

Assessment and Compliance Checks:

A Guide for Statistics Producers

Introduction

The purpose of the Office for Statistics Regulation is to enhance public confidence in the trustworthiness, quality and value of statistics:

Trustworthiness: trusted people, systems and processes

- Trustworthiness means that the statistics and other numerical information are produced free from vested interest, and are based on the best professional judgement of statisticians and other analysts.
- Trustworthiness is a product of the people, systems and processes within organisations that enable and support the production of statistics and other numerical information.

Quality: robust data, methods and statistics

- Quality means that the statistics and numerical information represent the best available estimate of what they aim to measure at a particular point in time and that they are not materially misleading.
- Quality is analytical in nature and is a product of the professional judgements made in the specification, collection, aggregation, processing, analysis, and dissemination of data.

Value: statistics that serve the public good

- Value means that the statistics and numerical information are accessible, remain relevant, and benefit society, helping the public to understand important issues and answer key questions.
- Value is a product of the interface between the statistics or numerical information and those who use them as a basis for forming judgements.

National Statistics

The designation of **National Statistics** provides confidence to the public that the statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and value.

All official statistics should comply fully with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics¹. They are awarded National Statistics status following an Assessment by the regulatory team of the Office for Statistics Regulation. We consider whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.



It is the statistics producer's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If they become concerned about whether statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, they should discuss any concerns with us. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored. This might call for a full re-assessment or a compliance check.

The Code of Practice is currently being refreshed, following the Code Stocktake in 2016.² We plan to carry out a public consultation of the refreshed Code during the summer of 2017. We are aiming to release the new edition of the Code by the end of the year. For more information about the refreshed Code, please see the Code pages of our website³.

Compliance Checks and Assessments

We conduct **compliance checks** and **assessments** against the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, to ensure that all official statistics meet the standards of Trustworthiness, Quality and Value.

¹ <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/code-of-practice/>

² <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/stocktake-of-the-code-of-practice-for-official-statistics-exposure-draft/>

³ <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/monitoring-and-assessment/code-of-practice/>

Compliance Checks

Compliance checks are a short, focused review, providing a high-level investigation of the extent to which the statistics meet the standards of Trustworthiness, Quality and Value. They may examine a specific element of a practice. Some are pre-planned, but our programme is flexible enough to respond to salient issues as they arise.

Compliance checks largely involve desk research by our regulatory team. We speak with users, producer teams and other stakeholders as relevant. We are flexible in the coverage of each of the checks in order to focus on those matters that are most pertinent to the particular set of statistics. We ground any recommendations in the relevant aspects of the Code of Practice.

We undertake compliance checks with one or more of the following objectives in mind:

- To confirm compliance with the Code of Practice in those areas investigated, and hence that the National Statistics status should continue
- To identify whether any immediate enhancements are necessary for the producer to be able to maintain National Statistics status, or whether National Statistics status should be withdrawn
- To help evaluate and decide whether a full re-assessment would be appropriate to explore the statistics more deeply

The Role of a Statistics Producer in a Compliance Check

Our Head of Compliance Programme (Head of CP) will contact your Head of Profession (HoP) to say that we are going to conduct a compliance check and discuss the issues that have triggered the check and its specific focus.

We do not require statistical producers to provide any evidence but will focus on material that is in the public domain, to carry out our investigations.

We may contact your statistics team to ask for clarification during the check and we will share our findings with the team (and HoP).

Once our Director General (DG) for Regulation has approved the findings of the CC, we will publish them on our website in the form of a letter from our DG along with a more detailed report in some cases. The letter will provide a deadline for responding to any areas of improvement found during the check.

We ask you to inform us of how you have addressed the requirements by sending a written response that sets out your actions.

Assessments

We assess statistics against the Code of Practice, and if they comply in full with the Code, designate them as National Statistics. Where sets of official statistics do not maintain the high standards expected by the Code, acting on the Office for Statistics Regulation's advice, the Statistics Authority can remove their National Statistics status (see the Register of De-designations⁴). In some cases National Statistics status will be removed after a producer approaches us when its statistics have temporarily fallen below expected standards – for example through error or during a change in methods. In other cases removal follows a fuller assessment, which has resulted in a range of actions for the producer body to implement before National Statistics status can be reinstated.

The full Assessment process is described below, setting out what we require of statistics producers.

The Assessment Process

We have sought to make the Assessment process less burdensome to statistics producers by changing the way that we ask for evidence to be provided. We have a document list that we ask producers to complete as far as possible from information that is already compiled (see Annex A). We see our meetings and conversations with you as important opportunities, too, to fully understand your practices.

