

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on Children's and Young People's Social Care for England

*(produced by the Office for Standards in
Education, Children's Services and Skills
(Ofsted))*

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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 Authority's overall objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. It 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.

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ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* gives the UK Statistics Authority a statutory power to assess sets of statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*. Assessment will determine whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated as National Statistics.

Designation as National Statistics means that the statistics comply with the *Code of Practice*. The *Code* is wide-ranging. Designation can be interpreted to mean that the statistics: meet identified user needs; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are explained well.

Designation as National Statistics should not be interpreted to mean that the statistics are always correct. For example, whilst the *Code* requires statistics to be produced to a level of accuracy that meets users' needs, it also recognises that errors can occur – in which case it requires them to be corrected and publicised.

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

Assessment reports typically provide an overview of any noteworthy features of the methods used to produce the statistics, and will highlight substantial concerns about quality. Assessment reports also describe aspects of the ways in which the producer addresses the 'sound methods and assured quality' principle of the *Code*, but do not themselves constitute a review of the methods used to produce the statistics. However the *Code* requires producers to "seek to achieve continuous improvement in statistical processes by, for example, undertaking regular reviews".

The Authority may grant designation on condition that the producer body takes steps, within a stated timeframe, to fully meet the *Code's* requirements. This is to avoid public confusion and does not reduce the obligation to comply with the *Code*.

The Authority grants designation on the basis of three main sources of information:

- i. factual evidence and assurances by senior statisticians in the producer body;
- ii. the views of users who we contact, or who contact us, and;
- iii. our own review activity.

Should further information come to light subsequently which changes the Authority's analysis, it may withdraw the Assessment report and revise it as necessary.

It is a statutory requirement on the producer body to ensure that it continues to produce the set of statistics designated as National Statistics in compliance with the *Code of Practice*.

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1 Summary of findings

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports¹ prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*². The Act allows an appropriate authority³ to request an assessment of official statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*⁴ in order for them to gain National Statistics status. This report is in response to such a request. The report covers the sets of statistics referred to in this report as social care statistics, produced by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) and reported in:

- *Fostering quality assurance and data forms*⁵ (*Fostering*)
- *Adoption quality assurance and data forms*⁶ (*Adoption*)
- *Children's social care providers and places*⁷ (*Providers and Places*)
- *Children's homes inspection outcomes*⁸ (*Children's Homes Inspections*)
- *Children's social care (excluding children's homes) inspection outcomes*⁹ (*Inspections excluding Children's Homes*)
- *Local authority children's services inspections and outcomes*¹⁰ (*LA Inspections*)
- *Social Care Annual Report inspection data*¹¹ (*Inspection Annual Data*)

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

1.2 Decision concerning designation as National Statistics

1.2.1 The Statistics Authority judges that the statistics covered by this report are readily accessible, produced according to sound methods and managed impartially and objectively in the public interest, subject to any points for action in this report. The Statistics Authority confirms that the statistics listed in paragraph 1.1.1, with the exception of *Inspection Annual Data* can be

¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html>

² http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf

³ Subsection 12(7) of the Act defines 'appropriate authority' as Ministers of the Crown, Scottish Ministers, Welsh Ministers, Northern Ireland departments or the National Statistician

⁴ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

⁵ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/fostering-quality-assurance-and-data-forms-2012-13-first-statistical-release>

⁶ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/adoption-quality-assurance-and-data-forms-2012-13-first-statistical-release>

⁷ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/official-statistics-childrens-social-care-providers-and-places>

⁸ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/official-statistics-childrens-social-care-inspections-and-outcomes>

⁹ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/official-statistics-childrens-social-care-inspections-and-outcomes>

¹⁰ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/official-statistics-local-authority-childrens-services-inspections-and-outcomes>

¹¹ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/official-statistics-childrens-social-care-inspections-and-outcomes>

designated as new National Statistics products, subject to Ofsted implementing the Requirements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by December 2014.

- 1.2.2 *Inspection Annual Data* should be clearly labelled as a supplementary dataset to the social care statistics designated as National Statistics, rather than as a National Statistics product in its own right. This is discussed further in paragraph 2.12.
- 1.2.3 Ofsted has informed the Assessment team that it has started to implement the Requirements listed in section 1.5. The Statistics Authority welcomes this.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.3.1 The social care statistics are the first of Ofsted's official statistics to be assessed against the *Code*. Ofsted has demonstrated a strong commitment to strengthening existing statistical policies, and to developing new ones where needed. The Assessment team has identified some areas where further improvements are required, mainly to ensure more orderly release of the statistics and to provide users and suppliers with more information to assure them about the quality of the statistics and about arrangements for protecting the confidentiality of the people to whom the statistics relate. The Assessment team has identified a potential concern around the suppression applied to the detailed datasets published as part of Adoption, and has directed Ofsted to review immediately its disclosure arrangements in respect of protecting the confidentiality of the children and adoptive families.
- 1.3.2 The statistics team engages well with users from within Ofsted, from the Department for Education (DfE) and with the local authorities and adoption and fostering services that both supply and use the data that are used to produce the statistics. However, we consider that these statistics potentially have a wider audience, for example, from organisations representing children, and that by widening its dialogue with users, Ofsted could produce more insightful analysis to appeal to those users, thereby extracting more public value from its investment in producing these statistics.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

- 1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where Ofsted should improve the production and presentation of its social care statistics. Those which are essential for Ofsted to address in order to strengthen its compliance with the *Code* and to enable designation as National Statistics are listed – as Requirements – in section 1.5, alongside a short summary of the key findings that led to each Requirement being made. Other recommended changes, which the Assessment team considers would improve the statistics and the service provided to users but which are not formally required for their designation as National Statistics, are listed – as Suggestions – in section 1.6.

1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

1.5.1 This section includes those improvements that Ofsted is required to make in respect of its social care statistics in order to comply fully with the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*, and to enable designation as National Statistics.

Finding	Requirement	
Ofsted acknowledges that it needs to do more to broaden its engagement with users, and is developing user engagement strategies. Ofsted should:	1	a) Engage with users beyond itself, DfE and LAs to understand the use that they make, and would like to make, of the social care statistics and document more fully the types of decision that they inform b) ensure that the user engagement strategies that it is developing are clear about how Ofsted will extend its dialogue with users beyond discussing the provision and use of the administrative data (para 3.4).
Ofsted releases provisional statistics as part of a statistical report and then final statistics without any commentary. This does not aid user interpretation, particularly with respect to any revisions. Ofsted should:	2	a) Review its practice of publishing final statistics for the previous period separately to the provisional statistics for the latest period, without any commentary, and present the statistics in a way that better aids user interpretation b) include information within or alongside its statistical reports, data tables and datasets about the scale and impact of any revisions c) publish its updated revisions policy, taking account of further developments made in response to part (a) of this Requirement (para 3.7).
Ofsted publishes insufficient information about the methods used to produce the social care statistics, or the quality of those statistics. Ofsted should:	3	a) Publish information about the methods used to produce the social care statistics b) publish information about the quality of the social care statistics, in relation to their use and potential use, and including quality measures c) publish information in <i>Fostering</i> about the impact on estimates of changing survey response rates, and about its rationale for not making any adjustment for non-response in <i>Fostering</i> and <i>Adoption</i>

		(para 3.14).
Ofsted does not publish information about how it assures itself of the quality of the statistics, and the data that underpin them. Ofsted should:	4	Publish information for users, alongside the social care statistics, about how it assures itself of their quality, including its assessment of any risk and potential source of error associated with the use of the administrative data sources (para 3.16).
Ofsted does not provide sufficient assurances about how it protects confidentiality, and the Assessment team identified potential concerns about the levels of suppression applied to the detailed datasets published as part of <i>Adoption</i> . Ofsted should:	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Publish its confidentiality statement, including sufficient information to provide assurance about its confidentiality arrangements in respect of all aspects required by the <i>Code</i> b) Review immediately, and prior to the next publication, the disclosure arrangements for <i>Adoption</i>, and publish the outcomes. Publish alongside the social care statistics information about the rationale for the different statistical disclosure control methods applied to protect confidentiality, and how this is balanced with optimising their utility c) confirm that all staff who produce official statistics have signed confidentiality declarations d) advise respondents to its surveys how the confidentiality of any data that they supply will be protected (para 3.20).
Ofsted needs to do more to draw out the key messages from its social care statistics, and to set them in a broader context. Ofsted should:	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Improve the commentary and analysis in the social care statistical reports and, in particular, present the statistics in a way that helps users easily draw out the key messages, for England and for the LAs, by presenting appropriate indicators and analyses of trends and setting the statistics in their wider context b) present information about the comparability and coherence of its social care statistics with similar statistics for England, the other countries of the UK, and internationally (para 3.30). As part of meeting this Requirement, Ofsted should consider the points detailed in annex

