

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Driver and Vehicle Statistics in Northern Ireland

*(produced by the Department of the Environment
Northern Ireland)*

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About the UK Statistics Authority

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

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

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

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

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ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* gives the UK Statistics Authority a statutory power to assess sets of statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*. Assessment will determine whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated as National Statistics.

Designation as National Statistics means that the statistics comply with the *Code of Practice*. The *Code* is wide-ranging. Designation can be interpreted to mean that the statistics: meet identified user needs; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are explained well.

Designation as National Statistics should not be interpreted to mean that the statistics are always correct. For example, whilst the *Code* requires statistics to be produced to a level of accuracy that meets users' needs, it also recognises that errors can occur – in which case it requires them to be corrected and publicised.

Assessment reports will not normally comment further on a set of statistics, for example on their validity as social or economic measures. However, reports may point to such questions if the Authority believes that further research would be desirable.

Assessment reports typically provide an overview of any noteworthy features of the methods used to produce the statistics, and will highlight substantial concerns about quality. Assessment reports also describe aspects of the ways in which the producer addresses the 'sound methods and assured quality' principle of the *Code*, but do not themselves constitute a review of the methods used to produce the statistics. However the *Code* requires producers to "seek to achieve continuous improvement in statistical processes by, for example, undertaking regular reviews".

The Authority may grant designation on condition that the producer body takes steps, within a stated timeframe, to fully meet the *Code's* requirements. This is to avoid public confusion and does not reduce the obligation to comply with the *Code*.

The Authority grants designation on the basis of three main sources of information:

- i. factual evidence and assurances by senior statisticians in the producer body;
- ii. the views of users who we contact, or who contact us, and;
- iii. our own review activity.

Should further information come to light subsequently which changes the Authority's analysis, it may withdraw the Assessment report and revise it as necessary.

It is a statutory requirement on the producer body to ensure that it continues to produce the set of statistics designated as National Statistics in compliance with the *Code of Practice*.

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1 Summary of findings

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports¹ prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*². The Act allows an appropriate authority³ to request an assessment of official statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*⁴ in order for them to gain National Statistics status. This report is in response to such a request. The report covers the sets of statistics referred to in this report as driver and vehicle statistics, produced by the Department of the Environment Northern Ireland (DOE) and reported in:

- *Driver, Vehicle, Operator and Enforcement Statistics – Annual*⁵ (*Annual Driver and Vehicle*)
- *Driver, Vehicle, Operator and Enforcement Statistics – Quarterly*⁶ (*Quarterly Driver and Vehicle*)

1.1.2 Section 3 of this report adopts an ‘exception reporting’ approach – it includes text only to support the Requirements made to strengthen compliance with the *Code* and Suggestions made to improve confidence in the production, management and dissemination of these statistics. This abbreviated style of report reflects the Director General for Regulation’s consideration of aspects of risk and materiality⁷. The Assessment team nonetheless assessed compliance with all parts of the *Code of Practice* and has commented on all those in respect of which some remedial action is recommended.

1.1.3 Assessments of compendium publications against the *Code of Practice* relate to the processes involved in preparing the publication, rather than in producing the statistics that are included. The National Statistics designation relating to the compendium is not automatically conferred on any of the constituent series. Those sets of statistics will normally be subject to separate assessment to attain National Statistics status, but in some cases a compendium publication may include other statistics where this is helpful context. Designation of a compendium publication as National Statistics therefore means that the producer body has, for example: identified and met user needs in terms of the content of the publication; considered the appropriateness of each series for inclusion; and written appropriate commentary.

1.1.4 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.

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 Subsection 12(7) of the Act defines ‘appropriate authority’ as Ministers of the Crown, Scottish Ministers, Welsh Ministers, Northern Ireland departments or the National Statistician

⁴ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

⁵ http://www.doeni.gov.uk/statistics/dva_statistics.htm

⁶ See footnote 5

⁷ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/guidance-about-assessment/criteria-for-deciding-upon-the-format-of-an-assessment-report.pdf>

