

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on Further Education and Cross-Cutting 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 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 sets of statistics included in the following National Statistics publications produced by the Welsh Assembly Government:

- *Further Education, Work-based Learning and Community Learning in Wales Statistics (provisional)*⁴;
- *Further Education, Work-based Learning and Community Learning in Wales Statistics (early figures)*⁵;
- *Further Education, Work-based Learning and Community Learning in Wales Statistics (compendium publication)*⁶;
- *National Comparators for Further Education and Work-Based Learning*⁷;
- *Participation of Young People in Education and the Labour Market*⁸; and
- *Levels of Highest Qualification held by Working Age Adults in Wales*⁹.

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

- *Learning Network Analysis*¹⁰;
- *Analysis of Participation in Post-16 Education and Training in Wales*¹¹;
- *Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)*¹²; and
- *Educational Attainment of Young People by Age 19*¹³.

1.1.3 *Further Education, Work-based Learning and Community Learning in Wales Statistics* is a compendium publication. Assessments of compendium publications against the *Code of Practice* relate to the processes involved in preparing the publication, rather than in producing the statistics that are included. Those sets of statistics will normally be subject to separate assessment. Designation of a compendium publication as National Statistics therefore means that the producer body has, for example: identified and met user needs in terms of the content of the publication; considered the

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/theme/post16ed/further-educa/?lang=en>

⁵ See footnote 4

⁶ See footnote 4

⁷ See footnote 4

⁸ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/post16ed/part-labour/?lang=en>

⁹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/post16ed/quali-skills/?lang=en>

¹⁰ See footnote 4

¹¹ See footnote 8

¹² See footnote 8

¹³ See footnote 9

appropriateness of each series for inclusion; and written appropriate commentary.

- 1.1.4 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 products listed in paragraph 1.1.1 are designated as National Statistics, and has determined that the statistics published in the products 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 July 2011.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.3.1 The Welsh Assembly Government statistics team documents users' needs, and recently consulted users for their views about the clarity, accessibility, relevance and timeliness of its further education (FE) and cross-cutting education (CCE)¹⁴ statistics. The statistics team has altered the content and timing of some of its FE and CCE publications to meet user demand for more timely statistics. However, there is scope to improve the presentation of the statistics releases by providing more context and commentary, including appropriate links between tables and text, and by providing clearer definitions.
- 1.3.2 The Welsh Assembly Government's annual statistical plan includes information about the use made of the statistics and the statistics team now includes information about uses and users in its publications.
- 1.3.3 The Welsh Assembly Government includes some details about methods and quality in its publications but there is scope to include more information about the quality of the statistics. Some data providers had concerns about the quality of the data which they provide using the Lifelong Learning Wales Record¹⁵ (LLWR), and some also stated that providing the required data was burdensome.

¹⁴ For the purposes of this report, further education (FE) statistics also include work-based learning and community learning. Cross-cutting education (CCE) statistics include participation in education and the labour market, qualifications and skills, and young people not in education, employment or training (NEET).

¹⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/learningproviders/datacollection/llwr09/?sessionid=1HZHMwnSJhRD2JnGq7W07nPxQd9f1ns1yD10wQtpTIZzxG0thV97!508665744?lang=en>

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 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 more information about the methods used to produce further education and cross-cutting education statistics and why the methods were chosen (para 3.12).
Requirement 2	Publish the guidance used to assess the quality of the data in the further education and cross-cutting education statistics publications (para 3.13).
Requirement 3	Provide more information about the quality of these further education and cross-cutting education statistics, including strengths and weaknesses and when these statistics may potentially be used (para 3.14).
Requirement 4	Publish a plan for how <i>Educational Attainment of Young People by Age 19</i> will be developed to meet the standards of the <i>Code</i> (para 3.15).
Requirement 5	Improve the presentation and format of the statistical publications to aid understanding and interpretability (para 3.29).
Requirement 6	Draw attention in the relevant statistical release to the availability of individual provider-level data and make these data available on request with appropriate explanation to encourage informed use (para 3.30).
Requirement 7	Ensure that the further education and cross-cutting education statistics publications contain appropriate information about the policy and operational context of the statistics (para 3.32).

