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**Stakeholder Engagement - the UK's Office for National Statistics Experience**

**Introduction**

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has a vision: ‘to be widely respected as the leading producer of high quality statistics showing the changes in the UK’s economy and society, and to publish our statistics and analysis in a way that makes it easy for people to use them to inform debate and improve decision making.’ This can only be achieved by working with and through other people and organisations.

Our customer relationships are fundamental to achieving success. We want to develop and target our products to increase the use of our statistics and analysis in policy development, decision making and public debate. By improving the dissemination and communication of our statistics and analyses we also aim to increase the reach of our statistics among more occasional users, helping our statistics contribute to the daily lives of UK citizens.

The ONS recognises a range of stakeholders who we need to work with including:

- users - individuals or groups who use, or could use, our statistics;
- respondents - people, businesses and organisations who take part in our surveys;
- partners - organisations who collaborate with ONS to produce and disseminate our statistics;
- funders - provide funding for ONS, including HM Treasury and others who fund some of our surveys and statistics;
- ONS employees - people who contribute to the delivery of ONS's objectives; and
- other bodies – including UK Statistics Authority, Eurostat, OECD, UN, media, regulators and suppliers.

This paper concentrates on the ONS’s engagement with the users of our statistics, describing our strategy for this engagement and includes two case studies and a description of how we engage with our key stakeholders.

**User Engagement strategy**

This strategy is focused on our users and sets out how we will encourage and promote user engagement as a driver for improvement and achieving our vision. The strategy is intended to be a

high level document from which ONS Directorates and Divisions will develop more detailed user engagement plans specific to their users. Two of these are included as case studies (see below).

ONS users are defined in this strategy as ‘individuals or groups who use, or could use, our statistics’ and we define customers as users who we know and are in regular contact with.

The User engagement strategy therefore has two key aims:

- to turn users into customers, and customers into ambassadors; and
- to broaden our engagement with users.

Through an effective engagement strategy, we aim to understand more about our frequent and infrequent users by improving our dialogue with them, helping us better understand their needs and to help them better understand and use our statistics in an informed way. This will help them become informed customers. In due course, active partnership working with our customers will encourage them to take on an ambassador role for ONS, promoting our statistics and services to their peers.

Through effective stakeholder engagement, ONS expects to:

- make our overall performance more effective;
- seek and identify solutions;
- become more innovative, develop new business and access new markets;
- identify emerging issues and resolve negative feedback at the earliest opportunity;
- utilise outside expertise and advice in ONS to further our objective of becoming a learning organisation;
- create a more positive public image, enhance our community relations and improve our reputation;
- better understand users’ needs and to supply data better suited to stakeholder requirements and improving dissemination e.g. via the ONS website; and
- help statistics to be used in a more informed and informative manner by helping users understand the quality of our statistics.

However, it became evident through various conversations and business meetings that there was a need to set up a series of high level meetings to discuss key issues with important stakeholders. In response to this need, Key Accounts were set up.

## **Key Accounts**

The current approach to managing Key Accounts has been used since the early 2000s. It has been reviewed and refreshed on a number of occasions, but the underlying approach has largely been left unchanged over the years. The objective of key accounts is to gain a thorough understanding of key customers. We need to:

- understand their requirements including their business, policies and challenges;
- meet their requirements; and / or
- manage their expectations where we cannot.

The number of key accounts today is 22. While the Key Accounts system has focused on our relationships with government departments and agencies, we recognise that we need to have arrangements in place with other groups of stakeholders, for example recognising the increasing importance and influence of the voluntary sector.

The roles and responsibilities of Key Accounts are:

- to provide accurate, reliable and comparable feedback on the performance of ONS;
- to convey strategic plans, work programmes and new developments to ONS;
- to ensure that products and services required by ONS are delivered to standard and schedule;

- to notify key players in the event of problems with or failure to deliver key products and service that will impact significantly on ONS outputs and reputation; and
- to notify business areas of any issues or concerns they may have to ensure prompt and effective resolution.

The Key Accounts process should include a minimum of two meetings each year to inform the planning process, provide an end of year assessment of ONS performance, subsequent work programme, horizon scanning and future developments. Key Account holders should commission 'issues and concerns papers' from across all relevant Directorates in ONS prior to the meetings. Where possible, resolution should be sought outside of the key account meeting, providing time for more strategic discussion. Where issues cannot be resolved in this manner, then they should be on the key account meeting agenda.

A successful Key Account is one where:

- there is regular contact with discussions on issues and policies affecting both parties as well as honest feedback;
- ONS and the Key Account work in collaboration to deliver the best outcome for both parties;
- ONS understands the business and policies of the department / agency, and are involved at an early stage in any changes that impact on us and vice versa;
- information gained from the key account is shared with Directors and other staff in ONS involved with the government department / agency; and
- the relationship has added value to the ONS and the department / agency's agenda.

