

Strength in Numbers

A strategic vision for the GSS

October 2024



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The Government Statistical Service (GSS) is the community for all UK civil servants that collect, analyse, produce and communicate statistics. It is spread across a whole range of public bodies, including UK government departments, the devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales and the Office for National Statistics (ONS)*. It includes professional statisticians and data scientists in the [Government Statistician Group \(GSG\)](#), geographers, researchers, economists, analysts, operational delivery staff, IT specialists and other supporting roles working in the statistical domain and/or in statistical roles. The GSS is part of the cross-government Analysis Function.

Members of the GSS are responsible for ensuring that statistics effectively inform decision-makers and the public. We innovate by investigating new data sources, methodologies and processes to improve the quality of analysis and statistics. We come from over 40 different bodies, each with different policy and operational focuses and hence different statistical priorities, but act collaboratively across organisational boundaries in order to maximise impact, hence our vision statement introduced here; '**Strength in Numbers**'.

In particular, the GSS works collaboratively in the areas of:



**Coordination,
cooperation
and leadership**



**Capability and
community**



**Setting
Standards**



**Transformation
and innovation**

This document celebrates how the GSS achieves this collaboration across each of these areas and sets out a vision for furthering cooperation and impact, alongside strengthening the identity of the GSS. This vision does not cover what and how each organisation produces statistics and analysis as this will be covered in individual departmental strategies.

The GSS is an integral part of the UK Statistical System which has a strategy; '[Statistics for the Public Good](#)'. This vision focuses on where and how the GSS will (or aims to) collaborate across organisational boundaries to realise 'Statistics for the Public Good', but **Strength in Numbers** should also reach beyond the life of this strategy (which runs until the end of 2025). This GSS vision should play a significant role in influencing the next UK Statistics Authority strategy. Under each theme we therefore describe initiatives that we need to maintain alongside more ambitious proposals we aim to deliver in the medium/longer term.

*** Note:** There is a separate civil service in Northern Ireland. Statistical staff in the Northern Ireland Civil Service are not members of the GSS but maintain a close professional association with it.



Coordination, Cooperation and Leadership

Vision statement: GSS decision making is system-wide by default, focused on delivering in partnership across departmental boundaries. GSS governance is transparent and inclusive, with roles and responsibilities clearly set out between departments, the GSS and Analysis Function.

We will maintain:

- **The leadership role of the National Statistician:** The National Statistician leads the GSS. Each UK government department and each devolved administration that produces official statistics, including the ONS, has a Chief Statistician or Head of Profession for Statistics (HoPs). HoPs, in addition to reporting to their departmental management, have a dotted line and professional accountability to the National Statistician. Where an organisation produces official statistics but not a sufficient number to warrant appointing a HoP, the organisation appoints a Lead Official (LO) for statistics. LOs are often supported by a HoP in another (e.g. sponsoring or related) organisation. Collectively, the strong network of HoPs work together to support the National Statistician in leading the GSS, reporting to the National Statistics Executive Group (NSEG).
- **Additional governance:** The Presentation and Web Dissemination Committee and the GSS International Committee provide additional governance for the GSS reporting into HoPs. There are also networks of GSS Champions that focus on specific issues such as quality, harmonisation and user engagement.

Our ambition is to implement:

- **A new Deputy Head of the GSS role:** This has been created in 2024 to provide stronger links between HoPs and the National Statistician, and further bolster the visibility of the community. In addition, the membership and terms of reference of NSEG will be reviewed to ensure appropriate representation of HoP views such that their feedback drives the strategic leadership of the GSS.
- **A permanent central GSS support team:** Whilst many GSS initiatives rely on volunteers from across the GSS there is also a need for a permanent central GSS support team to coordinate these activities, provide secretariat support for groups such as PAG and lead on specific activities such as recruitment and induction. There is a need for a sustainable funding model that is ringfenced from other ONS funding for this central GSS support team to ensure their important contributions can continue to be delivered in an effective way. HoPs need to influence the workplan for this GSS central resource to ensure it is focused on priorities that will deliver for the community.