		1 and annex 2.
Ofsted's official statistics are fairly well structured on its website but there are some problems that could be easily resolved to aid accessibility. Ofsted should:	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Improve the labelling and signposting of the statistics on its website, and in particular, the accessibility of <i>Fostering and Adoption</i> b) distinguish clearly between National Statistics, official statistics and management information on its website c) implement a more accessible solution than the use of compressed zip files <p>(para 3.32).</p>
Ofsted makes data available for users in a range of formats but could do more to support re-use. Ofsted should:	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Present longer time series in the Excel tables and datasets, and include some metadata alongside the datasets to aid interpretation b) provide the adoption and fostering statistics in a format that better supports re-use c) explain clearly in the statistical reports and in Data View the relationship between the data available from Data View and the official statistics <p>(para 3.33).</p>
Ofsted does not release its social care statistics in an orderly manner, with its decision to replace <i>LA Inspections</i> with management information in April 2014 due to low numbers of inspections having taken place being of particular concern. Ofsted should:	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Review, in consultation with users, the appropriate timing and periodicity of its statistics about social care inspections to account for fluctuations in inspection activity and provide assurances for users about the future orderly release of these statistics b) commit to signposting the planned future publication of supplementary datasets in its statistical reports, and to referencing <i>Inspection Annual Data</i> appropriately when Ofsted publishes its Social Care Annual Report c) update its publication schedule to include a timetable of statistical reports for twelve months ahead and ensure that the schedule is internally consistent d) publish its statement of compliance with the <i>Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008</i> <p>(para 3.36).</p>

Ofsted is reviewing its quality assurance and audit arrangements prior to publishing a Statement of Administrative Sources. Ofsted should:	10	Publish its Statement of Administrative Sources, reflecting its arrangements for audit and quality assurance (para 3.37).
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1.6 Suggestions for extracting maximum value from the statistics

1.6.1 This section includes some suggestions for improvement to Ofsted’s social care statistics, in the interest of the public good. These are not formally required for designation, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

We suggest that Ofsted:

1	Draw on examples of good practice on user engagement from across the Government Statistical Service; it could also explore taking advantage of StatsUserNet to facilitate user discussions (para 3.4).
2	Seek to implement all the recommendations about quality assurance made by its Internal Audit team (para 3.16).
3	Publish estimates of the cost to adoption agencies and fostering services of responding to Ofsted surveys in <i>Fostering and Adoption</i> (para 3.23).
4	Publish the outcomes of its regular deliberations when seeking to balance emerging data needs with the cost and time burden on data suppliers, including any progress in streamlining overlapping Ofsted and DfE collections (para 3.25).
5	Publish a progress update alongside the <i>Making the most of Ofsted’s data</i> strategy on its website (para 3.29).
6	Ensure that <i>Inspection Annual Data</i> is clearly labelled, well signposted from the statistical reports and includes appropriate metadata (para 3.31).

2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) was established on 1 April 2007, under the provisions of the *Education and Inspections Act 2006*¹², bringing together the Adult Learning Inspectorate, the Commission for Social Care Inspection, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Court Administration and the Office of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools (the former Ofsted). Ofsted is a non-ministerial government department of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector and reports directly to Parliament. Its primary purpose is to inspect and regulate services in England which care for children and young people, and those providing education and skills for learners of all ages.
- 2.2 Ofsted produces regular official statistics relating to its inspection and regulation functions, along four key themes: early years and childcare; education in schools; further education and skills; and children's and young people's social care. Seven of the eight sets of Ofsted's social care statistics are the subject of this assessment, and are the first sets of official statistics to be put forward by Ofsted for assessment against the *Code*. The exception is *Serious incident notifications*¹³ which was published for the first time in April 2014 as experimental statistics, and which Ofsted considers is not yet sufficiently developed to achieve National Statistics status.
- 2.3 This assessment was also due to assess new official statistics about the placement by local authorities (LAS) of looked after children. The data collection commenced in 2013¹⁴ but Ofsted has announced¹⁵ that the first publication has been delayed until June 2014 due to the complexities of processing this first dataset, placing it out of scope of this assessment. These complexities are due in part to Ofsted introducing, in November 2013, a new single inspection framework¹⁶ (single framework). For new inspections of LAs, a judgement is given for overall effectiveness of services and arrangements for children who need help and protection, children looked after and care leavers. This includes LA fostering and adoption services. Ofsted's expectations of the likely future impact of the single framework on the social care statistics covered by this assessment are explained as each of the outputs is described below, and provide some context for the Requirements set out in section 3 of this report.

Fostering and adoption statistics

- 2.4 Ofsted produces these statistics annually using administrative data that it collects to support inspections carried out under the *Care Standards Act 2000*¹⁷ and the *Adoption and Children Act 2002*¹⁸. The statistical reports present totals for England, and are supported by Excel workbooks presenting information for all LA and all voluntary adoption agencies (VAAs) and independent fostering agencies (IFAs).

¹² <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/contents>

¹³ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/serious-incident-notifications-official-statistics-release>

¹⁴ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/children-looked-after-placement-data-collection-31-march-2013>

¹⁵ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/official-statistics-local-authority-childrens-services-inspections-and-outcomes>

¹⁶ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/news/ofsteds-single-inspection-takes-effect>

¹⁷ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/14/contents>

¹⁸ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/38/contents>

- 2.5 *Fostering quality assurance and data forms (Fostering)* includes information provided by LA and private and voluntary fostering services about foster carers and children who are users of the services, including statistics about the recruitment of foster carers. *Fostering* was first published as a statistical report for 2009/10. Prior to this only datasets were available. The statistics are available approximately nine months after the end of the reference year.
- 2.6 *Adoption quality assurance and data forms (Adoption)* includes information provided by LA and private and voluntary adoption services about adopters and children who are users of the services, including statistics about the recruitment of prospective adoptive families. *Adoption* was first published for 2011/12, the first year for which data were collected. The statistics are available approximately nine months after the end of the reference year.
- 2.7 Information about LA adoption and fostering services will continue to be included in *Adoption* and *Fostering*. This is not affected by introduction of the single framework in November 2013.

Inspections, Providers and Places

- 2.8 Ofsted produces these statistics using administrative data held in its Regulatory Support Application (RSA) database and Inspection Tracking System (ITS), which hold information about all registered social care providers and secure training centres respectively.
- 2.9 *Children's social care providers and places (Providers and Places)* presents statistics about the number of social care providers subject to Ofsted regulation or inspection in England and its regions, and the maximum number of registered places offered for children and young people. Examples of types of providers include children's homes, boarding schools, residential special schools and further education colleges, independent fostering and voluntary adoption agencies, adoption support agencies and residential family centres. From November 2013, the statistics exclude LA-run adoption agencies and fostering services, which are inspected as part of the single framework. *Providers and Places* is published approximately every six months, around six weeks after the end of the reference period, and presents statistics as at the end of each calendar month.
- 2.10 *Children's homes inspections and outcomes (Children's Homes Inspections)* and *Children's social care (excluding children's homes) inspection outcomes (Inspections excluding Children's Homes)* present statistics about the outcomes from inspections of all social care providers that have taken place under various legislation, including the *Care Standards Act 2000*. Ofsted publishes *Children's Homes Inspections* every quarter and *Inspections excluding Children's Homes* every six months. The more frequent publication of *Children's Homes Inspections* is because children's homes are inspected twice a year, and account for two-thirds of all social care providers in England. Consistent with *Providers and Places*, *Inspections excluding Children's Homes* excludes LA-run adoption agencies and fostering services from November 2013.
- 2.11 *Local authority children's services inspections and outcomes (LA Inspections)* includes statistics about all LA-level inspections of children's services that have taken place under the latest inspection framework. Statistical reports published since June 2012 covered inspections from that point forward that have taken

place under the provisions of the *Children Act 2004*¹⁹. The statistical reports are scheduled to be published approximately every six months and present cumulative summary statistics together with details of individual inspections carried out. In April 2014, following the introduction of the single framework, Ofsted published data about inspections since November 2013 as management information²⁰ in place of the regular official statistics, advising users that the official statistics would be reintroduced in October 2014 when there will be sufficient inspections to report on. The single framework inspections presented in *LA Inspections* will encompass LA adoption and fostering services.

