

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Construction Price and Cost Indices

*(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 Statistics*³. The report covers the set of statistics presented in *BIS Construction Price and Cost Indices Online*⁴, 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 Authority judges that *Construction Price and Cost Indices* do not sufficiently comply with the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics* to be published as National Statistics; that substantial further work is required for them to be fully compliant with the Code; and that it is in the public interest that these matters be indicated clearly to users by the temporary removal of the existing designation as National Statistics. The Authority notes that a programme of work led by BIS is underway to address the requirements made in this Assessment Report, and that BIS expects to report on their implementation to the Authority in July 2011. After considering BIS' report, the Authority will review the designation of this set of statistics.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.3.1 BIS engages with users in the construction industry and government departments through an open user group and through informal meetings. It has a steering group that oversees the production of *Construction Price and Cost Indices Online (PCIs)*.
- 1.3.2 BIS provides detailed indices of construction prices and costs to support contract management in the construction industry. The statistics are available on subscription through a web tool, with end of year figures published subsequently by ONS in its annual construction report. The tool includes documents that explain the definitions for each index but these do not explain the methods or the quality and reliability of the data. BIS does not provide any commentary about the indices.
- 1.3.3 Due to changes in the methods of procuring public sector construction projects, the sample sizes have fallen substantially for some indices. BIS facilitated work

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://stats.berr.gov.uk/UKSA/construction/sa20100913.htm>

between the Building Cost Information Service⁵ (BCIS) and ONS which led to improvements in the output price indices. Further work to improve the sample sizes of some of the tender price indices is required.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that substantial further work was required by BIS to 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	Produce and publish a report detailing the progress made to improve the <i>PCIs</i> and a timetable for the development programme (para 3.2).
Requirement 2	Release the <i>PCIs</i> free of charge, at the same time or before the statistics are available through any supplementary statistical services, and revise the BIS pricing policy to make clear the statistical outputs for which it makes a charge and the reasons for this (para 3.6).
Requirement 3	Publish a revisions policy for the <i>PCIs</i> that are subject to scheduled revisions and provide a statement explaining the nature and extent of revisions at the same time they are released (para 3.8).
Requirement 4	Ensure that the <i>PCIs</i> are produced to a level of quality that meets users' needs (para 3.12).
Requirement 5	Publish details of the methods adopted, including explanations of why particular choices were made (para 3.13).
Requirement 6	Publish information about the quality, including strengths and limitations, of the <i>PCIs</i> (para 3.14).
Requirement 7	Determine whether there is a risk of disclosure of confidential information and devise suitable methods of statistical disclosure control if necessary (para 3.18).

⁵ <http://www.bcis.co.uk/site/index.aspx>

Requirement 8	Publish information about the estimated cost to businesses of responding to the <i>PCIs</i> surveys (para 3.20).
Requirement 9	Review the resources allocated to these statistics and confirm that they are sufficient to meet the standards of the <i>Code of Practice</i> (para 3.23).
Requirement 10	Ensure that the <i>PCIs</i> are published with appropriate commentary, analysis and supporting information that meets users' needs (para 3.24).
Requirement 11	Ensure that access to the <i>PCIs</i> is as straightforward as possible and signpost users to other relevant sources (para 3.26).
Requirement 12	Ensure that all releases are issued at 9.30am on the day of release (para 3.32).
Requirement 13	Include the name and contact details of the responsible statistician on all future releases (para 3.33).

