

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

## Statistics on NHS Diagnostics Waiting Times and Activity

*(produced by NHS England)*

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### **About the UK Statistics Authority**

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

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

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

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

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

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## ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* gives the UK Statistics Authority a statutory power to assess sets of statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*.

Assessment will determine whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated as National Statistics.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# 1 Summary of findings

## 1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports<sup>1</sup> prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*<sup>2</sup>. The Act allows an appropriate authority<sup>3</sup> to request an assessment of official statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*<sup>4</sup> in order for them to gain National Statistics status. This report is in response to such a request. The report covers the set of statistics reported in *NHS Diagnostics Waiting Times and Activity Data*<sup>5</sup> (DWTA), produced by NHS England.
- 1.1.2 Section 3 of this report adopts an ‘exception reporting’ approach – it includes text only to support the Requirements made to strengthen compliance with the *Code* and Suggestions made to improve confidence in the production, management and dissemination of these statistics. This abbreviated style of report reflects the Head of Assessment’s consideration of aspects of risk and materiality<sup>6</sup>. The Assessment team nonetheless assessed compliance with all parts of the *Code of Practice* and has commented on all those in respect of which some remedial action is recommended.
- 1.1.3 This report was prepared by the Authority’s Assessment team, and approved by the Assessment Committee on behalf of the Board of the Statistics Authority, based 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 DWTA can be designated as new National Statistics, subject to NHS England implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by December 2013.
- 1.2.2 NHS England has informed the Assessment team that it has started to implement the Requirements listed in section 1.5. The Statistics Authority welcomes this.

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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> 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

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

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/diagnostics-waiting-times-and-activity/monthly-diagnostics-data-2013-14/>

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

### 1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.3.1 NHS England invites feedback from users about the statistics presented in *DWTA*, and has started to keep a record of user feedback it has received. However, NHS England does not seek to identify users in order to increase its engagement with users and understanding of how the statistics are used. It also does not routinely review feedback, in order to inform the production and presentation of the statistics.
- 1.3.2 NHS England publishes little information about the methods used to produce the statistics and whilst it has prepared some information about the quality of the statistics, this has not yet been published.
- 1.3.3 The commentary in *DWTA* is mainly limited to comparing the most recent month with the previous month, and the equivalent month a year ago for all diagnostic tests in England. NHS England presents a range of statistics in *DWTA* and supporting data tables – for example, by type of test and by provider, which are not explained.

### 1.4 Detailed recommendations

- 1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that NHS England 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 further steps to engage with the wider user community outside NHS England and DH, document the uses made of the statistics and publish information about users' experiences of the statistics (para 3.1).
<b>Requirement 2</b>	Adopt transparent statistical planning arrangements, including priority setting, that account for users' needs (para 3.2).
<b>Requirement 3</b>	Publish more information about the sources and methods used to produce the statistics, and the quality of the statistics (para 3.3).
<b>Requirement 4</b>	Explore whether the statistics should be seasonally adjusted in order to meet users' needs and aid interpretation of trends, and publish the findings (para 3.4).

**Requirement 5**

Improve the commentary in *DWTA* so that it aids users' interpretation of the statistics (para 3.5).

**Requirement 6**

Prepare a Statement of Administrative Sources and ensure that this includes the information required by the *Code* (para 3.6).

