

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

## Statistics on UK Manufacturers' Sales by Product (PRODCOM)

*(produced by the Office for National Statistics)*

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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**

## **Statistics on UK Manufacturers' Sales by Product (PRODCOM)**

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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 sets of statistics reported in *UK Manufacturers' Sales by Product (PRODCOM)* – provisional<sup>4</sup>, intermediate<sup>5</sup> and final<sup>6</sup> – produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).
- 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>7</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 *PRODCOM* are designated as National Statistics, subject to ONS implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by December 2012.
- 1.2.2 ONS has 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 ONS has been developing the *PRODCOM* statistics over the last 12 months, following a long period of only small incremental change. ONS now has a

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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.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/prodcom/prodcom-provisional-results/2011/index.html>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/prodcom/prodcom-intermediate-results/2010/stb---prodcom-2010-intermediate.html>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/prodcom/prodcom-final-results/2009/index.html>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/guidance-about-assessment/criteria-for-deciding-upon-the-format-of-an-assessment-report.pdf>

prioritised plan for reviewing the methodology for producing the statistics and has told the Assessment team that it will ensure that the statistical resource and expertise is in place to deliver this plan.

- 1.3.2 ONS publishes helpful information about the methods used to produce, and the quality of, the PRODCOM statistics in *Quality and Methodology Information – Products of the European Community*<sup>8</sup> (PRODCOM QMI). However, ONS does not provide guidance about the quality of the statistics in relation to their potential uses.
- 1.3.3 ONS has made improvements to the commentary that accompanies the statistics during this assessment and is seeking to address accessibility problems on its website. However, ONS acknowledges that there is still work to do to present the statistics in a way that is most helpful for users. ONS has introduced an ONS Business Statistics interactive user guide<sup>9</sup>, a new service which invites users to specify topics of interest and uses this information to direct them to relevant statistics, including PRODCOM. This is an example of good practice.

## 1.4 Detailed recommendations

- 1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that ONS 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 engage regularly with users about how well the PRODCOM Commodity Codes support their needs, and publish information about users' experiences of the PRODCOM statistics (para 3.1).
<b>Requirement 2</b>	Publish clear information about the nature and extent of any revisions at the time that the PRODCOM statistics are released (para 3.2).
<b>Requirement 3</b>	Publish more information about the quality and accuracy of the PRODCOM statistics, particularly in relation to their use (para 3.3).
<b>Requirement 4</b>	Review the PRODCOM quality assurance procedures to ensure that the unit value statistics are produced to a level of quality that meets users'

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/quality/quality-information/business-statistics/annual-prodcom-survey.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/understanding-ons-statistics/business-statistics---interactive-user-guide/index.html>

needs, and provide sufficient metadata in support of the Excel tables to aid user interpretation of the PRODCOM statistics (para 3.4).

**Requirement 5**

Investigate the need for, and feasibility of presenting, consistent time series and publish any plans to do so (para 3.5).

**Requirement 6**

Review the application of ONS disclosure policies in the production of the PRODCOM statistics to ensure that current practices are not unduly limiting the practical utility of the statistics (para 3.6).

**Requirement 7**

Investigate whether other data sources, including data already collected by trade bodies, could be used to reduce the burden on business or to improve the quality of the PRODCOM statistics (para 3.7).

**Requirement 8**

Improve the commentary in the releases so that it aids user interpretation of the PRODCOM statistics (para 3.9).

**Requirement 9**

Improve the accessibility of the PRODCOM statistics through ONS's website (para 3.10).

