

Recorded Crime
in Scotland

*Scottish
Government*

Recorded Crime in Scotland

June 2009

© Crown Copyright 2009

The text in this document may be reproduced free of charge in any format or medium providing it is reproduced accurately and not used in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and the title of the document specified.

Where we have identified any third party copyright material you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned.

For any other use of this material please write to Office of Public Sector Information, Information Policy Team, Kew, Richmond, Surrey TW9 4DU or email: licensing@opsi.gov.uk

About the UK Statistics Authority

The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body operating at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament. It was established on 1 April 2008 by the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*.

The UK Statistics Authority's overall objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. The Statistics Authority is also required to promote and safeguard the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics, and good practice in relation to official statistics.

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

1. oversight of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – the executive office of the Authority
2. independent scrutiny (monitoring and assessment) of all official statistics produced in the UK

Contact us

Tel: 0845 604 1857

Email: authority.enquiries@statistics.gsi.gov.uk

Website: www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk

UK Statistics Authority
Statistics House
Myddelton Street
London EC1R 1UW

ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

Under the provisions of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007, the UK Statistics Authority has a statutory function to assess sets of statistics against the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, with a view to determining whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated, or to retain their designation, as National Statistics.

Designation as National Statistics means that the statistics are deemed to be compliant with the Code of Practice. Whilst the Code is wide-ranging, designation may be broadly interpreted to mean that: the statistics meet identified user needs; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are well explained.

Assessment reports will not normally comment further, for example on the validity of the statistics as a social or economic measure; though reports may point to such questions if the Authority believes that further research would be desirable.

Designation as National Statistics will sometimes be granted in cases where some changes still need to be made to meet fully the requirements of the Code, on condition that steps are taken by the producer body, within a stated timeframe, to address the weaknesses. This is to avoid public confusion and does not reduce the obligation to comply with the Code.

Designation is granted on the basis of the information provided to the Statistics Authority, primarily by the organisation that produces the statistics. The information includes a range of factual evidence and also assurances by senior statisticians in the producer organisation. The views of users are also sought. Should further information come to light subsequently which changes the Authority's analysis, the Assessment report may be withdrawn and revised as necessary.

Once designated as National Statistics, it is a statutory requirement on the producer organisation to ensure that the set of statistics continues to be produced in compliance with the Code of Practice.

1 Introduction

1.1 This is one of a series of reports prepared under the provisions of Section 14 of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*¹. The report covers *Recorded Crime in Scotland* statistics, produced by the Scottish Government. This presents statistics on crimes and offences recorded and cleared up by the eight Scottish police forces. The statistics are released in an annual report².

1.2 The initial set of statistics selected for assessment included: statistics produced by the Office for National Statistics, Whitehall departments, the Devolved Administrations, and an Arms Length Body; statistics from a variety of sources; different types of product; and different types of series. The breadth of the selection was to learn as much as possible from the early assessments and contribute both to our longer term planning and to our development of the process. The Statistics Authority will be inviting comments on both the process for assessment and the presentation of reports with a view to further development of the arrangements in the coming months. The forward programme of Assessments is at <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/programme-of-assessment/index.html> and further information on the principles and procedures for assessment is at <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/principles---procedures/index.html>.

1.3 The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

Section 2 Summary of findings, highlighting the main strengths and weaknesses in relation to the Code of Practice. This summary includes the UK Statistics Authority's recommendation in relation to designation as National Statistics.

Section 3 Subject of the assessment, an overview of the statistics and their history.

Section 4 Detailed assessment, providing more details about the assessment of compliance against each principle and protocol of the Code of Practice.

Annex 1 Suggestions for improvement

Annex 2 Summary of the assessment process and users' views.

1.4 This report was prepared by the Authority's Assessment team, and approved by the Board of the Statistics Authority on the advice of the Head of Assessment.

¹ http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pga/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf

² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice/PubRecordedCrime>

2 Summary of findings

2.1 Recommendation for designation as National Statistics

2.1.1 The annual statistics published in *Recorded Crime in Scotland* are confirmed as National Statistics, subject to the Scottish Government making some specific enhancements listed in section 2.4 below and reporting them to the Authority by October 2009.

