

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Index of Production and Index of Services for Northern Ireland

*(produced by the Department of Enterprise,
Trade and Investment, Northern Ireland)*

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About the UK Statistics Authority

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

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

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

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

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ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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1 Summary of findings

1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports¹ prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*². The Act requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*³. The report covers the National Statistics produced by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI), Northern Ireland and published in the *Northern Ireland Index of Production*⁴ statistics bulletin.
- 1.1.2 At the request of DETI, this assessment also covers the statistics which are not currently designated as National Statistics published in: the *Northern Ireland Index of Services (Experimental)*⁵ statistics bulletin.
- 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 the *Northern Ireland Index of Production* are designated as National Statistics, and has determined that the statistics published in the *Northern Ireland Index of Services (Experimental)* are designated as National Statistics, subject to DETI implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by April 2011.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.3.1 The Assessment team considers that the presentation of the statistics in the releases is clear, and that there is some good background and contextual information. However, there is still room for improvement, to help users interpret the data – for example, by adding commentary and providing more information on the quality of the statistics.
- 1.3.2 DETI has established good arrangements for user engagement, including an Economic and Labour Market Statistics user group. Information about user engagement and user needs could be brought together to improve its accessibility and to encourage feedback.

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://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/stats-surveys/stats-index-of-production.htm>

⁵ <http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/stats-surveys/stats-ios.htm>

1.3.3 DETI is working closely with ONS to improve methodology and comparability with equivalent statistics for the UK. The statistics are volatile and no measures of quality are published to help users interpret or use the statistics.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that DETI 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

Requirement 1	Ensure that full details of the methods used, including why they were chosen, are made available to users (para 3.11).
Requirement 2	Improve documentation on data quality to include information about the main sources of bias and other errors (para 3.14).
Requirement 3	Improve the commentary and analysis in the <i>Index of Production</i> and <i>Index of Services</i> statistical releases to aid users' interpretation and understanding (para 3.26).

2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 This assessment covers statistics published in two quarterly releases that present important indicators of short-term changes in economic activity in Northern Ireland. Both releases present headline measures for Northern Ireland alongside corresponding figures for the UK, published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).
- *Northern Ireland Index of Production*
This release presents statistics on the Index of Production (IoP) for Northern Ireland. The IoP measures changes in the output of the production industries, which cover manufacturing, mining and quarrying, and electricity, gas and water. They account for almost a fifth of the output of the Northern Ireland economy. The headline measures are supported by analysis which shows how different production industries contribute to the movement in the overall IoP.
 - *Northern Ireland Index of Services*
This release presents statistics on the Index of Services for Northern Ireland (IoS). The IoS measures changes in the output of the service industries, which cover distribution, hotels and restaurants, transport, finance, business services and other services. The service sector accounts for almost two-thirds of the output of the Northern Ireland economy. The release includes analysis of different service industries and shows how they contribute to the movement in the overall IoS
- 2.2 DETI publishes both statistical releases on the same day as the Northern Ireland labour market statistics, in the interests of coherence. The indices are published 14 weeks after the end of the reference quarter.
- 2.3 The majority of the data used to produce the IoP is collected by DETI through the Quarterly Inquiry into Sales of Industry (QSI) in Northern Ireland, a survey of 600 businesses sampled from the Inter-Departmental Business Register⁶ (IDBR), the Northern Ireland component of which is maintained by DETI. This is a statutory survey collected under Article 5 of the *Statistics of Trade and Employment (Northern Ireland) Order 1988*⁷.
- 2.4 The data used to compile the IoS are collected by DETI through the Quarterly Inquiry into the Distribution and Services Sector (DSS Inquiry) in Northern Ireland, a survey of 1,500 service industry business sampled from the IDBR. This started as a voluntary survey in 2005, but became a statutory survey in September 2010, also collected under Article 5 of the *Statistics of Trade and Employment (Northern Ireland) Order 1988*.
- 2.5 The main purpose of these statistics is to provide a measure of short-term movements in the Northern Ireland economy. They are used within the Northern Ireland government to brief Ministers and for policy formulation. DETI

⁶ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/idbr/idbr.asp>

⁷ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1988/595>

uses these statistics to produce the annual *DETI Economic Commentary*⁸. This publication presents an analysis of recent trends in the Northern Ireland economy and aims to stimulate debate within Northern Ireland. It includes a foreword from the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment which sets out current economic policy direction. DETI also uses these statistics to brief the Economic Advisory Group⁹, a group of experts that was established in 2010 to provide independent advice to the Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment.