- 2.12 *Social Care Annual Report inspection data (Inspection Annual Data)* is a detailed dataset about inspection outcomes that Ofsted publishes to provide transparency about the official statistics that it has used to evidence Ofsted's Social Care Annual Report²¹, a non-statistical publication. The statistics are published at 9.30am on the same day as the annual report and do not include any commentary or metadata. Ofsted told us that it draws almost wholly on statistics that it has already published as part of the other social care statistical reports. During the course of this Assessment, Ofsted agreed with the Assessment team that this dataset doesn't constitute an official statistics product in its own right, but is best regarded as a supplementary dataset of the social care statistics designated as National Statistics as per paragraph 1.2.1.
- 2.13 Ofsted told the Assessment team that none of the social care statistics are used directly to monitor government targets. Uses of Ofsted's social care statistics include:
- Ofsted uses the statistics to: monitor the quality of LA arrangements to protect children, for example, through its fostering and adoption services; inform the development of inspection policy and regional inspection operations; identify any changes in the overall quality of children's services; and, alongside a wider collection of information, to help prioritise inspections and evaluate inspection frameworks. The statistics also inform regular Ofsted meetings with organisations including The Association of Directors of Children's Services Ltd²² (ADCS) and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers²³ (SOLACE)
 - DfE uses the range of social care statistics to inform and monitor policy, such as the *Children and Families Bill*²⁴. For example, *Adoption* informs DfE's *Adoption Scorecards*²⁵ and *Children's Homes Inspections* is used in its *Children's Homes Data Pack*²⁶
 - LAs use the statistics to benchmark the supply, demand and performance of adoption and fostering services with those in neighbouring and statistically similar authorities. They also use the inspections statistics to understand

¹⁹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/31/contents>

²⁰ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/statistics/m/Management%20information%20-%20LA%20inspection%20outcomes%20-%20April%202014.pdf>

²¹ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/social-care-annual-report-201213>

²² <http://www.adcs.org.uk/>

²³ <http://www.solace.org.uk/about/>

²⁴ <http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2012-13/childrenandfamilies.html>

²⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-scorecards>

²⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-homes-data-pack>

which local authorities have been inspected, and the outcomes, so that they can place children appropriately and target their own learning and inform self-improvement as social care providers

- National trade press such as *Community Care*²⁷ and *Children & Young People Now*²⁸ use the statistics to monitor the overall quality of children's services in England, the effect of changes in Ofsted inspection frameworks on inspection outcomes, and explore topics such as missing children
- 2.14 In other parts of the UK, the inspection functions broadly equivalent to those of Ofsted for England are carried out by: the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales, which publishes quarterly summary statistics²⁹; the Care Inspectorate³⁰ in Scotland, and the Social Services Inspectorate³¹, which is part of the Department of Health Social Services and Public Safety in Northern Ireland. The bodies in Scotland and Northern Ireland do not publish statistics. DfE also publishes related statistics for England. Assessment report 265³² assessed *Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers)*³³ and *Outcomes for Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England*³⁴ produced by the DfE.
- 2.15 Ofsted publishes its social care statistical reports in Word format with supplementary tables in Excel format and, in most cases, detailed datasets in Excel and csv formats. This equates to a level of three stars under the Five Star Scheme that forms part of the Open Standards Principles proposed in the *Open Data White Paper: Unleashing the Potential*³⁵ and adopted as government policy in November 2012³⁶. Five stars represents the highest star rating within the Scheme. In most cases, all of the files relating to a statistical report are published together within a compressed zip file.
- 2.16 Ofsted told the Assessment team that the annual cost of producing its social care statistics is approximately £52,000.

²⁷ <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2012/11/23/rise-in-children-missing-from-foster-care/>

²⁸ <http://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/1143058/childrens-home-standards-rise>

²⁹ <http://cssiw.org.uk/our-reports/quarterly-stats/?lang=en>

³⁰ <http://www.careinspectorate.com/>

³¹ <http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/ssi-funcions-whyweinspect>

³² <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/assessment-reports/assessment-report-265---statistics-on-looked-after-children.pdf>

³³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoption>

³⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/outcomes-for-children-looked-after-by-las-in-england>

³⁵ http://data.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Open_data_White_Paper.pdf

³⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-standards-principles/open-standards-principles>

3 Assessment findings

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.

- 3.1 Ofsted told the Assessment team that it engages with its main users and data suppliers on a regular basis. For social care statistics, the main users and suppliers are in large part the same organisations and include the Ofsted inspection teams, DfE, LAs, children's homes, and private and voluntary adoption agencies and fostering services. Mechanisms for engagement include regular meetings and training events, for example with the Association of Directors of Children's Services³⁷. Ofsted also utilises Regional Information Groups and an online Social Care Information Google Group, both of which are discussion forums led by LAs but which Ofsted has joined to initiate a dialogue about social care data and to seek views about proposals for change. These groups have restricted membership but Ofsted told the Assessment team that it understands that some academics are also members. While this type of engagement is not very transparent, it is an innovative and proactive way of working with users.
- 3.2 Ofsted acknowledged that engagement with these users and suppliers of social care statistics is primarily focused on the administrative data that underpins the official statistics, and that it does not engage regularly or proactively with a broader group of potential users, for example, children's charities and organisations such as the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Office of the Children's Commissioner for England. Ofsted told the Assessment team that it uses Google Analytics³⁸ to help it understand the patterns of use of its official statistics, but mainly restricts its engagement to responding to incoming queries and to issuing open invitations within the statistical reports to provide feedback about how well the statistics meet user needs. However, Ofsted has developed internal guidelines for staff about the principles for user engagement and told the Assessment team that it is currently developing user engagement strategies for each of its official statistics themes, including social care, coordinated by a new Quality Champions Group that it has set up. Ofsted told us that, when these strategies are in place, it plans to consult users about its statistical plans³⁹, and to seek users' views about the statistical reports.
- 3.3 Ofsted has run a series of public consultations, mainly in relation to education inspections statistics, and in 2012 it consulted users about proposed changes to its portfolio of official statistics. Ofsted received 118 responses to an online survey and supplemented this with email correspondence and a focus group. Ofsted published a report on the response to the consultation in April 2014⁴⁰. The report does not go very far towards describing the users and uses of the statistics but it effectively summarises what Ofsted learned about users'

³⁷ See footnote 22

³⁸ <http://www.google.com/analytics/>

³⁹ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/statistical-work-plan-april-2014-march-2015>

⁴⁰ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/report-responses-2012-consultation-of-ofsted-official-statistics>

experiences of the statistics and included a clear improvement plan. Ofsted told the Assessment team that many of the actions have been taken forward.

3.4 As part of the designation as National Statistics, Ofsted should:

- a) engage with users beyond itself, DfE and LAs to understand the use that they make, and would like to make, of the social care statistics and document more fully the types of decision that they inform
- b) ensure that the user engagement strategies that it is developing are clear about how Ofsted will extend its dialogue with users beyond discussing the provision and use of the administrative data⁴¹

(Requirement 1).

We suggest that in meeting this Requirement Ofsted draw on examples of good practice on user engagement from across the Government Statistical Service (GSS); it could also explore taking advantage of StatsUserNet⁴² to facilitate user discussions.