- **Improved cross-GSS topic prioritisation and collaboration:** As a statistical community delivering analytical work, we are strongest when we work together, recognising and respecting the individual expertise and remit of departments and agencies, but working collectively and collaboratively across boundaries to maximise the impact and delivery of statistics and insights. There are areas where we have achieved this but there are areas where prioritisation is not as effective as it could be. We will develop a light-touch annual work plan that will set out at a high-level an overview of statistical activities in relation to significant areas of work with cross Government responsibilities (such as labour market, children and education, and health and care). In line with the Code of Practice for Statistics, these plans will support transparency about our processes, methodology and content, coherence between different statistics outputs, and collaboration between producers. These plans will then be overseen by NSEG and will align with the recommendations from the [Independent Review of the UK Statistics Authority](#) and the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC), [‘Transforming the UK’s Evidence Base’](#) around the need for coordination around evidence and data gaps and will support proposals for the UK Statistics Authority Triennial Statistical Assembly.





Capability and Community

Vision statement: GSS members can come from any background and work in supportive teams across the UK to reach their full potential, with clear progression routes and guidance from junior to the most senior grades. The GSS comprises a diverse, inclusive and vibrant community which people want to join and to stay and to build their career in.

We will maintain:

- **The People Advisory Group:** This represents the current governing body that ensures these aims are achieved across the GSS.
- **The Government Statistical Group (GSG) competency framework:** The GSG (statisticians and data scientists who have passed an accreditation exercise) has a well-established competency framework, defining the technical skills of the GSG, which is used to ensure consistency in recruitment, and support career development and learning and development activities. The GSS competency framework should reflect the skills required of a modern statistician.
- **The GSS conference:** We will build on the success of the 2023 GSS Conference towards fostering a sense of community, we will prioritise community-building efforts at future GSS conferences. These annual events are essential to bringing the community together by facilitating networking, collaboration and best practice to be shared across the GSS. The GSS Conference will be a flagship event in the GSS calendar.
- **GSS community groups:** We have several existing GSS community groups, particularly active in regional hubs across the UK. We want to actively promote and extend these activities to strengthen the GSS community across all locations. We will also further develop the content of the GSS section of the [Analysis Function website](#) and GSS newsletter.

Our ambition is to implement:

- **Improved induction and talent management:** The learning curriculum is an important part of the GSS offer and a varied analytical offer is available to support continued learning and development of GSS members. Although these resources are already in place to deliver a highly capable GSS workforce, we will be focusing on improving induction processes and talent/career management to support our capability goals and improve retention.

- **Horizon scanning on the evolving role of statisticians:** It is important that we look ahead and understand what skills and capabilities the GSS will need in 5 to 10 years' time. Working with the Royal Statistical Society we will undertake a horizon scanning think piece to identify how the role of statisticians will change in the future, and what this means for the GSS.
- **Greater understanding and embedding of diversity and inclusion for the GSS:** We have an ambition to embed diversity and inclusion throughout the delivery of this vision, informed by the work of the GSS Diversity and Inclusion Working Group. This includes an ambition to understand and monitor diversity information more closely, to ensure we grow and maintain our diverse and inclusive community.
- **A clear identity for the GSS within the Analysis Function:** The GSS is part of the cross-government Analysis Function (AF). Community and capability activities for the GSS should where possible and appropriate join up with AF initiatives whilst maintaining the identity of the GSS.
- **Improved visibility of GSS leadership:** GSS leadership will become more visible through providing a directory of HoPs, and promoting blogs and departmental visits, which should also support our aim to clarify and promote the status and identity of the GSS following the introduction of the AF.





Setting Standards

Vision statement: The principles of the Code of Practice for Statistics underpin all GSS activities and outputs, and is supported by harmonised, coherent standards and shared practices that promote high-quality, trustworthy statistical production across the UK.

