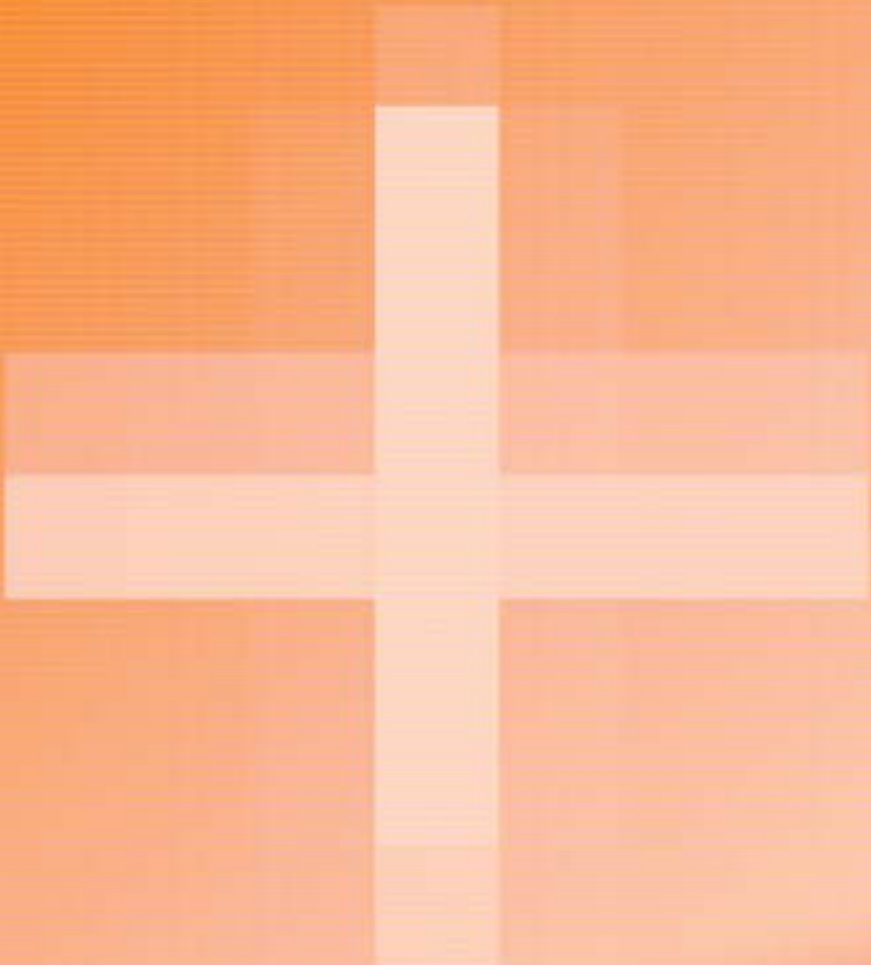


National Statistics Code of Practice

Protocol on Quality Management



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A National Statistics Publication

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Summary of Principles – Quality Management

National Statistics Code of Practice – Statement of Principles

National Statistics will be fit for purpose and of high quality

The provision of National Statistics will be effectively managed.

A thorough review of key outputs, at least every five years, using outside expertise where appropriate, will contribute to quality assurance and improvement.

National Statistics will meet the needs of government, business and the community, within available resources.

Knowledge of National Statistics will be sustained by quality measures, regularly published.

A culture of evaluation will be systematically fostered, including peer group appraisal and comparative benchmarking.

Producers of National Statistics will support the development and use of standard practices.

The selection of statistical sources, methods and procedures is a professional responsibility and will be based on scientific principle and best international practice, taking into account cost implications to government and providers.

Processes and methods used to produce National Statistics will be fully documented.

Introduction

For background information on this document please see *An Introduction to the National Statistics Code of Practice and its supporting Protocols*.

Scope

This protocol describes how the producers of National Statistics will carry out their responsibilities in respect of quality management – as set out in the *Framework for National Statistics* and the *National Statistics Code of Practice – Statement of Principles*.

The protocol sets out the basic elements which are required to ensure the quality of those individual statistical outputs designated as ‘National Statistics’. Producers may sometimes need to balance the tensions between the different dimensions of quality – for example, timeliness versus accuracy; or relevance versus consistency. In so doing, they may also need to balance priorities across several outputs or in the light of corporate policies.

