Office for National Statistics

Accounting Officer Assessment

Integrated Data Programme: Full Business Case update, due to be submitted to HM Treasury on 31st October 2023

Sir Ian Diamond, National Statistician
2nd November 2023

Accounting Officer Summary

Accounting Officer Memorandum: Integrated Data Programme

Background and context

The ONS is the lead delivery partner for the cross-government Integrated Data Programme (referred hereafter as "the programme") with responsibility for delivering the Integrated Data Service (IDS)[1] for Government. HM Treasury has confirmed funding for the programme until the end of this investment period (year end March 2024/2025).

The IDS is a scalable modern data service operating on a cloud-native platform, with a rich dictionary of data, consistently indexed and linkable with provision for the latest data science and generative AI potential. The IDS is a key enabler of the National Data Strategy[2], bringing together ready-to-use data to enable faster and wider collaborative analysis for the public good, not just from across government but also the third sector, local government, academia and other organisations such as the Bank of England. IDS users have to be accredited, either as government analysts or accredited researchers to use the service and access these data.

Over the past year, the programme has delivered key transformation elements that are playing a vital role in achieving the government's digital transformation ambitions. The IDS:

- Secured accreditation for processing under the Digital Economy Act 2017 (DEA) on 14th September 2023 — making the service the only operational Trusted Research Environment with cloud-native tooling to be accredited under the DEA.

- Is transforming the way de-identified data about our society and economy is made available, integrated (using the Reference Data Management Framework) and used securely. This is enabling vital analysis which improves UK-wide decision making, aids policy development and crucially policy impact evaluation earlier and through the policy life cycle.

- Brings together data in a sustainable, repeatable, and scalable way offering cloud-based access to both government and non-government users; providing a value-for-money service.

- Has broadened its base to include analysts from additional government departments and public sector bodies. The number of analysts on the IDS has risen to 100 users.

- Has onboarded nine new projects in the past few months, taking the total of live projects to 18. These projects are enabling high impact analysis with an immediate impact on key government policy areas, such has health and labour markets and levelling up.

- Is piloting centrally purchased private sector data on contractual terms for wider government use, through the IDS. Contracts have been signed with Telefonicia (O2) for the provision of (geo-spatial) mobility data which will be available to government users through IDS from November.

As the Accounting Officer, I am assured that the IDS is being delivered in compliance with the ONS's Planning and Portfolio Management approach for Government Major Project Portfolios

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[1] Integrated Data Service website.
[2] Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport — National Data Strategy, 9th December 2020

and in accordance with Managing Public Money[3] Principles, as set out in the ONS Strategic Business Plan[4] and its associated strategic drivers.

Assessment against the Accounting Officer standards

Regularity

The ONS is the UK Statistics Authority's (UKSA) statistical production function. The UKSA was established under the Statistics and Registration Service Act (SRSA) 2007 and is an independent statutory body. It operates at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department and reports directly to the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Assembly. The work of the Authority is further defined under secondary legislation made under the Act by the UK Parliament or the devolved legislatures.

The ONS is delivering the IDS within existing legal frameworks, namely the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 (SRSA) and the Digital Economy Act 2017 (DEA). The latter of which provides a permissive power for all public authorities and Crown bodies to provide access to their data in a de-identified form for public good research. The IDS was accredited for processing under the DEA (Part 5, Chapter 5 (Research)) in September 2023, which:

- enables the ingest of full sensitivity data;

- provides data capabilities previously unobtainable to government, the Devolved Administrations, and external researchers;

- makes the IDS the first Trusted Research Environment (TRE), underpinned by cloud technologies, to be accredited under DEA; and

- will now be the default legal gateway under which projects will be accredited.

The ONS is uniquely placed to deliver the objectives of the IDS. It has the necessary legal powers, under the SRSA, and it is aligned to the department's ambit. The programme is funded by the Exchequer and expenditure managed through the HM Treasury Spend Controls (ratified in 2021 and 2022).

As the Accounting Officer, I am satisfied that the programme is being delivered in accordance with HM Treasury spend controls and the commitments set out in the latest Full Business Case update (October 2023). Thus, meeting the requirements of the regularity test.

Propriety

The programme sits within the Government Major Projects Portfolio and it is regularly assured by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority and Central Digital and Data Office. Internally, the programme is monitored through ONS central governance portfolio, which includes Portfolio and Investment Committee and to the UKSA Board.

