

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on Output and New Orders in the Construction Industry

(produced by the Office for National Statistics)

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About the UK Statistics Authority

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

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

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

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

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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 following sets of statistics produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS):

- *Output in the Construction Industry*⁴ (*Output*); and
- *New Orders in the Construction Industry*⁵ (*New Orders*).

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 *New Orders* and *Output*, are designated as National Statistics, subject to ONS implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by May 2012.

1.2.2 ONS 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 ONS has engaged with the users of these statistics through consultations, a user committee, media briefings and other ad hoc meetings. It produces some good information about the quality of these statistics, including estimates of sampling error and descriptions of the main potential sources of error. However, there is insufficient information about the quality of the regional estimates of construction output.

1.3.2 *Output* and *New Orders* should be accompanied by more useful commentary, to aid user interpretation of the statistics, and links to more complete information about methods.

1.3.3 ONS did not take sufficient steps to promptly alert all users to an error in the August 2011 publication of *Output*.

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.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/all-releases.html?definition=tcm%3A77-211472>

⁵ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/all-releases.html?definition=tcm%3A77-21530>

1.4 Detailed recommendations

1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that ONS could strengthen its compliance with the *Code*. Those which the Assessment team considers essential to enable designation as National Statistics are listed in section 1.5. Other suggestions, which would improve the statistics and the service provided to users but which are not formally required for their designation, are listed at annex 1.

1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

Requirement 1	Ensure that errors discovered in statistical reports are addressed, and stakeholders alerted, promptly (para 3.7).
Requirement 2	Provide more information about the methods used to produce the construction statistics, and make this information accessible (para 3.10).
Requirement 3	Publish more information to explain the quality measures and the quality of the regional construction output statistics, in relation to use (para 3.12).
Requirement 4	Improve quality assurance procedures, ensure that staff are suitably trained in quality management and publish information about the improved arrangements (para 3.13).
Requirement 5	Report annually the estimated costs of responding to the construction surveys (para 3.16).
Requirement 6	Provide links in the summary <i>Output</i> releases to supporting information (para 3.18)
Requirement 7	Improve the commentary in <i>Output</i> and <i>New Orders</i> so that it aids user interpretation of the statistics (para 3.19).

2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 On 1 March 2008, ONS took over responsibility for the collection and publication of construction output and new orders statistics from the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills⁶ (BIS). In 2010 ONS introduced changes to the frequency of the publications and to the methods, which it documented in a published article⁷. BIS continues to publish statistics about building materials and components⁸ and building price and cost indices⁹.
- 2.2 *Output* presents summary information about construction activity, analysed by sector, including: public and private new housing, repair and maintenance, and infrastructure.
- 2.3 The output statistics are produced using data collected in ONS's Monthly Business Survey of Construction, with businesses sampled from the Inter-Departmental Business Register¹⁰ (IDBR). The survey samples around 8,000 businesses. The sample includes all construction businesses that employ 100 people or more, or have an annual turnover of £60m or more, and a substantial sample of smaller construction businesses. Each business that is sampled is asked to return data on work carried out in the previous month.
- 2.4 *New Orders* is published quarterly; it presents statistics on the estimated total value of new orders in the sector. It also provides breakdowns for new housing, infrastructure and commercial work. It draws on data compiled from the Quarterly Survey of Contracts and New Orders, with businesses selected from the IDBR.
- 2.5 These releases provide information about an important sector of the economy. Construction accounts for around 6 per cent of GDP. BIS, HM Treasury and the Bank of England use these statistics as a leading indicator of the state of the construction industry.
- 2.6 In addition to *Output* and *New Orders*, ONS produces a range of detailed tables that present information relating to the construction industry. These previously formed an annual compendium¹¹ – published every August – but are now available separately, linked from a PDF contents page. ONS told us that it is working to improve the accessibility of this information and it is consulting¹² users about possible changes to the content and format of the published information.
- 2.7 ONS told us that the annual cost of producing these statistics is around £1.1m.