2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 BIS is responsible for producing and publishing *BIS Construction Price and Cost Indices Online (PCIs)*, a suite of indices which describe changes in the price of construction services and materials over time. The indices are used for cost management for those letting construction contracts within both the public and private sectors, are used as deflators within the UK National Accounts and are used by economists to monitor inflation and explain changes in the output of the construction industry.
- 2.2 BIS contracts the Building Cost Information Service⁶ (BCIS) to produce and publish the *PCIs*. BCIS publishes the indices through its web tool⁷. It is the information service of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and the leading provider of cost information to the construction industry. The web tool presents the full suite of *PCIs* and allows users to create tables and charts of their own design. Since they were first introduced by the Property Services Agency (an agency of the (then) Department of the Environment) in the 1970s, the indices were published in hardcopy until the move to online only publication in 2008.
- 2.3 The *PCIs* provide construction price and cost information in three types of statistics: tender price indices (TPIs), output price indices (OPIs) and resource cost indices (RCIs). Since it is not possible to compare the price of identical construction projects in consecutive periods (as the majority of projects will be unique), the price of individual elements of the project, such as the price of excavation, are collected and then combined to produce an overall index.
- 2.4 TPIs represent the cost a client has agreed to pay for a building and correspond to the price offer made by the contractor in the tender. The price reflects the contractor's views about future costs for labour and materials and their anticipation of the market's influence on profit margins. TPIs are available for public sector construction only, with separate indices for public sector non-housing building, social housing building, and road construction. TPIs are compiled by comparing the prices of a proportion of the items within a sample of accepted tenders during a given period of time against the price of similar items in a base schedule of rates. An index is calculated for each tender within the sample and the average taken to give the final index for that period. The raw index is smoothed to produce the published index for the period.
- 2.5 OPIs are derived from the TPIs by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and represent changes in the prices actually paid for construction work. They are produced for both public and private sector construction projects. They are based on values of TPIs from previous periods but also account for changes in the cost of additional items such as labour and materials. The OPI corresponds to the value at current prices of the work done in the relevant quarter, on the basis of contracts placed in or before the same quarter, divided by the volume of that work. ONS uses the OPIs as deflators to convert official statistics about

⁶ <http://www.bcis.co.uk/site/index.aspx>

⁷ http://www.bcis.co.uk/site/scripts/retail_product_browse.aspx?product_id=770&category_id=4

the value of contractors' output of new construction work from current to constant prices for use in the UK National Accounts.

- 2.6 RCIs measure changes in the costs incurred by the builder in the completion of the construction project on items such as wages, material prices and plant costs. They reflect the current costs, rather than the future costs incorporated into tenders and exclude any contractor's profit. The indices are calculated by applying the price change observed in the relevant indices of the *Price Adjustment Formulae Indices Online; Series 3 - for Building and Specialist Engineering Indices*⁸ to the price of the individual elements of a typical construction project. RCIs are available for buildings, roads, infrastructure and building maintenance.
- 2.7 BCIS is responsible for the data collection and the calculation of indices at the individual project level. A sub-contractor, Bob Packham Associates (BPA), uses the project indices to calculate regional, function and value factors for each quarter which are then used to normalise the project indices before calculating a smoothed median index for the quarterly project indices. BPA also combines the individual indices for work sectors to form the main TPIs and RCIs. Data are stored in databases which are shared with ONS and BIS. ONS derive the OPIs from these data. BCIS then publishes the PCIs on the web.
- 2.8 ONS took over responsibility for the production of several sets of construction statistics from BIS in March 2008 after a review was conducted into transferring the statistics from the (former) Department of Trade and Industry⁹. The transfer included responsibility for the publication of the report, *Construction Statistics Annual*¹⁰. BIS contributes to this report by providing ONS with the *PCIs* and other building statistics produced by BCIS. ONS also produces the *Monthly Digest of Statistics*¹¹, which includes a table on producer prices that features the quarterly construction output price index. These publications are available free on the Internet and published several months after the equivalent statistics in the online service.
- 2.9 Some of the *PCIs* are used to meet the *EC Short-term Statistics Regulation* (1165/98 amended by 1158/2005)¹² that requires that the UK provide an index of construction costs. In addition, a public sector housing cost index is required to calculate payment to landlords in respect of service charges incurred for works including repairs and improvements in accordance with the *Housing (Right to Buy) (Service Charges) (Amendment) (England) Order 2008 (Statutory Instrument 2008/533)*¹³.
- 2.10 The cost to BIS of producing the *PCIs* is around £420,000.

