

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on Post-16 Education in Wales

*(produced by the Welsh Assembly
Government)*

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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 of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on Post-16 Education in Wales

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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*.

Contents

Section 1: Summary of findings

Section 2: Subject of the assessment

Section 3: Assessment findings

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

Annex 2: Summary of the assessment process and user views

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 requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the Code of Practice for Official Statistics³. The report covers the following National Statistics publications produced by the Welsh Assembly Government:

- *Students in Higher Education Institutions*⁴;
- *Initial Teacher Training in Wales*⁵;
- *Welsh in Higher Education Institutions*⁶;
- *Destinations of students gaining qualifications from Higher Education Institutions: Wales*⁷;
- *Student Finance: Education Maintenance Allowances Awarded In Wales, Provisional*⁸;
- *Student Finance: Education Maintenance Allowances Awarded In Wales*⁹; and
- *Student Finance: Assembly Learning Grants Awarded To Welsh Domiciled Students In Further Education*¹⁰.

1.1.2 The Statistics and Registration Service Act also allows Ministers or the National Statistician to request an assessment of other official statistics in order for them to gain National Statistics status. This report also covers the following publications in response to such a request:

- *Student Finance: Financial Contingency Funds In Wales*¹¹; and
- *Education Maintenance Allowances Awarded in Wales*¹² (monthly tables).

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 listed in paragraph 1.1.1 are designated as National Statistics, and has determined that

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

⁴ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/post16education2010/0210/?lang=en>

⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/post16education2010/100319/?lang=en>

⁶ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/post16education2010/100729/?lang=en>

⁷ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/post16education2010/100923/?lang=en>

⁸ <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/2010/100128sdr142010en.pdf>

⁹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/post16education2010/100930/?lang=en>

¹⁰ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/post16ed2009/hdw20091029/?lang=en>

¹¹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/post16education2010/100429/?lang=en>

¹² <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/post16education2010/100908/?lang=en>

the statistics listed in paragraph 1.1.2 can be designated as new National Statistics products, subject to the Welsh Assembly Government implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by March 2011.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.3.1 The Welsh Assembly Government documents users' needs in minutes from meetings and is currently consulting users about their views of the clarity, accessibility, relevance and timeliness of its post-16 education¹³ statistics. The annual statistical plan includes information about the use made of the statistics, but this is focused on central government uses.
- 1.3.2 The publications include some details about the quality of the statistics but there is scope to include more information about the methods and data sources.
- 1.3.3 The format of the publications is inconsistent, and the accessibility of the statistics could be improved by providing more commentary and analysis. The Welsh Assembly Government makes web-based data tables available for users to analyse and re-use the data.

¹³ The Welsh Assembly Government's post-16 education statistics provide information about students in higher and further education, and financial support to these students and some school students. This assessment does not include most statistical outputs relating to Further Education, or any statistics on Work-Based Learning and Community Learning. These statistics will be assessed separately.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

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

1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

Requirement 1	Provide users with information about supplier organisations' methods for collecting and analysing the data used in the post-16 education statistical publications (para 3.9).
Requirement 2	Provide more information about the quality of the statistics, including relevance and accuracy (para 3.11).
Requirement 3	Publish the guidance used to assess the quality of the data in the post-16 education statistical publications (para 3.12).
Requirement 4	Provide factual information about the policy and operational context of the statistics and improve the presentation and format of the statistical reports to aid understanding and interpretability (para 3.25).

2 Subject of the assessment

2.1 The Welsh Assembly Government uses data collected by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the Student Loans Company (SLC) to compile most of its post-16 statistics publications:

- HESA was established in 1993 as the official UK agency for the collection, analysis and dissemination of quantitative information about higher education.
- SLC provides financial services (loans and grants) to students in colleges and universities across the four education systems of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. SLC also administers the collection of repayments from customers who are no longer in higher education.

2.2 HESA and SLC have formal agreements with the Welsh Assembly Government to provide the data which the Welsh Assembly Government requires for its post-16 education statistical publications.

