

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

## Crime Statistics in England and Wales

*(produced by the Home Office)*

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### **About the UK Statistics Authority**

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

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

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

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

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## ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# 1 Summary of findings

## 1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports<sup>1</sup> prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*<sup>2</sup>. The Act requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*<sup>3</sup>. The report covers the following sets of National Statistics, produced by the Home Office:

- *Crime in England and Wales*<sup>4</sup>;
- *Crime in England and Wales: Quarterly Update*<sup>5</sup>;
- *Supplementary Volume 1 to Crime in England and Wales*<sup>6</sup>;
- *Supplementary Volume 2 to Crime in England and Wales*<sup>7</sup>;
- *Supplementary Volume 3 to Crime in England and Wales*<sup>8</sup>; and
- *Drug Misuse Declared*<sup>9</sup>.

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 detailed in paragraph 1.1.1 are designated as National Statistics, subject to the Home Office implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by August 2011.

1.2.2 A review of the arrangements for the production of crime statistics was announced by the Home Secretary in January 2011<sup>10</sup> and is being led by the National Statistician. The results of the review are expected to be published in

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga\\_20070018\\_en.pdf](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/hosb1210/?view=Standard&pubID=865264>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/hosb0211/?view=Standard&pubID=864166>

<sup>6</sup> <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110220105210/rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs10/hosb1910.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/hosb0111/?view=Standard&pubID=864212>

<sup>8</sup> <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110220105210/rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs10/hosb0810.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/hosb1310/?view=Standard&pubID=865142>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/media-centre/press-releases/crime-stats>

June 2011 and, if necessary, the Authority will then review the timescales for implementing the Requirements in this Assessment Report.

- 1.2.3 The Home Office has informed the Assessment team that it has started to implement the Requirements listed in section 1.5. The Statistics Authority welcomes this.

### **1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses**

- 1.3.1 The Home Office brings together information from the police on recorded crime and data, the British Crime Survey (BCS) and other external sources to provide a picture of crime in England and Wales. The releases are well-presented and the annual publications include good, detailed supporting commentary citing wider research and comparable international statistics. The Home Office has published a detailed user guide<sup>11</sup> to the statistics, though it publishes insufficient information about the quality of the police recorded crime (PRC) statistics.
- 1.3.2 The Home Office acknowledges that the overall picture of crime presented in the publications is not complete and has undertaken work to try to fill the gaps.
- 1.3.3 A wide variety of groups has an interest in crime statistics and the statistics are extensively reported in the media. The Home Office engages with users and suppliers through a range of fora, but users and suppliers who responded to the consultation exercise carried out as part of this Assessment indicated that engagement could be strengthened further.

### **1.4 Detailed recommendations**

- 1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that the Home Office 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.

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/user-guide-crime-statistics/>

## **1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics**

- |                      |                                                                                                                                                                          |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Requirement 1</b> | Ensure that information about revisions and forthcoming changes to methods is more clearly and consistently communicated to users (para 3.8).                            |
| <b>Requirement 2</b> | Improve the information about methods and quality presented in the Supplementary Volumes (para 3.15).                                                                    |
| <b>Requirement 3</b> | Publish more information about the quality of the police recorded crime statistics, including the consistency with which crimes are recorded and classified (para 3.16). |
| <b>Requirement 4</b> | Publish more information about the ‘capping’ of incidents reported in the British Crime Survey (para 3.17).                                                              |
| <b>Requirement 5</b> | Ensure that data are always accompanied by (links to) relevant metadata (para 3.34).                                                                                     |



## 2 Subject of the assessment

2.1 Crime statistics have been collected since the end of the 19th Century. The statistics are an important operational tool for the police and for those who develop and implement crime policy, but they are also used far more widely.

