

PAPER 05/05

TOPIC WORK: SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE SURVEY HARMONISATION AND REALIGNMENT

- **Members are asked to comment on the topic work proposals set out in this paper.**

Background

1. This paper sets out the first steps of Stage 1b of the draft long term strategy in more detail: Scottish Executive Survey Harmonisation and Realignment (2005-2008). This involves Office of the Chief Statistician (OCS) working with Analytical Services Divisions (ASD) to harmonise and realign Scottish Executive surveys to improve the consistency of key estimates and maximise the coverage of topics. This would also allow us to be in a better position to boost the ONS CPS once it is bedded in.
2. Initial proposals for work on harmonisation and realignment were discussed at the SPSCC April 2004 meeting (see paper 04/03 at Annex A). This work has not progressed for a number of reasons including:
 - Higher priority assigned to organising the SPSCC new population and social statistics seminar in September 2004, and responding to ONS proposals about the Continuous Population Survey;
 - Staff changes and vacant posts in OCS;
 - The changing agenda for this work in light of the ONS CPS proposals;
 - It was felt that the original proposal could be refined to give a better balance between the role of OCS, topic specialists and survey specialists (the original proposal saw the majority of work on topic specialists shoulders and this would also have resulted in some duplication of effort);
 - An assessment that the coverage of the topics covered in some of the work should go beyond the agreed list of UK harmonised topics (and questions) and outputs. The original scope was to map out only harmonised topics and it was recognised that consideration of additional topics would give a better understanding of the relationships between the Scottish and UK surveys;

New proposals for taking the work forward

3. With these developments in mind we have reviewed the original proposals for this work and these new proposals were set out in the draft long term strategy (SPSCC 05/05). This work will provide a starting point for taking forward harmonisation more proactively in its own right. It will also inform our understanding of what the real scope is for current surveys to form modules of a CPS, helping to set out practical issues and continuity aspects. In particular we need to ensure that the core set of questions for a CPS and harmonised Scottish Surveys meet user needs.

4. The following section attempts to set out how OCS will work with topic and survey specialists to complete this work by summer 2005.
5. It is envisaged that this work will be useful to the Scottish Household Survey and Scottish Health Survey review groups, and OCS will seek to avoid duplication of effort.

OCS will map out the content, coverage, geography, frequency and cost of all Scottish surveys and Scottish boosts.

6. A lot of work identifying the content of Scottish and UK surveys was carried out by topic and survey specialists in 2004. OCS will build on this work by collating additional information on:
 - Coverage: the type of units the survey covers (e.g. households/individuals/children) and the sample size;
 - Geography: the geographies for which the survey produces outputs;
 - Frequency: the frequency at which outputs are released;
 - Cost: the cost of the survey
7. This will involve OCS reviewing existing documentation and speaking with topic and survey specialists where necessary.
8. A report showing the findings from the mapping exercise will be produced.

OCS will work with topic specialists to review the harmonised questions and outputs included in SE population and household surveys, and develop an action plan for increasing the level of harmonisation where appropriate.

9. The mapping exercise above will be followed by work looking at whether Scottish and UK surveys use harmonised questions and outputs, and will also investigate question positioning. Improved harmonisation can improve efficiency; it can also add value by making it easier to compare outputs across surveys; and reduce confusion to users of statistics. However, it is recognised that in some instances there will be good reasons why questions and outputs are not harmonised.
10. This work is likely to concentrate on those questions asked across multiple surveys and which are likely candidates for inclusion in a core module within an integrated survey and or are considered key outputs in their own right (e.g. income). The Government Statistical Service has developed a bank of harmonised questions which will be used in this work. The harmonised bank does not cover all questions and outputs.
11. OCS will agree with topic specialists the list of questions and outputs which will be covered by this work. OCS will work with topic and survey specialists to identify actions to improve question and outputs harmonisation across Scottish Executive surveys, and this will take account of contractual agreements and opportunities for changes to survey questions, and the impact of continuity of outputs.
12. OCS will also consider the need for additional guidance on using harmonised questions in Scottish Executive contracted surveys. The OCS view is that the SPSCC would take

forward the more strategic role for harmonisation. In addition, OCS will also consider the role of the current cross-office group on Survey Monitoring and Advice in improving harmonisation on an ongoing basis at the working level.

