

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on International Development

*(produced by the Department for International
Development)*

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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

Statistics on International Development

(produced by the Department for International Development)

NATIONAL STATISTICS STATUS

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.



All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is a producer's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics, and to improve its statistics on a continuous basis. If a producer becomes concerned about whether its statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, it should discuss its concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

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1 Summary of findings

Introduction

- 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 gives the Statistics Authority power to re-assess whether the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*³ continues to be complied with in relation to official statistics already designated as National Statistics. The report covers the set of statistics produced by the Department for International Development (DFID) and reported in:
- *Provisional UK Official Development Assistance as a proportion of Gross National Income (ODA-GNI)*⁴
 - *Statistics on International Development (SID)*⁵
- 1.2 The previous assessment of these sets of statistics was reported in Assessment report 9⁶. The statistics are being re-assessed because of the importance of the topic and the length of time that has passed since the last assessment.
- 1.3 This report was prepared by the Authority's Assessment team, and approved by the Regulation Committee on behalf of the Board of the Statistics Authority, based on the advice of the Director General for Regulation.

Decision concerning designation as National Statistics

- 1.4 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 paragraph 1.1 are designated as National Statistics, subject to DFID implementing the Requirements listed in paragraph 1.11 and reporting them to the Authority by January 2016.
- 1.5 DFID has informed the Assessment team that it has started to implement the Requirements listed in paragraph 1.11. The Statistics Authority welcomes this.

Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.6 DFID conducts regular consultations about users' experiences of international development statistics, including about the presentation of the statistics and the methods used to produce them. It engages with specialist users through working groups of the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) and Organisation for

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 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/provisional-uk-oda-as-a-proportion-of-gni-2014>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistics-on-international-development-2014>

⁶ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/assessment-reports/assessment-report-9---statistics-on-international-development-and-the-oda-gni-ratio--27-july-2009.pdf>

Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Development Assistance Committee⁷ (DAC). Most users told us that they were broadly content with the range of statistics produced and found them useful and well presented.

- 1.7 DFID provides some supporting information about the statistics in *SID* and *ODA-GNI*, including definitions of the main terms and an outline of the data sources. However, this information does not give sufficient explanation of the strengths and limitations of the statistics, or of the arrangements for the quality assurance of the administrative data.
- 1.8 DFID provided an explanation about the effect of a method change on the international development target statistics; however, it was not sufficiently clear to aid users' understanding of whether the target had been met. The official statistics outputs provide little narrative about the nature of the UK's international development assistance, particularly regarding multilateral contributions.
- 1.9 DFID publishes statistics in its Annual Report and a factsheet about the Syrian crisis; however, DFID does not regard these as official statistics. *Factsheet: The UK's Humanitarian Aid Response to the Syria Crisis*⁸, in particular, may be perceived by users to be an official statistical release, given its presentation of statistics and the level of public interest represented by the topic. It also does not signpost users to relevant official statistical sources.

Detailed recommendations

- 1.10 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that DFID should improve the production and presentation of the international development statistics. Those which are essential for DFID to address in order to strengthen its compliance with the *Code* and to enable designation as National Statistics are listed – as Requirements – in paragraph 1.11, alongside a short summary of the key findings that led to each Requirement being made. Other recommended changes, which the Assessment team considers would improve the statistics and the service provided to users but which are not formally required for their designation as National Statistics, are listed – as Suggestions – in paragraph 1.12.

Requirements for designation as National Statistics

- 1.11 This section includes those improvements that DFID is required to make in respect of its statistics on international development in order to fully comply with the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics* and to enable designation as National Statistics.

⁷ <http://www.oecd.org/dac>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/factsheet-the-uks-humanitarian-aid-response-to-the-syria-crisis>

Finding	Requirement	
The release arrangements and National Statistics status for <i>Statistics on UK Gross Publication Expenditure on International Development</i> are unclear. DFID should:	1	Review the release arrangements of the outputs containing official statistics to ensure coherent and straightforward access to DFID's international development assistance statistics (para 3.9).
DFID publishes provisional ODA statistics in <i>ODA-GNI</i> , followed by final statistics in <i>SID</i> , but has not published its revisions policy. DFID should:	2	Publish a revisions policy for international development statistics (para 3.11).
DFID undertakes a variety of quality assurance procedures on its data but provides insufficient explanations of these and related data quality issues. DFID should:	3	<p>a) Provide straightforward explanations of the quality assurance arrangements</p> <p>b) Make clear how the statistics are produced to a level of quality that meets users' needs; include a description of their strengths and limitations, and cover all aspects of quality referred to in the European Statistical System framework</p> <p>c) Clearly signpost users to associated supporting documentation, such as <i>Gift Aid Methodology Note</i>, explaining its relevance (para 3.18).</p> <p>As part of meeting this requirement, DFID should consider the Authority's Report <i>Quality Assurance and Audit Arrangements for Administrative Data</i>.</p>
DFID has not published a Statement of Administrative Sources. DFID should:	4	Publish a Statement of Administrative Sources and ensure that this includes the information required by the <i>Code</i> (para 3.19).
DFID has improved the presentation of	5	a) Improve the commentary in its releases so that it aids user interpretation of the statistics,

<p>its statistics but further narrative would aid users' interpretation of the statistics. DFID should:</p>		<p>by providing fuller contextual information about the nature of the development aid</p> <p>b) Present longer time series of the international development statistics, or make clear why this is not possible</p> <p>c) Inform users about the feasibility of providing more detailed statistics and the timescale for their release (para 3.21).</p> <p>As part of meeting this Requirement, DFID should consider the points detailed in Annex 1 and Annex 2 and address the recommendations in ICAI's February 2015 and June 2015 reviews noted in paragraph 3.21.</p>
<p>DFID publishes the supplementary <i>Statistics on UK Gross Public Expenditure on International Development (GPEX)</i> tables in Excel format only. DFID should:</p>	<p>6</p>	<p>Publish the <i>GPEX</i> tables in a format that equates to at least a three-star level under the Five Star Scheme (para 3.22).</p>

Suggestions for extracting maximum value from the statistics

1.12 This section includes some suggestions for improvement to DFID's statistics on international development, 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.