⁴¹ In relation to Principle 1, Practices 1, 2, 3 and 5 of the *Code of Practice*

⁴² <http://www.statsusernet.org.uk/Home/>

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

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

- 3.5 Ofsted publishes these statistics on its website in a timely manner, free of charge to users, and presents the statistics impartially and objectively. The Assessment team has identified some areas of improvement needed to ensure the orderly release of statistics. These are detailed under Protocol 2.
- 3.6 Ofsted published a revisions policy in 2011⁴³. The policy is clearly accessible alongside each set of statistics. Ofsted is updating the policy to include new statistical products and to account for changes to existing products, and has shared a draft version with the Assessment team. The draft policy outlines how Ofsted manages planned and unplanned revisions, and the correction of any errors identified in the published statistics. It also commits to announcing any changes to methods in advance of the release of the changed statistics. The Assessment team welcomes this commitment, as recent practice has been mixed, with some changes only being announced alongside the latest statistics.
- 3.7 As part of its revisions policy, Ofsted explains that for most statistical outputs it releases provisional statistics, followed by a second release of final statistics. For example, for *Children's Homes Inspections*, Ofsted published provisional statistics for July to September 2013 on 23 January 2014⁴⁴ and final statistics on 25 March 2014⁴⁵, the same day that the provisional statistics for October to December 2013 were published. The provisional statistics are presented as part of a statistical report but the final statistics are released only as data tables and datasets, with no commentary. Revisions are handled as follows in *Children's Homes Inspections*:
- Provisional (July to Sept) – Ofsted alerts users to planned revisions to the statistics, and that the statistics will be republished as final. It explains the reasons for the planned revisions and provides a link to the revisions policy
 - Final (July to Sept) – No information is presented in the data tables and datasets about the scale and impact of any revisions, and Ofsted does not direct users about where they can find such information
 - Provisional (Oct to Dec) – Published the same day as the final statistics for the previous period, this statistical report includes a section about the impact of revisions to the July to September statistics on key findings. This section of the report signposts the final statistics for users, and quantifies the impact

The Assessment team considers that Ofsted needs to better quantify and label revisions in the data tables and datasets, but that otherwise it presents users with appropriate information about revisions. However, the structure of reporting, with a separate release of final statistics with no commentary, does

⁴³ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/statistical-notice-ofsted-revisions-policy-for-official-statistics>

⁴⁴ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/statistics/c/Children%27s%20homes%20inspection%20outcomes%20-%20Jul%20to%20Sep%202013%20-%20Provisional.zip>

⁴⁵ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/statistics/c/Children%27s%20homes%20inspection%20outcomes%20-%20Jul%20to%20Sep%202013%20-%20Final.zip>

not help users to interpret the statistics. We consider this could be easily remedied by publishing a single quarterly report, which makes it clear that it includes the latest provisional statistics, and draws on revised final statistics for the previous period. All of the data tables and datasets could then be presented alongside this single report. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Ofsted should:

- a) review its practice of publishing final statistics for the previous period separately to the provisional statistics for the latest period, without any commentary, and present the statistics in a way that better aids user interpretation
- b) include information within or alongside its statistical reports, data tables and datasets about the scale and impact of any revisions
- c) publish its updated revisions policy, taking account of further developments made in response to part (a) of this Requirement⁴⁶

(Requirement 2).

- 3.8 Ofsted issues prominent corrections notices when it identifies an error. For example, *LA Inspections*⁴⁷ was corrected on 23 October 2013 after Ofsted discovered an error in the statistical report originally published on 15 October. Ofsted included a notice on its website that explained the source of the error, the broad impact of the correction and tables affected. A correction notice was then published with the updated statistical report that specified the exact change, with the old and new values. Ofsted's revisions policy confirms that it alerts known users to such corrections by e-mail.

⁴⁶ In relation to Principle 2, Practices 4, 6 and 7 of the *Code of Practice*

⁴⁷ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/official-statistics-local-authority-childrens-services-inspections-and-outcomes>

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.

- 3.9 No incidents of political pressures, abuses of trust or complaints relating to professional integrity, quality or standards were reported to or identified by the Assessment team.
- 3.10 Compliance with the *Code* requires that the relevant statistical Head of Profession (HoP) has the sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical reports. The HoP oversees all official statistics produced by Ofsted, and the statistics team told us that the role of the HoP is clearly established and embedded in Ofsted's culture and that officials are very aware that any pressure applied to contravene the *Code* would be swiftly challenged.
- 3.11 The HoP has operational responsibilities in addition to those of producing official statistics. This is discussed further under Principle 7.

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.

- 3.12 Ofsted includes a standard methodology section in its statistical reports. The statistical reports briefly describe the data sources, highlight any changes in methods or classifications and describe the revisions policy. The statistical reports do not present any detailed information about the methods for producing the statistics, the users and uses of the statistics, or the strengths and limitations of the statistics in relation to their use or potential use. The statistical reports present no quality measures or other information about the quality of these statistics. The statistical reports include a small number of notes cautioning users about making specific comparisons but do not provide any guidance for users about potential sources of error in the statistics or any uncertainty around estimates. Ofsted told the Assessment team that it is developing quality reports to be published alongside each statistical report from June 2014 onwards, and that it is using the *GSS Quality Measurement and Reporting: Guidance Statement and an example framework for reporting*⁴⁸ for this development.
- 3.13 For *Fostering* and *Adoption*, Ofsted carries out surveys to collect the data. For *Adoption*, Ofsted achieved a 100 per cent response rate to the survey for 2012/13. In the previous year, three LAs and 4 VAAs did not respond. Ofsted does not adjust for these small levels of non-response but includes a prominent quantified estimate of the impact upon the statistics of the increased response, in this case, accounting for 3 per cent of total number of adoptive families recorded. For *Fostering*, the response rate for 2012/13 was 98 per cent compared with 94 per cent the previous year. However, Ofsted does not present any assessment of the impact of the increased response rate on the estimates for *Fostering*, making it difficult for users to interpret the significance of changes between years, for example, to the number of children placed in foster care. Ofsted told the Assessment team that it has considered estimating for missing returns but discounted this approach as the impact is not material enough to justify the additional resource. Ofsted told us that instead, it reviews the potential impact on the estimates of the different response rates, and judges whether changes represent a genuine change or are due in some part to the response rate. It said that in future it will provide more information about this in *Fostering*, as it does in *Adoption*.
- 3.14 As part of the designation as National Statistics, Ofsted should:
- a) publish information about the methods used to produce the social care statistics
 - b) publish information about the quality of the social care statistics, in relation to their use and potential use, and including quality measures

⁴⁸ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/best-practice/gss-best-practice/gss-quality-good-practice/quality-measurement-and-reporting-guidance/gss-quality-measurement-and-reporting.doc>

- c) publish information in *Fostering* about the impact on estimates of changing survey response rates, and about its rationale for not making any adjustment for non-response in *Fostering and Adoption*⁴⁹

(Requirement 3).

- 3.15 Ofsted uses standard quality assurance checklists as part of the process for producing and signing off statistical reports, with final sign off by the HoP. It also maintains a quality manual for its statistical staff, which is easily accessible and includes a collection of good practice guides, templates and checklists for staff, including the specific desk instructions for their statistics team.
- 3.16 Ofsted's Internal Audit team recently audited the quality assurance processes for all of the social care statistics. The Assessment team considers this an example of good practice, in relation to the Authority's Statement *Administrative Data and Official Statistics*⁵⁰. Ofsted provided the Assessment team with a copy of the October 2013 Internal Audit report for *LA Inspections* which addressed issues such as whether the quality assurance processes are proportionate to risk, what quality frameworks are used to inform quality assurance processes, the clarity of any instructions, and what sort of quality issues arise. Internal Audit made some recommendations for improvement to the checking process, including allowing more time to review the findings. It also noted the risk of error associated with the processing of the administrative data for *LA Inspections* as, unlike the other inspections data taken from Ofsted's Regulatory Support Application (RSA), it is compiled manually rather than through Ofsted's data management systems. Internal Audit also made recommendations about the information presented in the statistical report – for example, doing more to 'tell the story' and including more information about changes to inspection frameworks. These points about the statistical report are picked up under Principle 8. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Ofsted should publish information for users, alongside the social care statistics, about how it assures itself of their quality, including its assessment of any risk and potential source of error associated with the use of the administrative data sources⁵¹ (Requirement 4). We suggest that in meeting this Requirement Ofsted seek to implement all the recommendations about quality assurance made by its Internal Audit team. This Requirement should be considered together with Requirement 10 (paragraph 3.37).

