

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on Winter Fuel Payments

*(produced by the Department for Work and
Pensions)*

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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.

Contact us

Tel: 0845 604 1857

Email: authority.enquiries@statistics.gsi.gov.uk

Website: www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk

UK Statistics Authority
1 Drummond Gate
London
SW1V 2QQ

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(produced by the Department for Work and Pensions)

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 *Winter Fuel Payment*, produced by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and reported in:

- *Winter Fuel Payment: caseload and household figures*⁵
- *Winter Fuel payments by EEA country and Switzerland*⁶

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 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.

1.2 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 has determined that the statistics published in the products listed in paragraph 1.1.1 can be designated as new National Statistics products subject to DWP implementing the Requirements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by March 2015.

1.2.2 DWP has informed the Assessment team that it has started to implement the Requirements listed in section 1.5. The Statistics Authority welcomes this.

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 <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/winter-fuel-payments-caseload-and-household-figures>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/winter-fuel-payments-by-eea-country>

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

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.3.1 The *Winter Fuel Payment* statistical reports are in their infancy and DWP has made a good initial effort to produce useful statistical reports. Areas where there is scope for further improvement include the inclusion of expenditure data for Great Britain, further contextual commentary, and better use of charts to depict geographical differences in the numbers of people receiving the benefit.
- 1.3.2 DWP seeks the views of users of winter fuel payment statistics within the department on a fairly regular basis through, for example, direct email contact and user consultation. DWP engages less well with other users and does not seem to be aware of who these users might be.
- 1.3.3 The winter fuel payment statistics are produced using administrative data sources and DWP publishes a methodology report that describes the relevant processes. It is currently hard for users to form a judgement about quality as the report is technical in nature and does not give enough information about the quality assurance and audit processes involved. DWP has plans to publish a report on the quality of these statistics.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

- 1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that the DWP should improve the production and presentation of statistics on winter fuel payments. Those which are essential for the DWP 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 the DWP is required to make in respect of its statistics on winter fuel payments in order to fully comply with the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*, and to enable designation as National Statistics.

Finding	Requirement	
DWP engages well with users within the department but has not been as effective in investigating the needs of users outside DWP, or documenting the uses of these statistics. DWP should:	1	a) Publish documentation on its user engagement; b) Directly consult other relevant government departments and organisations about their needs, as users; c) Publish information about how it takes into account users' needs

		when planning publications (para 3.1).
DWP has produced a document on <i>Uses and users of the DWP Winter Fuel Payment statistics (Uses and users)</i> but it does not contain any information about the users of the statistics and has only limited examples of their use. DWP should:	2	Publish more detailed documentation on uses and users of winter fuel payment statistics and users' experiences of statistical services, data quality, and the format and timing of reports (para 3.2).
DWP does not make it clear whether the statistics are subject to scheduled revisions. DWP should:	3	Publish a revisions policy for these statistics explaining the nature and extent of any revisions and how users will be informed of any changes (para 3.3).
DWP has produced a document on methods which gives background information about the processing of the administrative data. This document is not very accessible to the non-expert user. DWP should:	4	Provide a summary explanation of methods that is accessible to non-expert users (para 3.4).
DWP provides little information about quality assurance procedures in relation to these statistics. DWP should:	5	<p>a) Publish information about the key strengths and limitations of these statistics and their reliability;</p> <p>b) Publish comprehensive information about the audit and quality assurance arrangements in place for these statistics; and</p> <p>c) Publish quality guidelines to cover all aspects of quality referred to in the European Statistical System framework.</p> <p>As part of meeting this Requirement, DWP should consider the Authority's Report <i>Quality Assurance and Audit Arrangements for Administrative Data</i> and the National Statistician's <i>Interim Guidance</i> (para 3.5).</p>
DWP publishes tables by different categories but users	6	Publish these statistics in as much detail as is reliable and practicable,

