

# Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

## Statistics on Pensions

*(produced by the Office for National Statistics)*

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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 reports<sup>1</sup> prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*<sup>2</sup>. The Act requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the Code of Practice for Official Statistics<sup>3</sup>. The report covers *Pension Trends*<sup>4</sup>, the *Occupational Pension Schemes Annual Report*<sup>5</sup> (OPS Annual Report) and the *Occupational Pension Schemes Statistical Bulletin*<sup>6</sup> (OPS Statistical Bulletin) produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). *Pension Trends* is a compendium that draws together statistics on pensions from a range of sources into 14 chapters. The chapters are published separately at different times. The OPS Annual Report and the OPS Statistical Bulletin cover occupational (trust-based) pension schemes registered in the UK, including both public sector and private sector schemes. These publications are based on data collected using the Occupational Pension Schemes Survey (OPSS).
- 1.1.2 Assessments of compendium publications against the Code of Practice relate to the processes involved in preparing the publication, rather than in producing the statistics that are included. Those sets of statistics will normally be subject to separate assessment. Designation of a compendium publication as National Statistics therefore means that the producer body has, for example: identified and met user needs in terms of the content of the publication; considered the appropriateness of each series for inclusion; and written appropriate commentary.
- 1.1.3 This report was prepared by the Authority's Assessment team, and approved by the Board of the Statistics Authority on the advice of the Head of Assessment.

## 1.2 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 published in *Pension Trends*, the OPS Annual Report and the OPS Statistical Bulletin are designated as National Statistics, subject to ONS implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by January 2011.

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

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga\\_20070018\\_en.pdf](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pensiontrends/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=1721>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/ops1009.pdf>

### 1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.3.1 *Pension Trends* brings together a range of statistical information about pensions to provide a coherent overview of trends in pension provision in the UK. The *Pension Trends* web page, together with the information page on the National Statistics Publication Hub and the *Guide to pension statistics*<sup>7</sup>, provide an easy-to-use entry point for users. *Pension Trends*, the OPS Annual Report and the OPS Statistical Bulletin are well presented, with useful commentary and analysis to aid interpretation.
- 1.3.2 User consultation for these statistics has focused on internal ONS users or key users in other government departments, who have been selected by ONS. User views are not well documented, and there is no published information on users' experiences of the statistics. *Pension Trends* chapters do not follow a pre-announced timetable for twelve months ahead. Some users feel that the OPS Annual Report and the OPS Statistical Bulletin may be losing relevance as personal and stakeholder pensions, which are not covered by OPSS, gain popularity; ONS is conducting a strategic review which will investigate this issue and how it should be addressed.

### 1.4 Detailed recommendations

- 1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that ONS could strengthen its compliance with the Code. Those which the Assessment team considers essential to enable designation as National Statistics are listed in section 1.5. Other suggestions, which would improve the statistics and the service provided to users but which are not formally required for their designation, are listed at annex 1.

### 1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

<b>Requirement 1</b>	Take steps to develop a more complete understanding of the use made of the statistics; publish the relevant information and assumptions and use them to better support the use of the statistics (para 3.6).
<b>Requirement 2</b>	Publish information on users' experiences of these statistics, data quality, and the format and timing of reports (para 3.7).
<b>Requirement 3</b>	Provide users with a summary of the methods adopted by the sources in <i>Pension Trends</i> , and comment on the quality of these sources (para 3.15).
<b>Requirement 4</b>	Explain the distinction between National Statistics and other types of statistics that are in the

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/guide-to-pension-statistics/index.html>

compendium, and for those that are currently labelled 'non-National Statistics', provide information about the quality of the statistics and comment on the extent to which they are reliable (para 3.17).

**Requirement 5**

Consult users on proposed changes to OPSS, and publish user responses to the consultation, along with the records of decisions and actions following the consultation (para 3.21).

**Requirement 6**

Publish a timetable for *Pension Trends* for twelve months ahead which takes into account user needs (para 3.36).

**Requirement 7**

Investigate whether existing administrative data could be used to improve estimates about occupational pension schemes (para 3.38).

