

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Welsh Compendium Publications

(produced by the Welsh 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.

Contact us

Tel: 0845 604 1857

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

Website: www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk

UK Statistics Authority
1 Drummond Gate
London
SW1V 2QQ

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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 take 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 following compendium publications produced by the Welsh Government:

- *Health Statistics Wales*⁴ (*Health Statistics*);
- *Key Health Statistics for Wales*⁵ (*Key Health Statistics*);
- *Social Service Statistics Wales*⁶ (*Social Services*);
- *Wales in Figures*⁷ (*Figures*); and
- *Key Education Statistics*⁸ (*Education*).

1.1.2 The Act also allows departments to request an assessment of other official statistics in order for them to gain National Statistics status. The inclusion of *Health Trends in Wales*⁹ (*Health Trends*) is in response to such a request.

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

1.1.4 Section 3 of this report adopts an ‘exception reporting’ approach – it includes text only to support the Requirements made to strengthen compliance with the *Code* and Suggestions made to improve confidence in the production, management and dissemination of these statistics. This abbreviated style of report reflects the Head of Assessment’s consideration of aspects of risk and materiality¹⁰. The Assessment team nonetheless assessed compliance with all parts of the *Code of Practice* and has commented on all those in respect of which some remedial action is recommended.

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/publications/health2011/?lang=en>

⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/publications/keyhealth2011/?lang=en>

⁶ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health2012/1202291/?lang=en>

⁷ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/publications/walesfigures2010/?lang=en>

⁸ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/publications/keyeducation2011/?lang=en>

⁹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health2011/110331/?lang=en>

¹⁰ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/guidance-about-assessment/criteria-for-deciding-upon-the-format-of-an-assessment-report.pdf>

1.1.5 This report was prepared by the Authority's Assessment team, and approved by the Board of the Statistics Authority on the advice of the Head of Assessment.

1.2 Decision concerning designation as National Statistics

1.2.1 The Statistics Authority judges that the statistics covered by this report are readily accessible, produced according to sound methods and managed impartially and objectively in the public interest, subject to any points for action in this report. The Statistics Authority confirms that the statistics listed in 1.1.1 are designated as National Statistics, and has determined that the statistics detailed in paragraph 1.1.2 can be designated as new National Statistics products, subject to the Welsh Government implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by November 2012.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

1.3.1 The compendia bring together statistics from a wide range of sources in easily accessible formats at low cost to the producer. Few of the compendia include either commentary or pointers to where relevant commentary can be found. The releases do not provide, or link to, information about the context to the figures, or explain trends.

1.3.2 The Welsh Government told us that it periodically consults with users about specific changes to the compendia – for example, its proposal to cease printing of hardcopy statistical publications – and engages separately with users of the underlying statistics that are subsequently published in these compendia. The Welsh Government has published no documents detailing the users and their needs of these compendia.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that the Welsh 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** Take steps to develop a greater understanding of the use made of these compendium publications, publish the relevant information and assumptions, and use them to better support the use of the statistics (para 3.1).
- Requirement 2** Make it clear when scheduled revisions will be made to these compendia (para 3.2).
- Requirement 3** a) Signpost users to details of the methods used to produce *Health Trends*, *Key Health Statistics*, *Education*, *Social Services* and *Figures* and explanations of why particular choices were made; and b) Provide links to information about the quality of these statistics, including their strengths and limitations in relation to use and potential use (para 3.3).
- Requirement 4** Ensure that *Key Health Statistics*, *Education* and *Figures* clearly distinguish between National, official, non-official and experimental statistics (para 3.4).
- Requirement 5** Provide information, or links to information, about the comparability of these statistics with those produced by other countries in the UK (para 3.5).
- Requirement 6** a) Provide links to more detailed commentary in *Health Trends*, *Health Statistics* and *Social Services*; and b) Ensure that *Key Health Statistics*, *Figures* and *Education* provide links to appropriate commentary to aid users' interpretation of the statistics (para 3.6).
- Requirement 7** Include the responsible statistician's name and contact details within *Key Health Statistics*, *Health Statistics*, *Social Services*, *Figures* and *Education* (para 3.7).
- Requirement 8** a) Publish a publication timetable for *Education* that takes account of user needs; b) Inform users of plans to publish *Health Trends* and *Figures*; and c) Ensure that all releases are available through the National Statistics Publication Hub (para 3.8).