2.3 These annual publications cover various aspects of post-16 education in Wales:

- *Students in Higher Education Institutions* is an annual publication, first produced in 2005. It provides statistics about all students enrolled at Welsh Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and details of students from Wales enrolled at UK HEIs for each academic year. The publication contains statistics on mode of study (full or part-time) and level of study (undergraduate or postgraduate);
- *Initial Teacher Training in Wales* provides statistics on students at HEIs in Wales and England who are enrolled on Initial Teacher Training courses leading to Qualified Teacher Status. The publication includes details of subject area, Welsh language skills, and student age, ethnicity and gender;
- *Welsh in Higher Education Institutions* provides statistics on students in HEIs studying through the Welsh language, and higher education staff teaching through the Welsh language. The publication contains various breakdowns of the statistics, for example by institution, student gender and age, and by level, mode and subject of study;
- *Destinations of students gaining qualifications from Higher Education Institutions: Wales* provides details of the destinations – such as work or further study – of students who gained higher education qualifications in Welsh HEIs and students from Wales who gained qualifications in UK HEIs. The bulletin includes statistics on the destinations of qualifiers by mode and subject of study, salaries and type of employment gained;
- *Student Finance: Education Maintenance Allowances Awarded In Wales* (provisional and final releases) present statistics on allowances and bonuses paid to eligible 16 to 18 year olds in Wales attending school or further education college on a full-time basis. The bulletin includes details of approved applications by age and gender of students, level of allowance and type of learning centre. The statistics are based on data from SLC's management information system, which is used to pay and administer Education Maintenance Allowances in Wales;

- *Student Finance: Assembly Learning Grants Awarded To Welsh Domiciled Students In Further Education* provides details of the number of grant applications and the outcomes of applications. The publication contains various breakdowns of the data, for example by institution, mode of study, and total amounts paid to successful applicants;
- *Student Finance: Financial Contingency Funds In Wales* provides statistics on financial assistance (loans and awards) paid to students at Further and Higher Education institutions in Wales facing financial hardship to meet the costs of studying and general living expenses; and
- *Education Maintenance Allowances Awarded in Wales* is published monthly and provides a one-page update on the number of applications for these allowances. The publication includes a web link to tables which contain various data breakdowns, including the numbers of approved and rejected applications, type of learning centre, and student age and gender.

2.4 The Welsh Assembly Government's post-16 education statistics are used for a variety of purposes, including:

- modelling and forecasting the projected costs of student finance provision, and informing the allocation of funds to institutions and students;
- reviewing the use of student finance schemes to ensure that they are being used correctly, and monitoring the cost of the schemes to ensure that they remain within budget;
- informing Welsh Ministers and Welsh Assembly Government policy officials of relevant trends and developments in post-16 education and student finance;
- measuring performance against the Welsh Assembly Government's targets for recruiting students to Initial Teacher Training courses;
- monitoring by students, HEIs, careers services and the media of graduate employment prospects in Wales; and
- responding to media queries.

2.5 The Welsh Assembly Government told the Assessment team that it currently costs around £15,000 a year to prepare and publish its post-16 education statistics. These costs do not include time spent providing data for tables which are published on the StatsWales¹⁴ website. This website allows users to view, create and download data on a range of Welsh topics, including post-16 education.

¹⁴ <http://statswales.wales.gov.uk/index.htm>

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 The Welsh Assembly Government's statistical team has regular contact with various bodies, including the Welsh Higher Education Funding Council, the Welsh Statistical Liaison Committee and the Welsh Assembly Government's Student Support Forecasting User Group. Specific user needs for post-16 education statistics are documented in the minutes of the meetings with these groups. The membership of the Welsh Statistical Liaison Committee¹⁵ includes representatives from the Welsh Assembly Government, local authorities, police and fire services, and the Welsh Language Board. The Welsh Assembly Government publishes the minutes of Committee meetings on its website¹⁶.
- 3.2 In September 2010 the Welsh Assembly Government launched a web-based consultation¹⁷ for all its education statistics. The consultation asked respondents for information about their uses of the statistics and their views on the relevance, accessibility, clarity, comparability and timeliness of the statistical products. The consultation closed at the end of November. The Welsh Assembly Government plans to publish a summary of users' responses in early 2011 and intends to publish the actions it will take in light of the responses in spring 2011. The statistics team keeps records of enquiries from government and non-government users to monitor the areas in which users request extra information.
- 3.3 The Welsh Assembly Government publishes an annual statistical work plan¹⁸ which contains its overall user engagement plan and the Statistical Directorate's priorities for the year ahead. The plan also sets out the work programme for education (including post-16 education) statistics which the statistical team developed following consultation with policy colleagues. The Welsh Assembly Government invites users to comment on its statistical plan.
- 3.4 The statistical work plan includes information on the use made of post-16 education statistics although this is focused on central government uses. We suggest that the Welsh Assembly Government expand this information to include the uses made of the statistics by non-government users.