We suggest that DFID:

<p>1</p>	<p>Inform users about the constraints on publication timescales (para 3.2).</p>
<p>2</p>	<p>Establish an international development statistics community on StatsUserNet (para 3.3).</p>
<p>3</p>	<p>Publish a report on its development activities and regularly update users on progress (para 3.4).</p>
<p>4</p>	<p>Consider voluntarily complying with the <i>Code of Practice</i> in the preparation of <i>Annual Report</i> and <i>Factsheet</i> (and other similar future publications), making this clear to users (para 3.6).</p>

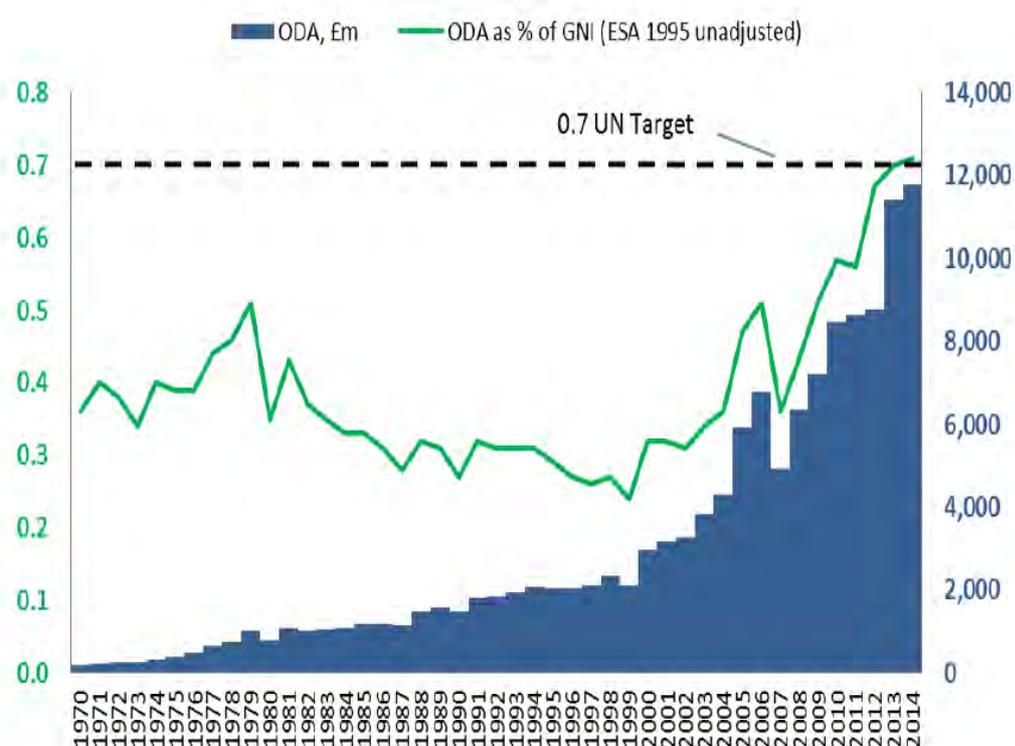
5	Provide clear signposting in <i>Factsheet</i> to the underlying statistics sources, particularly where they are National Statistics (3.8).
6	Publish its ad hoc analyses and consider such requests in its future statistical planning (para 3.10).
7	Ensure that its Head of Profession for Statistics is fully involved in the further development of the DFID Results Framework in response to ICAI's recommendation 1 in its Report <i>DFID's Approach to Delivering Impact</i> (para 3.20).
8	Consider re-naming <i>Provisional UK Official Development Assistance as a proportion of Gross National Income</i> and <i>Statistics on UK Gross Public Expenditure on International Development</i> , to use straightforward titles (para 3.23).

2 Subject of the assessment

Introduction

2.1 Department for International Development (DFID) is responsible for providing development assistance to developing countries⁹ and international organisations on behalf of the UK Government. International aid and the UK's response to overseas humanitarian crises attract much public, parliamentary, and media interest. The UK spent £11,775 million on ODA in 2014¹⁰, with spend monitored against the UK Government's commitment to spend 0.7 per cent of its national income on international development. This aspect of DFID's reporting is of particular interest to key users and the focus of public debate. These statistics are relevant to a range of decision makers and users, reflecting use in holding the government to account, as well as in informing activities in the international voluntary and financial sectors.

Figure 1: UK ODA levels since 1970, £ millions



Source: DFID, *ODA-GNI 2014*

2.2 Official Development Assistance (ODA) is the international classification of aid, and is measured in accordance with international standards agreed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). DFID provides information to OECD about the UK's ODA funding, comprising its own spend, as well as the spending by other government departments and

⁹ The criteria applied are based on per capita GDP, manufacturing base and literacy, and determined by OECD's Development Aid Committee

¹⁰ This is a provisional expenditure figure taken from *Provisional UK Official Development Assistance as a proportion of Gross National Income, 2014*

agencies. OECD uses the ratio of ODA to gross national income¹¹ (GNI) as its measure of the level of international aid provided by countries.

Subject of this Assessment

- 2.3 DFID publishes statistics on UK's international development assistance in:
- *Provisional UK Official Development Assistance as a proportion of Gross National Income (ODA-GNI)* – an annual release of the provisional figures in March/April
 - *Statistics on International Development (SID)* – an annual overview of official UK spend on international development, usually published in October each year
- 2.4 *Statistics on UK Gross Public Expenditure on International Development (GPEX)* is a set of international development statistical tables that presents the full range of DFID spend: the GPEX measure counts all official flows of development spending, including aid to countries and organisations that are not eligible to be classified under ODA according to the OCED classification. DFID told us that it regards *GPEX* as part of the *SID* international development statistics and so are within the scope of this assessment of *SID*. The table provides a summary of the main differences between ODA, as reported in *SID*, and *GPEX* delivered by the DFID programme. While *GPEX* includes a greater range of DFID expenditure, the recent rise in spending in 2014 has a greater influence on the ODA figure due to the time period covered.

Table 1: Characteristics of ODA and GPEX financial measures

ODA	GPEX
The international measure of aid spend, produced according to standardised definitions and methodologies to enable international comparisons	A broader measure that captures ODA and other official flows of development spend including aid to countries and organisations that are not ODA-eligible.
Net figure, taking into account any loans repaid or grants recovered	Gross flows
Aid to recipients (countries and organisations) on the DAC list	Development assistance to all countries
Calendar year	Financial year
Total DFID ODA in 2014: £10,108m ¹²	DFID Programme total including operating costs in 2013/14: £10,058m ¹³

- 2.5 DFID also reports on the impact of spend or 'results reporting'. The Authority's remit is to assess the compliance of *ODA-GNI* and *SID* against the *Code of Practice*. Scrutiny on value for money and impact of DFID's spend, is carried out by the National Audit Office (NAO), the Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) and the House of Commons International Development Committee (IDC) and is beyond the scope of this assessment.

