

PRESS RELEASE

11 March 2016

Embargo: Immediate

THE RSS CALLS ON THE CHANCELLOR TO COMMIT TO INVESTMENT IN DATA INFRASTRUCTURE THE COUNTRY NEEDS IN NEXT WEEK'S BUDGET

The Royal Statistical Society (RSS) welcomes today's final report of the independent review led by Professor Sir Charles Bean and now calls on the Chancellor of the Exchequer to implement its recommendations in next week's Budget to ensure gaps in statistics are closed, user needs are met and new methods for data collection can be utilised.

The Bean Review provides a good diagnosis of the issues that need to be overcome in UK statistics – both internal to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) (e.g. culture; lack of user engagement; development of new methodologies) and external (e.g. barriers to the use of administrative data; resources).

Commenting on the final Bean Review report, Mike Hughes, Chair of the RSS National Statistics Advisory Group said:

"The Bean Review is a substantial and important piece of work. It shows how the UK can have the data we need to drive our economy. We now look to the Chancellor to allocate the resources in next week's budget to make this happen."

In particular the RSS believes the following recommendations are crucial to take into account, in order to resource ONS appropriately to address key challenges in our national economy.

- Removal of obstacles so more public administrative data can be accessed for statistical purposes, through changing the associated legal framework, whilst ensuring ethical safeguards are in place. We welcome that this should be accompanied by an independent person or body to adjudicate on any contentious ethical issues, and that access to data from the private sector should also be explored.
- The establishment of a new centre of excellence for the analysis of emerging issues in the modern economy. ONS needs to build up its capability to make the most of existing and new data sources, and this should be facilitated through collaboration with academia, the private and public sectors, and internationally.
- Recruitment of a cadre of data scientists to widen the ONS' skills base, ONS needs to leverage its value as custodian of much of the data, to provide more of a service in the understanding of statistics. Support is needed for innovation and the skills base.

Additionally, we support the Review's overall approach to the governance of statistics.

Commenting on the governance aspects of the review, Mike Hughes, Chair of the RSS National Statistics Advisory Group said:

“The Bean Review is right to keep the statistics answerable to the Cabinet Office rather than the Treasury, where there would be the constant question of whether the Treasury had influenced the figures. The Review takes the right approach in saying that statistics must be made more answerable to its users. We support the idea of a new high level stakeholder group of economic statistics users. This approach could be usefully mirrored in areas beyond economic statistics.”

ENDS

NOTE TO EDITORS

1. The full text of the RSS response to the Review’s consultation is on the RSS website at <http://www.rss.org.uk/Images/PDF/influencing-change/2015/RSS-written%20evidence-to-Bean-Review-Sept-2015.pdf>
2. Our response to the Bean Review reflects the policy lines in our Data Manifesto - http://www.rss.org.uk/RSS/Influencing_Change/Data_manifesto/RSS/Influencing_Change/Data_democracy_sub/Data_manifesto.aspx?hkey=5dd70207-82e7-4166-93fd-bcf9a2a1e496
3. As championed by the RSS, there should be a greater focus in the ONS on the needs of the user. We welcome the recommendation to establish a high-level group comprising representatives of HM Treasury, the Bank of England, and other key stakeholders and users to facilitate frank and open discussion with the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA) Board.
4. We welcome the focus on strengthening the profile of the regulatory function within the UKSA. The RSS believes the regulatory function within the UKSA has significantly improved in recent years, with greater use of de-designation and an increased focus on data quality. We believe, however, that the binary nature of the National Statistics designation should not be compromised as it gives clarity and trust in the minds of the public and users
5. We are pleased that the Bean Review highlights the continuing issue of pre-release access – an issue highlighted in our Data Manifesto. The RSS takes the view that nobody should have pre-release access to statistics before they are released.
6. The RSS welcomes the Bean Review proposal that the UKSA has the power to designate when administrative data should be an official statistic.

CONTACTS

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The Royal Statistical Society (RSS) founded in 1834 is one of the world's most distinguished and renowned statistical societies. It is a learned society for statistics, a professional body for statisticians and a charity which promotes statistics, data and evidence for the public good. Today the Society has nearly 8000 members around the world. www.rss.org.uk