1.2 Decision concerning designation as National Statistics

- 1.2.1 The Statistics Authority judges that the statistics covered by this report are readily accessible, produced according to sound methods and managed impartially and objectively in the public interest, subject to any points for action in this report. The Statistics Authority confirms that the statistics listed in paragraph 1.1.1 can be designated as new National Statistics products, subject to DOE implementing the Requirements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by January 2015.
- 1.2.2 DOE has informed the Assessment team that it has started to implement the Requirements listed in section 1.5. The Statistics Authority welcomes this.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.3.1 DOE regularly liaises and communicates with users of the driver and vehicle statistics through a variety of platforms and, as part of this Assessment, users commented on the high levels of expertise and helpfulness of the statistics team. DOE listens to, and is responsive to, users' needs – for example, DOE introduced *Quarterly Driver and Vehicle* directly in response to an identified user need for more timely statistics. The driver and vehicle statistics cover a range of topics with a potentially wide range of user applications, which DOE could do more to illustrate.
- 1.3.2 The driver and vehicle statistics are mainly produced using comprehensive administrative data sources and DOE presents a data quality assessment alongside each set of statistics. DOE discusses some of the limitations of the underlying administrative data sources but it could do more to communicate the potential sources of error and include more detail on the arrangements for audit and quality assurance. DOE statisticians spend time out in the field with operational staff such as roadside enforcement officers, and appear to have a good sense of where the statistical risks lie, and this feeds through positively to the user experience.
- 1.3.3 The statistical reports are in their infancy and there is evidence that DOE is listening and responding to user needs. Key areas where there is scope for further improvement include the presentation of consistent time series; better analysis of trends; and further contextualisation of the statistics.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

- 1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that DOE should improve the production and presentation of its driver and vehicle statistics. Those which are essential for DOE to address in order to strengthen its compliance with the *Code* and to enable designation as National Statistics are listed – as Requirements – in section 1.5, 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 section 1.6.

1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

1.5.1 This section includes those improvements that DOE is required to make in respect of its driver and vehicle statistics in order to fully comply with the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*, and to enable designation as National Statistics.

Finding	Requirement	
DOE will be sourcing vehicle registration and licensing statistics from DfT from December 2014. The timing and content of what DOE will publish has not yet been established. DOE should:	1	a) Ensure that the Service Level Agreement that it establishes with DfT clearly sets out the timing and content of the vehicle registration and licensing statistics that DOE will publish and the arrangements for assuring the quality of the statistics for Northern Ireland produced from DVLA administrative data sources b) inform users in advance about the impact of the change in data source and explain any resulting quality limitations (para 3.5).
DOE does not publish a consistent quarterly time series in a way that supports analysis and re-use. DOE should:	2	Publish a plan with a clear timeline for publishing regular consistent quarterly time series in a format that maximises accessibility and demonstrate early progress for headline series (para 3.6).
DOE does not make it clear if the statistics are subject to scheduled revisions: DOE should:	3	Include a clear statement of its revisions policy in the annual and quarterly statistical reports (para 3.7).
DOE publishes helpful data quality assessments but needs to publish more information about the strengths and limitations of the statistics and its assurance and audit arrangements. DOE should:	4	a) Publish information about the key strengths and limitations of the driver and vehicle statistics and about any potential sources of error b) determine the appropriate scale of assurance and documentation required for the administrative data used in the driver and vehicle statistics based on pragmatic and proportionate judgement about the quality of the data and the public interest profile of the statistics c) building on its existing data quality

		<p>assessments, publish an appropriate level of detail to inform users about the quality assurance and audit arrangements for the administrative data</p> <p>DOE should take into consideration the Authority's Report <i>Quality Assurance and Audit Arrangements for Administrative Data</i> and the National Statistician's <i>Interim Guidance</i> (para 3.9).</p>
DOE could present a richer analysis of the statistics by drawing in contextual statistics and drawing out the key messages. DOE should:	5	<p>a) Improve the commentary in <i>Annual Driver and Vehicle</i> and <i>Quarterly Driver and Vehicle</i> by: improving the presentation of the key messages; providing more context for the statistics; extending the analysis of trends; and exploring better use of charts and maps to enhance the user experience</p> <p>b) provide better options for printing <i>Quarterly Driver and Vehicle</i></p> <p>As part of meeting this requirement DOE should consider the points detailed in annex 1 and annex 2 (para 3.11).</p>
DOE publishes the driver and vehicle statistics on its website but we consider that it would be difficult for a potential user to know of their existence or to locate them. DOE should:	6	<p>Work together with NISRA to determine how to make the driver and vehicle statistics for Northern Ireland more accessible to users, including improving the signposting from the NISRA website (para 3.12)</p>

1.6 Suggestions for extracting maximum value from the statistics

1.6.1 This section includes some suggestions for improvement to DOE's driver and vehicle statistics, in the interest of the public good. These are not formally required for designation, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

We suggest that DOE:

1	Publish illustrative examples of some of the different uses of the statistics, building on the good foundations of its user engagement, in
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	order to enhance the user experience (para 3.2).
2	<p>a) Alert users of the driver and vehicle statistics to the availability of any published research/statistical briefs, and so potentially widen the use of the statistics</p> <p>b) make any analysis produced in response to ad hoc requests equally available to all users – DOE might refer to how ONS does this as an example of good practice</p> <p>(para 3.3).</p>
3	Clearly state in the statistical reports where comparisons with other countries are not possible due to data being unavailable (para 3.10).
4	Explore, together with NISRA, how the signposting of official statistics from nidirect could be improved (para 3.12).