commented on the need for tables at a more-detailed geographical level. DWP should:		subject to legal and confidentiality constraints (para 3.6).
DWP could present a richer analysis of the statistics by drawing in contextual statistics and providing more appropriate charts. DWP should:	7	a) Provide more context for the statistics; and b) Make better use of charts and maps to enhance the user experience (para 3.7).
DWP pre-release access lists do not provide numbers of post-holders where these exceed one. DWP should:	8	Publish the numbers of post holders in pre-release access lists where there is more than one (para 3.8).
DWP has not updated its Statement of Administrative Sources (SoAS) with details of the arrangements for auditing the quality of the administrative data used for the purposes of producing these statistics. DWP should:	9	a) Ensure that the administrative data source used in the production of the winter fuel payment statistics is listed in its SoAS; and b) Update its SoAS for winter fuel payment statistics to include full information about the arrangements for auditing the quality of the administrative data (para 3.9).

1.6 Suggestions for extracting maximum value from the statistics

1.6.1 This section includes some suggestions for improvement to the DWP's statistics on winter fuel payments, 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 DWP:

1	Develop plans to publish the results from its user questionnaire (para 3.1).
2	Refer to the types of use put forward in the Authority's Monitoring Brief, <i>The Use Made of Official Statistics</i> (para 3.2).
3	Consider adding a link to the Uses and Users document from the <i>Winter Fuel Payment</i> report (para 3.2).

4	Include a link to the pre-release access list directly from its winter fuel payment webpage (para 3.8).
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2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 The winter fuel payment allowance was introduced in 1997 as a contribution to tackling fuel poverty amongst pensioners. It is an annual tax-free payment of between £100 and £300 to help those eligible to meet the costs of heating their homes in winter. Payments are generally made between November and December but this can extend until the end of March. Previously, the qualifying age to receive the payment was 60, but from 2010 this was increased in line with the changing State Pension age for women. Automatic entitlement is based on the individual(s) being in receipt of State Pension, Pension Credit, Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance or Income Support. The payment amount is based on their circumstances during the qualifying week, which is usually in the September prior to the winter referenced. From July 2002, the residency criterion was extended beyond those people living in the UK to include those living within the European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland during the qualifying week who have a genuine and sufficient link to the UK.
- 2.2 DWP first published winter fuel payment statistics in 2010 (for the period 2009/10) as a suite of Excel tables, broken down by different categories, including local authority, parliamentary constituency, age and gender. The statistics from 1999 to 2009 are available on request from the House of Commons Library⁸. During this assessment the statistics team produced, for the first time, a statistical report to accompany the latest set of winter fuel payment tables. The statistics assessed in this report were published in September 2014 and cover the period 2013/14.
- 2.3 The winter fuel payment statistics use data from two administrative sources. The first is DWP's benefit administration system and the second is winter fuel payment data that are supplied by HP Enterprise Services (HPES). These two sources are combined and processed to produce a final dataset of all recipients who should receive a winter fuel payment. Quality assurance checks are carried out by the statisticians; these include checking coding logs and making comparisons with the statistics obtained from previous years' outputs.
- 2.4 A decision of the European Court of Justice led to the winter fuel payment being extended to those living in the EEA and Switzerland who have a genuine and sufficient link to the UK, resulting in increased government spending on the winter fuel payment. This led to more freedom of information requests concerning the winter fuel payment benefit. A further legal change will mean that from autumn 2015, the winter fuel payment will only be made to those living in these qualifying countries where the average winter temperature in the particular country of residence falls below that in the UK.
- 2.5 Any ad hoc or follow-up requests that the statistics team receive are usually passed on to analysts working in the DWP Fuel Poverty team.
- 2.6 The House of Commons Library published a review⁹ of winter fuel payment covering a number of issues around the future of this benefit. Points included in the review are whether the payments should continue, whether eligibility should

⁸ By contacting hclibrary@parliament.uk

⁹ <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/research/briefing-papers/SN06019/winter-fuel-payments-update>

be extended to other potentially vulnerable groups and whether the current level of benefit should be reviewed.