Purpose

A professional commitment to quality management and an emphasis on quality measurement will strengthen public confidence in National Statistics, and in those who produce them. Accessible information about the quality of National Statistics, and about the methodologies which underpin them is also central to the needs of users.

Exclusions

This document does not offer solutions to all the quality-related issues which may arise. Nor does it provide guidance on specific questions such as the definition of an ‘adequate’ response rate, or what constitutes ‘appropriate’ target measures. On many occasions, the answer to a specific question will depend on the circumstances of the case. It is for the Heads of Profession within each of the separate government departments and agencies and the Chief Statisticians in the devolved administrations to use their professional judgement when deciding the best way to implement these principles and standards, consulting the National Statistician where appropriate.

Compliance

The best practice principles set out in this Protocol may require producers in government departments and agencies to develop and establish new systems and procedures. Compliance may, therefore, be an incremental process and dependent on cost constraints and competing priorities. Furthermore, it may not be possible for producers to apply these principles fully to all the systems from which statistics are derived – a qualification which applies in particular to management or administrative systems.

A guide to putting the principles into practice

1. The provision of National Statistics will be effectively managed.

Producers of National Statistics will develop and implement management strategies to help ensure they have the required resources, processes, skills and tools in place to demonstrate that they meet the National Statistics standards for all their National Statistics outputs. These strategies will include the following:

- a) investment in training and development to support people at all levels in order to ensure that they have the skills needed for the job;
- b) the use of formal project management techniques, where appropriate, to assure the effective development of new National Statistics and changes to current outputs;
- c) the use of documented quality management and assurance processes in the development of new and changed outputs, prior to their production;
- d) the use of structured risk management strategies and business continuity planning to manage the risks associated with the production of key statistical outputs;
- e) providing value for money;
- f) the use of common statistical frames, definitions and classifications where available and appropriate;
- g) measurement of quality throughout the statistical lifecycle in order to continually monitor, improve and compare the quality within and between outputs;

- h) the regular publication of quality measures for National Statistics to enable users to assess fitness for purpose.

Any National Statistic found not fit for its main purposes will be either improved or have its designation removed. Decisions to discontinue National Statistics on grounds of quality will be taken by Heads of Profession, and the Chief Statisticians in the devolved administrations in consultation with the National Statistician and in accordance with central guidance, and will be communicated to known users.

2. **A thorough review of key outputs, at least every five years, using outside expertise where appropriate, will contribute to quality assurance and improvement.**

Producers of National Statistics will regularly review both user needs and the standards reached by their outputs as part of their production cycles. They will also monitor and review quality during any redevelopment work, and formally review all their key outputs as part of a five-year rolling programme. When reviewing key outputs producers will:

- a) follow the *Guidance on the National Statistics Quality Review Programme*;
- b) consult key users during evaluation of the outputs to assess the extent to which users' needs are being met;
- c) evaluate the outputs against agreed quality dimensions such as those in the European Statistical System (see References);
- d) assess the tools and methods used, comparing them, where appropriate, with those used by the National Statistical Institutions of other countries, to ensure that they continue to conform to high professional standards;
- e) highlight areas needing improvement in quality in order to meet users' needs better;

- f) provide explicit reasons if any key National Statistics are not meeting any internationally recognised standards;
 - g) publish these reviews and any accompanying action plans on the National Statistics website;
 - h) apply the results of reviews to improve other outputs, where applicable.
3. **National Statistics will meet the needs of government, business and the community, within available resources.**

Producers of National Statistics will have effective mechanisms in place to help them understand the key uses of their outputs, and the key areas of emerging demand and unmet need. In particular, producers of National Statistics will:

- a) identify and consult key users to gain an understanding of their needs and to help determine priorities;
- b) involve other known interested parties from the outset in any proposals for substantial changes to National Statistics collections, methodologies or outputs. This applies especially to plans to introduce, withdraw or substantially modify outputs;
- c) set up a maintenance and development programme for all key outputs, and reflect these programmes in annual Theme Working Group and departmental business plans, as described in the National Statistics Quality Strategy;
- d) develop concepts, and design outputs, that are relevant to users' needs and intended uses, but that also take account of the relationship between quality and cost;
- e) ensure that outputs are accessible and clearly presented to users;
- f) establish mechanisms to develop the statistics needed to inform emerging public debates.

