

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

## Statistics on Scottish Businesses and Research and Development

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

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## ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* gives the UK Statistics Authority a statutory power to assess sets of statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*. Assessment will determine whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated as National Statistics.

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

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

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

Assessment reports typically provide an overview of any noteworthy features of the methods used to produce the statistics, and will highlight substantial concerns about quality.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# 1 Summary of findings

## 1.1 Introduction

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

- *Scottish Corporate Sector Statistics*<sup>4</sup> (SCSS);
- *Scottish Annual Business Statistics*<sup>5</sup> (SABS);
- *Gross Expenditure on Research and Development Scotland*<sup>6</sup> (GERDS);  
and
- *Business Enterprise Research and Development Scotland*<sup>7</sup> (BERDS).

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>8</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 listed in paragraph 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 July 2012.

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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.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Business/Corporate>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Business/SABS>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Business/RD>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Business/RD>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/guidance-about-assessment/criteria-for-deciding-upon-the-format-of-an-assessment-report.pdf>

### 1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.3.1 The Scottish Government engages with users through a variety of means, but could do more to document the use made of the statistics outside government. The statistics team within the Scottish Government is responsive to data requests and enquiries. The business publications (*SCSS* and *SABS*) include extensive sections on methods.
- 1.3.2 There is a need to improve the commentary and analyses in all the publications. *SABS* is not published until 20 months after the reference period, which limits its value to users. The differences between the *SCSS* and *SABS* outputs could be better explained to enable users to choose the most appropriate output for their needs.

### 1.4 Detailed recommendations

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

### 1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

<b>Requirement 1</b>	Publish more information about the uses made of these statistics (para 3.1).
<b>Requirement 2</b>	Investigate whether <i>Scottish Annual Business Statistics</i> can be published more quickly after the reference period (para 3.2).
<b>Requirement 3</b>	Provide more information to <i>Scottish Annual Business Statistics</i> users about the quality of the underlying Annual Business Survey and how concerns about its quality are being addressed by the Office for National Statistics (para 3.3).
<b>Requirement 4</b>	Improve the commentary in all the publications so that it aids user interpretation of the statistics (para 3.4).
<b>Requirement 5</b>	Publish more information about the relationship between <i>Scottish Corporate Sector Statistics</i> and <i>Scottish Annual Business Statistics</i> and the distinct user needs that they address (para 3.5).

## 2 Subject of the assessment

### *Scottish Business Statistics*

- 2.1 The business statistics published in *Scottish Corporate Sector Statistics (SCSS)* and *Scottish Annual Business Statistics (SABS)* provide valuable information about the health of the Scottish economy and of particular sectors within it.
- 2.2 SCSS presents statistics about the number of businesses that operate in Scotland, broken down by categories, including Standard Industrial Classification<sup>9</sup> and company size, and by local authority area. It presents similar information for Scotland as the Department for Business Innovation and Skills (BIS) provides for the UK in *Business Population Estimates for the UK and Regions*<sup>10</sup> (*BPE*). *BPE* is the subject of a separate Assessment report<sup>11</sup> from the Authority. *SCSS* and *BPE* adopt different definitions of the private sector; *SCSS* includes the not-for-profit sector and employment agencies while *BPE* does not. The Scottish Government has described and published<sup>12</sup> information about the methodological differences between *BPE* and *SCSS*.
- 2.3 The *SCSS* statistics combine information about businesses registered for VAT and Pay As You Earn (PAYE) with an estimate of the un-registered business population in Scotland. The Inter-Departmental Business Register<sup>13</sup> (IDBR) which is maintained by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) is the main data source for registered businesses. *SCSS* is published annually in October and presents a snapshot of the estimated number of active Scottish businesses taken in March.
- 2.4 *SABS* presents statistics about employment, turnover, purchases, approximate Gross Value Added (GVA) and labour costs for businesses in Scotland. *SABS* covers approximately two thirds of the economy, excluding parts of agriculture, financial services and the public sector. It is best suited to the analysis of individual industries rather than the economy as a whole. The statistics are produced from the Annual Business Survey (ABS) conducted by ONS which publishes similar information for the UK in the *Annual Business Survey*<sup>14</sup>. Statistics in the Annual Business Survey are the subject of a separate Assessment report from the Authority<sup>15</sup>. The Scottish Government pays ONS to carry out a Scottish boost to the ABS to produce more reliable survey results for Scotland. *SABS* is published annually in August, 20 months after the reference period. It is published a few weeks after ONS publishes the headline regional ABS data.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/guide-method/classifications/current-standard-classifications/standard-industrial-classification/index.html>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.bis.gov.uk/analysis/statistics/business-population-estimates>

