

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

## Statistics on Vehicles

*(produced by the Department for Transport)*

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

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

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

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

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

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## ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# 1 Summary of findings

## 1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports<sup>1</sup> prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*<sup>2</sup>. The Act requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*<sup>3</sup>. The report covers statistics on vehicles produced by the Department for Transport (DfT), reported in:

- *Vehicle Licensing Statistics*<sup>4</sup>;
- *Vehicles registered for the first time* monthly statistics<sup>5</sup>;
- *Licensed vehicles* quarterly statistics<sup>6</sup>;
- *Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) Evasion*<sup>7</sup>; and
- *Motorcycling Statistics*<sup>8</sup>.

1.1.2 The Act also allows Ministers to request an assessment of other official statistics in order for them to gain National Statistics status. The assessment of *MOT Non-Compliance*<sup>9</sup> in this report is in response to such a request.

1.1.3 This report is shorter than normal. In particular, section 3 adopts an ‘exception reporting’ approach – it includes text only to support the Requirements made to strengthen compliance with the *Code* and Suggestions made to improve confidence in the production, management and dissemination of these statistics. This abbreviated style of report reflects the Head of Assessment’s consideration of aspects of risk and materiality<sup>10</sup>. The Assessment team nonetheless assessed compliance with all parts of the *Code of Practice* and has commented on all those in respect of which some remedial action is recommended.

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

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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.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/datatablespublications/vehicles/licensing/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www2.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/datatablespublications/vehicles/licensing/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/datatablespublications/vehicles/licensing/all-stock/veh0101.xls>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/datatablespublications/vehicles/excisedutyevasion/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/datatablespublications/vehicles/licensing/latest/mccomp.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/datatablespublications/vehicles/motnoncomp/mot2007and2008>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/guidance-about-assessment/criteria-for-deciding-upon-the-format-of-an-assessment-report.pdf>

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

## 1.2 Decision concerning designation as National Statistics

1.2.1 The Statistics Authority judges that the statistics covered by this report are readily accessible, produced according to sound methods and managed impartially and objectively in the public interest, subject to any points for action in this report. The Statistics Authority confirms that the statistics published in the outputs listed in paragraph 1.1.1 are designated as National Statistics, and has determined that those listed in paragraph 1.1.2 can be designated as new National Statistics products, subject to DfT 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 DfT engages with the main users of vehicles statistics via the Transport Statistics User Group (TSUG)<sup>11</sup> and bilateral meetings with known users. The majority of people who responded to the consultation carried out as part of this Assessment made positive comments about their experience of contacting DfT. DfT has not, however, documented or published information about the use, or users' experiences, of the statistics. DfT is planning changes to its vehicles statistics, namely to *Motorcycling Statistics* and *VED Evasion Statistics*. DfT has not consulted widely with users or published information about these proposed changes.

1.3.2 DfT's statistical releases contain little information about the quality of the statistics or the methods used to produce them. DfT has included the database used for *Vehicle Licensing Statistics* in its *Statement of Administrative Sources*<sup>12</sup>. DfT publishes tables in Excel format for re-use and analysis although these could be presented more clearly. *Vehicle Licensing Statistics* contains a good summary of the main messages and good explanations of the statistics accompanied by clear tables and charts. DfT does not provide any commentary about the monthly and quarterly statistics.

## 1.4 Detailed recommendations

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

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.tsug.org.uk/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www2.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/standardsreview/dftstatementofadminsources.html>

## 1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

- |                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| <b>Requirement 1</b> | Document the use made and users' experiences of vehicles statistics and ensure that users in the wider community can access this information (para 3.1).   |
| <b>Requirement 2</b> | Publish more details about the methods used in producing <i>Vehicle Licensing Statistics</i> , and the quality and reliability of the statistics in relation to their use (para 3.2).  |
| <b>Requirement 3</b> | Provide information to users about the comparability of these statistics with related statistics produced in Northern Ireland (para 3.3).  |
| <b>Requirement 4</b> | Consult and inform users about the changes being proposed to <i>Motorcycling Statistics</i> and publish information for users about the change to the roadside survey (para 3.4).  |
| <b>Requirement 5</b> | Improve the commentary in the monthly and quarterly statistical releases, for example: by including information about the context and likely uses of the statistics; by presenting the main messages to aid interpretation by non-expert users; and by including, or providing links to, appropriate metadata and related statistics (para 3.6). |
| <b>Requirement 6</b> | Ensure that these statistics can be accessed from the National Statistics Publication Hub (para 3.7).  |