⁸ http://www.bcis.co.uk/site/scripts/retail_product_browse.aspx?product_id=771

⁹ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/berr.gov.uk/whatwedo/sectors/construction/constructionstatistics/transferreview/page20915.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=284&Pos=&ColRank=1&Rank=272>

¹¹ Table 3.7: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=611>

¹² http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/short_term_business_statistics/introduction/sts_in_brief

¹³ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2008/533/contents/made>

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 commissioned Davis Langdon Management Consulting¹⁴ to review¹⁵ *PCIs*, to inform the re-tendering of the contract for production of the *PCIs* in 2009. The review included a user survey and a workshop with key users, and made some recommendations for improvements to the methods. BIS told us that user feedback informed its proposals for the new contract but that it could not take forward all of the recommendations due to financial constraints. BIS reinstated the working group, which oversees the production and development of the statistics, after the review. The membership includes ONS, the contractors – BCIS and BPA, and is chaired by BIS.
- 3.2 BIS told the Assessment team that the working group is now carrying out a programme of research to improve the *PCIs*; however, the scope and progress of the developments is not clear. As part of the designation as National Statistics, BIS should produce and publish a report detailing the progress made to improve the *PCIs* and a timetable for the development programme¹⁶ (Requirement 1).
- 3.3 The Davis Langdon review documented some of the uses made of the *PCIs*. We suggest that BIS extend this information to reflect the full range of uses, and ensure that it is published.
- 3.4 BIS engages with a range of users with an interest in the construction industry through formal groups and informal contact. It leads a user group, the Consultative Committee on Construction Industry Statistics (CCCIS), which meets twice a year. The user group includes members representing trade associations, academics and users from government departments. The papers¹⁷ for the group are available on BIS's website. The group discusses changes to the methods, such as recent improvements to the OPIs led by ONS.
- 3.5 BIS also engages with users in government and the construction industry informally. For example, BIS statisticians meet regularly with the Construction Products Association (CPA) and Experian which both produce forecasts of the industry. BIS told us that it plans to build up links with individual trade associations by holding regular informal meetings and encourage their membership of the CCCIS. BCIS provides a support desk for handling user enquiries. BIS statisticians also answer queries from users, liaising with BCIS and BIS economists as necessary.

¹⁴ <http://www.davislangdon.com/EME/>

¹⁵ <http://stats.berr.gov.uk/construction/>

¹⁶ In relation to Principle 1 Practice 5, Principle 4 Practice 5 and Principle 7 Practice 3 of the Code of Practice

¹⁷ <http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/business-sectors/construction/construction-statistics/cccis>

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

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

- 3.6 BIS publishes the *PCIs* on the BCIS web tool¹⁸. The web tool is currently available to subscribers at a charge of £105 plus VAT per annum. BIS does not publish a separate release of headline data at the same time as the detailed figures. BIS's published charging policy¹⁹ states that it releases statistics free of charge on the Internet. It does not make clear that the publication of the *PCIs* is an exception, or explain the reason for this. As part of the designation as National Statistics, BIS should release *PCIs* free of charge, at the same time or before the statistics are available through any supplementary statistical services. BIS should revise its pricing policy to make clear the statistical outputs for which it makes a charge and the reasons for this²⁰ (Requirement 2).
- 3.7 BIS announces changes to the methods through the BCIS web tool at the same time as the implementation of each change. BIS announced²¹ changes to the OPI methods prior to the release of the data through the web tool. We suggest that BIS introduce email alerts to inform users when announcements have been released on the BCIS web tool.
- 3.8 There is currently no revisions policy available for the *PCIs*. BCIS revises the *PCIs* as more data become available and flags the status of the indices (as provisional, revised, or firm). However, it does not make clear the nature or extent of the revisions. Users have expressed concern about the scale of some revisions. As part of the designation as National Statistics, BIS should publish a revisions policy for the *PCIs* that are subject to scheduled revisions and provide a statement explaining the nature and extent of revisions at the same time they are released²² (Requirement 3).