⁶ <http://www.bis.gov.uk/>

⁷ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/elmr/economic-and-labour-market-review/no--3--march-2010/development-of-construction-statistics.pdf>

⁸ <http://www.bis.gov.uk/analysis/statistics/construction-statistics/building-materials>

⁹ <http://stats.bis.gov.uk/analysis/statistics/construction-statistics/prices-and-cost-indices>

¹⁰ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/who-we-are/services/idbr/about-the-idbr/index.html>

¹¹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/construction/construction-statistics/no--12--2011-edition/construction-statistics-annual-report-2011.pdf>

¹² <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/consultations/open-consultations/construction-statistics-annual/index.html>

3 Assessment findings

Principle 1: Meeting user needs

The production, management and dissemination of official statistics should meet the requirements of informed decision-making by government, public services, business, researchers and the public.

- 3.1 ONS's main forum for engaging users of these statistics is the Consultative Committee on Construction Industry Statistics (CCCIS). This group is chaired by BIS, which also publishes some statistics on construction and which has responsibility for relevant government policy. BIS publishes agendas and minutes¹³ from these meetings on its website. The group includes user representatives from government, the construction industry and academia. It meets twice a year to discuss the production of construction statistics, any issues relating to data quality and planned changes. ONS actively participates but does not publish any information about the group on its own website. We suggest that ONS publish information about CCCIS on its website, including its membership and links to the agendas and minutes of the meetings.
- 3.2 ONS has engaged users more widely, through open consultations and targeted user surveys. In 2009, ONS carried out a public consultation on its proposed changes to the methods used to produce construction statistics, and published the results¹⁴. In spring 2011 ONS carried out a survey of known users, to understand their experiences of the construction statistics releases. ONS published the results¹⁵ of this survey in December 2011.
- 3.3 ONS told us that it also engages users through ad hoc meetings. For example, in November 2011 ONS attended the Construction Products Association¹⁶ (CPA) Market Information Committee¹⁷ to discuss trends in construction statistics.
- 3.4 Some of the users who contacted us in response to this Assessment indicated that they felt that ONS could do more to engage users. We view ONS's engagement with users to be open and willing, as demonstrated by the examples outlined above. However, given the importance of these statistics and the wide interest in them, we suggest that ONS consider whether it can do more to engage with users, particularly those within the construction industry, and publish information about its arrangements for engaging users. For example, it may be able to present its statistics at relevant industry fora, to raise awareness and invite feedback. It may also be able to do more to keep users informed about planned development work and improvements.

¹³ <http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/business-sectors/construction/construction-statistics/cccis>

¹⁴ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/consultations/closed-consultations/2009/construction-statistics-publications/index.html>

¹⁵ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/user-engagement/index.html>

¹⁶ CPA represents the UK's manufacturers and suppliers of construction products components and fittings.

¹⁷ <http://www.constructionproducts.org.uk/activities/Page.aspx?Id=67>

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

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

- 3.5 ONS presents the statistics in these releases objectively and impartially. It announces changes to methods in advance, in the Notes section of the releases. When ONS introduced significant changes to the methods in 2010, it published an article¹⁸ explaining the changes, the reasons for them and the impact on the statistics.
- 3.6 *New Orders* and *Output* each include a section that explains the schedule for routine revisions to the statistics. They set out the reasons for the revisions and describe their overall extent. However, in *Output* covering the second quarter of 2011 (published in August 2011) ONS introduced several updates to the methods. The release did not show the extent of revisions across all time periods that had been affected, and did not illustrate how each of the individual updates to the methods contributed to the overall revisions. We suggest that ONS publish more detailed information about the extent of revisions in the releases.
- 3.7 There have been a number of errors in these publications. Most notably, on 12 August 2011 ONS withdrew *Output* on the day of its release when an error - which significantly affected the statistics - was found. ONS contacted all those users who were on its circulation list for the publication, to alert them to the error, published a notice and reissued the publication with a correction later the same day. However, there was a delay of four hours between the error being found and the incorrect release being removed from ONS's website. We consider that the delay in announcing the error left users misinformed. While ONS had notified known users of the error, other users will have unknowingly accessed the incorrect release during this time. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should ensure that errors discovered in statistical reports are addressed, and stakeholders alerted, promptly¹⁹ (Requirement 1). When ONS reissued the publication it removed the incorrect release from its website. We suggest that ONS provide clear signposting from corrected bulletins to the original incorrect release, (which should be clearly marked as superseded) and publish a clear audit trail, to ensure that users are able to refer back to the superseded statistics and commentary.