2.7 DWP told us that it costs approximately £6,000 each year to produce the *Winter Fuel Payment* reports.

2.8 The statistics from *Winter Fuel Payment* are used by:

- policy makers in DWP and other UK Government departments to inform decision making about winter fuel payment and fuel poverty policies
- DWP analysts to forecast expenditure of winter fuel payment
- academics researching issues such as pensioners' fuel poverty
- House of Commons Library to inform MPs and their staff about winter fuel payment
- charities that are concerned with helping the elderly that may be living in fuel poverty, for example Age UK

2.9 DWP publishes *Winter Fuel Payment* in PDF, with tables published in Excel format. 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*¹⁰ and adopted as UK government policy in November 2012¹¹. Five stars represents the highest star rating within the Scheme.

¹⁰ http://data.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Open_data_White_Paper.pdf

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-standards-principles/open-standards-principles>

3 Assessment findings

User engagement and meeting users' needs

- 3.1 The statistical team engages well with users within DWP, inviting feedback and regularly holding user events. However, DWP has published no evidence of this user engagement, such as remits, attendees, papers, agendas or minutes of any meetings or events. DWP has not been proactive in contacting users beyond the department. For example, it has not directly consulted with colleagues in other relevant government departments such as Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC), which produces fuel poverty statistics, or other organisations that could be important users of the statistics, such as Age UK. Prior to this assessment, DWP's engagement with the wider user community had mostly been through the web forum StatsUserNet¹² and there had been no evidence that statistical planning carried out by DWP with regards to these statistics had taken account of users' needs. However, during this assessment DWP published a user questionnaire¹³, which asks users for their views on, and use of, the winter fuel payment statistics. The questionnaire is an ongoing consultation with no defined end date, and DWP told us that it plans to consider users' responses in order to make improvements to these statistics to better meet users' needs. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DWP should a) publish documentation on their user engagement; b) directly consult other related government departments and organisations on their user needs; and c) publish information on how it takes into account users' needs when planning publications¹⁴ (Requirement 1). As part of meeting this requirement we suggest that DWP develop plans to publish the results from its user questionnaire.
- 3.2 During this assessment DWP produced a document entitled *Uses and users of the DWP Winter Fuel Payment statistics (Uses and users)*¹⁵. However it contains no information about the users of the statistics, and only one broad example of their use. DWP has published no information about users' experiences of the statistical services, data quality, or the format and timing of reports related to these statistics. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DWP should publish more-detailed documentation on uses and users of winter fuel payment statistics and users' experiences of statistical services, data quality, and the format and timing of reports¹⁶ (Requirement 2). We suggest that in meeting this Requirement, DWP should refer to the types of use put forward in the Authority's Monitoring Brief, *The Use Made of Official Statistics*¹⁷. We also suggest that DWP add a link to *Uses and users* from *Winter Fuel Payment*.

¹² <http://www.statsusernet.org.uk/home/>

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/winter-fuel-payment-statistics-user-questionnaire>

¹⁴ In relation to Principle 1, Practices 2 and 5 and Protocol 1, Practices 1, 3 and 6 of the *Code of Practice*

¹⁵ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/355469/uses-users-dwp-winter-fuel-payment-statistics.pdf

¹⁶ In relation to Principle 1, Practices 2 and 5 and Protocol 1, Practices 1, and 3 of the *Code of Practice*

¹⁷ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-reviews/monitoring-brief-6-2010---the-use-made-of-official-statistics.pdf>

Data revisions

- 3.3 DWP includes a link in the statistical report to DWP policy statements, which includes the DWP revisions policy. However in respect of the winter fuel payment statistics, it is not clear which statistics DWP is likely to revise in the future, if any. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DWP should publish a revisions policy for these statistics explaining the nature and extent of any revisions and how users will be informed of any changes¹⁸ (Requirement 3).