- 2.6 These statistics are used by organisations which comment on the Northern Ireland economy. They are quoted in a range of external publications, for example a report in the First Trust Bank's *Economic Outlook and Business Review*¹⁰ and in the Ulster Bank's *Northern Ireland Quarterly Economic Review & Outlook*¹¹.
- 2.7 The IoP for Northern Ireland has been produced since 1949. It was recently reviewed¹² by DETI in 2005. The review concluded that the IoP should continue to be published quarterly and identified some methodological improvements to the compilation of the index and the data collection. It reported that most users were content with the format, frequency and timeliness of the release. The IoS has been published as 'experimental statistics' since 2005 following demand from users for a short term measure of the performance of the service sector.
- 2.8 The cost of producing the IoP is £76,000. This covers the survey work, and analysis and production costs. It is mainly accounted for by staff costs. The cost of producing the IoS is £154,000.
- 2.9 Comparable statistics are produced for Wales by the Welsh Assembly Government¹³ and for Scotland by the Scottish Government¹⁴. ONS produces UK-level statistics¹⁵.

⁸ http://www.detini.gov.uk/economic_commentary_-_june_2010.pdf

⁹ <http://www.eagni.com/>

¹⁰ http://www.firsttrustbank.co.uk/servlet/ContentServer?pagename=FT_Treasury/FT_Quarterly_Outlook&channel=Quarterly

¹¹ <http://www.ulsterbankcapitalmarkets.com/home/Economist/NI%20Economics%202/NI%20Quarterly%20Economic%20Update%202.aspx>

¹² http://www.detini.gov.uk/iop_review_-_deti_format-ss.pdf

¹³ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/econ2009/hdw20090115/?lang=en> and

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/economy2010/100511/?lang=en>

¹⁴ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Economy/GDP/Download> (Table 2)

¹⁵ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=6230> and

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/product.asp?vlnk=9333>

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 DETI consults with users through the Statistics Advisory Committee¹⁶, organised by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). DETI also holds meetings every six months for users of Economic and Labour Market Statistics¹⁷ to assess the level of service DETI provides, obtain user views on developments such as the development of a composite index, and provide briefing on the workplan. Summaries of these meetings are published on the relevant websites. DETI also publishes a summary of the emerging themes from the user group meetings, along with a list of actions. In addition to these meetings DETI gives presentations about its work, meets with users on an ad hoc basis to discuss requests for information, and logs requests for information.
- 3.2 DETI's website has product pages for the IoP (see footnote 4) and the IoS (see footnote 5) which include links to a questionnaire to obtain users' views about the releases. DETI informed us that it receives very little feedback from this source. The DETI website also includes a user page (see footnote 17) which includes information about current consultations, planned changes to releases, and information about user group meetings. This webpage is signposted from quality reports¹⁸ which are produced for each product, but not signposted from the releases. We suggest that DETI include a link to the user page in the statistical releases and on the product pages for these statistics.
- 3.3 DETI produces a business plan for these statistics, and informed us that users' views and feedback are considered as part of the business planning process but it is not clear how users' views feed into priority setting. We suggest that DETI publish more information from their business plan including information on how users' views are taken account of in statistical planning.
- 3.4 DETI has produced a document setting out the uses of the IoP and the IoS and has provided this as part of the Assessment process. We suggest that DETI publish this information as it may help to identify other uses and potential uses.

¹⁶ <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/aboutus/default.asp.htm>

¹⁷ <http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/stats-national-statistics/user-consultation-and-information.htm>

¹⁸ <http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/stats-surveys/stats-index-of-production/stats-newpage-4.htm> and <http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/stats-surveys/stats-ios/revisions-to-ios.htm>

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

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

- 3.5 DETI publishes the releases for these statistics according to a published timetable and makes the statistics available free of charge on its website. DETI presents the statistics impartially and objectively.
- 3.6 Changes to methods have been announced in advance on the IoP and IoS product webpages, and within the revisions statements for the releases.
- 3.7 The statistics are frequently revised, due to factors such as seasonal adjustment, the late return of questionnaires and improvements to methodology. DETI has an organisational revisions policy¹⁹ which covers its overall policy for planned and unplanned revisions. DETI also has separate product-specific revisions policies²⁰ which provide the details and timing for planned changes to the IoP and the IoS.