2 Subject of the assessment

2.1 The publications included in this assessment cover various aspects of FE, work-based learning and community learning in Wales, participation in education and the labour market, and qualifications and skills:

- *Further Education, Work-based Learning and Community Learning in Wales Statistics* is an annual Statistical First Release produced in provisional form in November with a final release the following April. The main emphasis in the release is the preceding academic year, although the final release also includes early data for the current academic year. The publication presents statistics about learners enrolled at Welsh further education institutions (FEIs), work-based learning providers, and with local authority (LA) community learning providers;
- *Further Education, Work-based Learning and Community Learning in Wales Statistics* is an annual compendium publication which focuses on one academic year but with additional longer-term trend data. The publication provides an annual picture of post-16 learning (numbers of learners and learning activities) in Wales;
- *National Comparators for Further Education and Work-Based Learning* is an annual publication, published each May, containing headline statistics about learner outcomes for the previous academic year, with breakdowns by sector and subject area. The publication presents statistics about students at Welsh FEIs and work-based learning providers;
- *Participation of Young People in Education and the Labour Market* is an annual publication which brings together school, FE and higher education data, along with relevant data from the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) *Annual Population Survey*¹⁶ and ONS *Population Estimates*¹⁷ to provide estimates of participation levels in education, training and employment. To improve the timeliness of these statistics, an additional year of provisional data for the most recent year was included in the latest release. The publication provides a complete picture of participation in education and the labour market in Wales of those aged 16 to 24. It contains the definitive annual estimate of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET);
- *Levels of Highest Qualification held by Working Age Adults in Wales* is published annually as headline statistics, generally around July, followed by a fuller bulletin in October. The publication includes details of highest qualifications by various categories, including age, gender, disability, ethnicity and LA. It also presents trend data and UK-wide comparisons;
- *Learning Network Analysis* is an annual publication which presents statistics about post-16 learners from Wales (excluding those at higher education institutions (HEIs)) at both a national and regional level. It includes an overview of the number of learners and provides breakdowns by type of provider, age and subject area;
- *Analysis of Participation in Post-16 Education and Training in Wales* presents statistics on the participation of post-16 learners from Wales at

¹⁶ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/Statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=10855>

¹⁷ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/product.asp?vlnk=601>

both a national and LA level. This annual publication presents standard participation rates which allow comparisons across areas with different gender and age profiles, and presents statistics on participation in a variety of sectors. The Welsh Assembly Government told us that it did not produce the publication in 2010 due to insufficient resources and competing priorities but that it intends to publish an update in 2011;

- *Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)* is a quarterly publication, introduced in December 2009 in response to the high level of interest in the number of young people in this category. The quarterly publications provide more timely – but less statistically robust – estimates of young people who are NEET using data solely from ONS’s *Annual Population Survey*. It includes analysis by gender, age and region, and presents LA estimates (from the *Careers Wales Pupil Destinations from Schools* data¹⁸) of Year 11 leavers who are known to be NEET. For completeness, the publication includes the definitive annual measure of NEET from the *Participation of Young People in Education and the Labour Market* release; and
- *Educational Attainment of Young People by Age 19* has been published twice – in May 2009 and December 2010 – as experimental statistics¹⁹. The publication presents the results of analyses obtained by linking datasets of school, FE and work-based learning awards to gain a complete picture of attainment.

2.2 In addition to the statistical publications listed in paragraph 1.1.1, the Welsh Assembly Government also publishes *Vocational Qualifications*²⁰ as an annual headline release. This publication, which is currently designated as National Statistics, is simply a summary of key points and does not link to any underlying data or methods. The Welsh Assembly Government informed us that it will no longer produce this release but will consider, as part of its planning process, whether to produce a new output on vocational qualifications in Wales.

2.3 The Welsh Assembly Government’s Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (DCELLS) collects Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) data to inform the level of funding it allocates to relevant education providers in Wales. The LLWR data collection system allows FE, work-based learning and community learning providers to report individualised data on learners, learning programmes, activities and awards to the Welsh Assembly Government using an online system. The Welsh Assembly Government’s statistics team mainly uses LLWR data to compile its FE, work-based learning and community learning statistics.