⁴⁹ In relation to Principle 4, Practices 1 and 2 and Principle 8, Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

⁵⁰ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/administrative-data-and-official-statistics/index.html>

⁵¹ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 3 of the *Code of Practice*

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.

- 3.17 Ofsted's arrangements for protecting the confidentiality of the data used to produce its official statistics are not sufficiently transparent to provide public assurance. Ofsted told the Assessment team that it is developing a statement about its confidentiality arrangements and that it plans to publish this on its website in 2014. Ofsted also shared with the Assessment team a draft confidentiality declaration and told us that all staff producing official statistics will be required to sign declarations for the first time from June 2014.
- 3.18 As part of its social care statistics, Ofsted publishes datasets that include different granularities of data. *Fostering*, for example, presents only totals for all LAs and for all independent places and placements. *Adoption* presents data for each named adoption agency, with a number of them reporting small numbers in some fields. The Excel workbooks state that 'any number of less than five, for certain sensitive fields, has been suppressed'. The sensitive fields include numbers of applications refused or referred for review, complaints and allegations. Information about the characteristics of the children placed and the adoptive families, for example, their ethnicity or marital status, is not suppressed. The Assessment team considers that this raises potential concerns that families might be identifiable. Ofsted does not provide any information about the rationale for the levels of detail published or levels of suppression applied for the different statistics, or the decisions taken to balance their utility with the protection of the identity of individuals.
- 3.19 Ofsted publishes the letters that it sends annually to adoption agencies⁵² and fostering services⁵³ to request the data that are used to produce *Fostering* and *Adoption*. These letters explain why Ofsted is collecting the data – to inform its inspection activity - but do not inform respondents how confidentiality will be protected.
- 3.20 As part of the designation as National Statistics, Ofsted should:
- publish its confidentiality statement, including sufficient information to provide assurance about its confidentiality arrangements in respect of all aspects required by the *Code*
 - review immediately, and prior to the next publication, the disclosure arrangements for *Adoption*, and publish the outcomes. Publish alongside the social care statistics information about the rationale for the different statistical disclosure control methods applied to protect confidentiality, and how this is balanced with optimising their utility
 - confirm that all staff who produce official statistics have signed confidentiality declarations

⁵² <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/adoption-quality-assurance-and-data-form-2013-14>

⁵³ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/fostering-quality-assurance-and-data-form-2013-14>

d) advise respondents to its surveys how the confidentiality of any data that they supply will be protected⁵⁴

(Requirement 5).

3.21 Ofsted told us that when it exchanges confidential statistical records with a third party, both parties must sign a data access agreement, and that every time new data are required, a new agreement must be signed. Ofsted does not have any ongoing arrangements for data sharing. Ofsted shared with the Assessment team a recent example of an agreement that clearly set out the conditions under which the data were shared, and the confidentiality arrangements that had to be in place.

⁵⁴ In relation to Principle 5, Practices 2, 3 and 4 of the *Code of Practice*

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.

- 3.22 Ofsted sources the data used to produce its social care statistics in two ways:
- from the administrative data that Ofsted holds about the organisations that it regulates and the inspection and regulatory visits that it carries out each year. For social care inspections, this information is taken from Ofsted's Regulatory Support Application (RSA) database and Inspection Tracking System (ITS)
 - Ofsted carries out two annual surveys of adoption agencies and fostering services – Adoption Quality Assurance and Data Form, and Fostering Services Quality Assurance and Data Form. Ofsted told the Assessment team that all of the data are collected and held for operational reasons, to support its regulatory and inspection functions, and that the production of the social care statistics is a secondary use of the data
- 3.23 While it collects the data for operational reasons, Ofsted recognises the burden associated with the surveys of adoption agencies and fostering services and reports them to DfE for inclusion in its submission for the On-line List of Government Statistical Surveys⁵⁵. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) uses this information to help compile its *Annual Report on Government Statistical Surveys for Official Statistics of Businesses and Local Authorities*⁵⁶ that estimates the overall cost of complying with statistical surveys. Ofsted does not publish any estimated costs of complying with its surveys but told the Assessment team that it is committed to including questions on future surveys to allow it to measure the burden. We suggest that Ofsted publish estimates of the cost to adoption agencies and fostering services of responding to Ofsted surveys in *Fostering and Adoption*.
- 3.24 Ofsted told the Assessment team that it has not enacted its powers to make the provision of data mandatory, instead working with data suppliers on a voluntary basis to help them deliver high quality data. The Authority's Assessment report 265 reported that data suppliers for DfE's Quarterly Adoption Survey had identified some duplication with Ofsted's Adoption Quality Assurance and Data Form. Ofsted told the Assessment team that it is aware of this duplication and is working with DfE to explore more streamlined data collection, though it has some barriers to overcome in relation to the commonality of data needs and timetables. More generally, Ofsted told us it applies the principle of 'collect once, use twice' and where it can access data that DfE collects and remove them from own collections, it is seeking to do so. For example, Ofsted is working with DfE to embed Ofsted identifiers in DfE's children looked after database so that it can re-use that data.
- 3.25 Ofsted also told the Assessment team that it manages a formal annual process to review new data needs submitted by users, mainly from within Ofsted and

⁵⁵ http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/HTMLDocs/OLGSS/OLGSS_interactive.html

⁵⁶ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/government-statistical-surveys/annual-report-on-government-statistical-surveys/2012-13-annual-report-on-government-statistical-surveys-of-businesses-and-local-authorities/rpt---2012-13.html>

from DfE, and to challenge existing data requirements. This process leads to questions being added or removed from future administrative data requirements. While this would not be a requirement of the *Code*, as the data are collected for administrative reasons, we suggest that Ofsted publish the outcomes of its regular deliberations when seeking to balance emerging data needs with the cost and time burden on data suppliers, including any progress in streamlining overlapping Ofsted and DfE collections.

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.

- 3.26 Ofsted's official statistics are produced by its Data and Insight team, under the leadership of the HoP. The team has 140 statistical and research staff and the production of statistics forms only a small part of their responsibilities, which include all pre and post inspection planning and reporting and all data analysis needed to support inspections and inspection development. Within Data and Insight, the work of the Social Care Data team that produces the social care statistics includes, for example, the development of new frameworks such as the single framework and the preparation of Ofsted's Social Care Annual Report.
- 3.27 Ofsted told the Assessment team that the range of responsibilities can result in competing pressures on the Design and Insight team but it assured us that the resources for official statistics are protected in the budget planning process and that Ofsted prioritises the publication of the regular official statistics, with no delays having occurred as a result of resource constraints. Ofsted told us that the Data and Insight business plan is developed to support Ofsted's Corporate Plan and that progress against the Data and Insight plan, which includes performance indicators, is reviewed annually within Ofsted and with DfE.
- 3.28 Ofsted told the Assessment team that the HoP maintains strong links with the professional network of official statisticians through GSS HoPs' meetings and correspondence. Ofsted uses the GSS competency framework to inform recruitment and the ongoing development of its statistical staff, using it to design job descriptions and to identify gaps in skills. Ofsted told us that it encourages statistical staff to attain Royal Statistical Society (RSS) qualifications and to attend RSS seminars and also undertake training available from ONS. Ofsted also works with government statisticians who are based locally, for example, from the Ministry of Defence to run shared learning events. The Social Care Data team has an induction programme, a 'buddy' system for supporting individuals' development, and desk instructions that support the production of the statistics.

