



UK Statistics
Authority

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Consumer Trends

*(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.

Contact us

Tel: 0845 604 1857

Email: authority.enquiries@statistics.gsi.gov.uk

Website: www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk

UK Statistics Authority
Statistics House
Myddelton Street
London EC1R 1UW

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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 set of statistics reported in the *Consumer Trends*⁴ publication, produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

1.1.2 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 *Consumer Trends* are designated as National Statistics, subject to ONS implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by May 2011.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

1.3.1 *Consumer Trends* presents statistics on Household Final Consumption Expenditure (HHFCE). These statistics are widely recognised as an important economic indicator and a component of the National Accounts. The statistics are also supplied to Eurostat. They are produced according to well-established and well-documented methods and comply with international standards.

1.3.2 ONS engages well with the major users of *Consumer Trends* and the underlying data on HHFCE, including the National Accounts team within ONS, Eurostat and the Bank of England. Much of this engagement takes place as part of wider consultation about the National Accounts. However ONS has limited knowledge of other users of *Consumer Trends* and consequently little documentation of their needs or the decisions that are informed by the statistics.

1.3.3 *Consumer Trends* contains commentary on trends, presents tables and key findings, and provides breakdowns of HHFCE into different expenditure categories. The commentary in the publication is quite technical and could benefit from more contextual information. ONS should also say more about the quality and reliability of the data and how they compare with other related

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.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/Product.asp?vlnk=242>

statistics. ONS has published extensive documentation of National Accounts methods on its website but these documents do not appear to be kept up-to-date.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

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

Requirement 1	Publish information on the use made of the statistics in <i>Consumer Trends</i> , and use this to better support the use of the statistics (para 3.3).
Requirement 2	Publish more information about the quality of the statistics, including strengths and limitations, in particular explaining the main sources of bias and other errors (para 3.13).
Requirement 3	Explain more fully how these statistics compare with related statistics (para 3.14).
Requirement 4	Publish the estimated costs of responding to the alcohol survey that is carried out for <i>Consumer Trends</i> and add links between the <i>Consumer Trends</i> and <i>Compliance Plan</i> web pages (para 3.19).
Requirement 5	Publish more easily accessible commentary in <i>Consumer Trends</i> , to aid non-expert users' interpretation of the statistics, perhaps also drawing more on other statistical sources (para 3.25).

2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 *Consumer Trends* presents comprehensive estimates of Household Final Consumption Expenditure (HHFCE). The HHFCE data are an important component in calculating the expenditure measure of UK Gross Domestic Product (GDP(E)). They are sent to Eurostat to meet the UK's requirement for the delivery of quarterly and annual HHFCE data, consistent with Regulation (EC) 1392/2007⁵, which sets out common standards, definitions, classifications and accounting rules. *Consumer Trends* is published quarterly in PDF format, alongside HHFCE tables in spreadsheets (the latter providing a longer time series). The publication is available from 2001 onwards although historical statistics consistent with *Consumer Trends* are available in varying levels of detail back to 1948.
- 2.2 *Consumer Trends* presents all expenditure by UK households, divided into twelve areas of expenditure: Food and Drink; Alcohol and Tobacco; Clothing and Footwear; Housing; Household Goods and Services; Health; Transport; Communication; Recreation and Culture; Education; Restaurants and Hotels; and Miscellaneous Goods and Services. These categories conform to the European Classification of Individual Consumption According to Purpose⁶ (COICOP). The data conform to the European System of National and Regional Accounts 1995⁷ (ESA 95) and the UN System of National Accounts 1993⁸ (SNA 93).
- 2.3 Estimates are presented at current prices (the prices paid in the year of purchase) and constant prices (the equivalent values in a selected base year). The constant price estimates are a measure of the volume of expenditure allowing for inflation. These volume measures are derived by a process of annual chain-linking, in which growth is measured by re-valuing current expenditure at average prices prevailing in the previous year and comparing the result with actual expenditure in the previous year. Using this method means that changes in the structure of the economy are reflected in the statistics at an earlier stage than would be the case if the statistics were simply re-based every five years, as used to be the case. Dividing the current price series by the chain volume measures gives a series of implied deflators – the adjustment made for changing prices. These are also published in *Consumer Trends*. All three measures are presented with and without seasonal adjustment.
- 2.4 The statistics are based on expenditure data from a range of different sources. The main sources are the Living Costs and Food Survey⁹ (LCF) and the Retail Sales Inquiry¹⁰. Administrative data are also used, such as data from energy companies provided by the Department of Energy and Climate Change and from the private sector, including data from telecommunications businesses and regulatory bodies.