¹⁸ http://www.bcis.co.uk/site/scripts/retail_product_browse.aspx?product_id=770&category_id=4

¹⁹ <http://stats.bis.gov.uk/sd/compliance1.htm>

²⁰ In relation to Principle 2, Practices 1, 3, 8 and 9 and Protocol 2 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

²¹ http://www.bcis.co.uk/site/scripts/news_article.aspx?newsID=177

²² In relation to Principle 2, Practice 6 of the Code of Practice

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 BIS told us that its Head of Profession for statistics has sole responsibility for deciding on issues such as the statistical methods and the content and timing of statistical releases.
- 3.10 The Assessment team was told by one government department that it had raised a concern with the National Statistician about the *PCIs* being released through the website of a private organisation for a charge. It felt that the practice allowed the independence of the statistics to be questioned (see para 3.6).

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 BCIS uses a range of data sources to produce the *PCIs*, including its own data collection from individual project clients and consultants and from local and central government, including the health service and highways agencies which commission public sector construction work. The current period price and quantity data required to calculate the *TPIs* come mainly from tender documents supplied to BCIS, where the indices are calculated from the bills of quantities and other contract cost reports for items or services corresponding to types of construction work categories. The Tender Price Index for Social Housing (TPISH) uses a slightly different method which re-prices the mix of units in a contract from a base matrix and adjusts them for a predetermined list of specifications. The data are requested through a survey from BCIS with the assistance of the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA).
- 3.12 The Davis Langdon review identified users' concerns about the reliability of the methods. These issues included the nature of the samples used to construct the *PCIs*, with small and unrepresentative samples for some series as a result of a move away from traditional procurement methods to new means of awarding contracts, such as framework target contracts. These procurement changes mainly affected *TPIs* for public non-housing projects and road construction projects, where final sample sizes have fallen as low as 20 and 5, respectively, over the last 2 years. BIS accepted the findings of the review and hoped to address the concerns in the re-tendering of the contract in 2009, but it told us that this work was unaffordable. However some improvements have been made through the working group chaired by BIS to develop a new method for calculating new *TPIs* for private industrial projects and infrastructure work. While useful developments in improving the *OPIs*, these changes do not address the underlying weaknesses in some of the other indices. Furthermore, the Davis Langdon review did not consider other aspects of the methods used such as the smoothing of data and consistency of base year. As part of the designation as National Statistics, BIS should ensure that the *PCIs* are produced to a level of quality that meets users needs²³ (Requirement 4). We suggest BIS review the selection of base years for the *PCIs* in consultation with users.
- 3.13 BCIS explains the definitions on the web tool alongside each index series. These descriptions provide some useful information to help users apply the indices but do not give sufficient detail to explain the methods underpinning the indices. This issue was raised by some users in response to this assessment. As part of the designation as National Statistics, BIS should publish details of the methods adopted, including explanations of why particular choices were made²⁴ (Requirement 5).

²³ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

²⁴ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

- 3.14 BCIS provides sample size information alongside the respective indices on its web tool. This is the only measure of quality provided to users. BIS told us that the BCIS contract allows for further quality information to be requested and intends to seek additional quality measures in the future. As part of the designation as National Statistics, BIS should publish information about the quality, including strengths and limitations, of the *PCIs*²⁵ (Requirement 6).
- 3.15 BCIS has detailed quality assurance procedures and employs and trains staff (including qualified chartered surveyors) for the production and checking of the indices.
- 3.16 The geographic coverage varies for the different indices. For example, the social housing TPI is for England and Wales, while the road construction and public building (non-housing) TPIs are for Great Britain. The BCIS definition documents describe the coverage but do not explain the reasons for the differences. We suggest that BIS ensure that explanation is given for the geographic coverage and signpost users to equivalent data for the devolved administrations.
- 3.17 BCIS uses the same methods to calculate *PCIs* for the Scottish Government.

