

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

## School Statistics for Scotland

*(produced by the Scottish 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 12 sets of National Statistics produced by the Scottish Government:

- *Attendance and Absence in Scottish Schools*<sup>3</sup>
- *Exclusions from Schools*<sup>4</sup>
- *Children Educated Outwith School*<sup>5</sup>
- *Pupils in Scotland*<sup>6</sup>
- *Independent School Census*<sup>7</sup>
- *Placing Requests in Schools in Scotland*<sup>8</sup>
- *School Meals in Scotland*<sup>9</sup>
- *Destinations of Leavers from Scottish Schools*<sup>10</sup>
- *SQA Attainment and School Leaver Qualifications in Scotland*<sup>11</sup>
- *SQA Examination Results in Scottish Schools*<sup>12</sup>
- *Teachers in Scotland*<sup>13</sup>
- *Expenditure on School Education in Scotland*<sup>14</sup>

1.1.2 This report also covers *School Estate Statistics*<sup>15</sup> and the *Follow Up Survey of School Leavers from Scottish Schools*<sup>16</sup> which do not currently carry the National Statistics designation. The Scottish Government asked the UK Statistics Authority to assess these products for designation as National Statistics.

1.1.3 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

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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)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/12/08155629/0>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/02/15094039/0>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/10/26154423/0>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/11/05112711/0>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/04/20113524/0>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/03/19130022/0>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/06/22104701/0>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/11/20112425/0>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/03/22111037/0>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/09/17165819/0>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/11/27091141/0>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/05/11134917/0>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/10/08104324/0>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/06/follow>

impartially and objectively in the public interest, subject to any points for action in this report. The Authority confirms that the sets of National Statistics listed in 1.1.1 are designated as National Statistics and has determined that the statistics detailed in 1.1.2 are designated as National Statistics. These designations are subject to the Scottish 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 These statistics produced by the Scottish Government provide good coverage of the Scottish school system, and are presented in a variety of formats. The Scottish Government has worked in partnership with local authorities to improve the efficiency of data transfer and data quality. The school statistics team within the Scottish Government works closely with policy colleagues and local authorities to ensure that the statistics are relevant.
- 1.3.2 There is little documentation available about how the producers engage with users, and it is not clear how they ensure that the statistics meet users' needs. The statistical reports would benefit from further commentary and analysis to aid interpretation, and they would also benefit from more accessible information on the methods and definitions used.

### **1.4 Detailed recommendations**

- 1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that the Scottish 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>	Take steps to develop a more complete understanding of the use made of the statistics, the needs of current and potential users, and user views on the service provided. Publish the relevant information and assumptions and use them to better support the beneficial use of the statistics (para 3.4).
<b>Requirement 2</b>	Provide estimates of the undercounting of children educated outwith school, investigate options for producing consistent historical time series and update <i>Children Educated Outwith School</i> (para 3.13).
<b>Requirement 3</b>	Investigate and seek to improve methods for estimating entitlement to free school meals (para 3.14).

- Requirement 4** Publish annually the estimated compliance cost on suppliers of data for these statistics (para 3.23).
- Requirement 5** Ensure that information is provided about classification systems used for these statistics (para 3.27).
- Requirement 6** Adopt formats of presentation which enhance clarity; provide commentary and analysis that aid interpretation; and provide factual information about the context of these statistics (para 3.28).
- Requirement 7** Draw attention in the relevant statistical releases 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 (para 3.32).
- Requirement 8** Publish information on the arrangements for auditing the quality of the administrative data used to produce these statistics (para 3.38).

## 2 Subject of the assessment

2.1 These statistics provide a wide range of information about Scottish schools, including attainment levels, the characteristics of pupils and teachers, attendance rates, the destinations of school leavers, and the resources available to, and the performance of, the school system in Scotland.