## 2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 *UK Manufacturers' Sales by Product (PRODCOM)* – provisional, intermediate and final – present annual statistics on the value and volume of products manufactured and sold in the UK. The publications include information about sales, imports, and exports – with breakdowns by product and industry provided in a series of accompanying Excel tables. The provisional statistics are published within six months of the end of the reference period, intermediate statistics 12 months after and final statistics 24 months after. Until recently the provisional, intermediate and final statistics were published under different names – for example, *PRODCOM Final Results - 2009, Products of the European Community - 2010 Intermediate Estimates* and *Products of the European Community - 2010 Provisional Results* – but starting with the publication on 29 June 2012, the publication title has been changed to *UK Manufacturers' Sales by Product (PRODCOM)* with the provisional, intermediate or final status of the statistics communicated as appropriate.
- 2.2 European Commission Regulations (*EEC*) 3924/91<sup>10</sup> and (*EC*) 912/2004<sup>11</sup> require EU Member States to collect annual statistics about the value and volume of goods produced and sold for the mining, quarrying and manufacturing sectors and report within six months of the end of the reference period. The PRODCOM (PRODUcts of the European COMMunity) list<sup>12</sup> details approximately 4,500 products and provides the framework for the collection of the statistics. Eurostat publishes the PRODCOM list and updates it annually following consultation with Member States. The product codes, referred to as PRODCOM Commodity Codes (PCCs), are aligned with the European system for the classification of goods used for EU external trade statistics, the Combined Nomenclature<sup>13</sup> (CN), and the European NACE Rev. 2<sup>14</sup> (NACE) industry classification system. Alignment with the CN and NACE classification systems facilitates the consistent production of PRODCOM, international trade and industry statistics.
- 2.3 PRODCOM statistics are primarily produced using data that ONS collects from businesses through the annual PRODCOM Survey. The sample of around 21,500 businesses is drawn from the Inter-Departmental Business Register<sup>15</sup> (IDBR), stratified by size of business (the number of people employed) and industry. ONS established the survey in 1993 in response to the European Regulation introduced in 1991, replacing the previous Annual and Quarterly Sales Inquiries. From 1993, PRODCOM statistics were published quarterly and annually but in 2005, following an easing of EU requirements, the quarterly survey was discontinued.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:31991R3924:EN:HTML>

<sup>11</sup> <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32004R0912:EN:HTML>

<sup>12</sup> [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/Glossary:PRODCOM\\_list](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Glossary:PRODCOM_list)

<sup>13</sup> [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/Glossary:CN](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Glossary:CN)

<sup>14</sup> [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics\\_explained/index.php/Glossary:Statistical\\_classification\\_of\\_economic\\_activities\\_in\\_the\\_European\\_Community\\_\(NACE\)](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Glossary:Statistical_classification_of_economic_activities_in_the_European_Community_(NACE))

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/who-we-are/services/unpublished-data/business-data/idbr/index.html>

- 2.4 ONS uses three other datasets to produce the PRODCOM statistics. These data are already collected for other purposes. HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) provides Intrastat<sup>16</sup> data about imports and exports; the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) provides data about minerals from the Annual Minerals Raised Inquiry<sup>17</sup>; and, for a small cost to ONS, the Iron and Steel Statistics Bureau<sup>18</sup> (ISSB) provides data about the products of the iron and steel industry.
- 2.5 PRODCOM statistics are used by the European Commission to monitor and analyse the structure and competitiveness of industries and markets and to develop related policies. In the UK, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) uses the detailed product statistics to analyse sectors such as electronics which span a number of industries. ONS uses the industry and product sales information as an input to the Supply and Use tables which contribute to the calculation of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). PRODCOM data are also used by ONS to inform the sample design and weighting structure for the Producer Price Index<sup>19</sup>. Examples of how trade associations use the statistics include calculating the market size for their products and related products in the supply chain, and measuring the contribution of their sector to the economy. This information can then be used when representing the industry and for lobbying purposes. The Manufacturing Technologies Association (MTA) uses PRODCOM statistics in *MTA Basic Facts 2012*<sup>20</sup> to examine trends in the UK manufacturing technologies sector.
- 2.6 ONS estimates that the annual cost of producing *PRODCOM* in 2011/12 was approximately £664,000. ONS anticipates that following the recent implementation of new data validation and selective editing<sup>21</sup> procedures, these costs will be reduced by around £110,000 in 2012/13.