2.2 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

2.2.1 The assessment identified compliance with most aspects of the Code of Practice. User engagement is relatively strong, with a range of opportunities for internal and external users to provide comments.

2.2.2 Scottish Government statisticians responsible for producing *Recorded Crime in Scotland* are aware that their policy colleagues have a need for more frequent and timely published statistics, preferably on a monthly or quarterly basis, and are currently exploring the feasibility of more frequent publication. Police forces currently publish local crime statistics as part of their annual reports in June, which enables media users to collate their own national figures ahead of the official statistical release. This could be perceived as undermining the orderly release of the statistics.

2.2.3 Police forces are invited to provide commentary on the finalised statistics, which forms a large part of the published commentary. While this provides a useful insight into the operational context of the statistics, the impartiality of this commentary (which is taken verbatim) could be compromised.

2.3 Detailed recommendations

2.3.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that the Scottish Government could strengthen its compliance with the Code. Those which the Assessment team considers essential to enable re-designation as National Statistics are listed in section 2.4 below. Other suggestions, which would improve the statistics and the service provided to users but which are not central to their designation, are listed at annex 1.

2.4 Requirements for re-designation as National Statistics

- Requirement 1** Identify the earliest feasible date for publication of *Recorded Crime in Scotland* statistics after the data are supplied by police forces; and revise the published timetable to bring forward publication to that date (para 4.6)
- Requirement 2** Arrange for the UK National Statistics Publication Hub to provide improved access to *Recorded Crime in Scotland* statistics through a more direct link (para 4.7)
- Requirement 3** The authors of the statistical release should prepare their own impartial and objective commentary on the statistics rather than rely on commentary provided by police forces (para 4.11)
- Requirement 4** Ensure that government statements on *Recorded Crime in Scotland* statistics are clearly presented as policy statements (or ministerial statements) and can be readily distinguished from statistical releases (para 4.34)
- Requirement 5** Publish a Statement of Administrative Sources, once central guidance becomes available (para 4.36)

3 Subject of the assessment

- 3.1 *Recorded Crime in Scotland* is an annual statistical bulletin produced by the Justice Analytical Services Division of the Scottish Government. It presents statistics on crimes, and offences recorded and cleared up by police forces, and includes trends over the last decade for Scotland, police force areas and local authority areas.
- 3.2 The eight Scottish forces provide statistical returns to the Scottish Government on a cumulative quarterly basis. These comprise a simple count of the numbers of each type of offence recorded and cleared up by police. At the end of the recording year, the returns are checked for quality and aggregated to give a national total.
- 3.3 Once the statistics are finalised, the Scottish Government invites the police forces to provide commentary on what initiatives have taken place locally that may explain any changes in the figures for their area. These commentaries feed directly into the publication.
- 3.4 Statistical bulletins in the criminal justice series changed to present information on a financial year basis from 2004/05. This was at the request of users and data providers. As a transitional arrangement, the recorded crime bulletin for 2003 included data for financial years up to 2003/04 in addition to the calendar year figures for years to 2003.
- 3.5 Trends in the recorded crime figures since 2004/05 were affected by the introduction of the Scottish Crime Recording Standard (SCRS) which, as anticipated, increased the numbers of some minor crimes recorded by the police, such as minor crimes of vandalism and minor thefts.
- 3.6 Key figures from the 2007/08 bulletin appeared in the *Scotland on Sunday* newspaper on 28 September 2008. This was in advance of the official release of these figures at 9.30am on Tuesday 30 September 2008. The National Statistician and the UK Statistics Authority were informed and a 'breach report' was published³. A security investigation concluded that too many people had access to the statistics within the relevant time period for there to be a realistic prospect that further investigation would identify the source of the leak.

³ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/About/BrRecCr08>

4 Detailed Assessment

Principle 1: Meeting user needs

The production, management and dissemination of official statistics should meet the requirements of informed decision-making by government, public services, business, researchers and the public.

