

7th March 2011

100th Assessment Report

The UK Statistics Authority today publishes its 100th Assessment Report. Under the legislation that created the Authority, it is required to review all statistics that carry the National Statistics label to ensure that they comply with the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*, introduced in January 2009.

At the time the legislation came in to force there were over 1200 sets of National Statistics, some 450 of which have been covered in the first 100 reports¹. Whilst this is not yet half way through the full programme, many of the most widely used official statistics have now been assessed; and the statistical work of a wide range of government departments and other bodies has been reviewed in the process. As the first report in the programme was published in June 2009, the rate of production of reports has averaged more than one a week. More recently this has risen to around two a week.

Whilst an Assessment Report could give a set of statistics an immediate designation as National Statistics, this has yet to happen. All Assessments have found some further, sometimes quite minor, steps that needed to be taken to meet the challenging standards of the *Code*. In practice a 'conditional designation' is normally given and a timetable agreed for the extra steps that need to be taken. After that, the improvements made are documented and designation is then granted. Through this mechanism, Assessment is a powerful tool for guiding and driving the development of UK official statistics. We believe this process is currently unique among national statistical systems worldwide.

Although the *Code of Practice* covers all aspects of the production, management and dissemination of statistics, the areas that most often require attention are those that relate to communicating the statistics clearly and effectively to the people whose decisions and actions are influenced by them. The *Code* requires, among other things, that the main uses of each set of statistics be identified and that the quality and reliability of the statistics be explained in relation to those uses. This has proved to be an effective focus for enhancing the service to the user of statistics.

Whilst Assessment has driven many specific improvements, it has also shown that the great majority of official statistics meet identified user needs, are produced according to sound methods and are managed impartially and objectively. Thus Assessment also provides a large measure of public reassurance that the statistics are produced to high standards and are of value to both government and society more generally.

¹ A full list of assessment reports to date can be found at:
<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html>

The broader lessons from Assessment work are periodically identified and discussed in further reports² which guide the development of statistics that have not been assessed. This process, which is continuing to gather momentum, is designed to ensure that the whole UK statistical service, to which some 200 government organisations contribute, will work to shared and centrally managed standards and be seen both in the UK and internationally as being of the very highest quality.

As we pass the milestone of the 100th report, the Statistics Authority reiterates its commitment to the agenda of maintaining and developing the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics* and ensuring through Assessment that it is used continuously to develop the service across all four UK administrations. We shall additionally keep both the *Code* and Assessment process under review to see that they do not impose unreasonable demands on those who manage the many parts of the UK statistical service.

² <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-briefs/monitoring-brief-4-2010---findings-from-the-first-50-assessment-reports.pdf>