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<sup>16</sup> [http://customs.hmrc.gov.uk/channelsPortalWebApp/channelsPortalWebApp.portal?\\_nfpb=true&\\_pageLabel=pageImport\\_ShowContent&id=HMCE\\_PROD1\\_024570&propertyType=document](http://customs.hmrc.gov.uk/channelsPortalWebApp/channelsPortalWebApp.portal?_nfpb=true&_pageLabel=pageImport_ShowContent&id=HMCE_PROD1_024570&propertyType=document)

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planningbuilding/planningresearch/researchreports/mineralswasteresearch/annualmineralsraised/>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.issb.co.uk/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/ppi2/producer-price-index/april-2012/index.html>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.mta.org.uk/industry-facts>

<sup>21</sup> Selective editing prioritises the editing of data based on the potential impact on final estimates

### 3 Assessment findings

- 3.1 ONS has documented the key uses of the PRODCOM statistics and taken steps to improve engagement with users, including: establishing contact with the International Business Statistics User Group<sup>22</sup> (IBSUG) and appointing a dedicated ONS liaison point for IBSUG; writing to known users to consult on a project to review the sample for the PRODCOM survey; and setting up a business statistics user community on StatsUserNet<sup>23</sup>. ONS told us that this community was recently established, and so far has approximately 100 members. The statistics team also follows up all user enquiries to find out whether ONS's responses met their needs. The feedback is documented and reviewed every quarter. ONS represents the UK when Eurostat reviews the PRODCOM list<sup>24</sup> each year, but the statistics team told us that it does not currently have processes in place to engage UK users about how far the PRODCOM Commodity Codes (PCCs) support their needs. ONS has not yet published information about users' experiences of the PRODCOM statistics. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should take steps to engage regularly with users about how well the PCCs support their needs and publish information about users' experiences of the PRODCOM statistics<sup>25</sup> (Requirement 1).
- 3.2 ONS publishes three sets of statistics for each reference year – provisional, intermediate and final. ONS does not currently present information about the nature and extent of any revisions between these sets but the statistical team told us that it could quantify the revisions for users and is making plans to do so. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should publish clear information about the nature and extent of any revisions at the time that the PRODCOM statistics are released<sup>26</sup> (Requirement 2).
- 3.3 ONS presents helpful information about the methods used to produce the statistics, and about their quality, in the background notes of *PRODCOM* and the accompanying *PRODCOM QMI*<sup>27</sup>. However, the quality report does not provide guidance about the quality of the statistics in relation to their potential uses, and the language used is quite technical. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should publish more information about the quality and accuracy of the PRODCOM statistics, particularly in relation to their use<sup>28</sup> (Requirement 3). We also suggest that ONS clearly explain the technical terms used in the information about methods and quality that is published.
- 3.4 One noteworthy example where ONS does not provide sufficient guidance about the limitations of the statistics is in relation to the unit values (value per unit of volume) presented in the Excel tables. To illustrate, intermediate PRODCOM statistics for 2010 estimate a unit value for plastic shutters, blinds and similar articles of £122.79 per tonne for UK sales and £10,776.05 per

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.rss.org.uk/site/cms/contentviewarticle.asp?article=1044>

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.statsusernet.org.uk/Home/>

<sup>24</sup> See footnote 10

<sup>25</sup> In relation to Principle 1, Practices 1 and 5 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>26</sup> In relation to Principle 2, Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>27</sup> See footnote 6

<sup>28</sup> In relation to Principle 4, Practice 2 and Principle 8, Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

tonne for UK exports<sup>29</sup>. ONS told us that the validation of unit values is not routinely prioritised but when checks have been carried out, the reason for differences was that the series were not directly comparable – for example, the units of volume reported for imports and exports were different from those reported for UK sales. There is no discussion of this issue in the quality documentation and ONS does not provide sufficient metadata in the Excel tables to aid user interpretation. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should review the PRODCOM quality assurance procedures to ensure that the unit value statistics are produced to a level of quality that meets users' needs, and provide sufficient metadata in support of the Excel tables to aid user interpretation of the PRODCOM statistics<sup>30</sup> (Requirement 4).