⁵ <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2007:324:0001:0078:EN:PDF>

⁶ <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/cr/registry/regcst.asp?Cl=5>

⁷ <http://forum.europa.eu.int/irc/dsis/nfaccount/info/data/esa95/en/esa95en.htm>

⁸ <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/sna1993/introduction.asp>

⁹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about/surveys/a-z-of-surveys/living-costs-and-food-survey/index.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Source.asp?vlnk=563>

- 2.5 Users of the statistics presented in *Consumer Trends* include Eurostat, the Bank of England, HM Treasury (HMT) and the European Central Bank. The statistics are used to monitor and plan fiscal and monetary policy, and more widely as indicators of the general state of the economy. They also provide information about changing patterns of household expenditure and trends in consumption which are of widespread interest, including to market analysts, banks and industry to inform investment decisions.
- 2.6 The costs of producing the HHFCE statistics for the National Accounts amount to over £260,000. The *Consumer Trends* publication costs approximately an additional £7,400 a year.
- 2.7 ONS does not produce HHFCE statistics for each administration in the UK. However, the Scottish Government has developed its own estimates¹¹, which are published as experimental statistics.

¹¹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Economy/SNAP/expstats/Households>

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 the main users of *Consumer Trends* as part of the arrangements it has established for consulting on the National Accounts outputs. These users are primarily drawn from government (eg HMT), EU institutions, and the Bank of England. The Bank and HMT provide feedback on the composition and presentation of household expenditure statistics at quarterly meetings about GDP statistics. ONS has a dedicated email inbox for queries and suggestions from other users.
- 3.2 There is evidence that private sector organisations, such as market analysts, commercial banks and trade bodies, also use the statistics on household expenditure. To date, ONS engagement with such users has been ad hoc (via the designated inbox) and it has responded to repeated requests for additional data by including extra tables in the quarterly outputs. ONS told us that it is planning to consult users, in order to find out which tables are most used, and by whom. *Consumer Trends* is also included in ONS's current consultation¹² on its work programme.
- 3.3 There is little documentation about the uses made of the statistics besides their primary use as a component of the National Accounts. There is also little documentation of users' experiences of the statistics. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should publish information on the use made of the statistics in *Consumer Trends*, and use this to better support the use of the statistics¹³ (Requirement 1). We suggest that ONS refers to the generic classes of use put forward in the Monitoring Brief: *The Use Made of Official Statistics*¹⁴.
- 3.4 The *Consumer Trends* team told us that users' views inform its development programme for the publication and the statistics. This development programme is not published. The Assessment team suggests that ONS publish this development programme in order to demonstrate transparent priority-setting reflecting users' feedback.
- 3.5 *Consumer Trends* is published in accordance with the National Accounts timetable, which is published in advance. This meets the needs of the major users, such as Eurostat.

¹² <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about/consultations/work-programme-consultation/index.html>

¹³ In relation to Principle 1 Practices 1 and 5 of the Code of Practice

¹⁴ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-briefs/monitoring-brief-6-2010---the-use-made-of-official-statistics.pdf>

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

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

- 3.6 *Consumer Trends* is published in an impartial and objective manner. The statistics are available free of charge on ONS's website.
- 3.7 The publication presents recent changes to methods in a noticeboard section at the beginning. ONS has published articles on its website about changes being made, such as the inclusion of imputed rents for owner-occupied housing and the change to chain-linked volume measures. These articles were also published in *Economic Trends*¹⁵. ONS announces changes in advance, usually in the preceding quarterly publication.
- 3.8 The National Accounts revisions statement¹⁶ covers the *Consumer Trends* publication. ONS publishes revisions to HHFCE data quarterly in *Consumer Trends* and elsewhere on its website. The publication also gives information about the nature of the revisions.
- 3.9 ONS clearly announces errors in the statistics published in *Consumer Trends*, through notices on its website and attached to the publication and the relevant tables. The *Consumer Trends* publication was delayed in the first quarter of 2010, along with the publication of the *Quarterly National Accounts*¹⁷. We suggest that ONS publish a plan to describe how it will prevent the recurrence of problems that affected the release of these statistics for the first quarter of 2010.
- 3.10 ONS has a pricing policy for supplementary statistical services. The *Consumer Trends* team told us that it rarely charges for extra analyses or data provision.

¹⁵ This publication has been superseded by *Economic and Labour Market Review (ELMR)*
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/product.asp?vlnk=14692>

¹⁶ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/CCI/article.asp?ID=1187>

¹⁷ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/Product.asp?vlnk=818>

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.

- 3.11 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.

Principle 4: Sound methods and assured quality

Statistical methods should be consistent with scientific principles and internationally recognised best practices, and be fully documented. Quality should be monitored and assured taking account of internationally agreed practices.

