

# Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

## School Statistics for Wales

*(produced by the Welsh Assembly Government)*

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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 reports<sup>1</sup> prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*<sup>2</sup>. The report covers 17 sets of statistics releases on schools and pupils in Wales, produced by the Welsh Assembly Government. The outputs include exam performance, school and pupil characteristics, and absence and exclusion statistics. The report does not cover statistics on further or higher education, which will be the subject of a future assessment. The full list of statistics is detailed in Section 2.

1.1.2 This report was prepared by the Authority's Assessment team, and approved by the Board of the Statistics Authority on the advice of the Head of Assessment.

## 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 Authority confirms that the sets of statistics detailed in paragraph 2.1 are designated as National Statistics, and has determined that the statistics detailed in paragraph 2.2 can be designated as new National Statistics products, subject to the Assembly Government implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by January 2011.

## 1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

1.3.1 The Assembly Government has regular meetings with key users, and recently carried out a 'mini consultation' where 28 users were interviewed. The positive approach to user engagement is reflected in the responses we received from users. Data collection has been rationalised and computerised, using management information systems in schools to provide the majority of the data. This has reduced the burden on suppliers and improved data quality. Timeliness has also been improved, with several publications brought forward, although users would still like some statistics sooner.

1.3.2 The statistics are generally presented clearly, although some commentary should be reviewed to ensure that it aids interpretation. There is a lack of available information on the sources and methods used. Some information about quality is provided, but coverage of the dimensions of quality is inconsistent.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga\\_20070018\\_en.pdf](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf)

## 1.4 Detailed recommendations

- 1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that the Assembly Government could strengthen its compliance with the Code. Those which the Assessment team considers essential to enable designation as National Statistics are listed in section 1.5. Other suggestions, which would improve the statistics and the service provided to users but which are not formally required for their designation, are listed at annex 1.

## 1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

<b>Requirement 1</b>	Ensure that full details of the methods used are made available to users (para 3.10).
<b>Requirement 2</b>	Ensure that users are informed about the quality of statistical outputs, including estimates of the main sources of bias and other aspects of quality (para 3.11).
<b>Requirement 3</b>	Report annually the estimated costs of responding to statistical surveys (para 3.16)
<b>Requirement 4</b>	Review commentary across all schools statistics, to ensure that it aids interpretation of the statistics (para 3.19).
<b>Requirement 5</b>	Review the <i>Academic Achievement and Entitlement to Free School Meals</i> release to ensure that it provides information on the uses of these statistics and includes commentary and analysis that aid interpretation (para 3.20).
<b>Requirement 6</b>	Review the way in which these statistics are presented, to ensure that users can easily identify and access information relevant to their needs (para 3.21).
<b>Requirement 7</b>	Draw attention in the relevant statistical release to the availability of datasets of attainment statistics for individual schools, and make these datasets available on request with appropriate explanation to encourage informed use (3.23).
<b>Requirement 8</b>	Review the use of the terms 'First Release' and 'Statistical Bulletin' when publishing statistical releases, to ensure clarity for users (para 3.24).
<b>Requirement 9</b>	Publish the name and contact details of the responsible statistician in all statistical releases (para 3.28).

**Requirement 10**

Publish lists of those people given pre-release access to each release (para 3.29).

