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Policy on the use of the National Statistics designation in various situations

1 Introduction

This Statement describes:

- how the National Statistics designation applies to associated products; and
- how changes to statistical outputs or to organisational structures in producer bodies affect the designation as National Statistics.

2 Application of the National Statistics designation to statistical outputs and associated compliance material

Statistics are usually released in a statistical bulletin. The model adopted by the Statistics Authority for assessment treats the statistical bulletin as the relevant statistical report for the purposes of the *Code*, and requires some commentary to appear in the bulletin itself, including appropriate descriptions about the strengths and limitations of the statistics. In order to fully comply with the *Code*, statistics need to be accompanied by a range of additional material.

The following list summarises the additional information that needs to be published for statistics to comply with the *Code*:

- i. A timetable of forthcoming releases (Principle 1 practice 4, and Protocol 2, practice 2)
- ii. Information about users' experiences (Principle 1, practice 5)
- iii. Announcements of changes to methods or classifications, where any occur (Principle 2, practice 4)
- iv. Details of exemptions from practices within the Code, where granted (Principle 2, practice 5)
- v. A Revisions Policy (Principle 2, practice 6)
- vi. Corrections to errors, where any have occurred (Principle 2, practice 7)
- vii. Details of methods chosen, including why they were chosen (Principle 4, practice 1)
- viii. Information about the quality of the statistics (Principle 4, practice 2)
- ix. Quality guidelines (Principle 4, practice 4)
- x. Deviations from standards, if any (Principle 4, practice 6)
- xi. Arrangements about confidentiality protection (Principle 5, practice 4)
- xii. Authorisations of exceptions to confidentiality principles, if any (Principle 5, practice 5)
- xiii. Compliance costs for surveys (Principle 6, practice 1)
- xiv. Additional tables, online tabulation tools etc where the statistics and user need warrants this (Principle 8, practice 3 and Principle 8, practice 6)
- xv. Material that publicises and facilitates access to the statistics, such as press releases and web nuggets (Principle 8, practice 4)
- xvi. Changes to pre-announced release times if any have occurred (Protocol 2, practice 5)

While this material is necessary for *Code* compliance, none of it represents sets of statistics in its own right. The designation relates just to the set of statistics in the main statistical report and the use of National Statistics logo should be restricted to that report. The associated material is not designated as National Statistics, and therefore not badged as such, but when appropriate, should be accompanied by an explanation of its relationship with the relevant National Statistics output, and how it contributes to *Code* compliance.

Not all statistical reports fit cleanly into a standard model of statistical reports. Annex A lists some special cases, and how assessment and designation applies to each. Where there is any ambiguity in the classification of sets of statistics in particular outputs, producers should consult the Statistics Authority's Monitoring and Assessment Team to confirm the arrangements.

3 Application of the National Statistics designation to changed statistics

It is both desirable and inevitable that statistical reports evolve over time, in response to new user needs, changing data sources and other changes to the environment within which the statistics are produced. The statistical Head of Profession (HoP) is responsible for ensuring that the *Code* continues to be complied with, pending a further assessment.

Where major changes are made to statistical reports, such as the merging or splitting of them, it may be appropriate for the Authority to carry out a full or partial re-assessment of the new outputs. In all such cases, HoPs should consult the Statistics Authority's Monitoring and Assessment Team to discuss whether re-assessment is appropriate. The National Statistician has circulated guidance to HoPs to help them to determine the types of changes to statistics that should be reported to the Authority.

The responsibility for the production of statistics sometimes moves from one producer body to another. Although the designation relates to sets of statistics rather than to an individual producer body, many of the practices within the *Code* relate to the organisational environment within which the statistics are produced. The organisational arrangements inevitably vary from one producer body to another; in some cases the receiving body will previously have demonstrated that it complies with these practices through being assessed.. As above, receiving HoPs should consult the Statistics Authority's Monitoring and Assessment Team to discuss whether re-assessment is appropriate. Annex B describes two scenarios that we expect to occur.

Information summarising the steps for producer bodies to take in the various situations described in this Statement is included at Annex C and Annex D.

Notes about some non-standard statistical releases

A1 Introduction

The de facto standard for releasing statistics is in a statistical report, often called a statistical bulletin, and released either in pdf, Word or html format. Such reports present newly produced statistics, typically in the context of the equivalent statistics released for previous periods, accompanied by commentary. The remainder of this annex describes some deviations from this simple model.

