

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on Homicide, Domestic Abuse, Firearm Crimes and Offences and Firearm Certificates Recorded by the Police in Scotland

(produced by the Scottish Government)

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About the UK Statistics Authority

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

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

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

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

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ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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1 Summary of findings

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports¹ prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*². The Act requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*³. The report covers the sets of statistics included in the following National Statistics publications produced by the Scottish Government:

- *Homicide in Scotland*⁴;
- *Domestic Abuse Recorded by the Police in Scotland*⁵;
- *Recorded Crimes and Offences Involving Firearms, Scotland*⁶; and
- *Firearm Certificates Statistics, Scotland*⁷.

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 *Homicide in Scotland*, *Domestic Abuse Recorded by the Police in Scotland*, *Recorded Crimes and Offences Involving Firearms, Scotland* and *Firearm Certificates Statistics, Scotland* are designated as National Statistics, subject to the Scottish Government implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by October 2011.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

1.3.1 The Scottish Government has produced guidance to assist data suppliers; this was welcomed by data suppliers who responded to our consultation. The quality of the guidance and template documents demonstrate an efficient use of resources within the Justice Analytical Services Division of Scottish Government.

1.3.2 Although the Scottish Government has taken steps to ensure that the data reporting process is standardised as far as possible, there are some inconsistencies in the way that the Scottish police forces record crime and

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.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/12/101110553/0>

⁵ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/11/11095346/0>

⁶ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/10/25143316/0>

⁷ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/05/11133318/0>

incident information. This was an area of concern for both users and suppliers of the data.

- 1.3.3 The Scottish Government engages effectively with the users and suppliers of the domestic abuse data. It plans to consult with the users of the *Homicide in Scotland, Recorded Crimes and Offences Involving Firearms, Scotland* and *Firearm Certificates Statistics, Scotland*.
- 1.3.4 The Scottish Government have not published sufficient information on the uses of the statistics and the needs and experiences of users. There is also scope to improve the commentary and analysis in the releases, in particular by providing contextual information and an explanation of the strengths and weaknesses of the statistics in relation to their likely uses.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

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

1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

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| Requirement 1 | Publish a plan to document the needs of users and the use made of these statistics (para 3.3). |
| Requirement 2 | Ensure that users are aware which statistics are revised and are able to access revised statistics (para 3.6). |
| Requirement 3 | Confirm that any future changes to methods or classifications will be announced in advance, to ensure that all users are aware of planned changes (para 3.7). |
| Requirement 4 | Publish the quality guidelines used in managing the production of its police statistics (para 3.12). |
| Requirement 5 | Provide users with more information about the methods, procedures and classifications used to collate these statistics and publish more information about the quality of the police statistics, including the consistency with which crimes and incidents are recorded and classified, and the strengths and weaknesses in relation to uses (para 3.13). |
| Requirement 6 | Address the implications of recording practices on the relevance of statistics on domestic abuse (para 3.14). |

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Requirement 7 | Publish more information on definitions used and quality of the European homicide statistics included in <i>Homicide in Scotland</i> to help users make appropriate comparisons (para 3.17). |
| Requirement 8 | Prepare written confidentiality protection agreements covering the sharing of homicide data with National Records of Scotland (para 3.21). |
| Requirement 9 | Publish information about the policy and operational context for the statistics and improve the commentary and analysis within the police statistics publications and include within <i>Domestic Abuse Recorded by the Police in Scotland</i> analysis of statistics on domestic abuse as recorded by the police and reported in the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (para 3.29). |
| Requirement 10 | Review the graphs and charts in the publications to ensure they enhance users' interpretation and understanding of the statistics (para 3.30). |
| Requirement 11 | Review the format in which datasets are released to encourage re-analysis, and include relevant documentation with the datasets (para 3.31). |
| Requirement 12 | Include in its Statement of Administrative Sources the specific arrangements for using police forces' administrative data for the police statistics with particular reference to arrangements for auditing the quality of the administrative data held by police forces (para 3.39). |

2 Subject of the assessment

2.1 The publications included in this assessment are all annual and cover aspects of recorded crime involving homicide, domestic abuse and firearm crimes and offences as well as the issuing of firearm certificates in Scotland. They are derived from data provided by the eight police forces in Scotland. This report will collectively refer to the publications included in this assessment as police statistics. The police statistics are presented for a ten-year period for Scotland and by police force area. The data are supplied under Section 47 of the *Police (Scotland) Act 1967*⁸.

