involves providing leadership on the use of statistics across government, including bringing together analytical disciplines. My predecessors and I hold good and collaborative relationships with current and previous Government Chief Scientific Advisors (CSA) and wider GO-Science. These ranged from informal engagement to quarterly

meetings during 11 June 2009 to 21 January 2020. The engagement with previous Chief Medical Officers (CMO) was less frequent and more informal.

99. From the perspective of the wider ONS, engagement with current and previous CMOs and CSAs was limited to attendance of a lecture led by Professor Sir Chris Whitty in 2017 on potential public health risks in conjunction with an overview of the National Risk Register.
100. To the best of my knowledge, and following searches of the information held by the ONS, I do not believe that either myself, former National Statisticians, the Deputy National Statisticians or the ONS maintained relationships in any capacity, especially in emergency situations with the following officials:
- a. departmental and deputy departmental Chief Scientific Advisers (“CSAs”)
 - b. the Deputy Chief Medical Officers for England (“DCMOs for England”)
 - c. the Office of the CMO for England and CMA to the UK Government
 - d. the Chief Nursing Officer for England (“CNO for England”)
 - e. the Deputy Chief Nursing Officers for England (“DCNOs for England”)
 - f. other key members of the Government Science and Engineering (“GSE”) Profession and the Medical Profession in the UK Government; and
 - g. the Chief Veterinary Officer for the UK (“CVO”) in the context of zoonotic diseases and non-human to human transmission.
101. As such I am unable to offer a comprehensive view on the leadership, governance and structures of all the officials mentioned in relation to emergency situations.
102. From the perspective of the ONS, the formulation and communication of advice to UK Government decision-makers in emergency situations is generally through departmental input into Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms (COBR) situational reporting, which may have included ONS statistics. On an ongoing basis during crisis times, SAGE, the CSA and CMO provide advice to decision makers with support from the relevant lead government department, for example the Covid-19 Taskforce within Cabinet Office during the pandemic.

The ONS’s role in Government pandemic planning and preparedness

103. To the best of my knowledge and following searches of the information held by the ONS, I do not believe that either myself, former National Statisticians, the Deputy National Statisticians or the ONS were involved in the activities listed below during the time period of 11 June 2009 to 21 January 2020. As such I am unable to offer a view on aspects such as the effectiveness of the activities listed:

- a. Forecasts for an influenza pandemic or a new emerging high-consequence infectious disease pandemic
- b. Processes, systems or methodologies concerning future analysis and horizon scanning within the UK Government in relation to high-consequence infectious diseases, epidemics and pandemics.
- c. Readiness preparations specifically for new and emerging high-consequence infectious diseases like Covid-19.
- d. Provided advice to UK Government decision-makers and their advisers in relation to planning for, preparing for and managing the risks of high-consequence infectious diseases, epidemics and pandemics.
- e. Epidemic or pandemic simulation exercises and training or activities related to institutional learning arising out of such exercises and training.
- f. Initiatives or activities relating to institutional learning from international comparisons of experiences of civil emergencies, high-consequence infectious diseases, epidemics, pandemics or the Covid-19 pandemic.
- g. Any direct responsibilities for, or involvement in the UK Government's planning, policy and operational initiatives relating to managing public health services in the event of high-consequence infectious diseases, epidemics or pandemics.
- h. How the UK Government assesses and plans for the potential impacts on specific groups occurring in the event of a civil emergency, the risk factors which affect the extent of those potential impacts on specific groups and specific needs of specific groups required to mitigate any identified impacts (however, since March 2020 the ONS's work during the pandemic has highlighted the value that ONS data and analysis can play in understanding the distributional impacts of civil emergencies and presented an opportunity for the ONS to support decision makers with insightful data in this context).
- i. Cross-organisation cooperation with public sector bodies such as, NHS England, the private (including business, industry and unions) and voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors in relation to planning for, preparing for, and management of risks of high-consequence infectious diseases, epidemics and pandemics.
- j. Involvement in any large-scale preparedness exercises across government (other than the activity noted in paragraph 107 onwards) including:
 - i. the key preparedness and resilience functions
 - ii. the Covid-19 pandemic (as it became); and the Pandemic Influenza Preparedness Programme ("PIPP")

