

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on Participation in Culture, Leisure and Sport

*(produced by the Department for Culture,
Media and Sport)*

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About the UK Statistics Authority

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

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

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

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

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Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

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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 *Taking Part*⁴ (*TP Quarterly*) and *This Cultural and Sporting Life: The Taking Part Adult and Child Report*⁵ (*TP Annual*) produced by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

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 *TP Quarterly* and *TP Annual* are designated as National Statistics, subject to DCMS implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by August 2012.

1.2.2 DCMS has informed the Assessment team that it has started to implement the Requirements listed in section 1.5. The Statistics Authority welcomes this.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

1.3.1 DCMS holds an annual event for users, to showcase analysis from the Taking Part survey and to encourage discussion about the survey and its findings. However, it has not consulted users formally before making changes to the survey and its priority setting is not sufficiently transparent.

1.3.2 DCMS's statistical Head of Profession (HoP) is the most senior analyst in the Department but they are not a member of the Senior Civil Service. This may constrain the HoP's effectiveness if a threat to the integrity of these statistics was to arise.

1.3.3 *TP Quarterly* and *TP Annual* do not include sufficient contextual information or information about related sources of statistics. DCMS should take steps to explain how it plans to exploit and develop its administrative sources.

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.culture.gov.uk/publications/8734.aspx>

⁵ <http://www.culture.gov.uk/publications/8398.aspx>

1.4 Detailed recommendations

- 1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that DCMS 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	Adopt systematic statistical planning arrangements, including transparent priority setting (para 3.3).
Requirement 2	Consult users formally before making significant changes that affect the statistics (para 3.4).
Requirement 3	Publish clear information about the nature and extent of any revisions at the time the revised statistics are released (para 3.7).
Requirement 4	Publish an update about the forthcoming change of methods, to ensure that all users are aware of the impact on the statistics (para 3.8).
Requirement 5	Document how those who produce statistical reports (in DCMS and its arm's length bodies) are protected from any political pressures and so explain how the integrity of its statistics is safeguarded (para 3.11).
Requirement 6	Improve information about the methods used to produce these statistics and explain why choices were made (para 3.13).
Requirement 7	Improve information about the quality of the statistics and ensure that quality indicators presented alongside the statistics are well-explained (para 3.15).
Requirement 8	Provide users with information about other comparable statistics, include relevant signposting and make any appropriate comparisons (para 3.17).
Requirement 9	Publish plans outlining how administrative sources will be exploited and developed, to derive maximum benefit from them and so minimise the burden placed on survey respondents (para 3.21).
Requirement 10	Review whether resources are sufficient to produce statistics to the standards required by the <i>Code of Practice</i> (para 3.22).

Requirement 11	Improve the commentary in the releases so that it aids user interpretation of the statistics (para 3.23).
Requirement 12	Ensure that the Taking Part statistics are always accompanied by (links to) relevant metadata (para 3.24).
Requirement 13	Publish a timetable of releases for 12 months ahead (para 3.28).
Requirement 14	Ensure that all statistics are issued at 9.30am on the day of release (para 3.29).
Requirement 15	Review the arrangements for granting early access to the data and ensure that all those with access understand their obligations under the <i>Code of Practice</i> (para 3.30).
Requirement 16	Update the Statement of Administrative Sources (para 3.31).