- *Homicide in Scotland* presents statistics about all crimes of murder and culpable homicide, as recorded by the police⁹. The publication includes statistics on the characteristics of the victim and accused of the crime such as age, gender, whether or not they were intoxicated and the relationship between the victim and the main accused person. It provides statistics on the number of victims, and the location, method and motive relating to the crime. The release also presents a comparison of homicide rates in other European countries.
- *Domestic Abuse*¹⁰ *Recorded by the Police in Scotland* presents statistics on incidents of domestic abuse recorded by the police, crimes and offences associated with the incident, and reports to the Procurator Fiscal¹¹. It provides statistics on the characteristics of the victims and the perpetrators including age, gender, the relationship between victim and perpetrator, repeat incidents, and action taken by the police.
- *Recorded Crimes and Offences Involving Firearms, Scotland* presents statistics on all recorded offences where a firearm was alleged to have been used and/or where a firearm was stolen. It provides statistics on the type of offence and the type of firearm involved, including how it was used. Characteristics of the victim and the accused are also provided.
- *Firearm Certificates Statistics, Scotland* presents statistics on the issue of firearm and shotgun certificates. The publication provides statistics on the number of certificates currently held, new applications, cancellations and renewals.

2.2 These publications form part of a series of bulletins on the criminal justice system in Scotland, and provide more details to complement the summary statistics presented in *Recorded Crime in Scotland*¹² which was the subject of an earlier assessment (see Assessment Report 2 at footnote 1).

⁸ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1967/77/contents>

⁹ Cases of causing death by dangerous driving and causing death by careless driving while under the influence of drink or drugs are excluded from statistics on homicide.

¹⁰ Domestic abuse is defined as any form of physical, non-physical, or sexual abuse which takes place within the context of a close relationship, committed either in the home or elsewhere. This relationship will be between partners or ex-partners.

¹¹ <http://www.copfs.gov.uk/about/how-does-prosecution-system-work>

¹² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/09/07084606/0>

- 2.3 The statistics presented in each publication are used to monitor progress against *Scotland Performs* National Outcomes on Crime¹³ and Community¹⁴. The statistics on homicide, domestic abuse, and recorded crimes and offences involving firearms are used by the Scottish Government to inform policy on serious violent crime and domestic abuse in Scotland. They are used by campaign groups and local authorities in awareness-raising activities and in campaigns to reduce levels of domestic abuse and violence. The firearm certificates statistics have a lower profile but are reported to be useful for planning activities within police forces and responding to freedom of information requests. All of the statistics were reported to be of use in research and the production of other publications by research agencies, academia and other government departments.
- 2.4 *Homicide in Scotland* reports statistics on cases of homicide initially recorded by the police. Previously this release also included an analysis of homicide following court proceedings. The additional homicide statistics were produced by matching police homicide data with court proceedings data from the Scottish Court Service (SCS). This matching exercise has not taken place since the publication of the *Homicide in Scotland, 2006-07* publication due to changes in the submission of data by the SCS and a lack of resources for carrying out the data matching. The Scottish Government is planning to reintroduce these statistics later in 2011 following discussions with the SCS to start receiving more detailed court proceedings data in electronic format.
- 2.5 The UK Government has agreed to implement the recommendation of the Calman Commission on Scottish Devolution¹⁵, which transfers the regulation of air weapons to the Scottish Parliament. This change in legislation may have an impact on the way in which firearm and shotgun certificates are issued and monitored. The police statistics team responsible for producing the publications covered by this assessment plans to consult users of *Recorded Crimes and Offences Involving Firearms, Scotland* and *Firearm Certificates Statistics, Scotland* once the outcome of the changes to the legislation is clear.
- 2.6 The Scottish Government told us that the estimated cost of producing the four publications covered in this assessment is £28,000. These estimated costs are based on staff time and publishing charges.

