

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

## Statistics from the Living Costs and Food Survey

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

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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 statistics from the Living Costs and Food Survey (LCF) reported in the annual publication, *Family Spending*<sup>4</sup>, 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 from the LCF are designated as National Statistics, subject to ONS implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by July 2011.

## 1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

1.3.1 ONS engages with government users via the LCF Steering Group, which meets regularly. However this group does not include any non-government users and the discussions of the group are not published. ONS does not document users' experiences of the statistics from the LCF.

1.3.2 The survey has been carried out in some form for over 50 years. It is well integrated with other household surveys and uses international classifications and definitions. Recent reviews of the survey have highlighted that ONS has insufficiently robust data processing systems for the LCF. ONS is undertaking a development project to address these issues. Some users responding to the user consultation carried out as part of this Assessment expressed concern about the quality and reliability of the statistics, particularly in comparison with similar statistics in *Consumer Trends*<sup>5</sup>. ONS could better explain how the household expenditure figures relate to similar statistics from other sources.

1.3.3 ONS publishes the statistics in *Family Spending* and a news release highlighting the main results. *Family Spending* presents the results in a clear

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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.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=361&Pos=1&ColRank=1&Rank=272>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/Product.asp?vlnk=242> *Consumer Trends* was the subject of Assessment Report 92, see footnote 1

and accessible way. However the commentary could include additional contextual information to aid users' interpretation of the statistics. ONS provides Excel tables for further analysis and has made available an anonymised microdata set for use by researchers via the UK Data Archive<sup>6</sup>.

## 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

<b>Requirement 1</b>	Publish information about users' experiences of LCF statistics (para 3.1).
<b>Requirement 2</b>	Publish more explanation of the limitations of the data and the impact of the declining response rate in relation to different uses of the expenditure information (para 3.10).
<b>Requirement 3</b>	Update the analysis and explanation in <i>Family Spending</i> of the increased reliance on proxy interviews and the extent of imputation in the LCF (para 3.11).
<b>Requirement 4</b>	Publish information about the actions being taken to improve the quality of the data and the reliability of the production process (para 3.12).
<b>Requirement 5</b>	Publish an explanation of how the LCF statistics compare with related statistics (para 3.13).
<b>Requirement 6</b>	Review the resources allocated to the production of these statistics and confirm that these are sufficient to meet the standards of the <i>Code</i> (para 3.20).
<b>Requirement 7</b>	Improve the commentary in <i>Family Spending</i> , adding more contextual information, such as household spending patterns during previous recessions, to aid users' interpretation of the statistics (para 3.21).
<b>Requirement 8</b>	Ensure that all administrative sources used for the statistics from the LCF are included in the Statement of Administrative Sources (para 3.30).

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/>

## 2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 Statistics from the Living Costs and Food Survey (LCF) are published by ONS in the annual publication *Family Spending*. ONS (and its predecessor departments) has carried out the survey in some form since 1957. The LCF was previously known as the Family Expenditure Survey and subsequently the Expenditure and Food Survey, following its merger with the National Food Survey in 2001. The survey became a module of the Integrated Household Survey<sup>7</sup> (IHS) in 2008. In anticipation of this change, the LCF moved onto a calendar year basis and ONS added a core set of IHS questions.
- 2.2 The LCF is a continuous survey collecting data on household expenditure on goods and services from a sample of around 5,200 households in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency<sup>8</sup> (NISRA) carries out the survey in Northern Ireland. Participation in the LCF is voluntary and involves:
- a household questionnaire, including questions on family relationships, ethnicity, employment details and the ownership of consumer durables;
  - a questionnaire for each individual in the household, including questions on income from employment, benefits and assets; and
  - a detailed expenditure diary completed by each individual in the household over a period of two weeks.
- 2.3 One of the main purposes of the LCF is to define the 'basket of goods'<sup>9</sup> used in the Retail Prices Index<sup>10</sup> (RPI) and the Consumer Price Indices<sup>11</sup> (CPI). The LCF is also an important source for estimates of household expenditure in the UK National and Regional Accounts. LCF information on income and expenditure is used by HM Treasury (HMT) and HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) to analyse the effects of taxes and benefits on households. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) uses data from the food section of the LCF to analyse food consumption and nutrition. It publishes these data separately in its publication, *Family Food*<sup>12</sup>. Other government departments use LCF statistics as a basis for policy making in their areas of responsibility, such as energy and transport. Users outside government, such as academics and business researchers use the statistics to analyse expenditure and consumption. ONS also sends LCF data to Eurostat for inclusion in its five-yearly Household Budget Survey<sup>13</sup>.
- 2.4 The cost of the survey is approximately £3.7m annually. This includes the supply of datasets to government users and the UK Data Archive, and the production of *Family Spending*. Of this total cost of the survey, approximately