2.4 The Welsh Assembly Government uses various other data sources to compile its CCE statistics. Statistics on participation in education and the labour market

¹⁸ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/othersources/childrendata/education/pupildestinations/?jsessionid=XmXwNyTDJngD92Np645z9mbQFnpYQnhxSHDN1JyFQf2GZnrSC2MY!395851124?lang=en>

¹⁹ Experimental statistics are new official statistics undergoing evaluation. They are published in order to involve users and stakeholders in their development and as a means to build in quality at an early stage.

²⁰ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/post16education2010/100512vocational/?lang=en>

use data from the Pupil Level Annual School Census²¹ (PLASC), ONS's *Annual Population Survey*, the Higher Education Statistics Agency²² and the Individualised Learner Record²³ for FE institutions in England. Statistics on qualifications are based on analysis of ONS's *Annual Population Survey*.

- 2.5 The Welsh Assembly Government's FE and CCE statistics are used for a variety of purposes, including:
- informing national and local planning and policy making within the post-16 education and training sector;
 - by the Welsh Assembly Government to monitor the impact of its Learning Pathways 14-19 policy²⁴ and to monitor progress against relevant targets in its economic plans *The Learning Country: Vision into Action*²⁵, *Wales: A Vibrant Economy*²⁶ and *Child Poverty Strategy for Wales*²⁷;
 - monitoring sector performance and as baseline information to underpin the Welsh Assembly Government's Quality and Effectiveness Framework²⁸ for post-16 learning;
 - informing Welsh Ministers and Welsh Assembly Government policy officials of relevant trends and developments in further education and work-based and community learning;
 - by the Welsh Assembly Government to inform its funding allocations to, for example, CareersWales²⁹ companies;
 - by Estyn³⁰ (HM Inspectorate for Education and Training in Wales) for specific aspects of its inspections;
 - monitoring local authority targets on qualification levels for 19-21 year olds; and
 - by providers of post-16 education to benchmark themselves against sector averages as part of their annual self-assessment cycle.
- 2.6 The Welsh Assembly Government told the Assessment team that it currently costs around £21,000 a year to prepare and publish its FE and CCE outputs included in this assessment.

²¹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/schooldata/ims/datacollections/pupillevelannualschoolcensus/?jsessionid=pGHJM17f615gxTKLJqP2vBqMbY7plmqR7DTZ8TQfNR4k2mJy2Kvk!741275934?lang=en>

²² <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/>

²³ <http://www.theia.org.uk/ilr/>

²⁴ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/pathways/?lang=en>

²⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/guidance/learningcountry/?lang=en>

²⁶ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/businessandconomy/publications/wave/?lang=en>

²⁷ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/childreynoungpeople/poverty/newcpstrategy/?lang=en>

²⁸ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/learningproviders/raisingqualityandstandards/?lang=en>

²⁹ <http://www.careerswales.com/corporate/server.php?show=nav.4353>

³⁰ <http://www.estyn.gov.uk/>

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 statistics team has regular contact with various bodies, including the Welsh Assembly Government's FE and work-based learning data steering groups, FEIs' management information service managers, Adult Community Learning quality managers and Welsh for Adults Regional Centres. These groups help the statistics team to develop the methods it uses to compile the statistics and its publications. Specific user needs are documented in minutes of meetings, which are circulated to group members.
- 3.2 The statistics team also has regular contact with the Welsh Statistical Liaison Committee³¹ (WSLC) which promotes liaison and consultation between public sector organisations in Wales concerning data and statistical issues. The membership of WSLC includes representatives from the Welsh Assembly Government, local authorities (LAs) and the Welsh Language Board. The Welsh Assembly Government publishes the minutes³² of WSLC meetings on its website. For individual FE topics, the Welsh Assembly Government also brings users together when needed – for example, to obtain feedback on *Educational Attainment of Young People by Age 19, 2008/09* data, and to discuss the development of consistent performance measures for school sixth forms and FEIs.
- 3.3 From September to November 2010 the Welsh Assembly Government carried out a web-based consultation³³ about all its education statistics. The consultation asked respondents for information about their uses of the statistics and their views on a number of aspects of the statistics including: the quality of the statistics; the commentary and analysis; the presentation of graphs, tables and maps; and the level and detail of the statistics. The Welsh Assembly Government published a summary³⁴ of responses to the consultation in February 2011 and plans to publish details of the changes it will make in response to users' comments in June 2011.
- 3.4 The statistics team also keeps records of enquiries from government and non-government users to monitor the areas in which users request extra information. The team has responded to this feedback by altering the format and timing of some of its publications – for example, in response to user demand for more up-to-date provisional estimates, it added more information to *Further Education, Work-based Learning and Community Learning in Wales*, showing early statistics for the current academic year as well as final statistics for the previous year.