<sup>11</sup> Assessment report 187: *Statistics on UK Business Population and Demography*

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Business/Corporate/methchange>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/who-we-are/services/unpublished-data/business-data/idbr/index.html>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/abs/annual-business-survey/2010-provisional-results/index.html>

<sup>15</sup> Assessment report 180: *Statistics from the Annual Business Survey*



2.5 The Scottish Government uses these statistics to monitor the Scottish economy and to understand developments in the size, geographical spread and growth of businesses in different industry sectors in Scotland. *SABS* is the only source of information about GVA for all local authority areas in Scotland, and for those sectors within the economy covered by the survey. Local authorities use this information to monitor economic activity as part of their Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs)<sup>16</sup>. Businesses, academics and consultants use these statistics to analyse the performance of individual industries in Scotland, for example, the whisky and ship-building industries, and to make comparisons with performance in other parts of the UK.

#### *Scottish Research and Development (R&D) Statistics*

2.6 The R&D expenditure statistics published in *Gross Expenditure on Research and Development Scotland (GERDS)* and *Business Enterprise Research and Development Scotland (BERDS)* provide information about the flow of investment into R&D. R&D is seen as a key component of innovation that generates economic growth.

2.7 *GERDS* presents statistics about total expenditure on R&D for Scotland. The total expenditure is the aggregate of three separate components - R&D expenditure by business, by Higher Education and by Government (including Research Councils). ONS produces these statistics for the UK and publishes them in its UK-wide annual publication *Gross Expenditure on Research and Development*<sup>17</sup> (*GERD*) in March, 15 months after the reference period. The Scottish Government publishes *GERDS* a few weeks later, based on data provided by ONS.

2.8 *BERDS* presents statistics about expenditure and employment in R&D by businesses operating in Scotland. The statistics are sourced from the Business Enterprise R&D survey conducted by ONS. ONS publishes some headline statistics about business R&D for Scotland in its UK-wide annual publication *Business Enterprise Research and Development*<sup>18</sup> (*BERD*). The Scottish Government publishes more detailed statistics about Scottish business R&D expenditure and employment in *BERDS*, about 2 weeks after the ONS release. *BERDS* is published in November, 11 months after the reference period.

2.9 The Scottish Government uses the statistics to develop and monitor government policies on innovation and the economy and to monitor trends. *BERDS* statistics are frequently used as an indicator of innovative capacity. Local authorities use *BERDS* statistics to track their progress against their SOA Performance Indicators and Economic Development Frameworks<sup>19</sup>. Other national bodies, for example, Scottish Enterprise and the Scottish Funding Council, use R&D publications to analyse and compare expenditure by sector

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Government/local-government/delperf/SOA>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/rdit1/gross-domestic-expenditure-on-research-and-development/2009/index.html>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/rdit1/bus-ent-res-and-dev/2010/stb-berd-2010.html>

<sup>19</sup> [www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/278232/0083591.pdf](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/278232/0083591.pdf)

over time. *GERDS* is used to measure progress against the Scotland Performs National Indicator 'Increase research and development spending'<sup>20</sup>.

- 2.10 The Scottish Government estimated the costs of producing all four publications to be 1.75 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) statisticians. Other costs are estimated as being approximately £130k, of which £90k goes towards the Scottish boost of the ABS.