¹³ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms/outcomes/crime>

¹⁴ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms/outcomes/communities>

¹⁵ <http://www.commissiononscottishdevolution.org.uk/> ; Paragraph 5.13

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 Scottish Government engages with users of these statistics via the Crime and Justice Committee within the ScotStat¹⁶ network – a forum for providers and users of the statistics produced by the Scottish Government. The ScotStat Crime and Justice Committee has members from the Scottish police forces, academia and central and local government. The committee holds meetings every six months and publishes the minutes¹⁷ on the Scottish Government's website.
- 3.2 In 2010, the Scottish Government held a consultation with users of the domestic abuse statistics. The consultation sought to identify how the statistics were used; whether the statistics were of suitable quality for those uses; which parts of the statistical release were used, and what additional information could be included in the release. The Scottish Government published the results of the consultation¹⁸ on its website. The results of this consultation with users of the domestic abuse statistics indicated that overall, users are satisfied with the quality of the statistics and the statistical release.
- 3.3 The Scottish Government plans to consult users of the homicide statistics in summer 2011. It also plans to consult users of the two sets of firearms statistics although the timing of this consultation depends on the changes to Scottish legislation on air weapons. However there is currently no published documentation about the use made of these statistics or the needs of users. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should publish a plan to document the needs of users and the use made of these statistics¹⁹ (Requirement 1). As part of documenting the use of these statistics, we suggest that Scottish Government refer to the types of use put forward in the Statistics Authority Monitoring Brief *The Use Made of Official Statistics*²⁰.

¹⁶ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/scotstat>

¹⁷ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice/scotstatcrime/meetings>

¹⁸ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice/scotstatcrime/StakeCon/DAConResult>

¹⁹ In relation to Principle 1 Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

²⁰ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-briefs/monitoring-brief-6-2010---the-use-made-of-official-statistics.pdf>

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

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

- 3.4 The Scottish Government releases the statistics according to a published timetable, and makes the statistics available free of charge on its website. The statistics are presented impartially and objectively.
- 3.5 The Scottish Government has published an organisational revisions policy²¹ on its website. The statistics team told us that it does not carry out scheduled revisions of the statistics but that it revises its police statistics when it receives late data returns or identifies errors.
- 3.6 The Scottish Government told us that data relating to quarter 1 of 2008-09 had not been submitted by Fife Constabulary, as part of the data return for 2008-09 for *Recorded Crimes and Offences Involving Firearms, Scotland*. The Scottish Government published a note²² on its website and sent an email to users informing them of the error, describing its impact on the statistics and stating that the release would be corrected at the earliest opportunity. The team told us that data sets are reviewed on an annual basis and any discrepancies are rectified immediately and corrections are published in the following bulletin, along with an accompanying explanation. However, it is not always clear which statistics have been revised. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should ensure that users are aware which statistics are revised and are able to access revised statistics²³ (Requirement 2).
- 3.7 The Scottish Government introduced a change to the data collection for the 2009-10 release of domestic abuse statistics, to collect and publish the statistics according to the year that the incident was recorded by the police, rather than according to the year that the incident occurred. This change brings the data collection for domestic abuse in line with other police statistics publications. This change was announced in the annex to the 2009-10 domestic abuse publication. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should confirm that any future changes to methods or classifications will be announced in advance, to ensure that all users are aware of planned changes²⁴ (Requirement 3).

