

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

## Statistics on Births, Infant Mortality and Teenage Conceptions in Wales

*(produced by the Welsh 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 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 the set of statistics reported in *Births and Infant Mortality Statistics Wales*<sup>4</sup> and *Teenage Conceptions in Wales*<sup>5</sup>, produced by the Welsh Government.
- 1.1.2 Section 3 of this report 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>6</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.
- 1.1.3 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 *Births and Infant Mortality Statistics Wales* and *Teenage Conceptions in Wales* are designated as National Statistics, subject to the Welsh Government implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by April 2012.

## 1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.3.1 The producer team has a good understanding of who uses the statistics within the Welsh Government and the NHS, and the ways in which they are used; however, this is not well documented. The Welsh Government also engages with non-government users through wider maternity and child health

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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://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health2011/110309/?lang=en>

<sup>5</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health2010/101216/?lang=en>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/guidance-about-assessment/criteria-for-deciding-upon-the-format-of-an-assessment-report.pdf>

stakeholder groups; however, it is not clear that the Welsh Government understands how the statistics are used by these users, and again this is not well documented.

1.3.2 The Welsh Government provides links within the statistical releases to information about methods and quality published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). There is scope for the Welsh Government to provide more information about the strengths and limitations of the statistics in relation to potential uses.

1.3.3 The Welsh Government makes good use of statistics already in the public domain by repackaging them into products to meet its users' needs. The presentation of graphs and tables, and the supporting commentary could be improved.

#### **1.4 Detailed recommendations**

1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that the Welsh 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**

<b>Requirement 1</b>	Take steps to develop a greater understanding of the use made of the statistics, publish the relevant information and assumptions, and use them to better support the use of the statistics (para 3.1).
<b>Requirement 2</b>	Prepare a plan for engaging with users of births, infant mortality and teenage conceptions statistics beyond those already known to the Welsh Government, and make this plan known (para 3.2).
<b>Requirement 3</b>	Confirm that in future a statement explaining the nature and extent of revisions will be provided at the same time that the statistics are released. In meeting this requirement, Welsh Government should indicate more precisely the revisions to the statistics that have been made by ONS. (para 3.3).
<b>Requirement 4</b>	Improve the signposting to specific issues within the information about the quality of the births, infant mortality and teenage conception statistics, published by ONS, including strengths and limitations in relation to use; and ensure that users are informed of all main sources of error and bias (para 3.4).

**Requirement 5**

Document, or provides links to, all the confidentiality and disclosure control procedures used in producing these statistics (para 3.6).

**Requirement 6**

Improve the commentary in the releases so that it aids user interpretation of the statistics (para 3.7).

## 2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 *Births and Infant Mortality Statistics Wales* presents statistics on births and fertility rates for Wales, as well as live births and stillbirths by age of mother and by weight of baby. It also presents statistics on infant mortality in Wales and selected statistics by Welsh Unitary Authority (UA). Most of these statistics<sup>7</sup>, are first published by ONS although some of the ONS tables are available only for England and Wales combined. The Welsh Government also provides statistics for the other countries of the UK as context. The release also presents statistics compiled from tables produced by ONS for the NHS, which are not published elsewhere. The annual release was first published in May 2007 to provide key statistics for Wales. The Welsh Government also publishes related statistics in two other releases: *Maternity Statistics, Wales: Method of Delivery*<sup>8</sup> which will be assessed in 2012; and *Births in Wales: Data from the National Community Child Health Database*<sup>9</sup> (NCCHB) which are official statistics<sup>10</sup> and do not have National Statistics status.
- 2.2 The births and infant mortality statistics are used within the Welsh Government to monitor key health outcomes and the potential pressure on health service provision. As an indicator of overall health and of health inequality, infant mortality is used to monitor the success of the Welsh Government strategies, such as *Our Healthy Future*<sup>11</sup> and as a Sustainable Development Indicator<sup>12</sup>. In September 2011, the Welsh Government published *A Strategic Vision for Maternity Services in Wales* which has established an All Wales Maternity Services Implementation Group. One subgroup of this, which the producer team will be a part of, will review the statistics currently available in order to improve the collection, analysis and use of maternity information.
- 2.3 The Welsh Government attends the twice-yearly Maternity and Child Health Information Exchange meetings, which is a subgroup of the Royal Statistical Society's Health Statistics User Group<sup>13</sup>. The subgroup includes representatives from ONS, the Department of Health, the NHS Information Centre, and other Devolved Administrations, as well as organisations concerned with maternal and child health, for example the Centre for Maternal and Child Enquiries<sup>14</sup> (CMACE) and BirthChoiceUK<sup>15</sup>, and academics. The group discusses latest developments in methodology and provides a forum within which plans for new statistics can be reviewed.
- 2.4 *Teenage Conceptions in Wales* presents rates of teenage conceptions for Wales and its Unitary Authorities by different age groups, as well as comparisons with England and its regions. Statistics on teenage conceptions

