

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on Lifelong Learning in 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.

Contact us

Tel: 0845 604 1857

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

Website: www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk

UK Statistics Authority
Statistics House
Myddelton Street
London EC1R 1UW

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ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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1 Summary of findings

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports¹ prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*². The Act requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the Code of Practice for Official Statistics³. The report covers the following National Statistics publications produced by the Scottish Government:

- *Students in Higher Education at Scottish Institutions*⁴;
- *Age Participation Index*⁵;
- *Attainment in Higher Education and Destinations of Leavers*⁶;
- *Higher Education Student Support in Scotland*⁷;
- *Education Maintenance Allowances*⁸; and
- *Student Loans for Higher Education*⁹.

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 Statistics Authority confirms that the statistics listed in paragraph 1.1.1 are designated as National Statistics, subject to the Scottish Government implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by March 2011.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

1.3.1 The Scottish Government's Lifelong Learning¹⁰ (LL) statistics team has regular engagement and consultation with both government and non-government users of the statistics. This engagement includes online consultations including statistical planning, arranging a users' conference and responding to ad hoc requests. Users were satisfied with the Scottish Government statisticians' level of engagement, but some were dissatisfied with the timing of LL publications.

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

⁴ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/03/18144043/0>

⁵ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/08/25161104/0>

⁶ <http://scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/12/10091627/8>

⁷ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2009/11/17092744/0>

⁸ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/01/29093954/0> and

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/01/29093954/2>

⁹ <http://www.slc.co.uk/pdf/slcsfr03r2009.pdf>

¹⁰ The Scottish Government's 'Lifelong Learning' statistics provide information about students in higher and further education, and financial support to these students and some school students.

1.3.2 The Scottish Government includes some details about the quality of the statistics in its publications but should publish more information about some aspects of quality, about the methods used, and data sources. The Scottish Government appears to have robust systems in place for protecting confidentiality of individual data and is also seeking to enhance the utility of the statistics.

1.3.3 The Scottish Government reviews the format of its LL publications to provide the level of detail which meets users' requirements. However, some users felt that the presentation and accessibility of the statistics could be improved.

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 re-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 central to their designation, are listed at annex 1.

1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

Requirement 1	Clarify which organisation is responsible for publishing <i>Student Loans for Higher Education</i> (para 3.10).
Requirement 2	Provide users with information about supplier organisations' methods for collecting and analysing the data it uses in the lifelong learning statistical publications (para 3.11).
Requirement 3	Provide more information about the quality of the statistics, including relevance and accuracy (para 3.12).
Requirement 4	Publish the quality guidelines used in managing the production of lifelong learning statistics (para 3.13).
Requirement 5	Refer users to the relevant methodological notes and other appropriate metadata for the data tables (para 3.27).
Requirement 6	Improve the presentation of the statistical publications to aid understanding and interpretability (para 3.30).

2 Subject of the assessment

2.1 The six publications cover various aspects of lifelong learning in Scotland:

- *Students in Higher Education at Scottish Institutions* provides details of all students participating in higher education at Scottish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and colleges by academic year. The publication contains various breakdowns of the data, for example by level of study, gender, age group, mode of study (full-time or part-time), location and subject of study.
- *Age Participation Index* is the number of Scots aged under 21 who enter a full-time higher education course in a given year as a percentage of the total population of 17-year-olds at 31 December in the same year. It is an estimate of the proportion of 17-year-olds in the population who can be expected to enter higher education for the first time before their 21st birthdays, if current trends continue. The publication includes breakdowns by local authority area and deprivation category.
- *Attainment in Higher Education and Destinations of Leavers* provides details of higher education qualifications gained by students graduating from Scottish HEIs and colleges by academic year. The publication contains various breakdowns of the statistics, including level of qualification, mode and subject of study, and students' nationalities and ethnic backgrounds. The publication also provides details of the first destinations – for example, work or further study – of higher education graduates from Scottish HEIs and colleges.
- *Higher Education Student Support in Scotland* provides information about financial support provided by the Student Awards Agency for Scotland¹¹ (SAAS) to higher education students in Scotland. The publication contains various data breakdowns, including the numbers of students receiving financial support or who were assessed as being entitled to loans, the levels of different kinds of support, and details of financial support by students' gender, age and location of study.
- *Education Maintenance Allowances* provides information on means-tested payments to 16 to 19-year-olds in Scotland attending school or further education college on a full-time basis. The aim of these payments is to increase participation in school and college by 16 to 19-year-olds from low-income families. The publication includes breakdowns by deprivation category, place of study (school or college) and level of payment.
- *Student Loans for Higher Education* contains information on the payment and repayment of student loans for Scottish students and EU students who study in Scotland. The publication uses data from the Student Loans Company's (SLC) management information system which is used to pay and administer student loans across the UK.