¹⁹ http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti_revisions_policy-3.pdf

²⁰ http://www.detini.gov.uk/iop_revisions_policy.pdf and
http://www.detini.gov.uk/ios_revisions_policy-2.pdf

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.
- 3.9 DETI protects those producing statistics reports against political pressure by making the publication schedule publicly available, and by ensuring that publications are released as soon as possible. The format and content of all statistical publications and press releases are decided upon by the senior statistician in DETI, acting on behalf of Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency's (NISRA) Head of Profession for devolved Northern Ireland statistics. The Permanent Secretary of the Northern Ireland Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) has briefed Northern Ireland Ministers and senior officials within DETI on the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*. DFP's Permanent Secretary has also issued guidance to Northern Ireland public servants, including DETI staff, on implementing the *Code*.
- 3.10 DETI statisticians monitor press coverage of statistical releases and told us that they would respond to any misuse of the figures. The senior statistician wrote to a local newspaper in 2009²¹ to draw attention to inaccurate reporting of unemployment statistics.

²¹ Andersonstown News 23 Nov 2009 page 16

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.

- 3.11 Information about the methods used to produce the IoP and the IoS is provided within the 'Background Notes' section of the releases. These notes summarise the composition of the sample, the data collection and validation process and estimation methods. The releases do not provide links to more detailed information about the methods. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DETI should ensure that full details about the methods used, including why they were chosen, are made available to users²² (Requirement 1).
- 3.12 DETI publishes comprehensive quality reports for the IoP and the IoS which use the European Statistical System (ESS) framework²³ for reporting dimensions of quality. DETI publishes detailed information about the impact of revisions on the overall IoS in revisions triangles²⁴ which provide details of each published IoS time series. DETI plans to publish similar information for the IoP.
- 3.13 In a recent IoP release, DETI highlighted a change to the data collection whereby businesses that had previously provided measures of volume, were asked to provide turnover data instead. DETI told us that it will collect both volume and turnover data from these businesses for five quarters before changing to using the turnover data. At that point, they will provide information on the impact of this change to the methodology.
- 3.14 The IoP and the IoS are subject to both sampling and non-sampling errors but DETI does not provide information about the extent of these errors. The comparison between the Northern Ireland and UK indices is affected by the greater volatility in the Northern Ireland indices, which is particularly noticeable when comparing sub-sectors of the economy. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DETI should improve documentation of data quality to include information about the main sources of bias and other errors²⁵ (Requirement 2). As part of addressing this Requirement, we suggest that DETI investigate whether numerical – as opposed to qualitative – estimates of data accuracy could be produced. This would help users to understand the uses to which the statistics can be put, based on their quality.
- 3.15 DETI has been awarded funds from UK Statistics Authority's Quality Improvement Fund (QIF) which aims to help producers to comply with the Code. DETI is working with methodologists from ONS on two projects that concern these statistics. One project will review the methods used to compile the statistics. The second project will enable DETI to report the indices using a

²² In relation to Principle 4 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice.

²³ http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/quality/quality_reporting

²⁴ Revisions triangles provide previously published data in an easy to use format to show how particular estimates are revised over time. The IoS revisions triangles also indicate the size and direction of revisions, by presenting a summary of the differences between the first estimates published and those published 3 years later

<http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/stats-surveys/stats-ios/revisions-to-ios.htm>

²⁵ In relation to Principle 4 Practice 2 of the Code of Practice.

new industrial classification, SIC 2007²⁶, at the same time as ONS. One of the aims of the project is to maximise consistency between DETI's outputs and the equivalent UK outputs.

- 3.16 DETI is currently developing an Integrated Business Survey System for Northern Ireland, and this will improve the timeliness of these releases. The current timetable for introduction of this new system would result in quarterly output surveys being moved to the new system by March 2012.

