

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on Offender Management 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 set of statistics reported in the following National Statistics products, produced by the Scottish Government:

- *Prison Statistics Scotland*⁴
- *Prison Population Projections, Scotland*⁵; and
- *Criminal Justice Social Work Statistics, Scotland*⁶.

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 listed in section 1.1.1 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 December 2011.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

1.3.1 The Scottish Government provides valuable commentary that aids analysis and interpretation in the *Prison Population Projections* release. There is also good engagement with users of the *Criminal Justice Social Work Statistics (CJSW)*.

1.3.2 The Scottish Government could do more to engage with the users of the prison statistics. The commentary and analysis in the *Prison Population* and *CJSW* releases could be improved, and more information on the effect of the potential influences described in *Prison Projections* could be given to aid interpretation.

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

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/2010/12/15154652/0>

⁵ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/03/01104348/0>

⁶ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/12/13132528/0>

Assessment team considers essential to enable designation as National Statistics are listed in section 1.5. Other suggestions, which would improve the statistics and the service provided to users but which are not formally required for their designation, are listed at annex 1.

1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Requirement 1 | Investigate and document the needs of users, the use made of existing statistics and the types of decisions they inform (para 3.3) |
| Requirement 2 | Publish further details of the methods adopted for these statistics, and include explanations of why particular choices were made. In meeting this requirement, information about the quality of the statistical outputs should be included (para 3.8) |
| Requirement 3 | Ensure that users are consulted about any future changes to the crime coding classifications that will affect these statistics (para 3.12) |
| Requirement 4 | Report annually the estimated costs imposed on local authorities in supplying the aggregate return for <i>Criminal Justice Social Work Statistics</i> (para 3.16) |
| Requirement 5 | Provide more information in all releases on the quality and reliability of these statistics in relation to the range of potential uses, and improve the commentary and analysis in the <i>Prison Statistics Scotland</i> and <i>Criminal Justice Social Work Statistics</i> to aid user interpretation (para 3.21) |
| Requirement 6 | Review the format in which datasets are released to encourage re-analysis (para 3.23) |
| Requirement 7 | Include in the Statement of Administrative Sources the specific arrangements for using this administrative data for these statistics with a particular reference to arrangements for auditing the quality of the administrative data (para 3.29) |

2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 The Scottish Government produces a series of related bulletins that provide information on crime and justice in Scotland. The three sets of statistics included in this assessment are published annually by the Scottish Government and cover aspects of offender management in Scotland. The statistics are derived mainly from administrative data provided by the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) and local authorities in Scotland.
- 2.2 *Prison Statistics Scotland* presents information about the number of prisoners in Scotland. The release also presents contextual information on imprisonment rates for Scotland and various other countries, including the number of receptions⁷ to and liberations from prison, broken down by: age, gender, custody type, sentence length and main crime or offence. The prison statistics are derived from data held on SPS's information management system. These statistics are used by Community Justice Authorities⁸ to identify trends in the prison population and to monitor performance.
- 2.3 *Prison Population Projections, Scotland (Prison Projections)* presents annual projections of Scotland's prison population. The projections are calculated using the statistical data described above. The statistics are used by central and local government organisations (including SPS) to: plan for future service requirements; and monitor trends and performance within the criminal justice system. The statistics are also used for research by the academic community.
- 2.4 *Criminal Justice Social Work Statistics* presents statistics on community penalties in Scotland including: Social Enquiry Reports⁹ (SERs); Community Service Orders (CSO)¹⁰; Probation Orders (POs)¹⁰; Supervised Attendance Orders (SAOs)¹⁰, and Drug Treatment and Testing Orders (DTTOs). Data used to compile these statistics are derived from Local Authority Social Work management information systems. *Criminal Justice Social Work Statistics* include rates of community penalties per 10,000 of the population which are calculated using National Records of Scotland's¹¹ (NRS) mid-year population estimates for 16-70 year olds. The statistics are used by Community Justice Authorities and Community Health and Care partnerships to monitor trends in community sentencing and to plan for future demand. They are used by the Scottish Government to assist with the allocation of funding across Community Justice Authorities, and by academia for research.