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=15381&Pos=&ColRank=1&Rank=422>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/index.html>

<sup>9</sup> For more explanation of the basket of goods and inflation, see

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=62&Pos=1&ColRank=2&Rank=272>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cpi/nugget.asp?id=21>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=868>

<sup>12</sup> This publication is currently being assessed separately by the Statistics Authority

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/statistics/foodfarm/food/familyfood/>

<sup>13</sup> [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/household\\_budget\\_surveys/introduction](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/household_budget_surveys/introduction)



£0.9m is provided by Defra, covering their contribution to the overall running costs, and the marginal costs associated with their specific data requirements.

### 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 engages with users of LCF statistics primarily via a steering group, which consists of representatives from ONS and other government departments, such as Defra, HMT and HMRC. The steering group meets twice a year and discusses progress, plans for the future, issues with specific variables and the survey questionnaire. ONS has no formal group for engaging with other users but uses other mechanisms, such as an enquiries service, bilateral meetings (such as with the Association of Census Distributors) and contact with the UK Data Archive (which is supported by the Economic and Social Data Service<sup>14</sup> (ESDS)). We suggest that ONS also consider expanding the representation of the steering group to external users, publishing information about discussions held in the steering group, and use the ESDS as a way to engage researchers. ONS does not publish any information about users' experiences of the LCF statistics, such as minutes of, or papers for, steering group meetings. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should publish information about users' experiences of LCF statistics<sup>15</sup> (Requirement 1).
- 3.2 ONS documents the uses of LCF statistics in Appendix B of *Family Spending* and in the *Summary Quality Report for the Living Costs and Food Survey*<sup>16</sup>. These describe the main uses by government and briefly mention other non-government uses. ESDS documents<sup>17</sup> the research undertaken using the LCF dataset held on the UK Data Archive.
- 3.3 ONS publishes *Family Spending* approximately 11 months after the end of the reference period. The LCF team consults the steering group about the timetable of the report.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.esds.ac.uk/government/about/>

<sup>15</sup> In relation to Principle 1 Practices 1, 2 and 5 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/quality/qual-info-economic-social-and-bus-stats/quality-reports-for-social-statistics/sum-rpt-exp-food-surv.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.esds.ac.uk/government/efs/usage/>

## Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

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

- 3.4 ONS publishes the statistics from the LCF in an orderly manner free of charge on its website. The statistics are presented impartially and objectively.
- 3.5 ONS discusses changes to methods or classifications with users in the steering group and announces changes in advance in *Family Spending*. The change to the method used for equivalisation<sup>18</sup>, for example, was announced in the previous year's publication.
- 3.6 ONS does not carry out any regular revisions to the LCF statistics. ONS corrects errors in line with its revisions and corrections policy<sup>19</sup>. ONS detected some minor errors in some tables in the 2009 report and issued a correction notice which was attached to the front page of the publication.
- 3.7 ONS provides some additional tables on request, in accordance with its pricing policy.