## 2 Subject of the assessment

2.2 The 15 sets of statistics included in this assessment that are currently designated as National Statistics are:

- *Schools in Wales: Examination Performance*<sup>3</sup>, and *Schools in Wales: General Statistics*<sup>4</sup>. First published as a single publication in 1975 by the Welsh Office, these were separated in 1999 so that *General Statistics* could be published earlier.
- *Examination Results in Wales*<sup>5</sup>. Published as provisional statistics in September and finalised in November. In 2007 the indicator definitions changed to encompass all qualifications used in schools, and to bring definitions into line with those used in England.
- *Teacher Assessments of the Non-Core Subjects at Key Stage 3, Wales*<sup>6</sup>. Published since 1999.
- *National Curriculum Assessments of 7, 11 and 14 Year Olds: Wales*<sup>7</sup>. Published since 1997.
- *Assessment and Examination Performance in Wales: Comparison with England and its Regions*<sup>8</sup>. First published in 2001 as a result of increased interest during the early years of the National Assembly for Wales.
- *Academic Achievements by Pupil Characteristics*<sup>9</sup>. First published in 2006 using matched pupil-level data from the National Pupil Database.
- *Academic Achievement and Entitlement to Free School Meals*<sup>10</sup>. Uses the National Pupil Database to explore the relationship between deprivation and achievement.
- *Schools Census: Provisional Results*<sup>11</sup>. Published since the early 1990s. This release is marked as provisional, with finalised statistics published in *Schools in Wales: General Statistics*.
- *Teachers in Service, Vacancies and Sickness Absence*<sup>12</sup>. First published in the early 1990s, with sickness data added in 2003.
- *Pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs*<sup>13</sup>. First published in the early 1990s.
- *Absenteeism from Secondary Schools*<sup>14</sup>. The content of this publication was expanded in 2009 using pupil-level data to include the distribution of absence by the length of absence, by free school meal entitlement, and by absence rates.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/schools2009/hdw20090507/?lang=en>

<sup>4</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/schools2009/hdw200910293/?lang=en>

<sup>5</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/schools2009/hdw200911263/?lang=en>

<sup>6</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/schools2009/hdw20090903/?lang=en>

<sup>7</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/schools2009/hdw200908271/?lang=en>

<sup>8</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/schools2009/hdw200906251/?lang=en>

<sup>9</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/schools2009/hdw200903241/?lang=en>

<sup>10</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/schools2009/hdw200903191/?lang=en>

<sup>11</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/schools2009/hdw200907011/?lang=en>

<sup>12</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/schools2009/hdw200906182/?lang=en>

<sup>13</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/schools2009/hdw200906171/?lang=en>

<sup>14</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/schools2009/hdw200910011/?lang=en>

- *School Statistics by Assembly Constituency and Region*<sup>15</sup>. Produced for the first time in 2007 as a result of increased demand from Assembly Members for localised statistics.
- *Class Sizes in Primary Schools in Wales*<sup>16</sup>. First published in 1999 to monitor a National Assembly target to reduce class sizes. The date for achieving this target has now passed, but limits on class sizes remain a legal obligation.
- *Pupils Leaving Education With No Qualifications*<sup>17</sup>. First published in 1999 to monitor compliance with a National Assembly target. This target no longer exists but the data are now used as a National Strategic Performance Indicator.

2.3 There are also two sets of statistics included in this assessment that are not currently designated as National Statistics. They are:

- *Absenteeism from Primary Schools*<sup>18</sup>. This was first collected for all schools in 2004 after a pilot in 2003. The content of this publication was expanded in 2009 to present statistics on absence by duration, by free school meal entitlement, and by absence rates.
- *Exclusions from Schools in Wales*<sup>19</sup>. Until 2009, this was collected by policy officials in the Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills but still partly validated and published by the Statistical Directorate of the Assembly Government. The full process is now managed by the Statistical Directorate.

2.4 All of the above statistical releases are published annually. Prior to 2004, all data collection was at aggregate school or local authority level. With the introduction of the Information Management Strategy for Schools, the Assembly Government began collecting data at pupil-level. Nine pupil-level data sets are collected electronically from school management information systems. One of these collections is also known collectively as the Schools Census, and some of the collections feed into a dataset known as the National Pupil Database. Three data sets are collected directly from records held by local authorities. Data from independent schools are collected separately at school-level.

2.5 The Assembly Government was unable to tell us the cost of producing these statistics.

2.6 In 2001 the Assembly Government Education Minister held a public consultation on proposals to discontinue the publication of school-level attainment statistics as school 'league tables'. Since then, the Assembly Government has published school-level attainment statistics in a restrictive format. On announcing the abolition of Welsh school league tables, the Education Minister said that she was determined to stop local newspapers publishing results in order of performance<sup>20</sup>. The Assembly Government's

<sup>15</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/schools2009/hdw200901292/?lang=en>

<sup>16</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/schools2009/hdw200911262/?lang=en>

<sup>17</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/schools2009/hdw200912023/?lang=en>

<sup>18</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/schools2009/hdw20090217/?lang=en>

<sup>19</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/schools2009/hdw200903312/?lang=en>

<sup>20</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/1448158.stm>

policy on league tables was recently subject to criticism reported in the media<sup>21</sup>, although there are a range of views on the value of league tables<sup>22</sup>.