## 2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 In response to growing public demand for reliable pension statistics, *Pension Trends* was first released in 2005. The first edition was produced by the interdepartmental Pension Statistics Task Force<sup>8</sup> (PSTF). Subsequent publications were produced by a new Pensions Analysis Unit<sup>9</sup> in ONS. The aim of this unit is to be a centre of excellence within ONS in the collection and analysis of pension statistics.
- 2.2 *Pension Trends* brings together existing statistics and background information from a range of sources<sup>10</sup> to illustrate the economic and social issues that shape trends in pension provision. Since 2008, following consultation with the interdepartmental Pensions Statistics Advisory Group (PSAG) – members include a range of Government and private sector users of *Pension Trends* – *Pension Trends* has been a web-only publication. Updated chapters are published on the dedicated ONS *Pension Trends* web page<sup>11</sup>. Some chapters are updated annually, with others appearing less frequently. The *Pension Trends* web page includes a link to the *Pension Trends Glossary* and the *Guide to pension statistics*.
- 2.3 The OPS Statistical Bulletin is released on same day as the OPS Annual Report. The Statistical Bulletin is a high level summary of the detail included in the OPS Annual Report. Following a review in 2005, ONS accepted responsibility for running the OPSS from the Government Actuary's Department (GAD), which had run the survey since the 1950s. It is designed to provide estimates of scheme membership, contributions and benefits for occupational pensions. The methods currently used are unable to provide robust estimates of the number of schemes, and ONS is addressing this weakness as part of a wider strategic review of the methods used to create the OPS Annual Report and OPS Statistical Bulletin.
- 2.4 *Pension Trends* costs ONS approximately £84,000 per year to produce. OPSS costs ONS approximately £82,000 to collect the data and £43,600 to analyse the data and produce the OPS Annual Report and OPS Statistical Bulletin.
- 2.5 *Pension Trends*, the OPS Annual Report and the OPS Statistical Bulletin are reported in the general and specialist media. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), which has regulatory responsibility for occupational pensions, uses OPSS data extensively. Investment management organisations and pension scheme providers use the statistics to assess the changing market dynamics of the pensions industry. Economic research institutes also make use of the statistics for their own analyses of the pensions system.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/development/pstf/background.asp>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/guide-to-pension-statistics/pension-organisations/index.html>

<sup>10</sup> For example, the Labour Force Survey (ONS), the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ONS), the General Household Survey (ONS), the Family Resources Survey (DWP), the Pensioners' Income Series (DWP) and HMRC data. See 'Sources and further reading' within each *Pension Trends* chapter for a full list of sources.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pensiontrends/>

### 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 ONS engages with users of its pension statistics at meetings of the PSAG. The group mainly focuses on *Pension Trends*, but also includes some updates on OPSS, the OPS Annual Report and the OPS Statistical Bulletin. Selected representatives from government, the private sector and academia are invited to attend PSAG meetings twice a year. The group is not advertised to all users or potential users. User feedback suggested these meetings are useful for enabling key users to learn about and discuss pension data, but there was a lack of evidence about how user suggestions received by ONS at these meetings had been responded to. However, ONS is holding an open user engagement forum in October 2010 which has been advertised to a wide range of users and via the *Pension Trends* webpage and will include sessions to seek and respond to user feedback.
- 3.2 Some OPSS strategy meetings have taken place involving representatives predominantly from ONS, but also some representatives from other government departments and two professional bodies. It is positive that these meetings have taken place but there does not appear to be a consistent format for them and they are not well documented. ONS does not hold meetings which are advertised to all users or potential users of OPSS, the OPS Annual Report and the OPS Statistical Bulletin to seek user feedback or consult on changes to the survey or the publication.
- 3.3 ONS consults DWP about changes to the OPSS questionnaire, but does not consult more widely. ONS has begun a review of OPSS that may lead to some significant changes to the statistics; this is currently an internal project but ONS plans to consult users about any draft proposals.
- 3.4 User queries relating to Pension Trends and OPSS, the OPS Annual Report and the OPS Statistical Bulletin are encouraged by providing contact details on the *Topic guide to: Pensions*<sup>12</sup> section of the Publication Hub and the *Guide to pension statistics* web pages<sup>13</sup> on ONS's website. We were told that statisticians in ONS review users' queries relating to *Pension Trends* and OPSS to identify ways to improve the reports.
- 3.5 ONS does not currently publish information on users' views on *Pension Trends* or OPSS, the OPS Annual Report and the OPS Statistical Bulletin, or the use made of these statistics.
- 3.6 As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should take steps to develop a more complete understanding of the use made of the statistics. It

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/economy/personal-finance/pensions>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/guide-to-pension-statistics/index.html>

should publish the relevant information and assumptions, and use them to better support the use of the statistics<sup>14</sup> (Requirement 1).