OCS will work with topic specialists to review those questions included in multiple surveys and assess whether the overlap is desirable and if not consider any action for reducing it. This work will also try to establish the preferred source of information on key variables (e.g. income, smoking rates).

13. This work will look focus on core questions and module questions separately. The paragraphs below attempt to describe the difference between core and module questions, and in some cases some questions can be considered both core and modular.
14. There are a range of core questions (e.g. age, sex, tenure, employment status) which are included across a number of surveys. These are included in some instances to provide estimates of levels and proportions for the questions in their own right, but in other instances are used to unbundle results for other modular questions. For example, the Scottish Household Survey (SHS) includes questions about employment status to allow analysis of sub groups (e.g. those in employment), but the SHS should not be used to provide estimates of the level of employment, because the Labour Force Survey is the official source.
15. OCS will work with ASDs to identify a list of core variables to be covered in this work. OCS will then work with topic and survey specialists to identify whether the core questions are included in surveys to provide estimates of levels and proportions for the questions in their own right, or to unbundle results for other questions. We will attempt to identify the preferred sources for estimates for core questions.
16. Other questions can be considered modular questions which are included on a number of surveys, for example, smoking rates, which is included on the Scottish Health Survey and Scottish Health Survey. For modular questions, OCS will work with topic and survey specialists to understand why questions are asked across a number of surveys and to identify preferred sources. It is recognised that coverage, frequency and geography will need to be considered in this work.
17. In some cases core questions are supplemented with more detailed questions. For example, when looking at income, a question on banded income could be considered a core question, whereas, more detailed questions about individual aspects of income used to provide point estimates would be considered modular.

OCS will work with survey managers to describe the methodology used in each survey and consider scope for increased harmonisation.

18. OCS will work with survey specialists to understand better the similarities and differences between methodologies used in Scottish surveys. The depth and breadth of this work will be agreed with survey specialists. A report on the scope for increased harmonisation in survey methodology will be produced.

EXTRACT FROM THE 'LONG TERM STRATEGY FOR POPULATION SURVEYS IN SCOTLAND':

Stage 1a: Ensuring that the ONS CPS meets Scottish Needs (2005-2008)

The SE will need to ensure that the CPS meets Scottish needs. This will involve working closely with staff in ASDs, GROS and Scotstat to establish their own information needs and developing a network of contacts to draw a collective response to the emerging proposals on core and module questions.

The overall plan for CPS development contains six key phases:

- development of the modular structure during 2005;
- piloting fieldwork at the end of 2005;
- conducting a parallel run in June 2006;
- benchmarking outputs from parallel run and wide consultation January 2007;
- decision whether to proceed April 2007;
- agree topic modules and core outputs.

Given the complexity of the development, and the fact that some of the component surveys are under review themselves, ONS expect the content of core and modules to develop iteratively during 2005. However, in Scotland we need to be in a position to provide informed responses to the emerging picture.

From the CPS papers on timeline and framework for assessment (contained in SPSCC 05/04) the key dates and work we require to take forward are:-

- Steering Group in March 2005;
- Report back from feasibility trial one in May 2005;
- Feasibility trial two in August 2005;
- Steering Group in November 2005.