2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 DOE comprises a number of executive agencies and policy divisions responsible for the environment, planning and local government, and road safety in Northern Ireland. Driver and vehicle statistics are produced by DOE statisticians based with the Driver and Vehicle Agency⁸ (DVA), an agency of the DOE responsible for: vehicle testing; driver testing and licensing; road transport licensing; monitoring of compliance with roadworthiness and traffic legislation; and roadside enforcement. All DOE statisticians, including those in DVA, are part of its Analytical Services Branch and are employed by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency⁹ (NISRA).
- 2.2 DOE also produces *DVA Customer Satisfaction Survey*¹⁰ and *Driver & Vehicle Agency Heavy Goods Vehicle, Taxi and Bus Compliance Surveys*¹¹. These official statistics are not in scope for this assessment as their future publication is not assured and is being kept under review, dependent on user priorities. For example, the compliance surveys have been conducted on a regular quarterly basis for three years and have now provided a good sense of overall compliance with standards relating to MOT testing and Vehicle Excise Duty. DVA is now considering the value of switching to more targeted operations.
- 2.3 *Driver, Vehicle, Operator and Enforcement Statistics – Annual (Annual Driver and Vehicle)* was first published in June 2012 for the year ending March 2012, followed by the first publication of *Driver, Vehicle, Operator and Enforcement Statistics – Quarterly (Quarterly Driver and Vehicle)* in September 2012 for the three months to June 2012¹². The annual and quarterly statistical reports present broadly the same statistics with chapters relating to each of DVA's functions – for example, for driver testing, statistics are presented for the number of applications and appointments for tests together with pass rates, and include breakdowns by vehicle type and driver gender, and Northern Ireland/Great Britain comparisons. The annual report examines longer-term trends. DOE also publishes supplementary tables on vehicle and driver test pass rates¹³ by test centre in support of the annual and quarterly statistics. DOE does not produce *Quarterly Driver and Vehicle* for the fourth quarter (January to March) as the annual statistical report is published covering the year ending March.
- 2.4 While most of the statistics presented in *Annual Driver and Vehicle* and *Quarterly Driver and Vehicle* are being released for the first time, the statistical reports also include, for completeness, related official statistics published separately in their own right. For example, summary statistics from the compliance surveys are presented as part of the driver and vehicle statistics as they become available. Also, responsibility for vehicle registration and licensing in Northern Ireland transferred to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), an executive agency of the Department for Transport (DfT), on 21 July

⁸ <http://www.dvani.gov.uk/>

⁹ <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/>

¹⁰ <http://www.doeni.gov.uk/dvacustsat11.pdf>

¹¹ <http://www.doeni.gov.uk/doe-dva-compliance-surveys-report-2013-14.pdf>

¹² http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/information/asb/publications_archive.htm#dvastatistics

¹³ http://www.doeni.gov.uk/dva_pass_rates_2013-14.xlsx

- 2014¹⁴. From December 2014, DOE expects to include in its statistical reports the official vehicle registration and licensing statistics for Northern Ireland that will be produced by DfT.
- 2.5 The statistics are largely produced using the administrative data sources that support DVA's operations. For example, vehicle testing statistics are based on records maintained by the 15 vehicle test centres in Northern Ireland and driver licensing statistics come from the Northern Ireland Driver Licensing System.
- 2.6 The driver and vehicle statistics have a range of uses. DVA uses the statistics to report on Key Agency Targets¹⁵ such as waiting times for driving tests and numbers of compliance checks carried out. DVA and DOE also use the statistics to inform the development of policy and operations. For example, patterns in driving test data and pass rates are regularly reviewed to ensure that DVA systems are free from any systematic bias. DOE also uses vehicle registration statistics to support its environmental policy including around greenhouse gas emissions. Economists and the media pay particular attention to new car registrations as an early indicator of economic optimism and these statistics, together with licensed vehicle stock statistics are also used to examine trends in traffic volumes. There are no international regulatory requirements for DOE to report these statistics.
- 2.7 When DOE first started publishing driver and vehicle statistics in 2012, there was some overlap with National Statistics¹⁶ already published by the Department for Regional Development Northern Ireland (DRD) in *Northern Ireland Transport Statistics*¹⁷ and *Northern Ireland Road and Rail Transport Statistics*¹⁸. Following a public consultation¹⁹, the overlaps were removed from the first quarter of 2014 (April to June).
- 2.8 DOE publishes *Annual Driver and Vehicle* in pdf with supplementary tables and datasets published in Excel format. *Quarterly Driver and Vehicle* is published in Excel format only. This equates to a level of two stars under the Five Star Scheme that forms part of the Open Standards Principles proposed in the *Open Data White Paper: Unleashing the Potential*²⁰ and adopted as UK government policy in November 2012²¹. Five stars represents the highest star rating within the Scheme.
- 2.9 DOE told us that the estimated annual cost of producing its driver and vehicle statistics is approximately £21,400.

¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/future-of-vehicle-registration-and-licensing-services-in-northern-ireland>

¹⁵ <http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/information/foi/recent-releases/publications-details.htm?docid=8890>

¹⁶ Assessed as part of Assessment report 62:

<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/assessment-reports/assessment-report-62---statistics-on-transport-in-northern-ireland.pdf>

¹⁷ http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/statistics/stats-categories/ni_transport_statistics.htm

¹⁸ http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/statistics/stats-categories/ni_road_and_rail_transport_statistics.htm

¹⁹ http://www.drdni.gov.uk/final_-_ni_road_and_rail_transport_statistics_january_to_march_2014.xls

²⁰ http://data.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Open_data_White_Paper.pdf

²¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-standards-principles/open-standards-principles>

3 Assessment findings

- 3.1 DOE regularly liaises and communicates with users of the driver and vehicle statistics through a variety of platforms and, as part of this Assessment, users commented on the high levels of expertise and helpfulness of the statistics team. DOE told us that it engages users in developing its annual statistical work programme and that, together with DRD, it contributes to a Transport Statistics User Group²² encompassing all of the transport-related statistics produced by each organisation. DOE also consults users on specific issues – for example, in March 2014 DOE sought users' views on a proposal to publish separate Quarter 4 (January - March) vehicle licensing statistics, in addition to the annual statistics²³.
- 3.2 DOE launched a readership survey in March 2014 to gather users' views on all aspects of the driver and vehicle statistics. The survey ran until the end of June and DOE published the results on 30 July 2014²⁴. DOE promoted the survey on its website, in the statistical reports and by email to known users. It was sent directly to around 160 potential users including from across government departments and agencies, other public sector bodies, environmental organisations and academia. 21 respondents provided feedback. Most indicated high levels of satisfaction but key areas highlighted for development included the availability of data for re-use; improved trend analysis; and better presentation of the statistics through charts, tables and maps. These themes are echoed in the findings of this Assessment and are picked up later in this report. As part of the report on the readership survey, DOE outlined its plans to address the points raised by users and told the Assessment team that it will include a regular section in its statistical reports to keep users informed of progress against these plans, and against its broader statistical plans, including explaining where progress has not been possible and why. DOE also published some very general information about the users and uses of the driver and vehicle statistics in its report on the readership survey but recognised that a deeper understanding of how the statistics are used will inform their development. DOE has committed to engage further with users. As part of this Assessment, we have established that these statistics have a very broad range of potential uses and we suggest that, building on the good foundations of its user engagement, DOE could helpfully publish illustrative examples of some of the different uses of the statistics in order to enhance the user experience.
- 3.3 As part of its scheduled statistical work programme, and in response to ad hoc user requests, DOE carries out more in-depth research and analysis based on the driver and vehicle statistics and the data that underpin them. DOE told the Assessment team that most often this research is commissioned from within DVA or DOE to explore specific policy or operational issues – for example, the extent to which factors such as age and gender influence driver test pass rates. DOE prepares impartial research/statistical briefs and it told us that these can lead to enhancements to the statistical reports such as the inclusion of regular additional breakdowns by age and gender. DOE told us that it is considering publishing these briefs on its website to make them accessible to a wider

²² http://www.drdni.gov.uk/index/statistics/transport_statistics_users_group.htm

²³ http://www.doeni.gov.uk/index/information/asb/statistics/dva_statistics.htm

²⁴ <http://www.doeni.gov.uk/asb-dva-readership-survey-results.pdf>

audience. Based on our broader experience of users' appetite for such research and analysis, the Assessment team would encourage DOE to seek to publish them in such a way. DOE also offers within its statistical reports to make a greater disaggregation of the statistics available on request – for example, by DVA test centre. DOE advises that such analysis may incur a cost dependent on the work involved, but it is not clear how the resulting statistics are made equally accessible to all users. We suggest that DOE a) alert users of the driver and vehicle statistics to the availability of any published research/statistical briefs, and so potentially widen the use of the statistics b) make any analysis produced in response to ad hoc requests equally available to all users – DOE might refer to how ONS does this as an example of good practice²⁵.