¹¹ SAAS administers the student support arrangements for higher education students from Scotland studying in the UK and EU students studying in Scotland.

2.2 The Scottish Government combines data from two sources to produce the *Students in Higher Education at Scottish Institutions* and *Attainment in Higher Education and Destinations of Leavers* publications:

- the Higher Education Statistics Agency¹² (HESA) which collects data from HEIs which it quality assures before sending to the Scottish Government; and
- the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) which collects and quality assures data on students participating in higher education at Scotland's colleges.

The Scottish Government uses these sources, along with statistics published by the General Register Office for Scotland on the size of Scotland's population, to produce the *Age Participation Index*. For the *Education Maintenance Allowances* publication, the Scottish Government combines data from SFC and ScotXed¹³.

2.3 The LL statistics are used for a variety of purposes, including:

- monitoring progress against the Scottish Government's National Indicator¹⁴ to increase the percentage of Scottish domiciled graduates from Scottish HEIs in 'positive destinations' such as work or further study;
- informing Scottish Government economic modelling and spending decisions for higher education;
- monitoring progress against Scottish Government policies – for example, its strategy to increase the number of entrants to higher education from Scotland's deprived areas;
- providing the Scottish Parliament with briefings on the participation of various groups in higher education;
- informing student funding organisations' budget forecasting and monitoring of application numbers;
- providing information for economists and labour market statisticians to analyse the graduate labour market, and monitoring graduate employment trends;
- informing Ministerial briefings and answering parliamentary questions; and
- informing student organisations' responses to the Scottish Government's consultation on higher education students.

2.4 The Scottish Government told the Assessment team that it currently costs around £20,000 a year to prepare and publish its LL statistics (not including the *Student Loans for Higher Education* publication). These estimated costs are based on staff time and publishing charges.

¹² HESA was established in 1993 as the official UK agency for the collection, analysis and dissemination of quantitative information about higher education. HESA has a formal agreement with the Scottish Government to provide the data which the Scottish Government requires for its higher education statistical publications.

¹³ ScotXed is a data exchange unit of the Scottish Government's Education Analytical Services Division, which collects and quality assures data from local authorities
<https://www.scotxed.net/Static%20Content/About%20Us.aspx>

¹⁴ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms/indicators/domiciledGraduates>

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 Scottish Government Lifelong Learning (LL) statistics team has regular engagement with government colleagues in various departments. The team investigates non-government users' needs through online consultations for specific statistical products, and publishes reports on the outcome of these consultations on its website. The statistics team modifies the format of its publications in response to users' feedback – for example, it included more details and commentary in the latest *Higher Education Student Support* publication (October 2010) following a user consultation in summer 2010. The team also uses the Scotstat Lifelong Learning consultation groups¹⁵ to regularly consult non-government users of LL statistics about the content and design of its statistical products.
- 3.2 In March 2010, the Scottish Government hosted a conference¹⁶ on its LL statistics to engage with both government and non-government users, and to increase awareness of the statistics. The Scottish Government published a report on users' feedback about the event and their experiences of the statistical service. The Scottish Government plans to make this conference an annual event. The Assessment team welcomes this approach to engaging with users of LL statistics.
- 3.3 The Scottish Government provides an ad hoc service for users who request additional analysis of its LL statistics. The statistics team records and monitors the kinds of information that both government and non-government users request most frequently. The Scottish Government is aware of how its LL statistics are used by government colleagues and non-government users but we suggest that it publishes this information to demonstrate the uses of the statistics.
- 3.4 The Scottish Government publishes its annual LL statistics plan on its website and invites users to comment on the plan via a web-based consultation. The timings of LL statistical publications depend on when the Scottish Government receives final form data from other organisations such as HESA, SFC and ScotXed.
- 3.5 The Scottish Government told us that it publishes the statistics as soon as practically possible after it receives these datasets in order to meet users' needs for early access to the information. However, several users told us that more timely publications would allow them to monitor and inform current LL policy issues more effectively. We suggest the Scottish Government review users' needs for more timely LL statistics.

