

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on Life Expectancy by Local Areas in the UK

*(produced by the Office for National
Statistics)*

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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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Statistics on Life Expectancy by Local Areas in the UK

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ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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1 Summary of findings

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports¹ prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*². The Act requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*³. The report covers the set of statistics reported in *Life expectancy at birth and at age 65 by local areas in the United Kingdom*⁴ produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

1.1.2 This report was prepared by the Authority's Assessment team, and approved by the Board of the Statistics Authority on the advice of the Head of Assessment.

1.2 Decision concerning designation as National Statistics

1.2.1 The Statistics Authority judges that the statistics covered by this report are readily accessible, produced according to sound methods and managed impartially and objectively in the public interest, subject to any points for action in this report. The Statistics Authority confirms that the statistics published in *Life expectancy at birth and at age 65 by local areas in the United Kingdom* are designated as National Statistics, subject to ONS implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting to the Authority by August 2011 for Requirements 1 and 4, and by October 2011 for Requirements 2, 3, 5 and 6.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

1.3.1 ONS has identified a range of users of the local area life expectancy statistics; these users span the public, private and academic sectors. ONS carried out a stakeholder consultation⁵ during September 2008. This consultation provided insight into who uses the statistics, and how, and gave users the opportunity to contribute to the development programme. In November 2010, a Population and Census outputs user engagement workshop was held at the Royal Statistical Society. This event provided a further opportunity for users to influence the future of the local area life expectancy statistics.

1.3.2 Local area life expectancy statistics are available in Excel tables and a template showing how life tables are calculated is also provided. The statistics are also presented in an innovative way using interactive animated maps, which make the statistics accessible for a wide range of audiences and which are a helpful way of illustrating the change in local life expectancy over time. The annual statistical bulletin contains clear, helpful commentary and information about methods and quality. However, the statistical bulletin does

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

² http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf

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

⁴ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/liex1010.pdf>

⁵ http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_population/LE_Review_Nov2008.pdf

not convey the policy context behind the production of the statistics, or the range of known and potential uses.

- 1.3.3 Local area life expectancy statistics are produced in line with internationally recognised methods. Information about quality is provided in a Summary Quality Report and confidence intervals are also published.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

- 1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that ONS 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	Review the methods for producing local area life expectancy statistics to ensure that the most appropriate and up-to-date methods are being used (para 3.11).
Requirement 2	Provide a clear and prominent explanation within the statistical bulletin that there is no causal relationship between geography and life expectancy, and at the same time explain the relevance of the geographical analysis of life expectancy statistics (para 3.20).
Requirement 3	Present the statistics in the tables and maps (in the statistical bulletin) consistently and appropriately to meet users' needs and to encourage analysis and re-use (para 3.21).
Requirement 4	Provide guidance to help users locate and understand the variety of life expectancy statistics available (para 3.22).
Requirement 5	Include commentary in the statistical bulletin that provides more information on context, importance and use, in particular regarding the Public Services Transparency Framework (para 3.23).
Requirement 6	Include time series and geographical analyses of life expectancy in the statistical bulletin (para 3.24).

2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 Life expectancy statistics are produced by ONS at both UK and local area⁶ level. *Life expectancy at birth and at age 65 by local areas in the UK* has been produced by ONS since 2001. Responsibility for the production of local area life expectancy statistics lies with ONS's Centre for Health Analysis and Life Events (CHALE) as they are used as an indicator of geographic inequalities in health. National life expectancy statistics⁷ were produced by the Government Actuary's Department (GAD) until 31st January 2006. Responsibility was then transferred to the ONS Centre for Demography (ONSCD) as they are produced through the same process as the National Population Projections⁸. As such, the national life expectancy statistics will be assessed for *Code* compliance alongside ONS's population estimates and projections. This organisational history, together with the different audiences, reflects the division of responsibility for these related statistics.
- 2.2 Life expectancy at a given age, for an area in a given time period, is an estimate of the average number of years that a person would survive, if they experienced the particular area's age-specific mortality rates for that time period throughout the rest of their life. All statistics presented in *Life expectancy at birth and at age 65 by local areas in the UK* and associated Excel tables and maps are period life expectancies⁹. Period life expectancies are a useful measure of mortality rates actually experienced over a given period, and allow for comparison of trends over time, and between geographies. They do not take into account future changes in mortality. The statistics are published annually for the UK, UK constituent countries, Government Office Regions, counties and local areas.
- 2.3 Statistics on life expectancy are of particular interest to the health sector life expectancy at birth has been used as a general indicator of the health of the population since the 1840s. Life expectancy data feed into healthy life expectancy and disability-free life expectancy¹⁰ statistics. Healthy life expectancies are important indicators used to monitor policy objectives relating to long-term improvements in health outcomes, for example the Marmot Review¹¹. Life expectancy figures are used at regional and local levels as a means of monitoring the health of the local population, for example, through the regional Health profiles produced by the Association of Public Health Observatories (APHO)¹².

