

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on Further Education and Skills

*(produced by the Department for Business,
Innovation and Skills)*

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About the UK Statistics Authority

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

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

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

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

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ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* gives the UK Statistics Authority a statutory power to assess sets of statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*.

Assessment will determine whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated as National Statistics.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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1 Summary of findings

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports¹ prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*². The Act requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the Code of Practice for Official Statistics³. This report covers statistics published in the *Post-16 Education & Skills: Learner Participation, Outcomes and Level of Highest Qualification Held* quarterly statistical first release⁴ produced by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS).

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 published in *Post-16 Education & Skills: Learner Participation, Outcomes and Level of Highest Qualification Held* are designated as National Statistics, subject to BIS implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by May 2011.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

1.3.1 BIS and the Data Service (which compiles the FE data for BIS) engage with users of further education and skills (FE) statistics in government and the FE sector. Users providing feedback to the Assessment team were happy with the level of engagement and consultation with statisticians at BIS and the Data Service. BIS and the Data Service hold regular meetings with users and invite feedback on the FE statistical release on the Data Service's website. There is less engagement with users in the wider community.

1.3.2 BIS has recently revised the format of the statistical release to present FE statistics in a single quarterly release. It publishes the statistics in an easily accessible manner on the Data Service's website. It is not clear on either BIS's or the Data Service's websites, or in the release itself, that BIS is responsible for the statistics. The commentary could be strengthened to help users interpret the data.

1.3.3 The statistical release is mainly comprised of administrative data collected by the Data Service from FE providers. The release is intended to cover the entire

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.thedataservice.org.uk/statistics/statisticalfirstrelease/>

sector of post-16 education, although there are some gaps in coverage. BIS could explain better the reliability and quality of the statistics, particularly in relation to gaps in the coverage of the statistics.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that BIS 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

Requirement 1	Engage with the wider user community, including learners, and report the outcomes of user engagement (para 3.3).
Requirement 2	Improve the labelling on the statistical release, the Data Service's website and all associated documents to make clear BIS's responsibility for the statistics, and improve the signposting from its website to the data (para 3.4).
Requirement 3	Publish more information about the nature of the excluded types of provision and the impact on the FE statistics (para 3.13).
Requirement 4	Improve the information about the quality and reliability of the in-year FE statistics in relation to their potential uses (para 3.14).
Requirement 5	Provide more detailed information in the statistical release about the impact of the Demand Led Funding on the FE statistics (para 3.15).
Requirement 6	Improve the commentary about FE statistics to aid interpretation, including providing an overview of trends in FE participation and achievement, and include charts where appropriate (para 3.24).
Requirement 7	Improve the explanatory notes in the statistical release and provide appropriate cross-referencing between the text, tables and notes (para 3.25).

2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 BIS assumed responsibility for statistical aspects of FE from the former Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) in 2009. The Data Service is responsible for the production and dissemination of FE statistics. It was established and funded by BIS, and supported by the Skills Funding Agency⁵, to act as a single, central collection point of information for further education. It is responsible for the central collection and storage of sector and sector-related data. The Skills Funding Agency is the BIS agency responsible for funding and regulation of adult FE training in England.
- 2.2 A quarterly statistical first release *Post-16 Education & Skills: Learner Participation, Outcomes and Level of Highest Qualification Held* presents the FE statistics for England. BIS publishes this statistical release on the Data Service's website. The release provides an overview of participation and achievement in further education by level and type of further education provision. Before 2008, FE statistics were published in several releases covering the different types of FE provision and various aspects of the FE sector. However, an external review of the format, content and timing of the releases conducted by PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC) in 2007 recommended developing an integrated quarterly release. The first such release was published in December 2008.
- 2.3 The Data Service compiles a profile of each individual learner's participation and achievement on government-funded FE courses. Statistics based on these profiles cover FE courses delivered by providers such as independent training organisations, further education institutions, and local authorities. The statistics to date do not cover sixth form schools or privately-funded FE provision. The statistical release also presents estimates (derived from the Office for National Statistics' Labour Force Survey (LFS)) of the highest qualification attained by adults, as well as information about vocational qualifications from examination bodies.
- 2.4 The statistics are used within central government for developing and monitoring FE policies and programmes, such as in the Skills Investment Strategy⁶ and the Leitch Review⁷. There have been some Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets⁸ in this area, such as those related to the level of qualifications achieved and the skills of adults, the number of apprenticeships completed, and FE success rates. Other users include regulatory bodies such as the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (OFSTED)⁹ and the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (OFQUAL)¹⁰, FE providers, academics and education charities.
- 2.5 BIS has estimated the cost of producing the published statistics to be around £92,000.