2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 The statistics in *TP Quarterly* and *TP Annual* are from DCMS's Taking Part survey (TPS). TPS is a household survey of adults and children in England. DCMS uses the survey to collect information about participation (or non-participation) in cultural, leisure and sporting activity, and about volunteering and charitable giving. The survey has been run annually since 2005.
- 2.2 TPS is undertaken by a contractor (TNS⁶) on behalf of DCMS. The contractor samples households from the Postcode Address File. At each responding address, face-to-face interviews are held with one randomly selected adult and (where relevant) one child aged between 11 and 15 and one child aged between 5 and 10. The survey is run continuously throughout the year. TNS supplies the survey data to DCMS, and DCMS produces the statistical releases. *TP Quarterly* provides rolling annual estimates, and is published three months after the end of each complete quarter. DCMS publishes more detailed analysis of the data from each full financial year in *TP Annual*, each August. DCMS estimates that the annual cost of producing these statistics is approximately £1.4m.
- 2.3 When the survey started in 2005 the sample size was approximately 26,000 adults. In 2009/10 DCMS reduced the sample size to about 6,000 and halved the interview length to about 22 minutes (corresponding to a much shorter questionnaire). In 2010/11 DCMS increased the sample size to 14,000 and reinstated the longer interview. In 2012 DCMS is introducing a longitudinal element to the survey design for adults and children.
- 2.4 TPS is DCMS's key evidence source, providing national and regional measures of participation that it uses to monitor its success and inform development of policies. The survey covers a broad spectrum of activities and so is of interest and importance to many public sector and private sector organisations. DCMS commissions TPS in partnership with some of its arm's length bodies (ALBs): Arts Council England, English Heritage, Sport England and (until 2011) the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. These ALBs and other organisations use the statistics to evaluate the extent of participation in sporting, cultural and leisure activities, to set benchmarks and monitor the performance of organisations that aim to increase levels participation.
- 2.5 The Welsh Government, Scottish Government and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency publish related statistics about participation in sports, art and culture. Sport England also publishes statistics⁷ about engagement in sport. Its Active People survey gathers data on participation in sport – including the number of adults who participate in physical activity at least three times a week. Active People is a telephone survey designed to provide results on participation in individual sports and on participation at local authority level.

⁶ <http://www.tnsglobal.com/>

⁷ http://www.sportengland.org/research/active_people_survey.aspx

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 from TPS cover a broad range of topics and so there is user interest in the statistics from many different organisations. This is reflected in a list of users of the statistics that DCMS maintains. DCMS carried out a survey of users in September 2010 and published the findings⁸, which outlined how the statistics from TPS are used and included users' suggestions for improvement to the statistics. DCMS holds an annual event for users, to showcase analysis from TPS and encourage discussion about the survey and its findings.
- 3.2 DCMS maintains a 'user corner'⁹ on its website which provides some information about the annual user events, key survey developments and explains how to join a mailing list, through which DCMS keeps users informed about latest releases and events and seeks feedback. We view these aspects of DCMS's engagement with users as an example of good practice. For completeness, we suggest that DCMS publish summaries of the user events, indicating who attended and describing the feedback received and any responses or outcomes.
- 3.3 DCMS runs a TPS steering group, attended by representatives from DCMS and those ALBs that co-fund the survey. DCMS told us that the feedback it receives from users influences the development of the survey and DCMS's wider statistical planning. For example, in 2011 it held a workshop for selected users to inform the development of the survey questionnaire. It has, in the past, committed to publishing its statistical workplans, but statisticians told us that they were unable to do so in 2011, partly due to resource constraints. In addition, there is no published information about the steering group, its membership, agendas, decision-making process or minutes of meetings. As a result, DCMS's priority setting is not sufficiently transparent. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCMS should adopt systematic statistical planning arrangements, including transparent priority setting¹⁰ (Requirement 1). In meeting this Requirement, we suggest that DCMS publish and consult on an annual statistical workplan, publish information about the TPS steering group, including its membership and terms of reference, and establish a formal process for proposing and evaluating new questions for the TPS.
- 3.4 DCMS discusses forthcoming changes with users at its annual user events and in the Steering Group. This is good practice, but it should also carry out formal consultations before making significant changes that affect the statistics, to ensure that all users have the opportunity to respond. For example, it would have been appropriate to formally consult all users before halving the interview length in 2009/10 (to enable all users to influence which questions were

⁸ http://www.culture.gov.uk/images/research/Taking_part_User_Survey_Factsheet.pdf

⁹ http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/research_and_statistics/7394.aspx

¹⁰ In relation to Principle 1, Practice 3 and Principle 7, Practice 3 of the *Code of Practice*

retained) and before introducing a longitudinal element to the survey design in 2012. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCMS should consult users formally before making significant changes that affect the statistics¹¹ (Requirement 2).