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<sup>18</sup> the process by which incomes are adjusted to take account of differences in household size and composition

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/revisions/corp-stat-policy.asp>

### **Principle 3: Integrity**

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

- 3.8 No incidents of political pressures, abuses of trust or complaints relating to professional integrity, quality or standards were reported to or identified by the Assessment team.

## Principle 4: Sound methods and assured quality

**Statistical methods should be consistent with scientific principles and internationally recognised best practices, and be fully documented. Quality should be monitored and assured taking account of internationally agreed practices.**

- 3.9 ONS documents the survey methods in *Family Spending*. This includes details of sample design, data processing, weighting, non-response and classifications, and a glossary of terms. ONS has also produced a technical report for the LCF with more in-depth information about the survey. We suggest that ONS publish the technical report. The *Summary Quality Report for the Living Costs and Food Survey* outlines various aspects of quality and gives details of the quality assurance procedures (including automatic checks of incoming data from interviewers, and logic checks of amounts), and of the process for imputing missing data. ESDS supports users of the LCF dataset through the UK Data Archive and has published a detailed user guide produced by ONS, *Introductory Guide to the Expenditure and Food Survey*<sup>20</sup>.
- 3.10 The response rate for the LCF in 2009 was 50% in Great Britain and 56% in Northern Ireland. Response rates have declined in recent years and ONS has investigated the impact of this for household surveys in general<sup>21</sup>. ONS weights the LCF data to adjust for non-response and publishes some information in the report on item non-response, and standard errors of the estimates. However ONS could go further in presenting the impact of non-response on LCF estimates of different types of expenditure, and on the reliability of the statistics as a basis for the RPI/CPI 'basket of goods'. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should publish more explanation of the limitations of the data and the impact of the declining response rate in relation to different uses of the expenditure information<sup>22</sup> (Requirement 2).
- 3.11 ONS uses proxy interviews for the household questionnaire to capture information from another household member about an absent person; 20% of responding households included a proxy interview in 2009. This has almost doubled from the 2001/02 survey when proxy interviews were first included. ONS provides a brief explanation of proxy response in *Family Spending* and gives an example of the impact on the statistics from the 2002/03 survey. ONS also outlines its handling of missing information but does not give any indication of the extent of the imputation carried out. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should update the analysis and explanation in *Family Spending* of the increased reliance on proxy interviews and the extent of imputation in the LCF<sup>23</sup> (Requirement 3).
- 3.12 Several reviews of the LCF have been carried out, most notably an external review in 2004 and an internal audit in 2008. Both reviews highlighted inefficient data processing and production systems which had the potential to lower the quality of the LCF statistics. The internal audit, in particular, recommended that,

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.esds.ac.uk/government/resources/themeguides.asp>

<sup>21</sup> See <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=2186&Pos=&ColRank=1&Rank=272> for analysis of non-response for household surveys

<sup>22</sup> In relation to Principle 4 Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>23</sup> In relation to Principle 4 Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

- ONS thoroughly review the survey production process and rewrite it where necessary to make it more robust and less error prone;
- ONS eliminate unsupported software;
- ONS introduce more stringent control of the change management process for the survey; and
- ONS give high priority and dedicated resources to flowchart all derived variables.

The survey team is undertaking a project to address some of the issues highlighted and has made progress in documenting the data validation processes and mapping derived variables. Further improvements are required to establish a robust IT platform for the survey (see Principle 7). As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should publish information about the actions being taken to improve the quality of the data and the reliability of the production process<sup>24</sup> (Requirement 4).

- 3.13 The LCF uses the international classification of expenditure, COICOP<sup>25</sup>, and has adopted international definitions and methods. The survey is a module of the Integrated Household Survey (IHS) (see paragraph 2.1). There is currently little information about the impact of the HIS on the LCF. We suggest that ONS explain the impact and benefits of the LCF's inclusion in the IHS. Some users who responded to the user consultation carried out as part of this Assessment told us that they were concerned about the quality of the LCF statistics; in particular that it is not always clear how comparable the LCF statistics are with other related statistics, such as those published in *Consumer Trends*<sup>26</sup>. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should publish an explanation of how the LCF statistics compare with related statistics<sup>27</sup> (Requirement 5).