### *Sources of crime statistics*

2.2 There are two main sources of information about crime in England and Wales.

- The Home Office collates information from police forces in England and Wales covering all notifiable offences. Notifiable offences include all offences that could possibly be tried by jury and some additional offences such as assault without injury. These recorded crime data are an indicator of police workload and local crime patterns and have been collected since 1898. Police recording practice is governed by Home Office Counting Rules<sup>12</sup> and the National Crime Recording Standard<sup>13</sup> (NCRS). The data exclude crimes that have not been reported to the police or incidents that the police decide not to record. Trends in recorded crime data can be affected by changes to police reporting and recording practices, and police activities and priorities. Police forces supply the data monthly to the Home Office.
- The British Crime Survey (BCS) is a survey of households in England and Wales. It measures the amount of crime by collecting information about respondents' experiences of a range of crimes in the 12 months before the survey interview. It also asks about attitudes to other crime-related issues, such as the police, and perceptions of crime and antisocial behaviour. The first survey, in 1982, collected information about crimes in 1981. The survey was repeated periodically until 2001 and it has run continuously since then. Questions about people's experiences of crime have remained largely unchanged, so the survey provides consistent long-term trend data. Since its inception, the BCS has maintained a relatively high response rate (76 per cent in 2009/10). As it is a household survey, the BCS does not cover murder or 'victimless' crimes (for example, possession of drugs), and it does not cover crimes against businesses. The Home Office contracts out the survey fieldwork and data preparation.

2.3 Since 1946, the Home Office has also collected detailed paper records from police forces about each recorded murder. Since 1967 this collection has covered each recorded homicide – which covers murder, manslaughter and infanticide. The information provided includes victim and suspect details and the circumstances of the offence. Home Office uses this information to populate an electronic database called the Homicide Index, which covers the period from 1977. The Homicide Index is continually updated with revised information from police as investigations continue and cases are heard by the courts.

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/science-research/research-statistics/crime/counting-rules/>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/ncrs>

## *Crime statistics outputs*

- 2.4 The Home Office draws together the information from these data sources to present a picture of crime in England and Wales. The Home Office produces five annual publications and a quarterly publication:
- *Crime in England and Wales* is an annual release published in July; it presents the crime statistics for the previous financial year. The report provides information on a variety of crime types, including violent and sexual crime, and analyses of perceptions of crime, geographic patterns and long-term trends.
  - *Crime in England and Wales, Quarterly Update*. Three quarterly updates to the annual release provide headline figures on the levels and perceptions of crime using the latest quarterly data from the BCS and police recorded crime (PRC).
  - *Crime in England and Wales: Supplementary Volume 1*. Released in November each year, the first Supplementary Volume provides in-depth analysis of the perception of crime and anti-social behaviour using data from the BCS. The exact content of the publication varies from year to year.
  - *Crime in England and Wales: Supplementary Volume 2* provides detailed analysis on homicides, firearm offences and intimate violence<sup>14</sup>, using data from the Homicide Index, PRC and BCS. It is published in January each year.
  - *Crime in England and Wales: Supplementary Volume 3*. The third Supplementary Volume provides in-depth analysis of a different topic each year, using data from the BCS. In 2008/09 it provided analysis of acquisitive crime and plastic card fraud. It is published annually in Spring.
  - *Drug Misuse Declared* provides extensive analysis and reporting on illicit drug use, using data from the BCS. It is published in July.
- 2.5 The releases are supported by a detailed user guide which provides information about methods, differences between the data sources, types of crime, and data quality.

## *Users and uses of crime statistics*

- 2.6 Crime statistics are an important operational tool for the police and for those in the Home Office who develop, implement and monitor crime policy. Specific types of crime impact on different policy domains and geographical areas. For example, the Department for Transport uses the statistics to monitor crimes on the transport system. Local government users need the statistics to compare local crime levels with the national picture. The statistics are important to a wide variety of other groups with an interest in crime and the criminal justice system, including charities. Academics use the statistics to inform research across a broad range of crime-related issues. The statistics are also used by private sector service and information providers.
- 2.7 The statistics are widely reported in the news media, reflecting the public's interest in – and concern about – crime. The statistics are used to hold the

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<sup>14</sup> Intimate violence is the collective term covering domestic violence, sexual assault and stalking.

police and government to account and are regularly referred to in responses to Parliamentary Questions.

### *Reviews of crime statistics and related issues*

- 2.8 Between 2000 and 2006 there were three significant reviews of crime statistics<sup>15</sup> and in 2008 there was a review of crime, justice and community involvement<sup>16</sup>. All of these reviews drew attention to the lack of public trust in crime statistics. In May 2010, the Statistics Authority published a Monitoring Report, *Overcoming Barriers to Trust in Crime Statistics: England and Wales*<sup>17</sup>, focussing on this issue. In January 2011, the Home Office announced that, from April 2012, responsibility for publication of crime statistics would move from the Home Office to an independent body. The Home Secretary tasked the National Statistician with leading an independent review into the collection and publication of crime statistics. The results of the review are expected to be published in June 2011 and will advise which body should become responsible for publishing crime statistics.
- 2.9 In 2008 the Home Office issued a clarification of its Counting Rules regarding the recording of crimes involving grievous bodily harm without intent. This led to revisions to the PRC statistics, and in particular upwards revisions to levels of serious violent crime. This attracted criticism in the news media.