- 4.1 The Scottish Government has good knowledge of, and contacts with, users of the statistics presented in *Recorded Crime in Scotland*. The main internal users are officials responsible for crime policy. External users include the police forces themselves, the media, local authorities, academics and criminal justice organisations.
- 4.2 Methods of engagement with internal users include discussions throughout the year on particular issues relating to recorded crime data. Police forces are engaged via quarterly meetings with Scottish Crime Registrars Group (SCRG), led by the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS), and regular meetings of the SCRG Scenarios/Counting Rules sub-group.
- 4.3 Other external users are consulted through the ScotStat Crime and Justice Committee⁴, which meets twice a year. ScotStat is a network for users and providers of Scottish statistics, and users are able to register on the ScotStat website where papers and minutes are uploaded.
- 4.4 Users were reportedly satisfied with the level and format of engagement.
- 4.5 While minutes and papers from ScotStat meetings are available, there is a shortage of documentation about the uses and users of the statistics. A number of areas for possible development have been identified through consultation, but there is a lack of documentation describing how the Scottish Government prioritises and develops these issues.
- 4.6 Users reported that the statistics are of limited use due to their late publication in September. The Justice Analytical Services Division of the Scottish Government is aware that its policy colleagues have a need for more frequent and timely published recorded crime statistics. Police forces currently publish local crime statistics as part of their annual reports in June, which enables media users to collate their own national figures ahead of the official statistical release. The Assessment team recognises that the producer is currently working to address this issue. As part of the re-designation as National Statistics the Scottish Government should identify the earliest feasible date for publication of *Recorded Crime in Scotland* statistics after the data are supplied by police forces; and revise the published timetable to bring forward publication to that date⁵ (Requirement 1). In addition, it would be desirable to increase the frequency of published crime statistics through the release of quarterly statistics.

⁴ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice/scotstatcrime>

⁵ In relation to Principle 1 Practice 4 and Protocol 2 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

Official statistics, and information about statistical processes, should be managed impartially and objectively.

- 4.7 Statistics are published in an orderly and timely manner via the Scottish Government website, and are free-of-charge for all. They can be accessed from the UK National Statistics Publication Hub although the link on that website is to the home page for the Scottish Government Statistics rather than to the publication itself. As part of the re-designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should arrange for the UK National Statistics Publication Hub to include a more direct link to *Recorded Crime in Scotland* statistics⁶ (Requirement 2).
- 4.8 A revisions policy is included in the Statement of Compliance⁷ with the (now-superseded) National Statistics Code of Practice. A prominent sentence drawing attention to revisions is included on the 'link page' to the publication.
- 4.9 Information about changes to reporting systems and recording periods is included in the publication. These changes were also announced through the ScotStat network and media briefings.
- 4.10 Concerns regarding a breach of pre-release access have mostly been addressed by new guidance (see Protocol 2).
- 4.11 Police forces are invited to provide commentary on the finalised statistics, which forms a large part of the published commentary. While this provides a useful insight into the operational context of the statistics, the impartiality and objectivity of this commentary (which is taken verbatim) could be questioned. The Justice Analytical Services Division of the Scottish Government, as the producer of these official statistics, is responsible for the commentary provided on recorded crime statistics. As part of the re-designation as National Statistics, the authors of the statistical release should prepare their own impartial and objective commentary on the statistics rather than rely on commentary provided by police forces⁸ (Requirement 3).

⁶ In relation to Protocol 2 Practice 3 of the Code of Practice

⁷ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/03/20843/54401>

⁸ In relation to Principle 2 Practice 2 and Principle 8 Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

Principle 3: Integrity

At all stages in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics, the public interest should prevail over organisational, political or personal interests.

- 4.12 The statistical release is issued separately from two statements published as 'news releases', neither of which is issued to the press or published ahead of the publication of the statistics. One of these⁹ is a factual summary of the statistical release, while the other¹⁰ is more media-oriented and includes government statements. It is not immediately clear which of these news releases are official statistics and which are government statements (see Protocol 2).
- 4.13 No incidents of political pressures, abuses of trust or complaints relating to professional integrity, quality or standards were reported.

⁹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2008/09/30102248>

¹⁰ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2008/09/30100641>

Principle 4: Sound methods and assured quality

Statistical methods should be consistent with scientific principles and internationally recognised best practices, and be fully documented. Quality should be monitored and assured taking account of internationally agreed practices.