2.2 The statistics are used:

- by the Scottish Government to develop and evaluate school policy;
- by headteachers and local authorities to support the management of schools;
- by parents, parent councils, school management bodies and HM Inspectorate of Education<sup>17</sup> (HMIE) as benchmarks against which to consider the quality of individual schools, and to monitor trends in the resources made available to schools and in educational outcomes;
- to inform the public and the Scottish Parliament about progress against the Scottish National Indicator<sup>18</sup> for school leavers entering further or higher education, training or employment – the data are available on the Scotland Performs<sup>19</sup> website;
- as part of Single Outcome Agreements<sup>20</sup> between local authorities and the Scottish Government; and
- by the Accounts Commission<sup>21</sup> in monitoring statutory performance indicators for local authorities.

2.2 Most of the data presented in these statistical releases are collected by schools, local authorities, the Scottish Qualifications Authority<sup>22</sup> (SQA) and Skills Development Scotland<sup>23</sup> for their own operational purposes. Data are submitted by schools directly to the Scottish Government through ScotXed<sup>24</sup>, which is a partnership between the Scottish Government and local authorities that provides a service of electronic data exchange between local authorities and other partners in education. Data about school expenditure are supplied from the Local Government Finance statistics team of the Scottish Government.

2.3 The Scottish Government reported that the analytical staff costs associated with producing the 14 statistical products is approximately £ 300k each year. This figure does not include IT development and maintenance, license fees or costs of other staff in other parts of the Scottish Government or amongst their partners.

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.hmie.gov.uk/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms/indicators/schoolLeavers>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/local-government/SOA>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/about/ac/>

<sup>22</sup> [http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/CCC\\_FirstPage.jsp](http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/CCC_FirstPage.jsp)

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/>

<sup>24</sup> [www.scotxed.net](http://www.scotxed.net)

- 2.4 The statistics are disseminated via individual statistical releases, the release of statistical datasets and the Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics<sup>25</sup> website. The statistics are also presented in School Handbooks<sup>26</sup> and within an on-line directory on the Scottish Schools Online<sup>27</sup> website, maintained by Learning and Teaching Scotland<sup>28</sup>, although these are not official statistics outlets. Detailed analyses of examination performance data are provided to schools, local authorities and other partners through the ScotXed Standard Tables and Charts (STACS) system
- 2.5 *Attendance and Absence in Scottish Schools* presents the percentage of days missed by pupils in a school year for local authority and grant-aided schools. The statistics are used by the Scottish Government to monitor attendance and truancy rates, to develop initiatives to improve attendance and to support policies on tackling poverty, inequality and deprivation.
- 2.6 *Exclusions from Schools* provides statistics about the number and type of pupil exclusions from local authority and grant-aided schools. It shows how frequently schools resort to exclusion and can be used to identify the groups of children that are most likely to be excluded from schools, and for what reasons.
- 2.7 *Children Educated Outwith School* reports the number of children who are known to the local authority to be receiving education outwith school due to ill health, other extraordinary circumstances or through parental choice. The Scottish Government uses these statistics to monitor changes in this population.
- 2.8 *Pupils in Scotland* provides information about the pupil population of local authority and grant-aided schools. These data are linked to other sources to enable the analysis of outcomes by characteristics, including indicators of deprivation and disadvantage. This publication includes estimates of pupil projections which are used for planning the number of pupil places. Similar information is collected through the *Independent School Census*, although this is collected at school-level.
- 2.9 *Placing Requests in Schools in Scotland* presents the number of requests made by parents to place their child in a specific school. One of the uses is to identify the number of children placed in a school in a local authority other than in which they live.
- 2.10 *School Meals in Scotland* provides information on the provision and uptake of school meals, registration for free school meals and expenditure on meals. It is used to support government healthy eating initiatives in schools, to monitor overall uptake and in allocating resources to local authorities.
- 2.11 *Destinations of Leavers from Scottish Schools* and *Follow up Survey of Leavers from Scottish Schools* present statistics on the destinations of school

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.sns.gov.uk/>

<sup>26</sup> See for example <http://www.moray.gov.uk/downloads/file58280.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/scottishschoolsonline/index.asp>

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/index.asp>

leavers, approximately three and nine months after leaving school. The information is used to monitor the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training, and to monitor the uptake of post-compulsory education.