²¹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/About/NatStats>

²² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/10/25143316/0>

²³ In relation to Principle 2 Practice 7 of the *Code of Practice*

²⁴ In relation to Principle 2 Practice 4 of the *Code of Practice*

Principle 3: Integrity

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

- 3.8 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.
- 3.9 The Scottish Government's justice statisticians hold technical briefings for media representatives on the morning of publication of two of their key publications, namely *Recorded Crime in Scotland* and the *Scottish Crime and Justice Survey*²⁵. This helps to ensure that the media is sufficiently informed to accurately represent the statistics. Justice statisticians work closely with colleagues in their communications team to respond to any media queries. Responses are generally issued via their communications colleagues.
- 3.10 The Scottish Government is planning to train senior statisticians in media handling, and will issue a policy statement on statisticians dealing with the media in their Chief Statisticians' Annual Report²⁶.

²⁵ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice/crime-and-justice-survey>

²⁶

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/About/ChiefStatisticiansAR2009/Q/EditMode/on/ForceUpdate/on>

Principle 4: Sound methods and assured quality

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

- 3.11 The Scottish police forces record crime in accordance with the Scottish Crime Recording Standard²⁷. The Scottish Government provides data suppliers with guidance notes including classifications and methods alongside all data collection instruments; the Assessment team's consultation showed that suppliers think that this guidance is clear and of good quality. Each publication contains background information about data sources, methods and classifications but in some instances the Assessment team felt that this was insufficient and some users identified that the way in which statistics are produced is not always clear.
- 3.12 The Scottish Government uses quality guidelines to assess the quality of its police statistics. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should publish the quality guidelines used in managing the production of the police statistics²⁸ (Requirement 4).
- 3.13 The Scottish Government highlights in its releases any concerns about the quality of the data – for example: the different practices by police forces in assigning crimes to domestic abuse; inconsistency in following the definition of 'clearing up' of a crime; and incomplete data on repeat victimisation. The releases also note where there have been changes in definitions – for example recording of firearm offences. However, there is no discussion of the impact of the quality concerns on the relevance, accuracy or coverage of the statistics in relation to their uses. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should provide users with more information about the methods, procedures and classifications used to collate these statistics and publish more information about the quality of the police statistics, including the consistency with which crimes and incidents are recorded and classified, and the strengths and weaknesses in relation to uses²⁹ (Requirement 5).
- 3.14 Despite the use of the standards and guidance described in paragraph 3.11, some suppliers and users were concerned about the impact of differences in police recording practices. In particular this was a concern in relation to domestic abuse where there is evidence of different practices in police forces of recording of incidents, allocating crimes to incidents, and referring cases for prosecution. As a result, statistics derived from each of these processes are not comparable between police force areas and the Scotland totals are a combination of figures based on different procedures. Although this variation is highlighted in the release, no information is provided about the procedures adopted by different police forces. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should address the implications of

²⁷ <http://www.acpos.police.uk/Documents/Policies/CRIME%20-%20Scottish%20Crime%20Recording%20Standard%20Manual.pdf>

²⁸ In relation to Principle 4 Practice 4 of the *Code of Practice*

²⁹ In relation to Principle 4 Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

recording practices on the relevance of statistics on domestic abuse³⁰ (Requirement 6).

- 3.15 During February 2010, the Scottish Government consulted with the police forces that provide data for the domestic abuse statistics. The consultation gave data providers the opportunity to discuss the recording practices and definitions they use, and to highlight any differences or inconsistencies that may impact on the statistics. We consider this to be good practice, and suggest that the Scottish Government consult with suppliers of the data for the other releases to explore the extent of any differences in recording practices.
- 3.16 The Scottish Government has a quality assurance process which includes automated validation procedures and checks for significant changes in the data and unrealistic values. Any questionable values are referred back to the police force that provided the data. The police force then either corrects the data or provides an explanation for any unusual values. The validation process has recently been improved by providing police forces with a final version of their own data in tabular format at the end of the validation process. All police forces are required to sign off this final data extract as correct or rectify and notify the Scottish Government of any remaining issues. The new quality assurance procedures were introduced following identification of the errors described in paragraph 3.6. The final releases are checked by statisticians who are not involved in the production process, using detailed guidance. We consider the guidance that the police statistics team has in place to be good practice.
- 3.17 The Scottish Government contributes statistics to international publications including the *United Nations Surveys on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems*³¹, and the *European Sourcebook of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics*³². Differences in legislation counting practices mean that it is not straightforward to compare police recorded crime statistics across national boundaries. The Scottish Government include comparisons with European countries within the *Homicide in Scotland* release as the definitions are reasonably comparable, but highlight that care must be taken when making comparisons. There is no information provided within the release on the extent of differences in definitions or quality and so it is not clear how these statistics should be used appropriately. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should publish more information on definitions used and quality of the European homicide statistics included in *Homicide in Scotland* to help users make appropriate comparisons³³ (Requirement 7).