²⁶ http://www.statistics.gov.uk/methods_quality/sic/downloads/SIC2007explanatorynotes.pdf

Principle 5: Confidentiality

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

- 3.17 DETI has published a confidentiality statement²⁷ about the arrangements it has in place to comply with this Principle. This includes information about DETI's arrangements for physical and technical security, disclosure control, guidance on complying with data protection legislation and providing data to third parties, and staff training. DETI informs respondents to the surveys it conducts that it treats the information provided as confidential, and includes a link to the confidentiality statement on the IoS data collection form²⁸. DETI plans to include this link in the IOP data collection form when it is next issued to businesses.
- 3.18 NISRA has concluded a consultation with the Trade Unions regarding the need to sign a separate confidentiality declaration. The existing terms and conditions for civil servants include a duty of confidentiality, a requirement to exercise care in the use of information acquired in the course of official duties and a requirement to protect information which is held in confidence. In addition, members of staff are provided with reminders of their confidentiality obligations under their terms and conditions and a section of the NISRA induction process covers confidentiality in the context of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.
- 3.19 Statistics published by DETI are aggregated to ensure that individual businesses cannot be identified. This applies to the IoP and IoS releases and to responses to ad hoc queries that are based on the data used to derive these indices. As the data used in the indices is collected under the *Statistics of Trade and Employment (Northern Ireland) Order 1988*, the disclosure methods used are those specified within this Order, which states that statistics based on less than five returns will not be disclosed.
- 3.20 All third-party contractors sign a declaration that they will adhere to DETI confidentiality guidelines on the use of micro data. DETI keeps records of all recipients of individual level data, which include information about the conditions under which the data are made available, the uses of the data, the period of access and the security arrangements within the third party organisation.

²⁷http://www.detini.gov.uk/data_confidentiality_statement__principle_5_of_the_code_of_practice_for_of_ficial_statistics_.pdf

²⁸ http://www.detini.gov.uk/ios_general_form-3.pdf

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 DETI publishes compliance costs²⁹ for the QSI and DSS Inquiry in the *Annual Report on Statistical Surveys to Businesses – Compliance and Quality Improvement Plan*. In 2008, the estimated compliance cost of the QSI was £32,252, and the estimated compliance cost of the DSS Inquiry was £38,699.
- 3.22 DETI collects turnover data from Northern Ireland businesses on behalf of ONS (through its Monthly Business Survey (MBS)) for use in producing economic indicators for the UK including the output measure of Gross Domestic Product, the IoP for the UK and the IoS for the UK. In order to reduce the burden on data suppliers, where a business is included in both QSI and MBS, DETI uses the data collected through the MBS as part of the QSI sample. This avoids collecting the same data twice from the same business and produced a saving on compliance costs of approximately £2,900 in 2008.

²⁹ http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti_2008_report_to_ministers-2.pdf

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 A total of nine people work on the production of the IoP and the IoS. DETI estimates that it costs £76,000 to produce the IoP and £154,000 to produce the IoS. These costs cover staff costs for processing the data, and the costs of the printing and postage of the survey forms.
- 3.24 DETI told us that it operates within a very tight resource environment. Assessment Report 29³⁰ (*Labour Market Statistics for Northern Ireland* produced by DETI) included a suggestion for improvement that DETI consult the Chief Executive of NISRA, as the Head of Profession for Northern Ireland statistics, in relation to the level of resources required to ensure that labour market statistics continue to be produced to the standard of the *Code*. These discussions are currently taking place, and also cover the economic indices produced by DETI. DETI's business plan does not include much information about the resources available to produce these statistics. We suggest that DETI include more information about the resources available to produce these statistics within its business plan.
- 3.25 Learning and development policies and competency frameworks for statisticians working in government departments in Northern Ireland are developed and delivered centrally by NISRA.

³⁰ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/assessment-report-29---assessment-of-labour-market-statistics-for-northern-ireland.pdf>

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

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

3.26 The IOP and IOS releases share similar formats. They both present a range of statistics with useful, clear graphs and a detailed notes section, which includes information about methods, quality and revisions. The releases are factual and comprehensive but provide little analysis of the statistics presented. For example, both releases provide three measures of change:

- the percentage growth in the index for the most recent quarter compared with the previous quarter;
- the percentage growth in the index for the most recent quarter compared with the equivalent quarter a year previously; and
- the change in the average of the latest four quarters with the equivalent four quarters a year previously.