⁶ Local area refers to local and unitary authorities in England and Wales, council areas in Scotland and local government districts in Northern Ireland.

⁷ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=168>

⁸ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=8519>

⁹ ONS also produces cohort life expectancy statistics at the UK level (see footnote 7). Cohort life expectancy takes account of known or projected changes to mortality. Although cohort life expectancy gives a more accurate measure of expected mortality as a result, the use of projected mortality rates introduces an element of judgment in making assumptions.

¹⁰ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/health11110.pdf>

¹¹ <http://www.marmotreview.org/>

¹² <http://www.apho.org.uk/resource/item.aspx?RID=96930>

- 2.4 Until 2010, local area life expectancy statistics were also used by the Department of Health (DH) to monitor Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets¹³. These PSA targets aimed to increase life expectancy and reduce the gaps between the most and least deprived areas in the UK. Monitoring the Spearhead Group¹⁴ was an important aspect of the PSA target – this group comprised local authorities and primary care trusts ranked in the lowest 20 per cent for 3 out of 5 measures, including life expectancy, mortality and the Index of Multiple Deprivation. As part of the 2010 Spending Review PSAs were replaced with a new Public Services Transparency Framework¹⁵.
- 2.5 Life expectancy statistics are produced using mid-year population estimates¹⁶ (MYEs) and data on deaths registered in England and Wales¹⁷, Scotland¹⁸, and Northern Ireland¹⁹. The local area life expectancy statistics are calculated using three-year aggregates of mid-year population estimates and death registrations data to ensure that they are sufficiently robust. Abridged²⁰ life tables are then constructed for males and for females using five-year age groups.
- 2.6 Local area life expectancy statistics cost approximately £14,300 annually to produce.

¹³ http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/pbr_csr07_psa18.pdf

¹⁴ http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4101455

¹⁵ http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/speech_cst_270810.htm

¹⁶ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/pop0610.pdf>

¹⁷ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=14409&Pos=1&ColRank=1&Rank=272>

¹⁸ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/files2/stats/high-level-summary/j11198/j1119814.htm>

¹⁹ <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/demography/default.asp10.htm>

²⁰ Complete life tables (based on single year of age) are used to produce the national interim life expectancy figures at the UK and constituent countries' levels as detailed in para 2.1.

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 ONS recently consulted users about its statistical work programme²¹, asking them to help prioritise non-statutory outputs in the light of the 2010 Spending Review²². A response will be published by ONS in due course. ONS told us that, generally, users are consulted on major statistical developments²³ and that responses are used to influence business plans.
- 3.2 The team producing *Life expectancy at birth and at age 65 by local areas in the UK* displays a good understanding of the uses of these statistics. The statistics were used by the Department of Health (DH) until 2010 to measure progress against a PSA target. The local area life expectancy statistics were subject to a stakeholder review in 2008, which asked users what they used life expectancy data for and what changes could be made to make the statistics more useful. The responses led to improvements to the release and to other forms of dissemination, such as animated maps. ONS published a response to users²⁴ explaining actions taken and providing links to further information where appropriate.
- 3.3 In response to user feedback, the team aims to produce life expectancy statistics for health areas²⁵ in the UK alongside the 2011 *Life expectancy at birth and at age 65 by local areas in the United Kingdom* release. In addition, to meet users' requests for more timely statistics, from 2008 the timetable for the release of the statistics was brought forward by a month from November to October.
- 3.4 Life expectancy statistics were discussed at the November 2010 Population and Census outputs user engagement workshop. This was organised by ONS's Centre for Demography (ONSCD) as part of the ONS statistical work programme consultation (see paragraph 3.1), and held at the Royal Statistical Society (RSS). However, there is no reference to the event or the note of discussion on ONS's website. We suggest that ONS provide a link to a note of the discussion at the Population and Census outputs user engagement workshop held at the RSS.