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

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

- 3.29 In 2012, Ofsted published *Making the most of Ofsted's data*⁵⁷ and stated that this strategy focuses on how it will develop and use official statistics as a basis for improving the way that Ofsted works, and how it will disseminate the data and statistics it gathers through its role as an inspector and regulator. The strategy covers a range of issues consistent with the practices of Principle 8 of the *Code*, and there will be some synergy between the delivery of Ofsted's action plans across its official statistics and addressing the points the Assessment team has outlined in paragraph 3.30 in respect of the social care statistics. Ofsted provided the Assessment team with an update on progress against these plans. We suggest that Ofsted could publish a progress update alongside the *Making the most of Ofsted's data* strategy on its website.
- 3.30 Ofsted's social care statistics, excluding *Inspection Annual Data*, which is discussed separately in paragraph 3.31, are presented in a professionally sound manner and include some useful commentary to explain the statistics. Ofsted told the Assessment team that it has started to work with the National Statistician's Good Practice Team to review its commentary, starting with its education statistics, but with plans to extend good practice to all of its statistical reports. Ofsted also told us about some improvements that it started to implement for the social care statistics during the course of the assessment and will roll out as future statistical reports are published. These include giving more prominence to the main messages in the statistics and exploring options for presenting information about the statistics for England alongside equivalent statistics for the other countries of the UK, and internationally. The Assessment team welcomes these planned developments. Based on our review of the statistical reports and feedback received from users as part of this assessment, some of the key areas where the Assessment team considers further improvements are most needed are as follows:
- a good understanding of children and young people's social care, and Ofsted's inspection activity is assumed. It would be helpful if Ofsted could: present some contextual information about how the range of social care statistics fit together and how they are affected as a whole when there are changes in policy and inspection frameworks; improve the titles to clearly explain the content of the statistical reports (recognising that Ofsted has said that it is reviewing this); explain the relationship with similar statistics published by organisations such as DfE; and make the referencing and labelling of tables clearer – some of the statistical reports assume a detailed knowledge of the sections of the data collection forms
 - the statistical reports tend to focus on describing the statistics for the latest period or inspections carried out under the current inspection framework, and the commentary does not provide users with sufficient insight about what patterns and trends in the statistics say about the quality of the provision of children's social care in England

⁵⁷ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/making-most-of-ofsteds-data>

- care is needed with regard to some of the language used in the statistical reports such as ‘very few’ and ‘substantially higher’, particularly when there is little presented in the way of time series or comparative analyses to contextualise such statements. Related to this, Ofsted does not provide any information for users about what they can and cannot infer from any large changes in the statistics when data are available only for two or three years
- users told the Assessment team that they would welcome more sub-national analyses and commentary in the statistical reports, and the inclusion of some indicators that would aid them with benchmarking across LAs

As part of the designation as National Statistics, Ofsted should:

- a) improve the commentary and analysis in the social care statistical reports and, in particular, present the statistics in a way that helps users easily draw out the key messages, for England and for the LAs, by presenting appropriate indicators and analyses of trends and setting the statistics in their wider context
- b) present information about the comparability and coherence of its social care statistics with similar statistics for England, the other countries of the UK, and internationally⁵⁸

(Requirement 6). As part of meeting this Requirement, Ofsted should consider the points detailed in annex 1 and annex 2.

3.31 As discussed in paragraph 2.12, *Inspection Annual Data* is supplementary dataset to the other social care statistics rather than a National Statistics product in its own right. We suggest that Ofsted ensure that *Inspection Annual Data* is clearly labelled, well signposted from the statistical reports and includes appropriate metadata.

3.32 Ofsted’s official statistics can be accessed from two different links within the Resources and Inspection Reports sections of the homepage of its website. The statistics page then describes the themes for which statistics are available, presents information about some statistical policies that underpin the statistics, and provides links to pages dedicated to the different sets of statistics. Each of those pages then presents a general introduction to the statistics, highlights any current issues such as delays or corrections, and provides the latest and previous versions of the statistics reports together with data tables and detailed datasets in Excel and csv formats. However, the Assessment team experienced some difficulties navigating the statistics pages. Ofsted told us that it is considering options for developing a new website or transferring to GOV.UK and any major website changes are suspended until plans are confirmed. In the meantime, the Assessment team considers that some immediate improvements are needed to improve accessibility:

- the statistical themes described are inconsistent with those used in Ofsted’s publication schedule, sometimes making it difficult to locate the different statistics. *Fostering* and *Adoption* are particularly difficult to locate without utilising the search function
- web pages labelled as official statistics also include management information

⁵⁸ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 6 and Principle 8, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

- statistical reports and the supporting information are often grouped together in compressed zip files. Ofsted acknowledges that this can cause problems for users and is exploring options to stop using them

As part of the designation as National Statistics, Ofsted should:

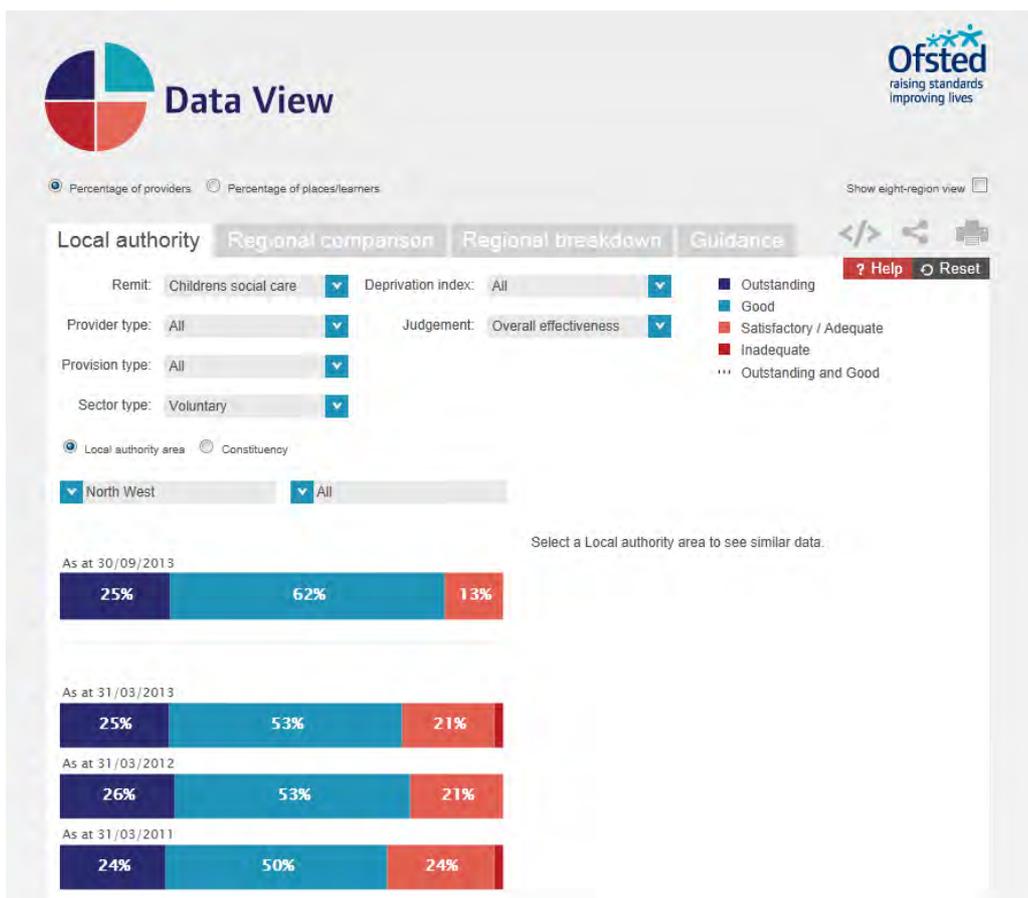
- a) improve the labelling and signposting of the statistics on its website, and in particular, the accessibility of *Fostering and Adoption*
 - b) distinguish clearly between National Statistics, official statistics and management information on its website
 - c) implement a more accessible solution than the use of compressed zip files⁵⁹
- (Requirement 7).

3.33 Ofsted makes data available for users in three different forms:

- Summary Excel tables – these tables summarise the key statistics discussed in the statistical reports. The tables are well structured and labelled and include some helpful metadata. However, with the exception of *Children’s Homes Inspections* and *Inspections excluding Children’s Homes* they do not present more than one year’s data. Where Ofsted presents charts alongside the data tables, they include a longer time series. Ofsted also includes some helpful maps in *Providers and Places*. Ofsted told the Assessment team that it is working to improve the labelling of the maps in the Excel files and the statistical reports to aid users interpretation, and the maps within *Children’s Homes Inspections* demonstrate this recent improvement
- Datasets in Excel and non-proprietary csv formats – in addition to the summary data tables, Ofsted provides more detailed datasets for all of the social care statistics except *Fostering*. Other than for *Adoption*, these are not overly formatted and are made available in a non-proprietary format, supporting re-use. However, each dataset features only one year’s data, so requiring users to access a number of files to carry out any time series analysis. Also, the addition of a metadata page to the datasets to explain the coding would be helpful
- Data View⁶⁰ – this digital tool allows users to visualise Ofsted inspection data, including social care inspection data, and compare and contrast performance in inspections between regions, local authority areas and parliamentary constituencies, and over time

⁵⁹ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 4 of the *Code of Practice*

⁶⁰ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/statistics/data-view>



Ofsted promotes Data View alongside its official statistics and states that the data that underpin it are updated periodically, though it does not make it clear whether the timetable is consistent with the official statistics release schedule. Ofsted told the Assessment team that data would not be available from Data View before being published as part of the official statistics. Responding to this assessment, users told us that they appreciate this service and would like to see its use extended to more of Ofsted's statistics.