### *Other sources of crime statistics*

- 2.10 The first two British Crime Surveys, in 1981 and 1988, were used to collect data in Scotland, as well as England and Wales. The BCS ceased to cover Scotland when the Scottish Crime Survey<sup>18</sup> (SCS) was launched in 1993. The SCS was repeated periodically since then and has now been replaced by the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey. This was the subject of Assessment Report 12<sup>19</sup>. The Scottish Government and the Police Service of Northern Ireland publish PRC statistics for Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively. The Department of Justice in Northern Ireland publishes findings from its Northern Ireland Crime Survey<sup>20</sup>, which closely mirrors the BCS. It also publishes a

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<sup>15</sup> *Review of Crime Statistics: A Discussion Document*, Home Office, July 2000 - <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/quality/nat-stats-qual-revs/qual-revs-by-theme/crime-and-justice/nsqr-series-report-no-20--review-of-crime-statistics.pdf>; *Crime Statistics: User Perspectives*, Report No.30 Statistics Commission, September 2006 - [http://www.statscom.org.uk/C\\_1054.aspx](http://www.statscom.org.uk/C_1054.aspx); and *Crime Statistics: An independent review*, November 2006 - <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110220105210/rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs06/crime-statistics-independent-review-06.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> *Engaging Communities in Fighting Crime*, A review by Louise Casey, Cabinet Office, June 2008 [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/18\\_06\\_08\\_caseyreport.pdf](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/18_06_08_caseyreport.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/reports/overcoming-barriers-to-trust-in-crime-statistics--england-and-wales.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice/crime-and-justice-survey/background>

<sup>19</sup> See footnote 1.

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.dojni.gov.uk/index/statistics-research/stats-research-publications/current\\_publications.htm](http://www.dojni.gov.uk/index/statistics-research/stats-research-publications/current_publications.htm)

compendium publication<sup>21</sup> that draws together statistics on crime and justice in Northern Ireland.

- 2.11 International comparisons of crime statistics are inherently difficult due to the different legal systems and different definitions and methods used to collect and record data on crime. The United Nations has published guidance<sup>22</sup> on the production of crime statistics.
- 2.12 In January, the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) launched a website<sup>23</sup> providing local crime and policing information for England and Wales. This website maps street-level crime data supplied directly by police forces. It replaced a website that NPIA had maintained since January 2009, which provided ward level crime data.
- 2.13 The Ministry of Justice publishes statistics on criminal justice, the courts and sentencing. These statistics were the subject of Assessment Report 52<sup>24</sup>.

### *Cost*

- 2.14 The Home Office has estimated its annual costs for producing crime statistics to be £6.1 million:
- Police recorded crime, £0.9 million;
  - British Crime Survey, £5.2 million.

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<sup>21</sup> [http://www.dojni.gov.uk/index/statistics-research/stats-research-publications/department\\_of\\_justice\\_digest\\_of\\_information\\_on\\_the\\_northern\\_ireland\\_criminal\\_justice\\_system-autumn\\_2010.pdf](http://www.dojni.gov.uk/index/statistics-research/stats-research-publications/department_of_justice_digest_of_information_on_the_northern_ireland_criminal_justice_system-autumn_2010.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> For example, United Nations manual on victimisation surveys 2010 - [http://www.unece.org/stats/publications/Manual\\_Victimization\\_Surveys\\_English.pdf](http://www.unece.org/stats/publications/Manual_Victimization_Surveys_English.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.police.uk/>