- 2.12 *SQA Attainment and School Leaver Qualifications in Scotland* and *SQA Examination Results in Scottish Schools* summarise pupil attainment statistics for cohorts of pupils and school leavers by population subgroups and by local authority. They provide an important indicator of educational outcomes and are disseminated to parents via the Scottish Schools Online website. HMIE uses these statistics to report on the performance of schools, including comparisons of attainment levels for schools with similar characteristics.
- 2.13 *Teachers in Scotland* covers all publicly funded schools and is used by the Scottish Government and partners for teacher workforce planning. The information informs the development of policy on workforce issues such as equality, continuous professional development and teacher retention.
- 2.14 *School Estate Statistics* presents school-level information including the physical characteristics of schools. Local authority level information includes expenditure on the school estate. The statistics inform government spending decisions and support assessments of value for money in the school estate.
- 2.15 *Expenditure on School Education in Scotland* provides statistics and analysis of data about expenditure on school education. It details expenditure on staff, operating costs and support services by school sector and by local authority. It provides information about how local authorities spend their grant allocations from the Scottish Government on the education service.

### 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 school statistics team in the Scottish Government reported that the main users of these statistics are policy teams within the Scottish Government and local authorities. It engages with these groups through formal dialogue and working day-to-day with policy and delivery teams. Detailed consultation on data collections takes place through *ScotXed*.
- 3.2 Some users expressed dissatisfaction with the current arrangements for user engagement and some non-government users were unaware of consultations about the format and content of the publications.
- 3.3 A few expert users raised concerns about the quality of the datasets and the way in which data quality is presented in statistical releases.
- 3.4 The school statistics team produces a Statistics Plan which documents the uses of these statistics by the Scottish Government and how the needs of these users are met. Some users outside Government told us that they were not clear how views that they provide to producers through consultation exercises are taken into account. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should take steps to develop a more complete understanding of the use made of the statistics, the needs of current and potential users, and user views on the service provided. The Scottish Government should also publish the relevant information and assumptions and use them to better support the beneficial use of the statistics<sup>29</sup> (Requirement 1).

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<sup>29</sup> In relation to Principle 1 Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

## Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

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

- 3.5 These statistics are published in an orderly and timely manner. The school statistics team reported that it does not charge for additional analyses.
- 3.6 The school statistics team has published a revisions policy<sup>30</sup> for these statistics on the Scottish Government's website. The Scottish Government is planning to publish a new revisions policy covering all statistics that it produces. We suggest the school statistics team review its revisions policy to ensure that it is consistent with the Scottish Government revisions policy.
- 3.7 Announcements of changes to methods or classifications are made through *ScotXed*. Some users told us that they did not learn of certain changes in advance of the publication being released. We suggest the Scottish Government consider options for publicising announcements of changes to methods and classifications more widely.
- 3.8** The UK Statistics Authority agreed an exception to the Code for *School Estate Statistics*<sup>31</sup> on 6th October 2009. This allowed the Scottish Government to provide the Scottish Parliament Information Centre<sup>32</sup> (SPICe) with access to corrected official statistics shortly before publication. It enabled SPICe to brief Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs) on these corrections for a parliamentary debate that had been scheduled to take place a few hours before the corrected statistics were due to be released. The timing of the correction was the subject of some negative comments from MSPs during the debate. In the light of this incident the school statistics team is reviewing aspects of its revisions policy and its quality assurance arrangements and is investigating the possibility of releasing statistics more quickly on the Scottish Government's website. We suggest the Scottish Government publish the findings from this review.

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/SchEdStats>

<sup>31</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/About/BreachSchoolOct09>

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/business/research/index.htm>

### **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.**

- 3.9 The only incident of political pressure, abuse of trust or complaints relating to professional integrity, quality or standards reported to or identified by the Assessment team, was the negative comment made in a parliamentary debate, discussed under Principle 2.
- 3.10** The Scottish Government encourages its statisticians to discuss statistical matters with external stakeholders. Training events have been held for statisticians to enhance their skills in dealing with the media.