We do not want producers to write anything specifically for the assessment. It may be that a gap is found in the material provided to users or held internally, but this can be provided at a later date, when responding to the Assessment findings. We recommend incorporating the improvements within your ongoing activities, rather than adding additional load at the time of the assessment.

⁴ <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/monitoring-and-assessment/assessment/register-of-de-designations/>

Overview of the Assessment Process:

Stages involving the producer team are in purple (dark shading) and stages for the regulatory team in blue (light shading).



Our Head of CP will discuss with the statistics producer's Head of Profession the timing and scope of an assessment, including the range of statistics to be included and broad timings. They will discuss the reasons for triggering the assessment, such as a request from the producer, a concern raised through casework correspondence received by the Office for Statistics Regulation or perhaps the length of time since the last assessment.

A regulatory team in the Office for Statistics Regulation will be assigned the Assessment and they in turn will contact the lead statistician to discuss the Assessment – the timing, scope and process. If the producer is new to Assessment we may offer an initial meeting to give you a better understanding of Assessment and its goals, ensuring public confidence in the statistics through meeting the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and value.

Evidence gathering

Vital to our Assessment is hearing the views of **users and suppliers**. We ask producers to send us a list of known contacts to supplement the Regulatory Team's own understanding of users and potential users that we can approach, to hear their experiences and comments. This occurs at the start of the process so that we can immediately begin to contact users.

Our key tool for gathering documentary evidence is to ask you to provide links or files as requested in our **Document List**, to illustrate your statistical practices. These can be user engagement plans, minutes of meetings, governance arrangements, method and quality information, statistical policy documents.

Just to be clear: it is not mandatory for you to provide every document in the List. Feel free to refer to any individual document as often as it applies but be sure to highlight the specific part of any document that relates to each entry.

We will arrange two **evidence meetings**. The first one ('initial evidence meeting') will be near the start of the assessment, after an initial review of the material forwarded to us. This is our main opportunity to understand how you put your statistics together, their context, your plans for development etc. It gives us an opportunity to go through your statistical practices more fully and gain a better understanding.

We will review all of the evidence and compile our Compliance Record which forms the basis of our Assessment report. After an internal quality assurance review we will hold a **second evidence meeting** ('follow-up evidence meeting') when we will go through in more detail about areas of your practice. We will also discuss the next steps about the timing of the circulation of the draft Assessment report and its publication.

We aim to let you know the areas for improvement during the evidence meeting so that you can begin to address the compliance issues. We can reflect your improvements in our Assessment report should you implement changes during the period of the Assessment report preparation.

Content of a typical Assessment Report

The key features are the executive summary and chapters related to trustworthiness, quality and value.

Executive Summary

This is an overview of the main findings and views of the OSR presented in the following sections:

a) Subject of the Assessment

A brief section that outlines what is being assessed – the set of statistics and related outputs (reports, data, infographics etc). We propose a diagram is included that places the output within the wider statistical context, if it is considered that this would be helpful to the reader.

b) Public Value Statement

This section outlines the **potential** public value of the statistics, the key questions they might answer, and the decisions for which they provide an evidence base. It also indicates the cost of producing the statistics.

c) OSR Decision

This section will summarise the decision of OSR in relation to designation.

d) OSR Strategic Perspective

Where appropriate, we aim to offer a strategic perspective on the direction of travel for the statistics, drawing out key considerations for producer bodies that go beyond meeting the specific Requirements. These are linked to developing the public value of the statistics.

Often issues emerge as part of an Assessment that would not be practical for you to address within a six-month timeframe, and would not immediately impact NS status. However, with more time and/or investment these changes could radically improve the public value of the statistics, or if not done could reduce the future value of the statistics.

e) Summary Findings

This section gives summary statements on Public Value, Quality and Trustworthiness.

Chapter 1: Public value

This chapter focuses on the potential public value of the statistics and how the producer delivers on that public value. It encompasses the questions that the statistics should be seeking to answer and the decisions they inform. It draws on the user perspective and sets out how the statistics are delivering on value, in relation to the relevant principles of the Code.

Chapter 2: Quality

This chapter focuses on methods and quality and will be supported by more detailed annexes if required, e.g. on a specific aspect of methodology – tailored to each assessment.

Chapter 3: Trustworthiness

For established producers, it is likely that the primary focus will be on chapters 1 and 2 but this chapter will highlight any strengths and limitations with respect to trustworthiness. Any reflections at an organisational level will feature here.