These statistics are reported for each sector, but no information is given to users to decide when each measure should be used. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DETI should improve the commentary and analysis in its IoP and IoS statistical releases to aid users' interpretation and understanding³¹ (Requirement 3).

3.27 DETI maintains a list of users and notifies them of the publication of each of its statistical reports. DETI publicises its statistical outputs in several ways including through its website, NISRA's website, and the National Statistics Publication Hub. It provides articles for inclusion in publications including the Department for Employment and Learning's *Labour Market Bulletin*³² and through its press office.

3.28 DETI provides data tables³³ for the most recent releases of the IoP and IoS in a form which allows users to analyse and re-use the data. However these data tables do not include the equivalent UK indices which are used in the release, and there is no accompanying metadata. All historic IoP and IoS releases are published in PDF format on DETI's website, but the associated data tables are not made available alongside the releases. We suggest that DETI expand the data tables to include metadata and links to the UK indices, and review the user need for the data tables associated with historic releases.

³¹ In relation to Principle 8 Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

³² <http://www.delni.gov.uk/index/publications/pubs-stats/labour-market-bulletin.htm>

³³ <http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/stats-surveys/stats-index-of-production.htm>

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.

3.29 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.

- 3.30 DETI publishes the release dates³⁴ for these statistics on its website, and the statistics can be accessed via the National Statistics Publication Hub.
- 3.31 Ministerial press releases are usually issued on the same day as these statistics are released. The ministerial statements are published separately on the Northern Ireland Executive Information Services website³⁵ and contain a link to DETI's statistics website and the relevant statistical press releases. Prior to publication, the statistics and factual information contained in the Ministerial statements are checked for accuracy by the lead statistician for the statistical release being referred to.
- 3.32 DETI publishes pre-release access lists³⁶ for each statistical publication. Nine people outside the statistical production team are granted pre-release access to these statistics. DETI has published a statement of compliance³⁷ with the *Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order (Northern Ireland) 2009*³⁸, which states that pre-release access lists are kept to a minimum.

³⁴ http://www.detini.gov.uk/publication_schedule_10-19.pdf

³⁵ <http://www.northernireland.gov.uk/news/news-deti.htm>

³⁶ http://www.detini.gov.uk/publication___pre-release_access_list-6.pdf

³⁷ http://www.detini.gov.uk/pre_release_access_-_deti_statement_of_compliance.pdf

³⁸ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2009/71/contents/made>

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 DETI has published a Statement of Administrative Sources³⁹ which lists the administrative sources that are used in the production of official statistics, and those with a potential use, along with information on access and security arrangements and audit procedures.

³⁹ http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti_statement_of_administrative_sources_-_june_2010.pdf

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to DETI 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 | Include a link to the user page from the statistical releases and product pages (para 3.2). |
| Suggestion 2 | Publish more information from their business plan including information on how users' views are taken account of in statistical planning (para 3.3). |
| Suggestion 3 | Publish the information on known uses as a way of identifying other uses and potential uses of these statistics (para 3.4). |
| Suggestion 4 | Investigate whether numerical – as opposed to qualitative – estimates of data accuracy could be produced for these statistics (para 3.14). |
| Suggestion 5 | Include more information about the resources available to produce these statistics within its business plan (para 3.24). |
| Suggestion 6 | Expand the data tables to include metadata and links to the UK indices, and review the user need for the data tables associated with historic releases (para 3.28). |

Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

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

A2.2 The Assessment team – Cecilia Macintyre and Neil Jackson – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with DETI representatives in August. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 10 September. The Assessment team subsequently met DETI 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 seven responses to the user consultation, five from DETI and other government departments and two from non-government members of the Statistics Advisory Committee.

A2.5 Five of the users responded that the available short-term output indices generally met their needs. They use the statistics to monitor economic activity in Northern Ireland and to compare with statistics for the UK. One user identified a gap in comparisons with the Republic of Ireland, and two users commented that they would like improvements to timeliness of the statistics. One user commented that the generality of the statistics mean they have limited use to the agricultural and agri-food sector. All users were satisfied with the level of user engagement by DETI statisticians.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