## 2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 NHS England publishes monthly, quarterly and annual statistics<sup>7</sup> on diagnostics waiting times, as well as *Diagnostic Imaging Dataset*<sup>8</sup>. The subject of this assessment is the set of monthly statistics published in *NHS Diagnostics Waiting Times and Activity Data*<sup>9</sup> (*DWTA*). NHS England only requested the assessment of *DWTA* as the future of the quarterly statistics is uncertain, and the *Diagnostic Imaging Dataset* is new and labelled as experimental statistics. The annual imaging and radiodiagnostics statistics were assessed in Assessment Report 228<sup>10</sup>.
- 2.2 Department of Health (DH) first published *DWTA* in May 2006. DH transferred responsibility for its publication to NHS England from 1 April 2013, along with many other analytical and statistical operations. DH and NHS England share a statistical Head of Profession and in most cases, the analysts moved with the statistical operations<sup>11</sup>. The transfer of these statistical operations reflects wider changes to the NHS structure<sup>12</sup>, many of which also took effect from 1 April. These changes included the replacement of primary care trusts and strategic health authorities as the commissioners of care with clinical commissioning groups<sup>13</sup> (CCG).
- 2.3 *DWTA* reports on diagnostics waiting times and activity for 15 key diagnostic tests. *DWTA* presents statistics on patients waiting six weeks or more for each test and the number of tests carried out on a rolling year basis. The maximum six week wait for diagnostic tests was originally a milestone towards meeting the 18 week referral to treatment<sup>14</sup> (RRT) introduced in 2008. Subsequently, the *2012-13 NHS Operating Framework*<sup>15</sup> introduced a standard that no more than one per cent of patients should wait over six weeks for a diagnostic test. *DWTA* is a Statistical Press Notice with commentary on the overall waiting times and activity in the latest month compared to previous months, together with two sets of supplementary tables that present diagnostics waiting times and activity for each test by CCG and by the provider of the tests.
- 2.4 The providers of diagnostic tests – NHS Trusts and other providers of NHS care – supply the data used to produce *DWTA*. NHS England has approved the data collection for these statistics with the Information Standards Board for Health and Social Care<sup>16</sup> (ISB). Providers extract data from their local Patient Administration System (which are managed by contracted suppliers and must

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/diagnostics-waiting-times-and-activity/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/diagnostic-imaging-dataset/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/diagnostics-waiting-times-and-activity/monthly-diagnostics-data-2013-14/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/assessment-report-228---statistics-on-nhs-hospital-activity.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> In many cases the analysts moved on a placement, These placements are not time limited and the analysts remain DH employees

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/thenhs/about/Pages/nhsstructure.aspx>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.england.nhs.uk/ccg-details/>

<sup>14</sup> RRT is the legal right to start NHS consultant-led treatment within a maximum of 18 weeks from referral

<http://www.nhs.uk/choiceintheNHS/Rightsandpledges/Waitingtimes/Pages/Guide%20to%20waiting%20times.aspx>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-operating-framework-for-the-nhs-in-england-2012-13>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.isb.nhs.uk/setting/approval/index.html>

also meet ISB standards) and submit a data return online into the Unify2<sup>17</sup> data collection system. Unify2 produces aggregate records by provider and by commissioner, with the latter checked by the relevant CCG for accuracy prior to being submitted to NHS England.

- 2.5 Statistics about diagnostic test waiting times are also produced for Scotland by the Information Services Division of NHS National Services Scotland<sup>18</sup>, for Wales by the Welsh Government<sup>19</sup> and for Northern Ireland by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety<sup>20</sup>. The statistics produced for Scotland were assessed in Assessment Report 55<sup>21</sup>. The statistics produced for Wales were assessed in Assessment Report 134<sup>22</sup>.
- 2.6 The statistics are used by the NHS and central government to assess performance against NHS standards and to inform government on the demand for diagnostic tests to aid planning; by the general public to learn about waiting times for diagnostic tests; and by academics and researchers to investigate aspects of diagnostic testing, such as rates of tests per head in England.
- 2.7 The statistics presented in *DWTA* are published in PDF, with supplementary tables published in Excel and CSV formats. This equates to a level 3 rating under the Five Star Scheme proposed in the *Open Data White Paper: Unleashing the Potential*<sup>23</sup>.
- 2.8 NHS England told us that the estimated cost of producing these statistics is £33,000.