¹¹ GNI is an important statistic within the National Accounts; it is used in the calculation of a Member State's contribution to the EU budget: http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/dcp171766_404184.pdf

¹² Source: Provisional estimate for 2014 *ODA-GNI 2014*

¹³ Source: *GPEX 2013-14*

- 2.6 *ODA-GNI* provides timely summary statistics on the ODA contributions by the UK. These statistics are published prior to the release of provisional ODA statistics for all OECD members by OECD's DAC. The ODA:GNI ratio is provisional at this stage, since the ODA figure is estimated and DFID uses the most current GNI estimate to produce the ratio. The provisional ratio is based on the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) GNI¹⁴ estimate published in March, while the final ratio in *SID* is based on the September GNI estimate. DFID does not revise the back series (to take into account the revisions to estimates of GNI) in order to maintain comparability with other countries' international development statistics.
- 2.7 DFID has published *SID* annually since 1999. It replaced *British Aid Statistics*, an annual publication dating from the 1960s. *SID* is based on final ODA activity level outturn data. It gives a detailed breakdown of UK official aid flows from the main donor (DFID) and other government departments and agencies. It also provides a summary of the provisional ODA statistics published by DAC. The statistics are presented for the two main channels of delivery of ODA:
- Bilateral: usually aid to a specific country, region or programme
 - Multilateral: where UK funding is pooled with other donors' funding and provided to multilateral organisations such as the World Bank¹⁵ where it is used to fund the multilateral agencies' own programmes
- 2.8 The (provisional) total UK ODA in 2014¹⁶ was £11,775 million, of which around 57 per cent was bilateral funding and 43 per cent multilateral contributions. Between 2013 and 2014, the ODA contribution to multilateral organisations increased by £314 million (6.7 per cent), compared with an increase in bilateral funding of £31 million (0.5 per cent). The UK provides ODA bilateral funding to around 140 countries, with the primary purpose being the promotion of their economic development and welfare. DFID provides most of its bilateral ODA to priority countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia (61 per cent, £2,472 million). The UK Government is committed to spending 0.7 per cent of its national income on international development. This ODA:GNI target was first discussed internationally in 1970 by the United Nations General Assembly. In May 2005, EU member states pledged to meet the 0.7 per cent target by 2015, with a collective EU target milestone of 0.56 per cent by 2010. In 2004, the UK Government set an earlier target date, to increase total UK ODA to 0.7 per cent of GNI by 2013. The UK ODA spend in 2014 was slightly below the target when based on the European System of Accounts 2010, at 0.67 per cent¹⁷. On 9 March 2015, the *International Development (Official Development Assistance Target) Bill* received Royal Assent¹⁸. The main implications of the Bill are:
- It places a duty on the Secretary of State to ensure that the 0.7 per cent target is met by the UK in 2015 and each subsequent calendar year

¹⁴ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/naa2/quarterly-national-accounts/index.html>

¹⁵ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/about>

¹⁶ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/420707/Statistical-Release-Provisional-GNI-2014.pdf

¹⁷ UK ODA in 2013 and 2014 met the target when based on ESA 1995 at 0.70 and 0.71 per cent, respectively. ONS published its first GNI estimates using ESA 2010 methodology in September 2014

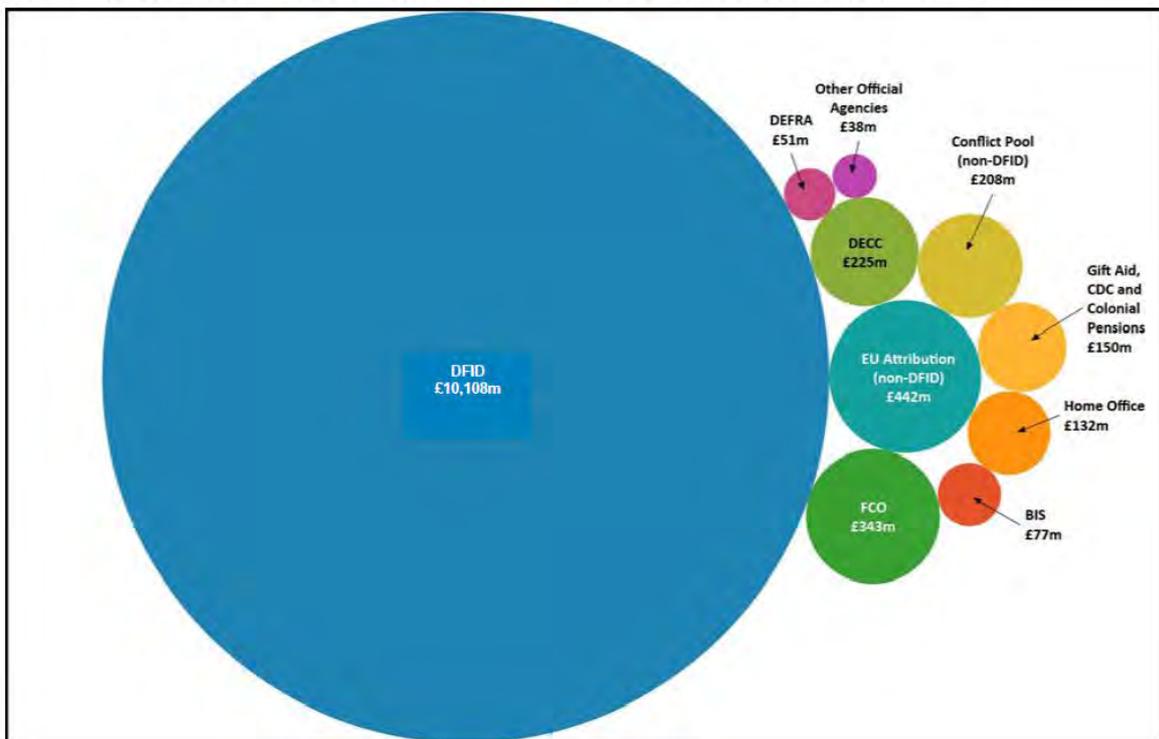
¹⁸ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2015/12/enacted>

- Accountability over meeting the target is to Parliament, rather than the courts
- The Secretary of State must make arrangements for the independent evaluation of the extent to which UK ODA represents value for money. The Secretary of State must include in each annual report a statement as to how he or she has complied with this duty

Official Development Assistance

2.9 ODA estimates are produced primarily from the DFID financial and administrative system, ARIES¹⁹ (DFID ODA), in which data are input by aid programme and project managers. DFID ODA accounted for an estimated 86 per cent of total UK ODA in 2014²⁰. DFID combines non-DFID ODA data, submitted by other UK official agencies, with data captured through ARIES. These other UK official agencies comprise of ten ministerial departments, the Scottish Government, and the Welsh Government (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2: UK ODA in 2014 by Official Agency and Other Sources



Source: DFID, *ODA-GNI 2014*

2.10 Another source of UK ODA is CDC Capital Partners PLC²¹, a wholly government-owned company that invests in businesses in Africa and South Asia to support economic development and job creation. The net amount of CDC investments (that is equity purchase less equity sales) in ODA-eligible

¹⁹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/214282/ARIES-Strategy-2012-2015.pdf

²⁰ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/420707/Statistical-Release-Provisional-GNI-2014.pdf

²¹ <http://www.cdcgroup.com/>

countries is reported as ODA in *SID* and the gross amount is reported in *GPEX*.

- 2.11 A further source of ODA is the Gift Aid scheme which allows UK charities to reclaim tax from HM Revenue and Customs on donations made by UK tax payers (accounting for less than 1 per cent of UK ODA). HMRC provides DFID with an estimate of the total amount of Gift Aid paid to charities active in development in the latest year. To estimate how much of this Gift Aid is ODA-eligible, DFID sends a questionnaire to a sample of charities active in international development every three years. The survey asks the charities to identify the proportion of their annual budget spent on ODA-eligible activities. DFID then applies the weighted average percentage of ODA-eligible spend from its survey responses to the total amount of Gift Aid provided by HMRC, to give the official estimate of ODA-eligible Gift Aid for the UK overall²².