In order to take the work forward by summer 2005:-

1. OCS will gather internal and external users views on what should be contained in the core and modules – building on the consultation last autumn and with particular reference to LFS interests and emerging views from the SHS and SHeS Reviews.
2. ETLLD will review the requirements from the LFS, and the boost currently paid for by the SE, as this is the core of the CPS for Scotland.
3. GROS will keep SPSCC informed of census and census alternative developments.
4. OCS will consult through SPSCC and Scotstat on any proposals provided by ONS. In particular we shall explore issues of frequency and geography of topics, together with continuity requirements.
5. OCS will pursue the strategic issues already identified:

- Decision making – OCS will ensure Scottish views are co-ordinated and fed to the CPS Steering Group as appropriate.
 - Funding – OCS will continue to fund its part of the boost to the LFS and will explore longer term funding options.
 - Data sharing, access, disclosure control – OCS will take forward ONS assurances that suitable access to data will be provided, and approve any disclosure methods.
 - Reserved and devolved issues – OCS will ensure that the topic content takes account of these differences sensibly.
6. OCS will ensure that risk is taken account of properly.
 7. OCS will ensure there is sufficient communication of developments and scope for input by interested parties. This will include setting up a website and considering the need for seminars at key stages.
 8. OCS will begin to explore the potential for a Scottish module.

By October 2005 we hope that SPSCC will be well aware of the Scottish requirements and how they match up to the ONS proposals – to allow us to influence their development.

The anticipated work for SPSCC in 2006 is to:-

1. Continue to work with ONS on the emerging survey structure.
2. Evaluate and react to the findings of the parallel run.
3. Discuss scope and content of a Scottish module further.

For 2007, assuming there is a decision to proceed, SPSCC will require to:-

1. Comment on the finalised modules and outputs.
2. Work on the harmonisation needs of this finalised structure to establish whether Scottish surveys can be included.

Stage 1b: Scottish Executive Survey Harmonisation and Realignment (2005-2008)

As set out earlier, irrespective of whether ONS proceed with a CPS there is considerable benefit from greater harmonisation of existing surveys in Scotland than we currently have. This parallel phase of work aims to take forward that agenda, and will require considerable work on the part of topic specialists and survey managers.

We hope by ensuring the membership of the SPSCC covers a wide enough range of topics and interests this group would effectively take forward the more strategic aspects of Survey Monitoring and Advice. Essentially leading the development of surveys in line with wider developments to ensure that the most appropriate sources of information are used to meet analytical needs.

This phase of the work will explore the types of harmonisation issue set out in the original remit:-

- To consider the role of different surveys in respect of common socio-economic and demographic data with a view to developing a more strategic approach.

We also need to consider how other sources of information have developed or might develop that would impact on our requirements for survey information.

- To consider issues and options in respect of harmonisation

We need to consider the extent to which there is and needs to be effective harmonisation of

- *question design and positioning*
- *classifications both of a relatively formal nature such as ethnicity classifications and less formal classifications such the intervals for income bands, age groups etc.*
- *sampling methodology*
- *quality control at various stages*

- To consider issues of timing including sharing of practice and the management of continuous surveying methods.
- What opportunities can be pursued to provide more robust estimates at smaller levels of geography.
- To consider pursuing issues in relation to locally managed surveys – but now in light of potential scope for inclusion in the national if applicable.

In order to take this forward and help inform our thinking on the CPS development by summer 2005:-

1. OCS will map out the content, coverage, geography, frequency and cost of all Scottish surveys and Scottish boosts.
2. OCS will work with topic specialists to review the harmonised questions and outputs included in SE population and household surveys, and develop an action plan for increasing the level of harmonisation where appropriate.
3. OCS will work with topic specialists to review those questions included in multiple surveys and assess whether the overlap is desirable and if not consider any action for reducing it. This work will also try to establish the preferred source of information on key variables e.g. income, smoking rates.
4. OCS will work with survey managers to describe the methodology used in each survey and consider scope for increased harmonisation.

This work will provide a starting point for taking forward harmonisation more proactively. It will also inform our understanding of what the real scope is for current surveys to form modules of a CPS, helping to set out practical issues and continuity aspects. In particular we need to ensure that the core set of questions for a CPS and harmonised Scottish Surveys meet user needs.

During 2005-08

As table 1 showed, there are a wide range of surveys currently underway in Scotland with a range of contracts running to different timescales. Over the period 2005 to 2008 SPSCC needs to move the harmonisation work forward taking into account the development of these

surveys. At present the Scottish Household Survey (SHS) and the Scottish Health Survey (SHeS) are embarking on their own reviews. Given the substantial contribution these surveys make it will be important that they consider harmonisation issues, and that we keep in step with CPS proposals so as not to miss the potential for realignment.