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms/indicator/research>

### 3 Assessment findings

- 3.1 The Scottish Government uses Scotstat,<sup>21</sup> a network for users and providers of official statistics for Scotland to consult users about these statistics. More than 550 members of Scotstat have registered an interest in business statistics in Scotland (as of November 2011) including users from central and local government, academics and researchers, consultants, students, the media and members of the public. The Scottish Government has been proactive in consulting users of these statistics over the last two years. It consulted users about the two R&D publications in Spring 2010, about SCSS in Autumn 2010 and about SABS in Spring 2011, with the findings published<sup>22 23 24</sup> on its website. These findings provide information about the uses made of these statistics, about the type of decisions they inform and about users' experiences of the statistical services. SCSS and SABS give some information about uses, and provide a link to where more information about comparable statistics within and outside Scotland may be found. BERDS and GERDS provide no information about the uses of these statistics. The majority of users responding to these surveys are from the government sector. The statistics team at the Scottish Government has held a series of consultation meetings with users in the creative industries, tourism, life sciences and research and development sectors. It has not published the outcomes of these consultations. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should publish more information about the uses made of these statistics<sup>25</sup> (Requirement 1). We suggest that the Scottish Government refer to the generic classes of use put forward in the Authority's Monitoring Brief, *The Use Made of Official Statistics*<sup>26</sup> in meeting this requirement. We further suggest that the Scottish Government refer in BERDS and GERDS to the weblinks detailing the uses made of these statistics.
- 3.2 SABS is usually published in August, 20 months after the reference period. Some users told us that this time lag reduced the usefulness of the statistics and that they would welcome more timely release of these statistics. The Scottish Government informed us that it does not receive the final data for these statistics from ONS until May, which is 17 months after the reference period. ONS is currently undertaking a review of the ABS and this may lead to a reduction in the lag between the collection of the data and the publication. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should investigate whether SABS can be published more quickly after the reference period<sup>27</sup> (Requirement 2).
- 3.3 Assessment report 180 *Statistics from the Annual Business Survey* produced by ONS identified a number of concerns about the quality of the statistics. These concerns are relevant to the statistics published in SABS by the Scottish

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/scotstat>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Business/scotstat/SABSFindingsReport>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Business/scotstat/findings>

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Business/scotstat/RDFindings>

<sup>25</sup> In relation to Principle 1, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-briefs/monitoring-brief-6-2010---the-use-made-of-official-statistics.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> In relation to Protocol 2, Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

Government. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should provide more information to *Scottish Annual Business Statistics* users about the quality of the underlying Annual Business Survey and how concerns about its quality are being addressed by ONS<sup>28</sup> (Requirement 3).

- 3.4 SCSS and SABS both include extensive background notes sections which provide additional information about these statistics, including some explanation about the methods that have been used to produce them. Both releases provide a summary of key points but little commentary and contextual information. GERDS and BERDS both provide concise background notes outlining methodology. These publications provide some commentary accompanied by graphs and charts. GERDS makes comparisons over time for Scotland and compares Scotland against some OECD countries and against other UK regions. BERDS makes some comparisons with other UK regions as well as highlighting aspects of the distribution of business expenditure on R&D across Scottish local authorities. These publications do not provide a separate summary of the key findings and headlines from the statistics. Some users who contacted us as part of the Assessment said that they would like to see more analysis in all the publications. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should improve the commentary in all the publications so that it aids user interpretation of the statistics<sup>29</sup> (Requirement 4). We suggest that in meeting this Requirement the Scottish Government should consider the points detailed in annex 2.
- 3.5 The Scottish Government has published a table<sup>30</sup> which describes some of the key differences between SCSS and SABS and when each should be used. SABS, for instance, details registered businesses only whereas SCSS details both registered and unregistered businesses. The Scottish Government does not draw attention to this information in the releases. A user who contacted us regarding this Assessment expressed concern about a lack of coherence between SCSS and SABS. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should publish more information about the relationship between SCSS and SABS and the distinct user needs that they address<sup>31</sup> (Requirement 5).
- 3.6 The releases clearly identify the producer organisation, but SCSS and SABS do not identify the name of the responsible statistician. The Scottish Government has written to the Authority giving an undertaking that SCSS and SABS will in future give the name of the contact for these statistics as well as the contact details.