## 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.**

- 3.11 The data for these statistics are subject to various automated validity checks as part of the data transfer procedures. The school statistics team carries out further data quality checks. Some users have expressed concern over data quality; this is discussed under Principle 1.
- 3.12 Each statistical release is published together with a background note which provides commentary on the data sources and quality.
- 3.13 Parents of children educated outwith school are not obliged in all cases to report that their child is not attending school. This results in the statistics undercounting the actual number of children educated outwith school. *Children Educated Outwith School* makes clear that there is undercounting but provides no indication of the extent of the problem. Also, changes in reporting procedure have caused substantial year-on-year changes to the statistics and the publication does not provide a consistent time series. As part of the designation as National Statistics the Scottish Government should provide estimates of the undercounting of children educated outwith school, investigate options for producing consistent historical time series and update *Children Educated Outwith School*<sup>33</sup> (Requirement 2).
- 3.14 The *School Meals in Scotland* publication explains that local authorities frequently undercount entitlement to free school meals and this affects the accuracy of the published statistics. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should investigate and seek to improve methods for estimating entitlement to free school meals<sup>34</sup> (Requirement 3).
- 3.15 *School Estate Statistics* states that statistics on the condition of schools are not comparable across local authorities due to different interpretations of the guidance on how this information should be reported. The Scottish Government has produced revised guidance to improve the consistent reporting of information about the condition of schools. We suggest the Scottish Government investigate whether the revised guidance is being consistently applied, and the feasibility of publishing consistent time series of statistics on school conditions, and publish the findings of its investigations.
- 3.16 The Scottish Government plans to introduce major changes to the school curriculum through its programme *Curriculum for Excellence*<sup>35</sup>. This will include a new National Qualifications system which will have a major impact on statistics about school attainment. We suggest the Scottish Government consult with users on how it should respond to changes stemming from the *Curriculum for Excellence* programme to meet user needs and publish its plans.

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<sup>33</sup> In relation to Principle 4 Practice 2 and Principle 4 Practice 7 of the Code of Practice

<sup>34</sup> In relation to Principle 4 Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/curriculumforexcellence/assessmentandachievement/index.asp>

**3.17** The Scottish Government contributes to UK-wide statistical outputs such as Regional Trends<sup>36</sup> produced by the Office for National Statistics. It also contributes to work led by the Department for Education (DfE) on the International Standard Classification System to promote international comparability of statistics. It is difficult to compare pupil attainment statistics for Scotland with statistics for England, Wales and Northern Ireland because of the different examination systems. Other school statistics, for example, on attendance, may lend themselves more readily to comparisons across administrations. We suggest the Scottish Government work with DfE, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Department of Education, Northern Ireland to investigate options for producing comparable statistics across the four administrations.

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<sup>36</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/product.asp?vlnk=836>

## 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.**

- 3.18 The school statistics team has assured us that it takes all necessary steps to protect the confidentiality of the data it collects, and that it adheres to the Scottish Government's data confidentiality policy<sup>37</sup>. All staff are trained in handling confidential data, and all staff with access to confidential data sign a data access authorisation form and a confidentiality declaration.
- 3.19 Where confidential statistical data are shared with third parties, a record is logged by the data access officer for school statistics. Data are only shared upon receipt of a signed data access agreement, and these access agreements are reviewed at least annually to ensure that the conditions of the agreement remain relevant. Details of the data access procedures and conditions<sup>38</sup> are available on the Scottish Government's website.
- 3.20 Techniques for disclosure control employed by the school statistics team are consistent with those published in the Scottish Government Methodology Glossary<sup>39</sup> which provides detailed advice on statistical disclosure control methods.
- 3.21 School Handbooks include a statement that explains to parents that the Scottish Government holds confidential data on pupils, why these data are needed and how they are protected.