- 4.14 Overall, the statistics meet the quality requirements of the main users. There is good consultation with users about improvements to methods. The compilation of the statistics appears to be sound. The publications contain some explanation of why particular choices were made, as well as discussion of bias and recording issues.
- 4.15 Data are subjected to a number of quality assurance checks and inconsistencies are followed up with the police forces. The Assessment team is satisfied that staff are appropriately trained in quality management.
- 4.16 The Scottish Government is aware of ways it can improve the statistics and has made efforts to achieve continuous improvement. For example, a pilot was conducted to demonstrate the feasibility of gathering individual level data, although this has not been taken forward due to a forthcoming IT system development within police forces which will implement a common crime recording platform across all forces
- 4.17 Previous publications have referred to the Scottish Crime and Victimization Survey (SCVS). However, the commentary provides little or no analysis comparing crime statistics provided by these two sources or considers their coherence when viewed together. The Assessment team recognises that the new Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS) will provide much higher quality data than previous surveys. Strengthening the commentary to analyse both these sources of crime statistics and to consider their coherence would be desirable.
- 4.18 Legislative differences, as well as differences between recording systems, mean that it is not straightforward to make comparisons between Scotland and the rest of the UK. Further work into how the data can be made more comparable would add value to the statistics.
- 4.19 Historical data are available from 1930 to 2008. Figures for 2004/05 were affected by the introduction of a new reporting system. It was hoped that the SCVS would be able to monitor the effect of this change, but due to shortcomings in the survey design this was not possible. The Assessment team recognises that with the improved SCJS, the producer will be in a better position to monitor the effect of any future changes to time series.

Principle 5: Confidentiality

Private information about individual persons (including bodies corporate) compiled in the production of official statistics is confidential, and should be used for statistical purposes only.

- 4.20 The cumulative quarterly data returns from police forces are aggregated totals for types of crime recorded by the police. No information on the characteristics of individuals is provided, so there is little risk of a breach in confidentiality for these statistics.
- 4.21 If the Scottish Government moves towards individual level data returns, the relevant practices under this principle will be applicable.

Principle 6: Proportionate burden

The cost burden on data suppliers should not be excessive and should be assessed relative to the benefits arising from the use of the statistics.

- 4.22 Whilst the data for *Recorded Crime in Scotland* statistics are already collected by police forces as part of their own administrative systems there is an additional collection burden to extract the relevant data for delivery to the Scottish Government. The Scottish Government has provided a generic Excel template, together with guidance notes, to help suppliers complete the returns.
- 4.23 The Scottish Government does not collect estimates of the time taken to provide this data, or report annually on the estimated costs. Some suppliers felt that the Scottish Government does not appreciate the time it takes to extract the data and highlighted that it is also time consuming to provide commentary on the statistics.

Principle 7: Resources

The resources made available for statistical activities should be sufficient to meet the requirements of this Code and should be used efficiently and effectively.

- 4.24 The production of these statistics appears to be sufficiently resourced. Staff are appropriately skilled, recruited via a centralised process and have an appropriate competence framework.
- 4.25 There is specific budget for user consultation via the ScotStat network.
- 4.26 Appropriate project management tools are used to manage resources.

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

Official statistics, accompanied by full and frank commentary, should be readily accessible to all users.

- 4.27 Many of the requirements of Principle 8 of the Code are met in relation to *Recorded Crime in Scotland* statistics. Particular features include:
- detailed commentary about local circumstances - although there are reservations about impartiality (para 4.11)
 - Useful charts
 - Frank discussion of limitations and details of methods and definitions
 - A range of methods for publicising the statistics.
- 4.28 However, additional commentary on the national (Scottish) situation, and on the policy context, would help users' interpretation of the statistics.
- 4.29 The availability of data tables in other formats, for example downloadable Excel files, would encourage analysis and re-use.

Protocol 1: User engagement

Effective user engagement is fundamental both to trust in statistics and securing maximum public value. This Protocol draws together the relevant practices set out elsewhere in the Code and expands on the requirements in relation to consultation.

4.30 The statistics are compliant with the requirements of the Code for user engagement. Regular consultation takes place through a range of mechanisms and media.

Protocol 2: Release practices

Statistical reports should be released into the public domain in an orderly manner that promotes public confidence and gives equal access to all, subject to relevant legislation.