2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 The Welsh Government provides a rich array of detailed statistics for a range of subject areas within the compendia covered by this report. Many of the statistics included within the compendia are released separately along with detailed commentary; several of these dedicated releases were the subject of Assessment Report 223¹¹.
- 2.2 The Welsh Government brings together a range of National and official Statistics on health within *Key Health Statistics*, *Health Trends* and *Health Statistics* including information about lifestyle choices such as smoking and drinking; preventative medicine; waiting lists and times; and health expenditure. Statistics are published at the national level in the releases; a range of sub-national geographies – Local Health Boards; NHS trusts and Unitary Authorities – are presented in *Health Statistics*.
- *Health Statistics* presents statistics about the health of the population and the health service in Wales. It provides brief summaries for each chapter with the focus being about detailed statistics.
 - *Key Health Statistics* is a leaflet summarising *Health Statistics* and includes tables of health-related statistics.
 - *Health Trends* briefly summarises long-term trends in health for Wales. Statistics are included for a range of periods, including calendar year and financial year.
- 2.3 *Social Services* brings together a range of statistics about local authority social services in Wales including information about: looked after children; child protection registers; and people with physical, sensory or learning disabilities, or mental health issues. *Social Services* presents statistics at the national level. *Social Services* includes experimental statistics about children in need.
- 2.4 *Figures* presents previously published statistics about a range of topics including population; health; labour market; economy; environment; education; and local government finance. The purpose of the compendium is to provide a selection of key statistics for Wales in an accessible document; to give an example of what information is available; and to point users to where they can find further information.
- 2.5 *Education* is a summary booklet bringing together a range of official statistics about the education sector in Wales including: the number of schools and exam grades achieved; further and higher education enrolments and expenditure; and local authority finance. The release provides a link to the StatsWales¹² website where more detailed statistics are presented in tables and charts.
- 2.6 *Health Statistics*, *Social Services*, *Education* and *Key Health Statistics* are published annually. *Health Trends* and *Figures* are published irregularly; the Welsh Government told us that it has no plans to publish *Health Trends* or *Figures* in 2012.

¹¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html>

¹² <http://statswales.wales.gov.uk/index.htm>

2.7 The Welsh Government told us that the compendia are used for reference by colleagues and ministers within the Welsh Government. The underlying statistics are used within Welsh Government and NHS Wales to monitor health and the progress towards meeting the Welsh Government's health and targets; to inform policies and strategies, such as Our Healthy Future¹³; and to inform Welsh Government and NHS Wales about service provision. Social Services statistics are used to advise Ministers; to provide an evidence base for local authority (LA) comparisons and benchmarking; and to inform the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales.

2.8 The Welsh Government told the Assessment team that annually the production of these statistics costs approximately:

- £250 for *Education*;
- £10,000 for *Key Health Statistics*; *Health Statistics*; and *Health Trends*;
- £4,600 for *Social Services*; and
- £5,500 for *Figures*.

¹³ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/ocmo/healthy/?lang=en>

3 Assessment findings

- 3.1 The Welsh Government told us that it periodically consults with users about specific changes to the compendia – for example, its proposal to cease printing of hardcopy statistical publications¹⁴ – and engages separately with users of the underlying statistics that are subsequently published in these compendia. The Welsh Government has published¹⁵ responses to some of these user consultations on its website. The Welsh Government has not published information about the uses of these compendia or users’ needs in relation to them. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Government should take steps to develop a greater understanding of the use made of these compendium publications, publish the relevant information and assumptions, and use them to better support the use of the statistics¹⁶ (Requirement 1). In meeting this Requirement, we suggest that the Welsh Government: refer to the types of use put forward in the Statistics Authority’s Monitoring Brief, *The Use Made of Official Statistics*¹⁷. We further suggest that the Welsh Government review the user need for three separate health statistics compendia.
- 3.2 The Welsh Government has not published a revisions policy specifically for these compendia, but told us that it follows the corporate revisions policy¹⁸. The compendia do not make it clear that Welsh Government has adopted this policy for these compendia, or provide information about revisions. The compendia do not make clear when, and under what circumstances, revisions will take place; the Welsh Government told us that it does not currently highlight revisions and will only revise the compendia if the revision is severe enough. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Welsh Government should make it clear when scheduled revisions will be made to these compendia¹⁹ (Requirement 2).
- 3.3 *Health Statistics* signposts users to where they can find information about the methods used to produce the statistics and the quality of them, but *Health Trends*, *Key Health Statistics*, *Education*, *Social Services* and *Figures* do not. The compendia do not discuss the quality and reliability of the statistics in relation to potential uses or explain why methods were chosen. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Government should: a) signpost users to details of the methods used to produce *Health Trends*, *Key Health Statistics*, *Education*, *Social Services* and *Figures* and explanations of why particular choices were made; and b) provide links to information about the quality of these statistics, including their strengths and limitations in relation to use and potential use²⁰ (Requirement 3).
- 3.4 *Health Statistics*, *Health Trends*, *Key Health Statistics* and *Education* include a mixture of official statistics and National Statistics; *Figures* contains National, official and non-official statistics; *Social Services* contains national and