- 3.4 When responsibility for vehicle registration and licensing for Northern Ireland transferred from DVA to DVLA on 21 July 2014, responsibility for producing related official statistics transferred from DOE to DfT. However, DOE told us that it wants to provide continuity for its users by including the statistics in *Annual Driver and Vehicle* and *Quarterly Driver and Vehicle* on an ongoing basis. The Assessment team considers this a positive ambition but understands that, while DOE has agreed this in principle with DfT and DVLA, the timing and level of detail of statistics to be published by DOE are still to be established. DOE told us that it is now finalising the details of a Service Level Agreement with DfT to facilitate this. DfT has published a statement²⁶ alongside its vehicle licensing statistics on GOV.UK that confirms its intention to publish Northern Ireland and UK statistics, as well as DOE's plans to continue to publish Northern Ireland statistics. First results published on this basis will be for Quarter 2 (July to September) and are due to be published in December 2014.
- 3.5 DOE has pre-announced the planned change to the source of the vehicle registration and licensing statistics in both its annual and quarterly statistical reports and in August 2014 published an additional notice²⁷ saying that it intends to provide more details with the Quarter 1 statistics on 2 October 2014. We consider that this will represent an important opportunity for DOE to fully explain the impact for users. For example, DOE told us that where records have missing post codes, it may no longer be possible for DVLA to differentiate whether they originate in Great Britain or Northern Ireland and so to assign them appropriately. This could mean that while these 'unknowns' will be included in UK totals, there could be an element of known under-recording for Northern Ireland. The media have also reported on delays experienced by car dealers trying to register vehicles since the transfer due to some technical and administrative differences in process that DVA and DVLA are working to resolve. While some of these may be short-term problems it will be important to help users to interpret the time series and to understand any quality limitations. The statistics have already been affected – for example, DOE has been unable to produce a full suite of vehicle census tables with *Annual Driver and Vehicle* due to 'the relatively quick decommissioning of the Northern Ireland Vehicle

²⁵ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/business-transparency/freedom-of-information/what-can-i-request/published-ad-hoc-data/index.html>

²⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/vehicles-statistics>

²⁷ <http://www.doeni.gov.uk/vehicle-licensing-statistics-for-northern-ireland-future-availability.pdf>

Licensing Information System and various associated technical issues arising from this²⁸. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DOE should a) ensure that the Service Level Agreement that it establishes with DfT clearly sets out the timing and content of the vehicle registration and licensing statistics that DOE will publish and the arrangements for assuring the quality of the statistics for Northern Ireland produced from DVLA administrative data sources; and b) inform users in advance about the impact of the change in data source and explain any resulting quality limitations²⁹ (Requirement 1).

- 3.6 DOE introduced *Quarterly Driver and Vehicle* to provide users with timely updates between publishing the more comprehensive *Annual Driver and Vehicle* each year. On this basis, DOE decided to publish the quarterly statistical reports only for Quarters 1 to 3 with Quarter 4 being replaced by the annual statistical report. DOE told us that, following some user engagement, it established that there was no great demand for a Quarter 4 statistical report but that users did want access to Quarter 4 statistics about vehicles registered for the first time. DOE published the new vehicle registrations statistics alongside the annual statistical report for the first time in June 2014. While we understand that to produce *Quarterly Driver and Vehicle* for the fourth quarter alongside the annual report would not necessarily represent a good use of resources, users contacting us as part of this Assessment and responding to DOE's own readership survey stressed the importance of being able to analyse trends and to have access to data in a form that supports re-use. At the moment, DOE does not publish Quarter 4 statistics anywhere, except for new vehicle registrations. The quarterly statistical reports mainly focus on comparing the current quarter with the same quarter the previous year and DOE does not present consistent quarterly time series. It is left to the user to derive the Quarter 4 figures and to construct time series from across the reports. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DOE should publish a plan with a clear timeline for publishing regular consistent quarterly time series in a format that maximises accessibility and demonstrate early progress for headline series³⁰ (Requirement 2).
- 3.7 It is also not stated whether the quarterly series are revised at any point, though DOE told us that the quarterly and annual statistics are not subject to scheduled revisions. DOE told us that it would be able to address the user need for consistent quarterly time series but said that it may take some time to implement this fully across its systems. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DOE should include a clear statement of its revisions policy in the annual and quarterly statistical reports³¹ (Requirement 3).
- 3.8 DOE publishes information about the methods used to produce the quarterly and annual statistics, and about their quality, in the statistical reports. Each chapter of the statistical reports includes information about: the source and coverage of the statistics; guidance that users should consider in their use of the statistics such as changes in vehicle testing arrangements; and a data quality assessment. The statistician rates the quality of the statistics, for