<sup>24</sup> See footnote 1

### 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 Home Office has published a *Statement of Compliance with Code of Practice for Official Statistics*<sup>25</sup> (compliance statement) which outlines how it engages and consults with users. Home Office statisticians actively participate in the Criminal Justice Statistics Network<sup>26</sup>, which is affiliated to the British Society of Criminology and the Royal Statistical Society. The Home Office helped to establish the group and part-funds its annual conference. The Home Office also participates in other relevant user fora, including the Economic and Social Data Service's meetings for users of crime surveys<sup>27</sup>.
- 3.2 There is a Surveys, Design and Statistics Subcommittee (SDSS) of the independent Home Office Science Advisory Committee. The role of SDSS is to advise the Home Office on matters relating to the running of surveys and production of statistics. The group consists of experts from outside the Home Office. It was established in 2007 in response to *Crime Statistics: An Independent Review*<sup>28</sup>. The Home Office provides secretariat support to SDSS and minutes of the meetings are published.
- 3.3 The users and uses of crime statistics are well-documented in the four significant reviews of crime statistics that have been carried out in recent years. These reviews have also documented the experiences of users. The Home Office is undertaking a series of user surveys via its website to enable users to provide feedback on its publications. The statisticians told us that they will be consulting users on the organisation's statistical workplan in the coming months. There have been other consultations on changes to statistical outputs over the last few years – most notably regarding the extension of the BCS to cover children aged 10 to 15.
- 3.4 The Home Office provides email updates on developments with these statistics to known external users of crime statistics. However, there are ways in which the Home Office could do more to keep users informed. For example, it could publish more information on the progress implementing recommendations from reviews. It would be useful to publish updates on projects and how they may impact on the statistics – for example, the Data Hub, which is a new system being introduced to collect PRC data. There are often long delays before the minutes of SDSS meetings are published and meeting papers are not usually published at all. Home Office statisticians told us that the delay is because minutes are only published when they have been approved at the next meeting, but there is a risk that users might perceive this delay as a lack of openness.

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/home-office-science/ho-compliance-state-11>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?A0=CRIM-BCS-USERS>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/esds/events/2010-12-07/index.html>

<sup>28</sup> <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110220105210/rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs06/crime-statistics-independent-review-06.pdf>

We suggest that the Home Office establish a process to ensure that regular, timely updates are published on issues of interest to users – for example, updates on progress implementing recommendations from reviews and other projects.

- 3.5 While the Home Office has a good range of ways to engage with its users, it could take further steps to ensure that there is a clear means for user views to inform the discussions that shape the development of the statistics. Much of the user engagement the statisticians undertake provides users with information, rather than seeking their views and input. Home Office statisticians told us that their colleagues responsible for developing and monitoring crime policy take the lead in managing relations with external stakeholders, such as victim support groups, and feed comments through to the statisticians as appropriate. Home Office statisticians do carry out consultations, but these are not always promoted as well as they could be. We suggest that the Home Office review its user engagement strategy, to ensure that there is a more effective means for stakeholder views to be taken into account in the development of the statistics.

## Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

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

- 3.6 The releases present these statistics impartially and objectively. The Home Office releases its statistics free of charge.
- 3.7 The Home Office has published a revisions policy within its compliance statement (see paragraph 3.1). This policy outlines how the Home Office manages revisions and corrections.<sup>29</sup> The Home Office Counting Rules webpage lists all revisions to the Rules and when they came into force. The Home Office discusses any impact on the statistics in the releases. The quarterly releases also state that the police can amend the recorded crime figures during the year and so the statistics are provisional until the following year.
- 3.8 The Home Office has not always announced changes to methods and classifications in advance. Home Office statisticians told us that when changes have not been pre-announced it is because the timescales have been short and there has been no convenient means to communicate the change to users. The statisticians told us that in future all changes to methods will be announced in advance. However, the Home Office does not have a consistent approach to communicating revisions and forthcoming changes to methods, and none of the releases refer to the organisational revisions policy. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Home Office should ensure that information about revisions and forthcoming changes to methods is more clearly and consistently communicated to users<sup>30</sup> (Requirement 1).
- 3.9 All the annual releases include informed, supporting commentary to aid user interpretation. This is good practice. However, there are some examples that could lead users to question whether the commentary is policy-neutral:
- In *Supplementary Volume 3 to Crime in England and Wales 2008/09*<sup>31</sup> the Home Office stated that the BCS 'demonstrates that home security devices reduce burglary victimisation'. While the BCS shows a correlation between the two, this does not necessarily imply causation. This issue has been discussed in an academic article<sup>32</sup>, which questioned the Home Office's motive in drawing this conclusion.
  - *Supplementary Volume 2 to Crime in England and Wales 2008/09*<sup>33</sup> included a section that outlined the Home Office policy on intimate violence. While this is potentially helpful, the amount of information provided could be seen as excessive and it is not clear that all the information is necessary to support the interpretation of the statistics.

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<sup>29</sup> See footnote 12

<sup>30</sup> In relation to Principle 2 Practice 4 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>31</sup> <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110220105210/rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs10/hosb0810.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> <http://pierprofessional.metapress.com/content/w75627qv33157386/>

<sup>33</sup> <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110220105210/rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs10/hosb0110.pdf>

We suggest that the Home Office review these examples of criticisms of its releases with a view to learning lessons for the future presentation of the statistics.