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<sup>24</sup> In relation to Principle 4 Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>25</sup> Classification Of Individual Consumption According to Purpose, <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/cr/registry/regcst.asp?Cl=5>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/STATBASE/Product.asp?vlnk=242>

<sup>27</sup> In relation to Principle 4 Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*

## Principle 5: Confidentiality

**Private information about individual persons (including bodies corporate) compiled in the production of official statistics is confidential, and should be used for statistical purposes only.**

- 3.14 The LCF statistics comply with ONS confidentiality policies<sup>28</sup>. ONS is developing a special licence version<sup>29</sup> of the annual dataset for use by approved researchers via the UK Data Archive. Other releases of survey microdata follow ONS's procedures for disclosure, which include approval by panels of experts from different business areas. The release of LCF data to other government departments is governed by signed data access agreements.
- 3.15 Respondents receive an advance letter and a brochure which inform them how their personal data will be protected.

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/disclosure/gss-policy-microdata.asp>

<sup>29</sup> see <http://www.esds.ac.uk/aandp/access/login.asp> for more information

## 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.**

- 3.16 ONS publishes details of the burden of the LCF survey on respondents in its annual *Office for National Statistics Compliance Plan*<sup>30</sup>. The survey is voluntary. ONS sends an advance letter and brochure to respondents informing them about the uses of the survey. Respondents complete a face-to-face interview and each individual aged 16 or over in the visited household is asked to keep a diary of daily expenditure for two weeks. This means that the burden of responding to the survey is relatively high.
- 3.17 ONS has investigated various administrative data sources – for example bus-pass data or data on free fruit and vegetables for children in school – to see whether the survey burden can be reduced. ONS has carried out an in-depth review of the LCF questionnaire over the past two years to see whether all questions are necessary and whether alternative sources could be identified.

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<sup>30</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=9175&More=N>



## 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.**

- 3.18 The 2008 internal audit of the LCF highlighted the need for more resources, in particular to replace the unsupported IT platform that is used by ONS to produce these statistics. The LCF team has submitted a business case to obtain these resources in 2011. Previous bids for these resources have been unsuccessful. The audit also noted that relocation and staff turnover had caused some problems with continuity and data quality in the past. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should review the resources allocated to the production of these statistics and confirm that these are sufficient to meet the standards of the *Code*<sup>31</sup> (Requirement 6).
- 3.19 The LCF team has a high level business plan that outlines the main deliverables and resources, as well as a more detailed work plan. ONS's management board monitors the deliverables at its quarterly meetings.
- 3.20 The LCF team complies with ONS's organisational policies relating to staff recruitment, training and development.

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<sup>31</sup> In relation to Principle 7 Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

## Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

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

- 3.21 ONS publishes the LCF results annually in *Family Spending*, accompanied by a news release and a ‘nugget’ of information – a summary of key findings on its website. *Family Spending* includes some commentary, an overview of the statistics and summary charts and tables. However, as part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should improve the commentary in *Family Spending*, adding more contextual information, such as household spending patterns during previous recessions, to aid users’ interpretation of the statistics<sup>32</sup> (Requirement 7). As part of improving the commentary, we suggest that ONS refer to the Statistics Authority’s Standards for Statistical Releases<sup>33</sup> for further guidance. ONS has made some changes in the light of user feedback, such as the introduction of a new chapter on housing expenditure and more detailed commentary on trends over time. ONS told us that the news release has also stimulated media coverage.
- 3.22 *Family Spending* contains information about the quality of the statistics and explanations about the survey and methods of analysis; it is supplemented by the *Summary Quality Report for the Living Costs and Food Survey*.
- 3.23 ONS provides tables with breakdowns of the statistics to Government Office Region<sup>34</sup> level and by economic status, income decile and age group of the household reference person. The table headings in *Family Spending* link directly to Excel tables.
- 3.24 ONS releases an annual dataset on the UK Data Archive for use by approved researchers.