³¹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/liaison/?lang=en>

³² <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/liaison/meetings/?lang=en>

³³ <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/statistics/education/?lang=en>

³⁴ <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/consultation/110216elluser2010en.pdf>

3.5 The Welsh Assembly Government publishes an annual statistical work plan³⁵ 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 FE and CCE) statistics which the statistics team developed following consultation with policy colleagues. The Welsh Assembly Government invites users to comment on its statistics plan. The statistics work plan includes information about the uses made of FE and CCE statistics and the Welsh Assembly Government included information about the uses and users of FE and CCE statistics in its recent publications. The Welsh Assembly Government told us that it plans to extend this approach to its other FE and CCE statistics reports.

³⁵ <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.

- 3.6 The Welsh Assembly Government publishes its 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.
- 3.7 The Welsh Assembly Government has published a statement³⁶ to explain how it communicates revisions to its statistical outputs. The statistics team notes major revisions or changes to methods in the FE and CCE statistics publications and in any related StatsWales³⁷ metadata. The statistics team informed us that, where appropriate, it will also announce changes to classifications in advance of the release of the changed statistics.
- 3.8 The Welsh Assembly Government has not made any revisions to, or corrected any errors in, its FE and CCE statistics since 2005.

³⁶ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/compliance/revisions/?lang=en>

³⁷ <http://statswales.wales.gov.uk/index.htm>

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.

- 3.9 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.
- 3.10 The Welsh Assembly Government holds briefing sessions for the media at individual topic level and will, where appropriate, comment on the misuse of statistics. The Welsh Assembly Government told us that it has established a process to allow its statisticians to brief the media and opposition Welsh Assembly Members directly on statistics releases following publication. The statistics team briefs a subject specialist in the Welsh Assembly Government's press office about its FE and CCE statistics publications.

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 The statistics team includes information about data sources, definitions and coverage in its FE and CCE statistics publications. The Welsh Assembly Government also includes information about methods – including data matching, where appropriate – in each of the statistics publications. The statistics team developed the methods for the performance measures for FEIs and work-based learning providers in collaboration with DCELLS officials and learning providers who both provide and use the data.
- 3.12 For the *Analysis of Participation in Post-16 Education and Training* publication, the statistics team standardises the participation rates to take account of differences in gender and age profiles between LAs. The statistics team provides details of this standardisation in the publication, and explains why the method was chosen. However, there are areas where there is insufficient information provided about the methods used and why the methods were chosen, including: the adjusted population used in the *Further Education, Work-based Learning and Community Learning* releases; the allocation of qualifications with unknown levels in *Levels of Highest Qualification held by Working Age Adults in Wales*; and the treatment of Welsh learners studying outside Wales in *Learning Network Analysis*. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Assembly Government should publish more information about the methods used to produce its FE and CCE statistics and why the methods were chosen³⁸ (Requirement 1).
- 3.13 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 it uses to assess the quality of the data in its FE and CCE statistics publications³⁹ (Requirement 2).
- 3.14 *Participation of Young People in Education and the Labour Market* includes headline figures for the estimated number of young people who are NEET. The Welsh Assembly Government responded to users' needs for more timely figures by introducing a provisional estimate based on early data and introducing quarterly estimates based on ONS's *Annual Population Survey* in the *Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)* publication. The Welsh Assembly Government highlights in the publication that these estimates are 'less statistically robust', and includes confidence intervals for the percentage NEET, but there is scope to include information about the limitations of the data and when they should and should not be used. The other FE and CCE statistics publications also include some information about aspects of quality such as confidence intervals for NEET estimates based on ONS's *Annual Population Survey* and comparability with previous years' data.

