

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics from the National Survey for Wales

(produced by the Welsh Government)

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About the UK Statistics Authority

The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body operating at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament. It was established on 1 April 2008 by the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*.

The Authority's overall objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. It is also required to promote and safeguard the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics, and good practice in relation to official statistics.

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

1. oversight of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – the executive office of the Authority;
2. independent scrutiny (monitoring and assessment) of all official statistics produced in the UK.

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ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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1 Summary of findings

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports¹ prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*². The Act allows an appropriate authority³ to request an assessment of official statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*⁴ in order for them to gain National Statistics status. This report is in response to such a request. The report covers statistics from the National Survey for Wales⁵, produced by the Welsh Government:

- *National Survey for Wales: Headline results*⁶ (*Headline Results*); and
- Forthcoming National Survey for Wales topic-based Statistical Bulletins (*Topic Statistical Bulletins*).

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 materiality⁷. 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 from the National Survey for Wales are designated as new National Statistics.

1.2.2 Given the progress made in improving the presentation of its statistical reports the Authority invited the Welsh Government’s Chief Statistician to commit to address each of the issues identified in this assessment report. Following this, the Chief Statistician has confirmed that a number of steps, which would

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 Subsection 12(7) of the Act defines ‘appropriate authority’ as Ministers of the Crown, Scottish Ministers, Welsh Ministers, Northern Ireland departments or the National Statistician

⁴ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/about/aboutresearch/social/ocsropage/nationalsurveyforwales/?lang=en>

⁶ <http://wales.gov.uk/about/aboutresearch/social/ocsropage/nationalsurveyforwales/publications/?lang=en>

⁷

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

otherwise have been formal recommendations, have already been taken or will be taken; these are noted in the body of the report:

- i. Engage with the voluntary sector about its use of the statistics; and
- ii. Document and publish users' experience of the statistics.

The specification of improvements expressed in this manner does not diminish the responsibility of the Welsh Government to ensure that it continues to produce this set of statistics in compliance with the *Code of Practice*.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.3.1 The statistics team in the Welsh Government responsible for producing these statistics has engaged extensively with policy officials within the Welsh Government during the development of the survey questions. The statistics team has also consulted local authorities. The statistics team has, however, engaged less intensively with other potential users of the statistics.
- 1.3.2 The Welsh Government has published a technical report⁸ and a quality report⁹ to provide users with detailed information about the survey and questionnaire design, the statistical methods and aspects relating to quality. The statistical report itself also includes a section about key quality information, which provides guidance on interpreting the survey results.
- 1.3.3 The development of the National Survey for Wales has been managed effectively. The statistics team has a good relationship with its contractors, who provided positive feedback on their engagement with the statistics team (see Annex 3).

1.4 Detailed recommendations

- 1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that the Welsh Government could strengthen its compliance with the *Code*, these are summarised in section 1.2.2. The Welsh Government's Chief Statistician has made the following commitment to address these issues by the end of August 2013:

'The Welsh Government commits to engage with users within the voluntary sector about its needs for statistics from the National Survey for Wales, and to publish documentation about users' experiences of using statistics from the survey. By August 2013 we will:

- *Pro-actively contact voluntary sector organisations to inform them about the results. We will send regular updates to those organisations, and discuss with the Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA) other ways to disseminate information about the survey.*
- *Check with voluntary sector organisations whether they will be analysing the data themselves and, if so, whether it would be useful for us to run a*

⁸ <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/caecd/research/121025nsfwtechnicalreport.pdf>

⁹ <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/statistics/2012/120927nsfwqualityreporten.pdf>

workshop on analysing the data. If needed, we would plan this workshop by August 2013 and run it by October 2013.

- *Plan a similar workshop for academics; this will be run by October 2013.*
- *Seek feedback from internal and external users on how we can make the results more useful to them.*
- *Publish a short summary of feedback received to date. This will also outline how we plan to engage with users to inform them of our proposals and the decisions we have made in response to their feedback.'*

We will review the Welsh Government's progress with these improvements in August 2013. 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.