²⁸ See note 26

²⁹ In relation to Principle 2, Practice 4; Principle 4, Practice 2; and Protocol 3, Practice 5 of the *Code of Practice*

³⁰ In relation to Principle 8, Practices 3 and 6 of the *Code of Practice*

³¹ In relation to Principle 2, Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*

example as 'good' or 'very good' and briefly explains the reasoning behind the rating. A good example of this is for the driver theory test statistics where DOE explains that the statistics are derived from administrative data maintained by the business contracted to deliver the tests. DOE acknowledges the potential risks associated with this, as the contractor's payment is dependent on this information, and explains for users that independent audits are carried out annually to mitigate this risk. We consider it good practice that responsible statisticians share their judgement with users about how assured they are about data quality. However, DOE could helpfully present more information about the strengths and limitations of the statistics, the potential sources of error and about any arrangements for audit and assurance. For example, DOE told us that the statistics team spends time with operational DVA staff to observe practices. For roadside enforcement activity, for example, they have observed enforcement officers at the roadside to ensure that vehicles are being stopped on a random basis, and they talk to enforcement officers about why this is important, in terms of not introducing any bias into the sample. In addition to strengthening the statisticians own understanding of the potential sources of error, based on the findings of this Assessment, this operational knowledge would appear to feed through to users' respect for the team's expertise.

- 3.9 As part of the designation as National Statistics, DOE should a) publish information about the key strengths and limitations of the driver and vehicle statistics and about any potential sources of error; b) determine the appropriate scale of assurance and documentation required for the administrative data used in the driver and vehicle statistics based on pragmatic and proportionate judgement about the quality of the data and the public interest profile of the statistics; and c) building on its existing data quality assessments, publish an appropriate level of detail to inform users about the quality assurance and audit arrangements for the administrative data. DOE should take into consideration the Authority's Report *Quality Assurance and Audit Arrangements for Administrative Data*³² and the National Statistician's *Interim Guidance*^{33 34} (Requirement 4).
- 3.10 DOE includes some comparisons with Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland in the statistical reports but not for all available statistics. For example, comparisons are included with Great Britain for pass rates in theory tests and practical driving tests but not for vehicle test pass rates. DOE told us that it recognises the importance to users of statistics for Northern Ireland of being able to make such comparisons but that any gaps are because equivalent comparable statistics are not available for other countries. We suggest that DOE clearly state in the statistical reports where comparisons with other countries are not possible due to unavailable data.
- 3.11 DOE publishes *Annual Driver and Vehicle* and *Quarterly Driver and Vehicle* in different formats, with the annual statistics in a traditional report format and the quarterly statistics in an Excel workbook with multiple worksheets. Despite the differences in presentation, the content is broadly similar. The Assessment

³² <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/administrative-data-and-official-statistics/quality-assurance-and-audit-arrangements-for-administrative-data---exposure-draft.pdf>

³³ <https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Interim-Admin-Data-guidance.pdf>

³⁴ In relation to Principle 4, Practices 1, 2 and 3; and Protocol 3, Practice 5 of the *Code of Practice*

team considers that the following improvements would better aid user interpretation and the accessibility of the statistics:

- *Quarterly Driver and Vehicle* includes a good visual presentation of the key points from the statistics whereas *Annual Driver and Vehicle* begins with an eight page executive summary. While this summary includes helpful information it addresses each aspect of the statistics separately and DOE could do more to draw out the key overall messages for users
- DOE could do more to explain the statistics and to offer some context that would enhance the use of the statistics. Paragraph 3.3 of this report discussed making the more-detailed analysis that DOE produces available for all users but DOE could also do more to explore links with other official statistics – for example, to explore the impact of more fuel-efficient vehicles on CO₂ emissions.
- Users responding as part of this Assessment, and to DOE’s own readership survey, said that they would appreciate better analysis of trends in the driver and vehicle statistics. *Annual Driver and Vehicle* focuses on five year trends and *Quarterly Driver and Vehicle* mainly on year-on-year comparisons. These are relatively new statistical reports and DOE told us that longer time are not always available but said that it will explore what is possible historically and seek to build up its trend analysis over time
- Linked to the interest in greater analysis of trends, users have also expressed an interest in a better use of charts to present the statistics, and for DOE to explore what would be possible in terms of spatial analysis and mapping
- Due to its format, *Quarterly Driver and Vehicle* is potentially difficult to print, reducing its accessibility. DOE told us that it is exploring ways to make a printable version readily available for users