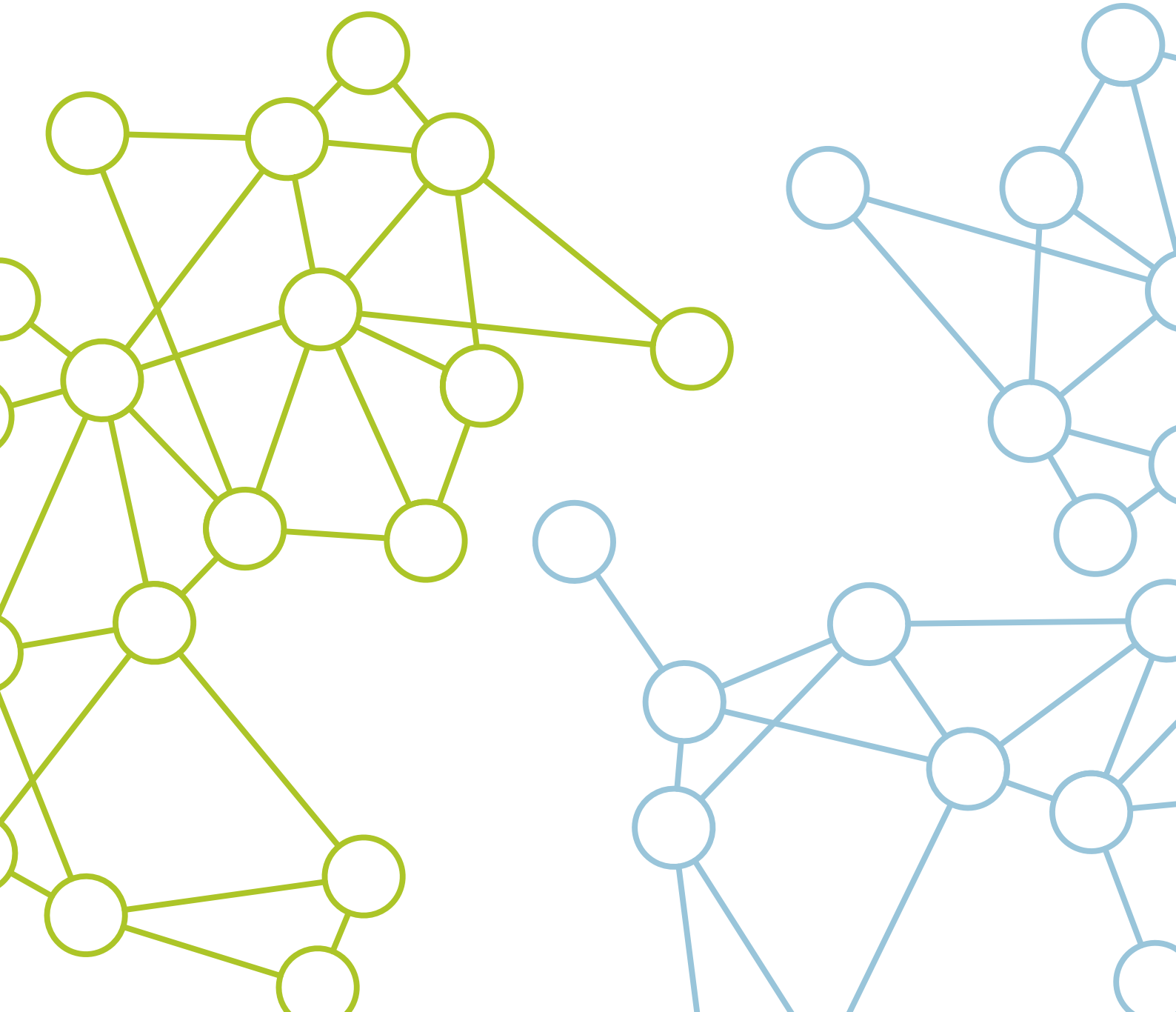
We will maintain:

- Clear adherence to the Code of Practice for Statistics: The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) provides independent regulation of official statistics produced in the UK, as set out in the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007. The role played by the Code of Practice for Statistics and by OSR is a huge and unique asset for the GSS. OSR's regulation of Code compliance sets the standard for GSS work; provides principles to guide decision-making in a wide range of situations; and provide assurance to users inside and outside Government. HoPs uphold and advocate the standards of the Code in their organisation and strive to make high-quality statistics available for all, improving statistics and data for the public good and challenging their inappropriate use. From induction of new HoPs to mentorship between experienced HoPs, HoPs provide an important support network in meeting these standards and interpreting the Code. The OSR also play an important role collaborating, supporting and challenging HoPs.
- **Prioritisation of harmonisation:** [The GSS Harmonised standards and guidance](#) are tools for improving the consistency, comparability, and coherence of statistics. Producers of statistics can use the harmonised standards to align with others, which increases the usefulness of their statistics. In practice harmonised standards and guidance mean using consistent definitions and survey questions in data collection across the GSS, improving understanding of how data and statistics can be combined, presenting data and statistics in a comparable and coherent way, and providing guidance where absolute consistency may not be appropriate or achievable. HoPs supported by departmental Harmonisation Champions are key to ensuring harmonisation is prioritised within their organisations.

Our ambition is to implement:

- **A raised profile of the Code of Practice and intelligent transparency:** HoPs already play a key role in ensuring the Code of Practice is followed within their organisation. But we should go further. We need to work more across the GSS to ensure a coordinated effort to raise the profile of the Code and principles such as intelligent transparency at the most senior levels, with Permanent Secretaries and Ministers.

- **A greater focus on UK comparable data and statistics:** Many teams across the GSS have been focused on addressing the challenge of improving access to comparable data and statistics across the UK. The ONS leads on a programme of statistical coherence and working with Devolved Administrations and relevant departments has created new UK-wide data in high priority areas such as public transport, housing, smoking. The ONS has also launched the Explore Subnational Statistics service that allows users to compare metrics at the local authority level across all parts of the UK. In 2021 the UK Government, all three Devolved Administrations and the National Statistician signed a refreshed Statistics Concordat, committing to working together to improve the availability and use of coherent UK-wide data. There is still more that we can do and this challenge has been recognised in the PACAC report and the [Independent Review of the UK Statistics Authority](#). GSS HoPs will have a crucial role in supporting the government response to these reviews to ensure that coherence is considered for all statistical collections and outputs and prioritised where appropriate funding is in place.





Transformation and Innovation

Vision statement: The high quality and innovative statistics the GSS deliver are created through an interconnected data estate and contribute to a unified evidence base, planning today to inform public and decision makers of what they need to know tomorrow.

We will maintain:

- **Implementation of reproducible analytical pipelines:** The GSS has been instrumental in the widespread implementation of reproducible analytical pipelines (RAPs), increasing the efficiency, quality and value of statistical and analytical processes. This transformational leadership should continue.
- **Support for the Integrated Data Service:** The GSS should continue to support the development of the Integrated Data Service (IDS), a crucial enabler for data sharing.

Our ambition is to implement:

- **Increased leadership to influence data sharing:** Data sharing between government departments is critical to support innovation and allow the GSS to deliver the statistical evidence base that user's need. Both the Independent Review of the UK Statistics Authority and the PACAC report include recommendations that the centre of government must actively work to resolve the systemic, often cultural, barriers to data sharing. The GSS must show leadership within departments to influence data sharing initiatives and to address these barriers.
- **A focus on the use of Artificial Intelligence in statistics:** The GSS needs to be at the forefront of discussions surrounding artificial intelligence (AI) use in statistics, to ensure statisticians are influencing this work and are suitably prepared to handle this opportunity. The GSS competency framework should reflect these skills.
- **Better sharing of methodological expertise:** The GSS includes teams and individuals who are experts in different methodological areas. This expertise and best practice needs to be better shared across the community and beyond, including the AF, to enable high quality production of statistics and analysis.
- **A government-wide dissemination platform for statistics:** The GSS should explore options to develop and fund a government-wide dissemination platform for statistics, making it easier for users to find the data they need, to support coherence and improve impact through innovative and interactive visualisations. This exploration should investigate scaling up existing and successful departmental sites as well as designing from scratch.