¹⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/liaison/?lang=en>

¹⁶ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/liaison/meetings/?lang=en>

¹⁷ <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/statistics/education/?lang=en>

¹⁸ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/publications/statsplan1011/?lang=en>

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

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

- 3.5 The Welsh Assembly Government publishes Welsh post-16 education statistical reports according to a published timetable and makes the statistics available free of charge on its website. It presents the statistics impartially and objectively.
- 3.6 The Welsh Assembly Government has published a statement¹⁹ to explain how it communicates revisions to its statistical outputs. The Welsh Assembly Government notes major revisions or changes to methods in the post-16 education publications and in any related StatsWales metadata. The Welsh Assembly Government's statisticians informed us that, where appropriate, they will also announce changes to classifications in advance of the release of the changed statistics.
- 3.7 The Welsh Assembly Government corrects errors to its web-based post-16 education statistical publications, and highlights these corrections on its website. The statistics team maintains a list of users for each post-16 education statistical publication and emails these users to inform them of the changes.

¹⁹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/compliance/revisions/?lang=en>

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.

- 3.8 No incidents of political pressure, abuses of trust or complaints relating to professional integrity, quality or standards were reported to or identified by the Assessment team. The Welsh Assembly Government issues guidance to staff detailing their responsibilities regarding the use of statistics.

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.

- 3.9 The data in the Welsh Assembly Government's post-16 education statistical publications are mainly provided by HESA and SLC. The statistical team is in regular contact with both HESA and SLC through formal meetings and regular communication, and provides advice to these bodies on improving methods. HESA publishes details on its website of the methods it uses for the most recent publications. The Welsh Assembly Government includes information in its post-16 education publications about data sources and coverage but it does not provide information about how supplier organisations collect and analyse the source data. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Assembly Government should also provide users with information about supplier organisations' methods for collecting and analysing the data it uses in its post-16 education statistical publications²⁰ (Requirement 1).
- 3.10 For the *Financial Contingency Funds* publication, the Welsh Assembly Government collects data from HEIs and Further Education institutions. The statistical team designed the data collection forms in collaboration with relevant policy colleagues, and improved the collection and validation processes to enhance the accuracy and consistency of the data it receives from educational institutions. The statistical publication includes information about data collection methods and quality.
- 3.11 The statistical publications include some information about aspects of quality such as missing data and response rates for HESA's Destination of Leavers from Higher Education survey. However, there is scope to provide users with more information about the quality of the statistical outputs – for example, their relevance to users and degree of accuracy. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Assembly Government should provide more information about the quality of these statistics, including relevance and accuracy²¹ (Requirement 2).
- 3.12 The Welsh Assembly Government has developed an internal quality framework but it has not published any quality guidelines. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Assembly Government should publish the guidance used to assess the quality of the data in its post-16 education statistical publications²² (Requirement 3).
- 3.13 Most of the quality assurance of the data in the Welsh Assembly Government's post-16 education statistical publications is carried out by the organisations which collect the data. The Welsh Assembly Government's statistical team follows guidance developed by the Welsh Assembly Government's Statistical Directorate to check, validate and analyse the data they receive. Quality

²⁰ In relation to Principle 4 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

²¹ In relation to Principle 4 Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

²² In relation to Principle 4 Practice 4 of the Code of Practice

assurance procedures are built into the process of compiling each post-16 education statistical output.

- 3.14 The Welsh Assembly Government's post-16 education statistics which are derived from HESA and SLC data are comparable with those about the other UK countries. However, the Welsh Assembly Government's releases contain little reference to the other countries' publications. We suggest that the Welsh Assembly Government signpost equivalent post-16 education releases from the four UK countries and document any differences in its approach.
- 3.15 When the Welsh Assembly Government revises the methods or classifications it uses to compile its post-16 education publications, it also revises the relevant charts to show consistent historical trends. Discontinuities in trends are clearly indicated in charts or tables, and explained in the accompanying commentary or notes. The statistical team decides whether or not a change in method or classification merits this treatment, in conjunction with the data suppliers.
- 3.16 The Welsh Assembly Government's Statistical Directorate – including the post-16 education statistics team – is currently reviewing the processes it uses to produce and publish its statistics. The statistics team will also review its processes and outputs following the current user consultation, mentioned in paragraph 3.2.
- 3.17 In 2006 the Welsh Assembly Government commissioned a review²³ of the statistical planning issues underlying Welsh Medium Initial Teacher Training course provision in Wales. The final report was published in March 2007 and included recommendations on statistical definitions used in the *Initial Teacher Training in Wales* publication. A user informed us that these recommendations have not been implemented and that there is still a need to review the definitions used in defining a Welsh medium course. We suggest that the Welsh Assembly Government publish a response to the recommendations from the review which relate to statistical issues.

