

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Fire Statistics

*(produced by the Department for Communities and
Local Government, the Welsh Government and 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*.

Contents

Section 1: Summary of findings

Section 2: Subject of the assessment

Section 3: Assessment findings

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

Annex 2: Compliance with Standards for Statistical Releases

Annex 3: Summary of assessment process and users' views

1 Summary of findings

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports¹ prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*². The Act requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*³. The report covers the sets of statistics produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Welsh Government, and the Scottish Government (collectively referred to as the producers in this report), and reported in the following publications:

Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG)

- *Fire Statistics Great Britain*⁴ (FSGB); and
- *Fire Statistics Monitor*⁵ (FS Monitor).

The Welsh Government

- *Fire Statistics Wales*⁶ (FS Wales);
- *Deliberate Fires*⁷; and
- *Grassland Fires*⁸.

The Scottish Government

- *Fire Statistics Scotland*⁹ (FS Scotland).

1.1.2 The Act also allows departments to request an assessment of other official statistics in order for them to gain National Statistics status. This report is in response to such a request in relation to:

The Welsh Government

- *Fire and Rescue Service Performance*¹⁰ (FRS Performance).

1.1.3 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 materiality¹¹. The Assessment team nonetheless assessed compliance with all

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.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/firestatsgb201011>

⁵ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/monitorq1q22011>

⁶ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/fire2011/110728/?lang=en>

⁷ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/fire2012/120228/?lang=en>

⁸ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/fire2012/1202281/?lang=en>

⁹ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2011/10/25164018/0>

¹⁰ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/fire2011/1110131/?lang=en>

¹¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/guidance-about-assessment/criteria-for-deciding-upon-the-format-of-an-assessment-report.pdf>

parts of the *Code of Practice* and has commented on all those in respect of which some remedial action is recommended.

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

1.2 Decision concerning designation as National Statistics

- 1.2.1 The Statistics Authority judges that the statistics covered by this report are readily accessible, produced according to sound methods and managed impartially and objectively in the public interest, subject to any points for action in this report. The Statistics Authority confirms that the statistics published in the products listed in 1.1.1 are designated as National Statistics, and has determined that *FRS Performance* can be designated as a new National Statistics, subject to DCLG, the Welsh Government and the Scottish Government implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by November 2012.
- 1.2.2 The producers have informed the Assessment team that it has started to implement the Requirements listed in section 1.5. The Statistics Authority welcomes this.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.3.1 Most of the statistics covered by this report are based on data from a common source: the Incident Recording System (IRS)¹². IRS captures detailed data about every incident attended by fire and rescue services in GB, so the data underpinning the statistics for England, Wales and Scotland are comparable.
- 1.3.2 The releases provide some good analysis of statistics from IRS. The producers have improved the publications in response to user feedback and have plans to ensure that the full range of data available from IRS is exploited to best meet users' needs.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

- 1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that the producers could strengthen their 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. We hope that the producers will work together to implement those requirements which apply to all.

¹² <https://www.irs.fire.gov.uk/irsweb/logon/>

1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Requirement 1 | Publish information about the user experience in relation to these fire statistics (para 3.1) – (DCLG). |
| Requirement 2 | Confirm that changes to methods or classifications will be announced in advance of the release of the changed statistics (para 3.3) – (All producers). |
| Requirement 3 | Improve the information about revisions to these statistics, to ensure that the revisions policies are clear and that the nature and extent of revisions is explained (para 3.4) – (All producers). |
| Requirement 4 | Improve the published information about methods and quality in relation to the statistics in <i>FRS Performance</i> (para 3.6) – (Welsh Government). |
| Requirement 5 | Improve the information about the quality of these statistics in relation to potential use (para 3.7) – (All producers). |
| Requirement 6 | Provide users with links or other appropriate signposting to equivalent statistics for Northern Ireland (para 3.8) – (DCLG and the Scottish Government). |
| Requirement 7 | Publish longer time series (para 3.9) – (Welsh Government). |
| Requirement 8 | Publish information to explain how the arrangements for confidentiality protection are sufficient to protect the privacy of individual information, but not so restrictive as to limit unduly the use of the statistics (para 3.10) – (All producers). |
| Requirement 9 | Improve the commentary and contextual information in the releases to aid user understanding (para 3.13) – (All producers). |
| Requirement 10 | Ensure that data are always accompanied by (links to) relevant metadata (para 3.15) – (DCLG). |
| Requirement 11 | Investigate the user need for statistics about response times and take steps to address any needs identified (para 3.19) – (Welsh Government and Scottish Government). |