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<sup>28</sup> In relation to Principle 4, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>29</sup> In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>30</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Business/SourcesandSuitability/KeyDifferences>

<sup>31</sup> In relation to Principle 8, Practice 4 of the *Code of Practice*

## Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

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

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|---------------------|---|
| <b>Suggestion 1</b> | Refer to the types of use put forward in the Statistics Authority's Monitoring Brief, <i>The Use Made of Official Statistics</i> when documenting use (para 3.1). |
| <b>Suggestion 2</b> | Refer in <i>BERDS</i> and <i>GERDS</i> to the weblinks detailing the uses made of these statistics (para 3.1).  |
| <b>Suggestion 3</b> | Consider the points detailed in annex 2, in seeking to improve the statistical releases (para 3.4).   |

## **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>32</sup>. While 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 statistics on Scottish businesses and research and development, 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 Each of the releases has a title that reflects the coverage and reference period of the statistics, although the title of SCSS does not immediately suggest what statistics it might cover which would be different to those in SABS. All of the releases use appropriate headings and logos for a National Statistics product. Contact details for the statistics teams are given in all publications. All releases include a contents page and a brief abstract of what the statistics cover at the head of the releases.

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

- A2.4 SCSS and SABS include summaries that outline the main findings but very little further commentary about the context of the statistics. Commentary in *BERDS* and *GERDS* takes the form of narrative paragraphs that state the main findings. The language used in all releases is mostly straightforward, with some explanation of technical terms within the main text. SABS is the only one of the four publications using maps, and both SCSS and SABS are heavily reliant on the use of tables.
- A2.5 SCSS should provide clearer guidance on what the term 'private sector' does and does not include.
- A2.6 SCSS does not expand on some of the salient aspects of the statistics, for example, there is no reference to the data indicating that the make-up of businesses by legal status appears to differ quite markedly between Scotland and the UK.

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

- A2.7 The commentary in each release is impartial and evidence-based.

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-releases.html>

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

- A2.8 *SCSS* and *SABS* lack information about the context of the statistics but do refer to the likely uses and give a weblink to more details about their uses. *BERDS* provides regional comparisons in the UK as well as Scottish local authority area comparisons. *GERDS* forms the basis of a national indicator and provides UK regional and international comparisons. Neither *BERDS* nor *GERDS* refers to the uses of the statistics. The publications say little about uses made by non-government users with the exception of uses by consultants.
- A2.9 *SABS* presents statistics for annual growth in GVA. The publication warns against quoting overall/ total growth rates from *SABS* given that significant sectors of the economy are not included. In the latest publication *SABS 2009* Table 1 shows an estimate of annual growth in total GVA, which appears to contradict the previous advice.

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

- A2.10 The releases and associated web pages include information about the sources and methods used to compile these statistics as well as information about how the methods and definitions relate to European/international concepts and classifications. Some of the weblinks to ONS quality documents in *SABS* and on the Scottish Business Statistics website do not take users to the specific documents.
- A2.11 Where there has been a change, for example, in the definitions of SIC codes between the 2003 and the 2007 definitions and the definitions of unregistered businesses, the Scottish Government informed users in advance of the publications about the changes.
- A2.12 Where the statistics are subject to revision clear explanations are given about when these are likely to be revised.

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

A3.1 This assessment was conducted from November 2011 to February 2012.

A3.2 The Assessment team – Iain Russell and Neil Jackson – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of the Scottish Government in November. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 25 November. The Assessment team subsequently met the Scottish Government during December 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 11 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Private	2
Local authorities	3
Scottish Government	2
Researchers	2
National bodies	2

A3.5 Points raised included:

- Users were happy with their contact with the Scottish Government statisticians.
- Some users said they would like to see more up-to-date statistics.
- Some of the users would like to see more, and better, analyses to help them understand the statistics.
- lack of coherence in respect to apparently similar statistics between SCSS and SABS.
- volatility of local data in SABS, particularly in areas with high proportions of small and unregistered businesses.

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

Written Evidence for Assessment document