As part of the designation as National Statistics, Ofsted should:

- present longer time series in the Excel tables and datasets, and include some metadata alongside the datasets to aid interpretation
- provide the adoption and fostering statistics in a format that better supports re-use
- explain clearly in the statistical reports and in Data View the relationship between the data available from Data View and the official statistics⁶¹

(Requirement 8).

⁶¹ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*

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.

3.34 The requirements for this Protocol are covered elsewhere in this report.

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.

3.35 Ofsted's core systems and processes for publishing official statistics to a regular pre-announced schedule have some strengths. However, there are several limitations to the orderly release of statistics:

Strengths

- Ofsted follows set internal timetables and quality assurance checklists for each set of statistics that it publishes, linked to the publication date, and all official statistics are published at 9.30am
- Ofsted publishes a *schedule for the release of official statistics*⁶² on the statistics page of its website
- Ofsted informs users about changes to pre-announced publication dates on its website. For example, on 22 April 2014, it announced prominently alongside its publication schedule the delay of *Placements of Children Looked After* from 24 April to 5 June, and the reasons for this delay
- Ofsted includes the name and contact details of the responsible statistician in all of its statistical reports
- Ofsted reviewed the Authority's *Update on the extent of Pre-release Access to official statistics 2011 to 2012*⁶³, and noting the relatively high numbers of people with access to its statistics before public release, Ofsted has committed to regularly re-examine its pre-release access lists and to start to publish them alongside the statistics for the first time in 2014. The pre-release access list for *Children's Homes Inspections* was the first published on 25 March 2014. Ofsted also told the Assessment team that it has drafted a statement of compliance with the *Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008*⁶⁴ for publication on its website
- Ofsted had one incidence of unintended early release of official statistics in November 2012 for *Maintained School Inspections and Outcomes*⁶⁵. These statistics are outside the scope of this Assessment. Ofsted provided a detailed breach report⁶⁶ to the National Statistician that described the circumstance and lessons learned, as required by the *Code*

⁶² <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/statistics/s/Schedule%20for%20the%20release%20of%20official%20statistics.pdf>

⁶³ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/about-the-authority/uk-statistical-system/legislation/pre-release-access/pre-release-access---2012-update.pdf>

⁶⁴ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/about-the-authority/uk-statistical-system/legislation/pre-release-access/index.html>

⁶⁵ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/official-statistics-maintained-school-inspections-and-outcomes-june-2013>

⁶⁶ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/breach-reports/maintained-school-inspections-and-outcomes--2011-12.pdf>

- Ofsted has been working with ONS to make arrangements to publish all of its social care statistics through the National Statistics Publication Hub in future, and the infrastructure is now in place

Limitations

- Ofsted schedules its statistical reports to be published once every quarter, once every six months or once a year. However, it sometimes takes late ad hoc decisions to delay publication where it has concluded that insufficient inspections have taken place to justify a statistical report. This affects not only the timetable but also the periods covered by the reports. While such decisions have clear benefits for Ofsted with respect to effective use of resources, they potentially impact the perceived integrity of the statistics, and suggest that the frequency of publication might benefit from a review. For example, *LA Inspections* is characterised on Ofsted’s website as a quarterly statistical report:

Publication date	Periods for which inspections were reported for the first time
24 January 2013	1 August 2012 – 31 December 2012
11 July 2013	1 January 2013 – 31 May 2013
15 October 2013	1 June 2013 – 31 July 2013
24 April 2014	7 November 2013 – 28 February 2014 (published as management information)

Ofsted told the Assessment team that it has decided to publish these statistics every six months in future, because of the small number of inspections, and that it has updated the schedule accordingly. However, this decision has not been clearly communicated for users on its website, and in April 2014 Ofsted published management information instead of official statistics due to low numbers of inspections having taken place under the new single framework. Not only does this mean that it will be twelve months between releases, it also potentially undermines users’ perceptions of the robustness of the official statistics

- Ofsted sometimes releases more detailed datasets after the main statistical report. However, users are not sufficiently informed of these plans. For example, *Adoption* was published in November 2013 and then a local authority dataset was released in December 2013. The web page was updated to note the availability of the new data, but its planned release had not been flagged in the statistical report or included in the publication schedule
- Ofsted releases *Inspection Annual Data* at 9.30am on the same day that Ofsted publishes its Social Care Annual Report. The dataset contains all the official statistics that have been used to evidence the Social Care Annual Report, which is not a statistical output. The Assessment team considers this good practice. Ofsted told us that most of the statistics featured in the

Social Care Annual Report and included in *Inspection Annual Data* will already have been published as part of other social care statistical reports, though it may on occasion feature some supplementary data. The *Inspection Annual Data* was not included in Ofsted's publication schedule in 2013, but Ofsted told the Assessment team that this will be remedied for 2014. Also, *Inspection Annual Data* appears alongside the Social Care Annual Report on Ofsted's website, when it would be more appropriate to signpost the version released on the official statistics pages, to ensure that its status is clear

- Ofsted's release schedule does not cover a rolling twelve month period, and the information presented is internally inconsistent, with the summary table presenting a different picture to the detailed list of statistics to be published

3.36 As part of the designation as National Statistics, Ofsted should:

- a) review, in consultation with users, the appropriate timing and periodicity of its statistics about social care inspections to account for fluctuations in inspection activity and provide assurances for users about the future orderly release of these statistics
- b) commit to signposting the planned future publication of supplementary datasets in its statistical reports, and to referencing *Inspection Annual Data* appropriately when Ofsted publishes its Social Care Annual Report
- c) update its publication schedule to include a timetable of statistical reports for twelve months ahead and ensure that the schedule is internally consistent
- d) publish its statement of compliance with the *Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008*⁶⁷

(Requirement 9).

⁶⁷ In relation to Protocol 2, Practices 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7 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.

3.37 Ofsted has prepared a draft Statement of Administrative Sources (SoAS) that includes some basic information about automated and manual quality assurance checks carried out on the administrative data used for statistical purposes that are held in RTS and ITS. Ofsted also told the Assessment team about some developments to its processes to minimise the risk of data being incorrectly entered on to the administrative systems or being processed incorrectly. For example, a document scanner is being employed to match inspection grades recorded in individual inspection reports with the information entered on the data systems. More detail about this type of activity could be helpfully included in the SoAS, which Ofsted is reviewing prior to publication in light of the Authority's Statement *Administrative Data and Official Statistics*⁶⁸ and the National Statistician's recently published guidance⁶⁹. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Ofsted should publish its SoAS, reflecting its arrangements for audit and quality assurance⁷⁰ (Requirement 10).

⁶⁸ See footnote 50

⁶⁹ <https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Interim-Admin-Data-guidance.pdf>

⁷⁰ In relation to Protocol 3, Practice 5 of the *Code of Practice*

Annex 1: Compliance with Standards for Statistical Reports

- A1.1 In November 2012, the Statistics Authority issued a statement on *Standards for Statistical Reports*⁷¹. While this is not part of the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*, the Authority regards it as advice that will promote both understanding and compliance with the *Code*. In relation to the statistical reports associated with Ofsted's Social Care statistics, this annex comments on compliance with the statement on standards.
- A1.2 In implementing any Requirements of this report (at paragraph 1.5) which relate to the content of statistical reports, we encourage the producer body to apply the standards as fully as possible.