¹⁴ <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/statistics/publications/?lang=en&status=closed>

¹⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/statistics/healthtrends/?lang=en&status=closed>; <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/statistics/healthstats2009/?lang=en&status=closed>; and <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/statistics/education/?lang=en&status=closed>

¹⁶ In relation to Principle 1, Practices 2 and 5 of the *Code of Practice*

¹⁷ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-briefs/monitoring-brief-6-2010---the-use-made-of-official-statistics.pdf>

¹⁸ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/compliance/revisions/?lang=en>

¹⁹ In relation to Principle 2, Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*

²⁰ In relation to Principle 4, Practices 1, 2 and 5 and Principle 8 Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

experimental statistics. The inclusion of official, non-official and experimental statistics helps to provide a more rounded and complete picture for users. The compendia do not include links to information about the methods used to produce the official and non-official statistics, and they do not make a clear distinction between the quality and reliability of these statistics and the other statistics that they are published alongside; *Health Statistics*, *Health Trends and Social Services* are the only releases to clearly indicate the status of the statistics. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Government should ensure that *Key Health Statistics*, *Education* and *Figures* clearly distinguish between National, official, non-official and experimental statistics²¹ (Requirement 4).

- 3.5 *Health Statistics* includes a chapter consisting of two tables and a bulleted summary which provides UK statistics for some topics covered by the release; and signposts users to where they can access additional UK statistics in the Notes section. However, it does not include information about comparability with the UK statistics. *Health Trends*, *Key Health Statistics*, *Social Services*, *Figures* and *Education* do not indicate whether similar statistics are available for other countries. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Government should provide information, or links to information, about the comparability of these statistics with those produced by other countries in the UK²² (Requirement 5). We suggest that the Welsh Government signpost similar statistics for other countries of the UK in *Health Trends*, *Key Health Statistics*, *Education*, *Social Services* and *Figures*.
- 3.6 *Health Trends* includes bullet points outlining trends over time; *Health Statistics* and *Social Services* present key points highlighting key messages for each section; and *Key Health Statistics*, *Figures* and *Education* do not include commentary. *Health Trends*, *Health Statistics* and *Social Services* do not provide context to the statistics included. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Government should: a) provide links to more detailed commentary in *Health Trends*, *Health Statistics* and *Social Services*; and b) ensure that *Key Health Statistics*, *Figures* and *Education* provide links to appropriate commentary to aid users' interpretation of the statistics²³ (Requirement 6). We suggest that in meeting this requirement the Welsh Government should consider the points detailed in annex 2.
- 3.7 *Health Trends* includes the contact details of the responsible statistician. *Key Health Statistics*, *Health Statistics*, *Social Services*, *Figures* and *Education* do not include the name of the responsible statistician. Instead, they include the generic contact details – for example, the Head of Unit. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Government should include the responsible statistician's name and contact details within *Key Health Statistics*, *Health Statistics*, *Social Services*, *Figures* and *Education*²⁴ (Requirement 7).
- 3.8 The Welsh Government has published a timetable²⁵ detailing the release of its statistics. However, this does not include *Health Trends*, *Education* and *Figures*. The Welsh Government told us that it has no plans to release *Health*

²¹ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 3 of the *Code of Practice*

²² In relation to Principle 4, Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*

²³ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

²⁴ In relation to Protocol 2, Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*

²⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/duel/?lang=en>

Trends and Figures in 2012. Key Health Statistics, Education and Figures are not available through the National Statistics Publication Hub. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Welsh Government should: a) publish a publication timetable for *Education* that takes account of user needs; b) inform users of plans to publish *Health Trends and Figures*; and c) ensure that *Key Health Statistics, Education and Figures* are available through the National Statistics Publication Hub²⁶ (Requirement 8).