## 2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 DfT has published *Vehicle Licensing Statistics* since 1954. The statistics are based on data on vehicle registration marks collected by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency<sup>13</sup> (DVLA). The data are collected for operational monitoring and tracking of vehicles and payment of Vehicle Excise Duty (VED). Monthly statistics on vehicle registrations and quarterly statistics on licensed vehicles are also compiled from this database. DfT publishes the statistics for Great Britain.
- 2.2 *VED Evasion Statistics* are based on DfT's roadside survey. This annual survey is carried out in June each year and records around 1.5 million registration marks from 256 sites across the UK, using Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR). These are then compared to DVLA records of licensed vehicles to estimate the number of vehicles being driven without a licence. *VED Evasion Statistics* has been published since 1999; it is published in December each year. The *MOT Non-Compliance Statistics* are compiled in the same way, by comparing the records of registration marks from the roadside survey to records of vehicles with a valid MOT. DfT published these statistics for the first time in 2009 and intends to publish them annually from 2011 if the data are available and of suitable quality.
- 2.3 *Motorcycling Statistics* is an annual compendium publication compiling statistics from a variety of administrative and survey sources, such as DVLA's Vehicle Information Database, the National Travel Survey, and DfT's road casualty and road traffic statistics. DfT is planning to discontinue this compendium from 2011 although the statistics will still be available on DfT's website.
- 2.4 DfT's vehicles statistics are used by DfT for a variety of purposes, such as to provide an indication of transport and economic trends and to monitor spending in the motor trade. The statistics also allow users to monitor the level of emissions caused by vehicles on the roads. Other users include academics, for research on trends in spending, and local authorities for transport and road planning. The motor industry uses the statistics to monitor trends in spending on motor vehicles. DfT sends data to the European Environment Agency on the number of vehicles and on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions under Regulation (EC) 443/2009<sup>14</sup>. Users of *MOT Non-Compliance Statistics* also include road safety experts and the police.
- 2.5 DfT staff costs to produce the statistical releases on vehicles statistics are estimated to be around £170,000 per year. It cost DfT around £200,000 to carry out the roadside survey in 2011. DfT told the Assessment team that they are investigating carrying out the roadside survey every two years from 2012, depending on the 2011 results, which will reduce annual costs to around £125,000.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.dft.gov.uk/dvla/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2009:140:0001:0015:EN:PDF>

### 3 Assessment findings

- 3.1 DfT engages with users of vehicles statistics mainly via the TSUG (see paragraph 1.3.1) and in bilateral meetings with known users, such as the DVLA, the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency<sup>15</sup> (VOSA) and the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders<sup>16</sup> (SMMT). TSUG has a wide membership, including representatives from business, interest groups and academia. However it is not possible for other users to access information discussed at TSUG. DfT has not documented the use made or users' experiences of the statistics elsewhere and does not contact users in the wider community to gather their views. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DfT should document the use made and users' experiences of vehicles statistics and ensure that users in the wider community can access this information<sup>17</sup> (Requirement 1). We suggest that in meeting this Requirement, DfT refer to the Authority's Monitoring Brief, *The Use Made of Official Statistics*<sup>18</sup>.
- 3.2 DfT compiles the annual, quarterly and monthly vehicles statistics from administrative data held by DVLA. DfT publishes *Vehicle and Licensing Statistics: Notes and Definitions*<sup>19</sup> alongside *Vehicle Licensing Statistics* with information about the source, definitions, historical changes and some information about quality – such as the underestimation of licensed stock at the end of the year due to vehicles with seasonal licences. However this could usefully be expanded to include details of how data are collected by the DVLA, how the statistics are compiled, the quality assurance of the data, and any shortcomings of the statistics in relation to their use. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DfT should publish more details about the methods used in producing *Vehicle Licensing Statistics*, and the quality and reliability of the statistics in relation to their use<sup>20</sup> (Requirement 2). DfT could, for example, expand the *Vehicle and Licensing Statistics: Notes and Definitions* document, and link to this and the *Statement of Administrative Sources* from the statistical releases. DfT documents the methods used for, and the quality of, the roadside survey and *VED Evasion Statistics* and *MOT Non-Compliance Statistics*.
- 3.3 *Vehicle Licensing Statistics* presents statistics for GB only. DfT receives data from Northern Ireland to compile the UK data sent to Eurostat. It does not publish these alongside the GB data although the team told us that it is currently investigating whether it can do so in the future. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DfT should provide information to users about the comparability of these statistics with related statistics produced in Northern Ireland<sup>21</sup> (Requirement 3).
- 3.4 DfT told us that it is planning to discontinue *Motorcycling Statistics* due to a lack of resources. It told us that it had consulted with the main users about this and is planning to publish the same statistics as part of *Vehicle Licensing Statistics*.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.dft.gov.uk/vosa/>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.smmmt.co.uk/>