⁵ <http://skillsfundingagency.bis.gov.uk/>

⁶ <http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/further-education-skills/funding/skills-investment-strategy>

⁷ <http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/migratedd/publications/w/worldclassskillsfinal.pdf>

⁸ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.bis.gov.uk/about/objectives>

⁹ <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/>

¹⁰ <http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/>

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 BIS and the Data Service have published a statistical policy statement¹¹ on engagement with users on the Data Service's website. This document outlines different types of users and the nature of their use of FE statistics. The Data Service invites feedback from users through a user engagement web page¹² on its website. User can subscribe to receive web alerts about the release of new information. They also can contact the Service Desk through the web site. Queries received by the Service Desk are reviewed to inform the content of the tables in the statistical release.
- 3.2 In 2007, PwC reviewed ten statistical releases relating to post-16 learning. PwC interviewed a range of users within the FE sector, academia and central government. The review led to the integration of the individual releases into the *Post-16 education & skills* statistical release. The report¹³ from the review is available on the Data Service's website. BIS and the Data Service are currently inviting comments from users about the integrated statistical release via this website. BIS told us that it would publish a statement on future changes, following feedback from users.
- 3.3 BIS and the Data Service engage with central government users and those in the FE sector through various groups. These include a departmental policy group which reviews the content of the statistical release each quarter. FE providers, including representatives of regional bodies and funding organisations, give feedback on their data needs and views about the content and presentation of the statistical release in regular meetings with BIS and the Data Service. BIS has made changes to the statistics as a result of feedback from these users: for example, it developed provisional in-year figures to enable the release of more timely statistics. Engagement with other users, such as learners, is limited to enquiries to the Service Desk and online feedback. As part of the designation as National Statistics, BIS and the Data Service should engage with the wider user community, including learners, and report the outcomes of user engagement¹⁴ (Requirement 1).

¹¹ <http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/39E0CC7B-E1B9-4F4F-9277-9846EF349453/0/UserEngagementStatement.pdf>

¹² http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/statistics/statisticalfirstrelease/sfr_user_engagement/

¹³ <http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/2912199D-9585-4F81-98AA-511E8AA43507/0/ReviewofPost16LearnerSFRs.pdf>

¹⁴ In relation to Principle 1, Practices 2 and 5 of the Code of Practice

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

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

- 3.4 BIS publishes the FE statistics in an impartial and orderly manner. However the statistical release does not make sufficiently clear that these statistics are BIS's responsibility. As part of the designation as National Statistics, BIS should improve the labelling on the statistical release, the Data Service's website and all associated documents to make clear its responsibility for the statistics, and improve the signposting from its website to the data¹⁵ (Requirement 2).
- 3.5 The statistics are available free of charge on the Data Service's website and via BIS's website, via the National Statistics Publication Hub and the Department for Education's research gateway¹⁶.
- 3.6 BIS has published a revisions policy¹⁷ for FE statistics on the Data Service's website. Having identified an error in the syntax for deriving the Skills for Life numeracy achievements in the June 2010 statistical release, BIS published a revised version of the release (highlighting the tables affected), and a paper¹⁸ explaining the nature and scale of the change in the statistics. The correction was clearly signposted on the Data Service's website.
- 3.7 BIS announced changes to the statistical release ahead of the introduction of the new quarterly release. It has also announced changes to methods prior to their introduction and provided accompanying documentation, for example regarding the method for measuring the highest qualification attained using the LFS.

¹⁵ In relation to Principle 2 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

¹⁶ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/>

¹⁷ http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/E7BEF71B-A425-4AAA-9AF2-F3955960B589/0/Revisions_Policy_v2.pdf

¹⁸ http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/9619D1E2-8D06-43D7-AB0C-335ECDDF59A9/0/September_SfL_Revision.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.

- 3.8 BIS and the Data Service told us that the BIS Head of Profession for statistics has sole responsibility for determining the methods, content and timing of FE statistics published in the statistical release.
- 3.9 BIS releases ministerial statements through its Press Office separately from the FE statistics. The BIS statisticians provide advice to policy colleagues on how to use the statistics appropriately prior to the release of the ministerial statements.
- 3.10 No incidents of political pressure, abuse of trust or complaints relating to the professional integrity, quality or standards were reported to or identified by the Assessment team.