Include an impartial narrative in plain English that draws out the main messages from the statistics

- A1.3 The statistical reports all have a standard cover sheet, followed by a brief introduction to the report, and where the length of the report justifies it, a table of contents.
- A1.4 While some of the statistical reports include a useful bullet point summary of key findings, in general the statistical reports would benefit from the main messages being more clearly drawn out at the start of each statistical report. These would usually precede the detail provided in the introduction and take the form of the main points that an informed user would regard as most interesting.
- A1.5 In general, the commentary in the statistical reports effectively describes the latest statistics but does not provide any insight about what the statistics might tell us about children's and young people's social care. The statistical reports include very little discussion of the main statistical patterns and trends. Where it is difficult to discuss long term trends as only two years data are available, Ofsted could do more in terms of year-on-year comparisons. *Providers and Places* provides some better examples of this. Some of the statistical reports present interesting comparative LA analysis and this could be helpfully extended to all of the statistical reports.
- A1.6 Ofsted generally explains definitions and terms well, and includes helpful glossaries within the statistical reports. However, some key terms might be helpfully explained when they first appear to aid the non-expert user – for example, when adoption plans are first mentioned in *Adoption*. Also, *Adoption* includes codes alongside the commentary that appear to be linked to the data collection forms and are presented to help direct users to the relevant sections of data tables. This would not be clear to users unfamiliar with the subject.
- A1.7 Ofsted should avoid language such as 'very few' or 'substantially higher' where there is little contextual evidence to support such descriptors. Where only a short time series is available, Ofsted could provide better guidance to users around what should and should not be inferred from these changes. Even where some quite large percentage changes are apparent, it is difficult to establish how significant these changes are without this additional context.

⁷¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-reports.html>

Include information about the context and likely uses of the statistics

- A1.8 Ofsted could do more to present the statistics within a broader context, including presenting information about how the range of social care statistics fit together. The statistical reports do not explain why the data are collected and more information about the users and uses of the statistics would be helpful, including providing links to any related targets and decisions they are used to inform. This information could help in providing possible explanations for changes in statistical trends over time. Some of the policy and contextual information contained in *Ofsted's Social Care Annual Report* could be used to help improve understanding of the relevance of the statistics.
- A1.9 While there is a definite overlap between the social care statistics produced by Ofsted and those produced by DfE, the social care statistical reports provide no comparisons with, or links to, the DfE statistics. Neither do the social care statistical reports include comparison with, or links to, similar statistics for other countries of the UK, or internationally.

Include information about the strengths and limitations of the statistics in relation to their potential use

- A1.10 Ofsted includes some information in the statistical reports about specific known inaccuracies in the statistics, but it does not offer any explanation about the main sources of potential bias or error, or the strengths and limitations of the statistics in relation to their use or potential use. Information about the methods used to produce the statistics, and changes to those methods, is very brief and Ofsted could helpfully present more information about its validation processes. More information should be provided on the actions taken by the statistical team to assure itself of the quality of the administrative data sources that it uses.
- A1.11 For the social care inspections statistics, the statistical reports provide links to Ofsted's revisions policy but the current presentation of the provisional and final versions of the statistics does not aid users' understanding of the impact of any revisions. This is because the final statistics are published separately without any commentary and the revisions profile is always discussed in the next provisional report. Revisions are not quantified or referenced in any way in the data tables.
- A1.12 *Fostering* makes no adjustments to account for non-response. Additional information is needed to explain the estimated impact of changes to the composition of the cohorts between reporting periods on the published statistics, particularly in relation to the main estimates reported in the statistical report. *Adoption* presents more helpful information in this respect.

Be professionally sound

- A1.13 Ofsted presents helpful charts, tables and maps in support of the statistics. The charts are often the only aspect of the statistical reports to offer a time series dimension. Some of the labelling of regions on the maps could be improved to aid interpretation and Ofsted should review the colour schemes used in the charts to ensure that they are clear when viewed in greyscale.

Include, or link to, appropriate metadata

- A1.14 Standard cover sheets for each of the statistical reports present the title, period, frequency and geographical coverage of the statistics, together with the name of the responsible statistician and their contact details. The official status of the statistics is clearly stated. The statistical report titles should better represent the subject matter of the official statistics, rather than the data source used – *Fostering quality assurance and data forms*. Ofsted does not always present the titles of the statistical reports consistently across its website and publications schedule.
- A1.15 Ofsted publishes the statistical reports and supporting data tables and datasets in zip files on its website. Ofsted provides some useful supplementary information as separate 'read me' text files within the zip files as part of each release. These contain summaries of the definitions and abbreviations used in the Excel and csv files. Ofsted has designed the Excel data tables to provide breakdowns of the statistics on an annual basis. In order to carry out any time series analysis users have to access each of the reports and Excel files for individual years separately. Some of the tables are heavily formatted and do not easily lend themselves to reuse. The datasets are more helpful in this respect.

Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

- A2.1 This assessment was conducted from November 2013 to May 2014.
- A2.2 The Assessment team – Oliver Tatum and Donna Livesey – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of Ofsted in November. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 21 March. The Assessment team subsequently met Ofsted during April to review compliance with the *Code of Practice*, taking account of the written evidence provided and other relevant sources of evidence.

Summary of users contacted, and issues raised

- A2.3 Part of the assessment process involves our consideration of the views of users. We approach some known and potential users of the set of statistics, and we invite comments via an open note on the Authority's website. This process is not a statistical survey, but it enables us to gain some insights about the extent to which the statistics meet users' needs and the extent to which users feel that the producers of those statistics engage with them. We are aware that responses from users may not be representative of wider views, and we take account of this in the way that we prepare Assessment reports.
- A2.4 The Assessment team received 6 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Local government	3
Commissions	2
Central government	1

- A2.5 Users told the Assessment team that they are broadly content with the quality of the social care statistics, though some users said that they mostly use the detailed datasets that underpin the aggregate statistics for England. Users reported good relations with Ofsted statisticians, who they find helpful and responsive. LAs told us that they welcome the focus group meetings that they attend with Ofsted.
- A2.6 Users described a number of ways that they use the statistics, and supporting datasets, and identified some additional potential uses for the future. DfE uses the adoption statistics to inform and monitor policy, such as the *Children and Families Bill*, and to assess the gap between the available supply and demand for adoption places. DfE is also working towards using the LA-level data to provide information for prospective adopters such as adoption maps via the First4Adoption website, and to inform its adoption scorecards to help assess whether recruitment is having an impact on the child's adoption journey. One local learning trust told us that these scorecards are generally used for benchmarking purposes ahead of the official statistics which do not lend themselves easily to this use. More than one user said that a limitation of the adoption and fostering statistics is that the main focus is on England totals and where more detailed regional breakdowns are available, only actual numbers are presented making comparisons across LAs difficult. One user said that the timeliness of these statistics is also a weakness.

- A2.7 The user need to make comparisons across LAs extends to all the social care statistics and users told us that they would very much welcome Ofsted presenting comparative analysis to inform LAs' strategic planning processes and support front-line operatives in benchmarking progress and identifying potential areas of good practice.
- A2.8 The two Commissions that responded to this Assessment told us that they anticipate making greater use of Ofsted's social care statistics to support their work in the future. For example, in the context of proposals in the *Children and Families Bill* to extend their statutory responsibilities to include promoting and protecting children's rights, with a particular regard to children and young people living away from home or receiving social care. These users also told us that they expect that the inspections and fostering statistics will be helpful in future in providing them with an overview of adults and children within GB, and about also about groups in the population that are more at risk of inequality such as children in the care of the state. For children receiving care or support, users were particularly interested in breakdowns by age, disability, ethnic group and gender with information about other equality characteristics and socioeconomic groups also being helpful. Other users identified some gaps in this type of information, for example, about the sexual orientation of foster carers consistent with that already presented for the adoption statistics. Other potential gaps identified in the social care statistics were: information about the demand for places in children's homes, and longitudinal information about children's homes and their inspection history.
- A2.9 Users told the Assessment team that they would welcome some improvements to the statistical reports for the social care statistics. These include: titles that better describe the content of the reports; clearer key messages; briefer commentary that offers context and better insight to the statistics, facilitated by drawing together related statistics; better information about the strengths and limitations of the statistics; and more detailed explanations of methods. Users requested information about how Ofsted accounts for less than 100 per cent coverage of the data, clarity around the provisional and final status of the statistics, and information about how the statistics are used. Users also said that they would welcome longer time series and said that they would like to see Ofsted's Data View service extended to the social care statistics, as this would support better comparative analysis across LAs.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