### 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 The Home Office takes steps to ensure the separation of statistical outputs from policy comment – most notably through its independent media briefings on crime and immigration statistics, which are held at neutral locations and chaired by the National Statistician or Home Office Chief Scientific Advisor. Ministerial comments on statistics are also clearly distinguished from the statistical releases themselves.
- 3.11 The governance structure for statisticians, including a Head of Profession for statistics and a separate Chief Scientific Advisor, as well as the SDSS group, means that there is strong leadership to protect statistical integrity. The chairperson of SDSS is selected from individuals nominated by the Royal Statistical Society. The Head of Profession has met analysts in the Home Office’s arm’s length bodies to explain the role of the Head of Profession and the reporting line for statisticians to the Head of Profession.
- 3.12 In 2008, the Home Office released a press notice and accompanying fact sheet about knife crime. This led to the publication of a Statistics Authority Monitoring and Assessment Note<sup>34</sup> in January 2009, which expressed concern about the presentation of the statistics in the fact sheet. The Home Office told us that following this issue it established new internal procedures to ensure that all documents containing statistics were signed off by the Head of Profession before being published. We have been told that the Head of Profession is regularly asked to advise Ministers about statistical issues and that statisticians have established closer links with their colleagues responsible for developing and monitoring crime policy and issuing press releases. We regard this as good practice, especially in a topic area as potentially contentious as crime.
- 3.13 The Code states that the Head of Profession should have sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures. The PRC statistics are necessarily dependent on the Counting Rules, which are ultimately the responsibility of the Home Secretary. In the interests of transparency we suggest that the Home Office communicate this clearly, either in the releases or on its website.

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-briefs/knife-crime-statistics---a-review-against-the-code-of-practice.pdf>

## 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.**

- 3.14 The methods used in the BCS are documented in an annual technical report<sup>35</sup> (produced by the survey contractor) with summary information presented in the releases. The BCS data are accessible through the UK Data Archive<sup>36</sup> where there is a separate dataset user guide. The Home Office publishes a detailed *User Guide to Home Office Crime Statistics*<sup>37</sup> (*User Guide*). This is a useful, but necessarily very long (70 pages), reference guide to crime statistics, covering both the BCS and PRC. It provides summaries of the two sources and their comparability, as well as guidance on different topic areas and references and links to other useful reports and UK data. It also discusses the strengths and limitations of the BCS and provides tables of key data with confidence intervals. The commentary in the statistical releases also makes it clear whether reported changes are statistically significant.
- 3.15 The *Crime in England and Wales* annual report and *Drug Misuse Declared* clearly explain the limitations of the relevant data sources and the impact on the statistics. *Crime in England and Wales: Quarterly Update* provides less information, but clearly refers users to the *User Guide*. The Supplementary Volumes do not provide sufficient information about data sources, methods and quality. While the volumes are called ‘supplementary’, so users might be expected to refer back to the annual volume, in practice they are likely to be referred to as stand-alone publications and should include, or provide clear links to, relevant information about methods and quality. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Home Office should improve the information about methods and quality presented in the Supplementary Volumes<sup>38</sup> (Requirement 2).
- 3.16 The *User Guide* provides detailed background information about PRC statistics. The statistics are based on data from police administrative records. The *User Guide* and releases themselves include information about the limitations of the statistics and caveats around their use, but there is scope for more discussion about quality, including the accuracy and extent of crime recording by different police forces. The quality of the data, including the consistency and extent of recording, used to be subject to inspections by the Audit Commission, but these ceased in 2007. In 2008/9, following the clarification to the Counting Rules concerning grievous bodily harm (see paragraph 2.9), HM Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) carried out an inspection of the affected data and some police forces resubmitted data. There has been no other formal audit of data quality in police forces since 2007, although Home Office statisticians do quality assure the data. From April 2011 HMIC will commence a trial, spot-checking

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<sup>35</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/bcs0910tech1?view=Standard&pubID=867337>

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/>

<sup>37</sup> See footnote 11

<sup>38</sup> In relation to Principle 4 Practices 1 and 2 of the *Code of Practice*

police forces, investigating the accuracy with which crimes are recorded and classified. Home Office statisticians told us that the introduction and initial findings from HMIC's inspections will provide the opportunity, and more concrete evidence, to support discussion of these quality issues. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Home Office should publish more information about the quality of the PRC statistics, including the consistency with which crimes are recorded and classified<sup>39</sup> (Requirement 3).