2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 The National Survey for Wales is a large-scale voluntary survey of people across Wales and is managed within the Welsh Government's Knowledge and Analytical Services (KAS) team. The survey started with a pilot wave between October 2009 and July 2010, and the main stage survey was subsequently developed once approval for it was given in July 2010. Survey fieldwork started in January 2012 and is carried out face-to-face in respondents' homes, with interviews typically lasting 25 minutes. The survey has been developed in response to the Welsh Government's policy needs and replaces the Living in Wales Survey¹⁰, which ran from 2004 to 2008.
- 2.2 Each year, the survey involves a randomly-selected sample of 14,500 people aged 16 and over, 660 people per local authority¹¹. The survey covers a range of topics, with a focus on well-being and people's views about the provision of public services. The Welsh Government plans to publish *Headline Results* annually from late-May 2013¹² and will include information about all topics covered by the survey, based on interviews conducted between April 2012 and March 2013. The Welsh Government plans to include detailed results for local authorities (as well as Wales level results) from 2014. The Welsh Government also plans to publish ad hoc *Topic Statistical Bulletins* based on the survey from summer 2013.
- 2.3 The Welsh Government has contracted the running of the survey to two social research organisations, TNS BMRB¹³ and Beaufort Research¹⁴. The contractors are primarily responsible for Computer Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) programming¹⁵; carrying out pilot testing and larger-scale field tests; contributing to, printing and distributing fieldwork materials; briefing interviewers; managing the fieldwork; data preparation; and the production of the final datasets.
- 2.4 The statistics team told the Assessment team that the annual cost of running the survey and producing the statistical outputs is approximately £1.4 million.
- 2.5 The Welsh Government commissioned two Office of Government Commerce (OGC) GatewayTM reviews¹⁶, which were published in 2010 and 2011. The purpose of the reviews was to assess whether the business case for conducting the survey was robust and whether appropriate project management and governance were in place to ensure delivery of the project. An Internal Audit Services review was also conducted in February 2012, which provided substantial assurance that controls, including appropriate scrutiny and risk management, were operating effectively.
- 2.6 The statistics team told us that the survey is specifically designed to obtain the views of the public in Wales to provide up-to-date information for those

¹⁰ <http://wales.gov.uk/about/aboutresearch/social/ocsropage/living-wales/?lang=en>

¹¹ The results of the survey are weighted to compensate for unequal selection probabilities, to ensure that the age and sex distribution of the final dataset matches that of the Welsh population

¹² See footnote 6

¹³ <http://www.tns-bmrb.co.uk/>

¹⁴ <http://www.beaufortresearch.co.uk/>

¹⁵ <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/caecd/research/121025nsfwtechnicalreport.pdf>

¹⁶ http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+www.dh.gov.uk/en/Managingyourorganisation/Gatewayre-views/DH_121642

responsible for developing policy in the Welsh Government. Priority will be given to topics considered most relevant to policy-making in the design of the survey questionnaire each year. The survey content is likely to change over time to ensure that the survey continues to provide the statistics needed to inform these decisions. The Welsh Government expects that it will use the statistics from the National Survey for Wales to:

- help base its decisions on sound evidence;
- monitor changes in the public's perception of public services over time; and
- identify areas or groups of people that would benefit from intensive local support.

2.7 The statistics team also told us it expects that the statistics from the survey will benefit a wide range of other users, including other UK administrations, Welsh local government organisations, other public sector organisations, academic institutions, members of the public and the voluntary sector in Wales. The statistics team plans to make Statistical tables available through StatsWales¹⁷ to ensure that they are widely accessible for research purposes and to deposit anonymised survey responses at the UK Data Archive¹⁸ following publication of *Headline Results*.

2.8 The Assessment team conducted this assessment during the period that the statistics team was developing a draft version of *Headline Results*, based on survey data collected from April 2012 to February 2013. The statistics team previously published an initial report in September 2012¹⁹, followed by Internet²⁰ and Education²¹ *Topic Statistical Bulletins* in December 2012 and Health²² and Wellbeing²³ *Topic Statistical Bulletins* in January 2013. The Assessment team provided feedback to the statistics team on these reports on issues relating to compliance with the *Code*, so that the team were able to address them before producing a draft version of *Headline Results* for assessment. This approach was taken due to the full survey results not being available when the assessment was being conducted.