¹⁸ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/elmr/economic-and-labour-market-review/no--3--march-2010/development-of-construction-statistics.pdf>

¹⁹ In relation to Principle 2, Practice 7 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.

- 3.8 No incidents of political pressures or abuses of trust were reported to or identified by the Assessment team.
- 3.9 The accuracy of the construction output estimates has been the source of some public debate and criticism²⁰. In particular, some commentators in the media and the construction industry have questioned why ONS's statistics do not reflect some other measures of construction activity and have raised concerns about the extent of revisions to ONS's outputs. ONS published additional briefing²¹ to address some of these concerns, explaining how its statistics compare with other sources and why some differences exist between them. ONS also held a session to publicise the briefing to the media. However, some users who responded to our consultation noted that ONS could have done more to ensure that there was wider representation from the specialist construction press at this briefing. We suggest that ONS invite more trade press to relevant media briefings.

²⁰ For example:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/newsbysector/constructionandproperty/8511810/We-still-dont-believe-it-says-construction-industry-as-ONS-revises-down-contraction-in-the-first-quarter.html> ; and <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/economics/8615499/Who-to-believe-in-construction-confusion.html>

²¹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/construction/output-in-the-construction-industry/june-and-q2-2011/questions-and-answers-regarding-the-ONS-construction-output-survey.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.

- 3.10 ONS publishes *Quality and Methodology Information*²² (*QMI*) for *New Orders* and *Output*, which include information about the methods used to produce these statistics and their quality. ONS has published some further information about methods, including detailed definitions for the different sectors, in the appendices of the annual compendium. It has also published articles²³ explaining specific aspects of the methods, for example when it has made changes. However, the published information is not comprehensive: for example, the *QMIs* do not include the questionnaire, do not explain how the data are checked, and only provide a high level summary of how the data are weighted and deflated. The information that does exist could be more accessible: the *Output* and *New Orders* releases do not explain methods or provide links to the relevant *QMI*. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should provide more information about the methods used to produce the construction statistics, and make this information accessible²⁴ (Requirement 2).
- 3.11 The *QMIs* include descriptions of the main sources of non-sampling error. In particular, the *QMI* accompanying *Output* explains that the definition of output is complex and it is possible that some businesses return other measures of activity (such as turnover or invoices) which better match their accounting processes. ONS told us that it will investigate this further when it reviews the construction output questionnaire in 2012. Given the impact this potential source of bias could have on the statistics, we suggest that ONS provide more information about the potential source of bias, the likely size of the bias (if known) and the work it is doing to investigate and address any issues.
- 3.12 In January 2012 ONS published estimates of sampling error in a set of 'basic quality indicators'²⁵, which accompany its output statistics. These are useful quality measures, but ONS should present more commentary to help users interpret them. ONS publishes regional statistics in *Output*, but told us that it has concerns about the quality of these statistics, which are estimated by apportioning new orders data to regions. ONS told us that it has discussed its quality concerns with some users, but that there is still a demand for the data. It told us it is not feasible to collect more robust data due to the burden this would place on survey respondents. This is discussed briefly in the *QMI*, and the tables of regional statistics advise users to exercise care when interpreting the statistics. There is room for more information to help users interpret these caveats. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should publish

²² <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/quality/quality-information/business-statistics/index.html>

²³ For example <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/elmr/economic-and-labour-market-review/no--3--march-2010/development-of-construction-statistics.pdf>

²⁴ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

²⁵ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/construction/output-in-the-construction-industry/november-2011/index.html>

more information to explain the quality measures and the quality of the regional construction output statistics, in relation to use²⁶ (Requirement 3). We also suggest that ONS investigate further whether it is possible to produce more reliable regional estimates of output using existing data.

