

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on Population, Demography and Households in Wales

*(produced by the Welsh Assembly
Government)*

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About the UK Statistics Authority

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

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

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

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

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ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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1 Summary of findings

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This is one of a series of 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 sets of statistics included in the following National Statistics publications produced by the Welsh Assembly Government:

- *Wales's Population: A Demographic Overview*⁴;
- *Local Authority Population Projections for Wales: Summary Report*⁵;
- *Local Authority Population Projections for Wales: Local Authority Report*⁶;
- *National Population Projections*⁷;
- *Household Projections for Wales: Summary Report*⁸;
- *Household Projections for Wales: Local Authority Report*⁹;
- *Household Estimates for Wales: Summary Report*¹⁰;
- *Mid-year Estimates of the Population*¹¹; and
- *Electoral Roll*¹².

1.1.2 The Act allows Ministers to request an assessment of other official statistics in order for them to gain National Statistics status. This report also covers the sets of statistics included in the following publications in response to such a request:

- *Population Projections for National Parks in Wales*¹³; and
- *Household Projections for National Parks*¹⁴.

1.1.3 *Wales's Population: A Demographic Overview* is a compendium publication. Assessment of compendium publications against the *Code of Practice* relate to the processes involved in preparing the publication, rather than in producing the statistics that are included. Those sets of statistics will normally be subject to separate assessment. Designation of a compendium publication as National Statistics therefore means that the producer body has, for example: identified and met user needs in terms of the content of the publication; considered the appropriateness of each series for inclusion; and written appropriate commentary.

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://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/publications/walespop10/?lang=en>

⁵ <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/population/pop-project/popprojla/?lang=en>

⁶ See footnote 5

⁷ <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/population/pop-project/popprojnational/?lang=en>

⁸ See footnote 8

⁹ <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/housing/estimate/hsehold-proj/?lang=en>

¹⁰ <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/housing/estimate/hseholdest/?lang=en#>

¹¹ <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/population/pop-est/?lang=en>

¹² <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/population/electoral/?lang=en>

¹³ <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/population/pop-project/parks/?lang=en>

¹⁴ <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/housing2010/1007281/?lang=en>

1.1.4 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 the products listed in 1.1.1 and 1.1.2 are designated as National Statistics, subject to the Welsh Assembly Government implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by August 2011.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

1.3.1 The Welsh Assembly Government communicates well with the users of its population and demography statistics. It discusses the format and timing of reports, and its plans for disseminating these statistics through a number of user and working groups. The Welsh Assembly Government holds road shows for local authorities (LAs), which include presentations about the development of the outputs and guidance on how to use the statistics.

1.3.2 Methods are documented in technical reports and guidance is produced to help users to understand the strengths and limitations of the statistics. Information about the quality of the statistics could be more accessible. Some quality assurance exercises have not been published. An explanation of why LA population projections do not constrain to the national projection was provided in the 2008 publication but has not been provided or linked to in subsequent reports. In addition, it can be difficult to find previous publications on the Welsh Assembly Government's website; for example, mid-year population estimates and national population projections.

1.3.3 The Welsh Assembly Government has made recent improvements to these statistics to take account of findings from previous assessment reports. For example, the most recent household projections publication provides more information on the limitations of the data, as well as contact information for the responsible statistician. The Welsh Assembly Government could provide additional commentary on these statistics and more information on their potential uses.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

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

1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Requirement 1 | Work with ONS, the General Register Office for Scotland and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency to identify and document the impact the differences in projection methods may have for users (para 3.13). |
| Requirement 2 | Provide users with additional information about the quality of population projections, taking account of outturn data (para 3.14). |
| Requirement 3 | Provide clear links to the methodological information provided in the 2008 <i>Local Authority Population Projections for Wales: Summary Report</i> (para 3.16). |
| Requirement 4 | Include commentary that provides information about the wider context and the importance of the statistics and known and potential uses (para 3.26). |
| Requirement 5 | Ensure access to releases on the Welsh Assembly Government's website is clear and straightforward (para 3.30). |
| Requirement 6 | Ensure all publications are available through the National Statistics Publication Hub (para 3.35). |

