

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

QUALITY ASSURANCE OF ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

This Annex sets out a high-level statement on what the Statistics Authority expects of producers when quality-assuring administrative data for use in statistical publications. The Authority will update the statement and provide additional guidance following discussion with the National Statistician and the Government Statistical Service, and a range of other interested stakeholders.

Administrative data and the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

The Code of Practice for Official Statistics¹ (the Code) recognises that organisations will use quantitative information drawn from administrative systems for the management of government business, decision-making and the production of official statistics.

The Code sets out the principles and practices that producers must follow in relation to statistics drawn from administrative sources. Relevant aspects of the Code (emphasis added) include:

- Principle 4, Practice 2: Ensure that official statistics are produced to *a level of quality that meets users' needs*, and that users are informed about the quality of statistical outputs, including estimates of the main sources of bias and other errors, and other aspects of the European Statistical System definition of quality².
- Principle 4, Practice 3: Adopt *quality assurance procedures*, including the consideration of each statistical product against users' requirements, and of their coherence with other statistical products.
- Principle 4, Practice 4: Publish *quality* guidelines, and ensure that staff are suitably trained in *quality management*.

In addition, organisations must compile a Statement of Administrative Sources (SoAS) in accordance with Protocol 3 attached to the Code. These describe how administrative, management or similar information is used within organisations, and how they are used, or the potential for their use, in producing official statistics. Protocol 3 also requires organisations to publish information on the arrangements for audit of the quality of administrative data.

In summary the Authority expects producers to demonstrate to users how they have satisfied themselves that there is adequate assurance of the quality of underlying administrative data, and that quality assurance procedures have been conducted satisfactorily throughout the process of collecting or collating administrative data to producing a statistical output.

Further guidance is set out in 'National Statistician's Guidance: Use of Administrative or Management Information'³ which was first published in August 2009, and updated in February 2011.

¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

² The six dimensions of the ESS Quality Framework are: relevance, accuracy, timeliness and punctuality, accessibility and clarity, comparability, and coherence.

³ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/national-statistician/ns-reports--reviews-and-guidance/national-statistician-s-guidance/index.html>

The term 'administrative data' refers to 'quantitative information derived from administrative, operational, managerial, financial, scientific, and research sources'.

Quality assurance and audit of underlying data

Any administrative data that form the basis of official statistics must be subject to an appropriate level of quality assurance and audit.

Administrative data may be quality assured (by internal management processes) and audited (for example, by an independent, external reviewer or regulator) a number of times as they progress from data to statistics. This may be carried out for different underlying purposes and with different levels of thoroughness, throughout the process. Quality assurance may involve a range of types of checking procedures (record sampling, spot checks, external audit, checking missing or inaccurate data, outlier analysis).

As a result of this potentially complex overlap of different layers of assurance, the roles and responsibilities of the organisations involved need to be fully understood. Moreover, the role of those with regulatory responsibilities needs to be specified at any relevant stage. The 'sign-off' procedure will ultimately be the responsibility of the staff responsible for producing the official statistics. They should have a close working relationship with all parties involved in the process. In this way, the producer of the resulting statistics can ensure that all concerned share the same expectations, and that there are no gaps in the assurance.

Mapping the process

The quality of official statistics derived from administrative systems will be enhanced by a clear description, and thus understanding, of the process through which both the original data are collected, and the resultant statistics are produced. An essential requirement is therefore to develop a detailed and easily accessible 'process map' which describes the complete chain of production – starting with the original collection process and ending with the delivery of the final statistical product.

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