

Minutes of the Data Steering Group Meeting, 17 November 2015

Item 1 - Vision of the Data Programme and Aims of the Data Steering Group

The NATIONAL STATISTICIAN welcomed the group and noted the reconstituted membership, thanking those from Civil Society, Business and Government for being willing to participate.

He invited the group to consider the papers including the speeches of the Minister for the Cabinet Office on Data and the Vision for Data. He then invited the Minister to set out his ambition for the group and the scale of the challenge.

THE MINISTER FOR THE CABINET OFFICE said there was huge potential for data to drive economic growth and productivity, and Government must unlock that potential. The data programme could fundamentally change what government does and how it does it, and it would recast the relationship between citizen and state. The group should challenge and advise and keep the government's feet to the fire. It should put forward both ideas of where to go and how to get there. The group should ask difficult questions and address important issues around privacy and data protection and ethical behaviour. Data security should also be on the agenda with modern ways of accessing data sets allowing improvement to existing security practice. The groundwork was there; there was still a long way to go but there were prizes of improved services and better value for money.

PAUL MALTBY said the Cabinet Office data team was now responsible for the Data pillar GDS policy the other two pillars being Digital and Technology. GDS would be responsible for delivery of a new generation of digital services. The steering group would be asked to contribute their views to the strategy underpinning that. Data quality across government would need to be improved as a prerequisite to more sophisticated use.

The group could assist in helping to make the case for open data including how opening up data could be used to benefit the economy

In discussion the following points were raised:

- While there was a focus on central government data it was important that local government and the wider public sector should not be forgotten. It was also important that if steps were taken on national registers, investment should be made to ensure that they could be used by local government. It was also important that the national framework around data ethics could be adopted as some of the data

sets held by local government were extremely sensitive such as the safeguarding registers.

- There were some important practicalities to address: firstly in commissioning new data projects and registers and secondly in dealing with legacy systems. There was also an important piece of work to be done on hearts and minds and showing the benefits to be obtained by data sharing.
- A shift from supplying data to the public in response to a specific demand to a supplying data that would create opportunities to generate new demand was needed.
- There was an opportunity to propose a new 'deal' on data with the public in terms of their having rights in relation to their data but also responsibilities in relation to how their data could be used for the common good.
- Government should consider how to open up its data for the benefit of the tech economy. One idea put forward was for dedicated Digital Ministers in every department and a new Chief Privacy Officer.
- There was a need to bring together the pockets of discussion regarding fear around data privacy, consent and ethics.
- The debate needed to be framed around how data was used - not just in terms of open and closed. On the international side HMG should be clear on where it needed to go it alone, where it needed to go forward and be an example to other countries and where it needed to bring other countries along to be effective. Government needed to work to make public data around energy use and trade more open in order to improve the economic benefit to the UK.
- The raw material of data was there but there was lack of understanding in how that data could be used. Prediction models would be helpful but were subject to public scepticism especially around the ethics of their use and this was an issue that would need to be dealt with.
- Public perception was key and the language used around data was very important. Strategies should consider that those who might be most afraid of the changes to way data was used might also be the those who would benefit most such as the elderly and the vulnerable.
- It was suggested that government had a tendency to focus on process but what the public cared about was outcomes. Messaging should focus on how outcomes could build up trust in how data was used and what benefits it could bring.

THE NATIONAL STATISTICIAN summing up said the scope for the work was clear. The group must think big and consider data policy across the whole of the public sector and in the international space. Its ambition was to consider what the deal was between government and the public on data. They should consider how the legitimate fears around ethics, privacy and security could be balanced against the prizes to be won.

Item 2 - Data Science Ethics Framework

CAT DREW outlined work to date on the development of a data science ethical framework.

The data science programme team had been considering how to build transparency and an ethical approach into their work. Data science offered great opportunities, but some of these techniques were new and untested in government.

The data science team had created a framework with six key principles:

1. Start with clear user need and public benefit;
2. Use data and tools which cause the minimum intrusion necessary;
3. Create robust data science models - use new data and tools but use them carefully and think through unintended consequences;
4. Be alert to public perceptions - especially as these are likely to be shifting;
5. Be as open as possible - and ensure there is oversight throughout;
6. Keep data secure.

Departments had started to use this framework to improve their projects.

The team would be doing more user research in the New Year with public workshops and an online interactive tool.

In discussion the following points were raised:

In discussion the following points were made:

- It was difficult to have a framework that would address issues 4 years down the line as the landscape could change completely in that time;
- Near horizon scanning was essential in order to be on top of media perception and an ethical framework that could cope with advances in technology;
- Trust was very important and took a long time to recover if lost;
- There was an inherent difficulty in openness of algorithms as they could lose commercial value efficacy or security if the detail of how they worked was released;
- The benefits of data science should not be lost sight of - there were potential benefits of around 20% savings for effective use of data science in the health sphere;
- The challenges of health data had shown how the ethical framework was very difficult to deliver and the public were not a homogenous group. Balancing the different interests presented real challenges;
- The scale of data collection could have ethical implications: for example traffic congestion data gathered by local authorities could, in greater volume, be used instead for tracking;
- That the ethical framework should include what constituted being a member of the public and society and that this should mean being on record;
- That consideration should be given to some work about how data was owned and that data could be subject to shared ownership by society.

There was also more discussion needed in terms of what privacy and consent really meant in respect of sharing data;

- It was possible to bring the public with you on Data Ethics and that this had been achieved to some extent in Scotland;
- There was also work to be done to portray data sharing better outside government.

The NATIONAL STATISTICIAN summed up saying work needed to be done to demonstrate the benefits of data sharing. The framework was approved and adopted by the group as version 1.0. It would be helpful to have case studies to flesh it out. It would also be important to win the public debate about data and this would be helped by things like the public sessions to feed into the ethics framework.

Item 3 - Forward Work-plan for Data Programme

PAUL MALTBY presented the forward work plan for comment and it was accepted by the group

THE NATIONAL STATISTICIAN, summing up, said the plan was adopted, the Terms of Reference for the group were adopted and that the group would meet again on February 16th. He also noted that a summary of the meeting would be published online.