- iii. the Pandemic Flu Readiness Board (“PFRB”)
 - iv. the Emergency Preparedness, Resilience and Response Partnership Group (“EPRRPG”)
 - v. large-scale pandemic preparedness exercises; and
 - vi. UK pandemic preparedness plans.
104. As part of our searches, we have also not identified any formal systems or processes relating to preserving institutional memory from past UK civil emergencies and UK or worldwide high-consequence infectious diseases, epidemics and pandemics.
105. During the Covid-19 pandemic response the ONS was able to demonstrate its capability in offering key insights for decision makers and the public and I believe that there would be great value in involving the ONS in future initiatives and planning activities for responding to civil emergencies.
106. In conducting searches of ONS records there were some items that may be of interest to the Inquiry in relation to the Provisional Outline of Module 1. I have detailed these below.
107. In August 2015 the then National Statistician received an invitation sent to Permanent Secretaries [ID/14- INQ000130455] regarding the launch of the National Risk Assessment.
108. In September 2017 the National Security Adviser and the Permanent Secretary at the Department of Health (DH) wrote a joint letter to Permanent Secretaries on pandemic flu preparedness. This was part of a cross-government work programme to enhance preparedness for pandemic influenza led jointly by DH and CCS. The letter sought a point person from each Department to be put in touch with DH and CCS and our searches indicate that the ONS nominated the then HR Deputy Director. A copy of the letter is exhibited as part of this return [ID/15- INQ000130456].
109. On 5 December 2018 a colleague from the ONS attended an event hosted by the Foundation for Science and Technology. The Foundation hosted a debate asking the question "Is the UK well prepared for a repeat of the 1918 influenza pandemic?". Based on the information found in searches of ONS records, three speakers opened the debate: Professor Sir Chris Whitty in his role as Chief Scientific Adviser at DHSC, Katharine Hammond, Director of CCS, and the Director of the Advisory Board for the Centre for Risk Studies at the Judge Business School, University of Cambridge.
110. Searches of the ONS’s records also highlighted a document entitled the ‘Core Analytical Script’ [ID/16-INQ000130457]. This document was produced in 2010 by

the analytical professions to brief new Ministers about the professions and it was circulated again in 2015 to be updated with new content and case studies, which included a chapter entitled 'Modelling'. This included examples of modelling being used to support UK contingency planning for pandemic influenza and informing responses to the 'swine flu' pandemic 2009-10 and Ebola outbreaks in Western Africa during 2014-15. Reviewing records, it is not clear which analytical profession added these case studies.

111. As far as we have been able to ascertain, no formal structures existed for the ONS to directly contribute to civil emergency preparedness and responses outside of ad hoc commissions and requests for support between 11 June 2009 and 21 January 2020. As the UK's largest independent producer of official statistics, the ONS produces statistics related to the UK economy, population, and society for use by policy makers and the public. As such, it is possible that government bodies may have used publicly available ONS data as part of their crisis preparedness and resilience work.
112. The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the value that ONS data and analysis can play in preparing for and responding to civil emergencies and presented an opportunity for more direct input to ensure that the full range of ONS data is being used in this context. Within the ONS's PLU, which operates as a link between the ONS and central government policy areas, is a dedicated official for crisis preparedness and response work. This colleague works directly with newly established data-focussed teams such as the National Situation Centre. Through the PLU, the ONS is now systematically reviewing its data holdings against a range of risks outlined in the National Security Risk Assessment (NSRA) and working with the wider analytical community to improve cross-government analytical preparedness to crisis scenarios. The ONS was a key advisor on the update of the NSRA for its 2022 release, supporting teams across government to improve their use of data in NSRA returns and assessment.
113. In addition to the activities listed above, we have conducted internal continuity planning work on an annual basis for all our business areas including for large ONS programmes. For example, as part of the ONS Census programme, extensive incident management and business continuity plans were made in response to a range of risks and scenarios, including that of a pandemic. The risks identified and scenario planning was influenced by the National Risk Register and learnings from the International Census community.