²¹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about/consultations/closed-consultations/work-programme-consultation/index.html>

²² http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/press_10_10.htm

²³ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about/consultations/index.html>

²⁴ http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_population/LE_Review_Nov2008.pdf

²⁵ Health areas are defined as primary care trusts in England; local health boards in Wales; health and social care trusts in Northern Ireland; and health boards in Scotland

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

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

- 3.5 ONS has published a revisions policy²⁶ and a revisions guide²⁷ to its statistics. Revisions to the local area life expectancy statistics are made according to this organisational policy.
- 3.6 The statistics are provided free of charge. However, charges for supplementary analysis are not published by ONS. We suggest that ONS publish a clear pricing policy regarding charges for supplementary analysis.
- 3.7 The method used to calculate the local area life expectancy statistics has not changed since the 1991-93 period, when the time series begins. Although there have been changes to the geographies over time, the statistics are available in previous and new geographies for the whole time series.
- 3.8 The presentation of the statistics in the releases is impartial and objective. Where errors in the published outputs have been found, ONS told us that they had been corrected. After the release of 2006-08 local area figures on 21 October 2009, errors were discovered in the *Results for the United Kingdom 1991-93 to 2006-08* and *Results for Northern Ireland 1991-93 to 2006-08* tables. Users were informed of corrections by a notice²⁸ placed on the front page of the Excel workbook containing the tables. The notice explained the reasons for the corrections and the figures affected but key stakeholders were not alerted to the corrections. The statistical bulletin was unaffected by these corrections. We suggest that ONS alert key stakeholders directly and promptly to the correction of errors.

²⁶ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/revisions/corp-stat-policy.asp>

²⁷ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/revisions/guide.asp>

²⁸ Results for the United Kingdom 1991-93 to 2006-08

www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_population/LE_UK_2009.xls

Results for Northern Ireland 1991-93 to 2006-08

www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_population/LE_NI_2009.xls

Principle 3: Integrity

At all stages in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics, the public interest should prevail over organisational, political or personal interests.

3.9 No incidents of political pressure or abuse of trust were reported to or identified by the Assessment team in the course of this assessment.

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.

- 3.10 All life expectancy statistics are produced according to internationally recognised methods. Detailed methodological documents are available²⁹ for the local area life expectancy statistics and references to independent methods publications are also provided³⁰. A brief explanation of the method for producing the local area life expectancy statistics is given in the annual statistical bulletin with links to the more detailed information.
- 3.11 The local area life expectancy statistics were first published in 2001 and the method used to produce them has not been reviewed since then. The most recent methods publication referred to is from 1994; there is no evidence to show that the methods used are still the most appropriate. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should review the methods for producing local area life expectancy statistics to ensure that the most appropriate and up-to-date methods are being used³¹ (Requirement 1).
- 3.12 In 2003, ONS undertook an investigation to identify a way of producing life expectancy statistics for very small geographies, for example at ward level. The report aimed to establish a minimum population size below which the calculation of life expectancy may not be considered feasible. The results were published in *Life expectancy at birth: methodological options for small populations*³².
- 3.13 The statistical bulletin contains information about how to interpret life expectancy and how the results compare with national interim life expectancy figures, as well as an explanation of the difference between period and cohort life expectancies. The bulletin clearly explains that the national interim life expectancy figures should be used when making international comparisons.
- 3.14 To ensure that life expectancy statistics are of a suitable quality for smaller geographies, standard abridged life tables are produced for three-year periods by five-year age groups; confidence intervals (CIs) are published to provide an indication of the quality of the statistics. The methodology report (see paragraph 3.12) also compared different methods for calculating CIs. A *Summary Quality Report*³³ (SQR) was published in December 2010; it provides information about the statistics according to the European Statistical System³⁴

²⁹ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/ssdataset.asp?vlnk=6949>

³⁰ Newell, C. (1994) *Methods and Models in Demography*, John Wiley & Sons: Chichester; Shyrock, H.S. and Siegel, J.S. (1976) *The Methods and Materials of Demography* (Abridged Edition), Academic Press: New York; and Chiang (1968) 'The life table and its construction' in *Introduction to Stochastic Processes in Biostatistics*, Chapter 9, John Wiley & Sons: New York, 189-214.