PAPER 05/11d

SCOTTISH POPULATION SURVEYS CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE

RESOURCING FUTURE HARMONISATION WORK

Purpose

1. To inform members of the general progress on harmonisation work, the likely changing nature of the work over the coming months, and Office of the Chief Statistician (OCS) plans to bring in a contractor to assist with harmonisation and realignment work.

Background

2. In January 2005, the SPSCC agreed the Long Term Strategy for Population Surveys in Scotland, this included 4 stages. **This paper is about taking forward stages 1a and 1b of the long term strategy.**

Stage 1a: Ensuring that the ONS Continuous Population Survey meets Scottish Needs (2005-2008)

This involves working with Scottish Executive Analytical Services Divisions (ASDs), GROS, ScotStat and ONS to ensure that the ONS CPS meets Scottish needs.

Stage 1b: Scottish Executive Survey Harmonisation and Realignment (2005-2008)

Work with ASDs to harmonise and realign Scottish Executive surveys to improve the consistency of key estimates and maximise the coverage of topics. This would also allow us to be in a better position to boost the ONS CPS once it is bedded in (should the Scottish Executive wish to).

- i. OCS will map out the content, coverage, geography, frequency and cost of all Scottish surveys and Scottish boosts.
 - ii. OCS will work with topic specialists to review the harmonised questions and outputs included in SE population and household surveys, and develop an action plan for increasing the level of harmonisation where appropriate.
 - iii. OCS will work with topic specialists to review those questions included in multiple surveys and assess whether the overlap is desirable and if not consider any action for reducing it. This work will also try to establish the preferred source of information on key variables (e.g. income, smoking rates).
 - iv. OCS will work with survey managers to describe the methodology used in each survey and consider scope for increased harmonisation.
3. Annexes A and B set out more detail on stages 1a and b.

Progress

Stage 1a

4. We have continued to work with ONS to ensure that the ONS CPS is developing in line with other survey developments in Scotland, and that Scottish needs can be met.

Discussions on the content and sample size of the ONS CPS in Scotland will take place during 2006. Some of the main discussions here will be around how the LFS boost in Scotland makes the transition in to the ONS CPS, and how the ONS CPS addresses devolved matters. This work will be taken forward by Enterprise Transport and Lifelong Learning Department and OCS.

Stage 1b i

5. There has been steady progress, and OCS have worked with survey managers to map out a range of information about three of the main large scale surveys. The next step is to assess this information and draw out action plan for improved harmonisation; and extend to other large scale surveys. This is discussed in paper SPSCC 05/11a.

Stage 1b ii and iii

6. Over the coming months the Scottish Household Survey and Scottish Health Survey reviews (which are being carried out by the Development Department and Health Department respectively) will start to consider detailed content matters. This will involve assessing the use of harmonised questions, and also the coverage of particular content across surveys. This work is likely to result in increased demands on OCS.

Stage 1b v

7. Reviews of the Scottish Household Survey and Scottish Health Survey are progressing well and common methodological harmonisation issues across the surveys are being covered in these reviews, and also the work with survey managers to map out a range of information about three of the main large scale surveys (Stage 1bi).

Discussion

8. Since January 2005, there have been significant improvements in joint working across the large scale surveys through harmonisation and realignment work and also survey reviews. This looks set to continue, with increased discussion across surveys and topic specialists.
9. OCS have had some unforeseen absence over the summer, and are also have half a post vacant. The nature of the work coming up over the next months is changing and is likely to place a greater demand on OCS resources. To enable OCS to meet these demands and continue to lead on harmonisation and realignment across the Scottish Executive, we plan to bring in a contractor to assist in stage 1 harmonisation and realignment work. If needed, the contractor could also work with ASDs to specify survey requirements within the procurement phase of the large scale surveys.

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