¹⁷ <https://statswales.wales.gov.uk/Catalogue/National-Survey-for-Wales>

¹⁸ <http://data-archive.ac.uk/>

¹⁹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/compendia2009/120927/?lang=en>

²⁰ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/compendia2009/1212191/?lang=en>

²¹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/compendia2009/121219/?lang=en>

²² <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/compendia2009/national-survey-wales-jan-mar-2012-health/?lang=en>

²³ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/compendia2009/national-survey-wales-jan-mar-2012-wellbeing/?lang=en>

3 Assessment findings

- 3.1 The Welsh Government developed the National Survey for Wales in response to its policy development needs. The publication of *Headline Results* is scheduled for the end of May 2013, less than 2 months following the end of survey fieldwork. One of the primary drivers for the short production time is to ensure that the results can inform the Programme for Government²⁴ update in May each year. The Authority regards this proactive development and production of statistics in response to user needs as an example of good practice.
- 3.2 The statistics team provided evidence of a range of activities by which it engaged with policy officials, and academic and public sector users of the statistics. This engagement has been conducted through several working groups, including the Public Services Thematic Working Group, the Well-being Thematic Working Group, as well as through the Welsh Statistical Liaison Committee (WSLC). Statistics from the survey appear to meet the statistical needs of policy officials who have been engaged in the development of the survey. The statistics team developed internal analysis plans for policy officials to ensure that analysis and *Topic Statistical Bulletins* are relevant and able to inform policy and delivery decisions. The statistics team has, however, engaged less intensively with the voluntary sector. During the course of this assessment, the Chief Statistician confirmed that future engagement activities will be conducted with this group of users, through regular communication via email and newsletters. In addition, the statistics team plans to hold a workshop for academic users in late summer 2013 to promote the use of the survey results and to better understand their uses of the statistics.
- 3.3 The statistics team has received little feedback from users about their experience of the statistics from the National Survey for Wales. Local authorities have previously asked the statistics team for advice about how to interpret the results from previous surveys, which the Welsh Government has provided but has not published. The Welsh Government anticipates that the statistics team will receive more feedback following publication of *Headline Results* in May 2013. During the course of this assessment, the Chief Statistician confirmed that initial information about users' experiences of the statistics and the extent to which the statistics meet users' needs will be documented and published by August 2013. We suggest that the Welsh Government refer to the types of use put forward in the Statistics Authority's Monitoring Brief, *The Use Made of Official Statistics*²⁵ when documenting use.
- 3.4 Following feedback from the Assessment team, the statistics team has ensured that *Headline Results* now includes several detailed examples of planned uses of the results in policy decisions, using clear and impartial language. The report provides a generally straightforward commentary about the statistics for a range of questions in the survey, covering several topics such as health and education. The report includes effective contextual information through referencing results of other surveys and statistics, helping the user to interpret the results presented. We suggest that the Welsh Government consider the

²⁴ <http://wales.gov.uk/about/programmeforgov/?lang=en>

²⁵ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-reviews/monitoring-brief-6-2010---the-use-made-of-official-statistics.pdf>

points detailed in annex 2 in seeking to improve the statistical reports. *Headline Results* includes links to relevant documentation, in the form of a technical report and a quality report, which can further aid users' understanding of the survey results. The technical report provides detailed information about the survey and questionnaire design, while the quality report describes how the statistics from the survey meet the six dimensions of quality²⁶ set out by the European Statistical System and the strengths and limitations of the statistics. However, *Headline Results* itself does not include a reference to the strengths and limitations of the statistics. We suggest that the Welsh Government include clearer signposting in *Headline Results* to supporting guidance provided in the quality report about the strengths and limitations of the statistics in relation to their use.

²⁶<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/quality/documents/ess%20quality%20definition.pdf>

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to the Welsh Government's *Headline Results* and related *Topic Statistical Bulletins* in the interest of the public good. These are not formally required for designation, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| Suggestion 1 | Refer to the types of use put forward in the Statistics Authority's Monitoring Brief, <i>The Use Made of Official Statistics</i> when documenting use (para 3.3). |
| Suggestion 2 | Consider the points detailed in annex 2, in seeking to improve the statistical reports (para 3.4). |
| Suggestion 3 | Include clearer signposting in <i>Headline Results</i> to supporting guidance provided in the quality report on the strengths and limitations of the statistics in relation to their use (para 3.4). |

Annex 2: Compliance with Standards for Statistical Reports

- A2.1 In November 2012, the Statistics Authority issued an updated statement on *Standards for Statistical Reports*²⁷. 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 reports based on the National Survey for Wales, this annex comments on compliance with the statement on standards, using a draft of *Headline Results*, an annual report based on survey data collected from April 2012 to December 2012.
- A2.2 In implementing the actions identified in this report (at paragraph 1.2.2) which relate to the content of statistical reports, we encourage the producer body to apply the standards as fully as possible.