Financial and Economic Planning for Emergencies

114. To the best of my knowledge and following searches of the information held by the ONS, I do not believe that either myself, former National Statisticians, the Deputy National Statisticians or the ONS were involved in the precautionary planning for economic responses by the UK Government, including for high-consequence infectious diseases.
115. The information below regarding Authority funding during the period 11 June 2009 to 21 January 2020 is based on Authority audited Annual Report and Accounts documents for 2009/10 (April 2009 to March 2010) to 2019/20 (April 2019 to March 2020) inclusive.
116. Funding from His Majesty's Treasury (HMT) is allocated in the first instance to the Authority with the majority then allocated to the ONS as the executive office of the organisation. The GSS does not receive separate funding from HMT. Instead, individual government departments receive their own specific funding, from which statistical and analytical activity is in turn funded.
117. This response does not include other sources of ONS income such as contributions from other parties to deliver surveys.
118. The table below sets out expenditure (funded by HMT) on a monetary/cash basis, staffing levels and a summary of what the expenditure relates to. The expenditure trajectory during the time period 2009/10 to 2019/20 can be split into two high level categories – baseline expenditure on core activities, and Programme expenditure on distinct projects.
119. Expenditure across the time frame is largely flat across the baseline with significant spikes reflecting Census programme related activity. From 2016/17 onwards, further additional programmes of activity (predominantly in the Economic Statistics area) result in a gradual increase in organisational expenditure.
120. The figures provided are at Total Departmental Expenditure Limit (TDEL) level which includes expenditure on resource and capital items. It excludes depreciation and Annually Managed Expenditure to avoid double counting over time.
121. These items are classified from an accounting perspective as 'non-cash' and reflect accounting treatments.
122. The staffing levels within the table below are based on Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) and reflect the average number of FTEs on our monthly payroll for the relevant year. Significant spikes in FTE numbers driven by periodic Census Field Force activity have been detailed at the bottom of the table.
123. No separate funding is allocated specifically to the National Statistician or Deputy National Statisticians. The way that expenditure is recorded does not allow

the ONS to identify any spending relating to precautionary emergency planning or preparedness for high-consequence infectious diseases, epidemics and pandemics, however the nature of our ambit (the scope or extent of activity that Authority can use the funding received for) and of our programme objectives does not indicate that funding has been made available for these areas over the described period.

Financial Year	TDEL Expenditure £m*	FTE	Key Activity
2009/10	204	3,302	Baseline; Census 2011 preparation
2010/11	306	3,377**	Baseline; Census 2011 preparation and operation
2011/12	317	3,229***	Baseline; Census 2011 operation and dissemination
2012/13	185	3,007	Baseline; Census 2011 dissemination
2013/14	177	3,029	Baseline; Census 2011 dissemination and programme ramp down
2014/15	167	3,161	Baseline; Census 2011 ramp down
2015/16	171	3,247	Baseline; Census (2021) and Data Collection Transformation Programme (CDCTP) initiation
2016/17	207	3,400	Baseline; CDCTP; Economic Statistics Transformation Programme (ESTP)
2017/18	246	3,685	Baseline; CDCTP; ESTP; Bean Review Recommendations on Economic Statistics
2018/19	276	3,887	Baseline; CDCTP; ESTP; Bean Review Recommendations on Economic Statistics; EU Exit Funding
2019/20	301	4,173	Baseline; CDCTP; ESTP; Bean Review Recommendations on Economic Statistics; EU Exit Funding
*TDEL Expenditure figures have been rounded to the nearest million **Actual FTE including Census Field Force in 2010/11 was 4,163 (786 temporary FTE added) ***Actual FTE including Census Field Force in 2011/12 was 26,971 (23,742 temporary FTE added)			

124. To describe the key activities detailed in the table in more detail:

- a. Baseline is our core organisational funding delegated to the Authority by HMT which is predominantly covered by our ambit. Our ambit is subject to periodic adjustment at the annual fiscal events. Other Programme expenditure listed below relates to specific discrete and time bound activity which would have been subject to specific HMT business case approvals.
- b. Census 2011 Programme. This activity covers the preparation for and the operation of the 2011 Census together with the dissemination of Census results.
- c. Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme (CDCTP). This activity reflects the CDCTP programme encompassing Census 2021 delivery and dissemination plus the transformation of elements of our data collection processes and initial recommendations to inform the National Statistician's recommendation on the future of the Census.
- d. Economic Statistics Transformation Programme. Initiated on the back of Spending Review 2015 with the purpose of improving the production of Economic Statistics.
- e. Bean Review (Programme in nature). A further delegation of funding for additional improvements primarily in respect of Economic Statistics in response to the Bean Review.
- f. EU Exit Funding (Programme in nature). Funding provided to help us prepare – or moreover to reflect the additional work required in Economic Statistics to prepare for EU Exit.