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/About/NatStats>

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/DataAccess>

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/About/Methodology/Glossary>

## 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.**

- 3.22 The burden of data collection for the majority of these statistics has been reduced through the use of electronic data transfer. There was no evidence from data suppliers that the compliance cost is disproportionate.
- 3.23 Compliance costs imposed on data suppliers for these statistics are not estimated. The Scottish Government is participating in a working group of the Government Statistical Service which is devising a methodology for estimating data supply costs. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should publish annually the estimated compliance cost on suppliers of data for these statistics<sup>40</sup> (Requirement 4).
- 3.24** Most suppliers deliver data on time and to the agreed quality standards. The Scottish Government told us that changes to data collection arrangements are discussed and agreed with data suppliers. However, some suppliers reported that the Scottish Government sometimes announces changes to data collection arrangements without allowing enough time for implementation. Some suppliers also noted they were not given sufficient time to respond to queries which arise during the data cleaning by the school statistics team. We suggest the Scottish Government liaise with data suppliers to review options for mitigating these problems.

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<sup>40</sup> In relation to Principle 6 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

## 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.**

3.25 The school statistics team indicated that sufficient resources are available to produce these statistics to meet the requirements of the Code.

**3.26** The Scottish Government has a dedicated training and development intranet that includes a competence framework and provides learning and development opportunities for staff. It also has well-established procedures, coordinated by its Chief Statistician, for recruiting staff.

## Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

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

- 3.27 Information about classifications used for these statistics is provided through links to published guidance documents and to the *ScotXed* website where detailed documentation is held. The relevant documentation is sometimes difficult to find and the *ScotXed* system does not provide documentation for all the surveys. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should ensure that information is provided about the classification systems used for these statistics<sup>41</sup> (Requirement 5).
- 3.28 Some users praised the consistent presentation but noted that important messages are not clearly presented. Little information is provided about the policy context. Where this is included it is found in background notes rather than in the introduction. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should adopt formats of presentation which enhance clarity; provide commentary and analysis that aid interpretation; and provide factual information about the context of these statistics<sup>42</sup> (Requirement 6).
- 3.29 The Scottish Government's website has a section for school education statistics which provides a gateway to statistical publications and related information. It also provides topic pages which include a high-level summary of trends and relevant publications<sup>43</sup>. At the time of the assessment, some of the links within these high-level summaries were out of date. We suggest the Scottish Government ensure that links on the school education statistics section of its website are kept up-to-date.
- 3.30 The school statistics team provides supplementary datasets including historic data to allow additional analysis. In response to feedback from the academic community, the school statistics team is working with the Economic and Social Research Council funded Administrative Data Liaison Service<sup>44</sup> (ADLS) to facilitate wider access to schools data for research.
- 3.31 Statistics for pupil projections have been released in three different publications since 2003. They were most recently published as part of *Pupils in Scotland* although this is not clear from the title. We suggest the Scottish Government consult users on the most suitable means of releasing pupil projection statistics.
- 3.32 The Scottish Government publishes national figures on attainment levels for a set of National Qualifications in publicly funded schools. It also publishes background datasets for these statistics at local authority level but not at school-level. School-level statistics on attainment, along with a range of other school-level information, are published by Learning and Teaching Scotland on its Scottish Schools Online website, although this is not an official statistics outlet. The absence of a published dataset of school-level attainment statistics makes it difficult to analyse and to re-use the statistics. School-level is a natural

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<sup>41</sup> In relation to Principle 8 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

<sup>42</sup> In relation to Principle 8 Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education>

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.adls.ac.uk/>

level of disaggregation for these statistics; it will support a range of analyses of interest and can be safely supported given confidentiality constraints. As part of the designation as National Statistics the Scottish Government should draw attention in the relevant statistical releases 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>45</sup> (Requirement 7).

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<sup>45</sup> In relation to Principle 8 Practices 3 and 6 of the Code of Practice

## **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.**

3.33 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.**

- 3.34 Statistical reports are released to a timetable which is announced a year in advance. *Pupils in Scotland* and *Teachers in Scotland* were recently brought forward by three months to allow these statistics to inform financial planning by the Scottish Government.
- 3.35 The recent change to the publication date for *Teachers in Scotland* was announced through the Scottish Government's website and through an email to users registered with the Scotstat network. The decision to change the publication date was taken by the Scottish Government's Chief Statistician.
- 3.36 All publications are included on the National Statistics Publication Hub. Users registered with the Scotstat network are informed when publications are released.
- 3.37 A record of individuals provided with pre-release access to these statistics is maintained on the Scottish Government records management system. We suggest the Scottish Government publish records of those granted pre-release access to these statistics in their final form.