¹¹ In relation to Principle 1, Practice 3 and Protocol 1, Practice 7 of the *Code of Practice*

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

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

- 3.5 These statistics are presented impartially and objectively.
- 3.6 Until December 2011, DCMS's statistical releases included the department's mission statement¹² prominently at the front of the release. DCMS told us that this was standard practice in all its publications. However, its inclusion within the statistical publications could have been viewed as an endorsement of government policy. The Assessment team raised this issue with DCMS during the course of the Assessment and DCMS took quick steps to remove the statement from subsequent statistical releases. In place of the mission statement it now makes more prominent the statement that 'Taking Part is a National Statistic and has been produced to the standards set out in the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*'.
- 3.7 DCMS has published a revisions policy¹³ that states that statistics from TPS are not normally revised. However, the TPS releases state that 'some figures may have been revised', without explaining the nature or extent of any revisions. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCMS should publish clear information about the nature and extent of any revisions at the time the revised statistics are released¹⁴ (Requirement 3).
- 3.8 DCMS told us that there have been no significant changes to the methods used to produce these statistics. However, it has made significant changes to the TPS sample size and questionnaire, and is introducing a longitudinal element to the survey sample design during 2012. It discussed these proposals at its user event in 2011, but it has not published any updates outlining progress or explaining when the changes will feed into the statistics and what the impact will be. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCMS should publish an update about the forthcoming change of methods, to ensure that all users are aware of the impact on the statistics¹⁵ (Requirement 4).

¹² "Our aim is to improve the quality of life for all through cultural and sporting activities, support the pursuit of excellence, and champion the tourism, creative and leisure industries."

¹³ http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/research_and_statistics/4824.aspx

¹⁴ In relation to Principle 2, Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*

¹⁵ In relation to Principle 2, Practice 4 of the *Code of Practice*

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 abuses of trust or complaints relating to professional integrity or standards were reported to or identified by the Assessment team.
- 3.10 DCMS has a relatively small statistical team of seven staff. *TP Quarterly* and *TP Annual* are DCMS's only National Statistics outputs, but it produces 11 sets of Official Statistics¹⁶, for example on museum visits and treasure troves.
- 3.11 DCMS told us that some of its official statistics are produced by non-statisticians who primarily work to develop and monitor DCMS's policies. The Assessment team felt that this arrangement could present a conflict of interests and so could be a risk to the integrity (or perception of integrity) of DCMS's statistics. DCMS told us that non-statistical teams that produce statistical releases are supported by a statistician and each release is signed-off by the HoP. There is no formal documentation about these practices. DCMS's HoP is the most senior analyst in the Department but is not a member of the Senior Civil Service. This may constrain the HoP's effectiveness if a threat to the integrity of these statistics were to arise. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCMS should document how those who produce statistical reports (in DCMS and its ALBs) are protected from any political pressures and so explain how the integrity of its statistics is safeguarded¹⁷ (Requirement 5). In meeting this Requirement, we suggest that DCMS document how it complies with the guidance for non-statisticians (*Good Practice in the Use of Official Statistics*¹⁸) issued by Cabinet Office in 2009.
- 3.12 DCMS has seven ALBs that produce Official Statistics. DCMS told us that each of its ALBs has a nominated Lead Official who is supported by the HoP. In order to ensure that those people producing Official Statistics in ALBs are suitably protected from any political pressure, we suggest that DCMS consider whether the HoP should play a more active role supporting DCMS's ALBs, for example through visits and discussions with relevant senior staff in ALBs, to explain the importance of statistics and compliance with the *Code of Practice*.