⁷ Receptions refer to offenders who are entering custody in prison.

⁸ Community Justice Authorities were set up under the Management of Offenders etc Act 2005 to provide a coordinated approach to planning and monitoring the delivery of offender management services <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2006/04/03081953>

⁹ SER's provide information about the offender and their circumstances prior to sentencing. They are used to help courts decide how to deal with the case.

¹⁰ CSOs, POs and SAOs have recently been replaced by Community Payback Orders (CPOs) for crimes committed on or after 1 February <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Justice/public-safety/offender-management/offender/community/examples/payback>

¹¹ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/>

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 the offender management statistics through the Crime and Justice Committee within ScotStat¹², a network for users and providers of Scottish official statistics. The Committee has members from the Scottish Police Forces, academia and central and local government. The Committee holds six-monthly meetings and the minutes¹³ of these meetings are published on the Scottish Government's website.
- 3.2 Users of the CJSW statistics are consulted through the Review of Criminal Justice Social Work Statistics working group. Membership of the group consists of both data suppliers and users, including representatives of Scottish Government policy teams, local authority service managers and Community Justice Authority staff. The primary role of this group is to discuss and agree what data should be collected in the future for CJSW, in order to best meet the current and future needs of customers. The Scottish Government publishes the relevant agendas and minutes of the group meetings on the review's Sharepoint website¹⁴, a web based information sharing hub. There is also a wider stakeholder group consisting of all 32 local authority service managers and all Community Justice Authority Chief Officers. All key recommendations made by the main working group are shared with the wider stakeholder group for comment via ScotXed¹⁵. The group also discuss other issues relevant to the gathering of criminal justice social work data. The Scottish Government publishes the relevant agendas and minutes of the meetings on its website¹⁶.
- 3.3 The Scottish Government has consulted extensively with central government and local authority users of the CJSW statistics. The Scottish Government has not consulted as extensively with users of *Prison Statistics* and *Prison Population Projections*. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should investigate and document the needs of users, the use made of existing statistics and the types of decisions they inform¹⁷ (Requirement 1). In meeting this Requirement, we suggest the Scottish Government refer to the generic classes of use put forward in the Authority's Monitoring Brief: The Use Made of Official Statistics¹⁸.

¹² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/scotstat>

¹³ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice/scotstatcrime/meetings>

¹⁴ <https://www.scotxed.net/criminaljusticesw/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx>

¹⁵ <https://www.scotxed.net/criminaljusticesw/default.aspx>

¹⁶ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice/scotstatcrime/LASWSCJ>

¹⁷ In relation to Principle 1, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

¹⁸ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-briefs/index.html>

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

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

- 3.5 The Scottish Government publishes these statistics in an orderly manner. The statistics are presented impartially and objectively. They are available free of charge on the Scottish Government's website and can be accessed from the National Statistics Publication Hub.
- 3.6 The statistics team told us that it follows the Scottish Government's revisions policy¹⁹, published on its website. The releases contain brief information on the nature of revisions and corrections in the technical annexes. The Scottish Government also provides further detail for the CJSW statistics in additional datasets²⁰ published online. The Scottish Government told us that it continuously updates the additional online CJSW excel tables as and when new data become available. The team also told us that it is considering whether to update the statistics for *Prison Population* continuously in the future. A short note is included on the webpage that outlines the continuous nature of these tables. We suggest that the Scottish Government clearly indicate the nature of these additional online tables in the releases and provide an explanation as to why the data in the release may be different to the data presented in the online tables.

¹⁹<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/About/CPsonRevisionsCorrections/Q/EditMode/on/ForceUpdate/on>

²⁰<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice/Datasets/SocialWork/Q/forceupdate/on>

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.

- 3.7 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.