²⁵ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 2 and Principle 8, Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

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 No statistical disclosure control methods are applied to these statistics, and it therefore may be possible that disclosive business information can be derived from these indices. However, when data are requested, suppliers are assured that no individual contract, contractor or client will be recognisable in the published outputs. As part of the designation as National Statistics, BIS should determine whether there is a risk of disclosure of confidential information and devise suitable methods of statistical disclosure control if necessary²⁶ (Requirement 7).
- 3.19 No data are shared with third parties other than BIS, BCIS, BPA and ONS which are all involved in the production of the *PCIs*. All information about individual construction projects is accessed through a secure system. The index data sent to BIS and ONS do not contain information on individual projects.

²⁶ In relation to Principle 5, Practices 1 and 2 of the Code of Practice

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 has published a statement of the costs of responding to surveys by businesses and local authorities²⁷, but this does not include the surveys to collect data for the *PCIs*. As part of the designation as National Statistics, BIS should publish information about the estimated cost to businesses of responding to the *PCIs* surveys²⁸ (Requirement 8).
- 3.21 The data used to calculate the *PCIs* are provided on a voluntary basis. BIS told us that as much of the required data as possible are collected directly from tender documents to reduce the burden on suppliers of completing a questionnaire. A questionnaire is used to collect data for the TPISH, and several steps have been taken to ensure that this burden is minimised. During the initial development, feedback was sought from suppliers to ensure that the questionnaire was clear and straightforward to complete. The questionnaires are pre-populated with some data from the HCA. BCIS gives suppliers a list of project criteria to ensure that they return data for suitable projects only.

²⁷ <http://stats.bis.gov.uk/surveyactivity/2008-09/Forward%20Compliance%20Plan%202009-10,%202010-11,%202011-12.pdf>

²⁸ 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.

- 3.22 BIS awarded the contract to produce the *PCIs* through a competitive tender process. It told us that it pays approximately £420,000 to BCIS for the calculation and publication of these indices, a cost that is subsidised by BCIS since it also uses the data to derive indices of its own. Furthermore, the subscription charges collected by BCIS fund the running and maintenance of the web tool. To make the *PCIs* available free of charge, BCIS told us that it would require an additional annual payment of around £150,800 per year and that it would incur the cost of setting up a new, or altering an existing website, to host the data and for the provision and maintenance of the website.
- 3.23 The regular production of the *PCIs* appears adequately resourced. BIS told us, however, that it did not have the resources necessary to address all of the improvements recommended in the Davis Langdon review. As part of the designation as National Statistics, BIS should review the resources allocated to these statistics and confirm that the resources made available are sufficient to meet the standards of the *Code of Practice*²⁹ (Requirement 9).

²⁹ In relation to Principle 7, Practices 1 and 5 of the Code of Practice

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

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

- 3.24 No commentary or analysis is provided with the release of the *PCIs* on the web tool. The web tool allows the user to produce graphs of the series but provides no additional explanation to support the interpretation of the data. As part of the designation as National Statistics, BIS should ensure that the *PCIs* are published with appropriate commentary, analysis and supporting information that meets users' needs³⁰ (Requirement 10).
- 3.25 The *PCIs* are available for different project types, with TPIs available for regions and for projects of different values. Some users told us that it can be difficult to identify particular indices, for example, where one index is superseded by another. We suggest that BIS publish the *PCIs* with a unique identifier to assist users in identifying the correct index.
- 3.26 The *PCIs* can be accessed on the web tool from BIS's construction web page³¹ or via the National Statistics Publication Hub. These entry routes lead to different areas of BCIS's website where it is not clear how to access the data or obtain a subscription. BIS's web pages require some updating: two pages quote different, both incorrect, prices for the subscription. Users are not made aware that less timely but free-of-charge data are available in ONS's *Construction Statistics Annual* and *Monthly Digest of Statistics*, and no up-to-date link is provided to either of these releases. The web tool opens as a pop-up window, requiring many users to adjust their browser settings to allow the window to open. BIS told us that work is due to start in order to improve accessibility to the web tool in line with the Web Accessibility Initiative Double-A standard. As part of the designation as National Statistics, BIS should ensure that access to the *PCIs* is as straightforward as possible and signpost users to other relevant sources³² (Requirement 11).
- 3.27 From the web tool, it is possible to download data in a variety of formats, allowing users to analyse and re-use the data. Few instructions are available and they are quite difficult to find on the web tool. We suggest that BIS ensures clear instructions for exporting data are provided.