2 Subject of the assessment

2.1 The statistics covered in this report cover various aspects of population, demography and households in Wales:

- *Wales's Population: A Demographic Overview* brings together demographic data and analysis for Wales in one report. It was first published in 2007 and provides statistics on population, births, deaths, migration, and the Welsh language together with an analysis of the main demographic trends.
- *Local Authority Population Projections for Wales: Summary Report* and the *Local Authority Population Projections for Wales: Local Authority Report* are produced every two years. The *Summary Report* compares and contrasts the patterns across all local authorities, and the *Local Authority Report* provides detailed analyses for each LA. In addition, experimental population projections have also been produced at a National Park level in response to strong user demand.
- *National Population Projections* presents estimates of the population for Wales over a 25-year period. The source statistics for this publication are produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).
- *Household Projections for Wales: Summary Report* and the *Household Projections for Wales: Local Authority Report* are produced every two years. The *Summary Report* compares and contrasts patterns across all LAs. The *Local Authority Report* provides detailed analysis for each LA and is published a few months later. In addition experimental household projections have also been produced at National Park level in response to strong user demand.
- *Household Estimates for Wales* provides summary information on household estimates for 2005 to 2007 and the revised household estimates for 1991 to 2004. It provides a comparison of patterns across all LAs.
- *Mid-year Estimates of the Population* highlights the main trends in the population for Wales and reports any significant shifts in the population share for individual local authorities. The source statistics for this publication are produced by ONS.
- *Electoral Roll* is a brief headline and key points summarising the statistics for Wales. The source statistics for this publication are produced by ONS.

2.2 The LA and National Park population and household projections are used for planning purposes, such as for the Welsh Assembly Government's Spatial Plan policy and LAs' Local Development Plans. Projections are produced by the Welsh Assembly Government, so they are consistent and comparable across all 22 Welsh LAs. The National Parks are also required to produce Local Development Plans, hence the need for population and household projections for these areas. It has recently been decided that LA population projections will

be used instead of mid-year population estimates in the local government settlement in Wales from 2011/12 onwards.

- 2.3 LA household estimates and projections are used to estimate current and future housing needs in Wales. They will also inform the allocation of the Social Housing Grant in Wales.
- 2.4 *Mid-year Estimates of the Population* were used in the local government finance settlement for Wales until 2010/11. They are used by LAs to plan and monitor services and as a denominator in the production of other statistics (for example birth and death rates).
- 2.5 The production of all the outputs covered by this assessment relies heavily on existing ONS publications and the provision of data by ONS. The Welsh Assembly Government's Population and Demography Statistics Team (statistics team) is in frequent contact with ONS through formal working groups as part of Improving Migration and Population Statistics (IMPS) and the Migration Statistics Improvement Programme¹⁵ and is also part of the UK Population Committee's working group (UKPCWG)¹⁶. The UKPCWG works to ensure that improvements to and development of population and migration statistics are coordinated across the four UK countries. It also considers the communication and dissemination of statistics, and collaboration with academics and other expert users. The statistics team is also in regular informal dialogue with ONS's Centre for Demography. The Welsh Assembly Government has agreements in place with ONS for the provision of LA and National Park population data.
- 2.6 The Welsh Assembly Government told the Assessment team that it currently costs around £32,300 a year to compile, check and publish its population, demographic and household statistics. This estimate is based on staff costs and the length of time each output takes to produce, including writing and quality assuring each output and associated StatsWales¹⁷ data cubes. It does not include the costs involved in ongoing user engagement, running working groups or the associated development of methodologies.

¹⁵ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/imps/background/index.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/ukpc/default.asp>