2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 In GB there are 55 fire and rescue services (FRSs) which respond to fires, road traffic accidents and a range of other incidents, for example – flooding and rescuing people trapped in buildings and lifts. Statistics about fires and casualties have been collected since 1946. In April 2009 an electronic Incident Recording System¹³ (IRS) was introduced across GB. Previously, data were collected from FRSs using paper forms. IRS automatically creates a record for every incident attended by FRSs in GB, populated with some basic information about the time and type of incident and the location. FRSs then complete the records after returning from the incident, adding information about the details of the incident and whether there were any casualties. Information about incidents can also be updated as a result of fire investigations, for example, to determine the cause of a fire or to update the number of fatalities.
- 2.2 All the existing National Statistics publications listed in 1.1.1 present counts of incidents, casualties and fatalities. They provide analysis about issues such as the location and causes of fires, whether fires are accidental or deliberate, injuries from fires and the presence of systems such as smoke alarms and sprinklers. *Fire Statistics Monitor (FS Monitor)* is published twice a year. The other National Statistics publications are annual. *Fire and Rescue Service Performance (FRS Performance)* presents annual official statistics that the Welsh Government uses to measure fire and rescue service performance against a Performance Measurement Framework¹⁴. The key themes are risk reduction, community safety and corporate health.
- 2.3 *FRS Performance* is based on data collected directly from the three FRSs in Wales on Strategic Performance Indicators¹⁵ (SPI) and Core Performance Indicators¹⁶ (CPI) returns. SPI covers fires, fire deaths and injuries, risk reduction activity and effective response. CPI covers fires, fire deaths and injuries, false alarms and smoke alarms and other fire detection equipment. The three Welsh FRSs extract much of this information from IRS.
- 2.4 Statistics on fire incidents and casualties are an important tool for many users involved in fire prevention activities. For example:
- FRSs use the statistics to monitor and compare trends, and to target fire prevention, protection and response work;
 - the statistics are used by government to inform fire prevention policies, and campaigns and to monitor progress against indicators;
 - charities use the statistics to raise awareness of fire risks;
 - businesses involved in the supply and operation of fire prevention systems (such as smoke alarms and sprinklers) use the statistics to assess and quantify risks;
 - fire safety training providers use the statistics to provide context and inform discussion; and

¹³ See footnote 12

¹⁴ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/housingandcommunity/safety/fire/lgmeasure/pmf/?lang=en>

¹⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/data-collection/safety/fire/strategic/?lang=en>

¹⁶ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/about/data-collection/safety/fire/core/?lang=en>

- academics use the statistics to research fire-related injuries and emergency service responses.

The statistics are also used more widely; for example – the media may focus on the extent of a particular cause or type of fire (particularly deliberate fires).

- 2.5 Following a consultation, in November 2011, about proposed changes to its fire statistics publications, the Welsh Government has stopped publishing two fire statistics releases:
- *Fire Statistics Monitor Wales*¹⁷, a six-monthly publication that summarised the latest fire incident statistics from IRS; and
 - *Fire and Rescue Service Operational Statistics*¹⁸, an annual publication that summarised statistics on operational issues affecting the FRSs in Wales such as personnel issues and non-fire related incidents.

In place of these releases, the Welsh Government will publish data tables and a short summary of key points. It will continue to publish *Fire Statistics Wales (FS Wales)* and two additional releases drawing on data from IRS. Currently these releases are listed in 1.1.1 as *Deliberate Fires* and *Grassland Fires*, but the topic of each (and so its title) may change in response to users' needs.