Use and users

- 2.12 *SID* is of greatest relevance to users interested in international comparisons of development assistance, while *GPEX* is of particular interest to users concerned with wider aid spending and in the performance of DFID, such as the National Audit Office. The main uses and users of the international development statistics are:

- officials within DFID in managing development projects and researching expenditure by country and sector; ODA allocation and spending including non-DFID ODA; and research into specific topics such as funding prospects; bilateral shares of multilateral aid; and, women and education;
- UK Parliament, through the House of Commons International Development Committee overseeing the activities of DFID;
- the regulator – Independent Commission for Aid Impact (ICAI) – responsible for scrutinising UK aid;
- The National Audit Office uses the statistics within its evaluations of DFID's activities and value for money and reporting to the International Development Committee
- non-government organisations, such as the UK Aid Network²³, Oxfam²⁴, and the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR)²⁵ for providing development assistance programmes
- international organisations, such as the World Bank²⁶ and OECD²⁷
- academic researchers, consultants and think tanks investigating different aspects of international development assistance, such as Development Initiatives²⁸

²² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/248648/gift-aid-methodology-note.pdf

²³ <http://www.ukan.org.uk/beyond-the-numbers-on-aid/>

²⁴ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmintdev/334/334vw03.htm>

²⁵ <http://www.ippr.org/publications/understanding-public-attitudes-to-aid-and-development>

²⁶ <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/DT.ODA.ALLD.CD>

²⁷ <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/>

²⁸ <http://devinit.org/#/>

Related context

- 2.13 ICAI examines the effectiveness and value for money of UK aid spending, which is primarily delivered through DFID. One of ICAI's recent reports focused on the increased spending on multilateral funding²⁹. It has examined ODA spent by other government departments and official agencies, including DFID's role in compiling the official ODA statistics³⁰. ICAI also reviewed DFID's effectiveness in delivering lasting transformation, based on its 44 reports published over the past four years and additional research³¹.
- 2.14 DFID is working towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)³² by the target date of 2015³³. The UN General Assembly has recently agreed on a new set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals³⁴ (SDGs) and 169 associated targets to replace the MDGs. The SDGs are universal goals and represent an agenda for global action for the next fifteen years. They do not focus specifically on developing countries. Goal 1 is to end poverty in all its forms everywhere. All member states are encouraged to develop ambitious national responses to the SDGs and targets. The goals and targets will be followed up and reviewed using a set of global indicators. These will be complemented by indicators at the regional and national levels which will be developed by member states. The global indicator framework, to be developed by the Inter Agency and Expert Group (IAEG) on SDG Indicators, are due to be agreed by the 47th session of the UN Statistical Commission in 2016. ONS represents the UK on the IAEG. DFID's progress reporting against MDGs is included in its *Annual Report* and employs certain results based indicators, such as 'Gender Parity Index in primary level enrolment'. The statistics assessed in this Assessment report include spend on the development activities to achieve these goals.

Accessibility and costs

- 2.15 DFID publishes *ODA-GNI* and *SID* in PDF format, with supplementary tables published in Excel and CSV formats, and datasets published in CSV format. This equates to a level of three stars under the Five Star Scheme that forms part of the Open Standards Principles proposed in the *Open Data White Paper: Unleashing the Potential*³⁵ and adopted as UK government policy in November 2012³⁶. The *GPEX* tables are available in Excel format which equates with a level of two stars. Five stars represents the highest star rating within the Scheme.
- 2.16 DFID told us that the estimated annual cost of producing the international development statistics is around £60,000, based on 0.1 of a full time equivalent (FTE) of a Senior Statistician's time, 0.5 FTE of a Statistics Adviser, and 0.7 FTE of an Assistant Statistician.

²⁹ <http://icai.independent.gov.uk/reports/how-dfid-works-with-multilateral-agencies-to-achieve-impact/>

³⁰ <http://icai.independent.gov.uk/reports/a-preliminary-investigation-of-official-development-assistance-spent-by-departments-other-than-dfid/>

³¹ <http://icai.independent.gov.uk/reports/dfids-approach-to-delivering-impact/>

³² <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

³³ Paragraph 2.14 of this report was amended in November 2016 to correct a factual inaccuracy regarding when and where the MDGs were agreed.

³⁴ <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1565>

³⁵ http://data.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Open_data_White_Paper.pdf

³⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-standards-principles/open-standards-principles>

3 Assessment findings

Meeting user needs and user engagement

- 3.1 The DFID statistics team has engaged well with users through a variety of fora. It worked with the Royal Statistical Society (RSS) to establish the International Development Working Group³⁷ (IDWG) in 2013, to support statisticians and statistics in poorer countries. DFID held an RSS seminar in June 2014³⁸ on its aid statistics, with the specialist users of IDWG discussing their experiences of using the statistics. It engages with international users through the OECD DAC working party on international development assistance statistics and with development financial organisations such as CDC (which is wholly owned by the UK Government to support economic development in Africa and South Asia by investing in businesses). It also engages directly with specialist users such as data journalists (for example at Reuters Thomson) and non-government organisations (such as the Green Investment Bank).
- 3.2 DFID regularly undertakes user consultations, as well as seeking specific user views on issues such as the proposed change to the measurement of equity investments³⁹. It published the results of its user consultations held in 2012⁴⁰ and 2014⁴¹. Users told us of their interest in having a more rapid release of international development statistics (see Annex 2). DFID uses the latest available GNI estimates published by ONS, to produce its provisional and annual ODA figures. It has not asked users for feedback on the timing of outputs since its production timescales are tight, driven by the availability of the GNI estimates from ONS. We suggest that DFID inform users about the constraints on publication timescales.
- 3.3 The Statistics User Forum (SUF) was set up by the Royal Statistical Society, to support users of official statistics in communicating their needs to the government statistical service. The website, StatsUserNet, was set up to facilitate online communication between members of SUF and to stimulate engagement both between users of official statistics, and between users and producers of official statistics. The website provides a mechanism for the RSS and SUF to keep in touch with current statistical issues and with a range of users of official statistics. DFID told the Assessment team that it uses the StatsUserNet website to contact users and publicise consultations. There is no specific international development statistics community on StatsUserNet; establishing one would support direct engagement with interested users. We suggest that DFID establish an international development statistics community on StatsUserNet.