- 3.17 In the BCS, respondents are asked to differentiate between one-off crimes and 'series' of crimes: those crimes which are 'the same thing, done under the same circumstances and probably by the same people'. BCS estimates only include the first five incidents in such 'series'. The *User Guide* explains that the restriction ensures that the estimates are not affected by a very small number of respondents who report a very high number of incidents. Such incidents can be highly variable between survey years and affect the ability to monitor trends. However, there is no indication of how much effect this 'cap' has on the estimate, nor which types of crime and which types of people are mostly affected. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Home Office should publish more information about the 'capping' of incidents reported in the BCS<sup>40</sup> (Requirement 4).
- 3.18 In 2009 the Home Office commissioned a review of non-response and weighting methods used in the BCS, in response to user concerns. The review largely concluded that existing methods were satisfactory.
- 3.19 The Home Office acknowledges that the overall picture of crime presented in the publications is not complete and has undertaken work to try to fill the gaps. In 2009 it extended the data collection for the BCS to include children aged 10 to 15. The Home Office published the first results<sup>41</sup> as experimental statistics<sup>42</sup> in June 2010. At the same time, it launched a consultation seeking user views about the future production and presentation of the statistics. The Home Office response<sup>43</sup>, which included an action plan, was published in November 2010. The Home Office has also published a research report<sup>44</sup> considering the scope and feasibility of a new survey to measure commercial victimisation. In addition, the releases make use of external data sources, for example to provide supplementary evidence of the extent of plastic card fraud.
- 3.20 Home Office statisticians meet regularly with colleagues responsible for crime statistics in Scotland and Northern Ireland, aiming to improve coherence and learn lessons. This group is producing a UK crime paper, which will be published, detailing the extent of comparable data across the UK. Home Office statisticians also told us they plan to rename the BCS, to reflect its coverage of only England and Wales. This will minimise potential confusion among users.

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<sup>39</sup> In relation to Principle 4 Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>40</sup> In relation to Principle 4 Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>41</sup> <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110220105210/rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs10/hosb1110.pdf>

<sup>42</sup> Experimental statistics are new official statistics undergoing evaluation. They are published in order to involve users and stakeholders in their development and as a means to build in quality at an early stage.

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/consultation-bcs-children/?view=Standard&pubID=867431>

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/horr33/>

- 3.21 Home Office statisticians represent the UK on European and international crime statistics groups, including feeding into a project to develop a consistent EU measure of crime. *Crime in England and Wales 2009/10* included a chapter on international comparisons, drawing on research over the last decade.
- 3.22 Many users have expressed a need for more local crime statistics. The new local crime and policing website managed by NPIA (see paragraph 2.12) provides data on recorded crimes at the street-level, based on unchecked data submitted by police forces. The Home Office's Data Hub (see paragraph 3.4) will begin to collect incident-level crime data from all police forces over the course of 2011 (rather than the aggregate returns that police forces currently provide). Home Office statisticians told us that this may enable them to publish more detailed, official statistics on police recorded crime, subject to resource constraints and statistical disclosure control issues.

## **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.**

3.23 The Home Office's compliance statement includes a statement on confidentiality, and the statisticians have assured us that they take all necessary steps to protect the confidentiality of the data they collect whilst maximising its utility:

- Although Home Office statisticians reported that they handle very little confidential data, staff sign confidentiality declarations and have training on data security.
- Respondents to the BCS are informed that confidential data will be protected and there is an online FAQ that addresses common questions.
- The Home Office uses encryption software and secure electronic transfer when necessary; the BCS data supplied to the Home Office are anonymised.
- The Home Office sends the BCS data to the UK Data Archive, which makes the microdata available for researchers under Special Licence arrangements.