³⁸ In relation to Principle 4 Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

³⁹ In relation to Principle 4 Practice 4 of the *Code of Practice*

However, there is scope to provide more information about the quality of these statistical outputs – for example, the relevance to users and degree of accuracy and reliability including confidence intervals. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Assembly Government should provide more information about the quality of these FE and CCE statistics, including strengths and weaknesses and when these statistics may potentially be used⁴⁰ (Requirement 3).

- 3.15 The Welsh Assembly Government publishes *Educational Attainment of Young People by Age 19* as experimental statistics. Following publication of the statistics, the Welsh Assembly Government arranged a seminar for users which resulted in changes in the way that the statistics were presented. The publication also asked users for feedback on the statistics. The Welsh Assembly Government recognises that there is scope to improve the description of methods in the publication and the way complex patterns of attainment are presented and explained. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Assembly Government should publish a plan for how it will develop *Educational Attainment of Young People by Age 19* to meet the standards of the *Code*⁴¹ (Requirement 4).
- 3.16 The statistics team follows guidance developed by the Welsh Assembly Government's Statistical Directorate to check, validate and analyse the data it receives. Quality assurance procedures are built into the process of compiling each FE and CCE statistical output.
- 3.17 The Welsh Assembly Government's statistics team has used a self-assessment tool developed by the Office for National Statistics to review its processes for producing *Participation of Young People in Education and the Labour Market*. The review identified several minor improvements which will be included in the next release. We suggest that the Welsh Assembly Government extend the self-assessment approach to its other FE and CCE statistics publications.
- 3.18 The statistics team has regular contact and occasional meetings with its counterparts in the other UK countries but there is not a regular discussion forum. There are no common UK-wide standards for the *Participation of Young People in Education and the Labour Market* and *Educational Attainment of Young People by Age 19* estimates, but the Welsh Assembly Government has drawn on methods used for producing equivalent statistics in England when developing the estimates. Some publications, such as *Levels of Highest Qualification held by Working Age Adults in Wales* include comparisons with the other UK countries but other publications do not. We suggest that the Welsh Assembly Government signpost equivalent FE and CCE releases from the other UK countries and document any differences in its approach.
- 3.19 When the Welsh Assembly Government revises the methods or classifications it uses to compile its FE and CCE statistics publications, it also revises the relevant tables and charts to show consistent historical trends. Discontinuities in trends are clearly indicated in tables or charts, and explained in the accompanying commentary or notes.

⁴⁰ In relation to Principle 4 Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

⁴¹ In relation to Principle 4 Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

Principle 5: Confidentiality

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

- 3.20 The Welsh Assembly Government has assured us that it takes all necessary steps to protect the confidentiality of the data it collects. DCELLS supplies all individual FE learner record data to the statistics team. DCELLS has published a Privacy Notice⁴² on its website which it developed in conjunction with the statistics team. Learning providers are required to show their students this notice on enrolment. The Privacy Notice describes the uses of the LLWR data, including its use for statistical purposes, and informs students of their rights under the Data Protection Act. A similar Privacy Notice is used for school pupil data which are used to compile *Participation of Young People in Education and the Labour Market* and *Educational Attainment of Young People by Age 19*.
- 3.21 The Welsh Assembly Government rounds figures in its FE statistics publications to the nearest five to prevent the identification of individuals and includes details of these rounding methods in its publications. The FE statistics team informed us that this level of rounding does not affect the usefulness of the data. For relevant outputs, the statistics team uses standard *Annual Population Survey* disclosure control methods. We suggest that the Welsh Assembly Government include appropriate signposting to *Annual Population Survey* disclosure control methods in the relevant statistics publications.
- 3.22 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 protection⁴³. These include the Statistical Directorate's current information security project, staff training, and organisational protocols such as statistical disclosure control techniques. The statistics team keeps records of data access agreements for any individual data shared with other organisations.

⁴² <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/learningproviders/datacollection/llwr09/llwrprivacy/?lang=en>

⁴³ <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.