- 3.8 The Scottish Government has published summary documents that outline the suitability of the data sources used in the production of both prison statistics and the CJSW statistics²¹. These documents include short statements about the data sources, and the relevance and accuracy of the statistics. The 'notes' section in each of the releases also provides further basic information on the coherence with other published statistics and methods. The Assessment team considers that more details could be provided in relation to the methods adopted and the quality and accuracy of the data. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should publish further details of the methods adopted for these statistics, and include explanations of why particular choices were made. In meeting this requirement, information about the quality of the statistical outputs should be included²² (Requirement 2).
- 3.9 Most of the data used to produce *Prison Statistics* and *Prison Projections* come from existing administrative sources held by SPS. Each prison in Scotland provides SPS with prisoner level data which are then stored in an administrative database maintained by SPS. The prisons data are extracted as a 'snapshot' from the administrative system and sent to the Scottish Government. The producer team has a dedicated data manager for these statistics who is responsible for ensuring the integrity of the data transfer and the quality assurance of the data. The detailed level data allows substantial cross-checking and validation. The data manager is responsible for liaising with the prisons about any inconsistencies in the data. The Assessment team was told that the quality assurance of data, and a concerted effort to review previous data for accuracy, has resulted in an improved time series with few substantial revisions.
- 3.10 Each of Scotland's 32 local authorities provides the Scottish Government with aggregate data which are used to produce the CJSW statistics. The Scottish Government provides local authorities with detailed guidance to help them complete the return. The Scottish Government is currently consulting local authorities about plans to collect some of the data needed for the CJSW statistics through unit (i.e. order) level returns rather than an aggregated return that it expects to introduce from 2012. After this, the Scottish Government will review whether the remaining CJSW statistics should be collected at unit level.
- 3.11 *Prisons Statistics* includes comparisons with other UK countries and selected international countries; presented as the imprisonment rate per 100,000 population. The release notes that comparisons of the prison population in different countries should be treated with caution due to the different justice systems and recording rules in operation. The Assessment team regards this as a good example of enabling international comparisons, though we suggest

²¹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice/DataSource>

²² In relation to Principle 4, Practice 1 and 2 of the Code

that more information be provided to allow users to analyse the differences discussed between Scotland and the other countries.

- 3.12 Some users told us that the crime recording classifications used in these releases were inconsistent with those used in other releases, for example *Recorded Crime in Scotland*²³. The Scottish Government told us that it was aware of this and that it is collaborating with data provider agencies to review and simplify the crime categories currently in use. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should ensure that users are consulted about any proposed changes to the crime code classifications that are used for these statistics²⁴ (Requirement 3).
- 3.13 The team told us that it follows the Scottish Government's Quality Guidelines²⁵ and that staff are suitably trained in quality management. Draft releases are also shared with SPS and colleagues in Scottish Government as part of the quality assurance of these statistics.

²³ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice/PubRecordedCrime>

²⁴ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 1 and Protocol 1, Practice 7 of the Code

²⁵ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/About/QAGuide>

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 Scottish Government statisticians ensure the security of statistical processes that draw on administrative data by following a set of guidelines regarding the secure receipt, transmission, storage, access and disposal of data. Access to administrative data is only granted to authorised individuals who require it to carry out their work. Data are stored in secure, locked cabinets or in access-restricted electronic folders on the Scottish Government's computer system; permissions are regularly reviewed and updated.
- 3.15 The Scottish Government told us that it has spoken to the Local Authorities' Information Security group to discuss the development of the anticipated unit-level returns for CPOs, DTTOs and SERs to reassure that confidentiality is regarded as a very serious issue.

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 The Scottish Government has issued guidance to its statisticians about reporting compliance costs. CJSW data are provided to the Scottish Government by each local authority as an aggregate return. The Scottish Government does not publish data relating to the burden placed on local authorities in responding to this collection. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should report annually the estimated costs imposed on local authorities in supplying CJSW aggregate returns²⁶ (Requirement 4).

²⁶ In relation to Principle 6, Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

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.

- 3.17 The Scottish Government told us that adequate resources are available to produce these statistical outputs to the standards of the *Code*.
- 3.18 The work priorities for the offender management team are monitored as part of the branch's analytical work plan. The team holds monthly programme meetings to track progress and to allow any issues to be discussed. The Scottish Government's Chief Statistician has issued guidance²⁷ on the planning process, setting out requirements and suggesting that statistics teams publish plans and consult on them with stakeholders.
- 3.19 The Scottish Government has well-established procedures for recruiting statistics staff. It has a dedicated training and development intranet for statistics staff that includes a competence framework and provides information about learning and development opportunities.