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http://www.rss.org.uk/RSS/Influencing_Change/International_development/RSS/Influencing_Change/International_Development.aspx?hkey=a8577f9f-2551-43eb-8cf4-0b39ecfb99ad

³⁸ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/337219/Note-IDWG-event-aid-statistics.pdf

³⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/department-for-international-development-statistical-consultation>

⁴⁰ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/185799/SID-consultation-findings.pdf

⁴¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistics-on-international-development-user-consultation-findings-2014>

- 3.4 DFID completed a quality review⁴² in 2013 highlighting aspects of the data collection and processing systems and methods that required improvement. It published a summary of the findings and outlined a programme of work. DFID has not updated users on actions undertaken in response to the review or published further development plans for 2015/16. DFID stated in *SID 2014* (footnote 3 to Table 3) that it is considering ways to attribute multilateral spend across official agencies, to improve reporting prior to *SID 2015*; it has not published its development plan more fully. We suggest that DFID publish a report on its development activities and regularly update users on progress.

The orderly release of statistics

Requirements from previous Assessment report 9 (July 2009):

- Publish a revisions policy for international development statistics

- 3.5 DFID told the Assessment team that it aims to release all publications at 9.30am. It submitted a breach⁴³ report to the National Statistician, however, for its last release of *SID 2014* in October 2014. The report was published 36 minutes late due to an IT issue. DFID undertook a review and has established a series of precautions to prevent future delays, including:
- ensuring that its web team understands why the 9:30 deadline is important
 - queuing the statistical reports the night before they are due to be published
 - ensuring that the associated email alert, to notify key users of the publication on the website, is not sent before the statistics are released
- 3.6 While DFID does not publish ministerial statements alongside its official statistics publications, it releases two other publications that cite official statistics: *DFID Annual Report and Accounts*⁴⁴ (*Annual Report*) and *Factsheet: The UK's humanitarian aid response to the Syria crisis*⁴⁵ (*Factsheet*). *Factsheet* is listed under 'Our Statistics' on DFID's website and provides a topical update on DFID's activities in relation to the Syrian crisis. *Annual Report*⁴⁶ meets DFID's obligation to report on its activities and progress toward the Millennium Development Goals under the *International Development (Reporting and Transparency) Act 2006*⁴⁷. It includes information on DFID's results, spending, performance, and efficiency. *Factsheet*, last published in September 2015, reports on international assistance results and provides context through 'Key Facts'. DFID does not regard these reports as official statistical releases. The

⁴² See Method and Quality section: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-international-development/about/statistics>

⁴³ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/breach-reports/index.html>

⁴⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfid-annual-report-and-accounts-2014-15-results>

⁴⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/factsheet-the-uks-humanitarian-aid-response-to-the-syria-crisis>

⁴⁶ Figures in *SID* are not directly comparable to values included in *Annual Report* which records expenditure as it is incurred, not when it is paid out. *Annual Report* includes non-cash charges such as depreciation and capital charges. *SID* is produced on a cash basis in line with international reporting practices

⁴⁷ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/31/contents>

Head of Profession for Statistics told us that while *Factsheet* and *Annual Report* are largely prepared by policy officials, the DFID statistics team provides data, quality assurance and comments on the drafts of the outputs. The statistics team produces a part of *Annual Report's* Annex B 'Annual reporting of statistical information'. These publications may be perceived to be official statistical releases by users, given their presentation of statistics and the level of public interest represented by the topics. We suggest that DFID consider voluntarily complying with the *Code of Practice* in the preparation of *Annual Report* and *Factsheet* (and other similar future publications), making this clear to users.

- 3.7 One user raised strong concerns with both DFID and the Authority about the nature and interpretation of the results presented in *Annual Report 2012-13*, referring specifically to a claim that DFID had 'enabled 30.3 million people, including at least 14.6 million women, to work their way out of poverty by providing access to financial services'⁴⁸. The user challenged the interpretation that providing aid for financial services to the governments of these developing countries directly led to individuals moving out of poverty. DFID provided similar figures for *Annual Report 2013-14* and *Annual Report 2014-15*, but modified its description, claiming instead that it: 'provided 54.4 million people, including 26.9 million women, with access to financial services to help them work their way out of poverty'.
- 3.8 *Factsheet* addresses a high profile topic and draws on official statistics; it is likely to be of significant interest to users. It presents a table of key results of DFID's support to Syrian refugees, by type of activity, such as providing water rations and the number of medical consultations. It presents an overall total of assistance to date – since 2012. DFID refreshes this publication on a regular basis; however, it removes the previously published report, so that only the most recent edition is available. DFID explains some of the nuances of the data through footnotes to aid user understanding, such as '53% of Syria aid has been allocated to activities delivered cross-border'. It also explains some reporting issues such as where people may have benefited from more than one activity. The external sources of statistics used within the 'Key Facts' are highlighted but it does not clearly signpost users to its official statistics sources. We suggest that DFID provide clear signposting in *Factsheet* to the underlying statistics sources, particularly where they are National Statistics.
- 3.9 DFID regards the GPEX tables as being part of the *SID* statistical release; however, it has not always published the sets of statistics simultaneously or on the same web page. In 2013, DFID published the GPEX tables a month later than the ODA figures in *SID*, in a separate release, to avoid confusion between the two statistical series (with *SID* covering only the ODA-part of DFID spend and *GPEX* covering DFID's full programme). This change was undertaken in response to user feedback. In 2014, DFID provided GPEX figures in additional tables on the *SID 2014* web page shortly after the main release was published; a link to the tables and guidance on GPEX was provided in *SID*. GPEX tables and supporting documentation can also be found on a separate page of gov.uk website, categorised as Transparency data⁴⁹. The GPEX Overview note⁵⁰

⁴⁸ DFID Annual Report and Accounts 2012-13, page 4:

⁴⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statistics-on-international-development-2013-to-2014-gpex-tables>

describes the changes in reporting of GPEX from its original inclusion within *SID* but does not make clear their National Statistics status. The two sources for GPEX data may cause confusion for users and the publication strategy for the GPEX tables is not clear. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DFID should review its release arrangements of its official statistics to ensure coherent and straightforward access to the international development assistance statistics⁵¹ (Requirement 1).

- 3.10 Users providing comments to the Assessment team about their use of the international development statistics (see Annex 2) reported requesting additional analyses to be produced by DFID statisticians. The users found these analyses helpful and recommended that they be published. We suggest that DFID publish its ad hoc analyses and consider such requests in its future statistical planning.
- 3.11 In response to Assessment report 9, DFID published a revisions policy on its website. However, this policy was not transferred to DFID's new web pages when hosted on gov.uk. DFID posted an erratum message in *SID 2014*, and corrected the statistics for the core contribution to the UN development programme. It detailed the date of correction, the affected tables, and the nature and scale of the error. DFID's statistics are subject to scheduled revisions as it publishes a provisional ODA:GNI ratio in *ODA-GNI*, followed by the final figure in *SID*. Both *SID* and *ODA-GNI* provide a brief explanation of DFID's revisions policy for the international development statistics, highlighting the reason and scale for revisions. While *SID* includes a reference to DFID's revision policy in its supporting information section, the policy itself is not available publicly. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DFID should publish a revisions policy for international development statistics⁵² (Requirement 2).