¹⁵ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Lifelong-learning/scotstat/Q/EditMode/on/ForceUpdate/on>

¹⁶ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Lifelong-learning/scotstat/Q/EditMode/on/ForceUpdate/on>

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

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

- 3.6 The statistics team publishes its LL statistics according to a published timetable and makes the statistics available free of charge on its website. It presents the statistics impartially and objectively.
- 3.7 The Scottish Government consults users before changing the methods used to compile its LL statistical publications. It also pre-announces the changes and contacts users to inform them of the changes.
- 3.8 The statistics team provided us with evidence¹⁷ of how it has corrected errors in its web-based LL statistical publications and contacted both government and non-government users to inform them of the changes. The team amended the appropriate commentary and individual web tables, and introduced new checks to prevent similar errors in the future.

¹⁷ Table 13 on page 34 in <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/292215/0090098.pdf>

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 No incidents of political pressure, abuses of trust or complaints relating to professional integrity, quality or standards were reported to or identified by the Assessment team.
- 3.10 All the data in the *Student Loans for Higher Education* publication are held by SLC, and SLC produces the publication. The Scottish Government's role in the publication process is to quality assure the publication. SLC and the Scottish Government jointly release the publication which causes ambiguity about who is responsible for the statistical output. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should clarify which organisation is responsible for publishing *Student Loans for Higher Education*¹⁸ (Requirement 1).

¹⁸ In relation to Principle 3 Practice 3 of the Code of Practice

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 Scottish Government includes details in each LL statistical publication of the data sources and methods it uses to compile its statistics based on data from other organisations. However, it does not include any information on other organisations' methods for collecting and analysing these data. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should provide users with information about supplier organisations' methods for collecting and analysing the data it uses in its LL statistical publications¹⁹ (Requirement 2).
- 3.12 The Scottish Government includes information in its publications to highlight where it has concerns about the quality of the data – for example, the low response rate by Scotland's colleges to the Destinations of Leavers survey. However, there is scope to provide users with more information about the quality of the statistical outputs – for example, their relevance to users and degree of accuracy. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should provide more information about the quality of these statistics, including relevance and accuracy²⁰ (Requirement 3).
- 3.13 The Scottish Government uses quality guidelines to assess the quality of the data in its LL statistical publications. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should publish the quality guidelines used in managing the production of its LL statistics²¹ (Requirement 4).
- 3.14 Most of the quality assurance of the data in the LL statistical publications is carried out by the organisations which collect the data. The Scottish Government has issued guidance to its staff carrying out further quality assurance checks for all its LL statistics before they are published.
- 3.15 In the latest *Students in Higher Education at Scottish Institutions* publication, the statistics team included new tables on student numbers and entrants for each UK country to allow users to compare changes over time. As part of its review of the *Age Participation Index*, the Scottish Government also commissioned research²² to compare measurements of participation in higher education among the four UK countries and internationally. We suggest that the Scottish Government continue to pursue opportunities to promote comparability of its LL statistics with relevant statistics within the UK and internationally. We also suggest that the Scottish Government signpost equivalent LL statistical outputs relating to the four UK countries and document any differences in its approach.
- 3.16 When the LL statistics team changes the methods it uses to compile its publications, it revises the historical data to produce consistent time series. For example, in 2007 the team changed the method of identifying students for its

¹⁹ In relation to Principle 4 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

²⁰ In relation to Principle 4 Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

²¹ In relation to Principle 4 Practice 4 of the Code of Practice

²² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/08/17120618/0>

Students in Higher Education at Scottish Institutions publication to bring a greater level of consistency with HESA's definition. The team consulted users on this change and ensured that a suitable time series of consistent data was available to users.