³⁰ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

³¹ <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/United-Nations-Surveys-on-Crime-Trends-and-the-Operations-of-Criminal-Justice-Systems.html>

³² <http://www.europeansourcebook.org>

³³ In relation to Principle 4 Practice 2 and Principle 8 Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

Principle 5: Confidentiality

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

- 3.18 The Scottish Government has assured us that it takes all necessary steps to protect the confidentiality of the data collected and used in the police statistics publications. Homicide information that is transferred to the Scottish Government includes some potentially sensitive details, for example: the date and location of the homicide; the name, age, and method of killing of the victim; and the name, age, and motive of the accused. The Scottish Government has published a confidentiality statement³⁴ which includes detailed guidance for its staff. We were told that the police statistics team adhere to these guidelines.
- 3.19 The data for *Firearm Certificate Statistics, Scotland* are derived from an aggregate data return. Data for *Domestic Abuse Recorded by the Police in Scotland* and *Recorded Crimes and Offences involving Firearms, Scotland* are incident-based and we were told that they do not contain information which could identify individuals. The police statistics team told us that they use guidance produced by the Scottish Government statistics group and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) when considering disclosure control issues.
- 3.20 Homicide data are transferred to the University of Manchester for use in the research project National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Homicide by People with Mental Illness³⁵. The research project has been running since 1996 and is mainly funded by the National Patient Safety Agency³⁶. The Scottish Government has a data sharing agreement with the University of Manchester which details the nature and purpose of the data transfer.
- 3.21 Copies of the homicide data return are passed to National Records of Scotland³⁷ (NRS), which validates them against its own records. Currently there are no data access agreements governing the transfer of these data. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should prepare confidentiality protection agreements covering the sharing of homicide data with National Records of Scotland³⁸ (Requirement 8).

³⁴

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/About/CPSconfidentiality/Q/EditMode/on/ForceUpdate/on>

³⁵ <http://www.medicine.manchester.ac.uk/mentalhealth/research/suicide/prevention/nci/>

³⁶ <http://www.npsa.nhs.uk/>

³⁷ The General Register Office for Scotland and the National Archives of Scotland merged on 1 April 2011 to create the National Records of Scotland.

³⁸ In relation to Principle 5 Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*

Principle 6: Proportionate burden

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

- 3.22 Most data suppliers who responded to the Assessment team's consultation said that there was little burden on them in providing the Scottish Government with the requested data. Often, the police forces that supply the data reported that they would collect it anyway. Suppliers felt that the data return process is helped by the useful guidance and instruction provided by the Scottish Government, and some suppliers noted recent improvements that the Scottish Government had made to the data collection process.
- 3.23 The Scottish Government has issued guidance on reporting compliance costs to its statisticians. The police statistics team told us that it plans to measure the cost of compliance to data suppliers from 2011-12 onwards, and that it will include estimates in subsequent statistical releases.
- 3.24 The producer team has regular contact with the Violence Reduction Unit (VRU). The police led VRU helps police forces and the Scottish Government identify, develop and implement effective ways of dealing with the problem of violence. The VRU is currently developing a homicide and deaths database to record specialist knowledge and best working practices on murder investigations. To date, the project has covered incidents in the Strathclyde area, and is considering expanding this database to cover Scotland. The police statistics team is exploring the possibility of using these data in the production of homicide statistics rather than using data from individual police forces. This would reduce the burden on police forces as it would remove the need for them to extract data from their systems to provide to Scottish Government.
- 3.25 The police statistics team discusses new data collections with the data providers, and formal authorisation is given by the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland³⁹. The Scottish Government's recent consultation on the domestic abuse statistics identified some additional topic areas that users would find valuable, for example the presence of children at incidents. Providing this extra information to users would mean introducing new data requirements for data suppliers. The Scottish Government plans to liaise with police forces about the feasibility of collecting such new information.