²³ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/reports/rev-teacher-training-stats;jsessionid=dM6dMZWYp2tTt10fCHlb7x01mGxhJFZGyr2S0DH1Jh1JZnLQTYyQ!-42672990?lang=en>

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.

- 3.18 HESA and SLC supply most of the data used to produce the statistics in the Welsh Assembly Government's post-16 education statistical publications and these organisations inform students about the uses that will be made of their data, and how their confidentiality will be protected.
- 3.19 The standard terms and conditions for all Welsh Assembly Government staff include confidentiality arrangements, and the Welsh Assembly Government has published its arrangements for confidentiality protection²⁴. These include the Statistical Directorate's current information security project, staff training and organisational protocols such as statistical disclosure control techniques. The statistical team keeps records of data access agreements for any individual data shared with other organisations.
- 3.20 In most of the Welsh Assembly Government's post-16 education statistical publications, figures are rounded to the nearest five to prevent the identification of individuals. This approach is in line with HESA's rounding strategy. The Welsh Assembly Government informed the Assessment team that this level of rounding does not affect the usefulness of the data. The figures in the *Financial Contingency Funds* publication are rounded to the nearest ten. All the publications include details of the rounding method used.

²⁴ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/compliance/confidential/?lang=en>

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.

- 3.21 The data the Welsh Assembly Government uses to compile its post-16 education statistical publications generally come from administrative records compiled by HESA and SLC. The Welsh Assembly Government has not estimated the costs to data providers of supplying the information but informed the Assessment team that the Welsh component is a small part of the overall burden and supplying data to the Welsh Assembly Government carries no additional burden to these providers. The Welsh Assembly Government has asked suppliers of Financial Contingency Funds data to estimate the time taken to provide the information and consults these suppliers before making any changes to the data collection.
- 3.22 A member of the Welsh Assembly Government's post-16 education statistics team sits on HESA's statutory customers group which advises on issues concerning respondent burden and quality of information. HESA consults all its statutory customers – including the Welsh Assembly Government – on proposals to collect new data.

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.

- 3.23 The Welsh Assembly Government's HE statistics team comprises one statistician (0.75 full-time equivalent, FTE), two higher statistical officers (both 1.0 FTE) and two statistical officers (both 1.0 FTE). The team informed us that it is adequately resourced to produce and publish Welsh HE statistics to the standards of the Code of Practice.
- 3.24 The Welsh Assembly Government participates in the Government Statistical Service's recruitment schemes and uses a competency-based framework to manage staff performance. This involves assessments of continuing professional development and six-month performance reviews.

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

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

- 3.25 The format of the Welsh Assembly Government's post-16 education statistical publications is in line with its Statistical Directorate's guidelines. The *Initial Teacher Training* publication mentions the Welsh Assembly Government's targets on student intake but little policy context is provided in the other publications. There is little commentary included in the publications and several users informed the Assessment team that they would prefer the publications to include more analysis and commentary. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Assembly Government should provide factual information about the policy and operational context of the statistics and improve the presentation and format of the statistical reports to aid understanding and interpretability²⁵ (Requirement 4). In the current consultation with users, the statistical team is asking users how it can improve its publications to meet users' needs – for example, what type of output users find most useful, and the level of commentary required.
- 3.26 For its statistical outputs, the statistical team focuses its analysis on what it regards as the main issues of interest to users of Welsh post-16 education statistics. The team supplements its summary tables and commentary with detailed tables on the StatsWales website which users can download. The Welsh Assembly Government includes references to the relevant StatsWales table numbers in some of its post-16 education publications. We suggest the Welsh Assembly Government include references to the relevant StatsWales table numbers in all applicable post-16 education publications to help users find the data more easily. We also suggest the Welsh Assembly Government improve its signposting of the source (HESA and SLC) data for users to analyse. The producer team periodically reviews requests from users for additional information and may amend the content of its statistical publications or StatsWales tables to reflect common themes.
- 3.27 The Welsh Assembly Government makes its post-16 education statistics available on its website which adheres to accessibility guidelines. Where appropriate, the producer team ensures that its statistical outputs are available in the Welsh language.

²⁵ In relation to Principle 8 Practice 2 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.