- 2.6 Until 2001, when responsibility transferred to (the predecessors of) DCLG, fire statistics for the UK were published by the Home Office. Responsibility for fire policy and statistics became a devolved matter in 2004. The statistics¹⁹ produced by the Northern Ireland Fire and Rescue Service (NIFRS) are not currently within scope of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*, and so have not been included in this assessment. NIFRS does not currently use IRS. Statistics about fires in households in England (all fires, not only those attended by FRSs) are collected through the Survey of English Housing²⁰, which is also run by DCLG.
- 2.7 IRS is managed by DCLG, which maintains extensive guidance and provides a helpdesk to assist fire officers classifying attributes of fires in unusual circumstances. It has also established a forum on the Local Government Association's Knowledge Hub²¹, to allow effective sharing of information and discussion between producers of these statistics and FRSs. DCLG estimates that the annual cost of providing and managing the IRS IT system is £500,000 plus 5 full time equivalent (FTE) staff to manage the contracts and provide the helpdesk.
- 2.8 DCLG has a statistics team of two FTEs that produces its fire statistics publications. The Scottish Government estimates that the cost of producing *Fire Statistics Scotland (FS Scotland)* is £12,500. The Welsh Government estimates that the cost of producing its fire statistics is £11,000.

¹⁷ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/fire2012/120126/?lang=en>

¹⁸ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/fire2011/111013/?lang=en>

¹⁹ <http://www.nifrs.org/statistics.php>

²⁰ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingresearch/housingsurveys/surveyofenglishhousing/>

²¹ <https://knowledgehub.local.gov.uk/>

3 Assessment findings

3.1 DCLG, the Welsh Government and the Scottish Government (collectively referred to as the producers in this report) engage with users of these statistics through the Fire and Rescue Statistics User Group²² (FRSUG). The group meets two or three times a year and includes representatives from a wide range of user communities. It publishes minutes of meetings on its website, alongside membership details and links to publications and other useful information. Each producer also has other means to engage with its own users, for example:

- DCLG told us that it has improved the content of its fire statistics publications following feedback it has gathered from users. It has not published any of the user feedback. It told us that it will be seeking input from users of *FSGB* in 2012 to establish their needs and to inform the way that the publication evolves.
- The Welsh Government consulted users in November 2011, to gather views on proposed changes to its fire statistics publications. It has published a summary of responses²³ which explains the decisions it has taken.
- The Scottish Government engages with users of its fire statistics through ScotStat²⁴. In November 2011 it consulted users about the content of *FS Scotland*. The Scottish Government has committed to publishing the results of the consultation in Summer 2012²⁵.

As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCLG should publish information about the user experience in relation to these fire statistics²⁶ (Requirement 1).

3.2 The Welsh Government publishes *Deliberate Fires* and *Grassland Fires* annually in February, 11 months after the reference period and 9 months after the data become available. It told us that this reflects a need to prioritise other work that the statistics team is responsible for. However, it is not clear how users' needs have influenced this decision. We suggest that the Welsh Government engage users to ensure that its timetable of publications is informed by users' needs.

3.3 The producers have not consistently and clearly announced changes to methods and classifications in advance of the release of the changed statistics. The introduction of IRS, and the implications for the published statistics, was discussed with FRSUG, but there was no wider announcement to other users or opportunity for them to influence decisions such as the move from calendar to financial year reporting. The Scottish Government told us that in future it would make such announcements in advance to all users who have registered an interest in fire statistics through ScotStat. However, it should also make these announcements available to all users who haven't registered through ScotStat. As part of the designation as National Statistics, each of the

²² <http://www.frsug.org/>

²³ <http://wales.gov.uk/consultations/statistics/fire/?lang=en>

²⁴ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/scotstat>

²⁵ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice/scotstatcrime/StakeCon/Firesurvey2011>