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/characteristics-of-birth-1--england-and-wales/2010/index.html>

<sup>8</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health2011/110223/?lang=en>

<sup>9</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health2010/1007072/?lang=en>

<sup>10</sup> <http://statisticsauthority.gov.uk/national-statistician/types-of-official-statistics/index.html>

<sup>11</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/ocmo/healthy/?lang=en>

<sup>12</sup> Health inequalities indicator 19a: <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/publications/sustain11/?lang=en>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.rss.org.uk/site/cms/contentviewarticle.asp?article=1043>

<sup>14</sup> <http://cemach.interface-test.com/Home.aspx>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.birthchoiceuk.com/BirthChoiceUKFrame.htm?http://www.birthchoiceuk.com/AboutWebsite.htm>

terminated by abortion in Wales and England are also presented. The statistics<sup>16</sup> are first published by ONS, although these are generally not at the level of detail required by users in Wales. The annual release was first published in December 2006 to provide key statistics for Wales and UAs within Wales in the context of the statistics for England.

- 2.5 Statistics on teenage conceptions are used by the Welsh Government as outcome indicators for the *Sexual Health And Wellbeing Action Plan for Wales, 2010-2015*<sup>17</sup> as well as being used to monitor the success of strategies such as *Our Healthy Future* on reducing health inequality.
- 2.6 The Welsh Government estimates that the production of the two releases costs £2,000.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/quart-conc-to-women-und-18/q2-2010/index.html>

<sup>17</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/improvement/index/sexualhealth/?lang=en>

### 3 Assessment findings

- 3.1 The Welsh Government engages with users through the Welsh Statistical Liaison Committee<sup>18</sup> and the Welsh Health Analysts Network – although this network has now dissolved, the Welsh Government still uses the former membership list as a circulation list. The producer team also participates in the NCCHD Steering and Expert Groups. The Expert Group has a broad membership including academics and third sector organisations, as well as representatives from the Welsh Government and NHS Wales. Although the Welsh Government told us that the members of these groups are informed of the publication of the statistics, there is no evidence that they have been consulted about the quality or usefulness of them. The Welsh Government has a good understanding of the main uses of the statistics within government and the NHS, but has not documented this. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Government should take steps to develop a greater understanding of the use made of the statistics, publish the relevant information and assumptions, and use them to better support the use of the statistics<sup>19</sup> (Requirement 1). We suggest that the Welsh Government refer to the types of use put forward in the Statistics Authority’s Monitoring Brief, *The Use Made of Official Statistics*<sup>20</sup> when documenting use.
- 3.2 The Welsh Government occasionally asks known users for their comments about the statistics, most recently in April 2011, but has received few responses. The Welsh Government also directs its users to relevant consultations run by ONS. The Welsh Government provides all users with the opportunity to provide feedback through its website, but does not actively seek to engage with users beyond those already known. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Government should prepare a plan for engaging with users of births, infant mortality and teenage conceptions statistics beyond those already known to the Welsh Government, and make this plan known<sup>21</sup> (Requirement 2).
- 3.3 The Welsh Government has published a revisions policy<sup>22</sup>. Revisions were made to some rates published in *Teenage Conceptions in Wales 2008* and a brief explanation was provided; these revisions were made by ONS as a result of revised mid-year population estimates. Revisions were also made to the Total Fertility Rate published in *Births and Infant Mortality Statistics Wales 2009*. While the revised figures were clearly identified within the tables, no explanation of the nature and extent of these revisions was provided; the Key Quality Information only states that “ONS has made some revisions to figures since they were last published.” As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Government should confirm that in future a statement explaining the nature and extent of revisions will be provided at the same time that the statistics are released<sup>23</sup> (Requirement 3). In meeting this requirement,

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<sup>18</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/liaison/?lang=en>

<sup>19</sup> In relation to Principle 1, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

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

<sup>21</sup> In relation to Principle 1, Practice 2 and Protocol 1, Practices 1 and 3 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>22</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/compliance/revisions/?lang=en>

<sup>23</sup> In relation to Principle 2, Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*

Welsh Government should indicate more precisely the revisions to the statistics that have been made by ONS.