### **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.**

**3.38** The school statistics team uses a range of administrative sources in its publications. The data undergo validation checks when they are submitted, and the school statistics team carries out further quality assurance; however it does not provide information on the arrangements for auditing the quality of the administrative data. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should publish information on the arrangements for auditing the quality of the administrative data used to produce these statistics<sup>46</sup> (Requirement 8), with a view to including this information in their Statement of Administrative Sources.

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<sup>46</sup> In relation to Protocol 3 Practice 5 of the Code of Practice. Practice 5(e) requires the Statement to identify the arrangements for auditing the quality of administrative sources used for statistical purposes

## Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to school statistics produced by the Scottish Government 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> | Review the School Education revisions policy to ensure that it is consistent with the Scottish Government revisions policy (para 3.6).   |
| <b>Suggestion 2</b> | Consider options for publicising announcements of changes to methods and classifications more widely (para 3.7).   |
| <b>Suggestion 3</b> | Publish the findings from the review initiated following the release of corrections made to <i>School Estate Statistics</i> for a parliamentary debate in October 2009 (para 3.8)  |
| <b>Suggestion 4</b> | Investigate whether the revised guidance on condition of schools is being consistently applied, and the feasibility of publishing consistent time series of statistics on school conditions, and publish the findings of these investigations (para 3.15). |
| <b>Suggestion 5</b> | Consult with users on how the school statistics team should respond to changes stemming from the <i>Curriculum for Excellence</i> programme to meet user needs, and publish the resulting plans (para 3.16).   |
| <b>Suggestion 6</b> | Work with the Department for Education, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Department of Education for Northern Ireland to investigate options for producing comparable statistics across the four administrations (para 3.17).                         |
| <b>Suggestion 7</b> | Liaise with data suppliers to review options for mitigating problems concerning the time given to suppliers to implement changes to data collection arrangements and to respond to queries during data cleaning (para 3.24).                               |
| <b>Suggestion 8</b> | Ensure that links on the school education statistics section of the Scottish Government's website are kept up-to-date (para 3.29)  |

**Suggestion 9**

Consult users on the most suitable means of releasing pupil projections statistics (para 3.31)

**Suggestion 10**

Publish records of those granted pre-release access to these statistics in their final form (para 3.37)

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

- A2.1 This assessment was conducted from November 2009 to June 2010.
- A2.2 The Assessment team – Neil Jackson and Cecilia Macintyre - agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of the Education Analytical Services Division of the Scottish Government in November. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided in December. The Assessment team subsequently met with the school statistics team during January to review compliance with the Code, 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 35 responses from the user and supplier consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:
- |  |    |
|--|----|
| The Scottish Government and agencies     | 11 |
| Local authority users and suppliers      | 14 |
| Academia                                 | 3  |
| Parent and teacher representative bodies | 4  |
| Consultants                              | 3  |
- A2.5 Users were generally positive about the frequency and coverage of statistical reports. Where additional information or analysis was required, users found the producer team helpful and approachable.
- A2.6 Users reported some data gaps and data quality issues with specific publications, including exclusions, school meals and school leaver destinations. Some non-government users were unaware of consultations about the format and content of the publications.
- A2.7 Suppliers were positive about engagement with the Scottish Government, through the *ScotXed* team. Some local authority representatives commented that the change in the method of consultation used by the *ScotXed* network from face-to-face meetings to on-line voting was not as effective, although they recognised that it was less time-consuming.
- A2.8 Some suppliers commented that timescales for implementing recent changes in data collections had caused difficulties and that the Scottish Government had given less time to implement these changes than had previously been agreed.

A2.9 Some users noted that the format of the reports could be improved by making a clearer distinction between the key messages and the reference material. Some experienced users reported that some data quality issues were inadequately reflected in the publications and that they were unclear about action taken to act on feedback they had provided.

**Key documents/links provided**

Written Evidence for Assessment document