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<sup>17</sup> [http://www.datadictionary.nhs.uk/web\\_site\\_content/navigation/central\\_return\\_data\\_sets\\_menu.asp](http://www.datadictionary.nhs.uk/web_site_content/navigation/central_return_data_sets_menu.asp)

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/Waiting-Times/Publications/index.asp>

<sup>19</sup> <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/health2013/nhs-diagnostic-therapy-service-waiting-time-april-2013/?lang=en>

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats\\_research/hospital-stats/waiting\\_times\\_main/stats-waiting-times.htm](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/stats_research/hospital-stats/waiting_times_main/stats-waiting-times.htm)

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/assessment-report-55---nhs-waiting-times-in-scotland.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/assessment-report-134---statistics-on-nhs-wales-performance.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> [http://data.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Open\\_data\\_White\\_Paper.pdf](http://data.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Open_data_White_Paper.pdf)

### 3 Assessment findings

- 3.1 The statistical team producing *DWTA* told us that it works closely with teams within NHS England and DH responsible for policy development around diagnostic testing and monitoring performance against standards, to ensure that the statistics meet their needs. NHS England's *Statistical User Engagement Statement*<sup>24</sup> states that its primary mode for engaging with users outside NHS England is via its website; which it uses to consult users on any significant developments to the statistics and to publish the outcomes. NHS England told us it also has a departmental representative on the Health Statistics User Group<sup>25</sup>, who can receive queries or feedback about *DWTA* from participants. The statistical team also invites feedback in *DWTA*. However, whilst mechanisms are in place to support contact with NHS England by the wider user community, it is not clear that it has been very proactive in its engagement – for example, the statistical team told us that it has not routinely recorded contact details from user queries or analysed their content to inform the development of *DWTA*. NHS England told us that it is starting to document the use made of the statistics and to collect information about users' views – for example, it has developed a user feedback form to publish alongside the statistics. As part of the designation as National Statistics, NHS England should take further steps to engage with the wider user community outside NHS England and DH, document the uses made of the statistics and publish information about users' experiences of the statistics<sup>26</sup> (Requirement 1). We suggest that NHS England refer to the types of use put forward in the UK Statistics Authority's Monitoring Brief *The Use Made of Official Statistics* when documenting use<sup>27</sup>.
- 3.2 NHS England told us that it does not have a statistical work programme since statistical operations are not centralised; statisticians are embedded in teams across the organisation, and priorities and resources are assessed as part of normal business planning. However, it is not clear how the statistical planning process and priority setting account for user needs or wider developments in health statistics. As part of the designation as National Statistics, NHS England should adopt transparent statistical planning arrangements, including priority setting, that account for users' needs<sup>28</sup> (Requirement 2).
- 3.3 NHS England publishes a brief overview of the process involved in producing the statistics within the Statistical Notes section of *DWTA*. The monthly diagnostics waiting times and activity web page<sup>29</sup> contains links to a guidance document for data suppliers<sup>30</sup> and a *Diagnostics FAQ*<sup>31</sup>, which contain some

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2012/04/Unify-Statistical-User-Engagement-Statement-v3.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.rss.org.uk/site/cms/contentviewarticle.asp?article=1043>

<sup>26</sup> In relation to Principle 1, Practices 1, 2, and 5 and Protocol 1, Practices 1, 3 and 6 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-reviews/monitoring-brief-6-2010---the-use-made-of-official-statistics.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> In relation to Principle 1, Practice 3 and Principle 7, Practices 2, 3 and 4 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/diagnostics-waiting-times-and-activity/monthly-diagnostics-waiting-times-and-activity/>