²⁶ In relation to Principle 1, Practice 5 of the *Code of Practice*

- producers should confirm that changes to methods or classifications will be announced in advance of the release of the changed statistics²⁷ (Requirement 2).
- 3.4 DCLG's *FS Monitor* includes a very clear explanation of the schedule for revisions to the statistics. All the publications include information about the impact IRS had on the time series, but only *FS Scotland* includes information about the size of the scheduled revisions to the statistics. *FS Scotland* does not explain how many years' data are open to revision. The Welsh Government explains which statistics are provisional or revised, but does not explain the nature and extent of revisions. As part of the designation as National Statistics, each of the producers should improve the information about revisions to these statistics, to ensure that the revisions policies are clear and that the nature and extent of revisions is explained²⁸ (Requirement 3).
- 3.5 In 2011 *FSGB* was accompanied by an erratum²⁹, which highlighted an error in the commentary relating to the number of secondary fires in England. DCLG published the erratum as a separate document on its website, but did not link this from *FSGB*. *FSGB* itself has not been corrected, so it is likely that users who download *FSGB* (without noticing the erratum, which is listed further down the relevant web page) will not be aware of the error. We suggest that DCLG correct the error in the 2011 edition of *FSGB*, maintaining a clear audit trail, and review how it corrects errors to ensure that future corrections are sufficiently visible.
- 3.6 All the fire statistics publications are based on simple counts or rates, so there are no complex methods to explain. The publications all provide links to information about IRS with the exception of *FS Wales* which was published before the Welsh Government established the *Quality Report for Welsh Fire Statistics*³⁰ (*Quality Report*). The Welsh Government told us that it sometimes imputes for missing data when it produces *FRS Performance*. It refers to imputation in the *Quality Report*, which provides some information about the methods used to produce its suite of fire statistics, and about the quality of them. However, it is not clear that this applies only to *FRS Performance* and it includes little information to explain how data are imputed or the effect on the quality of the resulting statistics. There is insufficient information to explain the source of the statistics on the number of fire fighters and the amount of sick leave taken, or the quality of these statistics. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Government should improve the published information about methods and quality in relation to the statistics in *FRS Performance*³¹ (Requirement 4).
- 3.7 The producers publish information about the quality of the statistics, both in the releases and in accompanying documentation. The releases provide helpful information about the impact that the introduction of IRS had on the statistics. However, there is room for more discussion of the quality and comparability of the statistics in relation to potential use. Only the Welsh Government's *Quality Report* refers to the potential effect that different strategies and policies in

²⁷ In relation to Principle 2, Practice 4 of the *Code of Practice*

²⁸ In relation to Principle 2, Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*

²⁹ <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/52792351.pdf>

³⁰ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/publications/firequality/?lang=en>

³¹ In relation to Principle 4, Practices 1 and 2 of the *Code of Practice*

different countries may have on the comparability of the statistics. The producers take steps to ensure that classifications are applied consistently across the 55 FRSs, providing detailed guidance and a helpdesk to assist fire officers classifying attributes of fires in unusual circumstances. However, it is still possible that there are differences in the ways the FRSs classify fires and casualties, particularly for some data categories. DCLG told us that the extent to which FRSs use the 'not known' category in IRS can be an indicator of the consistency with which FRSs are applying the classifications, and so an indicator of the accuracy of the underlying data. These issues are not discussed in the quality documentation. As part of the designation as National Statistics, each of the producers should improve the information about the quality of these statistics in relation to potential use³² (Requirement 5). The Scottish Government does not include a link from *FS Scotland* to supporting information³³ about the quality of the statistics. We suggest that the Scottish Government improve the accessibility of its documentation about the quality of the statistics.

- 3.8 IRS is used by FRSs across GB. Until 2009 (when IRS was introduced) the statistics covered the UK. DCLG told us that NIFRS didn't introduce IRS in 2009. However, it should be possible to produce some key series for the UK because NIFRS collects comparable data. Neither DCLG nor the Scottish Government provides links to where information about fires in Northern Ireland can be found. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCLG and the Scottish Government should provide users with links or other appropriate signposting to equivalent statistics for Northern Ireland³⁴ (Requirement 6). We suggest that the producers investigate the need for, and feasibility of, producing some key series for the UK.
- 3.9 In its publications, the Welsh Government only publishes short time series (up to three years). It told us that this reflected a resource constraint when it produced the latest set of publications: it was unable to ensure the consistency of data from IRS with those from the previous paper-based system. It told us that it intends to examine the consistency of the data over time and publish longer time series in future. As part of the designation as National Statistics, Welsh Government should publish longer time series³⁵ (Requirement 7).
- 3.10 The producers have different approaches to publishing detailed information from IRS:
- DCLG told us that it is developing and testing databases to enable FRSs and (separately) other users to access detailed data from IRS. Much of the record-level incident data is not deemed confidential, but information about casualties is.
 - The Scottish Government told us that it expects that there will be scenarios that make record-level incident data potentially disclosive – for example, if it was possible to determine the cause of a fire that resulted in casualties, using statistics for small geographic areas. However, it is

³² In relation to Principle 4, Practice 2 and Principle 8, Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

³³ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice/DataSourcesFire>

³⁴ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*

³⁵ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 7 of the *Code of Practice*

investigating options to make local area fire statistics available through Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics³⁶.