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 Service collects the Individualised Learner Record (ILR) data from FE providers on behalf of BIS and the Skills Funding Agency. BIS and the Data Service have published detailed information about the methods^{19,20}, data definitions²¹ and data standards²². The Data Service has published extensive metadata on the data tables through a data dictionary²³ (an online repository explaining terms, codes and derivations of variables). The dictionary also publishes information sheets on issues with the quality of variables on the ILR.
- 3.12 The Data Service applies data standards set by the Information Authority²⁴ and the Information Standards Board²⁵, to ensure consistency across the education sector and across the UK. It has published a quality statement²⁶ outlining its overall principles for ensuring the quality of the data and a detailed quality framework²⁷ for the production of the statistics. It also published its detailed data checking rules.
- 3.13 The statistical release highlights that the FE statistics are not complete – the statistics do not include figures about FE participation and achievement from sixth form schools and private providers (those not receiving government funding). BIS has yet to resolve comparability issues between school sixth forms and sixth form colleges, but intends to add data on school sixth forms into the statistical release when these issues are resolved²⁸. As part of the designation as National Statistics, BIS should publish more information about the nature of the excluded types of provision and the impact on the FE statistics²⁹ (Requirement 3).
- 3.14 BIS publishes provisional in-year figures to meet some users' needs for more timely data. BIS told us that these figures can vary substantially from year to year, as changes in the operational procedures within the sector impact upon the number and completeness of returns from FE providers. Some users told the Assessment team that they felt that the in-year figures could be misleading due to the nature of the reporting. BIS told us that it plans in future to publish

¹⁹ http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/datadictionary/businessdefinitions/SFL_Business_Def.htm

²⁰ <http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/statistics/statisticalfirstrelease/methodology/>

²¹ The Definitions document for the statistical release is available on the same web page as the statistics release: http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/statistics/statisticalfirstrelease/sfr_current/

²² <http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/datadictionary/datastandards/>

²³ <http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/datadictionary/>

²⁴ <http://www.theia.org.uk/>

²⁵ <http://www.escs-isb.org.uk/>

²⁶ http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/NR/rdoonlyres/D7A04BB0-94EA-4C23-84E9-D8BBE153AB5E/0/Quality_Statement_for_the_Statistical_First_Release.pdf

²⁷ <http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/NR/rdoonlyres/AECBFC58-89A0-4444-969C-77C32C707906/0/QualityAssuranceFramework.pdf>

²⁸ The schools collect the information from awarding bodies at one point in time while the other FE providers collect the data over time. Different definitions of a valid learner are also used.

²⁹ In relation to Principle 4 Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

the statistical release a month later than in 2010 in order to base the provisional statistics on a more complete dataset. As part of the designation as National Statistics, BIS should improve the information about the quality and reliability of the in-year FE statistics in relation to their potential uses³⁰ (Requirement 4).

- 3.15 The Learning and Skills Council introduced Demand Led Funding³¹ in 2008. BIS analysed the impact of this change on the FE statistics and published a report³² describing the nature of the changes and a supplementary table³³ giving modelled results on the same basis for 2007/08 and 2008/09. However within the statistical release, the description of the policy change does not sufficiently convey the impact on the time series, nor on the different types of FE provision. As part of the designation as National Statistics, BIS should provide more detailed information in the statistical release about the impact of Demand Led Funding on the FE statistics³⁴ (Requirement 5).
- 3.16 BIS contributes to the report *Education and Training Statistics for the United Kingdom*³⁵ compiled by the Department for Education. BIS does not refer to this report, or to further education statistics for the UK and devolved administrations, in the statistical release. We suggest that BIS signposts users to further information about FE statistics for the UK and devolved administrations.

³⁰ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

³¹ Demand led funding is a funding model, reflecting the principle that learner (or employer) demand and choice should directly affect the amount of funding earned by providers.

³² <http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/5DC702AA-5117-40E1-A15E-01F95F2AF32B/0/TheeffectsofDemandLedFundingonthecountof2008v2.doc>

³³ http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/statistics/statisticalfirstrelease/sfr_supplementary_tables/

³⁴ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

³⁵ <http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/VOL/v000891/>

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 BIS and the Data Service assured us that they take all necessary steps to protect the confidentiality of the data it collects. This includes requiring staff in both BIS and the Data Service with access to disclosive data to sign confidentiality agreements. The Data Service shares the ILR data with third parties for verified research purposes if the users sign a confidentiality agreement.
- 3.18 BIS and the Data Service have published a policy³⁶ on the Data Service's website on protecting confidential information.
- 3.19 The Data Service uses secure transfer systems to receive data from FE providers and qualifications awarding bodies.

³⁶ <http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/C8A8748E-AD9A-45E2-995E-64D301436E59/0/ConfidentialityandDisclosureStatementv1.pdf>

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.

- 3.20 BIS and the Data Service produce the statistics from data collected in the ILR and from awarding bodies for other purposes. Most of the data are from the administrative system used for paying further education providers. Awarding bodies provide individual learner's course results for vocational qualifications. BIS also uses data from the LFS to derive a measure of highest qualification attained.
- 3.21 BIS and the Data Service told us that they now ensure that the statistical needs are considered when the data collection system for the ILR is changed in line with operational procedures. BIS has put in place new governance arrangements to enable appropriate input into what data are collected and how systems are managed.

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.