- 3.7 As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should publish information on users' experiences of these statistics, data quality, and the format and timing of reports<sup>15</sup> (Requirement 2).

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<sup>14</sup> In relation to Principle 1, Practice 2 of the Code of Practice.

<sup>15</sup> In relation to Principle 1, Practice 5 of the Code of Practice.

## Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

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

- 3.8 There have been some errors in these statistics, which ONS handled in accordance with the Code, promptly investigating the nature of the errors and alerting stakeholders.
- 3.9 Because it is a compendium publication, *Pension Trends* does not include announcements of changes to methods in advance. ONS has told us that these announcements are made by the source publication. *Pension Trends* includes footnotes to inform users where methods have changed since the last publication.
- 3.10 In 2008, ONS decided not to publish scheme numbers in the OPS Annual Report because of concerns over the robustness of these estimates. The Annual Report included an announcement that scheme numbers were not published in the report and the rationale for this.
- 3.11 Some users told us that they felt some introductory text in Chapter 1 of *Pension Trends* could be interpreted as favouring recent government policy. We suggest that ONS review the introductory text used in Chapter 1 of *Pension Trends* to ensure that there is no scope for the commentary to be interpreted as favouring any particular government policy.
- 3.12 The reports are released on the internet without charge to the user.
- 3.13 ONS has guidance for staff that outlines the circumstances when charging for supplementary statistical services is acceptable. The guidance is not particularly clear, and is not publicly available. We suggest that, in the interests of transparency, ONS produce and publish clear pricing policies for the provision of supplementary statistical information.

### **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.**

3.14 No incidents of political pressure or abuses of trust were reported to or identified by the Assessment team in the course of this assessment.

## 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.**

- 3.15 Most of the statistics presented in *Pension Trends* are from external sources, and are brought together in the form of a compendium to provide users with an overview of the latest statistics on pensions. No information is provided about the methods used for these external sources. References to the sources are included, but it is not always possible for users to find information about methods or quality this way. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should provide users with a summary of the methods adopted by the sources in *Pension Trends*, and comment on the quality of these sources<sup>16</sup> (Requirement 3). We suggest this be achieved by publishing a short summary note, with basic methods and quality information about each source.
- 3.16 In addition to statistics from external sources, *Pension Trends* includes some new analyses carried out by the *Pension Trends* team<sup>17</sup>. For these new analyses, ONS has published articles about the methods used and these are referenced at the end of the relevant chapter.
- 3.17 A 'list of tables and figures' appears at the beginning of each *Pension Trends* chapter, stating whether the information is 'classed as National Statistics', 'not classed as National Statistics', or 'mixture of National Statistics and non-National Statistics information'. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should explain the distinction between National Statistics and other types of statistics that are in the compendium, and for those that are currently labelled 'non-National Statistics', provide information about the quality of the statistics and comment on the extent to which they are reliable<sup>18</sup> (Requirement 4).
- 3.18 A *Summary quality report for Occupational Pensions Schemes Survey*<sup>19</sup> for OPSS and the OPS Annual Report is published on ONS's website. This informs users about the quality of OPSS statistics.
- 3.19 ONS told us that data validation procedures are carried out on OPSS data, and that user requirements have been taken into consideration in the development of these quality assurance procedures. We were also told that the introduction of online data collection has improved accuracy since it does not involve handwritten responses.

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<sup>16</sup> In relation to Principle 4, Practices 2 and 3, Principle 8, Practice 1 and Protocol 1 Practice 4 of the Code of Practice.

<sup>17</sup> Such as Chapters 8 and 14 of *Pension Trends* which includes analysis based on methods in 'Private pension contributions: updated estimates 1995 – 2007' by David Miller, Pensions Analysis Unit, Office for National Statistics. <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/articles/nojournal/Privatepensioncontributions1995-2007.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> In relation to Principle 4 Practices 2 and 3, Principle 8 Practice 1 and Protocol 1 Practice 4 of the Code of Practice.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/quality/qual-info-economic-social-and-bus-stats/quality-reports-for-economic-statistics/summary-quality-report-for-occupational-pensions-schemes-survey--opss-.pdf>