- 3.12 *Consumer Trends* is produced to conform to ESA 95 and SNA 93. ONS assured us that the statistics comply with these international standards.
- 3.13 ONS recently published a *Summary Quality Report for Consumer Trends*¹⁸ which describes aspects of the relevance, accuracy, timeliness and comparability of the statistics. Annexes to the publication itself present definitions of expenditure, and information about the sources and methods used. A more detailed description of methods is provided by the *National Accounts, Concepts, Sources and Methods*¹⁹ and a section in the UK's *Gross National Income (ESA95) Inventory of Methods*²⁰. These are extensive documents which were written in the late 1990s and which have not been updated. ONS told us that the range of sources used in compiling the HHFCE tables and the complexity of reconciling them with other measures in the National Accounts makes it difficult to provide quantitative estimates of statistical robustness. However the Assessment team feels that further explanation is needed in order to inform users about the quality of the statistics. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should publish more information about the quality of the statistics, including strengths and limitations, in particular explaining the main sources of bias and other errors²¹ (Requirement 2).
- 3.14 Some users expressed concern that the statistics presented in *Consumer Trends* often do not match other key economic indicators, for example with *Retail Sales Business Monitor*²² sales volumes and consumption figures. Users also noted differences between the consumption deflator and the Consumer Prices Index²³ (CPI) at aggregated and disaggregated level. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should explain more fully how these statistics compare with related statistics²⁴ (Requirement 3).
- 3.15 ONS provides comprehensive desk instructions for validating the HHFCE statistics, including guidance for each series on what quality assurance is carried out and by whom. *Consumer Trends* complies with ONS's *Guidelines for measuring statistical quality*²⁵ and adheres to ONS's quality strategy²⁶.

¹⁸ <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-consumer-trends.pdf>

¹⁹ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=1144&Pos=&ColRank=1&Rank=208>

²⁰ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/product.asp?vlnk=6392>

²¹ In relation to Principle 4 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

²² <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/product.asp?vlnk=1478>

²³ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/product.asp?vlnk=868>

²⁴ In relation to Principle 4 Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

²⁵ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/Product.asp?vlnk=13578>

²⁶ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/quality/quality-strategy/index.html>

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.

- 3.16 ONS only publishes aggregate statistics in *Consumer Trends* and does not provide more detailed breakdowns of LCF data than those published in the *Family Spending*²⁷ report.
- 3.17 Respondents to the source surveys are informed how the confidentiality of the information they provide is protected. This is done on the front page of the relevant questionnaires and on ONS's website.
- 3.18 The data are transferred to Eurostat and the National Accounts team by secure systems.

²⁷ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=361&Pos=&ColRank=1&Rank=272>

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.

- 3.19 The main sources of data for *Consumer Trends* are the LCF and the Retail Sales Inquiry. The compliance costs for these surveys are set out in ONS's *Compliance Plan*²⁸, which also outlines the steps ONS has taken to reduce the burden on business. In addition, ONS commissions a survey specifically for *Consumer Trends* in order to provide estimates of expenditure on alcohol that is sold directly to individuals. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should publish the estimated costs of responding to the alcohol survey and add links between the *Consumer Trends* and *Compliance Plan* web pages²⁹ (Requirement 4).
- 3.20 Some of the suppliers we contacted for this assessment indicated that they did not completely understand the uses of the data they were providing. Some also mentioned that they would welcome more consultation about matters such as changes to data provision and timetables. We suggest that ONS engage with suppliers of data for *Consumer Trends*.

²⁸ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=14683> LCF and the Retail Sales Inquiry are carried out for a range of purposes, so only a small proportion of the burden can be attributed to *Consumer Trends*.

²⁹ In relation to Principle 6 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

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.

- 3.21 ONS told us that it has adequate resources to compile the HHFCE statistics and *Consumer Trends*. *Consumer Trends* is included in ONS's current consultation about its work programme, which seeks views on whether to continue to produce non-statutory outputs. *Consumer Trends* itself constitutes only a very small proportion of the resources needed to produce and publish the underlying HHFCE data. ONS told us it is also planning to conduct a consultation on *Consumer Trends* specifically to identify whether there is a need for the publication.
- 3.22 ONS told us that it maintains a development programme (see para 3.4), outlining planning, resources and outcomes.
- 3.23 The *Consumer Trends* team complies with ONS's recruitment and development policies.