## **Case Studies**

The following are two case studies demonstrating how the ONS has effectively engaged with users.

### **Case Study 1**

#### **Census of Population 2011 - Partnership working with local authorities and communities to deliver the 2011 Census in England and Wales**

##### **Background**

Each year, the Government allocates funding of over £100 billion to local government and health services based on census estimates. Central and local government rely on this data to plan local transport, schools, health services and allocate resources. Producing accurate census population and household estimates every 10 years that users have confidence in is therefore critical. Following the 2001 Census, a number of users challenged the veracity of the estimates. Local government and other stakeholders criticised ONS and this resulted in increased scrutiny and scepticism regarding delivery of the 2011 Census.

In developing its stakeholder engagement strategy for the 2011 Census, ONS drew on lessons learned from the 2001 Census, user requirements for the census statistics and the advice and guidance of international census agencies and organisations with experience of similar operations. Working in partnership with census stakeholders would help build their confidence and trust in the results and could help it deliver a more successful 2011 Census. To help establish the right foundations for partnership working with users and help mitigate their concerns, it was essential to involve users at the beginning when census questions and detailed design decisions were being considered.

Extensive consultation was carried out to help understand user needs and shape the proposed census design. This included:

- formal consultation (e.g. questions on religion, national identity, language and ethnicity; census outputs);

## **Local authority engagement**

A network of ten local authority chief executives/directors was established to act as census regional champions - one for each government region in England, and for Wales. They helped to secure high-level commitment and resources from councils, and advised ONS of council concerns and how to address them. All local authorities were asked to nominate officers as census liaison managers (CLM) and assistant census liaison managers (ACLMs) to coordinate with their census regional champion, ONS and across their authority. ONS also worked closely with local government organisations such as the Local Government Association (for England and Wales) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) to encourage local authority participation and resources as they represent elected councillors and officers.

ONS worked with local government census advisory group members to produce a detailed partnership guide setting out the activities councils could undertake to support the census and when. A series of regional road shows for all chief executives and census liaison managers, chaired by the regional champions, provided further information to help councils plan and prioritise resources to support the census. Four further rounds of regional road shows (almost 50 events in total) were held for census liaison managers to keep them informed and listen to their feedback.

The partnership guide was accompanied by a communication and media toolkit. This provided key messages, key facts, FAQs, editorial content, census branding, photos, posters and leaflets in various languages to help councils and community organisations publicise the census (including over 35,000 census jobs) through their own channels and respond to questions they received. Councils made innovative use of the toolkit, including census advertising on billboards, local taxis, buses and council vehicles, advertising at sporting events, establishing census community champions, creating YouTube videos, working with community organisations to promote the census at celebratory events such as Black History Month and Chinese New Year. Local authority and ethnic community media and publicity activity helped raise census awareness and understanding in communities that ONS would have struggled to reach and where there was distrust of government.

Census area managers were asked to liaise with councils and community organisations to identify and agree the local challenges and priorities, the activities to address these and record this information in a census local partnership plan (CLPP). The CLPPs (348 in total – one for every local authority) included detailed community plans for high/medium priority population groups, local intelligence provided by councils and a record of the support that councils and community organisations provided. The CLPPs were a great success and many councils produced detailed communications plans to address local priorities. Almost all 348 local authorities provided information to support the development of the address list used to post out 25.3 million census questionnaires and more than 98% of local authorities provided local intelligence to help ONS target and tailor its local communications and operations.

Following census day, ONS shared local intelligence with local authorities to identify pockets of low return. In response, councils worked with their communities to encourage people to complete their questionnaires. ONS produced a detailed information pack on running events to help people understand the importance of the census and to complete their questionnaire. Almost 7,000 events were held – almost half of these organised by councils and community groups - many supported by community volunteers providing language assistance and advice. This was a fantastic achievement and community groups commented that it encouraged questionnaire completion from hard to reach sections of the population.

### **Further community engagement**

ONS also worked with national community and voluntary organisations to encourage their support and participation, particularly for population groups such as black and minority ethnic communities, young people and the over-80s. ONS established a number of community forums and a network of community advisors (with specific language skills) for specific population groups such as Indian, Chinese, Pakistani and Black African. The advisors worked with community organisations to raise understanding and awareness of the census, encourage their involvement and develop tailored strategies to encourage completion of the census questionnaire.

### **Conclusions and outcomes**

Local government response to the partnership was fantastic with over 98% of councils nominating CLM/ACLMs. Councils contributed significant resources to support the 2011 Census; estimated to be worth more than £10 million. This includes: staff costs; local publicity; networks of volunteers (particularly from black and minority ethnic communities) to provide language assistance and help with questionnaire completion; council tax data to support quality assurance; and meeting rooms for census staff. Local authorities and community organisations also gained considerable benefits from their involvement. A significant number of local authorities reported that their census participation resulted in improvements to their address databases, community relations, knowledge and understanding of their local areas.