- 4.31 Key figures from the 2007/08 bulletin appeared in the *Scotland on Sunday* newspaper on 28 September 2008, two days in advance of the official release of these figures. A security investigation concluded that too many people had access to the statistics within the relevant time period for there to be a realistic prospect that further investigation would identify the source of the leak.
- 4.32 Since this event, the Scottish Government has issued new guidance to all statistical staff and those who receive pre-release access. The key messages in this guidance are:
- Individuals can only be given access in line with explicit purposes
 - New statutory conditions prevent onward disclosure without permission
 - Pre-release access statistics can only be sent to individuals
- 4.33 The Assessment team recognises that the new guidance has tightened controls over pre-release. However, the guidance makes an exception to allow pre-release access statistics to be sent to certain approved generic mailboxes. The Assessment team considers that sending this material to generic mailboxes weakens the producer's control over who sees the statistics.
- 4.34 In addition to the statistical release, two separate statements are published on the same day, as 'news releases'. One of these¹¹ is a factual summary of the statistical release, while the other¹² is more media-oriented and includes government statements. It is not immediately clear which of these news releases are official statistics and which are government statements. As part of the re-designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should ensure that government statements on *Recorded Crime in Scotland* statistics are clearly presented as policy statements (or ministerial statements) and can be readily distinguished from statistical releases (Requirement 4)¹³.

¹¹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2008/09/30102248>

¹² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2008/09/30100641>

¹³ In relation to Protocol 2 Practice 9 and Principle 3 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

Protocol 3: The use of administrative sources for statistical purposes

Administrative sources should be fully exploited for statistical purposes, subject to adherence to appropriate safeguards.

- 4.35 *Recorded Crime in Scotland* statistics (which are a by-product of a largely administrative system) are compliant with the majority of principles under this protocol.
- 4.36 The Scottish Government should publish a Statement of Administrative Sources, once central guidance becomes available¹⁴ (Requirement 5).

¹⁴ In relation to Protocol 3 Practice 5 of the Code of Practice

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to the Scottish Government's statistical outputs, in the interest of the public good. These are not formally required for re-designation, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| Suggestion 1 | Make documentation available on how issues identified through user consultation are prioritised and developed (para 4.5) |
| Suggestion 2 | Increase the frequency of published crime statistics through the release of quarterly statistics (para 4.6) |
| Suggestion 3 | Strengthen the commentary to analyse statistics from both the SCJS and police recorded crime and to consider their coherence when viewed together (para 4.17) |
| Suggestion 4 | In collaboration with counterparts in the other Devolved Administrations, the UK Government and ONS, promote work to improve the comparability of recorded crime statistics across each of the 4 countries (para 4.18) |
| Suggestion 5 | Report annually on the estimated costs to suppliers (para 4.23) |
| Suggestion 6 | Prepare additional commentary on the national (Scottish) situation, and on the policy context, in order to help users' interpretation of the statistics (para 4.28) – see also Improvement Action 3 |
| Suggestion 7 | Make data tables in other formats, for example downloadable Excel files, to encourage analysis and re-use (para 4.29) |
| Suggestion 8 | Either amend the pre-release guidance (on the interpretation of the Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics (Scotland) Order 2008) so that pre-release statistics are sent to named individuals only (rather than generic mailboxes); or amend the guidance to cover what is expected of those individuals who have access to mailboxes that receive pre-release statistics but are not on the list of named individuals who have access to pre-release statistics (para 4.33) |

Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A2.1 This assessment was conducted from March to June 2009.

A2.2 The Assessment team met representatives of the Scottish Government at an initial meeting in March 2009. Some background information was provided by the Scottish Government during March 2009, and Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 1 May 2009. The Assessment team subsequently met with the Scottish Government during May 2009 to confirm and clarify the written evidence provided.

Summary of users contacted, and issues raised

A2.3 As part of the assessment, questionnaires were sent to more than 100 users and other interested parties. The Assessment team received 13 responses. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Internal Scottish Government	1
Police forces (suppliers)	4
External Users	6
ScotStat Users	2

A2.4 In general, users were satisfied with the *Recorded Crime in Scotland* statistics and with the producers in the Scottish Government. They mentioned the high level of quality, accuracy and accessibility of the data and the effective engagement and sharing of information. Some issues were raised about the timeliness of data and the level of detail available.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice/PubRecordedCrime>