- 3.13 Following the error in the August 2011 publication of *Output*, the Authority published a Statement²⁷ which questioned whether ONS had sufficient quality assurance arrangements in place. ONS subsequently commissioned an internal review of data quality assurance, which made recommendations for improved quality checks across all ONS releases. ONS told us that it is implementing all the recommendations in the review. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should improve quality assurance procedures, ensure that staff are suitably trained in quality management and publish information about the improved arrangements²⁸ (Requirement 4).
- 3.14 ONS told us it was an active member of a European construction output index task force²⁹, which has documented how Member States measure construction activity and identified best practice.

²⁶ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

²⁷ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/statement---authority-s-review---construction-statistics.pdf>

²⁸ In relation to Principle 4, Practices 4 and 5 of the *Code of Practice*

²⁹ http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/product_details/publication?p_product_code=KS-RA-11-018

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.

- 3.15 ONS has assured us that it takes all necessary steps to protect the confidentiality of the data it collects. This includes statistical disclosure controls to ensure that individual businesses are not identified in the published statistics.

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.

3.16 ONS has historically reported the business compliance cost of each of its surveys in its annual *Simplification Plan*³⁰. However, the most recent *Simplification Plan* relates to 2009 and a more recent publication (*ONS Compliance Plan 2010*³¹) only provided the total cost of compliance with its business surveys. ONS told us that the changes it introduced in 2010 led to a 20 per cent reduction in the cost to businesses of complying with the construction surveys, and that the estimated compliance cost for the surveys is £7.9m, but this information is not published. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should report annually the estimated costs of responding to its construction surveys³² (Requirement 5).

³⁰ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/all-releases.html?definition=tcm%3A77-29390>

³¹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/quality/survey-control/ons-compliance-plan-2009-2010.pdf>

³² In relation to Principle 6, Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

Principle 7: Resources

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

3.17 ONS told us that construction output survey costs approximately £840k each year, while the new orders survey costs approximately £280k each year. ONS told us that it is sufficiently resourced, both to produce the outputs and to undertake development work.

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

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

- 3.18 *Output* is based on a monthly survey. ONS publishes monthly statistics, but the content of the release varies each month on a quarterly cycle. It publishes a full statistical bulletin in each month when a new, full quarter's data becomes available (for example, in May, covering January to March). In the other months ONS publishes a short web-only summary of the statistics and a selection of tables: in the month preceding a full statistical bulletin, ONS publishes only the four tables that are updated on a monthly basis. In the month after a full statistical bulletin it publishes the complete set of tables, which includes all the tables in the full statistical bulletin and an additional two tables of quarterly statistics (analysis by type of work and region). ONS explains this publication schedule on its website and in the release. The summary releases published in the months between the full statistical bulletins do not contain sufficient links to supporting information about methods, revisions and other context. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should provide links in the summary *Output* releases to supporting information³³ (Requirement 6).
- 3.19 For each complete quarter's data, *Output* and *New Orders* present clear headline statistics, some commentary on each industry sector, and clear tables and charts. Some of the commentary could be improved, to draw out the key messages rather than simply describing rises and falls. There is insufficient contextual information, for example, on the uses of the statistics and coherence between the two releases and with other ONS and BIS sources of information. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should improve the commentary in *Output* and *New Orders* so that it aids user interpretation of the statistics³⁴ (Requirement 7). We suggest that in meeting this requirement ONS should consider the points detailed in annex 2.

³³ In relation to Principle 8, Practices 1, 2 and 4 of the *Code of Practice*

³⁴ 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.

3.20 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.

- 3.21 In the months when both *Output* and *New Orders* are released, ONS publishes *New Orders* on the first Friday of the month and *Output* a week later. While this reflects the production schedule for the two releases, users might benefit from ONS publishing the releases on the same day, in order to draw together the main messages from the statistics. We suggest that ONS investigate the feasibility of common release dates for *Output* and *New Orders* and whether this would better meet user needs.

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.

3.22 These statistics are based on survey data. ONS told us that before it introduced changes to the methods in 2010 it considered whether it would be possible to use administrative tax records from HM Revenue & Customs, in order to minimise burden on the industry. It presented these options to CCCIS, but it was agreed that the administrative data were not a suitable substitute for survey data.