As part of the designation as National Statistics, DOE should a) improve the commentary in *Annual Driver and Vehicle* and *Quarterly Driver and Vehicle* by improving the presentation of the key messages; providing more context for the statistics; extending the analysis of trends; and exploring better use of charts and maps to enhance the user experience and b) provide better options for printing *Quarterly Driver and Vehicle*³⁵ (Requirement 5). As part of meeting this Requirement, DOE should consider the points detailed in annex 1 and annex 2.

3.12 As part of this Assessment, some users highlighted difficulties locating the driver and vehicle statistics, and indicated that they use a number of different entry points other than the DOE website where the statistics are held. One point of entry is the DVA website, which is being decommissioned with the introduction of nidirect³⁶, a website that brings together information from government departments and agencies across Northern Ireland. nidirect does not signpost the driver and vehicle statistics. The main nidirect reference to statistics is a link to the NISRA³⁷ website within its ‘Contact A-Z’ section. The NISRA website in turn provides a link to the DOE website but there is no indication that this website includes anything other than ‘environmental’

³⁵ In relation to Principle 4 Practice 6 and Principle 8 Practices 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7 of the *Code of Practice*

³⁶ <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/index.htm>

³⁷ <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/index.html>

statistics. The Transport Travel and Tourism section of the website points to DRD transport statistics but not the DOE driver and vehicle statistics. The Assessment team considers that this makes it difficult for users to intuit where to find these statistics. DOE does make the statistics accessible through the National Statistics Publication Hub but they have yet to be added to its replacement, the release calendar on GOV.UK³⁸. DOE told us that it has training arranged for the end of September so that it can add and maintain its release schedule for all DOE National Statistics. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DOE should work together with NISRA to determine how to make the driver and vehicle statistics for Northern Ireland more accessible to users, including improving the signposting from NISRA's website³⁹ (Requirement 6). In meeting this Requirement, we suggest that DOE explore, together with NISRA, how the signposting of official statistics from nidirect could be improved.

³⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements>

³⁹ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 4 and Protocol 2, Practice 3 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*⁴⁰. 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 DOE's driver and vehicle statistics, this annex comments on compliance with the statement on standards. The comments included in this annex are based on a review of *Annual Driver and Vehicle* and *Quarterly Driver and Vehicle* for 2013-14 and Q3 (October to December) 2013 respectively.
- A1.2 In implementing any Requirements of this report (at paragraph 1.5) 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 annual statistical report begins with a clear contents page followed by an executive summary outlining the key points from each section in the report. Currently this summary is eight pages long and would benefit from being shorter and focussing only on the overall key findings from the whole report rather than section by section. A clear narrative at the start of both the annual and quarterly reports, similar to that included in the associated statistical press release, would help to give a clear view of the statistics and their purpose. Some of the narrative content in the annual report centres around structural and organisational change which, although relevant, detracts from the main messages that are likely to be of interest to a user. Adding an overall timeline and description that covers the many policy and operational changes that have affected the statistics might help the user to better interpret the results.
- A1.4 The structure of the annual report is helpful with themed chapters, each one including a topic introduction. The Excel format of the quarterly report, however, means that it is harder to navigate and it may benefit from also being offered in a printable format. DOE presents few links between the annual and quarterly statistics and where links do exist more explanation about the relationship between the two is required. For example, the introduction in the quarterly report links to the annual statistics but no discussion or further qualification is included. Both statistical reports might be improved if the information on methods and quality were moved to a separate document that both publications could reference consistently. This would have the added benefit of reducing the size of the reports.
- A1.5 DOE presents comparisons with Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland but only for some of the statistics and no other comparisons are included with any other countries. The annual report presents five-year trends (with charts) for most of the statistics and it would be helpful if DOE could extend this to include further years.