- 3.5 ONS does not present any time series for the PRODCOM statistics; the Excel tables are published separately for each reference year. It is therefore difficult for users to carry out time series analyses. ONS told us that it recognises that the presentation of time series for the headline statistics – for example, total sales – would be helpful for users but said that it is not aware of a user need for time series at the detailed product level. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should investigate the need for, and feasibility of presenting, consistent time series, and publish any plans to do so<sup>31</sup> (Requirement 5).
- 3.6 ONS suppresses a large amount of the detailed product level data that it collects, to protect confidentiality. The statistics team told us that it has procedures for writing to businesses for permission to publish their disclosive data and that it regularly reviews both the processes for targeting the respondents and the content of the letters. However, the statistics team told us that there has not been a review of the application of ONS's Disclosure Policy<sup>32</sup> in relation to PRODCOM statistics for at least five years. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should review the application of ONS disclosure policies in the production of the PRODCOM statistics to ensure that current practices are not unduly limiting the practical utility of the statistics<sup>33</sup> (Requirement 6). We suggest that ONS publish information to help users understand the high levels of suppressed data.
- 3.7 The PRODCOM survey is one of the largest of ONS's surveys in terms of the burden placed on business; the cost of compliance in 2010/11 was estimated at just over £2 million<sup>34</sup>. ONS uses some alternative data sources (listed in paragraph 2.4) to avoid duplicating data collection and has also explored options for using other sources such as its Index of Production data collection. However, ONS told us that it has been some time since it has investigated the potential for using information held by trade bodies. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should investigate whether other data sources, including data already collected by trade bodies, could be used to reduce the

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<sup>29</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/prodcom/prodcom-intermediate-results/2010/division-22---manufacture-of-rubber-and-plastic-products---2010-intermediate-estimate.xls>

<sup>30</sup> In relation to Principle 4, Practices 2 and 3 and Principle 8, Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>31</sup> In relation to Principle 4, Practice 7 and Principle 8, Practice 6 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/best-practice/disclosure-control-policy-for-tables/disclosure-control-policy-for-tables-produced-from-surveys.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> In relation to Principle 5, Practice 4 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/what-we-do/corporate-documentation/compliance/compliance-plan-2010-11.pdf>

- burden on business or to improve the quality of the PRODCOM statistics<sup>35</sup> (Requirement 7).
- 3.8 ONS employed a statistician in 2011/12 to implement some improvements to the PRODCOM methodology. Changes implemented already include improved data validation procedures, the introduction of selective editing and a review of the calculation of standard errors. The statistician has now left the team but, based on the work carried out, ONS has pre-announced the future publication of three methodology articles and produced a prioritised plan for further developments. ONS told us that it will ensure that sufficient additional resource and expertise will be assigned to deliver this plan. We suggest that ONS publish the prioritised plan for improving the PRODCOM statistics.
- 3.9 During the course of, and leading up to this assessment, the statistics team has been working to improve the commentary in the release and *PRODCOM*<sup>36</sup> published on 29 June includes some positive changes – for example, the addition of some information about how UK product sales compare with those of EU Member States. However, ONS acknowledges further developments are required, most notably the inclusion of information to help users understand longer term trends and place the statistics about product sales within a broader economic context. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should improve the commentary in the releases so that it aids user interpretation of the PRODCOM statistics<sup>37</sup> (Requirement 8). We suggest that in meeting this requirement ONS should consider the points detailed in annex 2.
- 3.10 The PRODCOM statistics are difficult to find on ONS’s website. One user told the Assessment team that they consider that better search facilities are needed. During the course of this assessment, the statistics team has improved the links between the provisional, intermediate and final statistics but statistics for years prior to 2008 are currently available only on request. ONS told us that it is planning further changes to present the PRODCOM statistics more helpfully for users. ONS also told us that it has launched the ONS Business Statistics - interactive user guide<sup>38</sup>, a new service which invites users to specify topics of interest and uses this information to direct them to relevant statistics. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should improve the accessibility of the PRODCOM statistics through its website<sup>39</sup> (Requirement 9).

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<sup>35</sup> In relation to Principle 6, Practice 1 and Protocol 3, Practice 3 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>36</sup> See footnote 4

<sup>37</sup> In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>38</sup> See footnote 7,

<sup>39</sup> In relation to Principle 8, Practices 4 and 6 of the *Code of Practice*

## Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

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

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|---------------------|---|
| <b>Suggestion 1</b> | Clearly explain the technical terms used in the information about methods and quality that is published (para 3.3). |
| <b>Suggestion 2</b> | Publish information to help users understand the high levels of suppressed data (para 3.6).                         |
| <b>Suggestion 3</b> | Publish the prioritised plan for improving the PRODCOM statistics (para 3.8).                                       |
| <b>Suggestion 4</b> | Consider the points detailed in annex 2, in seeking to improve the statistical releases (para 3.9).                 |

## 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>40</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 statistical releases associated with PRODCOM statistics, this annex comments on compliance with the statement on standards.
- A2.2 In implementing any Requirements of this report (at paragraph 1.5) which relate to the content of statistical releases, we encourage the producer body to apply the standards as fully as possible.