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.

- 3.17 The Scottish Government is aware of the confidentiality arrangements used by its data suppliers. HESA informs students about the uses their data will be put to and how their confidentiality will be protected, and SFC issues information on data protection to students in higher education at Scottish colleges.
- 3.18 For the *Higher Education Student Support* publication, the LL statistics team uses anonymised data from SAAS's administrative database. SAAS has its own data protection procedures that it informs people of when they submit an application for student support. The Scottish Government issues instructions for staff on how to deal with data protection and confidentiality of SAAS datasets. Local authorities and colleges are responsible for administering the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) scheme and inform participants of how their data are used. The Scottish Government has issued instructions to staff on how to deal with data protection and confidentiality of EMA data.
- 3.19 In the LL statistical publications, the statistics team uses a rounding procedure (all figures are rounded to the nearest 5) so that individuals cannot be identified from the results. The Scottish Government assured the Assessment team that this does not lower the utility of the statistics. Users are informed of this procedure in the statistical publications.
- 3.20 The Scottish Government receives requests – for example, from the Information Services Division of NHSScotland – to access individual data on student numbers. To ensure data confidentiality is protected and that the Data Protection Act is not breached, the statistics team has produced a Data Sharing Agreement following consultation with its legal colleagues and HESA. This agreement aims to enhance the utility of the statistics without compromising data confidentiality.

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.

- 3.21 All the statistics in the Scottish Government's LL statistical publications are derived from data collected by other organisations before being passed to the Scottish Government. Data on student numbers and destinations are collected on a UK-wide basis and would still be collected in the absence of the LL publications.
- 3.22 The data which are used to compile the *Higher Education Student Support* publication are taken from SAAS's administrative system and we were told that supplying this information to the Scottish Government carries no additional cost to SAAS. The data included in the *Education Maintenance Allowances* publication would still be collected by SFC and ScotXEd in the absence of the LL statistical publication.
- 3.23 HESA informed the Assessment team that it would benefit from more in-depth knowledge of how the Scottish Government uses the data it supplies. We suggest that the Scottish Government improve its communication with HESA and inform HESA about how it uses the data HESA provides.

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.

- 3.24 The Scottish Government's LL statistics team comprises one Statistician and two Assistant Statisticians. The statistics team assured us that it has sufficient resources to produce and publish the LL statistics.
- 3.25 The Scottish Government publishes its statistical planning arrangements²³ on its website. This includes guidance for producer teams on statistical planning and the Chief Statistician's annual Business Plan. We suggest the LL statistics team introduce regular reviews to monitor progress against its statistical plan.
- 3.26 The Scottish Government has well-established procedures for recruiting staff. It also has a dedicated training and development intranet for statistical staff that includes a competence framework and provides learning and development opportunities.

²³ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/About/Planning>

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

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

- 3.27 The Scottish Government publishes all its LL statistical publications on its website in accessible formats. All data tables are published in Excel format to allow users to carry out further analysis. The tables refer to supporting information but as part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should also refer users to the relevant methodological notes and other appropriate metadata for its data tables²⁴ (Requirement 5). We suggest that the Scottish Government also improve its signposting of the source data for users to analyse.
- 3.28 The statistics team reviews the design of its LL products to ensure that the level of detail provided is relevant to users' needs. It bases the level of detail on the main indicators and breakdowns which users have requested most frequently. These requests typically involve different breakdowns such as gender, age or geographic region, or relate to specific policies such as the number of entrants from deprived areas or the take-up of various types of student support.
- 3.29 The statistics team also monitors the nature of ad hoc requests and parliamentary questions which it receives. If a particular topic prompts a high level of ad hoc requests, the team may incorporate the analysis into the relevant publication.
- 3.30 The *Attainment in Higher Education and Destinations of Leavers* publication includes appropriate signposting to, and commentary relating to, the Scottish Government's National Indicator to increase the percentage of Scottish domiciled graduates from Scottish HEIs in 'positive destinations' such as work or further study²⁵. However, the presentation of the statistical publications could be improved by including clearer explanation of the statistics, information about their importance and their likely use, drawing out the main messages, and setting out the operational context. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should improve the presentation of these statistical publications to aid understanding and interpretability²⁶ (Requirement 6).
- 3.31 The Scottish Government publicises its statistical outputs in various ways, including: its and others' websites; email updates to government and non-government users; briefings, seminars and roadshows; and newsletters and magazine articles.
- 3.32 The Scottish Government uses an electronic records management system to store and manage corporate records. It maintains all current and historical records on a secure server. The Scottish Government sends copies of its statistical publications to the National Libraries.