³⁰ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

³¹ <http://stats.bis.gov.uk/ukxa/construction/sa20101213.htm>

³² In relation to Principle 8, Practice 4 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 pre-announces the release dates on its Economics and Statistics website³³, on the National Statistics Publication Hub and the BCIS web tool. The BIS schedule gives the release dates for 12 months ahead.
- 3.30 A link to the web tool is accessible from BIS's website and the National Statistics Publication Hub; however, the name given to the product varies between these sources. We suggest that BIS ensure that the same title is used on its website, the National Statistics Publication Hub and the BCIS web tool.
- 3.31 BIS releases the *PCIs* quarterly. This frequency suits the needs of the majority of users, though others told us that they would prefer monthly statistics. BIS releases the *PCIs* three months after the reference period, for example, statistics for Quarter 2 (April to June) are published in September.
- 3.32 The *PCIs* are currently released at midday. BIS told us that it is only possible to release the statistics on the hour, due to restrictions on BCIS's website. As part of the designation as National Statistics, BIS should ensure that all releases are issued at 9.30am on the day of release³⁴ (Requirement 12).
- 3.33 The name and contact details of the responsible statistician are not included on the BCIS web tool, although a general BCIS support email address is provided. As part of the designation as National Statistics, BIS should include the name and contact details of the responsible statistician on all future releases³⁵ (Requirement 13).
- 3.34 BIS told us that no pre-release access is currently granted to the *PCIs*.

³³ <http://stats.bis.gov.uk/index.asp>

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

³⁵ In relation to Protocol 2, Practice 6 of the Code of Practice

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.

3.35 No administrative sources are used to produce the *PCIs*. BIS told us that there are currently no suitable administrative sources available.

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to the BIS *PCIs*, 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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| Suggestion 1 | Extend the user information documented by the Davis Langdon review to reflect the full range of uses and ensure that it is published (para 3.3). |
| Suggestion 2 | Introduce email alerts to inform users when announcements have been released on the BCIS web tool (para 3.7). |
| Suggestion 3 | Review the selection of base years for the <i>PCIs</i> in consultation with users (para 3.12). |
| Suggestion 4 | Ensure that explanation is given for the geographic coverage and signpost users to equivalent data for the devolved administrations (para 3.16). |
| Suggestion 5 | Publish the <i>PCIs</i> with a unique identifier to assist users in identifying the correct index (para 3.25). |
| Suggestion 6 | Ensure that clear instructions for exporting data are provided (para 3.27). |
| Suggestion 7 | Ensure that the same title is used on its website, the Publication Hub and the BCIS web tool (para 3.30). |

Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

- A2.1 This assessment was conducted from September to December 2010.
- A2.2 The Assessment team – Penny Babb and Kat Pegler – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of BIS in September. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 1 October. The Assessment team subsequently met BIS during November 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 11 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Government departments	5
Private sector	4
Arms length body	1
Local authority	1

A2.5 These statistics are widely used and most users said that the indices meet their needs. However users did express some concerns. Users are generally unaware of a timetable for publication, and so have to regularly check BCIS's website or contact BCIS staff to find publication dates. Users were also concerned about access to the statistics since an annual subscription to the BCIS web tool is required. Not only is this seen as a disproportionate cost burden, especially if the statistics are only needed once a year, but one user said that it poses problems for contractual use because it raises questions about whether the statistics are independent. Some users said that they would like more timely statistics, published more frequently, and would also prefer it if the series were available on a consistent base year. Users would also like a more detailed explanation of the methodology used to construct the series and an explanation of revisions to the published series, particularly where these are significant.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