## 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.**

- 3.24 The Home Office reports the burden of the BCS (in terms of the time it takes respondents to complete the survey) in the technical report. The covering letter sent to respondents clearly explains the uses of the data, to encourage voluntary response – and when the survey was extended to cover those aged 10 to 15, a similar leaflet was provided for younger respondents.
- 3.25 The Home Office has reported how it aims to reduce the burden on data suppliers in its *Simplification Plan*<sup>45</sup>. The Home Office manages the burden of the data requirements placed on police forces through an Annual Data Requirement (ADR) process. This brings together all discussions about information required from police forces, of which crime data is just one part. The ADR is overseen by a committee which includes representation from the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). Related technical groups advise the Home Office on data collection issues, while any additional requirements are put out to consultation across police forces by ACPO.
- 3.26 Changes to the Counting Rules can introduce confusion and additional burden on police forces. The Counting Rules are discussed at an annual conference of police force crime registrars<sup>46</sup>, organised by the Home Office. Some police forces are also represented on the user groups discussed under Principle 1, and Home Office statisticians meet with statistical officers from police forces to discuss statistical issues. However, the recording, collection, and classification, of the data underpinning the PRC statistics are complex, and the data suppliers who contacted us as part of this assessment felt that communication could be improved and the burden reduced further. While recognising the steps that the Home Office already takes to engage with police forces, we suggest that it consider whether more could be done to improve communication and reduce the administrative burden, or the perception of burden, involved in supplying the PRC data. This may mean giving greater recognition to police forces as users of the data they supply, and doing more to help and guide police forces to derive benefit from the data and to understand how the data are used within the Home Office. It may also mean helping police forces to improve links between those who supply the data and those in the police who analyse the data.
- 3.27 Through its Improving Management Information project, the Home Office is identifying data sources within the Home Office, assessing (and aiming to improve) their quality and identifying the data owner. We regard this as good practice. Home Office statisticians told us that the Data Hub will enable the more efficient collection and use of police data.
- 3.28 The Home Office makes available all the non-personal data that it holds, through a 'non-personal data' section on its website (as encouraged by the Power of Information Task Force).

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<sup>45</sup> <http://www.bis.gov.uk/files/file54020.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> Each police force appoints a force crime registrar to act as final arbiter in the interpretation of the Counting Rules. The aim is to help ensure consistency across and between police forces.

## 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.**

- 3.29 The production of these statistics appears to be sufficiently resourced. The Home Office has estimated the annual costs of producing and managing crime statistics as £6.1 million. The Home Office runs a competitive tender exercise when it lets the contract for the BCS, which is the most substantial portion of the costs.
- 3.30 The Home Office is planning to consult on its statistical work plan in the coming months. The statisticians told us that they have delayed the consultation until the findings of the National Statistician's review are known.

## Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

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

- 3.31 The *Crime in England and Wales* annual report draws together the BCS and PRC statistics to present a more complete picture of crime, whilst also discussing the remaining gaps. The commentary draws on other data sources and research to explain trends, with appropriate caveats. All the annual releases include detailed, informed supporting commentary to aid user interpretation. This is good practice and the level of detail is appropriate for a technical audience. However, given the extremely high level of public interest in these statistics we suggest that the Home Office review the commentary to ensure it is also accessible to non-expert users.
- 3.32 The annual releases are long publications and they do not adopt a clear, consistent approach to providing information about methods and quality. This information is often contained within the body of the release, which makes it hard to locate. We suggest the Home Office review how information on methods and quality is presented, with a view to adopting a consistent approach that makes it easier for users to find information relevant to their needs.
- 3.33 Many users who contacted us regarding this assessment cited difficulties accessing information on the Home Office's Research Development and Statistics website. The Home Office is in the process of updating its website to address this long-standing problem, and implemented some improvements in April 2011. The improvements to its website should make the information more accessible, which in turn will help implement the suggestions in Principle 1 – to keep users better informed.
- 3.34 The Home Office publishes data in a variety of modes, including Excel, an interactive map and through the 'non personal data' section on its website. It also publishes a summary table<sup>47</sup> of the annual recorded crime statistics dating back to 1898. While this is good practice, the data are not always accompanied by sufficient metadata or links to such information. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Home Office should ensure that data are always accompanied by (links to) relevant metadata<sup>48</sup> (Requirement 5).
- 3.35 The Home Office draws together and explains the sources of data it holds about crime, but there is room for further guidance for users, drawing together other data sources on crime and criminal justice, including local data. This issue was documented in *Overcoming Barriers to Trust in Crime Statistics: England and Wales* and will be addressed by the National Statistician's review.

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<sup>47</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/crime-stats-1898-2002?view=Standard&pubID=866123>

<sup>48</sup> In relation to Principle 8 Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*



## **Protocol 1: User engagement**

**Effective user engagement is fundamental both to trust in statistics and securing maximum public value. This Protocol draws together the relevant practices set out elsewhere in the Code and expands on the requirements in relation to consultation.**