- 2.7 Schools statistics have a wide user base. Primarily, they are used for resource allocation, the most significant being the Welsh Local Government Revenue Settlement where £2 billion is allocated annually to local authorities on the basis of pupil numbers. Other examples are specific grants under the Better Schools Fund formula (£39 million per year) and the Minority Ethnic Achievement Grant (£9 million per year). Within the Assembly Government, the statistics are used widely to monitor education policies and the effectiveness of the education system. The Welsh education inspectorate, Estyn, uses the statistics as background to statutory school inspections, and the Wales Audit Office uses them for audits of local authorities. The statistics underpin many of the National Strategic Performance Indicators – a set of nationally agreed performance measures for Wales. Using matched data from the National Pupil Database, researchers are able to model value added analyses of school performance, and compare pupil attainment with a range of socio-economic factors. The statistics also feed into the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation.
- 2.8 Other uses include informing vaccination programmes for children in schools, calculating council tax banding of schools, estimating small area ethnic population and migration statistics, and for strategic planning by the fire and rescue service.

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/education-news/2010/01/15/school-league-tables-policy-criticised-91466-25605852/>

<sup>22</sup> For example: [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life\\_and\\_style/education/article7029813.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/education/article7029813.ece)

### 3 Assessment findings

#### Principle 1: Meeting user needs

**The production, management and dissemination of official statistics should meet the requirements of informed decision-making by government, public services, business, researchers and the public.**

- 3.1 The Assembly Government's Statistical Directorate commissioned a review of school and teacher statistics in Wales in early 2007. This 'mini consultation' involved face to face or telephone meetings with 28 users, including policy officials within the Assembly Government, local authorities, schools, Estyn, the Welsh Language Board and the Wales Audit Office. An interim report was prepared for internal review, and the findings were used to ensure that the published statistics were meeting user needs, with the introduction of new statistical releases as a result of user feedback. We suggest the Assembly Government publish this report.
- 3.2 The 'mini consultation' involved contacting users that the Statistical Directorate already knew about, but was not publicised more widely. The Statistical Directorate told us it plans to hold a full public consultation during 2010.
- 3.3 Statisticians in the Statistical Directorate are also members of the Association of Directors of Education in Wales (ADEW) Data Practitioners Forum, a group where local authority users of schools statistics used to meet three times a year. The ADEW Data Practitioners Forum has not met since 2008. We suggest the Assembly Government review the engagement strategy for this group to ensure that an appropriate level of contact is maintained.
- 3.4 Other methods of engagement include bilateral meetings with users and public consultations on specific issues. For example, the Statistical Directorate recently held a public consultation on changes to the way it disseminates *Schools in Wales: General Statistics*. Users who contacted us were generally positive about the way they had been engaged with and praised the Assembly Government for its excellent communication.

## **Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity**

**Official statistics, and information about statistical processes, should be managed impartially and objectively.**

- 3.5 The statisticians producing these statistics have confirmed that they follow the Assembly Government's organisational revisions policy and pricing policy for supplementary statistical services.
- 3.6 The statistics are presented impartially and objectively. Where statistics are released as provisional, the release clearly states when and where the revised statistics will be published. The last unplanned revision due to a data error was in January 2008, when a faulty data system led to missing records. A revised release and an explanation were published alongside the old release. We were told that changes to methods or classifications are announced as far in advance as possible.

### **Principle 3: Integrity**

**At all stages in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics, the public interest should prevail over organisational, political or personal interests.**

- 3.7 No incidents of political pressure or abuse of trust were reported to or identified by the Assessment team in the course of this assessment.