### Appropriate identification of the statistics being released

- A2.3 The title was changed for the latest release and now reflects the coverage and reference period of the statistics. ONS uses appropriate headings and logos for a National Statistics product and contact details are given for the responsible statistician. *PRODCOM* includes a brief introduction to the content of the release but would benefit from a clearer structure.
- A2.4 The PRODCOM statistics are difficult to find on ONS's website. However, ONS has introduced better links between the provisional, intermediate and final statistics during the course of this assessment.

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

- A2.5 *PRODCOM* includes a summary of the key points of the release. However, the focus is very much on year-on-year comparisons and it would be helpful to understand whether the changes in the latest year are part of a longer term trend.
- A2.6 The choice and presentation of the headline statistics in the release do not fully reflect the relevance of the PRODCOM statistics, as described in the accompanying methodology and quality information. The release does not include any commentary to provide an economic context and the absence of any time series or international comparisons makes it difficult to draw any conclusions from the measures presented. Volume and trade data are not discussed.
- A2.7 The provisional and intermediate PRODCOM statistics are supported by commentary but the final statistics are only published as a series of tables in spreadsheet format. The intermediate and final PRODCOM statistics are published on the same day and it would seem sensible to present them as part of a single release with supporting commentary.

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<sup>40</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-releases.html>

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

A2.8 The text used in the releases is impartial and evidence based.

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

A2.9 *PRODCOM* provides a brief summary of the users and uses of the statistics and a link is provided to *PRODCOM QMI* which presents more detail. However, the analysis presented in the release does not reflect the known uses.

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

A2.10 *PRODCOM* presents a helpful summary of information about the methods used to produce, and the quality of, the statistics; it also provides a link to more detailed information in *PRODCOM QMI*, though the language used is quite technical and would benefit from some illustrative examples. The quality report does not provide guidance about the quality of the statistics in relation to their potential uses. ONS also publishes standard errors alongside the statistics with information provided in *PRODCOM QMI* about how to interpret these measures. During the course of this assessment, ONS has started to present the statistics for the latest three years within the same Excel workbook but not as a time series. The nature and extent of any revisions are not presented.

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

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

A3.2 The Assessment team – Donna Livesey and David Duncan-Fraser – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of ONS in April. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 4 May. The Assessment team subsequently met ONS during May to review compliance with the *Code of Practice*, taking account of the written evidence provided and other relevant sources of evidence.

### Summary of users contacted, and issues raised

A3.3 Part of the assessment process involves our consideration of the views of users. We approach some known and potential users of the set of statistics, and we invite comments via an open note on the Authority's website. This process is not a statistical survey, but it enables us to gain some insights about the extent to which the statistics meet users' needs and the extent to which users feel that the producers of those statistics engage with them. We are aware that responses from users may not be representative of wider views, and we take account of this in the way that we prepare Assessment reports.

A3.4 The Assessment team received 7 responses from consultation of users and suppliers. The respondents were grouped as follows:

ONS (Producer Price Indices)	1
International organisations	2
Devolved administration	1
Trade association	1
Data suppliers	2

A3.5 Users confirmed the importance of the statistics. Uses reported included: providing a comprehensive picture of industrial production in the UK; providing an evidence base to demonstrate the contribution of specific industries to the economy; comparing product sales across sectors and countries; helping companies in the supply chain for products to determine market size; and informing research into product groups. ONS told us that it uses PRODCOM information to inform the sample design and weights for the Producer Price Indices. Users were complimentary about the responsiveness of the statistics team. One user said that more timely statistics would be welcomed and another user said that the statistics are difficult to find on ONS's website.

A3.6 The two data suppliers reported good communication with the statistics team. One supplier said that there have been a lot of recent changes to the data collection. While appreciating that these changes are driven by European requirements the supplier said that regularly adapting its reports for change is time-consuming.

### Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