Sound methods and assured quality

Requirements from previous Assessment report 9 (July 2009):

- Publish a Statement of Administrative Sources and ensure that this includes the information required by the *Code*

- 3.12 In February 2015 the Statistics Authority published a regulatory standard⁵³ that confirms the quality assurance (QA) arrangements that are required for statistics compiled using administrative data to comply with the *Code of Practice*. The *Administrative Data Quality Assurance Toolkit*⁵⁴ is the mechanism that the Authority is using to determine compliance in relation to four areas of practice:

⁵⁰ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/390322/GPEX-Overview-Note-2013-14.pdf

⁵¹ In relation to Principle 2, Practice 1 and Protocol 2, Practice 9 of the *Code of Practice*

⁵² In relation to Principle 2, Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*

⁵³ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/administrative-data-and-official-statistics/index.html>

⁵⁴ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/administrative-data-and-official-statistics/quality-assurance-toolkit.pdf>

- operational context and administrative data collection
 - communication with data supply partners
 - QA principles, standards and checks by data suppliers
 - producers' QA investigations and documentation
- 3.13 The QA Toolkit sets out that the judgment by statistical producers about the suitability of the administrative data for use in producing official statistics should be pragmatic and proportionate. It should be made in the light of an evaluation of the likelihood of quality issues arising in the data that may affect the quality of the statistics. It should also reflect the nature of the public interest served by the statistics. Statistical producers should determine the types of assurance and documentation required to inform users about the quality assurance arrangements for administrative data.
- 3.14 DFID checks each departmental ODA return using a series of internal logic checks that identify inconsistencies in the data. It discusses discrepancies with the data suppliers, and checks eligibility of ODA expenditure on a sample basis, according to the amount of expenditure and level of risk. ICAI conducted a review⁵⁵ of non-DFID ODA and DFID's role in compiling the statistics. It said that it was satisfied that DFID took an appropriate and proportionate approach to the checking of the departments' ODA data returns. ICAI mentioned that DFID may wish to ask the Ministry of Defence (MOD) to submit details of the calculations used to estimate its spending, together with supporting documentation, to enable DFID to verify the accuracy of the submitted expenditure data. DFID told us that it has made this request to MOD for the next submission of data.
- 3.15 DFID describes in *SID* and *ODA-GNI* (although more briefly) the data quality assurance procedures it has in place. However, it provides an insufficient explanation about:
- its assurance approach
 - the steps taken by data providers
 - the role of regulators such as ICAI or of international bodies such as OECD
 - the potential sources of bias
 - the strengths and limitations of the data in relation to use
- 3.16 DFID provides some supporting explanatory information in the annexes to *SID* and *ODA-GNI*. These present definitions of key terms and outline its approach for imputing missing values and estimating for spend by multilateral organisations. However, no indication is given of the scale or impact on the accuracy of the UK ODA statistics of the estimation so users have no idea about the proportion of the statistics that are estimated. DFID does not fully describe the quality of the statistics, for example in relation to the five dimensions of quality in the European Statistical System quality framework⁵⁶.

⁵⁵ See paragraphs 2.63 - 2.71: <http://icai.independent.gov.uk/reports/a-preliminary-investigation-of-official-development-assistance-spent-by-departments-other-than-dfid/>

⁵⁶ ESS Quality Framework five quality criteria: relevance; accuracy and reliability; timeliness and punctuality; coherence and comparability, accessibility and clarity: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/quality/quality-reporting>

3.17 DFID highlighted the risk of data input error as a result of the use of administrative data sources but does not provide any further information about any other associated risks. It does not draw attention to the data quality issues associated with the Gift Aid statistics, presented in brief in *Gift Aid Methodology Note*⁵⁷ published online.

3.18 As part of the designation as National Statistics, DFID should:

- a) provide straightforward explanations of the quality assurance arrangements
 - b) make clear how the statistics are produced to a level of quality that meets users' needs, include a description of their strengths and limitations, and cover all aspects of quality referred to in the European Statistical System framework
 - c) clearly signpost users to associated supporting documentation, such as *Gift Aid Methodology Note*, explaining its relevance⁵⁸
- (Requirement 3).

As part of meeting this requirement, DFID should consider the Authority's Report *Quality Assurance and Audit Arrangements for Administrative Data*⁵⁹.

3.19 In response to Assessment report 9, DFID published a Statement of Administrative Sources (SoAS) on its website; however, this was not transferred when the website was replaced by the web pages hosted on gov.uk. DFID does list data sources and provide general information in Annex 3 to *SID* on the relevant government departments and agencies supplying data. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DFID should publish a Statement of Administrative Sources and ensure that this includes the information required by the *Code*⁶⁰ (Requirement 4).

3.20 In reviewing the long term impact of DFID's activities, ICAI highlighted⁶¹ that the DFID Results Framework focuses on what can be counted: 'It conveys the scale of activity rather than the quality of interventions and their impact on people's lives.' Consequently, ICAI recommended that DFID should:

'...develop a Results Framework that better reflects the range of impacts it seeks to achieve, capturing not just the breadth of its engagement but also its transformative impact, including successes in institution building and policy influence. To do so, it will need to look beyond quantitative indicators towards other ways of capturing the impact of UK aid.'
[Recommendation 1, page iii]

In May 2015, the UK Statistics Authority⁶² set out its expectations for the production and presentation of official statistics where the data are used to measure performance or achievement against targets. It underlined the importance of:

⁵⁷ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/248648/gift-aid-methodology-note.pdf

⁵⁸ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 2 and Principle 8, Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

⁵⁹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/administrative-data-and-official-statistics/setting-the-standard.pdf>

⁶⁰ In relation to Protocol 3, Practice 5 of the *Code of Practice*

⁶¹ <http://icai.independent.gov.uk/reports/dfids-approach-to-delivering-impact/>

⁶² *Official statistics, performance measurement and targets*:

<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-reviews/index.html>

- senior officials responsible for policy making working with senior statisticians to embed statistical thinking in the development of performance measures and targets
- bringing statistical thinking to bear when performance management systems are developed, and performance measures and targets are evaluated
- performance measures and targets being recognised explicitly in official statistics that report the underlying data
- those engaged in policy making and statistical production recognising the twin, mutually beneficial roles of the statistician as expert advisors in the policy making process and as independent producers of statistics that are compliant with the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*
- senior departmental officials providing active support to enable statisticians to fulfil these dual roles effectively

We suggest that DFID ensure that its Head of Profession for Statistics is fully involved in the further development of the DFID Results Framework in response to ICAI's recommendation 1 in its Report *DFID's Approach to Delivering Impact*.