²⁶ In relation to Principle 1, Practice 4 and Protocol 2, Practices 2 and 3 of the *Code of Practice*

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to the Welsh Government's compendium publications, 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 | Refer to the types of use put forward in the Statistics Authority's Monitoring Brief, <i>The Use Made of Official Statistics</i> when documenting use (para 3.1). |
| Suggestion 2 | Review the user need for three separate health statistics compendia (para 3.1). |
| Suggestion 3 | Signpost similar statistics for other countries of the UK in <i>Health Trends, Key Health Statistics, Education, Social Services and Figures</i> (para 3.5). |
| Suggestion 4 | Consider the points detailed in annex 2, in seeking to improve the statistical releases (para 3.6). |

Annex 2: Compliance with Standards for Statistical Releases

- A2.1 In October 2010, the Statistics Authority issued a statement on *Standards for Statistical Releases*²⁷. While 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 Welsh Compendia 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 compendia have titles which broadly cover the topic of the statistics that they contain, and indicate the point at which the statistics are released. The compendia do not contain a statement about the frequency of the release of the statistics. Standard headings and logos are used within the compendia. *Health Trends*, *Health Statistics*, *Social Services* and *Figures* include National, official, non-official and experimental statistics; their status is clearly indicated in *Health Trends*, *Health Statistics* and *Social Services*, but not in *Figures*. *Health Trends* and *Figures* do not clearly indicate whether all of the statistics are sourced from producers of official statistics.
- A2.4 The compendia include the name of the originating unit and the contact details of the responsible statistician or the areas within the Welsh Government that are responsible for the statistics. With the exception of *Key Health Statistics*, *Education* and *Figures*, the compendia include useful contents pages outlining what is included within each of them. The compendia imply which of the statistics are new. *Key Health Statistics* and *Health Statistics* cover a range of different time periods.

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

- A2.5 *Health Trends* includes bullet points outlining trends over time; *Health Statistics* and *Social Services* present key points highlighting main messages for each section; *Key Health Statistics*, *Figures* and *Education* do not include commentary. The compendia do not provide context to the statistics.
- A2.6 The language used in the compendia is generally straightforward and widely understood. The statistics are described in an impartial way. For some of the compendia, technical terms and jargon are explained within the body of the text, footnotes or in a glossary of terms. *Key Health Statistics* and *Education* do not define some of the terms used in the tables.

²⁷ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-releases.html>

A2.7 Where commentary is provided, it is impartial and demonstrably evidence-based with descriptions that are professionally sound.

Include information about the context and likely uses

A2.8 *Health Trends* and *Social Services* describe the operational context of the statistics, but the other compendia do not. The compendia do not comment about the quality or reliability of the statistics in relation to potential use nor do they provide links from which users can determine this information. The compendia do not comment on the use of the statistics.

Include, or link to, appropriate metadata

A2.9 *Health Trends* and *Health Statistics* include links to other information about methods or definitions – usually within footnotes or an appendix – but these links are to generic homepages. The other compendia do not include links to information about sources, methods, definitions and reliability.

A2.10 The compendia do not include information about similar statistics for UK countries, or their comparability. It is not clear within the compendia whether the statistics are subject to later revision.

Annex 3: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A3.1 This assessment was conducted from January to June 2012.

A3.2 The Assessment team – Gary Wainman and Emily Gleeson – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of the Welsh Government in January. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided in February. The Assessment team subsequently met the Welsh Government during May 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 3 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Central government users	1
Data suppliers	2

A3.5 Data suppliers commented that they were content with the arrangements for supplying data; and reported that the Welsh Government had a good understanding of what is involved in supplying the data. Suppliers also reported a good understanding of how the data supplied are used.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