Sound methods and assured quality

- 3.4 DWP's winter fuel payment webpage contains a link to the *Methodology Statement for the Department for Work and Pensions Statistical Bulletin: Winter Fuel Payments*¹⁹, which gives background information about the processing of the administrative data. However, some of the processes described are technical and the statement does not provide a summary that would be accessible to a non-expert user. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DWP should provide a summary explanation of methods that is accessible to non-expert users²⁰ (Requirement 4).
- 3.5 DWP mentions that the statistics are quality assured in its *Methodology Statement for the Department for Work and Pensions Statistical Bulletin: Winter Fuel Payments* but provides little information about the quality assurance processes in relation to these statistics. For example, DWP has published no information about the reliability of the data, and made only brief mention about the steps taken, either by DWP or the data suppliers, to assure the quality of the data. DWP has not described to users the risks to statistical quality that are posed by the administrative data sources, nor explained at an appropriate level, any safeguards it applies to minimise these risks. The statistics team told us that it plans to publish a document by March 2015 which will provide more-detailed information about the quality assurance checks that are carried out on the data, as well as information about the strengths and weaknesses of the statistics. These statistics have a high political profile and the Authority judges them to require enhanced assurance around the audit and quality assurance arrangements. This is particularly relevant around explaining any limitations that may be present in the statistics as a result of using administrative data. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DWP should a) publish information about the key strengths and weaknesses of these statistics and their reliability; b) publish comprehensive information about the audit and quality assurance arrangements in place for these statistics; and c) publish quality guidelines to cover all aspects of quality referred to in the European Statistical System framework²¹ (Requirement 5). As part of meeting this Requirement, DWP should consider the Authority's Report *Quality Assurance*

¹⁸ In relation to Principle 2, Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*

¹⁹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/354998/methodology-statement-dwp-winter-fuel-payments.pdf

²⁰ In relation to Principle 4, Practices 2, 3 and 4 of the *Code of Practice*

²¹ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 1 and Principle 8, Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

and Audit Arrangements for Administrative Data²² and the National Statistician's Interim Guidance²³.

Frankness and accessibility

- 3.6 DWP publishes *Winter Fuel Payment* in PDF format and tables are available in Excel spreadsheets. Although tables are produced showing a variety of different analytical categories, some users told us that they would like these data to be available at a more-detailed level. One local authority suggested making the data available on Neighbourhood Statistics²⁴. Additionally, DWP does not make winter fuel payment statistics available through its Tabulation Tool²⁵ or Stat-Xplore²⁶. As part of the designation as National Statistics DWP should publish these statistics in as much geographical detail as is reliable and practicable, subject to legal and confidentiality constraints²⁷ (Requirement 6).
- 3.7 DWP produced a statistical report for *Winter Fuel Payment* for the first time in 2014 along with several other new related publications on background²⁸, methods and users and uses of the statistics. These changes have been beneficial in giving background and context to the statistics. The Assessment team welcomes these changes but considers that the following improvements would further aid user interpretation and the accessibility of the statistics:
- DWP includes tables on expenditure by European Economic Area (EEA) country and Switzerland in *Winter Fuel Payment*, which helps to relate the number of payments and the associated expenditure. DWP could also include expenditure detail for GB to add context to the statistical report
 - Users commented that the winter fuel payment statistics would benefit from more links to other related statistics and research. For example, an explanation of the links between winter fuel payment and fuel poverty²⁹ would help users to better interpret the statistics. DWP could add in links, or make reference to, fuel poverty statistics, cold weather payments³⁰ and other relevant statistics or research
 - DWP has produced a useful document providing background information related to winter fuel payment statistics. However, users told us that they would like to see more information about who is eligible to receive the winter fuel payment. Further clarity around the relationship between the household and individual-level data would be useful
 - The statistical report includes some charts, which is helpful in seeing changes over time. DWP could make more use of charts to enhance the report. The map (Figure 3.1 in *Winter Fuel Payment*) showing the number of payments made to eligible people in another EEA country and Switzerland,