⁴⁰ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-reports.html>

Include information about the context and likely uses of the statistics

- A1.6 DOE presents some contextual background in some sections of the reports, for example, on the impact of the most recent economic recession. However, DOE could go further by considering the broader picture and linking to other related transport, environmental and economic statistics. For example, the annual report mentions the fall in the number of taxi driver licences and the likely role the recession played in this reduction, and it would be helpful here to link to other related statistics such as public transport usage or to information about the forthcoming changes in taxi licensing laws.
- A1.7 DOE includes a glossary of terms as an appendix along with tables describing the list of vehicle and driver test categories. The glossary is primarily a list of acronyms and does not give a suitable explanation from a user perspective. For example, one acronym – RD – stands for ‘Refer to Drawer’ which may not be clear to some users. Other terms are used in the publication but not included in the glossary, such as V5CNI.
- A1.8 Users often approach DOE with requests for project work that result in some very interesting findings. It could be beneficial to many users and give deeper insight if DOE were to publish the results on its website along with links to other related research.

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

- A1.9 The annual report contains helpful guidance in each section that includes advice about where caution should be applied when using and interpreting the statistics in certain respects. For example, in section 6 of the annual report, users are advised not to sum the individual driver licence entitlement stock tables as each table is specific only to that driving entitlement. The statistical reports also include high-level data quality assessments. However, we would expect to see more information about the quality assurance and audit arrangements of the underlying administrative data in line with Authority guidance⁴¹.
- A1.10 DVA uses sample surveys to assess vehicle compliance levels roadworthiness and traffic legislation for taxis, buses and HGVs, and it presents the results as part of the annual statistical report. DOE includes the survey rates for compliance and non-compliance with the targets in an annex along with confidence intervals and a meaningful interpretation. Moving the detail on confidence intervals described in the annex into the main section of the annual report on compliance surveys would improve transparency and interpretation of the findings. More detail on the coverage of each survey would also be helpful although this could be potentially calculated by dividing the numbers of each vehicle type surveyed by the total numbers of known licensed vehicles.

Be professionally sound

- A1.11 For some of the statistics, DOE makes comparisons with Great Britain but this is not the case for others, which could potentially lead users to speculate about cherry-picking. For example, comparisons with Great Britain are included in

⁴¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/national-statistician/ns-reports--reviews-and-guidance/national-statistician-s-guidance/index.html>

section 8 of the annual report for vehicle excise duty (VED) evasion but not for MOT evasion. There could be valid reasons for this but these should be stated.

A1.12 Generally the annual report is well presented with clear titles and the use of charts throughout. The report would benefit from an earlier visual representation of the data to break up the heavy use of text. Additionally, the readability of the report would be improved by left-justifying figures and ensuring that all charts were meaningful when printed in black and white. A number of minor inconsistencies were noted including dropping the decimal place in the taxi compliance text which reads “29. %” and therefore differs from the table. Also, in the table on “Theory Test – Tests conducted” on page 47, the total figure for 2012/13 in the table (49,969) differs from that quoted in the text (49,968).

Include, or link to, appropriate metadata

A1.13 DOE includes a link in the annual report to the revisions policy but there is no further detail about revisions is included in the annual and quarterly reports. DOE does clearly mark and quantify any corrections but the situation regarding scheduled revisions is unclear.

Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A2.1 This assessment was conducted from June to September 2014.

A2.2 The Assessment team – Johan Mulligan and Donna Livesey – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of DOE in June. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 8 August 2014. The Assessment team subsequently met DOE during August 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. The Assessment team has also reflected on the feedback from DOE's own readership survey.

A2.4 The Assessment team received six responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Devolved government	4
Charity	1
Academic	1

A2.5 Users told us that they are broadly content with the statistics and said that they found the statisticians to be very helpful and knowledgeable, though one user said that they had experienced problems gaining access to historic time series data when they placed an ad hoc request. Experiences of finding the statistics on DOE's website were mixed but, in general, users said they would welcome better signposting of the statistical reports and datasets. Users did not raise any common concerns but most identified possible areas for future development:

- Publishing the quarterly statistical report every quarter – to date it has not been published in the fourth quarter when the annual statistical report is made available
- Clarifying for users that there are three licence types for goods vehicles operator licensing – one user suggested that the current presentation of the statistics could be misleading
- Providing greater clarification about the comparability of the Northern Ireland statistics with those for other countries of the UK – for example, explanations of any differences in the classification of vehicles. However, the user who raised this point also reflected positively on the presentation of

statistics that allow users to place the Northern Ireland statistics in a UK context

- Publishing a vehicle mileage dataset to help users to examine the relationship between recorded mileage and vehicle use of the road network

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

DOE Readership Survey – DOE Driver, Vehicle, Operator and Enforcement Statistics
User Engagement – Summary Paper on Survey Findings⁴²

⁴² See footnote 25