- 3.23 The data that the Welsh Assembly Government use to compile its FE statistics publications generally come from administrative records which it requires to distribute funding to learning providers. The statistics team told us that it has not needed to estimate the costs to data providers of supplying the information to the Welsh Assembly Government. Although DCELLS aims to reduce bureaucracy for learners and learning providers – including the burden of completing the LLWR – several data providers told us it was a burdensome task to complete the LLWR. We suggest that the Welsh Assembly Government estimate the cost burden on data suppliers and investigate ways to reduce it.
- 3.24 Several suppliers of LLWR data also told us that they find the data collection system complex and that there is a lack of clear definitions and guidelines. These users indicated that they are unaware of how the Welsh Assembly Government uses the data that they supply and that they would like to be better informed about changes to the data collection system. We suggest that the Welsh Assembly Government provide clear guidance to data suppliers and improve its communication with suppliers to inform them about the various uses of the data and about changes to the collection system.
- 3.25 The DCELLS LLWR team is currently formalising the process of reviewing data items. In 2010 the LLWR team carried out a major exercise to allocate data owners within the Welsh Assembly Government to fields and establish usage and importance of the information. As a result of this review, some fields were dropped which reduced the amount of information submitted by providers and processed by the Welsh Assembly Government. We were told that the exercise had limited success but that the Welsh Assembly Government has now incorporated the review into its annual process for reviewing the LLWR data collection process.
- 3.26 Any proposals to collect new data via the LLWR undergo a review process led by the LLWR team which checks for existing sources and consults all relevant users in the Welsh Assembly Government for views on adding the data requirement.

Principle 7: Resources

The resources made available for statistical activities should be sufficient to meet the requirements of this Code and should be used efficiently and effectively.

- 3.27 The Welsh Assembly Government's FE and CCE statistics team comprises 5.8 full-time equivalents. The team informed us that it is adequately resourced to produce and publish Welsh FE statistics to the standards of the *Code*.
- 3.28 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-monthly performance reviews.

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

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

- 3.29 The format of the Welsh Assembly Government's FE and CCE statistics publications is in line with its Statistical Directorate's guidelines. In the recent user consultation, the statistics team asked users about what type of output they find most useful and how it might improve its outputs. The Welsh Assembly Government has since amended the content and format of some of its FE and CCE publications in response to users' requests. However, there is scope to further improve the content and layout of the FE and CCE statistics publications – for example, by including appropriate context and commentary about key findings at the start of publications, an index of tables, improving the links between tables and text, and including a glossary of relevant terms. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Assembly Government should improve the presentation and format of the statistical publications to aid understanding and interpretability⁴⁴ (Requirement 5).
- 3.30 The Welsh Assembly Government supplements its summary charts and commentary in the FE and CCE statistics publications with detailed tables on the StatsWales website for users to download. The Welsh Assembly Government does not always publish individual provider-level data – for example *National Comparators for Further Education and Work-Based Learning* has a link to Tribal Benchmarking's website⁴⁵ which is password-protected and therefore not publicly accessible. The Welsh Assembly Government told us that this was because of the commercial sensitivity of some information, and that it was preparing institution-level reports to meet users' needs. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Assembly Government should draw attention in the relevant statistical release to the availability of individual provider-level data and make these data available on request with appropriate explanation to encourage informed use⁴⁶ (Requirement 6).
- 3.31 For outputs based on the LLWR, the Welsh Assembly Government issues short releases as soon as possible after the deadlines for data submission, and follows these up with more detailed publications incorporating other data sources. For *Levels of Highest Qualification held by Working Age Adults in Wales*, the Welsh Assembly Government publishes the main figures through headline statistics and also produces an in-depth analysis of the data, including various comparisons such as ethnicity, gender and disability. Other FE statistics publications are shorter, highlighting the main trends, and signalling the further availability of data through StatsWales.
- 3.32 The Welsh Assembly Government uses the statistics published in *Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)* to monitor progress against its target⁴⁷ to increase the percentage of young people in employment, education or training to 93 per cent by 2010. The publication refers to this target

⁴⁴ In relation to Principle 8 Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

⁴⁵ <https://www.tribalbenchmarking.co.uk/Wales/Home.aspx>

⁴⁶ In relation to Principle 8 Practices 3 and 6 of the *Code of Practice*

⁴⁷ See footnote 23

but does not provide any commentary about progress against the target. These statistics are also used to monitor progress against the Welsh Assembly Government's *Child Poverty Strategy*⁴⁸ but the publication does not refer to this. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Assembly Government should ensure that its FE and CCE statistics publications contain appropriate information about the policy and operational context of the statistics⁴⁹ (Requirement 7).