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<sup>32</sup> In relation to Principle 8 Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/statement--standards-for-statistical-releases.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> [http://www.statistics.gov.uk/geography/downloads/uk\\_gor\\_cty\\_1.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/geography/downloads/uk_gor_cty_1.pdf)

## **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 *Family Spending* is available via the National Statistics Publication Hub<sup>35</sup>, as is a timetable for the next release. ONS releases LCF statistics 11 months after the reference period. The Summary Quality Report states that ‘the publication of *Family Spending* has occasionally been delayed by a few months; this has sometimes been due to the need to find a place in the ONS publication timetable.’ However ONS told us that only the 2009 report, presenting the 2008 figures, was delayed – for two months due to issues with relocation, integration with the IHS and IT problems (see Principle 7). ONS notified users of this delay a month in advance of the original publication date. We suggest that ONS review the *Summary Quality Report for the Living Costs and Food Survey* to ensure that it accurately reflects ONS’s release practices.
- 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 website<sup>36</sup>. Subsequently, ONS has announced that it does not expect to be able to comply with this practice until the end of August 2011<sup>37</sup>. 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.
- 3.28 *Family Spending* gives the name of the report’s editor but the contact details for the responsible statistician could be made clearer. The customer enquiries information directs users to the generic ONS customer centre and an email box for Social Surveys. We suggest that ONS make the contact details for the responsible statistician for LCF clearer in *Family Spending*.
- 3.29 ONS told us that it does not grant pre-release access to *Family Spending* or the underlying LCF data.

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<sup>35</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/search/index.html?newquery=family+spending>

<sup>36</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/exemption-requests/index.html>

<sup>37</sup> <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.**

3.30 The statistics in *Family Spending* are primarily based on LCF data. However administrative sources are used to provide estimates of expenditure for a number of items, such as council tax, water rates, road tax and mortgage interest rates. These do not appear to be included in ONS's Statement of Administrative Sources<sup>38</sup>. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should ensure that all administrative sources used for the statistics from the LCF are included in its Statement of Administrative Sources<sup>39</sup> (Requirement 8).

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<sup>38</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/ns-standard/cop/statement-of-administrative-sources/index.html>

<sup>39</sup> In relation to Protocol 3 Practice 5 of the *Code of Practice*

## Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

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

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|---------------------|---|
| <b>Suggestion 1</b> | Consider expanding the representation of the steering group to external users, publishing information about discussions held in the steering group, and use the ESDS as a way to engage researchers (para 3.1). |
| <b>Suggestion 2</b> | Publish the LCF survey technical report (para 3.9).   |
| <b>Suggestion 3</b> | Explain the impact and benefits of the LCF's inclusion in the IHS (para 3.13).  |
| <b>Suggestion 4</b> | Refer to the Statistics Authority's Standards for Statistical Releases for further guidance (para 3.21).  |
| <b>Suggestion 5</b> | Review the <i>Summary Quality Report for the Living Costs and Food Survey</i> to ensure that it accurately reflects ONS's release practices (para 3.26).  |
| <b>Suggestion 6</b> | Make the contact details for the responsible statistician for LCF clearer in <i>Family Spending</i> (para 3.28).  |

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

- A2.1 This assessment was conducted from September 2010 to April 2011.
- A2.2 The Assessment team – Cathy Kruger and Penny Babb – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of ONS in September. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided in January. The Assessment team subsequently met ONS later in 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 11 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

ONS	2
Other government department	7
Private sector	1
Consolidated academic response	1

A2.5 The response received from users was mixed. Some felt that the LCF statistics met their needs while others were concerned over the reliability of the statistics; in particular in relation to the differences between household expenditure estimates in *Consumer Trends* and from the LCF. Most users were satisfied about the level and nature of engagement with the producers. The timing and presentation of *Family Spending* were considered satisfactory. A number of users would like data available at a lower level of disaggregation.

### Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document