<sup>30</sup> [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod\\_consum\\_dh/grops/dh\\_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh\\_086944.doc](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/grops/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_086944.doc)

information about methods and definitions, but these documents have not been updated to reflect the current NHS organisational structure, and have been produced to meet data suppliers' needs. *DWTA* does not contain links to the two documents. NHS England publishes information about the timeliness of the statistics in *Diagnostics FAQ*, but it has not published any other information about the quality of the statistics. However, NHS England has shared with the Assessment team a draft of a data quality and methodology statement that it is preparing for users, and told us that it plans to publish this once it has been finalised. The statement includes information about the comparability of the statistics over time and the coherence of *DWTA* with other statistics about hospital waiting times. However it needs to be augmented to include information about the coherence of *DWTA* with the statistics NHS England publishes about diagnostic waiting times on a quarterly and annual basis, as well as information about the comparability of the statistics with statistics produced about diagnostic waiting times in the other UK countries. As part of the designation as National Statistics, NHS England should publish more information about the sources and methods used to produce the monthly diagnostics statistics, and the quality of the statistics<sup>32</sup> (Requirement 3).

- 3.4 The *DWTA* Statistical Notes section includes a sub-section, Interpretation of waiting times and activity data, which states that 'measures of waiting time performance are subject to seasonality' and that this seasonality includes factors such as bank holidays and the number of working days. The table in *DWTA* which presents total diagnostic activity by test includes an adjustment for working days in order to assist interpretation of the figures, but no other seasonal factors are taken into account. The graph shows peaks around December and January each year which are not explained and these peaks could mask changes in the statistics due to other factors, such as changes in service delivery or the number of test referrals. NHS England told us that it is awaiting the installation of software that will enable it to explore the feasibility of seasonally adjusting the statistics. As part of the designation as National Statistics, NHS England should explore whether the statistics should be seasonally adjusted in order to meet users' needs and aid interpretation of trends, and publish the findings<sup>33</sup> (Requirement 4).
- 3.5 *DWTA* contains key points at its start, but these are limited to comparing overall waiting times of six weeks or more and activity for the most recent month with the previous month, and the equivalent month a year ago. It does not comment on the trend, or make other comparisons such as between tests, areas, or length of waiting times. *DWTA* presents statistics for each of the 15 diagnostic tests in tables, but does not explain similarities or differences between them. Also, *DWTA* does not include an explanation of the relationship between trends in total diagnostic test activity and median waiting times, which are presented in a chart. NHS England told us that it has started a review of *DWTA* with a view to publishing an improved version in October 2013. As part of the designation as National Statistics, NHS England should improve the commentary in *DWTA* so that it aids users' interpretation of the statistics<sup>34</sup> (Requirement 5). We

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<sup>31</sup> [http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod\\_consum\\_dh/groups/dh\\_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh\\_086943.doc](http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_086943.doc)

<sup>32</sup> In relation to Principle 4, Practices 1, 2, 3 and 6 and Principle 8, Practice 1 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>33</sup> In relation to Principle 4, Practices 1 and 2 and Principle 8, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>34</sup> In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

suggest that in meeting this requirement NHS England consider the points detailed in annex 2.

- 3.6 NHS England has not published a Statement of Administrative Sources to identify the administrative systems used in the production of official statistics, including those systems used to produce the monthly diagnostics statistics – the Patient Administration Systems and Unify2. NHS England told us that a decision is pending about whether NHS England and DH should publish a joint statement. As part of the designation as National Statistics, NHS England should prepare a Statement of Administrative Sources and ensure that this includes the information required by the *Code*<sup>35</sup> (Requirement 6).

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<sup>35</sup> In relation to Protocol 3, Practice 5 of the *Code of Practice*

## Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to NHS England's Diagnostics Waiting Times and Activity 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.

**Suggestion 1** Refer to the types of use put forward in the Statistics Authority's Monitoring Brief, *The Use Made of Official Statistics* when documenting use (para 3.1).