<sup>17</sup> In relation to Principle 1 Practices 1, 2 and 5 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-briefs/monitoring-brief-6-2010---the-use-made-of-official-statistics.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/datatablespublications/vehicles/licensing/technical/notes.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> In relation to Principle 4 Practices 1 and 2 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>21</sup> In relation to Principle 4 Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*

However DfT has not informed or consulted with users in the wider community, or potential users, of these statistics. Similarly, DfT is planning to reduce the frequency of the roadside survey and told the Assessment team that they will publish a note for users on the website later in 2011 once quality checks on the volatility of biennial data have been carried out. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DfT should consult and inform users about the changes being proposed to *Motorcycling Statistics* and publish information for users about the change to the roadside survey<sup>22</sup> (Requirement 4).

- 3.5 DfT recently published *Vehicle Licensing Statistics* in a new format, in line with the new standard DfT statistical release format. The new statistical release presents headline statistics and links to Excel tables on DfT's website. The Excel tables are available in a long list on DfT's website, under a number of headings that do not match those in the publication, which might make it difficult for infrequent users to find the table they need. We suggest that DfT review the structure and labelling of the Excel tables on its website to ensure that these are easily accessible.
- 3.6 The monthly and quarterly statistics are published only in Excel format, with no accompanying commentary or explanation of the statistics. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DfT should improve the commentary in these statistical releases, for example: by including information about the context and likely uses of the statistics; by presenting the main messages to aid interpretation by non-expert users; and by including, or providing links to, appropriate metadata and related statistics<sup>23</sup> (Requirement 5). In meeting this Requirement, DfT should consider the points detailed in Annex 2.
- 3.7 DfT has published one report on *MOT Non-Compliance Statistics*. It told us that it is now planning to publish annual statistics on MOT non-compliance. These statistics are not available via the National Statistics Publication Hub<sup>24</sup>. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DfT should ensure that these statistics can be accessed from the Publication Hub<sup>25</sup> (Requirement 6).

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<sup>22</sup> In relation to Principle 7 Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>23</sup> In relation to Principle 8 Practices 1, 2 and 4 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/travel-transport/roads/vehicles/index.html>

<sup>25</sup> In relation to Protocol 2 Practice 3 of the *Code of Practice*

## Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to the vehicles statistics published by DfT, 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** In meeting Requirement 1, refer to the Authority’s Monitoring Brief, *The Use Made of Official Statistics* (para 3.1).

**Suggestion 2** Review the structure and labelling of the Excel tables on its website to ensure that these are easily accessible (para 3.5).

## **Annex 2: Compliance with the Standards for Statistical Releases**

- A2.1 In October 2010, the Statistics Authority issued a statement on *Standards for Statistical Releases*<sup>26</sup>. Whilst this is not part of the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*, the Authority regards it as advice that will promote both understanding and observation of the *Code*. In relation to the statistical releases associated with statistics on vehicles, this annex comments on compliance with the statement on standards.
- A2.2 In implementing any Requirements of this report (at paragraph 1.5) which relate to the content of statistical releases, we encourage the producer body to apply the standards as fully as possible.