¹⁶ http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/research_and_statistics/4824.aspx#Stats_Catalogue

¹⁷ In relation to Principle 3, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

¹⁸ See Annex of letter from Kevin Brennan MP to Dr Tony Wright MP
<http://www.parliament.uk/documents/upload/letter-brennan-090227.pdf>

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.

- 3.13 DCMS publishes summary information about the methods used to produce these statistics within the releases. It publishes more detailed information about methods in an annual *Technical Report*¹⁹ and it publishes a range of supporting information including the survey questionnaires, cover letters and instructions for survey interviewers. There are some aspects of methods that are not fully explained. For example, it is not clear how adults in a household are selected for interview. This could have implications for data quality. DCMS should provide more explanation of the reasons for some of its choices, for example how it has defined 'participation' in each sector. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCMS should improve information about the methods used to produce these statistics and explain why choices were made²⁰ (Requirement 6).
- 3.14 There have been many changes to the questions included in TPS. DCMS publishes each questionnaire, but we suggest that DCMS consolidate information about changes to the questions in TPS into a single reference document.
- 3.15 DCMS publishes some information about the quality of the statistics in the releases, including confidence intervals alongside the statistics in tables and charts. It provides information about sample sizes and design factors. It has published *Taking Part Quality Indicators*²¹ which provides more information about the different aspect of the quality of the statistics. While the range of information that DCMS presents is good, in places it could be better explained. For example, there is insufficient explanation of the concepts of confidence intervals and design factors. There are some elements of the population not covered by the survey (including communal establishments) but there is insufficient explanation about the impact this may have on the statistics and their use and potential use. The releases do not provide links to *Taking Part Quality Indicators*. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCMS should improve information about the quality of the statistics and ensure that quality indicators presented alongside the statistics are well-explained²² (Requirement 7). In meeting this requirement, we suggest that DCMS make the information presented in *Taking Part Quality Indicators* more accessible by linking to it from the main releases.
- 3.16 DCMS has not documented its quality assurance processes. It told us that it carries out checks on the quality of the TPS data and that the ALBs that co-fund the survey also assure the quality of the data. We suggest that DCMS document the quality assurance processes followed in the production of the TPS statistics.

¹⁹ http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/research_and_statistics/7388.aspx

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

²¹ http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/research_and_statistics/7394.aspx

²² In relation to Principle 4, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

3.17 Sport England's Active People survey includes statistics on participation in sport. DCMS does not include any information about, or links to, statistics from the Active People survey in the TPS releases; nor does it provide any information about the availability of related statistics in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, or internationally. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCMS should provide users with information about other comparable statistics, include relevant signposting and make any appropriate comparisons²³ (Requirement 8).

²³ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 6 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.

3.18 DCMS has assured us that all necessary steps are taken to protect the confidentiality of the data collected as part of this survey. DCMS does not hold confidential data: the survey contractor provides anonymised datasets.

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 DCMS reports the respondent burden, in terms of the average time taken to complete the survey, in each release. It told us that respondent burden is managed during the planning of the survey by setting an upper limit for the length of the (average) interview (45 minutes for adults and 20 minutes for children).
- 3.20 In 2011 DCMS began asking adult respondents if they were willing for their children's details to be matched to the National Pupils Database. DCMS told us that this work, which will be undertaken by the Department for Education, will enable survey data to be supplemented with information about pupil characteristics.
- 3.21 In 2011 DCMS documented all administrative sources used by the department and its ALBs. Many of these sources have the potential to be used to provide additional analysis supporting DCMS's statistical outputs. For example, administrative information about the number of visits to museums, supplied by museums might be used to support information about museum visits from TPS. Some of these administrative sources are used as the basis of DCMS's official statistics releases (for example, *Museums and Galleries Monthly Visits*²⁴) but in general the TPS releases do not sufficiently explain or exploit those data sources. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCMS should publish plans outlining how administrative sources will be exploited and developed, to derive maximum benefit from them and to minimise the burden placed on survey respondents²⁵ (Requirement 9). *Museums and Galleries Monthly Visits* provides very little explanation about the data that the statistics are based on. We suggest that DCMS improve the information about the (often administrative) sources that is included in official statistics publications.

