

## **POST-ELECTION BRIEFING: BETTER DATA FOR INFORMED, TRANSPARENT DECISION- MAKING**

### **RSS manifesto ask**

Increased availability of government dashboards – using data for the public good to keep the public better informed about the functioning of the state.

### **Summary**

During the pandemic the UK developed world-leading expertise in communication of data through dashboards – presenting data clearly and helpfully while ensuring that the underlying data was readily available. This method of presenting data has great potential to make information about the impact of government decisions available to a greater percentage of the population and build public trust in both statistics and government. We would like to see dashboards used more regularly to communicate on the most important issues facing the state – we suggest that the government's five missions might be suitable candidates for areas to develop dashboards in.

### **What's the problem?**

During the pandemic, government dashboards proved to be a very effective way to communicate information with the public. Government statisticians worked incredibly hard to ensure the regular release of data and, after a slow start, the UK justifiably came to be seen as a world leader in the presentation of data. The UK's dashboards in particular were the only example in the world that we know of which both presented data clearly and helpfully while also making the underlying data reliably available.

Our sense is that the level of transparency that was eventually reached did not come naturally to government. However, it had huge benefits: it enabled every citizen to engage with the data at a reasonable level while also providing the tools for anybody who was interested and able to dig deeper and uncover interesting features of the data. One example of this was reported in the RSS's covid evidence sessions (pp24-5): from September-October 2021, an Immensa lab in Wolverhampton was sent around 43,000 false negative results and this was identified on September 10<sup>th</sup> by an individual looking at government data (far before it was officially recognised).



Now that the pandemic has passed, there is less emphasis on this type of data sharing than there might be. There are dashboards still being published, but none of them are given much prominence as a communication tool. If this is addressed there is great potential to inform the public, benefit from external insight and build public trust.

### **How to fix it**

We would like to see the government identify some key areas of high public interest, where the approach of using dashboards to communicate data would be beneficial. An example might be around climate change and progress towards net zero. We would also note that the new government is intending to be led by its five missions: growth, the NHS, clean energy, safer streets and opportunity. These might be good candidates for areas where dashboards are considered – to bring together the available information for the public good and to enable the public to clearly assess progress.

In some areas, eg health and social care statistics, the government has stated an aim to publish a higher percentage of their outputs in dashboard format. We welcome that move. We urge government in using dashboards to engage with users throughout the process – this will help establish clarity over use and purpose, which is essential to developing successful dashboards.

Increased effort into developing dashboards should not come at the expense of the production of other data sets for which there is a demand from users.