- The Welsh Government told us that it does not anticipate any confidentiality issues with record-level incident data. It provides ward-level data to users on request.

Scottish Government has published information³⁷ that explains how it applies disclosure control to its local authority level fire statistics, but it has not explained its policy in relation to making available other detailed statistics from IRS. Neither DCLG nor the Welsh Government has documented their statistical disclosure control policies relating to fire statistics. As part of the designation as National Statistics, each of the producers should publish information to explain how the arrangements for confidentiality protection are sufficient to protect the privacy of individual information, but not so restrictive as to limit unduly the use of the statistics³⁸ (Requirement 8).

- 3.11 The producers told us that the main means of engaging with FRSs is through a forum on the Local Government Association's Knowledge Hub³⁹. A representative of the FRSs also attends FRSUG. FRSs that responded to us regarding this Assessment reported that the level of consultation from the producers is good. However, they suggested that more could be done to communicate and explain the decisions taken following consultations. We suggest that each of the producers discuss with FRSs how the outcomes of any reviews and consultations can be communicated more clearly.
- 3.12 The Welsh Government collects the data for *FRS Performance* from the three FRSs in Wales through the SPI and CPI returns. The FRSs extract much of the information for these returns from IRS. The Welsh Government told us that although it could obtain this information directly from IRS it would need to confirm the data with FRSs, so it is unlikely that the burden on FRSs would be reduced. We suggest that the Welsh Government review how the data for *FRS Performance* are collected, in discussion with FRSs, to ensure that the burden placed on FRSs is kept as low as possible. In doing this, the Welsh Government may also be able to resolve the slight differences between the statistics presented in *FRS Performance* and those presented in *FS Wales*, which arise due to the timing of the data request.
- 3.13 The publications from the producers include clear presentation of the statistics in tables and charts. There are some particularly good examples of relevant commentary and analysis:
- In January 2012, *FS Monitor* included a chapter which outlined detailed statistics about deliberate fires during the riots of August 2011, including analysis of the statistics by day and comparisons with usual daily averages.
 - *Deliberate Fires* and *Grassland Fires* include good descriptions of the uses of the statistics and the policy context and links to relevant indicators.

³⁶ <http://www.sns.gov.uk/>

³⁷ In the 'Accuracy of statistics' worksheet in *Fire Statistics – Local Authority Level*

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Crime-Justice/Datasets/FirestatisticsLA1011>

³⁸ In relation to Principle 5, Practice 4 of the *Code of Practice*

³⁹ See footnote 21

In general, most of the commentary in the publications focuses on describing rises and falls. The producers could do more to explain the reasons (or likely reasons) for the main trends and to help users interpret the statistics. For example, none of the publications suggests reasons for the falling trend in casualty rates; *FS Wales* presents statistics about causes of fire and sources of ignition, without explaining how these two factors are related and which is most suitable for different uses. It would be helpful if the publications explained the use of technical terms (such as ‘primary fires’) at the time they are first used, or avoided these terms altogether (as *FS Monitor* does). Many of the statistics presented in *FRS Performance* are similar to those presented in *FS Wales*. *FRS Performance* includes some useful information about the policy and operational context but it is not sufficiently clear that *FRS Performance* serves a different purpose to *FS Wales* as it does not include the actual performance indicators or explain what constitutes good or poor performance. It does not provide an explanation for the slight differences between the statistics it presents and those (on the same topic) in *FS Wales*. None of the publications include any international data, which would provide wider context. As part of the designation as National Statistics each of the producers should improve the commentary and contextual information in the releases to aid user understanding⁴⁰ (Requirement 9). We suggest that in meeting this requirement the producers consider the points detailed in annex 2.