Adequacy of processes and systems for the pandemic in relation to statistics

125. As discussed further at paragraph 130, OSR identified specific issues in the health and care statistical landscape following consultation with users ahead of the pandemic, with improvements to coherence and accessibility being key to their recommendations.
126. The value of the English Health Statistics Steering Group (EHSSG) in improving collaboration amongst health statistics producers at the operational level and adopting a coordinated approach in producing statistics was demonstrated during the pandemic as well. The EHSSG used its collaborative strength to engage with the devolved nations and were able to effectively support the surveillance of Covid-19 at the UK level by publishing Covid-19 prevalence statistics in one place.
127. During the pandemic many of the EHSSG theme groups stopped meeting as health analysis resources across government were moved into pandemic focused work. However, we had the ability to ramp up the scope of the mortality theme group.

We immediately broadened the remit to include all devolved nations. This gave the ONS a great platform to disseminate and coordinate across agencies in England (Public Health England (PHE), NHS England (NHSE) and DHSC) and the UK how to collate mortality data during the pandemic. For example, we disseminated the new ICD codes produced by WHO via the group to ensure all agencies were given the most up to date information available about how to collate Covid-19 deaths data, plus discuss methodological issues.

English Health Statistics Steering Group (EHSSG)

128. Health and care statistics provide important information about trends in the population, patterns of medical conditions and the need for healthcare and the activity and effectiveness of health services. This includes information about the numbers of patients treated. By publishing this information, people understand the workloads of different services, study trends in demand and supply, and compare the quality of health care services and how well they are working in different areas and organisations. These statistics are widely used to plan services at national and local levels, develop government policy on major topics, such as pensions, allocate local government and NHS funding according to need, measure changes over time and measure differences between geographical areas and social groups. These data sources contribute to scientific knowledge about population health (known as epidemiology). The data sources also contribute to scientific knowledge about wellbeing and provide evidence for many types of medical research.
129. The ONS publishes information on life expectancy, mortality, health inequalities, disability, addiction and mental health. There are other health and social care statistics producers across Government and the devolved administrations, including: DHSC, NHS Digital, Care Quality Commission (CQC) and UKHSA (previously PHE).
130. In 2015, following a series of assessments, OSR undertook a systemic review, published in 2018 [ID/17- INQ000130458], which detailed several issues within the statistical system where action was required to increase the public value of statistics on health and social care. This included (but not limited to):
 - a. A lack of overarching framework for the production and dissemination of statistics on health and social care in England
 - b. Organisational fragmentation
 - c. Difficulties in linking and sharing data
131. OSR conducted extensive stakeholder engagement, convening and leading three Round Table meetings and two conferences with statistics users and producers

to recognise the issues and drive improvements. The created a set of performance goals and the cross producer EHSSG was formed in 2016 to provide an operational level network.

132. The EHSSG illustrated recognition from the producers within the health and care system of the issues identified in the review, and that they wanted to act in a coherent manner to improve the alignment of publication dates, remove duplication of statistical releases, harmonise methods and definitions and increase user engagement.
133. Members from the ONS, DHSC, NHSE and the UKHSA (then PHE) are members of the EHSSG.
134. There are 15 EHSSG theme groups:
 - a. Adult Social Care
 - b. Alcohol
 - c. Cancer
 - d. Child and Maternal Health
 - e. Cross-UK Performance Statistics
 - f. Disability
 - g. Drugs
 - h. End of Life Care
 - i. Health Inequalities
 - j. Mental Health
 - k. Mortality
 - l. Obesity, Physical Activity and Diet
 - m. Primary and Dental Care, and Oral Health
 - n. Smoking
 - o. Urgent and Emergency Care
135. In 2018, OSR handed over the co-ordination role to improve the coherence and accessibility of statistics on health and care in England to the EHSSG. OSR were confident that the foundations for the improvements to be made had begun and were visible, as detailed in this letter [ID/18- INQ000130459], and informed the EHSSG that they needed to:
 - a. Develop and implement a user/stakeholder engagement strategy, considering the wide range of users and information needs
 - b. Develop a long-term strategy for improving coherence and accessibility of statistics and embed this in an operating model
 - c. Publish a progress update against the 2017 EHSSG workplan and develop a new work plan which goes further, giving consideration to data linkage