²⁴ http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/research_and_statistics/3375.aspx

²⁵ In relation to Principle 6, Practices 1 and 3 and Protocol 3, Practice 3 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.

3.22 DCMS told us that it is resourced to produce these statistics to the standards required by the *Code of Practice*. However, as highlighted in Principle 3, the Assessment team felt that there was significant risk to the integrity of the statistics due to the small statistical team and because the HoP is not a member of the Senior Civil Service. DCMS told us that it was unable to publish its statistical workplan in 2011 due to resource constraints. It also told us that it sometimes has difficulty publishing its statistical releases at 9.30am on the day of release, due to staff shortages or workloads in its IT publication team. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCMS should review whether resources are sufficient to produce statistics to the standards required by the *Code of Practice*²⁶ (Requirement 10).

²⁶ In relation to Principle 7, Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

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

- 3.23 DCMS provides some commentary in *TP Quarterly* and *TP Annual* that describes the main changes over time. It includes some good graphical representations of the statistics, including Venn diagrams. However, the commentary does not sufficiently explain the statistics, to draw out the most interesting key findings and to make these relevant to users. There is not enough contextual information to help users interpret the statistics. In addition, in *TP Annual* (August 2011) DCMS misinterpreted one of the key findings: it stated that ‘88 per cent of adults reported watching TV as their main free time activity’. TPS respondents are not asked to identify their main free time activity, and the statistic in fact indicates that watching television is the most common activity across all respondents. The Assessment team raised this issue with DCMS during the course of the Assessment and DCMS has now issued a correction notice²⁷. The same release inappropriately used line charts to represent categorical data. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCMS should improve the commentary in the releases so that it aids user interpretation of the statistics²⁸ (Requirement 11). We suggest that DCMS consider the points detailed in annex 2, in seeking to improve the statistical releases.
- 3.24 DCMS presents these statistics clearly on its website, indicating which is the latest publication, providing clear links to previous publications and to tables of data that can be downloaded. It publishes a useful quarterly *Taking Part Dashboard*²⁹ alongside *TP Quarterly* that presents the key findings in a single page. The tables of statistics and *Taking Part Dashboard* should include sufficient metadata (or links to metadata) to ensure that users can interpret the statistics appropriately. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCMS should ensure that the Taking Part statistics are always accompanied by (links to) relevant metadata³⁰ (Requirement 12).
- 3.25 DCMS publicises its statistics through a range of social media. It archives these statistics with the UK Data Archive³¹.

²⁷ Revisions: <http://www.culture.gov.uk/publications/8398.aspx>

²⁸ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

²⁹ <http://www.culture.gov.uk/publications/8734.aspx>

³⁰ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*

³¹ <http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/>

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.

3.26 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.

- 3.27 DCMS uses the Taking Part data to undertake (and commission) additional research on a range of related topics. For example, DCMS has published regional factsheets³² on participation in sporting and cultural activities. DCMS has also released additional analysis as part of its Culture and Sport Evidence (CASE) research programme³³. These reports present topic-specific research, which complements the material in *TP Quarterly* and *TP Annual*. These reports are clearly accessible on DCMS's website, but we suggest that DCMS draw together the supplementary TPS releases into a more regular series with a clear release schedule.
- 3.28 DCMS has not published a full timetable of releases for 12 months ahead, either on its website or on the National Statistics Publication Hub³⁴. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCMS should publish a timetable of releases for 12 months ahead³⁵ (Requirement 13). We suggest that DCMS publish a timetable of releases for 12 months ahead on the National Statistics Publication Hub.
- 3.29 DCMS told us that it sometimes has difficulty publishing its statistical releases at 9.30am on the day of release, due to staff shortages or workloads in its IT publication team. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCMS should ensure that all statistics are issued at 9.30am on the day of release³⁶ (Requirement 14).
- 3.30 DCMS told us that the ALBs that co-fund the survey are given early access to the TPS datasets through a secure online portal, before the publications are produced. DCMS indicated that these ALBs help to assure the quality of the data. However, there is a tension between the legitimate need to grant access to the detailed data to those ALBs that co-fund the survey for genuine data validation and drafting and other operational purposes, and the need to limit access to the data prior to release to prevent inappropriate use. DCMS told us that it held training sessions with the ALBs in 2009, to explain how the data should be used, but it has not taken more recent steps to reinforce these messages. It is not clear whether the data are circulated with clear guidance explaining the restrictions on the use of the data. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCMS should review the arrangements for granting early access to the data and ensure that all those with access understand their obligations under the *Code of Practice*³⁷ (Requirement 15).

