

Date: 5th February 2016

By email

Dear ONS

GLA Intelligence Unit's Response to ONS Consultation on Products 2015

The Greater London Authority (GLA) Intelligence Unit welcomes the chance to respond to the Consultation on Changes to ONS Products 2015.

In response to the proposals, in general, we oppose the proposed reductions in sample sizes and response rates; our view is that reducing the amount and frequency of detailed analyses is a better way to make savings and free up resource.

The consultation document consistently suggests that despite stopping some surveys and reducing the sample sizes of others, the ONS is likely to be able to continue to produce national level statistics. However, the outlined proposal doesn't highlight how sub-national level statistics could be adversely affected by these proposed changes. Our view is that it is likely to be largely impossible to maintain the robustness of statistics at the sub-national level whilst reducing sample sizes. As a result, we oppose any reductions in sample sizes or response rates suggested in the proposals.

A decline in the quality of sub-national statistics contradicts the current political environment of increased devolution of powers from central government. This has and will continue to increase the need and demand for more robust, comprehensive and detailed local level statistics to hold authorities accountable for their decisions, and help to inform local level decision making. Furthermore, to ensure accountability and transparency, the GLA would encourage the widest possible availability of publicly collected data and the use of existing administrative sources to meet any data gaps, where possible. Any publication of currently unpublished data that increases the amount of regional demographic, social or economic data that is available would also be welcomed.

The current lack of a sub-national breakdown or a sub-national version of a broad number of UK-wide statistics has hindered analysis of London's economy both within the GLA and by the national government, which given the size of London's economy (representing over 20 per cent of the UK's total output) is detrimental to understanding the UK's economy as a whole. For example, the London level measure of Gross Value Added (GVA) falls well short of similar data available for the UK both in quality and in timeliness with the latest available data for London only available in nominal terms and referring to 2014. More timely, detailed, real, local and regional data, together with longer-run time series of such data, would significantly improve both the ability to understand London's population and economy and to prepare and deliver policies and programmes for Londoners on a more timely and effective basis. This in turn would support more effective national level policy making. The GLA has raised these concerns in response to previous consultations by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the UK Statistical Authority, amongst others.

An alternative approach to find cost savings could be available through a review of current statutory products that, as highlighted in the consultation document, account for a significant proportion of ONS's published products (around 80 per cent). Currently these statutory

requirements include some ONS products that aren't necessarily crucial to understanding the current structure of the UK economy. In contrast, some non-statutory products that are essential to users are not protected by legislation, for example statistics on population, living standards and public sector productivity, or these statutory products lack detail for the key parts of the UK economy. For example, we would argue that existing data provide insufficient detail of the service industries (accounting for over three quarters of UK economy), whilst in contrast very detailed information is available for older, more traditional, industries. In our view, it would be sensible if the content of these statutory products were reviewed more frequently to ensure that the available data better reflect the user needs.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Collinge', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the left.

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