Commentary and accessibility

3.21 DFID responded to users' feedback, and worked with the Government Statistical Service's Good Practice Team, to improve the presentation of the statistics within *SID*. The commentary within the publications is straightforward to read, providing some important information on the background to 0.7 per cent target and a factual summary of the published statistics. The Assessment team welcomes these changes and has identified some other areas where further improvements would aid the interpretation and accessibility of the statistics:

- Extensive commentary was given on the revision to ODA:GNI following the adoption of ESA 2010 in *SID 2014* and *ODA-GNI 2014*. The narrative was unclear about which version of ODA:GNI ratio was the most appropriate to use, to compare against the 0.7 per cent target. This was echoed by a user who thought the presentation of ODA variants could have been improved and who was unclear whether the target had been met.
- The commentary provides brief references to the support provided to developing countries but a fuller narrative would support users' interpretation of the ODA spend and its effectiveness. DFID told the Assessment team that it is looking to incorporate case studies within *SID*
- Users told us that they were interested in accessing longer time series within *SID* and *ODA-GNI*, with important changes in definition highlighted
- ICAI noted in its June 2015 review⁶³ (on DFID's work with multilateral agencies) the need to communicate more effectively with tax payers about the role, impact and importance of multilaterals' (in recommendation 7). Users also told us about their need for greater detail about ODA, such as the nature of the multilateral spending in specific countries and the sector breakdown of spend. DFID told us that this level of detail is not currently

⁶³ <http://icai.independent.gov.uk/reports/how-dfid-works-with-multilateral-agencies-to-achieve-impact/>

available from multilateral organisations, but that it is implementing system changes to accommodate this increased level of detail, where feasible

- ICAI recommended in its February 2015 review⁶⁴ that other government departments provide DFID with information describing in simple terms the main activities or types of activity claimed as ODA. It further recommended that DFID publish these explanations in an annex to *SID*. DFID told the Assessment team that it is planning to publish this information in *SID* 2015

As part of the designation as National Statistics, DFID should:

- a) improve the commentary in its statistical reports so that it aids user interpretation of the statistics, by providing fuller contextual information about the nature of the development aid
- b) present longer time series of the international development statistics in *SID* and *ODA-GNI*, or make clear why this is not possible
- c) inform users about the feasibility of providing more detailed statistics and the timescale for their release⁶⁵

(Requirement 5).

As part of meeting this Requirement, DFID should consider the points detailed in Annex 1 and Annex 2 of this report, and address the recommendations in ICAI's February 2015 and June 2015 reviews noted in paragraph 3.21.

- 3.22 Data tables provided alongside the main publications are available to users in Excel and CSV formats, as well as to view online. The datasets underlying *SID 2014* and *ODA-GNI* are available in Excel and CSV formats; however, the data files are not machine readable. The GPEX tables are only available in Excel format which is consistent with level 2 under the Five Star Scheme⁶⁶. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DFID should publish the *GPEX* tables in a format that equates to at least a three-star level under the Five Star Scheme⁶⁷ (Requirement 6).
- 3.23 The titles of the *ODA-GNI* and *GPEX* are not intuitive to non-expert users. We suggest that DFID consider re-naming the *Provisional UK Official Development Assistance as a proportion of Gross National Income* and *Statistics on UK Gross Public Expenditure on International Development*, to use straightforward titles.

⁶⁴ <http://icai.independent.gov.uk/reports/a-preliminary-investigation-of-official-development-assistance-spent-by-departments-other-than-dfid/>

⁶⁵ In relation to Principle 8, Practices 2 and 3 of the *Code of Practice*

⁶⁶ http://data.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Open_data_White_Paper.pdf

⁶⁷ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 4 of the *Code of Practice*

Annex 1: Compliance with Standards for Statistical Reports

- A1.1 In November 2012, the Statistics Authority issued a statement on *Standards for Statistical Reports*⁶⁸. 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 reports associated with Statistics on International Development, this annex comments on compliance with the statement on standards. The comments included in this annex are based on a review of *Statistics on International Development 2014*⁶⁹ (*SID*) and *Statistical release: Provisional UK Official Development Assistance as a proportion of Gross National Income 2014*⁷⁰ (*ODA-GNI*).
- A1.2 In implementing any Requirements of this report (at paragraph 1.11) which relate to the content of statistical reports, we encourage the producer body to apply the standards as fully as possible.

Include an impartial narrative in plain English that draws out the main messages from the statistics

- A1.3 The language used in the reports is largely straightforward to understand, with impartial narrative throughout. The two statistical reports include helpful executive summaries and the key messages are well presented. *SID* presents the key facts in a one-page summary with a very visual presentation style that includes charts and maps, accompanying the key findings in text boxes. DFID's approach in providing an engaging presentation is welcomed, although the page is a little cluttered which can make it difficult to glean the main points.
- A1.4 *SID* includes helpful summary boxes throughout the report which highlight and explain relevant terms that aid user understanding. The supporting information section on page 6 mentions that there is a separate document containing additional information and goes on to detail the content, but a link to the external annex is not included.
- A1.5 Most of the earlier part of *SID* discusses the commitment of the UK Government to attain the target of 0.7 per cent investment of GNI on ODA by 2013. An outline of the reasons for this commitment is included but more commentary or links to other relevant documents would be helpful - for example, giving a more global picture around why the target was set at this amount. Several paragraphs then go on to explain the different methodological changes to the ways that GNI is calculated and the resulting affect on the ODA:GNI ratio which ranges between 0.67 per cent and 0.71 per cent, depending on the measurement method. The Assessment team found this section of the report quite confusing, in particular that it does not make clear the appropriate measure to compare against the 0.7 per cent target figure.
- A1.6 *ODA-GNI 2014* includes the text: 'The UK Government has stated that it will measure the 0.7 per cent ODA:GNI spending targets for 2014 and 2015 using ESA 1995'. This text was originally published in the *International Development*

⁶⁸ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-reports.html>

⁶⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistics-on-international-development-2014>

⁷⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/provisional-uk-oda-as-a-proportion-of-gni-2014>

(*Official Development Assistance Target*) Bill that received Royal Assent in March 2015. It is not clear whether the statement refers to the unadjusted ESA 1995 variant, as suggested by Figure 2 of the report which charts this measure. Two ESA 1995-based ratios (whether adjusted or not for Eurostat reservations) are shown in Table 1 and Figure 1, together with the ratio based on ESA 2010. The Eurostat reservation is not explained in the main text and the explanation in background note (note 4) is not sufficiently highlighted. DFID has not explained whether the target will be revised to be based on ESA 2010 in the future.

- A1.7 DFID does not make it clear in the published reports why the amount of spending allocated to different recipient countries changes from year to year and how these kinds of decisions are taken. For example, in 2013, the country that received the largest amount of UK bilateral ODA was Pakistan, whereas in the previous two years it had been India. It would be helpful for users to know more about the reasons for these changes and also, given recent media reports, how spend on ODA is diverted in the advent of unpredicted events such as the Ebola crisis in West Africa.
- A1.8 *GPEX* was released as a separate publication in 2012/13 following user feedback but subsequent feedback has resulted in these figures being released as tables only with a link provided from *SID*. The link to the *GPEX* tables from *SID* results in a 'page not found' error. *SID 2014* provides a note on UK non-ODA development spend on page 46 that relates to the *GPEX* tables. DFID regards the *GPEX* tables as being of relevance to users specifically interested in the department's wider activities, such as the National Audit Office.