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to ONS's construction 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 information about CCCIS on the ONS website, including its membership and links to the agendas and minutes of the meetings (para 3.1). |
| Suggestion 2 | Consider whether more can be done to engage with users, particularly those within the construction industry, and publish information about its arrangements for engaging users (para 3.4). |
| Suggestion 3 | Publish more detailed information about the extent of revisions in the releases. (para 3.6). |
| Suggestion 4 | Provide clear signposting from corrected bulletins to the original incorrect release, (which should be clearly marked as superseded) and publish a clear audit trail, to ensure that users are able to refer back to the superseded statistics and commentary (para 3.7). |
| Suggestion 5 | Invite more trade press to relevant media briefings (para 3.9). |
| Suggestion 6 | Provide more information about the potential source of bias (arising from businesses differing interpretations of 'output'), the likely size of the bias (if known) and the work it is doing to investigate and address any issues (para 3.11). |
| Suggestion 7 | Investigate further whether it is possible to produce more reliable regional estimates of output using existing data (para 3.12). |
| Suggestion 8 | Consider the points detailed in annex 2, in seeking to improve these statistical releases (para 3.19). |
| Suggestion 9 | Investigate the feasibility of common release dates for <i>Output</i> and <i>New Orders</i> and whether this would better meet user needs (para 3.21). |

Annex 2: Compliance with Standards for Statistical Releases

A2.1 In October 2010, the Statistics Authority issued a statement on *Standards for Statistical Releases*³⁵. 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 construction 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 the publications describe the coverage and the time period to which the statistics relate. The publications do not explicitly state which months are included in each quarter. The appropriate National Statistics headings and logos are included in the PDF versions of *Quarterly Output* and *New Orders*. The publications clearly identify ONS as the originating department.

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

A2.4 The releases provide a factual description of the changes, including increases and decreases. The language used is mostly straightforward, with some explanations of technical terms such as 'deflators' and 'seasonal adjustments', but there is no explanation of the terms 'value' and 'volume'. Simple examples could be provided to explain some of the less-familiar concepts being measured, including output, infrastructure and new orders.

A2.5 The releases do not include contextual information about the state of the wider economy and its impact on the construction industry. The extended time series in *Output* show some interesting trends that are not discussed in the release; for example, output in public new housing has doubled between 2005 and 2011, whereas there have been substantial falls in private new housing output over the same period. The publications do not provide analysis to aid interpretation of such trends.

Use language that is impartial, objective and professionally sound

A2.6 The text used in the releases is impartial and evidence based. The descriptions of proportions, changes and trends in the releases are appropriate.

Include information about the context and likely uses

A2.7 The releases include little information about the policy and operational context of the statistics, for example the ways in which the statistics are used as leading economic indicators. The releases do not comment on the relationship

³⁵ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-releases.html>

between estimates of new orders and estimates of output, and hence do not add as much analytical value as they might. However, there is some information about how the statistics are used in the *QMI*.

Include, or link to, appropriate metadata

A2.8 The releases include little information about the sources and the methods used to compile the statistics. They do include a section which describes changes to definitions and methods, but not always with numerical comparisons.

Annex 3: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A3.1 This assessment was conducted from September to November 2011.

A3.2 The Assessment team – Jacob Wilcock and David Duncan-Fraser – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of ONS in September 2011. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 23 September 2011. The Assessment team subsequently met ONS during November to review compliance with the *Code of Practice*, taking account of the written evidence provided and other relevant sources of evidence.

Summary of users contacted, and issues raised

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 10 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Trade Association / Commercial organisation	8
Government department	1
Consultant	1

A3.5 The majority of users who responded were content with the statistics. Many users mentioned the public criticisms of the statistics; a few felt that ONS should have consulted more widely with users to understand the concerns. One user pointed out a divergence between non-housing output and new orders that is not easy to reconcile. Accessibility was a concern for users; a few users have expressed their concerns with ONS's website and the number of inactive links following the launch of the new site. However, this does seem to be improving.

A3.6 Many of the users that responded considered that CPA should play a more active role in the ONS's user engagement process, and suggest ONS should have more direct dialogue with CPA to enable this. ONS attended the CPA Market Information Committee meeting in November 2011.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