3.36 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.**

- 3.37 The *Crime in England and Wales* annual report is released 15 weeks after the reference period. Although the quarterly reports are shorter, they are also released 15 weeks after the reference period. The Home Office told us that it devotes more staff resource to the more detailed annual report, to meet this timescale. Due to competing priorities this is not feasible for each of the quarterly reports.
- 3.38 Most of these releases are very long, detailed documents. It is unclear whether this release strategy reflects the needs of the majority of users. This issue was documented in *Overcoming Barriers to Trust in Crime Statistics: England and Wales*, which recommended that the National Statistician should draw up proposals for the development of the publications, with the aim of making them as relevant as possible to the likely uses of the statistics. This will be addressed by the current National Statistician's review. The Home Office is in the process of requesting feedback on its releases, updating an exercise carried out in 2008. However, the Home Office told us that the results from the last exercise were mixed, and so were not used. We suggest that the Home Office provide the results of the user surveys to the National Statistician's review team, to inform recommendations about the release strategy for crime statistics.
- 3.39 Some of the lists of people with pre-release access to Home Office statistics are long. For example, 141 people received pre-release access to *Crime in England and Wales 2009/10*. 28 of these were internal Home Office – officials, Ministers and Special Advisers – and a further 88 were in police forces. The statisticians told us that the lists are kept under review and have been reduced significantly in recent years, and that there are a number of factors impacting on the length of the lists:
- in order to be transparent, the lists include the Ministers and everyone in their private offices who see each release (rather than just naming the Minister);
  - it is not always clear which Minister will cover a release, so it is often the case that all Ministers have to go on the list; and
  - for statistics that are relevant to the police, each of the 44 police forces requires pre-release access. Local PRC statistics are reported at the time of release, so police forces need to be in a position to handle press queries at 9.30am.

### **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.**

3.40 The Home Office publishes details of the administrative systems it uses in its Statement of Administrative Sources<sup>49</sup>. The Home Office provides access to the recorded crime administrative data through a password protected web-based tool. This allows police and Home Office staff to access the provisional, unpublished data for operational management purposes. The Home Office manages access to the site, setting clear conditions on the use of the data with a view to ensuring that the integrity of the National Statistics is not compromised by the use of provisional data.

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<sup>49</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/home-office-science/ho-state-admin-sources-10>

## Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to the Home Office’s statistical outputs, 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.

- |                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Suggestion 1</b> | Establish a process to ensure that regular timely updates are published on issues of interest to users – for example, updates on progress implementing recommendations from reviews and other projects (para 3.4). |
| <b>Suggestion 2</b> | Review the user engagement strategy, to ensure that there is a more effective means for stakeholder views to be taken into account during the development of the statistics (para 3.5).                            |
| <b>Suggestion 3</b> | Review examples of criticisms of the statistical releases with a view to learning lessons for future presentation of the statistics (para 3.9).                                                                    |
| <b>Suggestion 4</b> | Communicate clearly (either in the releases or on its website) that the PRC statistics are necessarily dependent on the Counting Rules, which are ultimately the responsibility of the Home Secretary (para 3.13). |
| <b>Suggestion 5</b> | Consider whether more could be done to improve communication and reduce the administrative burden, or the perception of burden, involved in supplying the PRC data (para 3.26).                                    |
| <b>Suggestion 6</b> | Review the commentary to ensure that it is also accessible to non-expert users (para 3.31).                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Suggestion 7</b> | Review how information on methods and quality is presented, with a view to adopting a consistent approach that makes it easier for users to find information relevant to their needs (para 3.32).                  |
| <b>Suggestion 8</b> | Provide the results of the user surveys on crime statistics releases to the National Statistician’s review team, to inform recommendations about the release strategy for crime statistics (para 3.38).            |

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

- A2.1 This assessment was conducted from December 2010 to April 2011.
- A2.2 The Assessment team – Jacob Wilcock and Gary Wainman – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of the Home Office in December. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 15 December. The Assessment team subsequently met the Home Office during January 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 15 responses to the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Home Office	3
Other government departments	3
Academia	2
Local government	1
Media	1
Charities	2
Police	2
General public	1

- A2.5 Most users providing feedback to the Assessment team came from government and academia. Within central government, the statistics are used to develop and monitor crime policy. The police themselves use the data as a management tool, to monitor levels of crime and compare crime rates. Other respondents used the data for grant applications and research into the geographical differences in the extent and type of crime.
- A2.6 Users had difficulty finding the statistics, releases and guidance on the Home Office's website. There was an interest in more timely and detailed statistics, particularly by geography and age of victim. Users expressed a desire for more detailed guidance and information on the relationship between Home Office crime statistics and other related statistics; for example, those produced by the Ministry of Justice. Users also suggested that the Home Office could improve its user communication particularly to encourage engagement with consultations and inform users of the results of consultations.

### Key documents/links provided

## Written Evidence for Assessment documents