²⁷ <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.

- 3.20 The Scottish Government publishes the offender management statistics in annual 'Statistical Bulletins'. These bulletins do not contain sufficient information about the quality and use of the statistics. For example, the releases could provide more information on how the statistics are used by government, local authorities and CJAs, amongst others.
- 3.21 The releases draw out some of the main messages from the results in the form of selected headline statistics. The *Prisons Projections* release includes useful commentary about the policy and operational context of these statistics and provides information on the main drivers of change and other potential influences to help aid user interpretation. The Assessment team regards this as good practice. More could be done to improve the presentation of the statistics in the *Prison Statistics Scotland* and *CJSW* releases. As part of the designation as National Statistics²⁸, the Scottish Government should provide more information in all releases on the quality and reliability of these statistics in relation to the range of potential uses, and improve the commentary and analysis in the *Prison Statistics Scotland* and *Criminal Justice Social Work Statistics* to aid user interpretation. (Requirement 5). In meeting this Requirement, the Scottish Government should consider the points noted in Annex 2.
- 3.22 The Scottish Government is considering whether to replace *Prison Statistics Scotland* and *Prisons Projections* with a single *Prison Population* publication to improve user interpretation. The Scottish Government told us that it will consult users about the timing and format of the new publication.
- 3.23 The Scottish Government provides users with useful summaries of the main trends on the Crime and Justice home page²⁹ of its website. The data tables included in the *Prison Statistics Scotland* and *CJSW* releases are published in Excel format to allow users to carry out further analysis, and additional tables are provided on request. 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 it was difficult to obtain earlier data on the Scottish Government website. In addition, the data tables included in *Prison Projections* are not published separately. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should review the format in which datasets are released to encourage re-analysis³⁰ (Requirement 6).
- 3.24 The Scottish Government uses an electronic records management system to store and manage corporate records. The Scottish Government sends copies of its statistical publications to the National Library of Scotland for archiving.

²⁸ In relation to Principle 8, Practices 1 and 2 of the *Code of Practice*

²⁹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice>

³⁰ 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.

3.25 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 The Scottish Government publishes these statistics on its website and on the National Statistics Publication Hub, in accordance with the timetable prepared by the branch. The Scottish Government's policy is to pre-announce the month of publication for statistical releases 12 months in advance and to pre-announce the date of release the month before. The list of forthcoming statistical publications³¹ is available on the Scottish Government website.
- 3.27 The Scottish Government provided us with lists of those who are granted pre-release access to the separate offender management statistics. We suggest that the Scottish Government publish records of those who have access to these statistics in their final form.

³¹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/03/18798>

Protocol 3: The use of administrative sources for statistical purposes

Administrative sources should be fully exploited for statistical purposes, subject to adherence to appropriate safeguards.

- 3.28 The Scottish Government produces the prisons statistics using administrative data that are provided by SPS. The data are transferred to the Scottish Government via electronic data collection.
- 3.29 The Scottish Government has published a Statement of Administrative Sources³² which includes information about the administrative data available to it. This identifies a list of all administrative sources currently used in the production of 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 the Statement of Administrative Sources the specific arrangements for using this administrative data for these statistics with a particular reference to arrangements for auditing the quality of the administrative data³³ (Requirement 7).

³²<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/About/StatementAdminSources/Q/EditMode/on/ForceUpdate/on>

³³ 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 offender management statistics, in the interest of the public good. These are not formally required for designation, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

- | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Suggestion 1 | Refer to the generic classes of use put forward in the Authority's Monitoring Brief: The Use Made of Official Statistics (para 3.3) |
| Suggestion 2 | Clearly indicate the nature of the additional online tables in the releases and provide an explanation as to why the data may be different that presented in the online tables (para 3.6) |
| Suggestion 3 | Provide more information to allow users to analyse the differences discussed between Scotland and other countries (para 3.11) |
| Suggestion 4 | Publish records of those who have access to the statistics in their final form (para 3.27) |

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*³⁴. 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 Scottish Offender Management statistics, 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 titles of all releases include the period to which the statistics relate and the geographical coverage is included in the title for *Prison Statistics Scotland* and for *Scottish Prison Population Projections*. The geographic coverage of Criminal Justice Social Work Statistics is included in the introduction. National Statistics headings and logos are included in all releases. All releases clearly identify the originating department and include the contact details for the responsible statistician. The releases include a contents page and an introduction that describes what is covered. All of the releases contain a range of previously published data along with new data from the year of the most recent population.