- d. Publish action plans for each topic network group and monitor progress against these
 - e. Implement mechanisms to share lessons learned and good practice across the topic networks
 - f. Develop metrics and provide regular updates to OSR on progress towards meeting the performance goals
136. The workplan was originally published as a five-year workplan covering 2019-2024 [ID/19- INQ000130460]. Much of the work of the EHSSG and associated theme groups slowed down or paused during the pandemic response, as health and social care resource pivoted. Therefore, in May 2021, the EHSSG met and an action was taken to review the workplan as the pandemic may have affected the plans, progress and priorities. The EHSSG workplan was updated for 2022-2027 following a review of policy priorities across government [ID/20- INQ000130461].

Our preparations for the Covid-19 pandemic response

137. The ONS responded at pace to the needs of decision makers and the public during the Covid-19 pandemic and set this out in detail in our response to Module 2 of the Inquiry.
138. In December 2019, Health Analysis colleagues were involved in informal discussions by phone with the World Health Organisation (WHO) regarding classifying the new virus. This was through our membership of technical groups on mortality statistics where we represent the UK, particularly the Mortality Reference Group for the ICD.
139. Our first request for analysis relating to Covid-19 was received on 24 January 2020 from the DfID Chief Scientific Advisor. This was to help identify flight networks from Wuhan to Asian and African countries, to enable DfID to target support to those countries with poorly resourced health services that might be highly impacted. This work was completed at pace by our Data Science Campus working in collaboration with colleagues across government.

Lessons learned exercises

140. Since March 2020, ONS colleagues have conducted or been involved with work reflecting on both the role and work of the ONS and GSS during the pandemic response. Below I have detailed work we have identified as relating to the Provisional Outline of Scope for Module 1, mainly with regards to the 'inter-organisational processes and cooperation' aspect.
141. Whilst this includes some lessons learned work involving GSS Heads of Profession and lead officials, it does not cover all such work that colleagues across

the GSS may have been involved with due to the size and nature of the statistical system.

142. In April 2022, the Cabinet Office commissioned departments for information to help capture innovations made during the pandemic period. The commission requested:

- a. Any existing lessons learned documents which identify improvements to productivity or service delivery, delivered in the context of the pandemic, covering the timespan of any point over the past 2 years
- b. Any analysis or evaluation of the impact of innovations or improvements made
- c. Examples and details of recent lessons that have been embedded in teams or departments, especially those with potential to improve productivity or service delivery outside of crises, and at scale.

143. Not all the lessons learnt work that was shared with the Cabinet Office relates to the Provisional Outline of Scope for Module 1 and so has not been listed below as part this response, but it is included in the exhibited return that was shared with Cabinet Office [ID/21-INQ000130462].

144. *June 2020, Looking forward review.* I commissioned the ONS's Interim Director General for Data Capability, Francesca Kay, and the then Head of Strategy Group to conduct a short internal piece of work to capture the opportunities that had materialised because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Amongst the high-level strategic recommendations, the review noted that cross-department and cross-discipline working should continue to be improved.

145. By engaging with ONS colleagues and stakeholders, and using focus groups and 'pulse surveys', information was gathered from across the organisation. This review was published internally. It provided 22 recommendations, outlining areas that we as an organisation wished to retain in the future and aspects of existing work practices that we wished to combine with new approaches. There were four high level strategic recommendations:

- a. The ONS should be on the front foot with the evidence needs of the nation.
- b. Improvements in the communication of statistics during the pandemic should be built upon.
- c. Cross-department and cross-discipline working should continue to be improved.
- d. Policies and practices should reflect the new context, for example where colleagues work.