³⁹ <http://www.acpos.police.uk/>

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.

- 3.26 The police statistics are produced by a team of four people. The team also produce other outputs.
- 3.27 The work priorities for the police statistics team are monitored as part of the analytical work plan for the Safer Communities Analytical Unit (SCAU). The team gave us a copy of this internal work plan, which included a timetable of activities during the year, and identified priorities. The team meet fortnightly to review progress against this plan. The Scottish Government's Chief Statistician has issued guidance⁴⁰ on the planning process, setting out requirements and suggesting that statistical teams publish a plan and consult on it with stakeholders.
- 3.28 The Scottish Government has well-established procedures for recruiting statistical staff. It also has a dedicated training and development intranet for statistical staff that includes a competence framework and provides information about learning and development opportunities.

⁴⁰ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/About/PlanningGuidance>

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

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

- 3.29 The police statistics publications draw out some of the main messages from the results in the form of selected headline statistics. However, there is scope to improve the level of commentary and analysis in all of the publications. The publications would also benefit from the inclusion of information about the policy and operational context of the statistics: some users were concerned that otherwise the statistics might be misinterpreted. In *Domestic Abuse Recorded by the Police in Scotland* the Scottish Government notes the limitations associated with statistics on recorded crime and identifies and links to the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey (SCJS) as an additional source of statistics on domestic abuse incidents. However, the commentary in the publication provides little analysis comparing crime statistics from these two sources, nor does it consider their coherence when viewed together. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should publish information about the policy and operational context for the statistics and improve the commentary and analysis within the police statistics publications and include within *Domestic Abuse Recorded by Police in Scotland* analysis of statistics on domestic abuse as recorded by the police and reported in the Scottish Crime and Justice Survey ⁴¹ (Requirement 9).
- 3.30 The releases include graphs and charts to illustrate trends and patterns. There are some instances when the choice of chart may present a misleading or unclear picture. For example: patterns of homicide between groups are presented based on one year's data in some instances where the number of cases is small; the choice of axis in graphs illustrating the relationship between the homicide victim and the accused makes it difficult to identify patterns in female victims; and same-sex domestic abuse cases are included in a graph which compares the gender relationship in domestic abuse without reference to the different base population, which could present a misleading picture. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should review the graphs and charts in the publications to ensure that they enhance users' interpretation and understanding of the statistics ⁴² (Requirement 10).
- 3.31 The statistics are published on the Scottish Government's website in accessible formats. All of the data tables included in the releases are published in Excel to allow users to carry out further analysis, and additional tables are provided on request. However, the data tables do not include links to the original release or other metadata, which may lead to inappropriate use of the data. Some users mentioned that the data were not in a format convenient for re-analysis because the available time series was limited to a ten-year period, and that data were released for each year in separate spreadsheets. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should review the

⁴¹ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

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

format in which datasets are released to encourage re-analysis, and should include relevant documentation with the datasets⁴³ (Requirement 11).

- 3.32 The Scottish Government publicises its statistical outputs in various ways, including: its own and others' websites; email updates to government and non-government users; and media briefings, seminars and road shows.
- 3.33 The Scottish Government uses an electronic records management system to store and manage corporate records. The publisher responsible for Scottish Government publications sends copies of the statistical publications, to the National Library of Scotland for archiving.

⁴³ 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.

3.34 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.