- 3.33 Several of the publications included in this assessment contain similar or overlapping statistics which may be confusing for users and reduce the accessibility of the statistics. We suggest that the Welsh Assembly Government review the range of FE and CCE statistics publications with a view to rationalising them and improving coherence among the releases.
- 3.34 Similarly, three of the publications are called *Further Education, Work-based Learning and Community Learning in Wales* which may also be confusing for users. We suggest that the Welsh Assembly Government review the titles of its FE and CCE statistics publications to provide clearer differentiation between the releases.
- 3.35 The Welsh Assembly Government makes its FE and CCE statistics available on its website, which adheres to accessibility guidelines. The statistics team ensures that its statistical outputs with a Welsh language relevance are available in Welsh.

⁴⁸ See footnote 27

⁴⁹ 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.

3.36 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.

- 3.37 The statistics team publishes a monthly timetable⁵⁰ for FE and CCE publications for the next 12 months on its website. It publishes FE and CCE statistics on the Welsh Assembly Government's website and on the National Statistics Publication Hub⁵¹. It told us that 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. For each publication, the statistics team aims to publish in the same month each year so that users know what month to expect the publications.
- 3.38 One reason that the Welsh Assembly Government finalises the LLWR data in the March following the end of the academic year is due to the time lag before providers submit reliable awards data. The Welsh Assembly Government has tried to keep delays to a minimum between receiving final data, publishing the national comparators in May (brought forward a week in 2010) and publishing benchmarking performance information for providers (brought forward from July to June in 2010).
- 3.39 The Welsh Assembly Government delayed the publication of *Educational Attainment of Young People by Age 19* by two weeks due to a delay in receiving the final data after problems were identified with initial data. The delay was necessary to allow the Welsh Assembly Government enough time to produce and to quality assure the publication. The Welsh Assembly Government informed users about this delay⁵² via its website and by email.
- 3.40 In April 2010 the Welsh Assembly Government announced in *Further Education, Work-based Learning and Community Learning in Wales Statistics (early figures)* that it did not plan to publish *Analysis of Participation in Post-16 Education and Training, 2007/08* in 2010. However, it did not update the relevant web landing page⁵³ which, at March 2011, still stated that the provisional publication date for the next release would be October 2010. We suggest that the Welsh Assembly ensure that it clearly communicates information about changes to release dates.
- 3.41 In compliance with the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics (Wales) Order 2009⁵⁴, the Welsh Assembly Government publishes lists of people who have pre-release access⁵⁵ to its individual statistical publications. For the FE and

⁵⁰ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/due/due-month/?lang=en>

⁵¹ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/index.html>

⁵² <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/post16education2010/101118/?lang=en>

⁵³ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/post16ed2009/hdw20091022/?lang=en>

⁵⁴ http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/wales/wsi2009/wsi_20092818_en_1

⁵⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/prerelease/?lang=en>

CCE statistics published in 2010, the number of individuals on the lists ranged from 19 to 30.

- 3.42 The statistics team has included the names and contact details of the responsible statisticians in recent FE and CCE statistics publications.

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.