- 3.20 ONS has made improvements to OPSS since it took over responsibility of the survey from GAD. On hand-over, the survey became statutory which doubled the private sector response rates from around 40 per cent to around 80 per cent, improving the quality of the data. Since then, cognitive testing with respondents has improved the wording of the questions, the design of the questionnaire and the ease with which respondents can complete the form. The calculation of sampling errors has been improved and are published in a methodology section of the annual report; and the sample design has been optimised to increase the precision of the main aggregates measured in the survey.
- 3.21 OPSS does not cover personal or stakeholder pensions. Users responding to the Assessment team's consultation said that due to the decline of occupational pension schemes, and the increasing popularity of personal pensions, OPSS is less relevant than it used to be. These users prefer statistics from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE). ONS is currently carrying out a strategic review of the OPSS. This review is considering issues such as the frequency of data collection, survey questions, scope, terminology, the availability of raw data, and the improvement of estimates of the number of schemes. We were told that ONS are planning to discuss the review with the ONS Pensions Board, ONS Pensions Analysis Unit<sup>20</sup>, DWP, users at an OPSS users' meeting and possibly more broadly at the Pension Statistics Advisory Group (PSAG). As part of designation as National Statistics, ONS should consult users on proposed changes to OPSS, and publish user responses to the consultation, along with the records of decisions and actions following the consultation<sup>21</sup> (Requirement 5).

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<sup>20</sup> <http://intranet/aboutons/businessareafocus/divisions/economiclabourandsocialanalysisdivisions/householdlabourmarketandsocialwellbeingdivision/pensions-analysis-unit.asp>

<sup>21</sup> In relation to Principle 4, Practice 2 and Protocol 1, Practice 7 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.**

- 3.22 ONS has assured us that it takes all necessary steps to protect the confidentiality of the data it collects. ONS has developed Statistical Disclosure Control policies for different types of statistical outputs<sup>22</sup>. Disclosure control policies exist for tables produced from administrative data, tables produced from survey data and social survey microdata. ONS told us that these policies balance the requirements for protecting confidentiality with user needs.
- 3.23 A written agreement is in place for the sharing of OPSS data with DWP. Datasets are anonymised and textual comments are removed before data are shared. ONS also makes OPSS data available to approved researchers via the Virtual Microdata Laboratory.

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.knowledgenetwork.gsi.gov.uk/statnet/statnet.nsf/RefDocs/DBHL-6ZYFQN?OpenDocument>

## **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.**

- 3.24 For OPSS, DWP and other government departments may request additional questions to meet emerging policy needs. Proposals to add or remove questions on the survey are considered by ONS in consultation with the client. When new questions are added to the survey questionnaire, ONS aims to drop existing questions so that respondent burden does not increase.
- 3.25 ONS retained the option to respond to OPSS online when it took over responsibility for the survey. This provides respondents with an alternative method of response, which, ONS told us, is easier and quicker for some respondents. For the latest survey in 2009, 55 per cent of responses were completed online.
- 3.26 The administrative burden placed on pension providers in responding to OPSS is measured with a separate voluntary survey and reported in the ONS Simplification Plan.

## 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.**

- 3.27 ONS has various organisational policies and procedures in place to support learning and successful recruitment with the aim of ensuring that appropriate staffing resources are in place to produce, manage and disseminate official statistics to the standards of the Code.
- 3.28 ONS told us that it is not always possible to meet the demand for the timely release of *Pension Trends* due to staffing resource constraints. This issue is addressed under Protocol 2.

## Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

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

- 3.29 All chapters within *Pension Trends* and the OPS Annual Report contain commentary and analysis to accompany the statistics presented in them. This commentary is useful in providing context for the reader and assisting the reader in understanding the statistics.
- 3.30 *Pension Trends* chapters are published on the dedicated ONS *Pension Trends* web page<sup>23</sup>. This web page includes a link to a glossary of technical terms and a *Guide to pension statistics*<sup>24</sup>. There is also a *Topic guide to: Pensions*<sup>25</sup> section of the Publication Hub. The Assessment team regards this collection of pages as an easy-to-use entry point that makes access to the statistics straightforward.
- 3.31 The OPS Annual Report and Statistical Bulletin are published on ONS's website. However, some information and links on the web pages<sup>26</sup> are out-of-date. We suggest ONS update the OPSS landing page, and include links to other relevant information such as the *Summary quality report for Occupational Pensions Schemes Survey*.
- 3.32 Since 2007, several new chapters have been added to *Pension Trends*. This made it difficult to retain the original logical structure of the publication. Therefore, in March 2009, *Pension Trends* was restructured to make it more coherent. It now has 14 chapters, one of which is currently under development.
- 3.33 ONS make a distinction between public and private sector pension schemes in the OPS Annual Report and Statistical Bulletin. Some users commented that they would like more information about the pension schemes falling within these categories and further information about the classification of public and private sector pension schemes in the OPS Annual Report. We suggest ONS reviews the information provided in the OPS Annual Report about the pensions schemes included in the OPSS and the classification of public and private sector schemes, taking into account user need.