¹⁷ <http://statswales.wales.gov.uk/index.htm>

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 Welsh Assembly Government publishes an annual statistical work plan¹⁸ which contains its overall user engagement plan and its Statistical Directorate's priorities for the year ahead. The plan includes the publication timetable for statistical outputs for the forthcoming year, and sets out the work programme for population and demography statistics. The statistics team developed the work programme in consultation with government colleagues. The Welsh Assembly Government invites users to comment on its statistical plan.
- 3.2 The statistics team engages with various user groups, including the Wales Sub-national Population Projections¹⁹ Working Group (WASPP). The group advises on the development of the methodology of the LA population projections, discusses the format and timing of reports, and dissemination plans. The statistics team also engages with the Wales Sub-national Household Estimates and Projections²⁰ Working Group (WASHP), which advises on the methodology for household estimates and projections. Papers and minutes documenting the engagement with users are available on the Welsh Assembly Government's website.
- 3.3 Both WASPP and WASHP are subgroups of the Welsh Statistical Liaison Committee²¹ (WSLC) which regularly discusses demographic outputs. The WSLC includes representatives of users who may not otherwise consider these demographic statistics, for example, police authorities and the Welsh Language Board. The Welsh Assembly Government publishes the minutes of WSLC meetings on its website. The WSLC meets 4 times a year.
- 3.4 The demand for National Park projections has been recorded in the WASPP and WASHP minutes. These meetings have also provided opportunities for users to become involved in the development of the statistics. For example in minutes from the WASPP meeting in October 2009 members from WASPP and WASHP and National Parks contacts helped develop methods for National Park projections.
- 3.5 A one-day Population Seminar²² was held in Llandrindod Wells in 2007. The seminar included presentations from the General Register Office for Scotland (GROS) and ONS. The ONS presentation provided users with information about the development of population statistics and the launch of the IMPS programme. Two launch events²³ for population projections were held in 2008.

¹⁸ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/publications/statsplan1011/?lang=en>

¹⁹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/population/pop-project/popprojla/waspp/?lang=e>

²⁰ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/housing/estimate/group/?lang=en>

²¹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/liaison/?lang=en>

²² <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/population/events/population071009/?lang=en>

²³ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/population/events/localprojections/?lang=en>

They provided an overview of the methods used to produce these statistics and received positive feedback from users.

- 3.6 The Welsh Assembly Government documents its engagement with users of population, demography and household statistics and publishes minutes of meetings on its website. However, the published documentation does not explain how user views have been taken into account or provide feedback on users' suggestions. We suggest that the Welsh Assembly Government publish additional information about how the needs and experiences of users have been taken into account.
- 3.7 The Welsh Assembly Government published plans²⁴ for user engagement on its website. Current user engagement practices include planned seminars and meetings, web consultation, and by offering training to other organisations in how to find and use statistics.

²⁴ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/compliance/engage1011/?lang=en>

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

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

- 3.8 The Welsh Assembly Government releases population, demography and household statistics according to a published timetable and makes the statistics available free of charge on its website. It presents the statistics impartially and objectively.
- 3.9 The statistics team depends mainly on the revisions policies of ONS, as this is where the majority of the statistics are sourced. The Welsh Assembly Government has published a statement²⁵ to explain how it communicates revisions to its statistical outputs. The statistics team is in regular contact with ONS about improvements to methods for population projections and estimates through the UKPCWG and less formal channels. The statistics team has communicated changes to users through WASPP and WASHP meetings and regular newsletters. The statistics team told us that no errors have been found in the Welsh Assembly Government's population, demography and household statistical publications.

²⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/compliance/revisions/?lang=en>

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.

- 3.10 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. The Welsh Assembly Government issues guidance to staff detailing their responsibilities regarding the use of statistics.

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 Welsh Assembly Government's releases provide Wales-specific analysis of ONS statistics and basic information on quality. Each publication provides links to additional information on ONS's web pages regarding methods. Although the statistics team relies on the methods used by ONS, the team is in frequent contact with the ONS Centre for Demography in order to develop the methods used.
- 3.12 The Welsh Assembly Government produces sub-national population and household projections, including the National Park projections. Technical reports provide information on methodology, including reasons why particular choices were made. Explanations of the limitations of the statistics, a guidance leaflet²⁶ and a frequently asked questions document²⁷ supplement the technical reports and help users to analyse and interpret the statistics appropriately.
- 3.13 Across the UK, sub-national projections are produced by the constituent countries using different methods. A joint paper²⁸ outlining the differences and similarities of approach and providing some guidance on using population projections has been published by ONS; a link to it is provided on the Welsh Assembly Government's website²⁹. A similar paper has been published for household projections³⁰. While the papers explain the differences in methodology, they do not adequately explain the impact these differences will have for users. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Assembly Government should work with ONS, the General Register Office for Scotland and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency to identify and document the impact the differences in projection methods may have for users³¹ (Requirement 1).
- 3.14 The Welsh Assembly Government presented a paper at the October 2009 WASPP meeting comparing the unrevised 2008 mid-year estimates with the population projections for LAs for the year 2008 from the 2006-based LA projections. This comparative analysis is part of the statistical team's process for assuring the quality of the projections and, if published, would provide useful additional information for users. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Assembly Government should provide users with