A2 Secondary analyses and derived statistics

Sometimes, additional secondary analyses (not just simply re-presentations of existing statistics) are published in additional statistical reports, separately from the main statistical bulletin. To determine the extent to which such additional analyses comply with the *Code*, an assessment here will relate to the extent to which users' needs relating to the secondary analysis have been established, whether the statistics are presented, explained and caveated in ways that meet those needs etc. Issues of methods etc will have already been explored in the assessment of the 'parent' publication, and unless there are any extenuating circumstances, will not in general need to be re-assessed.

Sometimes a series of articles is published relating to a single broad theme, but on different detailed topics, such as the special reports produced from the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs' Farm Business Survey, reported in Assessment Report 154¹. In such cases, we would consider these as a single series, put together to common standards, even though the detailed topic of a particular report varied from time to time; the National Statistics designation would apply to each without a separate assessment of each report being necessary.

A3 One-offs, and ad hoc and first editions

In general terms we consider that assessing and designating one-off outputs is both disproportionately difficult and costly. The National Statistician has published guidance² to help define which outputs should be regarded as 'official statistics'; this guidance precludes one-offs from being official statistics because of lack of ongoing demand.

In practical terms the designation of any output before it has first been published is somewhat problematic. For example, assessment takes account of the views of users, and the *Code* itself requires users' experiences of the statistics to be documented – neither of which is possible prior to the publication of the statistics. The Authority's preferred approach is that statistical producers release statistics as official statistics first, perhaps as experimental statistics³. This provides an opportunity for producers to engage with users about the development of the statistics, and to gather evidence about users' experiences, which is needed to demonstrate compliance with the *Code*.

¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/assessment-report-154---statistics-from-the-farm-business-survey-rotating-modules.pdf>

² <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/national-statistician/ns-reports--reviews-and-guidance/national-statistician-s-guidance/identifying-official-statistics.pdf>

³ Principle 4, Practice 5 of the *Code of Practice* states that the publication of experimental statistics is a helpful part of continuous improvement

A4 *Compendium publications*

Pure compendium publications draw together already-published sets of National Statistics into a single volume. Assessments of compendia, therefore, relate to the processes involved in bringing together the particular sets of statistics into a single entity. It reviews the way that users have been engaged in relation to the producer body deciding which statistics are to be drawn together in the compendium, the adequacy of summary commentary about the various sets of statistics, and links to where the reader can find more information about the individual sets of statistics. Designation of a compendium publication as National Statistics therefore means that the producer body has, for example: identified and met user needs in terms of the content of the publication; considered the quality of each series for inclusion; and written appropriate commentary. We have included such a description in reports of assessments of compendium publications, for the sake of clarity.

A5 *Hybrid publications*

The model in A4 above reflects a rather pure view of a compendium publication as including only sets of official statistics that have already been published elsewhere. Sometimes, compendia include other official statistics, (either those that have previously been published elsewhere, or those that are first published⁴ within the compendium), or statistics from non-official sources, as helpful context to help paint a full picture about the subject matter.

As described in A4 the assessment of a compendium relates to the procedures for drawing together the statistics from elsewhere. It does not mean therefore that any/all of the individual sets of statistics within it are designated as National Statistics in their own right. Such designation would require that users' needs have been established and taken into account in publishing the individual sets of statistics – the user need might be quite different (in terms of timeliness, presentation and so on) for statistics presented on their own, compared with that for a compendium.

This means that:

- any sets of statistics being released for the first time as part of a compendium publication, would need to be assessed formally and specifically as part of the assessment of the compendium if they were to be granted National Statistics status in their own right;
- official statistics included within a designated compendium would similarly not be designated as National Statistics in their own right without specific, formal assessment against the *Code*; and
- non-official statistics within the compendium would not be classified as either official statistics or National Statistics simply by virtue of having been included within a National Statistics compendium.

⁴ Statistics are sometimes released first within compendia where the timing is suitable, and the additional cost of presenting them in a separate statistical bulletin may not be warranted.

Scenarios relating to the transfer of statistical production from one body to another

B1 National Statistics transferring to an existing producer of National Statistics

Where National Statistics transfer to a producer body that has demonstrated to the Authority that its organisational practices comply with the *Code*, the National Statistics designation will generally be retained upon the assurance from the receiving HoP that the new body will continue to produce the statistics in compliance with the *Code*. Such statistics, depending on their importance and an evaluation of risk, would be prioritised for early re-assessment once processes have been bedded down in the new body.