3.28 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.

- 3.29 The producer team publishes a timetable²⁶ (by month) for its forthcoming post-16 education publications for the next 12 months on its website. It publishes post-16 education statistics on the Welsh Assembly Government's website and on the National Statistics Publications Hub. It prioritises the publication of outputs according to users' requirements and publishes the main outputs as soon as possible after receiving data from supplier organisations. However, the exact timing of publications depends on several factors, including: when supplier organisations compile and release their data; the quality of the data it receives from suppliers; and the workload of the team.
- 3.30 The Welsh Assembly Government delayed the publication of the 2008/09 *Welsh in Higher Education Institutions* output due to data quality issues discovered late in the production process. The producer team issued a postponement notice on its website to inform stakeholders of the delay, and published the output two weeks later than originally planned.
- 3.31 In compliance with the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics (Wales) Order²⁷, the Welsh Assembly Government publishes lists of people who have pre-release access²⁸ to its individual statistical publications on its website.
- 3.32 The statistical team has included the names and contact details of the responsible statisticians in recent post-16 education statistical publications.

²⁶ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/duel/duel-month/?lang=en>

²⁷ http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/wales/wsi2009/wsi_20092818_en_1

²⁸ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/prerelease/?lang=en>

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.

- 3.33 Most of the data which the Welsh Assembly Government uses to compile its post-16 education statistical bulletins are derived from well-established HESA or SLC datasets. HESA and SLC have close links with the statistics team and consult the team on data quality issues such as validations. The statistics team was involved in the development of HESA's privacy notice for HEIs to show their students on enrolment, ensuring that the data may be used for statistical purposes under the Data Protection Act.
- 3.34 The statistics in the *Financial Contingency Fund* publications are also derived from data from administrative sources. The Welsh Assembly Government only collects these data for inclusion in its publications and to inform funding allocations.
- 3.35 Before 2009, the Welsh Assembly Government's statistics team published monthly Education Maintenance Allowances (EMA) statistics, based on SLC management information. These statistics were based on different definitions from the annual EMA statistics, and were not subject to quality assurance. The statistics team worked with SLC to develop new monthly EMA statistics based on the same source as that used for the annual EMA statistics, and using methods which are quality assured by SLC analysts.
- 3.36 The Welsh Assembly Government has carried out various data linkage projects to potentially provide fuller information about, for example, progression from school to higher education, and participation in higher and further education. The producer team uses the same information technology system as the Welsh, English and Scottish funding councils to analyse HESA datasets.
- 3.37 The Welsh Assembly Government has published a Statement of Administrative Sources which describes the administrative and management sources²⁹ which the Statistical Directorate currently uses – or which have the potential to be used – to produce official statistics. We suggest that the Welsh Assembly Government include HESA and SLC in its Statement of Administrative Sources.

²⁹ <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/2010/100330adminen.pdf>

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to the Welsh Assembly Government 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 | Expand the information in the statistical plan to include the uses made of the statistics by non-government users (para 3.4). |
| Suggestion 2 | Signpost equivalent post-16 education releases from the four UK countries and document any differences in its approach (para 3.14). |
| Suggestion 3 | Publish a response to the recommendations which relate to statistical issues from the review of statistical planning issues underlying Welsh Medium Initial Teacher Training course provision in Wales (para 3.17). |
| Suggestion 4 | Include references to the relevant StatsWales table numbers in all applicable post-16 education publications to help users find the required data more easily (para 3.26). |
| Suggestion 5 | Improve signposting of the source (HESA and SLC) data for users to analyse (para 3.26). |
| Suggestion 6 | Include HESA and SLC in its Statement of Administrative Sources (para 3.37). |

Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A2.1 This assessment was conducted from May to September 2010.

A2.2 The Assessment team – Celia Macintyre and Phil Grigor – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with Welsh Assembly Government representatives in May. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 30 June. The Assessment team subsequently met the Welsh Assembly Government during September 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 15 responses from the consultation with users and suppliers. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Welsh Assembly Government	5
Other public sector organisations	5
HEI	1
Local Authority	1
Suppliers	3

A2.5 Users were generally content with the service and contact they had with the statistics team, and in general the publications met the needs of the users who responded to our survey. Some requested more detailed analysis of the Welsh language in the publications. Users also noted that recommendations in the *Initial Teacher Training* publication about statistical issues relating to the Welsh language have not been implemented. Some users commented that the publications would be improved by including more background to the statistics, clearer language and more analysis of trends.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