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

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

- 3.24 *Consumer Trends* contains some information about the quality and reliability of the statistics in the introduction section of the publication and in several annexes. The summary quality report also provides an overview, but would benefit from additional information (see comments under Principle 4).
- 3.25 There is some commentary in the briefing section of the publication. While this commentary is technically accurate, it is not particularly accessible for non-expert users. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should publish more easily accessible commentary in *Consumer Trends*, to aid non-expert users' interpretation of the statistics, perhaps also drawing more on other statistical sources³⁰ (Requirement 5). We also suggest ONS consider bringing together the main findings from HHFCE, retail sales, CPI and LCF statistics into an annual article, in order to provide a more coherent commentary on trends in household expenditure.
- 3.26 *Consumer Trends* contains a range of charts, mostly presenting trends for each category of expenditure. We suggest that the formatting of the charts in the *Consumer Trends* briefing section be improved, for example by using more consistent vertical scales to present percentage changes, so that the categories can more easily be compared. ONS informed us that it is beginning to make these changes.
- 3.27 The underlying data are available in spreadsheet form for re-use and analysis. ONS archives both published statistics and the underlying data on a monthly basis, in line with other National Accounts data.

³⁰ 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 ONS publishes *Consumer Trends* in line with the publication of the *Quarterly National Accounts*. All publications and a timetable of releases are available on the National Statistics Publication Hub.
- 3.30 The Code requires National Statistics releases to be issued at 9.30am on the day of publication. ONS's website systems do not enable releases to be published simultaneously, which means there is sometimes a delay beyond 9.30am. ONS informed us that this matter is being reviewed as part of its web development programme, which ONS expects to be implemented on 30 April 2011. The Head of Assessment has agreed an exemption from Protocol 2 Practice 4 for ONS until the new website functionality is available. The exemption request and the Head of Assessment's response are available on the Statistics Authority's website³¹.
- 3.31 ONS does not provide pre-release access to the statistics published in *Consumer Trends*. HHFCE statistics are included in the *Quarterly National Accounts*, for which ONS publishes a pre-release access list³² on its website.

³¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/exemption-requests/index.html>

³² <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/ns-standard/cop/compliance/quarterly/qna.html>

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.

3.32 ONS lists the administrative sources used in compiling the HHFCE data in its Statement of Administrative Sources³³. ONS told us that such sources are assessed for their suitability in measuring household expenditure and for the risk that they might be disclosive.

³³ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/ns-standard/cop/statement-of-administrative-sources/index.html>

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to *Consumer Trends*, 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 | As part of documenting the use of these statistics (see Requirement 1), refer to the types of use put forward in the Monitoring Brief: <i>The Use Made of Official Statistics</i> ³⁴ (para 3.3). |
| Suggestion 2 | Publish the development programme for <i>Consumer Trends</i> in order to demonstrate transparent priority-setting reflecting users' feedback (para 3.4). |
| Suggestion 3 | Publish a plan to describe how it will prevent the recurrence of problems that affected the release of <i>Consumer Trends</i> for the first quarter of 2010 (para 3.9). |
| Suggestion 4 | Engage with suppliers of data for <i>Consumer Trends</i> (para 3.20). |
| Suggestion 5 | Consider bringing together the main findings from HHFCE, retail sales, CPI and LCF statistics into an annual article, in order to provide a more coherent commentary on trends in household expenditure (para 3.25) |
| Suggestion 6 | Improve the formatting of the charts in the <i>Consumer Trends</i> briefing section, for example by using more consistent vertical scales to present percentage changes, so that categories of expenditure can more easily be compared (para 3.26). |

³⁴ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-briefs/monitoring-brief-6-2010---the-use-made-of-official-statistics.pdf>

Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

- A2.1 This assessment was conducted from September to December 2010.
- A2.2 The Assessment team – Cathy Kruger and Jill Barelli – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of ONS in September. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 13 October. The Assessment team subsequently met ONS during November 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 14 responses from the user/supplier consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:
- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| ONS | 1 |
| Other government department | 1 |
| Private sector | 4 |
| Suppliers | 8 |
- A2.5 The small number of users responding noted that *Consumer Trends* provides useful breakdowns of household expenditure. Most of these users have a satisfactory relationship and regular contact with the producers. Two of the business users were dissatisfied with the explanations given in response to their queries. Some users were concerned about errors occurring in the publication and some noted discrepancies between the consumption deflator and the Consumer Prices Index. Users also mentioned discrepancies in aggregate data when compared to the Retail Sales figures and other sources.
- A2.6 We received several responses from suppliers of the data used to produce *Consumer Trends*. While suppliers from within government had a good relationship with the producers and understood the uses of the data, suppliers from outside government expressed concerns. These suppliers did not know how the data were being used and noted some difficulties in providing the data in the correct format. One supplier also mentioned concerns about the statistics differing from those published by their department and wondered whether enough was done to explain these discrepancies to users. There seemed to be little contact between ONS and suppliers.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