³¹ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 5 of the *Code of Practice*

³² http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_other/GSSMethodology_No_33.pdf

³³ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/quality/qual-info-economic-social-and-bus-stats/quality-reports-for-social-statistics/summary-quality-report-for-life-expectancy-at-birth--at-age-65.pdf>

³⁴ http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/about_eurostat/european_framework/ESS

(ESS) dimensions of quality, including the strengths and limitations of local area life expectancy statistics and the ways in which they should and should not be used. Links to more in-depth articles are also provided in the SQR.

- 3.15 The local area life expectancy statistics for 2000-02 to 2006-08 were revised and published alongside the 2007-09 figures in October 2010, as the MYEs for 2002 to 2008 were revised by ONS in May 2010. The revisions were noted in the statistical bulletin and on the product page of ONS's website.

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.

- 3.16 ONS has assured us that it takes all necessary steps to protect the confidentiality of the data it collects. Life tables are based on non-disclosive estimates of the population and death registrations data. No further statistical disclosure control is required.
- 3.17 The local area team informed us that it follows ONS's policy³⁵ for the protection of confidentiality within births and deaths statistics and the policy³⁶ on confidentiality protection for health statistics.

³⁵ http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_health/ConfidentialityBirth&Death.pdf

³⁶ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/disclosure/health-statistics.asp>

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.

- 3.18 Life expectancy statistics are produced using existing sources of data: death registrations and MYEs. These sources are considered by ONS to be the best available for the calculation of life tables.

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.

- 3.19 The team informed us that they are currently sufficiently funded to enable them to produce high quality statistics.

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

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

- 3.20 *Life expectancy at birth and at age 65 by local areas in the United Kingdom* provides helpful guidance on interpreting life expectancy, basic methodological information, an explanation of the differences between period and cohort life expectancy statistics, and notes explaining how the local area figures differ from the national interim life tables. Links to more detailed information are also included. The guidance for interpreting life expectancy does state that “The figure reflects mortality among those living in the area in each time period, rather than mortality among those born in each area.”³⁷ However, we felt that a clearer, more prominent explanation that the statistics do not show a causal relationship between geography and life expectancy was necessary. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should provide a clear and prominent explanation within the statistical bulletin that there is no causal relationship between geography and life expectancy, and at the same time explain the relevance of the geographical analysis of life expectancy statistics.³⁸ (Requirement 2).
- 3.21 The bulletin presents the statistics in ranked tables and graphically as maps of the UK by local authority. The geographical boundaries used in the maps offer additional breakdowns of Unitary Authorities into their former (superseded) local authority areas. The team informed us that these additional boundaries were presented in the maps in response to user feedback for additional detail for monitoring purposes. However, it is not clear how the statistics as presented in the maps can be analysed and reused without also providing the statistics in a table. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should present the statistics in the tables and maps (in the statistical bulletin) consistently and appropriately to meet users’ needs and to encourage analysis and re-use³⁹ (Requirement 3). The statistical bulletin provides web links to Excel workbooks⁴⁰ – which present the local area statistics with 95 per cent confidence intervals and by local areas within each constituent UK country – and to interactive animated maps⁴¹.
- 3.22 The historical separation of the production of national and local area life expectancy statistics has resulted in different levels of user engagement, commentary and analysis. This appears to have caused confusion amongst users. Some users who contacted us in response to this assessment requested more guidance on the variety of life expectancy products available. One user from within ONS gave examples of regional statisticians answering queries from Public Health Observatories and explained that there was confusion over the responsibilities of the NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care and ONS in this area. As such, some medical and health users were not completely aware of what statistics are available from ONS. As part of the

³⁷ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/liex1010.pdf#12>

³⁸ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

³⁹ In relation to Principle 8, Practices 2, 3 and 6 of the *Code of Practice*

⁴⁰ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=8841>

⁴¹ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/life-expectancy/default.asp>

designation as National Statistics ONS should provide guidance to help users locate and understand the variety of life expectancy statistics available⁴² (Requirement 4).

- 3.23 The statistical bulletin contains useful commentary and analyses, although we think that it could be improved. It could provide more information about the policy context behind the production of these statistics. For example, provided on the implications of moving from PSA targets to the Public Services Transparency Framework. More information about the wider uses of the statistics could also be provided. As part of the designation as National Statistics ONS should include commentary in the statistical bulletin that provides more information on context, importance and use, in particular regarding the Public Services Transparency Framework⁴³ (Requirement 5). As part of improving the commentary, we suggest that ONS refer to the Statistics Authority's Standards for Statistical Releases⁴⁴ for further guidance.
- 3.24 ONS produces a 'nugget'⁴⁵ alongside the animated maps which provides brief commentary on trends in life expectancy at the UK and Government Office Region (GOR) level over time. A time series analysis at GOR and local area level within the statistical bulletin would provide users with useful comparisons and a better understanding of differences in life expectancy across the regions. Furthermore, some users who contacted us in response to this assessment requested more analysis and explanation of geographical differences in life expectancy. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should include time series and geographical analyses of life expectancy in the statistical bulletin⁴⁶ (Requirement 6).