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pensiontrends/>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/guide-to-pension-statistics/index.html>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/economy/personal-finances/pensions>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/Contact.asp?vlnk=2367&More=Y&ComboState=&Btn.x=21&Btn.y=10>

## **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 The *Pension Trends* web pages include a publication timetable, showing when chapters are expected to be updated. However, this is often just the year of publication. The Pension statisticians told us they follow ONS's guidelines for ad hoc publications, which is to announce a provisional publication date for each chapter when the team starts working on it, and finalising and publishing the date at least four weeks before the release date. Some chapters are updated annually and some less frequently, and users therefore cannot be certain of the frequency of updates to chapters.
- 3.36 ONS told us that internal discussions have taken place about this release practice because some staff involved in the production of the publication do not feel that it follows the Code. The Assessment team does not consider *Pension Trends* to be an ad hoc publication since it is a regular and ongoing publication. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should publish a timetable for *Pension Trends* for twelve months ahead which takes into account user needs<sup>27</sup> (Requirement 6).
- 3.37 ONS recently reviewed pre-release access across the department to ensure that access to its statistics before public release is limited to those people who require it.

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<sup>27</sup> In relation to Protocol 2 Practice 2 and Principle 1 Practice 4

### **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.**

3.38 The Pensions Scheme Registry, maintained by The Pensions Regulator<sup>28</sup>, is used for selecting the sample for the OPSS and for weighting sample data. As part of the strategic review (see para 3.21), ONS plans to consider whether these administrative data can be used to eliminate the need to collect some of the data currently collected on OPSS. One issue ONS informed us about is that The Pensions Scheme Registry data are not available annually which some users of the OPSS, the OPS Annual Report and the OPS Statistical Bulletin require. Another issue is that there can be a discrepancy between the figure published for total scheme membership by The Pensions Regulator and that which appears in the OPS Annual Report. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should investigate whether existing administrative data could be used to improve estimates about occupational pension schemes<sup>29</sup> (Requirement 7).

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.thepensionsregulator.gov.uk>

<sup>29</sup> In relation to Protocol 3, Practice 3, Principle 1, Practice 2 and Principle 6, Practice 1 of the Code of Practice.

## Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to *Pension Trends*, the OPS Annual Report and the OPS Statistical Bulletin, 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.

- Suggestion 1** Review the introductory text used in Chapter 1 of *Pension Trends* to ensure that there is no scope for the commentary to be interpreted as favouring any particular government policy (para 3.11).
- Suggestion 2** Produce and publish clear pricing policies for the provision of supplementary statistical information (para 3.13).
- Suggestion 3** Publish a short summary note, with basic methods and quality information about each source (para 3.15).
- Suggestion 4** Update the OPSS landing page, and includes links to other relevant information such as the *Summary quality report for Occupational Pensions Schemes Survey* (para 3.31).
- Suggestion 5** Review the information provided in the OPS Annual Report about the pensions schemes included in the OPSS and the classification of public and private sector schemes, taking into account user need (para 3.33).

## Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A2.1 This assessment was conducted from April to August 2010.

A2.2 The Assessment team – Joe Cuddeford, Emma Bowditch and Ed Swires-Hennessy – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of the ONS in April. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 17 May. The Assessment team subsequently met ONS statisticians during June 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 12 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Government departments	6
Local government	1
Pension providers	2
Academia	1
Other	2

A2.5 Overall, users were satisfied with the presentation and the commentary within *Pension Trends*, the OPS Annual Report and the OPS Statistical Bulletin. Generally, users were content with the *Pension Trends* chapters being published separately, rather than a single annual release. However, users told us they would like quicker updates of chapters, and for chapter updates to coincide with the release of new data. Some users of OPSS, the OPS Annual Report and the OPS Statistical Bulletin find the data from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) more useful than OPSS data since it covers contract-based, defined contribution pensions, unlike OPSS, as well as providing statistics on private and public sector pensions. Some users of the publications expressed feeling a lack of engagement with ONS. For example, one user reported a lack of response to their comments in relation to the *Pensions Trends* publication and another reported a lack of consultation on changes to the OPSS. However, others reported finding ONS contacts very helpful.

### Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document