- 3.4 Both releases include a section called Key Quality Information, but these provide only definitions and do not discuss aspects of quality such as reliability or accuracy; instead the Welsh Government provides links to relevant metadata published by ONS. The Welsh Government told us that it had experienced problems with the quality of birth weight data provided by hospitals in 2008 and that statistics about birth weight were not included in *Births and Infant Mortality Statistics Wales 2008*<sup>24</sup> as a result. The problem is not discussed in *Births and Infant Mortality Statistics Wales 2009* where the 2008 birth weight statistics were next published but is discussed in ONS's later Summary Quality Report<sup>25</sup>. The Welsh Government told us that many of the problems with birth weight data stem from the Connecting for Health system used in hospitals, which currently has no validation protocols<sup>26</sup> to check any extreme values being entered. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Government should improve the signposting to specific issues within the information about the quality of the births, infant mortality and teenage conception statistics, published by ONS, including strengths and limitations in relation to use; and ensure that users are informed of all main sources of error and bias<sup>27</sup> (Requirement 4).
- 3.5 *Births and Infant Mortality Statistics Wales 2009* presents comparable births and infant mortality statistics for constituent UK countries as well as the UK as a whole. *Teenage Conceptions in Wales 2008* presents some comparable statistics for England and provides a link to teenage conceptions statistics for Scotland. *Births and Infant Mortality Statistics Wales* lists the producers of the statistics for the other countries of the UK, but does not include links to relevant web pages, and so it is not straightforward to find these statistics. A more specific link would be particularly useful with reference to ONS's statistics given the range of publications produced by ONS on births and infant mortality. In addition, the statistics in *Births and Infant Mortality Statistics Wales* are based on registrations; statistics on births compiled from data provided by hospitals are published separately<sup>28</sup> by the Welsh Government, but this is not referred to in *Births and Infant Mortality Statistics Wales*. We suggest that the Welsh Government include links in its releases to sources of comparable statistics.
- 3.6 The Welsh Government publishes births, stillbirths and teenage conceptions statistics on the StatsWales database at small geographical levels, necessitating occasional suppression to maintain confidentiality. The producer team told us that it follows the Welsh Government's procedures<sup>29</sup> on confidentiality and disclosure control for general health statistics and ONS's procedures<sup>30</sup> in relation to births and deaths statistics. The Welsh Government

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<sup>24</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health2010/100330/?lang=en>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/quality/quality-information/social-statistics/index.html>

<sup>26</sup> Minimum values and warnings are planned for future and maternity staff have been notified about the problem.

<sup>27</sup> In relation to Principle 4, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>28</sup> See footnote 8

<sup>29</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/compliance/confidential/?lang=en>

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/best-practice/disclosure-control-policy-for-birth-and-death-statistics/index.html>

does not provide any information about ONS's procedures on its website, on StatsWales, or within *Births and Infant Mortality Statistics Wales*. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Government should document, or provides links to, all the confidentiality and disclosure control procedures used in producing these statistics<sup>31</sup> (Requirement 5).

- 3.7 The releases do not contain any information about the policy or operational context within which the statistics are used. Commentary is limited to describing increases and decreases; some noteworthy changes are not commented upon at all. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Government should improve the commentary in the releases so that it aids user interpretation of the statistics<sup>32</sup> (Requirement 6). We suggest that in meeting this requirement the Welsh Government should consider the points detailed in annex 2.

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<sup>31</sup> In relation to Principle 5, Practice 4 of the *Code of Practice*

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

## Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to the Welsh Government's statistics on births, infant mortality and teenage conceptions, 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 types of use put forward in the Statistics Authority's Monitoring Brief, *The Use Made of Official Statistics*<sup>33</sup> when documenting use (para 3.1).