146. The other recommendations in the review focused on people and resources, new outputs and products, and key existing statistical series. These were shared as part of the ONS's submission to Cabinet Office detailed at paragraph 143.
147. *June 2020, reflections on the Analysis Function's response to Covid-19.* A paper by DHSC's Director of Analysis reflecting on the Function's role in decision making during the pandemic, also included in the ONS's submission to Cabinet Office at paragraph 143. The paper was discussed at the Analysis Function Board which I chair as Head of the Analysis Function. The paper provided five main reflections on the role that the Function played in decision making during the pandemic and included recognition that there had been strong collaboration across departments. The five reflections were as follows:
- a. Analysis had played a prominent role in Covid decision-making.
 - b. We had risen to the challenge in rapidly developing new statistics, surveys and evaluations.
 - c. Data sharing and visualisation had been fast-tracked.
 - d. There had been strong collaboration across departments.
 - e. Analytical resource from across government had been shared, bringing our staff together in high-performing new teams.
148. *November 2020, rapid high-level lessons learned review.* In November 2020, NSEG commissioned a rapid high-level lessons learned review across the statistical system. This was undertaken in January 2021 and presented to NSEG and the IAC in February 2021 [ID/22- INQ000130463] with its annex [ID/23- INQ000130464].
149. This review was conducted via video sessions and a written proforma, consulting with GSS Heads of Profession and lead officials, Chief Statisticians from the devolved administrations and the GSS IAC, staff from the ONS and the devolved administrations, and Authority colleagues including Deputy National Statisticians, ONS Outputs Group, CPS and OSR.
150. The review made some short, high-level reflections on lessons learned and drew from other reflective work conducted across the GSS, namely that the GSS had risen to the challenges posed by the pandemic and responded in an agile and innovative way across the GSS and devolved administrations. It was also noted that the GSS had increased its influence in informing decision makers in Government. The paper highlighted challenges that the GSS faced which included resources, data sharing across departments and differences in definitions or methods particularly in relation to devolved statistics.
151. This work continued after the initial review and two further papers were tabled at NSEG in April 2021 and February 2022. These were shared with the Cabinet

Office as detailed in paragraph 143. The April 2021 paper updated NSEG on work that had taken place since the findings were first presented in February 2021 and set out a timeline summarising initiatives taking place across the GSS and Analysis Function. The February 2022 paper provided a strategic overview of the breadth of work happening across the GSS and Analysis Function that has supported the statistical and analytical communities to build on the successes achieved in the pandemic response.

152. In June 2021, a meeting of Departmental Directors of Analysis (Departmental Directors of Analysis are the senior officer accountable for analysis in an organisation) considered a paper, [ID/24- INQ000130465], which drew upon the findings of the GSS lessons learned work (noted at paragraph 148) and supplemented it with similar work undertaken by other analytical professions. Profession leads were invited to feed in on behalf of their professions. Findings included noting the enhanced collaboration across professions and Departments.
153. In October 2021, OSR published a report on the lessons learned for health and social care statistics in the UK during the pandemic [ID/25- INQ000130466]. This included identifying the value of analytical collaboration in producing statistics during the pandemic. The report noted that *'strong analytical collaboration resulted in valuable, high-quality, coherent statistics during the pandemic. Taking this approach to other topics will help overcome existing and future problems.'* The report also noted the challenges to collaboration such as the number of different producers responsible for health and social care data in England which is a result of the fragmented nature of the health and social care system. The review considered that *'there should be clearer analytical leadership and coordination of health and social care statistics in England.'*
154. As part of the evidence gathering for this review, OSR spoke to producers and users of health and social care statistics from across the UK. In addition to these interviews, OSR gathered evidence from other sources including written contributions from statistics producers and users, evidence gathered as part of regulatory work during March 2020 – October 2021, and published reports by other organisations such as the National Audit Office, the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) and the Institute for Government.
155. OSR published a follow-up report on health and social care statistics in the UK in November 2022 [ID/26- INQ000130467]. In relation to the Provisional Outline of Scope for Module 1, the report again noted the value of collaboration stating that it was an 'essential part' of the statistical system's response. The 2022 report also noted that in response to OSR's recommendation in the 2021 review the English

Health Statistics Leadership Forum was established with the aim of ensuring statistical outputs are aligned across the health statistics system.