- 3.14 The Welsh Government publishes tables of statistics through its StatsWales⁴¹ dissemination tool. It does not present any tables of statistics alongside its publications and it is not sufficiently clear what statistics are available through StatsWales. We suggest that the Welsh Government publish the relevant tables for users to download alongside the publication and provide a clear explanation of what additional tables are available through StatsWales.
- 3.15 DCLG publishes tables of statistics in Excel format, but these are not accompanied by any metadata, or links to relevant documentation. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DCLG should ensure that data are always accompanied by (links to) relevant metadata⁴² (Requirement 10).
- 3.16 *FSGB* includes some useful maps that illustrate geographic trends in fire incidents (per 100,000 population) at local authority level. The maps cover England and Wales, but not Scotland. We suggest that DCLG and the Scottish Government work together to include local authority statistics for Scotland alongside those for England and Wales in *FSGB*.
- 3.17 DCLG told us that it would be able to produce *FSGB* and *FS Monitor* more quickly if it had more automated IT processes. It indicated that this would make the process more robust and allow more time to exploit the detailed data collected on IRS. While recognising resource constraints, we suggest that DCLG investigate options for improving production processes to enable quicker and more robust data extraction for *FSGB* and *FS Monitor*.
- 3.18 The Scottish Government publishes *FS Scotland* annually in September or October, and releases more detailed statistics about a month later. Although it alerts registered users of these statistics (through ScotStat) when the detailed

⁴⁰ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

⁴¹ <http://statswales.wales.gov.uk/index.htm>

⁴² In relation to Principle 8, Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*

tables are published, it does not publish a timetable for the release. We suggest that the Scottish Government publish a clear timetable for the release of the detailed tables supporting *FS Scotland*. Neither the Welsh Government nor the Scottish Government has announced its timetable of forthcoming releases through the National Statistics Publication Hub⁴³. We suggest that the Welsh Government and the Scottish Government publish a timetable of statistical releases for 12 months ahead on the Publication Hub.

- 3.19 None of the releases includes information about the time it takes FRSs to respond to incidents, although this information is stored on IRS. It seems likely that this would be of considerable interest to users. DCLG told us that it will be publishing these statistics in forthcoming publications. The Scottish Government told us that it does not intend to publish this information, because Scottish FRSs do not have standard response time targets – each FRS sets its own response time targets for different types of fires, based on risk assessments. The Scottish Government told us that publishing statistics on response times may lead to poorly-informed comment and undermine the risk-based approach that FRSs have taken since the introduction of Integrated Risk Management Planning⁴⁴ in 2003. The Scottish Government has sought users' views on the need for statistics on response times (and other potential statistics from IRS) and reported⁴⁵ that there was little interest. However, the Assessment team considers that statistics on response times, accompanied by suitable commentary that explains the context, is likely to be of interest to users. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Welsh Government and the Scottish Government should investigate the user need for statistics about response times and take steps to address any needs identified⁴⁶ (Requirement 11).
- 3.20 The *Pre-release Access to Official Statistics (Scotland) Order 2008*⁴⁷ does not require the publication of a list of people who have access to official statistics in their final form, but it does say that a record must be kept, and made available on request. The Scottish Government provided us with a list of those individuals. We suggest that it publish records of those who have pre-release access to the statistics in their final form.

⁴³ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/index.html>

⁴⁴ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Justice/public-safety/fire-and-rescue-services/fire-rescue-advisory-unit/publications/IRMPReviewinSFERS>

⁴⁵ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/933/0115856.pdf>

⁴⁶ In relation to Principle 1, Practice 2; Principle 4, Practice 5; and Protocol 1, Practice 3 of the *Code of Practice*

⁴⁷ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2008/399/contents/made>

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to the fire statistics produced by DCLG, the Welsh Government and 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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|---------------------|---|
| Suggestion 1 | Engage users to ensure that its timetable of publications is informed by users' needs (para 3.2) – (Welsh Government). |
| Suggestion 2 | Correct the error in the 2011 edition of <i>FSGB</i> , maintaining a clear audit trail, and review how it corrects errors to ensure that future corrections are sufficiently visible (para.3.5) – (DCLG). |
| Suggestion 3 | Improve the accessibility of its documentation about the quality of the statistics (para 3.7) – (Scottish Government). |
| Suggestion 4 | Investigate the need for, and feasibility of, producing some key series for the UK (para 3.8) – (All producers). |
| Suggestion 5 | Discuss with FRSs how the outcomes of any reviews and consultations can be communicated more clearly (para 3.11) – (All producers). |
| Suggestion 6 | Review how the data for <i>FRS Performance</i> are collected, in discussion with FRSs, to ensure that the burden placed on FRSs is kept as low as possible (para 3.12) – (Welsh Government). |
| Suggestion 7 | Consider the points detailed in annex 2, in seeking to improve the statistical releases (para 3.13) – (All producers). |
| Suggestion 8 | Publish the relevant tables for users to download alongside the publication and provide a clear explanation of what additional tables are available through StatsWales (para 3.14) – (Welsh Government). |
| Suggestion 9 | Work together to include local authority statistics for Scotland alongside those for England and Wales in <i>FSGB</i> (para 3.16) – (DCLG and Scottish Government). |