²⁶ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/publications/publication-archive/localpopulationguidance/?lang=en>

²⁷ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/publications/popproj08faq/?lang=en>

²⁸ http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_population/snpp-2008/SNPP_guidance_for_users.pdf

²⁹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/population/pop-project/popprojla/?jsessionid=MStzNBRZKpnkdZLj2rwchSnccg1qQR1XCCkcTzn0rBpLmjYcVKnv!1915497929?lang=en>

³⁰ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/publications/technicalreport/?lang=en>

³¹ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 6 of the Code of Practice.

additional information about the quality of population projections, taking account of outturn data³² (Requirement 2).

- 3.15 The Welsh Assembly Government uses the same methodology to produce the National Park projections as the LA population projections. However, as no international migration data are available for National Parks, alternative assumptions about migration rates in these areas have been formed. A paper³³ presented to the January 2010 WASPP meeting details the methods used in the National Park projections and the differences from the LA projections methodology. We suggest that the Welsh Assembly Government provide a link to the National Park methodology paper in future National Park projections publications.
- 3.16 The LA population projections produced by the Welsh Assembly Government do not constrain to the national projection, whereas all other sub-national population projections produced by ONS, GROS and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) do constrain to the national projection (see para 3.13). The statistics team uses local fertility, mortality and migration trends as the basis for assumptions rather than national trends as these are considered to produce more meaningful results for LAs. Further information about the reasoning behind this method, the differences and when to use which projection are included in the *Summary Report*³⁴ published in 2008. The 2010 *Summary Report*³⁵ and *Technical Report*³⁶ also point out that the LA projections do not constrain to the national projection but provide little additional explanation. Furthermore, it is not clear that this information is available. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Assembly Government should provide clear links to the methodological information provided in the 2008 *Summary Report*³⁷ (Requirement 3).
- 3.17 Quality assurance is completed according to the Welsh Assembly Government's guidance and desk instructions provide detailed quality assurance procedures. The Welsh Assembly Government invite LA researchers to attend a meeting to quality assure preliminary population and household projections and the component data for their area under pre-release conditions³⁸. The statistics team told us these events are very well attended and appreciated by the LAs.
- 3.18 Statistics are revised when necessary, and a bulletin is sent out regarding the impact of any changes and the reasons for them, for example³⁹ when the 2002-2008 mid-year population estimates were revised. The statistics team will be producing a page on the Welsh Assembly Government's website about the ONS's IMPS programme to give users more information about future developments to population statistics. The web page will also provide links to outputs that have been revised.

³² In relation to Principle 4, Practice 2 of the Code of Practice.

³³ <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/meeting/100125waspppaper3en.pdf>

³⁴ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/publications/publication-archive/popprojsum06/?lang=en>

³⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/publications/popprojsum08/?lang=en>

³⁶ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/publications/2008populationtechnical/?lang=en>

³⁷ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 1 of the Code of Practice.

³⁸ <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/2010/100929releaseprotocolen.pdf>

³⁹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/population2010/100513/?lang=en>

3.19 The Welsh Assembly Government's Statistical Directorate is currently implementing a self-assessment tool for all outputs, which is based on ONS's Quality, Methods, and Harmonisation Tool⁴⁰. The Welsh Assembly Government informed us that population and household projections underwent the self-assessment process in July 2010.

⁴⁰ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/quality/quality-methods-and-harmonisation-tool/index.html>

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.