³² <http://www.culture.gov.uk/publications/8612.aspx>

³³ CASE is a strategic research programme that is being conducted in collaboration with DCMS's ALBs

³⁴ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/index.html>

³⁵ In relation to Protocol 2, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

³⁶ In relation to Protocol 2, Practice 4 of the *Code of Practice*

³⁷ In relation to Protocol 2, Practice 7 of the *Code of Practice*

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.

3.31 As discussed in Principle 6, DCMS has documented the administrative sources used by the department and its ALBs. DCMS has not included in its Statement of Administrative Sources³⁸ all those administrative sources that have potential to be used in official statistics. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCMS should update its Statement of Administrative Sources³⁹ (Requirement 16).

³⁸ http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/research_and_statistics/4824.aspx

³⁹ In relation to Protocol 3, Practice 5 of the *Code of Practice*

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to DCMS's Taking Part 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.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Suggestion 1 | Publish summaries of the user events, indicating who attended and describing the feedback received and any responses or outcomes (para 3.2). |
| Suggestion 2 | Publish and consult on an annual statistical workplan, publish information about the TPS steering group, including its membership and terms of reference, and establish a formal process for proposing and evaluating new questions to the TPS (para 3.3). |
| Suggestion 3 | Document how the guidance for non-statisticians (<i>Good Practice in the Use of Official Statistics</i>) issued by Cabinet Office in 2009 is complied with (para 3.11). |
| Suggestion 4 | Consider whether the HoP should play a more active role supporting DCMS's ALBs, for example through visits and discussions with relevant senior staff in ALBs, to explain the importance of statistics and compliance with the <i>Code of Practice</i> (para 3.12). |
| Suggestion 5 | Consolidate information about changes to the questions in TPS into a single reference document (para 3.14). |
| Suggestion 6 | Make the information presented in <i>Taking Part Quality Indicators</i> more accessible by linking to it from the main releases (para 3.15). |
| Suggestion 7 | Document the quality assurance processes followed in the production of the TPS statistics (para 3.16). |
| Suggestion 8 | Improve the information about the (often administrative) sources that is included in official statistics publications (para 3.21). |
| Suggestion 9 | Consider the points detailed in annex 2, in seeking to improve the statistical releases (para 3.23). |

Suggestion 10

Draw together the supplementary TPS releases into a more regular series with a clear release schedule (para 3.27).

Suggestion 11

Publish a timetable of releases for 12 months ahead on the National Statistics Publication Hub (para 3.28).

Annex 2: Compliance with Standards for Statistical Releases

- A2.1 In October 2010, the Statistics Authority issued a statement on *Standards for Statistical Releases*⁴⁰. Whilst this is not part of the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*, the Authority regards it as advice that will promote both understanding and compliance with the *Code*. In relation to the statistical releases associated with Taking Part Statistics, this annex comments on compliance with the statement on standards.
- A2.2 In implementing any Requirements of this report (at paragraph 1.5) which relate to the content of statistical releases, we encourage the producer body to apply the standards as fully as possible.