4. **Knowledge of National Statistics will be sustained by quality measures, regularly published.**
 - a) producers of National Statistics will provide accessible information on the quality of their outputs using, as guidance, the quality dimensions defined for the European Statistical System;
 - b) qualitative and quantitative measures of quality will be provided but may be published after publication of the data. Statistical publications will show where quality measures may be found;
 - c) quality measures will help users to understand better the strengths and limitations, interpretation and appropriate use of the data, and will enable producers to demonstrate changes in the quality of outputs;
 - d) where practicable, the presentation of information on quality will be tailored to meet the needs of different types of users, with more comprehensive quality reports prepared for 'expert users';
 - e) guidance will be provided to users on the interpretation of quality measures.
5. **A culture of evaluation will be systematically fostered, including peer group appraisal and comparative benchmarking.**
 - a) producers will publish details of their methodologies, systems and tools and will encourage evaluation and comment through peer group appraisals and other open forums;
 - b) methodologies, systems and tools used for key outputs will be compared with those used in other National Statistical Institutions, major statistical organisations and significant processing sites;

- c) the effectiveness of the methodologies, systems and tools used will be evaluated to ensure that these continue to support a high quality, coherent set of statistics;
- d) producers will endeavour to keep up to date with new technologies that allow for improvements in quality and efficiency, and for a reduction in the burden placed on providers.

6. Producers of National Statistics will support the development and use of standard practices.

They will:

- a) support the use of standard practices and approaches across National Statistics, and foster a culture that encourages their adoption;
- b) where relevant, use internationally or nationally agreed definitions and methods, to aid comparison with other outputs;
- c) give a clear statement for all outputs on the degree of compliance with agreed definitions, methods and practices (where these have been identified) including any known reasons for the deviations. Where standard practices are not being followed, producers will provide an explanation and, where appropriate, will have a development plan for each output which will include mechanisms for achieving compliance within a period acceptable to the relevant Head of Profession or Chief Statistician in a devolved administration.

7. **The selection of statistical sources, methods and procedures is a professional responsibility and will be based on scientific principle and best international practice, taking into account cost implications to government and providers.**
 - a) producers will endeavour to ensure that the methods used in the production of National Statistics are objectively chosen and based on sound statistical methods, particularly with respect to survey and questionnaire design, data collection and validation, estimation and analysis;
 - b) where practicable, the selection of methods and procedures will allow for the measurement of output quality;
 - c) when methods are used that potentially lead to biases, and where practicable, the level of bias in key variables will be evaluated prior to implementation. The level of bias will be kept under review and known users will be advised accordingly;
 - d) producers of National Statistics will make decisions for change and improvement based on evaluation and review. They will also incorporate appropriate testing, evaluation and best international practice into the implementation of new or changed methods or procedures;
 - e) producers will endeavour to ensure that the statistical sources of National Statistics are the best available after taking quality, cost and provider burden into account;
 - f) where relevant, producers of National Statistics will bring to the attention of users similar statistics from other sources, including a statement on how and why any two outputs differ. This includes published statistics that are used as a source for a National Statistic.

8. **Processes and methods used to produce National Statistics will be fully documented.**
 - a) National Statistics will be readily accessible through the web. They will be well described and supported by published documentation on statistical methods and processes which is easy to access and use;
 - b) documentation will be sufficiently detailed to allow users to assess fitness for particular purposes;
 - c) producers of National Statistics will review the documentation relating to their outputs on a regular basis and update their documentation to reflect any changes in methods or processes;
 - d) this documentation should be used in training to ensure continuity of approach.

References

National Statistics Quality Strategy

www.statistics.gov.uk/about_ns/quality_strategy.asp

Guidance on the National Statistics Quality Review Programme

www.statistics.gov.uk/methods_quality/quality_review/quality_review.asp

Quality dimensions defined for the European Statistical System

http://europa.eu.int/comm/eurostat/Public/datashop/print-catalogue/EN?catalogue=Eurostat&collection=10-Eurostat%20News&product=KS-45-02-814-__-N-EN

The dimensions covered are:

- relevance
- accuracy
- timeliness
- accessibility
- comparability
- coherence
- completeness.