- Suggestion 10** Investigate options for improving production processes to enable quicker and more robust data extraction for *FSGB* and *FS Monitor* (para 3.17) – (DCLG).
- Suggestion 11** Publish a clear timetable for the release of the detailed tables supporting *FS Scotland* (para 3.18) – (Scottish Government).
- Suggestion 12** Publish a timetable of statistical releases for 12 months ahead on the Publication Hub (para 3.18) – (Welsh Government and Scottish Government).
- Suggestion 13** Publish records of those who have pre-release access to the statistics in their final form (para 3.20) – (Scottish Government).

Annex 2: Compliance with Standards for Statistical Releases

- A2.1 In October 2010, the Statistics Authority issued a statement on *Standards for Statistical Releases*⁴⁸. 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 statistical releases associated with the producer's fire 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 bodies to apply the standards as fully as possible.

Appropriate identification of the statistics being released

- A2.3 The titles of the publications are clear, although *FS Monitor*, *Deliberate Fires* and *Grassland Fires* do not include the relevant country in the title to make the geographic coverage clear. *FS Monitor* does not include a clear statement explaining the time period covered – it is not clear whether *FS Monitor* published in the summer will cover six or twelve months' data.
- A2.4 All the publications use standard headings and logos, make clear the originating department and include contact details for the responsible statistician. All the publications include a brief account of what is included, in terms of the tables and subjects discussed.

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

- A2.5 All the publications include a summary that draws out key findings. Most of the commentary uses language that is straightforward, but some technical terms are used across all the publications (such as 'primary fires' and 'special services').
- A2.6 The commentary in all the publications focuses on rises and falls. None of the publications explains the reasons behind key trends, such as the fall in casualty rates. *Deliberate Fires* does not offer any explanation for the significant increase in deliberate fires during March to June. *FSGB* does not set out or explore statistical differences across the three countries, although it does include maps showing the statistics for local authority areas in England and Wales. None of *FSGB*, *FS Monitor* or *FS Scotland* includes information about the use of the statistics or the policy context; the Scottish Government includes this information in supporting documentation, but does not refer to or link to it in *FS Scotland*.

Use language that is impartial, objective and professionally sound

- A2.7 The language in all the publications is impartial and consistent with the statistics presented. The statistics are based on data that cover all fire incidents

⁴⁸ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-releases.html>

attended by FRSs, so sampling variability and confidence intervals do not apply. Two pie charts in *FSGB* were published without legends and in some releases the colours chosen for charts are such that the charts are difficult to interpret when printed in black and white. The presentation of three years' statistics (not in chronological order) in each bullet point in the key points in *FS Wales* is awkward and could be confusing. The maps in *FSGS* and *FS Wales* do not include any geographic features (for example, cities) to help users interpret the statistics. The use of dots in the maps in *FS Wales* may obscure multiple fires in some locations.

Include information about the context and likely uses

A2.8 *Deliberate Fires, Grassland Fires and FRS Performance* include useful information about the policy and operational context in which the statistics have been collected and will be used. The Scottish Government includes this information in its supporting documentation but not in *FS Scotland*. *FS Monitor* includes a link to a relevant indicator. *FSGB* and *FS Wales* do not include sufficient information about the policy context or operational context (such as the number of fire stations, number of people employed, and cost of the service). *FRS Performance* does not include sufficient information to explain how the statistics presented relate to performance and what they show in relation to the policy indicators.

A2.9 The publications include some good information about the quality of the statistics and the impact of the introduction of IRS. Some of the publications link to more detailed information about quality – but in general the information is not complete. For example, it does not discuss the possible impact of different standards or conventions applied in different FRSs – *FSGB* presents statistics about outcomes for fires where sprinklers were present, but doesn't explain how users should interpret these statistics, given that in about half of these incidents the outcome was 'not known'.