Appropriate identification of the statistics being released

- A2.3 The titles of both releases clearly indicate the time period to which the statistics relate, but do not describe the coverage of the statistics. Neither release includes a specific statement about the frequency of the release, but it is implied within the text. The releases use standard headings and logos, clearly state the name of the originating department and provide contact details for the responsible statistician. They include a short introduction at the start which describes what is included in the release. It is clear which statistics are new.

Include commentary that is helpful to the non-expert and presents the main messages in plain English

- A2.4 The releases include a key findings section which identifies some main messages. Generally, the language used in the releases is straightforward. Both releases include background notes and a definitions section which explains technical terms and key concepts, such as 'participation in the arts'. The releases would benefit from including a brief explanation of some of the more important concepts within the main body of text, for example digital engagement, so that users do not have to navigate to the end of the release to understand the main messages. The releases refer to 'DCMS's sectors' without explaining what this means.
- A2.5 The statistics are presented alongside commentary which describes changes and makes comparisons with previous years. There is scope to improve the commentary in both releases, so that it goes further than just describing the rises and falls in the data. For example by drawing out some more interesting key findings, providing a context within which to interpret the statistics and by drawing comparisons with other data sources where appropriate.
- A2.6 The statistics are presented in graphs and tables to illustrate comparisons. Some of the chosen graphics for presenting the statistics convey the messages very effectively, for example the Venn diagrams in *TP Annual*. However, the use of line graphs to represent categorical data is inappropriate. In places there is insufficient information to enable users to interpret the charts and commentary – for example, to understand whether the statistics are about

⁴⁰ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-releases.html>

participation in activities per day or per week.

Use language that is impartial, objective and professionally sound

A2.7 The language used in both releases is impartial and objective. In *TP Annual* (August 2011) DCMS has misinterpreted one of the key findings. It stated that '88 per cent of adults reported watching TV as their main free time activity'. TPS respondents are not asked to identify their main free time activity, and the statistic in fact indicates that watching television is the most common activity across all respondents. Otherwise, the descriptive statements in both releases are consistent with the statistics presented.

Include information about the context and likely uses

A2.8 Neither release provides sufficient factual information about the policy or operational context in which the statistics have been collected and will be used. The releases do not include information about the uses of the statistics, and there is not enough explanation about the quality and reliability of the statistics in relation to the range of potential uses.

Include, or link to, appropriate metadata

A2.9 Both releases include an accessible overview of the methods used to compile the statistics and link to where more detailed information can be found. In places, the releases do not explain why particular methods have been chosen, for example why the definition of 'participation in the arts' is different for adults and children.

A2.10 Both releases present the statistics alongside confidence intervals and clearly display error bars on the charts. Neither release includes complete information about the quality of the statistics, but further information is available in a separate document. There is scope to provide more explanation alongside the quality measures that are presented in the Taking Part releases and the separate quality document.

Annex 3: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A3.1 This assessment was conducted from November 2011 to January 2012.

A3.2 The Assessment team – Jacob Wilcock and Ruth James – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of DCMS in November. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 25 November 2011. The Assessment team subsequently met DCMS during December 2011 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

A3.3 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.

A3.4 The Assessment team received 6 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Central government	1
Local government	1
Other public bodies	3
Voluntary sector	1

A3.5 The organisations that responded to our consultation reported using the statistics to understand people's attitudes towards sporting and cultural activities, to set benchmarks and to monitor performance. They also use the statistics to provide context in their own publications. Most users said that the statistics meet their needs and reported positively about engagement with DCMS. Some users suggested that the process for adding new questions to the survey should be made clearer, and that when changes are implemented they should be better documented. Another user told us that it would be helpful if the main messages were made clearer and explained in a way that is more relevant to a non-technical audience. One user said that it would be helpful if statistics were available for lower level geographic areas. DCMS told us that the sample is designed to be representative at the regional level, but not below this.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