With help from local authorities and community organisations, ONS achieved its challenging objectives and targets of an overall census response rate of 94% for England and Wales and at least 80% in every local authority area. This was a considerable improvement on 2001, when 15 London Boroughs had a response rate below 80%, including 63% in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. Many users have commented on the high quality of the 2011 Census estimates and ONS believes that this is due to the significant involvement and contribution of local authorities and community organisations. In response to an evaluation, over three-quarters of councils felt they could significantly influence local census engagement and publicity and that ONS had significantly engaged with them. This conclusion was also reached by Office of Government Commerce Gateway Reviews of the 2011 Census and a recent National Audit Office (NAO) review highlighted the partnership as excellent practice across government.

## Case Study 2

### Measuring National Well-being Programme – the ‘National Debate’

#### Background

The Measuring National Well-being (MNW) Programme was launched by the Prime Minister, David Cameron, and the National Statistician in November 2010. Traditional measures of progress such as GDP are increasingly considered an incomplete picture of the state of the nation and that other economic, social and environmental measures are needed alongside GDP to provide a complete picture of how society is doing

The MNW Programme started with a national debate on ‘what matters to you?’ to give a basis and public support for new methods of measuring national well-being. This employed both conventional and innovative methods of communicating, to ensure engagement with as many people as possible. The outcomes effectively and efficiently delivered with confidence the ‘national debate and communication objectives’.

The debate helped ONS to pick out the key areas which matter most for national well-being and ways of showing figures that the people recognise as telling a story which reflects their experiences. All activity and objectives in this report cover the first phase of the MNW Programme which ran from 25 November 2010 to 15 April 2011.

#### Aim

The aim of the national debate was to:

- help deliver credible measures of subjective well-being and of wider national well-being, to meet policy and public needs, including effective presentation of those measures; and
- engage the public, civic society organisations and experts in an extensive and well-conducted debate in helping to develop appropriate measures of national well-being and presenting them effectively, independent of Government.

#### Activities Undertaken

The target groups for the national debate were identified as a) Informed stakeholders with an interest in the measurement of national well-being and b) general public (across UK) – aiming to reach a wide range of social and special interest groups, in order to establish national well-being measures that are broadly based.

The activity sought to reach people in a variety of ways, using both conventional and innovative methods. Participants involved children, young people, protected and hard to reach groups (i.e. age; disability; gender reassignment; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; and sexual orientation). There were also meetings with various academics and organisations with an interest in the topic.

On-line activity included: a) ONS on-line consultation paper; b) the launch of a MNW Debate website, in both English and Welsh, hosting ONS and guest blogs to which people could contribute; c) introduction of an ONS Twitter account (to make announcements and invite contributions); d) established MNW e-mail accounts; and e) working with existing on-line communities such as Mumsnet and Netmums to hold discussions.

Other activity included: a) face-to-face national debate events; b) MNW postcards to capture comments; c) dedicated phone line for MNW enquires; and d) the use of ONS Social Surveys field force staff to hand out leaflets to survey households to encourage them to join the debate.

## **Results**

The ONS received 34,000 responses to the on-line debate and other communication methods – of which over 7,900 were responses to the consultation paper. In addition, 175 events were held, involving around 7,250 people. We earned 1,116 followers on Twitter, 51 retweets and potential reach of 115,123 followers.

ONS staff, including the National Statistician, gave 30 TV and radio interviews during this period. There have been 450 separate article/news items with thousands more mentions in on-line news and social media.

40,000 leaflets were hand delivered to UK households by the ONS Social Surveys field force staff. At least 149 well-being blogs were identified on the ONS and external websites and 244 well-being post cards were returned.

Several events were hosted by partners with an interest in well-being, who either invited a member of the well-being team or reported back on their findings. These partners included London School of Economics, Liverpool University, Royal Statistics Society and Ulster University.

66 businesses, charities and other government departments completed group responses. It was decided that each of these responses be counted as an individual response, but had we chosen to include the number of staff in each organisation the potential reach and number of responders would have been much larger.

## **Conclusion**

The debate has helped the ONS identify the key areas that matter most and will help to ensure that the measures we use will be relevant, not only to government, but also to the wider public. This is crucial to allow for effective development and appraisal of policy, for individuals to use information to identify ways of improving well-being, and to allow for assessment of how society is doing overall.

## **Conclusion**

ONS views all of its stakeholders as important. Historically, ONS has focused its engagement on the more 'powerful, traditional and urgent requestors'. This strategy therefore demonstrates that ONS is moving toward a more flexible approach to engagement that adapts to changing relationships and incorporates a wider range of users of our statistics.

ONS is committed to becoming more proactive and solution orientated - our statistics are only of value when they are used. Our stakeholders are a key part of this and their views and support are key to ONS's success in delivering the ONS vision.

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