²² <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/administrative-data-and-official-statistics/quality-assurance-and-audit-arrangements-for-administrative-data---exposure-draft.pdf>

²³ <https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Interim-Admin-Data-guidance.pdf>

²⁴ <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/>

²⁵ <http://tabulation-tool.dwp.gov.uk/WorkProg/tabtool.html>

²⁶ <https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/>

²⁷ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 3 of the *Code of Practice*

²⁸ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/355000/winter-fuel-payment-statistics-background-note.pdf

²⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fuel-poverty-statistics>

³⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/cold-weather-payment/overview>

is difficult to interpret and does not clearly show comparisons between countries.

As part of the designation as National Statistics, DWP should improve the commentary in *Winter Fuel Payment* by a) providing more context for the statistics; and b) exploring better use of charts and maps to enhance the user experience³¹ (Requirement 7). As part of meeting this Requirement, DWP should consider the points detailed in Annex 1 and Annex 2.

Release Practices

- 3.8 In late September 2014 DWP updated its complete listing of all those with access to its statistics prior to their release³². DWP lists 12 Ministers and officials as having pre-release access to these statistics. The list for these statistics contains both discrete individual job titles as well as job titles for which there are multiple job holders such as 'special advisers'. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DWP should publish the numbers of post holders in pre-release access lists where there is more than one³³ (Requirement 8). We also suggest that DWP include a link to the pre-release access list directly from its winter fuel payment webpage.

The use of administrative sources for statistical purposes

- 3.9 DWP's Statement of Administrative Sources (SoAS)³⁴ does not reference the winter fuel payment administrative data source. Furthermore, DWP's SoAS does not contain details of the arrangements for auditing the quality of the administrative data used for statistical purposes. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DWP should a) ensure that the administrative data source used in the production of the winter fuel payment statistics is listed in its SoAS; and b) update its SoAS for winter fuel payment statistics to include full information about the arrangements for auditing the quality of the administrative data³⁵ (Requirement 9).

³¹ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 6 and Principle 8 Practices 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7 of the *Code of Practice*

³² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pre-release-access-to-statistics-order-2008/pre-release-access-to-statistics-order-2008>

³³ In relation to Protocol 2, Practice 7 of the *Code of Practice*

³⁴ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/324498/DWP_Statement_of_Administrative_Sources.pdf

³⁵ In relation to Protocol 3, Practice 5(e) of the *Code of Practice*

Annex 1: Compliance with Standards for Statistical Reports

- A1.1 In November 2012, the Authority issued a statement on *Standards for Statistical Reports*³⁶. 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 DWP's winter fuel payments statistics, this annex comments on compliance with the statement on standards. The comments included in this annex are based on a review of *DWP Winter Fuel Payment bulletin: September 2014*.
- 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 *Winter Fuel Payment* begins with a clear contents page followed by an executive summary outlining the key points from the report. The summary would benefit from including more detail along with each of the main points, particularly concerning the magnitude of any changes.
- A1.4 The statistics are explained well and the report includes good commentary and detail on why numbers might have fluctuated over time. Brief mention is made of the data collection methods involved, which are quite complex and involve third party organisations. A link is also included to *Methodology Statement for the Department for Work and Pensions Statistical Bulletin: Winter Fuel Payments*³⁷ that gives explicit detail on the production processes and mentions the quality assurance practices involved in the production of *Winter Fuel Payment*. Adding a briefer, summary description of any impact on quality as a result of these processes would enhance the report by making it more accessible to a wider range of readers. For example, further explanation is needed about how data have been aggregated at the household level. The document on methods is detailed but is quite technical, and non-expert users might have difficulty in following some of the processes involved.
- A1.5 The report includes links to other DWP statistics, which is helpful in providing users with the facility to contextualise the statistics. For example, detail about the likely impact of changes in the state pension age on trends is included within the statistical report. This could be enhanced by including projections of the ageing population. In addition to this, it would be beneficial to refer within the commentary to other related statistics and publications about the pensioner age group, such as those relating to fuel poverty, and to provide more explanation of the links between them.