- 3.20 The Welsh Assembly Government has assured us that it takes all necessary steps to protect the confidentiality of the data it collects. Birth and death records that are potentially disclosive are used in the production of population projections. The statisticians producing the population, demographic and household statistics have confirmed that they follow the Welsh Assembly Government's organisational arrangements for confidentiality protection. A data confidentiality agreement is signed with ONS. The Welsh Assembly Government seeks ONS's permission before sharing aggregated data with users.
- 3.21 The Welsh Assembly Government follows the practices on confidentiality protection as set out in Principle 5 of the *Code of Practice*⁴¹.

⁴¹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/compliance/confidential/?lang=en>

Principle 6: Proportionate burden

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

- 3.22 The statistics produced are based on existing statistics supplied by ONS. Therefore, there is minimal additional burden imposed by the Welsh Assembly Government as most of the statistics are already publicly available. The statistics team is also able to use bespoke output tables that ONS has already published for different users of ONS statistics across government.
- 3.23 For LA and National Park projections, the data are provided by ONS according to an agreement developed by both organisations, rather than using existing published statistics from ONS as in other products. The agreement specifies the data that are required by the Welsh Assembly Government, and the timetable.

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 statistics team told us that it has sufficient resources to produce these statistics.
- 3.25 The Welsh Assembly Government participates in the Government Statistical Service's recruitment schemes and uses a competency-based framework to manage staff performance. This involves assessments of continuing professional development and six-month performance reviews.

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

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

- 3.26 The statistical publications contain helpful information about the quality of the statistics, methods used and classifications. A guidance leaflet and frequently asked questions document provide users with information about how to use the statistics and their limitations related to those uses. The statistics team produces useful commentary and analyses, although there is room for improvement. For example, the National Park projections, mid-year population estimates, national population projections and electoral roll releases have little contextual information or explanation in the releases about why the statistics are important and for what they are likely to be used. As part of the designation as National Statistics the Welsh Assembly Government should ensure future population and demography statistics are accompanied by further commentary and information on the policy and operational context, in order to enhance users' interpretation of the statistics⁴² (Requirement 4).
- 3.27 Users are able to get data for sub-national population and household projections via the StatsWales website so that they can construct their own projections or replicate those of the Welsh Assembly Government. The Welsh Assembly Government also provides access to software⁴³ and input files for producing population and household projections. In addition, the statistics team has held technical workshops for LA researchers to help them reproduce the Welsh Assembly Government projections using the base input data files.
- 3.28 The detailed outputs are disseminated on the StatsWales website. They are also available on the ONS website⁴⁴. There is no direct commentary on the similarities or differences between the two sources of outputs. Some users who contacted us in response to this assessment said they were confused as to which would be the most appropriate data source to use. We suggest that the Welsh Assembly Government provide guidance about the statistics that are available from ONS and from StatsWales so that the user is informed about the most appropriate source for their needs.
- 3.29 All publications are freely available on the Welsh Assembly Government website. The Welsh Assembly Government informed us that there is an open consultation⁴⁵ about its plans to only publish annual compendia publications on the Internet, in order to reduce costs.
- 3.30 Historical publications are available on the website, but can be difficult to find. Some of the links to previous publications under the household projections and estimates pages do not work. Furthermore, although the National Park population projections are available under the population projections web page, the National Park household projections are only available under the Headlines, releases and bulletins link: The statistics team informed us that archived publications are located under this link. As part of the designation as National

⁴² In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the Code of Practice.

⁴³ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/theme/housing/estimate/hsehold-proj/hsegroupwales/?lang=en>

⁴⁴ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/onlineproducts/default.asp#population>

⁴⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/statistics/publications/?lang=en>

Statistics, the Welsh Assembly Government should ensure access to releases on the Welsh Assembly Government's website is clear and straightforward⁴⁶ (Requirement 5).

⁴⁶ 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.

3.31 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.

