

Russell George MS
Chair, Health and Social Care Committee
Welsh Parliament
Cardiff
CF99 1SN
(via email)

22 November 2022

Dear Mr George,

I am pleased to write to you commending two recent Office for Statistics Regulation reports. The *2022 update: lessons learned for health and social care statistics from the COVID-19 pandemic*¹ was published on 1 November and is an insightful analysis of the last year of the pandemic. The *Annual Review of Casework for 2021/22*² was published on 20 October which highlighted that the trends in casework remain higher than pre-pandemic levels.

Lessons learned

In its 2021 report³, the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) highlighted the vital role that data and statistics played during the pandemic in supporting individuals to reach informed decisions. It has been possible to meet the increased analytical demands of the pandemic thanks to the extraordinary, dedicated efforts of statisticians and analysts across governments.

In its 2022 update, much like the UK's health and care services, OSR has found a statistical system which is transitioning from pandemic crisis mode to living with COVID-19. While the intense analytical demands of the pandemic have eased, a real challenge is maintaining some level of analysis relating to COVID-19 while publishing new statistics to measure emerging issues, such as new disease outbreaks, and re-invigorating 'business as usual' statistics, such as those on NHS performance and the health and social care workforces. In the context of the increased demands on producers, we have identified four key areas which support the production of statistics which serve the public good:

- Horizon scanning – understanding what information people need
- Availability – ensuring data and statistics are made available in an accessible and transparent way
- Collaboration – sharing data, plugging gaps and improving coherence and comparability

¹ <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/lessons-learned-for-health-and-social-care-statistics-from-the-covid-19-pandemic-2022-update/>

² <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/annual-review-of-uk-statistics-authority-casework-2021-22/pages/1/>

³ <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/improving-health-and-social-care-statistics-lessons-learned-from-the-covid-19-pandemic/pages/1/>

- Communication – continuing to innovate and communicate statistics in a clear and engaging way to a wide range of users

We have seen many improvements to health and social care statistics over the last year. We have found a better understanding of the need for transparency of numbers used publicly by governments and are encouraged by new statistics published on topics of high public interest and ongoing efforts to fill existing data gaps. However, there is still progress to be made against several recommendations in our 2021 report, such as improving, where possible, the comparability of statistics across the UK and overcoming barriers to data sharing.

There are developments relating to health and social care data in Wales which we consider will support producers in their ability to provide timely information and analysis to support future decision-making. The ongoing transformation of health and social care using digital and data services⁴ presents several opportunities to improve the development and effectiveness of statistics, including the development of the National Data Resource⁵ and a strategic approach to social care data⁶. I look forward to the successful implementation of these strategies, and trust that sufficient resource will be made available to turn new operational data into published statistics.

Annual Review of Casework

As the UK Statistics Authority's regulatory arm, OSR investigates all cases reported to the Authority by members of the public, politicians, the media and third sector organisations, as well as issues identified through internal processes, to stand up for statistics that serve the public good.

The increased public interest in data experienced during the pandemic has been maintained, with over half (52%) of all casework relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. Other topics raised included population, crime and labour market. The largest proportion of cases in 2021/22 related to use/misuse of statistics (41% of all cases). These cases often related to concerns about statistics being used (most commonly by a public figure or a public body) in a way which someone considered to be potentially misleading. Most casework came from the public, with none being raised by members of the Welsh Parliament.

Please do let me know if you have any questions about either of the aforementioned reports, or anything else regarding the work of the Authority.

Yours sincerely,



Sir Robert Chote
Chair

⁴ <https://gov.wales/written-statement-transforming-health-and-social-care-using-digital-and-data-services>

⁵ <https://ndr.cymru/>

⁶ <https://socialcare.wales/research-and-data/strategic-approach-data/approach-to-data>