

David Hand's contribution to the Discussion of 'Independent Review of the UK Statistics Authority' by Lievesley

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I would like to congratulate Prof Lievesley on covering such a complex area under time pressure. I agree with much of what is said in the review, however, one place where I disagreed was in Recommendation 1, the establishment of a Triennial Assembly, which seemed to me both to lack ambition and to fail to take account of existing mechanisms within the Authority.

Let me begin by comparing two descriptions:

- (i) *"consult widely with statistics users and producers to understand the range of views regarding the priorities and data needs for the UK".*
- (ii) *"building sustainable relationships and feedback loops between statistics producers, users and potential users of statistics and other relevant stakeholders"*

These are almost paraphrases of each other. The first is from Recommendation 1 of the Review. The second is from the Terms of Reference of the National Statistician's Expert User Advisory Committee (NSEUAC).

My point is that the ONS already has in place a mechanism which will achieve the aims of the Assembly. Instead of meeting just once every three years, this Committee already meets at least four times a year, so permitting ongoing and continuing feedback of user concerns. In contrast, the proposed Assembly would at best permit an intermittent and slow provision of information on user concern. Now it may be that there is a lack of general awareness of the existence of NSEUAC, but that is a matter of publicity and promotion, not of creating a suboptimal and doubtless costly attempt to replicate its work. Instead an *annual* conference might be used to raise awareness of the existence and role of the Committee, encouraging users to engage with it, so having a continuing rather than erratic benefit on user engagement.

Incidentally, the review also says (page 57) "The National Statistician's Expert User Advisory Committee sits across [topics such as Data Ethics and Consumer Price Statistics] and includes representation from each of the Committees." But that is not right. In fact, members of the committee are now recruited through open advertisement and include academics, Royal Statistical Society representatives, people from commercial operations, and people from social enterprise and social research organisations.

So Recommendation 1 is a faltering step in the right direction: rather than putting in place a poor variant of something that already exists, the Authority should build on what it has, raising awareness of and accessibility to the existing mechanisms.

[397 words]