Include an impartial narrative in plain English that draws out the main messages from the statistics

- A2.3 The key findings are presented clearly at the start of the report and the narrative includes an explanation of what the key statistics indicate. The key findings represent all topics covered in the survey, and consequently there are more bullet points than would usually be considered appropriate for a summary. The report also presents some results over a longer term using comparable results of the Living in Wales survey, which gives an indication of Welsh social trends over time.
- A2.4 *Headline Results* includes useful charts and tables which draw out the main messages from the survey results, and the language used in the supporting commentary is generally clear.

Include information about the context and likely uses of the statistics

- A2.5 The report includes detailed contextual information about policies related to the topics presented in the report, such as education and health. The commentary includes detail of specific uses of the results by the Welsh Government, based on the Welsh Government's Programme for Government²⁸. Information about potential uses by other users, such as Health Boards, is also included.
- A2.6 *Headline Results* includes useful comparisons with results from UK-wide and European household surveys that include similar questions. These comparisons provide helpful context to the Wales-level results. Explanations are provided when other survey results referenced are not fully comparable with the National Survey for Wales results.

Include information about the strengths and limitations of the statistics in relation to their potential use

- A2.7 The nature and implications of the uncertainty associated with the estimates from the survey are explained at the Wales level. A clear description of the use

²⁷ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-reports.html>

²⁸ See footnote 24

of confidence intervals is provided in the Key Quality Information at the end of the report, which addresses the implications of survey sample size on accuracy. The report also includes a link to the quality report, which contains further information about the quality of the survey, including strengths and limitations of the statistics in relation to use, and provides a summary of the methods used to compile the results. However, *Headline Results* itself does not include a reference to the strengths and limitations of the statistics.

A2.8 *Headline Results* provides further guidance on the interpretation of the results, by referencing the results of surveys that ask similar questions. The report also includes a link to *The National Survey for Wales: question comparability study*²⁹ and *Generating aggregate statistics from National Survey for Wales data*³⁰, which has a strong emphasis on aggregation of results at a local authority level.

Be professionally sound

A2.9 The report includes appropriate tables and charts to help readers to visualise the statistics. The text in the report is impartial and descriptions of changes, trends and patterns are professionally sound and consistent with the statistics.

Include, or link to, appropriate metadata

A2.10 The report provides clear hyperlinks to the National Survey for Wales' quality report and technical report on the Welsh Government's website, which contains further detail on the quality of the statistics and explains the survey metadata.

A2.11 The report includes detailed statistical tables in an annex and a Key Quality Information section that provides further detail about the quality of the statistics. The report also contains prominent links to more detailed results covering the full range of topics which are published on StatsWales, and states that data will also be published on the UK Data Archive following the publication of *Headline Results*. Links to relevant Welsh Government policies and to results of similar surveys (such as the European Social Survey³¹) are also included.

²⁹ <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/caecd/research/120706nswMeth2Comparabilitystudyen.pdf>

³⁰ <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/caecd/research/120706nswMeth1Aggregatingsurveyyears.pdf>

³¹ <http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/>

Annex 3: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A3.1 This assessment was conducted from October 2012 to March 2013.

A3.2 The Assessment team – Sara James and Caroline Jones – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of the Welsh Government in October. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 24 January. The Assessment team subsequently met representatives of the Welsh Government during February 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 the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Data supplier	1
Welsh Government	4
Local authority	1
Other	1

A3.5 Most users who responded were very satisfied with the engagement by the statistics team and had been consulted at all stages of the survey development.

A3.6 The Welsh Government expects that the annual results from the National Survey for Wales will inform policy making in the Welsh Government on a variety of topics, including health and education. In addition, the annual results are expected to enable local authorities to understand how public services are perceived in order to support improvements to these services.

A3.7 One of the organisations contracted to collect, process and supply the survey data to the Welsh Government was very satisfied with their engagement with the statistics team, and emphasised that there was regular communication between both parties.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

National Survey for Wales: Headline results (draft)