- 3.22 BIS funds a team within the Data Service at an estimated cost of £200,000 to support its work on public dissemination projects. BIS has estimated that the annual cost of producing the FE statistics to be about £92,000, including the cost of both the lead BIS statistical team and the resource within the Data Service. This estimate includes staff overheads and the routine production of the statistical product and briefing.
- 3.23 Relevant competency frameworks and recruitment processes are used in both BIS and the Data Service and statisticians maintain a log of continuing professional development.

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

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

- 3.24 BIS and the Data Service produce the statistical release for publication on the Data Service's website. BIS provides commentary alongside the headline results in the statistical release about participation and achievement for young people and adults, for apprenticeships³⁷ and the Train to Gain Service³⁸. The commentary is technical and more suited to expert users than the non-specialist user. The presentation would benefit from the use of charts, and descriptions of the main types of FE provision, the policy context for the measures and an explanation of the trends in participation and achievement. As part of the designation as National Statistics, BIS should improve the commentary about FE statistics to aid interpretation, including providing an overview of trends in FE participation and achievement, and include charts where appropriate³⁹ (Requirement 6).
- 3.25 The statistical release includes a section on measures and definitions. However, there is insufficient signposting to this information and the explanations could be made clearer for non-specialist users. As part of the designation as National Statistics, BIS should improve the explanatory notes in the statistical release and provide appropriate cross-referencing between the text, tables and notes⁴⁰ (Requirement 7).
- 3.26 The Data Service's website provides access to the current statistical release and to an extensive range of supplementary tables and additional methodology documents. Data are made available as tables in Excel format. There is also a web page giving details about the next statistical release, including the expected publication date and an invitation for users to comment on the table templates for the next quarterly release.
- 3.27 The Data Service archives the ILR data which are available on demand for verified research purposes. BIS and the Data Service told us that they plan to deposit the dataset with the National Archive in the future. BIS and the Data Service will agree the content of this dataset with users and register it with the Information Authority. It will be a standardised dataset, and will include a range of derived variables to allow maximum use. This dataset will be available on a new research hub that BIS and the Data Service are developing, which will allow access to data for researchers and other government analysts.

³⁷ Apprenticeships are a framework consisting of an NVQ, Key Skills qualification and a technical certificate. Learning takes place both in the workplace and with a local learning provider

³⁸ Train to Gain is an advisory service intended to encourage and support employers to train their staff

³⁹ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

⁴⁰ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 1 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.

3.28 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.

- 3.29 BIS releases FE statistics at 9.30am on the Data Service's website.
- 3.30 BIS has published a timetable of releases for twelve months ahead⁴¹. The release date of FE statistics is pre-announced on the Data Service's website and through the National Statistics Publication Hub.
- 3.31 BIS has published its policy⁴² on pre-release access on its website. BIS told us that it has reduced the number of people receiving pre-release access to the statistics and that it reviews the list for the statistical release ahead of each quarterly release. The list is published on BIS's website⁴³.

⁴¹ <http://stats.bis.gov.uk/index.asp>

⁴² <http://stats.bis.gov.uk/sd/Compliance3.htm>

⁴³ http://stats.bis.gov.uk/sd/Pre-release_access_lists_for_web.doc

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.

- 3.32 BIS and the Data Service base most of the FE statistics on data collected by FE providers' administrative systems and data supplied by examination bodies.
- 3.33 BIS and the Data Service have published a detailed Statement of Administrative Sources⁴⁴ for the FE statistics on the Data Service's website.

⁴⁴ <http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/NR/rdonlyres/D69E2A02-20CD-4BEE-A61E-1535C51F34EC/0/StatementofAdministrativeSources.pdf>

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to BIS's further education and skills 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.

Suggestion 1

Signpost users to further information about FE statistics for the UK and devolved administrations (para 3.16).

Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

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

A2.2 The Assessment team – Penny Babb and Cathy Kruger – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with BIS representatives in June. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 28 July. The Assessment team subsequently met BIS and the Data Service during September to review compliance with the Code of Practice, taking account of the written evidence provided and other relevant sources of evidence.

Summary of users contacted, and issues raised

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

A2.4 The Assessment team received 18 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

BIS	6
Other government departments	4
FE sector	7
Local government	1

A2.5 Most users providing feedback to the Assessment team came from within government and the FE sector. There appeared to be a range of different uses of the data. Within government the main uses are for the development and monitoring of FE policies and programmes. Users outside government use the data to understand trends in further education provision and for specific comparisons, such as research into vocational and academic qualifications.

A2.6 Users seemed generally happy with the level of engagement and consultation with BIS statisticians. Users considered the FE data to be comprehensive and useful. Some users appeared to have difficulty finding the data tables, information on data sources and definitions on the Data Services' website. There was interest in having more interactive datasets to enable users to create the tables they required. Some users felt that the in-year figures could be misleading due to the nature of the reporting. Several users were interested in having data on FE participation in sixth form schools and more comparable information across the UK and to support international comparisons.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