## Principle 4: Sound methods and assured quality

**Statistical methods should be consistent with scientific principles and internationally recognised best practices, and be fully documented. Quality should be monitored and assured taking account of internationally agreed practices.**

- 3.8 The data used to derive these statistics are provided by schools and local authorities under statutory requirements. Until 2004, all data were collected at aggregate school-level or local authority-level. Most data are now collected at pupil-level from management information systems that schools use primarily for their own purposes, via an online secure system known as the Data Exchange Wales Initiative (DEWI). Once schools have successfully submitted their data, local authorities check the aggregates against their own records. The data are then sent to the Assembly Government through the secure DEWI system. Nine data sets are collected in this way, and records are linked by unique pupil identifiers.
- 3.9 There are two exceptions to this method. Firstly, independent schools provide their data manually in an aggregate school-level format. Secondly, there are three statistical releases in this assessment<sup>23</sup> that derive directly from records held by local authorities.
- 3.10 Some basic information about the methods used is included in the releases, but coverage is inconsistent. Information about data collection is available as guidance for data suppliers, but links are difficult to find from the schools statistics area of the Assembly Government website. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Assembly Government should ensure that full details of the methods used are made available to users<sup>24</sup> (Requirement 1).
- 3.11 Most releases contain a section entitled 'Key Quality Information', which, depending on the release, may include information on response, definitions, or specific data issues. However, this is usually limited to basic information and there is no consistency about which dimensions of quality are reported. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Assembly Government should ensure that users are informed about the quality of statistical outputs, including estimates of the main sources of bias and other aspects of quality<sup>25</sup> (Requirement 2).
- 3.12** The Welsh Assembly contributes to UK-wide statistical outputs such as Regional Trends<sup>26</sup> produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). It also contributes to work led by the Department for Education (DfE) on the International Standard Classification System to promote international comparability of statistics, and publishes a comparison of examination performance with England. It is difficult to compare pupil attainment statistics for Wales with statistics for Scotland and Northern Ireland because of the different examination systems. Other school statistics, for example, on

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<sup>23</sup> *Pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs, Teachers in Service, Vacancies and Sickness Absence and Pupils Leaving Education With No Qualifications*

<sup>24</sup> In relation to Principle 4 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

<sup>25</sup> In relation to Principle 4 Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/product.asp?vlnk=836>

attendance, may lend themselves more readily to comparisons across administrations. We suggest the Assembly Government work with DfE, the Scottish Government and the Department of Education, Northern Ireland to investigate options for producing comparable statistics across the four administrations.

## **Principle 5: Confidentiality**

**Private information about individual persons (including bodies corporate) compiled in the production of official statistics is confidential, and should be used for statistical purposes only.**

- 3.13 The Assembly Government has assured us that it takes all necessary steps to protect the confidentiality of the data it collects. The statisticians producing these statistics have confirmed that they follow the Assembly Government's organisational arrangements for confidentiality protection. In addition, DEWI is designed to securely share confidential data with key users. Fair processing notices are issued to all parents, outlining how their child's data will be protected and used. All cells with a non-zero value of less than five are suppressed, and other disclosure decisions are made on a case by case basis. Any request for access to data below school-level is only approved once a data access agreement is signed.

## **Principle 6: Proportionate burden**

**The cost burden on data suppliers should not be excessive and should be assessed relative to the benefits arising from the use of the statistics.**

- 3.14 Most data collections for these statistics are based on information that schools need to store about their pupils for operational purposes. The system of electronic data collection from management information systems is less burdensome than the old system of aggregated school returns. The suppliers we spoke to confirmed that the system is straightforward.
- 3.15 Information is collected on the amount of time that schools spend completing the returns. This has been consistently falling since 2003. In addition, the Assembly Government has started a 'data rationalisation' project which aims to capture the ad hoc requests that schools and local authorities receive from other bodies, such as Estyn, to identify where duplicate requests can be reduced.
- 3.16 At an organisational level, the Assembly Government submits to ONS a report of the estimated costs of responding to statistical surveys, but the Assembly Government does not publish this information. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Assembly Government should report annually the estimated costs of responding to statistical surveys<sup>27</sup> (Requirement 3).

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<sup>27</sup> In relation to Principle 6 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice and previously specified in Assessment Report 33

## Principle 7: Resources

**The resources made available for statistical activities should be sufficient to meet the requirements of this Code and should be used efficiently and effectively.**

- 3.17 The statisticians producing these statistics have confirmed that they follow the Assembly Government's organisational recruitment, learning and development policies.
- 3.18 Assembly Government statisticians told us that the move to administrative systems allowed for greater efficiency in preparing and quality assuring the statistics. They also told us that they have demonstrated effective stewardship of resources by consulting users on the prospect of discontinuing hard copies of *Schools in Wales: General Statistics*, to divert resources into further enhancing the school information available.

## Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

**Official statistics, accompanied by full and frank commentary, should be readily accessible to all users.**

- 3.19 In general, the statistics are presented clearly, with ‘key points’ that draw out the headline results. Some releases include comprehensive commentary<sup>28</sup>, but commentary in other releases is less helpful<sup>29</sup>. Much of the commentary stays the same year on year, with only the numbers changing. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Assembly Government should review commentary across all schools statistics, to ensure that it aids interpretation of the statistics<sup>30</sup> (Requirement 4).
- 3.20 One release - *Academic Achievement and Entitlement to Free School Meals* – would especially benefit from improved commentary on its purpose, intended use, and key messages. The release uses technical statistical modelling, which calls for particularly careful explanation for it to be accessible to users. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Assembly Government should review this release to ensure that it provides information on the uses of these statistics and includes commentary and analysis that aid interpretation<sup>31</sup> (Requirement 5).
- 3.21 The suite of releases covered in this assessment has been developed over time to meet specific user needs for information on schools in Wales. This has led to an assortment of publications that can make it difficult to identify and access relevant information, especially for casual users – a point made by some users, and one with which we concur. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Assembly Government should review the way in which these statistics are presented, to ensure that users can easily identify and access the information relevant to their needs<sup>32</sup> (Requirement 6). For example, this could be achieved by collating outputs by sub-themes, or by providing more guidance for users on where relevant information can be found.
- 3.22 Two releases in this assessment present attainment statistics for Wales based on teacher assessment results for Key Stages 1, 2 and 3 of the national curriculum, and attainment results for GCSE, AS and A level examinations for pupils aged 15 and 17. The statistics are published for Wales and for Welsh Local Education Authorities (LEAs).
- 3.23 In addition to the statistics covered in this assessment, the Assembly Government publishes some attainment results for individual schools on its website<sup>33</sup>. These results are only available in PDF format, and for each school separately. The results for each school are not presented alongside each other and are not accompanied by any comparative information, for example, the

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<sup>28</sup> For example, *Academic Achievement by Pupil Characteristics* contains a helpful commentary that aids interpretation of particular tables and charts.

<sup>29</sup> For example, *School Census: Provisional Results* only highlights the number of children with Special Educational Needs. Highlighting the proportion of the school population with Special Educational Needs would be more informative.

<sup>30</sup> In relation to Principle 8 Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

<sup>31</sup> In relation to Principle 8 Practices 1 and 2 of the Code of Practice

<sup>32</sup> In relation to Principle 8 Practice 4 of the Code of Practice

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.statswales.wales.gov.uk/TableViewer/document.aspx?ReportId=18342>

equivalent results for the local education authority. The absence of a published dataset of school-level attainment statistics makes it difficult to analyse and to re-use the statistics. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Assembly Government should draw attention in the relevant statistical release to the availability of datasets of attainment statistics for individual schools, and make these datasets available on request with appropriate explanation to encourage informed use<sup>34</sup> (Requirement 7).

- 3.24 The Assembly Government publishes its statistical releases under two titles: 'First Release' and 'Statistical Bulletin'. The significance of these differing titles is unexplained. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Assembly Government should review the use of the terms 'First Release' and 'Statistical Bulletin' when publishing statistical releases, to ensure clarity for users<sup>35</sup> (Requirement 8).

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<sup>34</sup> In relation to Principle 8 Practices 3 and 6 of the Code of Practice

<sup>35</sup> In relation to Principle 8 Practice 4 of the Code of Practice and previously specified in Assessment Report 33

## **Protocol 1: User engagement**

**Effective user engagement is fundamental both to trust in statistics and securing maximum public value. This Protocol draws together the relevant practices set out elsewhere in the Code and expands on the requirements in relation to consultation.**

3.25 The requirements for this Protocol are covered elsewhere in this report.

## Protocol 2: Release practices

**Statistical reports should be released into the public domain in an orderly manner that promotes public confidence and gives equal access to all, subject to relevant legislation.**