156. OSR gathered evidence by talking to producers and users of health and social care statistics from across the UK. They also gathered evidence via written contributions from statistics producers and users, evidence gathered as part of regulatory work during October 2021 – October 2022, and the RSS Covid-19 evidence sessions.
157. In June 2022, the Interim Deputy National Statistician for Health, Population and Methods, Emma Rourke, spoke at an event hosted by the RSS. This looked at evidence and policy making as part of the RSS's series of events entitled Covid-19 Evidence Sessions. As part of this Emma noted that statisticians should be engaged as experts in crisis response. She also noted the agility of statisticians during the pandemic, working across departments and topic areas to support the pandemic response.
158. In December 2022, the ONS commissioned an external review considering 'Evaluation of the ONS' role in the CIS programme' conducted by RSM UK Consulting LLP in partnership with NatCen Social Science Research [ID/27-INQ000130468]. The evaluation was undertaken using the following methods:
- a. A desk review of existing documents and data relating to the Programme as submitted by the ONS in relation to the key lines of enquiry for the review.
 - b. Data collection through an ONS staff survey, the Schools Infection Survey (SIS) and public perceptions survey, qualitative interviews with ONS staff, end-users, headteachers, and other programme users.
 - c. Thematic analysis of interview notes/transcriptions.
159. The evaluation took place between April 2022 and July 2022, with the report published 12 December 2022. The evaluation looked at CIS, SIS, Vivaldi Study, Daily Contact Test, the International Passenger Survey (IPS) and the Covid-19 modelling hub. These surveys and studies were all part of the ONS's work to support the monitoring of Covid-19.
160. As part of its key lines of enquiry, the review sought to identify lessons on challenges as well as successes experienced, so that future ONS programmes can learn from these and be delivered more efficiently and effectively. With regard to the Provisional Scope for Module 1 the review touched on the 'inter-organisational processes and cooperation' aspect. For example, the review noted that *'ONS staff reported that both internal and external processes and lines of communication with government departments had been improved as a result of working on the*

programme'. Amongst lessons learned, the review noted that the ONS should consider developing an emergency resourcing plan for future programmes.

Changes following the Covid-19 pandemic

161. The ONS adapted ways of working and processes in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. In relation to the Provisional Scope for Module 1, the main area in which the ONS made changes to its systems or processes relates to 'inter-organisational processes and cooperation'. Asides from the evaluation of the ONS' role in the CIS programme review discussed at paragraph 158, we have not formally responded to the lessons learned reviews from the pandemic period. However, we continue to reflect on how we can maintain the momentum built during the pandemic across the organisation, which effectively demonstrated the strengths and capability of the statistical system. We have also retained ways of working that commenced during the pandemic and I have detailed some of these below.
162. As noted in paragraph 52, the ONS's PLU was informally established when an ONS colleague was seconded into the CCS data team. This later merged into the Covid-19 Taskforce based in the Cabinet Office to directly understand the data needs and requirements of the UK Government. We retained a colleague there throughout the pandemic through to the evolution of Taskforce in mid-2022 (when it formed into the Joint Data and Analysis Centre (JDAC)). The success of this model led to the creation of the PLU with a small team of colleagues working closely with government departments to better understand policy priorities and data gaps and highlight where ONS data can help inform these areas.
163. The approaches we used to deliver insights during the pandemic, such as regular flexible surveys, are continuing to prove their value in tracking current societal and economic issues, such as the rising cost of living, and will do so in any future emergency situations. Throughout the pandemic we were agile and proactive in identifying the data, statistics and analysis that decision-makers and the public needed to respond to the pandemic and introduced new surveys such as the Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS), Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) and CIS. We also safely procured and used new data sources such as financial transactions to provide novel insights for decision-makers. We continue to work closely with government departments regarding survey and questionnaire design to better reflect user need. Given the frequency of data collection for these surveys, we can adapt survey questions to reflect data needs and provide insights incredibly quickly.