### **Appropriate identification of the statistics being released**

- A2.3 The releases all identify the period covered by the statistics and the coverage (GB). The National Statistics logo is included on the front cover of *Vehicle Licensing Statistics* and *Motorcycling Statistics* but not on *VED Evasion Statistics* or on the monthly or quarterly tables. This is due to an error in the production of the PDF version of the release. All of the publications identify the originating department. The contact details for the responsible statistician is given on the front page of *Vehicle Licensing Statistics* and *Motorcycling Statistics* and a telephone number to the statistical team is given in the other publications. *Vehicle Licensing Statistics*, *VED Evasion Statistics*, *MOT Non-Compliance Statistics* and *Motorcycling Statistics* include a brief outline of how the statistics are produced and the content of the publications. *VED Evasion Statistics* and *MOT Non-Compliance Statistics* contain a summary of the key statistics but do not include an introduction to what is contained in the releases in terms of subjects discussed. The monthly and quarterly tables are not accompanied by any commentary. All of the releases contain new statistics. DfT does not make it clear in *Vehicle Licensing Statistics* how the monthly and quarterly figures relate to those in the annual publication.

### **Include commentary that is helpful to the non-expert and presents the main messages in plain English.**

- A2.4 All of the releases are accompanied by a list of around ten bullet points which identify the key messages. The language used is straightforward and technical terms are not used. *Vehicle Licensing Statistics* and *Motorcycling Statistics* are the only two releases covered by this assessment to include additional commentary alongside the bullet points highlighting key messages. This commentary is clear but tends to describe the changes over the period without any additional explanation. Some graphs and tables are used to illustrate trends, although no explanation is given about why the statistics are important and how they are likely to be used, for example the collection of figures on *VED Evasion Statistics* and *MOT Non-Compliance Statistics* and implications for government revenue. The releases do not link to related statistics that could help users to put the statistics into context.

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-releases.html>

## **Use language that is impartial, objective and professionally sound**

A2.5 The text is impartial and is evidence-based. As mentioned under paragraph A2.3, the text contains very few descriptive comments which give further detail about the wider context. Descriptions of trends and changes over the period are sound. Tables produced from the roadside survey include 95 per cent confidence limits. A short description of statistical and methodological uncertainty is included in *MOT Non-Compliance Statistics* and *VED Evasion Statistics*, but no examples are given to help users interpret the confidence intervals.

## **Include information about the context and likely uses**

A2.6 None of the releases contains an explanation of the policy context for these statistics. Confidence intervals are given in the releases based on data from the roadside survey. Information on quality is included in *VED Evasion Statistics* and *MOT Non-Compliance Statistics*. *Vehicle Licensing Statistics* includes a notes section although this contains very little information about the quality of the published statistics.

## **Include, or link to, appropriate metadata**

A2.7 *Motorcycling Statistics* contains a section at the back which includes links to information about the data sources used. *Vehicle Licensing Statistics* includes a notes section but little detailed information on methods used to produce the statistics. It does not link to further information in the *Vehicle Licensing Statistics: Notes and Definitions* document or the *Statement of Administrative Sources* for the data source. The monthly and quarterly tables do include a link to the *Notes and Definitions* document. *VED Evasion Statistics* and *MOT Non-Compliance Statistics* both include detailed sections on the survey design and methods. The statistics are for GB. No indication is given in any of the releases about comparability with data for Northern Ireland. Details to changes in definitions and/or methods are included in the *Vehicle Licensing Statistics: Notes and Definitions* document, such as details of changes to the vehicle taxation system which impact on the figures shown. Where revisions have been made to the figures, a link is given to a document which describes the changes to the figures in more detail.

## **Annex 3: Summary of assessment process and users' views**

A3.1 This assessment was conducted from March to July 2011.

A3.2 The Assessment team – Cathy Kruger and Catherine Barham – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of DfT in March. DfT provided evidence\* in March and May. The Assessment team met DfT during May 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**

A3.3 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.

A3.4 The Assessment team received 15 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Department for Transport	4
Other government departments	5
Local government	1
Interest group	3
Researcher	2

A3.5 The users and suppliers responding to our consultation were satisfied with the level of engagement and responsiveness of the producer team. The majority of users were happy with the presentation of the statistics. Several users noted that they would like more timely statistics and better commentary about the statistics presented. One user noted that more detail and breakdowns for alternative vehicle types would be useful.

### **Key documents/links provided**

DfT Organisational Written Evidence for Assessment\*  
Section 1 background information, including contact details for users  
Details of data quality metrics  
DfT organigram

\*Evidence relating to the specific outputs was provided verbally