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

- A2.4 *Prison Statistics Scotland* and *Criminal Justice Social Work Statistics* both include a summary that identifies the main messages. *Scottish Prison Population Projections* does not include a summary; however the release begins with a section that identifies the main messages of the most recent statistics. The language used in the releases is mostly straightforward and clear. All releases include some technical terms, for example the use of the terms 'reception' and 'remand' in *Prison Population Projections*. These terms are not explained in a footnote or in the Annex and their meaning may not be immediately obvious to all users and potential users of the statistics. *Prison Population Projections* includes a good explanation of the statistics and a narrative that clearly illustrates the main messages. *Prison Statistics Scotland* and *Criminal Justice Social Work Statistics* both include an explanation of the statistics that describes the change in the statistics over time, however these releases do not provide the same quality of narrative that is evident in *Prison Population Projections*. None of the releases clearly specify why the statistics are important, to whom, and for what purposes they are likely to be used.

³⁴ <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. All releases contain descriptive statements that are consistent with the statistics. The text includes useful and professionally sound comments on changes, patterns and trends.

Include information about the context and likely uses

A2.6 The *Prison Population Projections* commentary includes useful information about the political context in which the statistics have been collected and identifies how recent policy may have influenced the statistics presented in the release. This provides users with a helpful context in which to interpret the statistics. The commentaries in *Criminal Justice Social Work Statistics* and *Prison Statistics Scotland* could be improved to provide users with a better understanding of the policy or operational context within which the statistics have been collected. It would be useful if the releases contained more information about the quality and use of the statistics, such as comparisons between previous prison projections and the current population statistics. The releases could also provide more information on how the statistics are used for example, by government, local authority and CJA, amongst others, and provide more detailed information on the quality and reliability of these statistics in relation to the range of potential uses.

Include, or link to, appropriate metadata

A2.7 *Criminal Justice Social Work Statistics* and *Prison Statistics Scotland* both have an Annex which includes information about the data sources used to compile the statistics. It is not clear from within the *Prison Population Projections* release which data sources have been used to compile the statistics. *Prison Population Projections* includes a detailed methods section which explains how the projections are calculated and why separate projections are not calculated for small populations e.g. female offenders. The *Prison Populations Projections* release could be improved by explaining more prominently the difference between projections based on historical trends and forecasts that model possible changes. The Annexes to *Criminal Justice Social Work Statistics* and *Prison Statistics Scotland* both include some information on the methods used to compile the statistics; however there is scope to improve the clarity of information provided on methods. No specific comments are made in any of the releases about comparability of the figures. The Annexes to *Criminal Justice Social Work Statistics* and *Prison Statistics Scotland* both include some information on changes to the definitions and categories of the source data; however no quantified comparisons are made. There is scope to improve the level of detail provided about changes to definitions or methods, to enable users to see more clearly the possible impact of changes on the statistics. The Annex to *Criminal Justice Social Work Statistics* includes a note explaining that changes to the statistics are highlighted at the time of change, but not in future releases. *Prison Population Projections* and *Prison Statistics Scotland* do not refer to revisions that might be made to the statistics.

Annex 3: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A3.1 This assessment was conducted from January to May 2011.

A3.2 The Assessment team – David Duncan-Fraser and Ruth James – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of the Scottish Government in January 2011. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 1 April 2011. The Assessment team subsequently met the Scottish Government 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 10 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Scottish Government	2
Local Authority	2
Community Health Partnership	1
Academia	5

A3.5 Some users told us that they had either been consulted by the Scottish Government or had otherwise interacted with the producer team. The majority of users were content that the statistics meet their needs. Some users told us that it would be desirable for Scottish Government to provide longer time series and provide data for lower level geographies. Some users felt that there was scope to improve the commentary and general presentation of the bulletins.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

