
Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation

Iain Bell
Deputy National Statistician
Office for National Statistics
(By email)

26 July 2019

Dear Iain

CONFIRMATION OF NATIONAL STATISTICS DESIGNATION FOR ONS CANCER SURVIVAL STATISTICS

We have reviewed the actions that you and your team have taken to address the requirements in Assessment Report number 341 Statistics on Cancer Survival in England. On behalf of the Board of the UK Statistics, I am pleased to confirm designation of National Statistics status of these statistics.

During this assessment, staff from both ONS and Public Health England (PHE) responded very positively to implement the improvements required from the assessment. They have shown enthusiasm and commitment to improving the value and quality of these statistics. We welcome particularly the improvements made to your publications. For example, the blog about cancer registrations and the cancer explainer article are both very readable publications.

I welcome the publication of a new report about the quality assurance of the administrative data (QAAD) used to compile these statistics. This clearly explains the various stages of quality assurance. I encourage you to further reinforce the important steps that you take to assure quality by enhancing the document's accessibility, for example directly from subsequent statistics releases.

I am aware of your plans to transfer all responsibility for the cancer survival outputs to PHE by April 2020. We will monitor the progress of this transfer, by keeping in touch with ONS and PHE to obtain periodic updates, to be assured that the National Statistics (NS) standard is maintained through the transfer.

We have included more detail about our judgement in an annex to this letter. I, or my team, would be very happy to talk you or your colleagues through any aspects of this letter or Code compliance more generally. National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and value and is something to be celebrated. We invite you to include a statement alongside the statistics which reflects the National Statistics status.

I am copying this letter to Clare Griffiths, Head of Profession at PHE and Ben Humberstone, Deputy Director for Health Analysis and Life Events at ONS.

Yours sincerely



Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation

Annex A Review of actions taken in response to Assessment Report 341: Statistics on Cancer Survival in England

Requirement	Actions taken by ONS to meet Requirements	OSR's evaluation of evidence in meeting Requirements
<p>1 ONS should publish plans and take steps to engage with users, to increase awareness of the data and statistics, and communicate effectively with the widest possible audiences, to support users and potential users.</p> <p>2 ONS should provide comprehensive signposting to the data, methodology and quality assurance information and consider the needs of different types of users and potential users when determining the readability of the documentation.</p> <p>4 ONS should work with users to provide an interpretation and comprehensive narrative around the statistics, to meet a wider range of user understanding and uses.</p> <p>5 ONS should work more closely with PHE and other experts to provide a comprehensive and coherent narrative covering the suite of cancer statistics it publishes.</p> <p>9 ONS should explain the strengths and limitations of each set of statistics in relation to their use, and explain the nature and extent of any uncertainty associated with the estimates.</p>	<p>ONS has engaged with users to understand their needs using a questionnaire, sent out in April 2019. The results are being used to structure the joint ONS and PHE workshop to be held on 24 September. ONS will publish the summary of the user feedback and the event and user feedback.</p> <p>ONS has published a Blog to coincide with the cancer registrations release 26 April https://blog.ons.gov.uk/2019/04/26/are-there-more-people-diagnosed-with-cancer/</p> <p>ONS published a Cancer explainer article on 24 May.</p> <p>ONS published Geographic patterns of cancer survival on 24 May, linking this latest release to the Cancer explainer published on the same day.</p> <p>On 18 June, ONS published an accessible article about Which cancers would benefit most from earlier diagnosis.</p>	<p>The Blog is an excellent example of how to pull together complex messages in an engaging and readable way.</p> <p>The Cancer explainer article published 24 May is very readable. It provides an overview of the suite of cancer survival statistics, includes extensive signposting to the underlying metadata and outlines the strengths and limitations of the various statistics, when each should be used and the differences between them.</p> <p>Geographic patterns of cancer survival indicate a possible reason for the reduction in survival of 1-year bladder cancer, due to a worldwide shortage of therapeutic treatment.</p> <p>The article about earlier diagnosis uses the data from the cancer survival datasets and explains simply how the stage of diagnosis affects health outcomes and could provide evidence of where to target health interventions.</p>
<p>3 ONS should work with PHE to explain the differences between their two releases and advise on the distinct uses to which each could be put.</p>	<p>The Cancer explainer article published on 24 May itemises the differences between the ONS and PHE releases.</p> <p>ONS published Geographic patterns of cancer survival on 24 May, linking this latest release to the Cancer explainer published on the same day.</p>	<p>The Cancer explainer article notes the differences between the statistics on cancer survival published by the two organisations and the use to which each can be put. ONS has made users aware of the Cancer explainer article.</p>

<p>6 ONS should publish information about the extent to which any limitations of PHE's cancer registry data can be overcome and the impact on the statistics, justifying the source change.</p>	<p>ONS published an updated Quality and Methodology Information (QMI) report on 3 July.</p> <p>The document notes that the registration processes within PHE are more timely, more comprehensive and more accurate, so justifying the switch.</p>	<p>In the QMI, ONS has included an explanation of why PHE is the preferred data source.</p>
<p>7 ONS should explain why certain methods were chosen for certain estimates, the impact of any bias and uncertainty on the statistics, and give consideration to making the methodology information available in a more accessible way.</p>	<p>ONS published an updated Quality and Methodology Information (QMI) report on 3 July.</p> <p>The report notes "All methods used are unbiased estimators of cancer survival and are presented with confidence intervals so users may assess the level of uncertainty associated with each estimate."</p> <p>The updated QMI also includes information about which method is used for which estimate, and the strengths and limitations of the method.</p>	<p>The updated QMI includes information to explain why each survival method was chosen, to reduce the bias in the estimates.</p> <p>The QMI is also now more readable. For example, including Figure 5 to show an overview of the processing steps that are then discussed in the main text.</p>
<p>8 ONS should publish, or link to, information in one place that outlines the data flows, the processing and quality assurance at each stage of statistical production, and the risk and impact of quality issues on the statistics, taking into consideration the UKSA's toolkit <i>Quality Assurance of Administrative Data</i>.</p>	<p>ONS published the Quality Assurance of Administrative Data (QAAD) report on 3 July.</p> <p>Table 1, lists the key potential sources of bias and error, together with actions taken to minimise the risks to data quality. A diagram of the data flows between each supplier is presented, to assist the reader to understand the sequence of quality assurance applied at each stage. The document explains the processes, risks, management and actions to ameliorate the risks to data quality.</p>	<p>An appropriate level of assurance has been chosen and the underlying steps and stages of quality assurance have been explained. Although the QAAD is accessible on the cancer home page, it would help users if ONS made the document accessible from the QMI and the subsequent statistics releases.</p>