- 3.43 Most of the data which the Welsh Assembly Government uses to compile its FE statistics are derived from the LLWR, which is an established and reliable source. DCELLS collects these data mainly to inform its funding for learning providers and supplies them to the statistics team and to other data users for various purposes. The statistics team has close links with DCELLS officials responsible for the LLWR, is consulted on data quality issues such as validations, and has mechanisms in place to feed back any concerns or advice.
- 3.44 DCELLS officials and FE statisticians within the Welsh Assembly Government access LLWR data via a common network and the statistics team analyses the data in the SAS statistics package (which is used across the Statistical Directorate). The statistics team provides statistics to DCELLS officials who disseminate them to learning providers – the main users of the data – via secure websites.
- 3.45 For publications which do not include LLWR data, the administrative data sources which the Welsh Assembly Government uses have already been deemed ‘fit for purpose’ within their own sectors (schools, FE and HE). For some publications, the statistics team combines different data sources, such as school and college records, to produce the statistics. In 2010 the Welsh Assembly Government extended *Analysis of Participation in Post-16 Education and Training* to include some combined analysis of FE and HE, working with HEFCW which produces the standardised participation rate reports for HE in Wales. *Educational Attainment of Young People by Age 19* is based on data from school datasets linked with information about individual FE students to provide a complete picture of attainment. As a pilot, the Welsh Assembly Government has also matched HE data and in 2011 it will begin to analyse the results.
- 3.46 The Welsh Assembly Government has published a Statement of Administrative Sources⁵⁶ which describes the administrative and management information sources which the Statistical Directorate currently uses – or which have the potential to be used – to produce official statistics. The Welsh Assembly Government includes LLWR and HESA in its Statement of Administrative Sources.
- 3.47 Some data suppliers informed us that there may be problems with the quality of LLWR data. We suggest that the Welsh Assembly Government investigate data quality as part of its review of LLWR data items, and publish the arrangements for auditing the quality of LLWR data in its Statement of Administrative Sources.

⁵⁶ <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's FE and CCE statistics, 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.

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|---------------------|---|
| Suggestion 1 | Extend the self-assessment approach used to review <i>Participation of Young People in Education and the Labour Market</i> to the other FE and CCE statistics publications (para 3.17). |
| Suggestion 2 | Signpost equivalent FE and CCE releases from the other UK countries and document any differences in approach (para 3.18) |
| Suggestion 3 | Include appropriate signposting to <i>Annual Population Survey</i> disclosure control methods in the relevant statistics publications (para 3.21). |
| Suggestion 4 | Estimate the cost burden on data suppliers and investigate ways to reduce this burden (para 3.23). |
| Suggestion 5 | Provide clear guidance to data suppliers and improve communication with suppliers to inform them about the various uses of the data and about changes to the collection system (para 3.24). |
| Suggestion 6 | Review the range of FE and CCE statistics publications with a view to rationalising them and improving coherence among the releases (para 3.33). |
| Suggestion 7 | Review the titles of FE and CCE statistics publications to provide clearer differentiation between the releases (para 3.34). |
| Suggestion 8 | Clearly communicate information about changes to release dates (para 3.40). |
| Suggestion 9 | Investigate data quality as part of the review of LLWR data items, and publish the arrangements for auditing the quality of the LLWR data in the Statement of Administrative Sources (para 3.47). |

Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

- A2.1 This assessment was conducted from December 2010 to March 2011.
- A2.2 The Assessment team – Phil Grigor and Cecilia Macintyre – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of the Welsh Assembly Government in December. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 17 January. The Assessment team subsequently met the Welsh Assembly Government during February 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 34 responses from the consultation with users and suppliers. The respondents were grouped as follows:
- | | |
|---|----|
| Welsh Assembly Government | 4 |
| Other public sector | 3 |
| Colleges and local authority training providers | 16 |
| Other training providers and skills organisations | 11 |
- A2.5 Most users were satisfied with the content and level of detail in the releases, and noted that improvements had been made in the last few years. Some users identified further potential improvements to the releases including more timely releases, further breakdowns and analysis, and a need to improve the coherence of the releases. Some users identified a need for benchmarking information for the adult community learning sector, and improvements to the accessibility of detailed data sets for further analysis. The users were content with the level of service provide by the Welsh Assembly Government's statisticians.
- A2.6 The data suppliers who responded were responsible for providing data for the LLWR. The suppliers did not distinguish between the information used in these releases and other information required for other purposes including funding allocation. Some suppliers from the adult community learning sector noted that they would only collect a small amount of the required information for their own purposes. The suppliers reported a number of difficulties providing the data including lack of clear definitions and guidelines, lack of information on the purpose of data collection provided to learners and tutors, double entry by providers, the complexity and unreliability of the system, conflicting information provided for other purposes such as key performance indicators and Estyn

inspections, and a large administrative burden for some suppliers due to the complexity of the system.

A 2.7 Some suppliers commented that they would appreciate more information on the uses of the information collected by the LLWR, and commented that they were not adequately informed when changes were made to the system.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