**Suggestion 2** Consider the points detailed in annex 2, in seeking to improve the statistical reports (para 3.5).

## Annex 2: Compliance with Standards for Statistical Reports

- A2.1 In November 2012, the Statistics Authority issued a statement on *Standards for Statistical Reports*<sup>36</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 reports associated with the monthly diagnostics waiting times and activity 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 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 *DWTA* includes main messages at the beginning that draw out some points of interest from the statistics presented in tables. These include basic comparisons over time but do not comment on trends.
- A2.4 NHS England provides statistics about diagnostic waiting times for each test in tables in *DWTA*, but the commentary does not include any discussion of differences between the tests, and is limited to key points. *DWTA* does not include an explanation of the relationship between waiting times and activity or the distribution of patients across waiting periods. The supplementary tables contain statistics for each geographical area, provider and commissioner of NHS care, but *DWTA* does not include an explanation of these statistics.
- A2.5 *DWTA* does not include an explanation of how the statistics relate to other waiting times statistics, such as Referral to Treatment waiting times statistics. The guidance documents published alongside *DWTA* are aimed at data suppliers and explain that patients waiting for diagnostic testing may be included in a range of waiting times statistics, such as inpatient waiting times statistics, but NHS England does not publish further information about the relationship between the sets of statistics. It publishes links to statistics produced about diagnostics waiting times in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, but does not provide information about the extent of comparability.
- A2.6 A graph and tables are used in *DWTA* to present the statistics, but the points of interest are not highlighted or explained. For example, the pattern which is most apparent in the graph is the peak around December and January in activity. These peaks are due to seasonal effects and could detract from other interesting features of the statistics.
- A2.7 The text used is impartial, avoids statements of opinion and is demonstrably evidence based. The language used is straightforward, although some readers would need to refer to the associated guidance documents to understand terms used. These documents are not linked from *DWTA*.

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<sup>36</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-reports.html>

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

- A2.8 *DWTA* includes a description of what is measured and why, but this is mostly located at the back of the report in the Statistical Notes section.
- A2.9 *DWTA* includes some information about the policy and operational context in which the statistics have been produced and will be used, but this information is located at the end of the report, and is limited to a brief overview.

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

- A2.10 *DWTA* does not include information about the strengths and limitations of the statistics in relation to their potential uses. Neither does it include information about the main sources of bias and error, their potential impact on the statistics, and their likely implications for use.
- A2.11 *DWTA* includes information about the nature and extent of revisions, and how these revisions affect the interpretation of the statistics.

### **Be professionally sound**

- A2.12 Descriptive statements are demonstrably consistent with the statistics and professionally sound.

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

- A2.13 *DWTA* includes a title which describes in plain English the coverage of the statistics and the period to which the statistics relate. It does not include a statement about the frequency with which the statistics are compiled. It also does not state the timing of the next release.
- A2.14 *DWTA* is labelled as a Statistical Press Notice but this is produced not just for the press but for use by all users. *DWTA* is referred to as 'Diagnostics Waiting Times and Activity Data' in its full title, but the product includes a report with statistical commentary in addition to the data.
- A2.15 *DWTA* does not make clear on its front page that it is published by NHS England, but this is clear at the end of the release, with contact details provided for the responsible statistician.
- A2.16 NHS England publishes definitions of terms used in *DWTA*, but these are not linked from it. *DWTA* includes little information about methods and data sources.
- A2.17 *DWTA* does not include a link to the revisions policy relating to the statistics.

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

- A3.1 This assessment was conducted from May to September 2013.
- A3.2 The Assessment team – Emma Bowditch and Donna Livesey – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of the NHS England in May. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 25 June. The Assessment team subsequently met NHS England in July 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 9 responses from the user and supplier consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

NHS	5
Department of Health	1
Other public sector	2
Media	1

A3.5 Overall, users reported the statistics as meeting their needs and were content with the contact with the statistical team. One user said it would be useful if they could obtain the data using secure electronic file transfer (known as SEFT), which would allow direct feed into their data systems. Another user said they would like a more granular dataset. Other requests for improvements included: more commentary to assist interpretation of the figures; visualisation of trends; assurance that all providers were included; increased comparability with other UK country statistics; comparisons of adults and children; and analysis of waiting times by specialty. One user suggested that NHS England publicise the statistics more broadly. A data supplier reported having to undertake various resource intensive manual processes in order to provide the required data, due to limitations of data systems.

### Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