B2 National Statistics transferring to a producer body that does not produce any National Statistics

Where statistics transfer to a producer body that has not been subject to an assessment of its statistics, the National Statistics designation will generally be retained upon the assurance from the receiving HoP that the new body will continue to produce the statistics in compliance with the *Code*. It would be appropriate for the producer body to include a statement alongside the published statistics along the following lines: "These statistics have not been formally assessed for compliance with the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics* since their transfer from [sending organisation]. The UK Statistics Authority is planning to assess the statistics for compliance with the *Code of Practice* in the near future." Such statistics, depending on their importance and an evaluation of risk, would be prioritised for early re-assessment once processes have been bedded down in the new body.

In either case, if the set of statistics had recently been assessed and granted a conditional designation⁵, we would normally expect the conditional designation to continue until the receiving body had demonstrated full compliance with the *Code*. It would be appropriate for the producer body to include a statement alongside the published statistics along the following lines: "These statistics have not been formally assessed for compliance with the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics* since their transfer from [sending organisation]. We are working with the UK Statistics Authority's Assessment Team to demonstrate compliance with the *Code of Practice*, and the designation as National Statistics is conditional on that." The relevant HoP should discuss the arrangements for assessment and designation with the Statistics Authority's Monitoring and Assessment Team ahead of the publication of the statistics.

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⁵ Conditional designations are granted in relation to sets of statistics where steps need to be taken by the producer body to become fully compliant with the *Code*

Process for determining National Statistics status in various situations

In relation to the following types of statistical releases

<i>Type of release</i>	<i>Considerations regarding NS status</i>
Statistical bulletins/reports	Badge as NS if passed assessment
Compendium publications	
Secondary analysis or statistics derived from existing NS series, published separately	Ask M&A about the NS status and the need for (full or partial) assessment.
One-offs and ad hoc publications.	Ask M&A for advice. Only in exceptional cases would these be subject to assessment and designation.
The first publication of a new statistical series	Ask M&A for advice. In general, ongoing series of statistics will be assessed after their first publication.
The publication of new statistics based on an existing set of NSs	Ask M&A for advice about whether the NS designation can be transferred to the new statistics, or whether (full or partial) re-assessment would be appropriate
Individual sets of statistics first released through a compendium	Do not badge as NS if released in their own right – ask M&A about an assessment
Undesignated official statistics included in a designated compendium	Do not badge as NS in their own right
Non-official statistics included in a designated compendium	Do not badge as NS in their own right (these are not official statistics)

In relation to the following types of compliance material

<i>Type of compliance material</i>	<i>Considerations regarding NS status</i>
A timetable of forthcoming releases	Label as compliance material; do not badge as NS
Published information about users' experiences	
Announcements of changes to methods or classifications	
Details of exemptions from practices within the Code, where granted	
A Revisions Policy	
Documentation of methods chosen, including why they were chosen	
Published information about the quality of the statistics	
Quality guidelines	
Published information about deviations from standards	
Published information about arrangements for confidentiality protection	
Published compliance costs for surveys	
Additional tables, online tabulation tools etc that support the published statistics	
Material that publicises and facilitates access to the statistics, such as press releases, web nuggets, tweets	

In relation to the following change situations

<i>Type of change</i>	<i>Considerations regarding NS status</i>
Changes have been made to a set of NSs that are clear improvements, such as increased coverage of the statistics, improved methods or improvements to the presentation of the statistics	Continue to badge as NS
The frequency of publication of a set of NSs has been reduced	Ask M&A for advice about whether the NS designation can continue, or whether (full or partial) re-assessment would be appropriate
The coverage or sample size relating to a set of NSs has been reduced	
Methods have been changed which may have negatively impacted on quality, or comparability of a set of NSs	
The method or format for publishing a set of NSs has been changed, for example by merging or splitting reports	
The coverage of a statistical report has been changed	
The responsibility for publication of NSs has been transferred to an organisation that publishes NSs	Ask M&A for advice – the default position is that the NS designation would be retained
The responsibility for publication of NSs has been transferred to an organisation that doesn't publish NSs	Ask M&A for advice – the default position is that the statistics would be prioritised for early re-assessment, and an explanatory note about NS status published alongside them