- 3.35 The Scottish Government publishes its police statistics on its website and on the National Statistics Publication Hub, in accordance with the timetable prepared by the SCAU. The release timetable⁴⁴ is published on the Scottish Government's website a year in advance.
- 3.36 The consultation with users of domestic abuse statistics identified that some felt that the releases were not published sufficiently promptly following the end of the financial year. The Scottish Government told us that it is unable to bring forward the publication date because the timetable takes account of available resources in both the Scottish Government and the police forces for production and quality assurance. It is important that users are made aware why their needs relating to the timing of the release cannot be met. We suggest that the Scottish Government communicate to users the reasons for being unable to alter the timing of *Domestic Abuse Recorded by the Police in Scotland*.
- 3.37 Pre-release access for the police statistics publications is given to between 43 and 66 people. We were told that the lists are reviewed before each release, but tend to be long because they include representatives from the eight police forces involved and the statistics relate to a broad spectrum of policy areas. We suggest that the Scottish Government publish records of those granted pre-release access to these statistics in their final form.

⁴⁴ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Search/Forthcoming>

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.

- 3.38 The Scottish Government produces the police statistics using administrative data that are provided by the eight police forces in Scotland. The data are transferred to the Scottish Government via an electronic data collection instrument.
- 3.39 The Scottish Government has published a Statement of Administrative Sources⁴⁵. This identifies a list of all administrative sources currently used in the production of its official statistics, but does not identify any potential sources that are not currently used. It includes general statements about arrangements for access to administrative data for statistical purposes, auditing the quality of the source data and dealing with changes to administrative systems. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should include in its Statement of Administrative Sources the specific arrangements for using police forces' administrative data for the police statistics with particular reference to arrangements for auditing the quality of the administrative data held by police forces⁴⁶ (Requirement 12).
- 3.40 In addition to being involved in a project to develop a central database that will store data on homicides and deaths in Scotland, the Scottish Government is also involved in a project which aims to develop a data warehouse of police administrative data. The Scottish Government has been involved in discussions about the potential design of the database and has suggested that built-in validation mechanisms are incorporated. We consider the Scottish Government's involvement in such projects as good practice in terms of seeking to maximise opportunities for the use of administrative data.

⁴⁵

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/About/StatementAdminSources/Q/EditMode/on/ForceUpdate/on>

⁴⁶ 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 Scottish Government's police statistics, in the interest of the public good. These are not formally required for designation, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

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|---------------------|--|
| Suggestion 1 | Refer to the types of use put forward in the Statistics Authority Monitoring Brief, <i>The Use Made of Official Statistics</i> (para 3.3). |
| Suggestion 2 | Consult with suppliers of the data for the other releases to explore the extent of any differences in recording practices (para 3.15). |
| Suggestion 3 | Communicate to users the reasons for being unable to alter the timing of Domestic Abuse Recorded by the Police in Scotland (para 3.36). |
| Suggestion 4 | Publish records of those granted pre-release access to these statistics in their final form (para 3.37). |

Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A2.1 This assessment was conducted from January to April 2011.

A2.2 The Assessment team – Cecilia Macintyre and Ruth James – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of the Scottish Government in January. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 28 February. The Assessment team subsequently met the Scottish Government during March 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 21 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Government | 5 |
| Academia | 4 |
| Police Forces | 4 |
| Awareness campaign representative | 1 |
| Research agency | 1 |
| Data providers | 6 |

A2.5 Users were satisfied that the statistics meet their needs and are clearly presented, comprehensive and accessible. Some users felt that there was a lack of context provided within the publications, which is an important part of ensuring that the statistics are correctly interpreted. A key concern that was raised related to consistency in the way that police forces record information, and the definitions that are used. This concern over differences in recording practices was echoed by data suppliers.

A2.6 Whilst the majority of data suppliers reported no issues with providing the requested data, some did highlight that the process could be laborious and time consuming. This contrast in opinion could reflect the fact that police forces use different recording systems. Data suppliers felt that the Scottish Government provided good guidance and instructions.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