Include information about the context and likely uses of the statistics

- A1.6 DWP presents some contextual background in the report but it would be helpful to users if the statistical report included more detail on the importance of the statistics and examples of who uses them and for what purposes. This could

³⁶ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-reports.html>

³⁷ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/354998/methodology-statement-dwp-winter-fuel-payments.pdf

enable users to maximise their own use of the statistics. The statistical report includes a link to *Uses and users of the Winter Fuel Payment Statistic*³⁸ which contains a brief statement of when the statistics should and should not be used, but it does not provide enough detail about who the users of the statistics are, what they are using the statistics for and what the statistics could be used for.

A1.7 *Winter Fuel Payment* includes a table on expenditure on this benefit for those residing in EEA countries and Switzerland. However, no similar expenditure data are included for Great Britain which makes it hard to make geographical comparisons on the amount of benefit expenditure across and within countries. A link to the DWP Benefits Expenditure statistics³⁹ is provided, which contains expenditure figures for winter fuel payments, but it would be preferable to include this data within the statistical report.

Be professionally sound

A1.8 The charts and tables mostly conform to good practice and are well-presented. The inclusion of the map is a potentially useful visual aid but not enough detail of the actual numbers in different geographical locations is provided. The statistical report includes links to the Excel tables which allows users to access and re-use the data. The Excel spreadsheet for expenditure on EEA countries and Switzerland⁴⁰ includes a footnote that incorrectly identifies the data as 'number of payments' rather than 'expenditure amount'. This should be corrected.

Include, or link to, appropriate metadata

A1.9 DWP has included a link to similar statistics produced in Northern Ireland⁴¹ which is useful but it would be beneficial to present a chart that gives a more direct comparison of the two sets of statistics. Additionally, users might find it helpful to know whether any other EU countries have a similar type of benefit.

³⁸ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/355469/uses-users-dwp-winter-fuel-payment-statistics.pdf

³⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/benefit-expenditure-and-caseload-tables-2014>

⁴⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/winter-fuel-payments-by-eea-country>

⁴¹ <http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/sf-annual-report-2012-13.pdf>

Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

- A2.1 This assessment was conducted from May to November 2014.
- A2.2 The Assessment team – Donna Hosie, Iain Russell and Johan Mulligan – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of DWP in June 2014. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 31 July. The Assessment team subsequently met DWP during September 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. User views were sought for this assessment on the excel tables only as the new statistical report had not yet been published.

A2.4 The Assessment team received 11 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Central government	3
Commercial organisation	2
Researcher	2
Not for profit organisation	2
Local government	1
Parliament	1

- A2.5 Most users told us that they found the statistics easy to access and clearly labelled, with many stating that they found them via a Google search. The navigation within the Winter Fuel Payment section of the GOV.UK website was felt to be easy to follow.
- A2.6 Overall users felt that the quality of the statistics was adequate for their needs, although some users would like more information about strengths and limitations, as well as some documentation of the technical aspects of the data. Some of the definitions were reported as being unclear. More information was requested about who was eligible for the payments, whether the counts in the tables refer to households or numbers of recipients, and how the individual and household data relate to each other.
- A2.7 Some users felt that the level of disaggregation of the statistics met their needs but several, particularly those in local government, said the statistics would only be useful to them if they were available at lower level geographies, such as middle level and lower level super output areas. There was a request for some of the data to be accessible via the Neighbourhood Statistics website.

- A2.8 There was a request by several users for more contextual information to be added to the statistical reports – in particular, research into any links between the winter fuel payments and fuel poverty, more information about expenditure on winter fuel payments, and rates by population of those claiming winter fuel payments to allow comparisons between areas.
- A2.9 Users from government departments told us that their engagement with the winter fuel payments statistical team was good and that they were very helpful. Other users tended to have less direct engagement with the statistical team.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