²⁴ In relation to Principle 8 Practice 6 of the Code of Practice

²⁵ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms/indicators/domiciledGraduates>

²⁶ In relation to Principle 8 Practice 2 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 The Scottish Government publishes the LL statistics on its website and on the National Statistics Publication Hub. The Scottish Government maintains a list of those who have pre-release access to its LL statistics and makes these details available on request in line with the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics (Scotland) Order 2008²⁷.
- 3.35 The Scottish Government publishes information about all forthcoming LL statistical publications for the next 12 months²⁸ on its website. The statistics team has internal timetables for producing the LL statistical publications to ensure that the outputs are published as soon as they are ready. There have been no delays in the production or publication of these statistics.

²⁷ http://www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation/scotland/ssi2008/draft/sdsi_9780111000236_en_1

²⁸ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Search/Forthcoming>

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.

- 3.36 The Scottish Government maintains regular contact with SAAS and ScotXed to monitor changes to their policies and IT systems which may affect the data the Scottish Government includes in its LL publications.
- 3.37 The statistics team also liaises with SFC to ensure that it receives similar information from colleges to that collected from local authorities. It has used SFC's Statistical Advisory Group for Further Education as a forum to discuss and propose potential improvements to the Education Maintenance Allowance data collection.
- 3.38 The Scottish Government publishes a Statement of Administrative Sources²⁹ but some sources it uses to compile its LL statistics (including HESA and SLC) are not included in the list. We suggest that the Scottish Government revise its Statement of Administrative Sources to include all the sources it uses to compile its LL statistics.

²⁹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/933/0097141.doc>

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to 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.

Suggestion 1	Publish information to demonstrate the uses of the statistics (para 3.3).
Suggestion 2	Review users' needs for more timely lifelong learning statistics (para 3.5).
Suggestion 3	Continue to pursue opportunities to promote comparability of Scottish lifelong learning statistics with relevant statistics within the UK and internationally (para 3.15)
Suggestion 4	Signpost equivalent lifelong learning statistical outputs relating to the four UK countries and document any differences in the Scottish Government's approach (para 3.15).
Suggestion 5	Improve communication with HESA and inform HESA about how it uses the data HESA provides (para 3.23).
Suggestion 6	Introduce regular reviews to monitor progress against the statistical plan (para 3.25).
Suggestion 7	Improve the signposting of the source data for users to analyse (para 3.27)
Suggestion 8	Revise the Scottish Government's Statement of Administrative Sources to include all the sources it uses to compile the lifelong learning statistics (para 3.38).

Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A2.1 This assessment was conducted from June to September 2010.

A2.2 The Assessment team – Phil Grigor and Celia Macintyre – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with Scottish Government representatives in June. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 20 July. The Assessment team subsequently met the Scottish Government during October 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 13 responses from the consultation with users. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Scottish Government	6
Other public sector organisations	4
Local authorities	2
Academia	1

A2.5 Users who responded reported good relationships with the Scottish Government statisticians. Several users reported that the timing of the publications presents problems when considering higher education policy issues. Several users indicated that the current format of the publications could be improved by including more detailed breakdowns of the data, more commentary and analysis of trends, and more information on definitions and background to the data.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

