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Dear Convener,

## DATA COLLECTION

Following the Committee meeting on 20 June 2012, you raised a number of questions

### **What possibilities does the Scottish Exchange of Education Data (ScotXed) programme offer?**

The ScotXed programme has developed a number of secure, efficient and effective electronic data exchanges between partners in the Scottish education and wider children's services community. This includes provision of data for statistical purposes, assisting schools and local authorities benchmark the achievement and attainment of young people in secondary education, and managing the national 'School to School Transfer System'.

This programme has achieved efficiencies and increased quality of data through the development of specialist software and expertise. Working with colleagues across Scottish Government it has brought these tools and expertise to bear to improve data collection activity across a range of policy areas such as local government finance, social care and justice. There remains further scope to provide services to other analytical teams across the Scottish Government and public sector more widely based on the approach of the ScotXed programme. This could improve efficiency of data collection, improve use of administrative resources and improve data security. ScotXed's ICT products and services lend themselves well to the collection of the high quality, unit level data required for effective data linking and richer analysis.

One example where we have worked with Local Authorities, analysts and other organisations to improve the quality of data and allow data linkage is around educational outcomes for Scotland's Looked After Children. The data made available prompted an enquiry by the Education and Culture Committee last year, their latest report on Looked After Children was published in May 2012.

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/51538.aspx>



**You asked what Scottish Government's strategy is to address gaps in performance, cost and activity data across the public sector.**

Our strategy is one of engagement with key users to prioritise how best to use limited resources, and to avoiding collecting data that is better collected and used at a local level, such as cost and activity data rather than outcomes data. The ScotStat network of users and producers of statistics across Scotland is a central component of this, with topic based committees considering and advising on how we should strike the right balance between collecting data and minimising burden on data providers. We are always open to suggestions and feedback on our work plans and priorities so if the committee, or any other user of official statistics, feel that there is a significant gap in statistical data then we would welcome a discussion about the specifics of that. The next step would be to consult with the full range of users and producers of statistics to reach a consensus on if, how and when to realign resources to fill the gap identified.

**In particular, you asked about approaches that would allow us to better measure outcomes equitably and consistently across public sector groups**

Improving quality and producing statistics that are accurate, up-to-date, comprehensive and meaningful is central to the work of Scottish Government statisticians. This includes ensuring our statistics can be compared consistently over time or across areas.

The Scottish Government will be participating in the forthcoming seminar on 'Benchmarking and Performance Measurement' being organised by the Local Government and Regeneration Committee on 10 September. We will use the findings from this seminar to review our existing approaches to benchmarking and consider our future role in supporting the public sector to robustly evaluate data on performance, costs and outcomes.

There is work quite a bit of development activity underway. For example, there is a current review the benchmarking framework in education where standards of performance in National Qualifications courses in secondary schools are benchmarked through the STACs (Standard Tables and Charts) system. STACs is used by local authorities, secondary schools and national education agencies for self-evaluation and improvement purposes. The Scottish Government and its partners are updating and adapting STACs so that it is fully aligned to Curriculum for Excellence. The new system, provisionally known as SMART-ER: Smart Education Results, will include a number of national measures that will be displayed on entry to the new system. SMART-ER will also enable local authorities and schools to develop additional customised "dashboards" to display the most important and relevant information at local and school level. An important feature of SMART-ER will be the links that it provides to related data sources such as Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics and Skills Development Scotland's 16+ Learning Choices data hub. SMART-ER is expected to be launched in summer 2014.

In relation to the concerns raised about the consistency of the Free Personal Care statistics, we have invested significant resources over the last 5 years to improve the data collected on Free Personal Care clients and expenditure. This has involved working with both research and finance colleagues in local authorities to improve quality assurance processes and develop a shared understanding of what is being collected. This has resulted in publication of a revised time series providing more consistent data between local authorities and over time. Due to accounting practices in a small number of local authorities some issues still remain and these are clearly explained in the Statistics Release. The Local Financial Return (LFR3) Review group was set up in May 2012 and is looking at ways to further improve the quality and consistency of all data collected on Social Work expenditure. The Free Personal

Care statistics were assessed by the UK Statistics Authority in 2011 and were designated National Statistics status in April 2012.

**You wanted to know about improvements being made by the wider public sector in Scotland: what these were and the Scottish Government role in extending their reach.**

The Scottish Government's Analytical Leadership Group oversees an ongoing and proactive programme of work designed to improve analytical and statistical capacity across the public sector, and data collection is a part of this.

There are currently 13 producers of official statistics in Scotland outwith Scottish Government and our intention is to extend this number. Staff in these organisations have now started attending training & development events organised by Scottish Government. In addition Scottish Government statistical staff regularly work on secondment in other public bodies, directly helping to build capacity and capability. There are currently 12 government statisticians working in other public bodies.

Wider than this, good practice is shared through seminars, workshops and informal analyst networks such as the ScotStat Public Sector Analysts Network and an analytical guidance library (developed with local authority analysts) is available.

**You asked for information about future plans for the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation in light of welfare reform plans by the Department for Work and Pensions.**

The next update to the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) will be published in November 2012. This will include an income domain based on DWP benefit and HMRC tax credit data as in previous versions of the SIMD.

Following publication of SIMD 2012 we plan to review the SIMD methodology and implement any necessary or appropriate changes for the next update. The review will consider, amongst other things, what changes should be made to the income domain in light of Welfare Reform. At present details of exactly what data will be available from DWP following the introduction of Universal Credit are limited. However we are in ongoing discussions with DWP to ensure we can feed into any decisions on this and to ensure we can make best use of the data for future SIMD updates as well as other statistical purposes. We are happy to keep the Committee informed at significant stages during this review.

**Finally, you asked for an update on findings from a recent consultation on data linkage for research and statistics.**

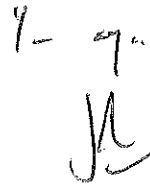
The consultation that we have recently run on the aims and principles of a Data Linkage Framework for Statistical and Research Purposes consisted of three parts: a written stakeholder consultation exercise, a series of deliberative research events with members of the public, and a variety of meetings, conferences and discussions between officials and key stakeholders. Taken together the consultation process aims to ensure the framework is developed and delivered in the most broadly acceptable and helpful way. The research findings and consultation analysis report will both be published on 31 August and I will arrange for the Convener to be sent copies of both.

The findings in the reports alongside views expressed through other routes will be considered fully in the next stages of developing the framework, including revisions to the draft guiding principles and developing potential models for a Scottish Data Sharing and Linking Service.

**In particular, you wanted to learn how this framework will lead to a better evidence base for evaluation.**

One of the benefits from data linkage which we are not currently seeing enough of is the production and analysis of longitudinal datasets. Longitudinal data provide a better basis for understanding the process of causality and allow for a better understanding of how outcomes are achieved. By enabling data from different points in the input - process - outcome chain to be joined together we will better be able to understand how a situation has arisen and design more effective policies. For example, linking data about adults' employment status back to school attendance and educational attainment records, and any children's services (such as support to attend a childcare centre and any social work support given to the family), would help understand what long term impact children's services have on people's lives. That understanding could then be used to inform decisions about overall spending, in particular 'preventative spend' whereby investment early on saves money in the long run as it avoids problems, such as poor health, or people getting involved in criminality. Currently, this kind of evaluation is possible only through relatively costly bespoke pieces of longitudinal research that take a number of years to produce results. Longitudinal studies, which make use of administrative data, also provide material to study the effect of policy interventions enacted in the past as natural experiments.

I trust this information is useful. Should you have further questions, the Chief Statistician Roger Halliday will be very happy to help further.



**JOHN SWINNEY**