- 3.32 In compliance with the *Pre-release Access to Official Statistics (Wales) Order 2009*⁴⁷, the Welsh Assembly Government publishes lists of people who have pre-release access⁴⁸ to its individual statistical publications on its website.
- 3.33 Scheduled releases are announced⁴⁹ 12 months in advance. The statistics team has informed us that the 2011 Census will affect the production and publication schedule for these outputs. In recent years, population and household estimates and projections have been published every two years, with the next publication due in 2012. However, the 2011 Census will provide the most up-to-date and complete source of information about the population on which to base future population projections. The Welsh Assembly Government informed us that it was considering – in consultation with users – waiting for the Census data to be available in 2013 to produce and publish its next set of projections. The Assessment team suggests that the Welsh Assembly Government publish its plans for the future production schedule of population and household estimates and projections.
- 3.34 The latest National Park projections are based on 2006 population estimates, whereas the latest LA projections are based on 2008 population estimates. The Welsh Assembly Government anticipates that the 2008-based National Park population projections will be published in April 2011, with the household projections to follow that summer. Some users who contacted us in response to this assessment were concerned that this disparity would affect their comparisons between LAs and National Parks and expressed disappointment that the National Park projections were not timely enough. The statistics team informed us that the delay was caused by availability of the source data from ONS. Investigations have been made with ONS to get the source data earlier but ONS resources and priorities have restricted this. The statistics team have also informed us that they will endeavour to work with ONS for future projection rounds in order to receive more timely data.
- 3.35 The electoral roll release is not available on the National Statistics Publication Hub⁵⁰. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Assembly Government should ensure all publications are available through the National Statistics Publication Hub⁵¹ (Requirement 6).

⁴⁷ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2009/2818/schedule/paragraph/1/made>

⁴⁸ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/prerelease/?lang=en>

⁴⁹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/due/due-theme/pop/?lang=en>

⁵⁰ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk>

⁵¹ In relation to Protocol 2, Practice 3 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.

- 3.36 The Welsh Assembly Government has published a Statement of Administrative Sources⁵² describing the administrative and management sources of data which the Statistical Directorate currently uses – or which have the potential to be used – to produce official statistics.
- 3.37 The Welsh Assembly Government is working with ONS towards securing a set of regulations to enable the sharing of individual Wales School Census records with ONS. These records can then be used for improving population and migration statistics.
- 3.38 The Welsh Assembly Government is developing a secure online data exchange system called AFON⁵³. This will facilitate the secure exchange of data between producers, suppliers and users of statistics. It will be used for all secure data transfers in the future.

⁵² <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/2010/100330adminen.pdf>

⁵³ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/compliance/confidential/?lang=en>

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to the Welsh Assembly Government’s population and demography statistics, in the interest of the public good. These are not formally required for designation, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

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|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Suggestion 1 | Publish additional information about how the needs and experiences of users have been taken into account (para 3.6). |
| Suggestion 2 | Provide a link to the National Park methodology paper in future National Park projections publications (para 3.15). |
| Suggestion 3 | provide guidance about the statistics that are available from ONS and from StatsWales so that the user is informed about the most appropriate source for their needs (para 3.28). |
| Suggestion 4 | Publish plans for the future production schedule of population and household estimates and projections (para 3.34). |

Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A2.1 This assessment was conducted from September 2010 to January 2011.

A2.2 The Assessment team – Rachel Beardsmore and Kim Reimann – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of the Welsh Assembly Government in September. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 11 November. The Assessment team subsequently met the Population and Demography team 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 12 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Government departments	4
Local government	7
Other	1

A2.5 Overall, users were satisfied with the way that the Welsh Assembly Government engages with them regarding these statistics, praising regular briefing days and helpful replies to queries. Users showed interest in acquiring statistics about small areas, such as Census Output Areas. They also stated that timeliness could be improved and more commentary could be provided about quality assurance methods. Some users said that more timely statistics would help their planning. This was of major concern to some users.

A2.7 Other users stated that although they were satisfied with the statistics, they had difficulty finding the information that they needed. There are several access points for example, such as through StatsWales, searching the website by theme, or searching by headlines, bulletins and releases. Also since the data are available from the ONS website as well, it would be useful to have guidance on where to go for information.

A2.8 Users noted that they are interested in using statistics that are country-specific for comparative analysis within Wales and between England and Wales (for example, migration to and from England). They find that the available statistics are limited in their ability to aid this kind of analysis.

A2.9 One user commented that they would like to see a more robust assessment of the statistical uncertainty of the assumptions upon which population projections are based for better clarity on the limitations of these statistics. More analysis on past trends of the data would be welcomed.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