- 3.26 The Assembly Government publishes a timetable for its statistical releases 12 months ahead. All outputs are made available on the National Statistics Publication Hub according to the published timetable.
- 3.27 The Assembly Government is aware that its users need timely information, and have worked to bring forward publication dates accordingly. The move towards collecting data from management information systems has allowed the publication of a number of schools statistics to be brought forward. Some users we contacted indicated that they would like statistics sooner, mentioning exclusions and Key Stage 4 statistics in particular. The Assessment team recognises that there may be minimal scope for improvement in some cases, as the timetables for production are sometimes influenced by factors beyond the statistical producer's control, such as the exclusions appeal process or exam marking timetables. We suggest the Assembly Government continue to explore the feasibility of improving timeliness.
- 3.28 As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Assembly Government should publish the name and contact details of the responsible statistician in all statistical releases<sup>36</sup> (Requirement 9).
- 3.29 The Assembly Government complies with the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics (Wales) Order 2009 and a generic list of post holders with pre-release access is provided on the website<sup>37</sup>. However, as part of the designation as National Statistics, the Assembly Government should publish lists of those people given pre-release access to each release<sup>38</sup> (Requirement 10).

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<sup>36</sup> In relation to Protocol 2 Practice 6 of the Code of Practice and previously specified in Assessment Report 33

<sup>37</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/pre-release/?lang=en>

<sup>38</sup> In relation to Protocol 2 Practice 7 of the Code of Practice and previously specified in Assessment Report 33

### **Protocol 3: The use of administrative sources for statistical purposes**

**Administrative sources should be fully exploited for statistical purposes, subject to adherence to appropriate safeguards.**

3.30 The Assembly Government has a published Statement of Administrative Sources<sup>39</sup>.

3.31 The Assembly Government's introduction of the DEWI system and electronic data collections from management information systems is an example of maximising opportunities for the use of administrative data. The DEWI system facilitates the flow of information, and the definitions and concepts are appropriate for statistical purposes. The Assembly Government communicates with its suppliers and users to try to ensure correct and appropriate usage.

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<sup>39</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/2010/100330adminen.pdf>

## Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to the Assembly Government's school 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.

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|---------------------|---|
| <b>Suggestion 1</b> | Publish the Assembly Government report of the mini consultation (para 3.1).   |
| <b>Suggestion 2</b> | Review the engagement strategy for the ADEW Data Practitioners Forum to ensure that an appropriate level of contact is maintained (para 3.3).   |
| <b>Suggestion 3</b> | Work with the Department for Education, the Scottish Government and the Department of Education, Northern Ireland to investigate options for producing comparable statistics across the four administrations (para 3.12). |
| <b>Suggestion 4</b> | Continue to explore the feasibility of improving timeliness (para 3.27).  |

## Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A2.1 This assessment was conducted from September 2009 to March 2010.

A2.2 The Assessment team – Joe Cuddeford and Rachel Beardsmore - agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of the Assembly Government in September. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 19 December. The Assessment team subsequently met with representatives of the Assembly Government during January to review compliance with the Code of Practice, taking account of the written evidence provided and other relevant sources of evidence.

### Summary of users contacted, and issues raised

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

A2.4 The Assessment team received 12 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Assembly Government internal user	3
Central Government	1
Local authority	3
Inspectorate/Audit	2
Private user	1
Academic	1
Media	1

A2.5 Users were mostly positive about how well the statistics meet their needs. There were few negative comments about accessibility, presentation or format. One user complained about the Assembly Government's policy on the release of school performance statistics. Some users felt that the level of detail met their needs while others wanted more detail in some areas such as attainment, eligibility for free school meals, ethnicity and geographic areas. Users recognised that improvements in timeliness had been made, but some wanted earlier publication of some releases.

A2.6 Users were mostly positive about how they had been engaged and consulted with. All statements about response to feedback were positive, reflecting the fact that the Assembly Government has incorporated user needs in material released on the website. Users were mostly positive about the format of engagement, although some felt their suggestions for improvements had not been addressed. The quality of engagement was mostly rated as positive, with users commenting on excellent communication and understanding of their needs.

## **Key documents/links provided**

Written Evidence for Assessment document