**Suggestion 2** Include links in its releases to sources of comparable statistics (para 3.5).

**Suggestion 3** Consider the points detailed in annex 2, in seeking to improve the statistical releases (para 3.7).

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<sup>33</sup> See footnote 19

## Annex 2: Compliance with Standards for Statistical Releases

- A2.1 In October 2010, the Statistics Authority issued a statement on *Standards for Statistical Releases*<sup>34</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 compliance with the *Code*. In relation to the statistical releases associated with births, infant mortality and teenage conceptions 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 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 the releases give the coverage of the statistics and the year to which the statistics relate. The releases do not state specifically that they are annual releases but refer to annual data in the summary quality report for births.
- A2.4 The releases use the standard National Statistics logos, give the name of the publishing organisation and the name and contact details of the lead statistician. The releases give a brief outline of the content of the release, although the outlines do not contain details of the subjects discussed. There are no contents lists that would help users locate information about methods, quality, and definitions, or find details about the sections, tables and charts within the releases. *Births and Infant Mortality Statistics Wales* contains a list of the relevant tables which can be downloaded from StatsWales.

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

- A2.5 Each release highlights key findings on its first page. The language used in the releases is straightforward although it would be useful to explain the concept of a Welsh birth or death in the introduction as this could be defined in a number of different ways. The concepts of stillbirth, infant mortality and teenage conception are explained in the text and in the Key Quality Information section of the releases. *Births and Infant Mortality Statistics Wales* includes statistics on perinatal and neonatal mortality but does not explain why three different measures of mortality are presented.
- A2.6 The releases include charts and line graphs which illustrate trends over time, and compare areas, and the commentary tends to report a selection of the statistics. Improvements could be made to graphs and tables in both releases. The charts are not referenced in the text, and it is not clear why the time periods have been chosen. The releases do not include any commentary explaining trends over time or variations in statistics between areas. There is

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-releases.html>

no commentary about the general upward trend of birth weights 'not stated', as shown in Table 4 of *Births and Infant Mortality Statistics Wales 2009*; furthermore, the statistics on stillbirths by weight of baby show a strong relationship but the Welsh Government does not comment upon this. There is also little explanation of how statistics from hospitals may differ from registered births, particularly in areas along the England / Wales border.

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

- A2.7 The text is impartial and objective throughout and does not endorse or criticise government policy.
- A2.8 The presentation of the statistics could be improved by ensuring that the charts have a clear purpose and reflect the key messages. For example, Chart 6 in *Births and Infant Mortality Statistics Wales 2009* illustrates trends in live births for six groups of birth weight. This illustrates trends in two categories of low birth weight, but it is not clear what the purpose is of including the other four groups. Table 7 in *Births and Infant Mortality Statistics Wales 2009* illustrates the trend in stillbirth rates since 1993, which provides useful context to the release but this is included later in the release and is not referred to in the text.

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

- A2.9 The releases contain no information about the uses of the statistics, although they list organisations and groups which may use the statistics. The Key Quality Information in each release includes information about definitions, but not other aspects of quality. The Welsh Government publishes another release, *Births in Wales: Data from the National Community Child Health Database*, which includes statistics on births from an alternative source. This context is not included in *Births and Infant Mortality Statistics Wales*, although it could potentially be important to users of these statistics to be aware of the alternative sources.

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

- A2.10 The releases state that ONS is the source of the statistics, and *Births and Infant Mortality Statistics Wales* includes links to the births metadata. *Teenage Conceptions in Wales* includes links to equivalent data for Scotland and England but such links are not included in *Births and Infant Mortality Statistics Wales*.

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

A3.1 This assessment was conducted from August to November 2011.

A3.2 The Assessment team – Celia Macintyre and Rachel Beardsmore – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of the Welsh Government in August. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 6 September. The Assessment team subsequently met the Welsh Government during October 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 2 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Welsh Government	1
NHS Wales	1

A3.5 One user provided information about how the statistics are used within the Welsh Government, in particular the importance of teenage conception rates as an indicator of health inequalities. One user identified the lack of commentary identifying important trends in births to women aged under 17 and under 20 years.

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

Written Evidence for Assessment document