Include, or link to, appropriate metadata

A2.10 All the publications provide (and link to further) information about IRS. *FRS Performance* does not provide sufficient explanation about the source of statistics about the number of fire fighters and the amount of sick leave taken, or about data quality.

A2.11 None of the publications includes comparison of the statistics across the three countries, or with international statistics. *FSGB* includes GB totals, but provides little analysis of differences across the three countries. Some of the publications provide information about (and links to) relevant statistics from other sources, including household surveys and arson statistics, but in general the publications could do more to discuss and link to other relevant sources of statistics.

A2.12 All the publications describe the changes introduced through IRS and the impact of these changes. The publications explain that the data are provisional and when they will next be updated.

Annex 3: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A3.1 This assessment was conducted from February to April 2012.

A3.2 The Assessment team – Jacob Wilcock and Donna Livesey – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of DCLG, the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government in February. The Written Evidence for Assessment documents were provided on 20 February (Scottish Government), 23 February (Welsh Government) and 20 March (DCLG). The Assessment team subsequently met the producers during March and April 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 29 responses from the consultation of users and suppliers. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Fire and Rescue Services	12
Commercial (including public corporations)	5
Other public sector bodies	4
Scottish Government	2
Trade associations	2
Non-profit organisations	3
Academia	1

A3.5 Users generally found the producer teams to be helpful and professional and commended their expertise and timeliness of response to bespoke data requests. The Fire and Rescue Statistics User Group was identified as a helpful forum for engaging with statisticians, though some users and suppliers said they would welcome more opportunities for engagement.

A3.6 The key issues raised by users were:

- Since the introduction of the IRS, statistics have not been available for Northern Ireland in *FSGB* and users have not been able to access all UK statistics in one place. One user also said it is not clear that the coverage of DCLG's *FS Monitor* is England only.
- Changes to methods and classifications are not always announced in advance. An example given was the move from calendar to fiscal year reporting, which some users found to be a backward step. Users also

highlighted the absence of good information about the methods used to produce the statistics.

- More high level interpretation of the key trends would be helpful. Users expressed an interest in understanding the story behind the statistics. FRSs data suppliers also indicated that more could be made of the rich IRS data, to draw out the significant stories and offer interesting insights. One user suggested that the statistics could be enhanced by integrating the IRS data with other sources, for example NHS pathways⁴⁹ and road traffic accident statistics⁵⁰.
- Several users reported that the data tables and bespoke services offered by the producers are as important as the headline publications. Some users said that more immediate access to the detailed data, including the microdata from the IRS, would be very valuable as it provides greater flexibility and allows the opportunity for deeper analysis.
- Some users highlighted potential gaps in the statistics: FRSs' fire safety activity, such as audits and prosecutions (DCLG told us that this information is available in other official statistics publications⁵¹); causes of commercial fires; property losses in buildings with and without sprinklers; and the same level of detail for non-fatal fires as is available for fatal fires. It was also suggested that the continuing focus on 'primary' and 'secondary' fires is outdated. Users told us that more work is needed to improve the recording of information about the effectiveness of sprinkler systems in order to improve the accuracy of the GB statistics.
- Users recognised recent improvements in timeliness, but there was interest in earlier publication across the suite of outputs. For example, users in Wales would like more immediate access to updates on deliberate and grassland fires during March to June, when these fires are at their peak.

A3.7 FRS teams supplying the data indicated that they generally viewed levels of consultation as positive. Some FRSs reported that the results of the consultations were not always fed back to them and changes recommended by FRSs (to systems, quality assurance processes and guidance) are implemented slowly. It was recognised that some problems have been caused by the transition to the IRS system in 2009; suppliers generally appreciated the advantages of moving to a single system. One supplier raised concerns about a lack of funding for the IRS and helpdesk going forward, but DCLG confirmed to us that funding is in place to continue this service.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

⁴⁹ <http://www.connectingforhealth.nhs.uk/systemsandservices/pathways>

⁵⁰ <http://www.dft.gov.uk/statistics/series/road-accidents-and-safety/>

⁵¹ For example, see appendix 15 of *Fire and Rescue Service: Operational Statistics Bulletin for England* <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/frsoperationalstats2010-11>