164. We have also retained some of the governance structures that supplemented existing arrangements during the pandemic. For example, during the pandemic, we introduced Outputs Group to oversee our analytical outputs and help make strategic decisions such as when less critical releases could be paused to allow colleagues to focus on priority products at the time. We recognise the value of this forum and it continues to meet every week supporting ONS colleagues in the preparation and planning of analytical outputs.

Reflections on preparedness and resilience processes

165. At the very beginning of the pandemic from January to early March 2020 the ONS had some involvement in the pandemic response, which is detailed in paragraphs 138 and 139. From March 2020 onwards, we demonstrated how our data and capabilities could support the pandemic response and developed our working relationships across government. The limited level of our involvement in the early months of 2020 could have impacted central government's availability to identify and access information needed to make decisions at the start of the pandemic. A quick response and management of any pandemic is essential, and central to that is the availability of good information. The ONS, as a trusted, independent producer of high-quality statistics should be involved in the preparation and delivery of that information at the earliest opportunity.

166. Since March 2020 our engagement across government has increased. For example, a member of PLU is now embedded within the National Situation Centre (SitCen) which was formed following the pandemic to improve situational awareness during national crisis scenarios by bringing together data and analytical expertise from across and beyond government. The ONS's work with SitCen plays a key role in informing government preparedness and response to crises and demonstrates the value of utilising multiple sources of data. Via the work of the PLU, the ONS is supporting work to improve UK-wide preparedness and resilience plans, including:

- a. Acting as conduit between central government teams working on pandemic preparedness and the wider ONS to identify opportunities for greater collaboration.
- b. Mapping existing ONS-held data to the pandemic scenario as detailed in the NSRA.
- c. Establishing a formal relationship with SitCen to rapidly collate ONS evidence in crisis response scenarios so that it may be made directly available to decision making forums such as COBR.

- d. Working with the Analysis Function to improve cross-government structures, standards, and guidance on analysis and data sharing during civil emergency scenarios.
 - e. Establishing ONS representation on key cross-government pandemic preparedness and risk management steering groups.
167. Utilising a range of data sources is not only essential to pandemic management but in the identification of illnesses and disease more generally. To facilitate the use of and access to multiple data sources, data sharing agreements must be arranged, where doing so is lawful, necessary, proportionate and safe. The importance of such agreements should not be understated to ensure that the appropriate data is accessible.
168. The ONS responded at pace during the pandemic to identify and establish new sources of data to deliver insights for decision makers and the public. For example, the ONS delivered the CIS in unprecedented time for a survey of its size and complexity. The CIS is the largest regular survey of coronavirus infections and antibodies and provides vital information to help the UK's pandemic response, delivering data breakdowns by age and region across all four nations.
169. A significant amount of work has gone into developing insight tools such as the CIS from scratch. I encourage the Government to continue working with the ONS to transition to a sustainable but ongoing infrastructure for health surveillance and crisis preparedness.
170. Based on my experience in the role as National Statistician, there are some actions that would aid the ability of the UK to respond to a future pandemic. With multiple data sources being utilised and considered during a pandemic or crisis, the role of the National Statistician in advising the government on the utility of different data sources is as important as CMO and CSA advice to government on matters related to their respective roles. The National Statistician should be supported in identifying relevant data from across the United Kingdom to deliver key insights and harmonise data to allow comparisons to be made across all four nations.
171. The relationship between the National Statistician, CMO and CSA is an important one and there would be great value in formalising regular interactions between the individuals in those roles. Establishing a regular rhythm of meetings would strengthen the relationships and knowledge sharing that would be valuable in any pandemic or crisis response. Furthermore, continuing to invite these three post holders to attend and present insights at meetings of Permanent Secretaries should continue.

172. I also hope that the recently established Social and Behavioural Science for Emergencies Steering Group chaired by Professor Jennifer Rubin, Chief Scientific Adviser at the Home Office will play a key role in horizon scanning, emergency planning and clarifying the role that social science can play in this area.

Statement of Truth

I believe that the facts stated in this witness statement are true. I understand that proceedings may be brought against anyone who makes, or causes to be made, a false statement in a document verified by a statement of truth without an honest belief of its truth.

Signed: _____ Personal Data _____

Dated: _____ 18/04/2023 _____