⁴² In relation to Principle 8, Practice 4 of the *Code of Practice*

⁴³ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

⁴⁴ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/statement---standards-for-statistical-releases.pdf>

⁴⁵ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?id=1850>

⁴⁶ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

Protocol 1: User engagement

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

3.25 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.

- 3.26 ONS has recently undertaken a review of all pre-release access and the up-to-date pre-release access list⁴⁷ for *Life expectancy at birth and at age 65 by local areas in the United Kingdom* is published on the ONS website.
- 3.27 The *Code* requires National Statistics releases to be issued at 9.30 am on the day of publication. ONS's website systems do not enable releases to be published simultaneously, which means there is sometimes a delay beyond 9.30 am. ONS informed us that this matter was being reviewed as part of its web development programme, and that it expected its new website to be implemented on 30 April 2011. The Head of Assessment agreed an exemption from Protocol 2 Practice 4 for ONS until that date. The exemption request, and the Head of Assessment's response are available on the Statistics Authority's website⁴⁸. Subsequently, ONS has announced that it does not expect to be able to comply with this practice until the end of August 2011⁴⁹. The Assessment team has asked ONS to submit a report describing the nature of the breach of the *Code* from 1 May 2011, and to log and report to the Authority details about delayed releases.

⁴⁷ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/ns-standard/cop/compliance/annual/life-expectancy-at-birth-at-age-65-local-area-in-the-united-kingdom.html>

⁴⁸ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/exemption-requests/index.html>

⁴⁹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about/what-we-do/programmes-projects/web-development/index.html>

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.

3.28 Local area life expectancy statistics make extensive use of administrative data as death registrations data are integral to the methodology.

3.29 ONS has published a Statement of Administrative Sources⁵⁰.

⁵⁰ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/ns-standard/cop/statement-of-administrative-sources/index.html>

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to ONS's local area life expectancy statistics, in the interest of the public good. These are not formally required for designation, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| Suggestion 1 | Provide a link to a note of the discussion at the Population and Census outputs user engagement workshop held at the RSS (para 3.4). |
| Suggestion 2 | Publish a clear pricing policy regarding charges for supplementary analyses (para 3.6). |
| Suggestion 3 | Alert key stakeholders directly and promptly to the correction of errors (para 3.8). |
| Suggestion 4 | Refer to the Statistics Authority's Standards for Statistical Releases for further guidance (para 3.23). |

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, Kim Reimann and Ruth James – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of the Office for National Statistics in September. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 22 November. The Assessment team subsequently met ONS 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 5 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Central government	3
Local government	2

A2.5 The local area life expectancy statistics serve a variety of purposes including supporting regional and local health comparisons. One user noted that they use the local area statistics as an indicator when they are creating area profiles. The statistics are also used for the planning and delivery of services, and to identify spending priorities. Central government users of the life expectancy statistics noted that they were in contact with users from the medical and health sectors.

A2.6 In general, the local area life expectancy statistics meet the needs of the users who contacted us. The only improvements suggested were for data at lower geographical levels and for more extensive commentary. It was suggested that ONS could improve commentary by explaining the underlying reasons behind geographic differences in life expectancy. It was also noted that providing further information on trends in the distribution of life expectancy would be useful in order to gain a greater understanding of health inequalities.

A2.7 The user consultation highlighted that the accessibility of the statistics could be improved, particularly by making improvements to ONS's website. We were told that access problems often lead to ONS's regional statisticians receiving a high number of basic queries. Users suggested that more guidance be made available to highlight the outputs that are available, as well as how to access

them. The planned improvements⁵¹ to ONS's website should help to address these issues with accessibility. Internal users in ONS noted that in particular, engagement with Public Health Observatories and the NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care could be improved. Another suggestion from a user was to provide a succinct explanation of life expectancy, aimed at the non-technical user.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

⁵¹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about/what-we-do/programmes---projects/web-development/index.html>