Include information about the context and likely uses of the statistics

- A1.9 DFID includes clear explanations of what is being measured and what is included in the DAC ODA definitions and what is not. It is less clear why and how changes are made to these definitions and DFID does not signpost users to its policy publications. *SID* does not set the government spending in the context of the other sources of donation made to support developing countries, such as by the general public and voluntary sector, or overseas remittances.
- A1.10 The difference between bilateral and multilateral aid is included, which is helpful, as is the section in *SID* on multilateral aid that explains which organisations receive the greatest amount of aid. However, it is not sufficiently clear how decisions are made on aid allocation to different organisations. An area of concern highlighted by users is in tracking where funding resulting from multilateral aid is spent. DFID has attempted to improve its statistics by using the overall percentages of ODA reported by multilateral organisations to impute the UK contribution. While it is very clear that these are estimates, there is no indication of the scale or impact on the accuracy of the UK ODA statistics.
- A1.11 DFID includes some information about the uses of the statistics in *SID* but it does not describe the nature of some other uses by organisations such as non-governmental organisations or international bodies.

Include information about the strengths and limitations of the statistics in relation to their potential use

- A1.12 DFID includes a section about quality in *SID* that gives a brief description of the ARIES system, alongside broad statements on QA checks that are carried out by DFID and OECD. The detail on the sort of checks that are carried out is not sufficient to enable users to understand the quality assurance arrangements or implications for the use of the data. DFID states that there is a low risk of data input error but gives little explanation about why it is of this view.
- A1.13 DFID makes scheduled revisions to GNI estimates as more economic data become available to ONS, with the provisional ODA:GNI ratio reported in *ODA-GNI* and finalised figures reported in *SID*. Specific details on revisions and changes to the publications, including correction notices, are included in both *ODA-GNI* and *SID*. *ODA-GNI* makes no reference to DFID's revision policy in its background notes section, while specific mention is made in *SID*. However, the link in *SID* only appears to be to the main statistics page, with no specific policy document provided.

Be professionally sound

- A1.14 In November 2013, following user feedback, DFID published a bulletin on GPEX separately from *SID* for the first time. However, the most recent GPEX estimate was published (in November 2014) in the data tables accompanying *SID* and under transparency data on the gov.uk website. DFID has not explained its future publication strategy for GPEX.
- A1.15 DFID makes good use of charts and graphs in *SID* which support the interpretation of the statistics. However, some of the maps do not translate well when printed in black and white; for example, on page 20, the printed version of the map of DAC members and ODA spend is difficult to read. In a number of tables in *SID*, DFID reports three years' data – 2009, 2012 and 2013, which may appear an odd selection. Users may not expect the jump in series and misinterpret the information.

Include, or link to, appropriate metadata

- A1.16 An annex to *SID* describes the data sources but the descriptions are more about which government departments or organisations are responsible than explaining the data collection approach or highlighting recording issues.
- A1.17 *SID* contains links to published tables which are available to download as Excel or CSV files. The tables are well laid out and each table is contained within a worksheet.

Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

- A2.1 This assessment was conducted from October 2014 to September 2015.
- A2.2 The Assessment team – Penny Babb, Jo Mulligan and Marie McGhee – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of DFID in October 2014. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 6 February 2015. The Assessment team subsequently met DFID during April to review compliance with the *Code of Practice*, taking account of the written evidence provided and other relevant sources of evidence.

Summary of users contacted, and issues raised

- A2.3 Part of the assessment process involves our consideration of the views of users. We approach some known and potential users of the set of statistics, and we invite comments via an open note on the Authority's website. This process is not a statistical survey, but it enables us to gain some insights about the extent to which the statistics meet users' needs and the extent to which users feel that the producers of those statistics engage with them. We are aware that responses from users may not be representative of wider views, and we take account of this in the way that we prepare Assessment reports.
- A2.4 The Assessment team received 11 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

DFID	2
Central Government	4
Special Interest Group	2
Academic	1
Commercial	1
General Public	1

- A2.5 Most users told us that they were broadly content with the statistics and found them very useful and well presented. Most also said that they found the statisticians to be very helpful and knowledgeable and responsible in answering ad hoc requests. Users commented that they found the statistics easily accessible from DFID's website, although one user thought that there should be more publicity surrounding the release of DFID's statistics due to their importance. Users raised a number of points where they thought that improvements could be made to the publications:
- Provide breakdowns showing more detail separately for DFID and non-DFID spending on ODA. It would also be useful to see more-detailed data at country level and delivery route
 - Provide more-detailed data for download and re-use so that users can carry out their own analyses
 - Several users commented on the timing of the various DFID statistical reports. One user wanted to see more tables released at the mid-year point along with the *ODA-GNI*. Several users wanted to see both *ODA-GNI* and *SID* published earlier, especially as the DFID accounts are published around

June or July and reporting is now on a calendar year basis rather than a financial one. However, one user did note that release could be tied in to ONS publication of National Accounts data⁷¹ which could potentially hinder a speedier release

- Time-series data that goes back further than at present: users acknowledged that this is not necessarily straightforward as definitions change over time for example but it would be useful to see like-for-like comparisons where possible going back further than are currently published

A2.6 Users had mixed views on the changes that have made to *SID* in recent years with one user describing the statistical report as “even better than it used to be” and others commenting on previously useful aspects of the publication (such as Table 13 in *SID 2012*⁷²) having been removed.

A2.7 One user felt that the claims made by DFID in its publications were sometimes misleading to the public. While acknowledging the difficulties in evaluating the impact of expenditure in different countries, the user felt that the number of people with access to financial services was not the same as the number of people helped out of poverty. Other users also commented on transparency issues, particularly around the administrative costs involved with multilateral aid. For example, a user felt that the publication should include details on the split of multilateral spending between different activities such as programming, fundraising, research, and administrative.

A2.8 Several users made comments on various aspects of the ARIES data management system:

- It would be useful if DFID could include more detail in *SID* on the judgements that it makes when entering, extracting and assuring the quality of the data in ARIES and any resultant strengths and limitations of the statistics
- Getting access to ARIES is very straightforward and projects can be easily set up and data entered by any DFID staff member in the UK’s main offices and any of the source countries. Some users felt that more explanation about the quality of the data would be beneficial. Limitations within ARIES have meant that it is hard to accurately apportion spending in centrally managed programmes to recipient countries (of which there may be several). Only one benefitting country can be selected within ARIES and all others are designated as ‘non specific’

A2.9 DFID statisticians often receive requests from users to carry out ad hoc analysis; several users commented that they were always very helpful in responding. One user commented that it could be useful to publish the results of these ad hoc analyses so other users could enhance their knowledge.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

⁷¹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/naa2/quarterly-national-accounts/index.html>

⁷² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/67317/SID-2012.pdf