The end of each chapter will feature a table of findings, examples and Requirements.

Annexes:

Annex 1: About the statistics

This is a short annex with some of the basic information about the statistics (previously contained in the old section 2 of Assessment reports), for those who are new to the statistics and require the context.

Annex 2: The source data

This annex discusses the source data used to produce the statistics.

Annex 3: The Assessment process

This annex briefly outlines our assessment process, including the evidence used and the user and supplier engagement undertaken.

Annex 4: Responding to the Assessment report – what OSR and the producer body should expect from each other

This section outlines what we expect from producers in terms of responding to the Assessment report and the process for reporting. It will also explain what you can expect from us while addressing Requirements.

Sign-off process of the Assessment report

Our report is cleared by the Head of CP and the DG for Regulation before being submitted to the Regulation Committee – the group of Non-Executive Directors of the UK Statistics Authority that oversees the regulation activities on behalf of the Authority. We will keep you informed of any substantive changes during the sign-off stages. You can then let us know if you identify any issues with the changes made.

Addressing Requirements

The vast majority of assessments will have Requirements – the areas for improvement required to demonstrate full compliance with the Code. These must be addressed – with evidence provided to us that demonstrates compliance. The Assessment report has a deadline for completing requirements. It is generally around 3 months. It is important that you bear this in mind during the course of the Assessment and let us know whether you expect any difficulties in meeting such a deadline.

We ask you to write to the regulatory team providing an action plan of the steps you plan to take to meet the requirements. We can then discuss with you any issues we see in relation to compliance. We recommend that you work with the GSS's Good Practice Team if you want guidance around best statistical practice.

We are happy to meet with you after the Assessment report has been published to discuss your plans for addressing requirements. We will also come back to you during the interval before the deadline to see how you are getting on. Feel free to contact us throughout the period if you would find that helpful.

Please write to us by the deadline given in the Assessment report with your report on addressing the requirements, providing links or attaching evidence to demonstrate compliance. We don't have a specific template for this response – you may like to check with your HoP's office to see if there is a template for your organisation.

We will review the evidence and either feedback areas requiring additional clarification or will recommend to the Head of CP that designation be confirmed. We will let you know the decision and if the recommendation can proceed to the Regulation Committee.

Confirmation as National Statistics

The confirmation decision is made by the Regulation Committee. It will be made on the recommendation of the DG for Regulation. A letter of designation will be sent by the DG to your HoP – this letter is published on our website alongside the Assessment report.

Please contact us by emailing regulation@statistics.gov.uk if you have any questions about compliance checks or assessments.

Annex A:

List of documents for statistics producers to provide as evidence

Item no.	Documentation	Title where submitting document or provide web link where available
1.	Latest statistical outputs	
2.	User engagement strategy/plans	
3.	Published information on users/uses	
4.	Team organisational chart	
5.	Examples of engagement activities (eg reports about user surveys, social media, consultations, other activities)	
6.	Description of governance arrangements, including committees, advisory boards, user groups	
7.	Minutes of relevant meetings eg with advisory and steering groups, user groups	
8.	Business plan or other relevant planning documents	
9.	Relevant legislation governing the production of the statistics	
10.	Relevant target or performance measures	
11.	Pre-release access lists; statement of compliance with pre-release order	
12.	Revisions and corrections policies	
13.	Any corrections notices	
14.	Pricing policy and arrangements for ad hoc data requests/charging	
15.	Examples of where statistician has commented publicly on statistics eg media, responding to misuse etc; communication plan for the statistics	
16.	Method and data collection (referencing standards and classifications applied) documents	
17.	Supporting quality material accompanying the statistics	
18.	Documents giving quality guidelines, quality assurance arrangements, including your Assessment of risk to quality, using the QAAD toolkit (including any supporting documentation with suppliers eg data specifications)	
19.	Any evidence of reviews/improvement projects	
20.	Survey documentation eg technical report, informed consent	
21.	Confidentiality protection: eg control disclosure arrangements, data sharing agreements, examples of leaflet/letter sent to respondents	



Item no.	Documentation	Title where submitting document or provide web link where available
22.	Cost estimates of responding to surveys, any information on compliance burden/documents demonstrating how explored and evaluated different data sources	
23.	Service level agreements or memoranda of understanding, for example, for the supply of data to compile the statistics or data processing	
24.	Staff recruitment, and training & development corporate documents: eg resource and staffing profile for the business area, including costs of producing the statistics, examples of job descriptions for relevant statisticians, examples of continuing professional development and relevant training undertaken	
	[Add any other documents you think are relevant]	