The programme has been approved at each stage (i.e. Outline Business Case (2020), FBC (2021), and FBC Refresh (2022)) by ONS Portfolio and Investment Committee and HM Treasury. HM Treasury has confirmed programme funding until the end of this investment period (year end March 2024/25) and expenditure is in line with spending controls.

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[3] Managing Public Money, HM Treasury, March 2022
[4] ONS Strategic Business Plan, 2020 to 2025

To ensure the high standards, reputation and integrity of data, the IDS is being delivered transparently and in accordance with the UKSA Code of Practice for Statistics.

The programme delivered March Public Beta and 'safe outputs' earlier this year. Safe outputs comprise technological solutions, plus business and operational processes, to prevent reasonable risks of data egress[5], whilst maintaining the highest levels of analytical functionality and useability for the IDS' users, which is critical for the service.

Recognising the nature of the programme, the IDS continues to deliver in a user-centric way with key experts in data governance, legislation and policy, data protection, security, data growth and operations to ensure public trust is upheld.

The programme is further safeguarding data integrity and improving efficiency of data access; through radical access to data that is secure, ethical and adheres to legal controls. Data are safeguarded and only accessed by accredited users, in accordance with data owners' terms for use, to protect the trust, accountability and integrity of statistics that will enhance the reputation of the UK's Statistical System.

As the Accounting Officer, I am satisfied that the propriety test has been met.

Value for Money

The Economic Case model has been updated to:

- include the latest evidence to support and test input values and assumptions — recognising the programme's focus to bring on more users and data;

- reflect the longer dual running period for the Secure Research Service (SRS) alongside the IDS;

- show that the IDS will have a demonstrable impact on the lives of citizens, through improved policy making; and

- deduce the latest benefit-cost ratio estimates: Through the delivery of better data-sharing and enhanced policy-making outcomes, the economic benefits the programme is expected to deliver range from £915k to £1.6bn, with a central scenario of £1.4bn (net present benefits)[1]. This is based on a range of scenarios (pessimistic and optimistic) modelled around three parameters.

The programme has strengthened its commercial approach and strategy, through a new Commercial and Finance Board. This approach allows the programme to track efficiencies and ensure that value for money is achieved for all of our contracts through close management and reporting.

This represents good value for money and a return on investment for the Exchequer and UK society as a whole, against other alternative courses of action. The programme is actively managing its risk and operating in accordance with the ONS risk appetite processes.

As the Accounting Officer, I am satisfied that the value for money test is met and that the programme is a sound use of public funds.

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[5] The process of data leaving a network and transferring to an external location.

[1] When compared to the revised FBC refresh figures in 2022: deliver range from £1.0bn to £1.7bn, with a central scenario of £1.2bn (net present benefits)

Feasibility

The ONS was chosen as the lead delivery partner for this cross-Government programme, due to its track record of: managing the SRS; complex analytical activity combining data security, ethics handling, legal gateways; and maintaining high levels of public confidence.

To ensure maximum impact and value for the IDS, the programme is taking user-centric delivery approach that reflects the cross-government nature of this initiative and it is working closely with the Central Digital and Data Office who lead the digital, data and technology (DDaT) function for government, to ensure the programme adheres to government wide best practice within DDaT.

The programme has demonstrated significant progress since its FBC refresh in 2022, having secured delivery confidence from Infrastructure Projects Authority (IPA) reviews and delivery of key programme milestones. The programme's IPA Gate Review 4 in February 2023 and Gate Review 0 in October 2023 received overall delivery confidence assessments of **AMBER**.

The programme continues to achieve its critical path milestones and ingest data and accredited users to the IDS.

As the Accounting Officer I am satisfied that delivery of the IDS remains feasible.

Conclusion

As the Accounting Officer for the ONS I considered this assessment of the Integrated Data Programme and approved it on [date of approval].

[If we want to delay timing of publication we need to add reasons here.]

I have prepared this summary to set out the key points which informed my decision. If any of these factors change materially during the lifetime of this project, I undertake to prepare a revised summary, setting out my assessment of them.

This summary will be published on the government's website (GOV.UK). Copies will be deposited in the Library of the House of Commons and sent to the Comptroller and Auditor General and Treasury Officer of Accounts.

Sir Ian Diamond

02/11/2023