

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

## Statistics on Schools and Pupils in Scotland

*(produced by the Scottish Government)*

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

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

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

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

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

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## ASSESSMENT 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 gives the Statistics Authority power to re-assess whether the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*<sup>3</sup> continues to be complied with in relation to official statistics already designated as National Statistics. The report covers the set of statistics reported in the following publications, produced by the Scottish Government:
- *Summary statistics for attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living*<sup>4</sup> (*Attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living*)
  - *Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland*<sup>5</sup> (*Schools in Scotland*)
- 1.1.2 The previous assessment of these sets of statistics was reported in Assessment report 50<sup>6</sup>. The statistics are being re-assessed because the Scottish Government substantially changed the way that it presented the statistics covered in the previous Assessment report, partly as a response to the Requirements in the previous assessment. This is discussed further in paragraph 2.2 of this report. These changes were also examined in the Authority's Statistical Expenditure Report (SER) on Scottish Schools Statistics<sup>7</sup>.
- 1.1.3 The Act allows an appropriate authority<sup>8</sup> to request an assessment of other official statistics in order for them to gain National Statistics status. In response to such a request, this report also covers the set of statistics reported in *Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy*<sup>9</sup> (SSLN).
- 1.1.4 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>10</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.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga\\_20070018\\_en.pdf](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/Pub-SS-ALM>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/Summarystatsforschools>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/assessment-reports/assessment-report-50---schools-for-scotland.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/statistical-expenditure-reports/index.html>

<sup>8</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>9</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/SSLN>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/guidance-about-assessment/criteria-for-deciding-upon-the-format-of-an-assessment-report.pdf>

1.1.5 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 listed in paragraph 1.1.1 are designated as National Statistics, and has determined that the statistics listed in paragraph 1.1.3 can be designated as new National Statistics products subject to the Scottish Government implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by February 2014.

## **1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses**

1.3.1 The Scottish Government consulted with users in 2010 about rationalising its range of statistics about schools and pupils in Scotland. The aim was to reduce the central burden on schools and local authorities (LAs), and to remove any unnecessary duplication across the different data collections and resulting statistics. It has obtained feedback from users about the new publications.

1.3.2 The Scottish Government has good levels of engagement with the users and other major stakeholders of Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy (SSLN); the survey and resulting statistics are supported by a project management board and by reference groups. The statisticians have attended various events to engage with local users and disseminate the SSLN results. However, the Scottish Government has not published any papers from its project boards or events to help inform other users.

1.3.3 The reports all contain clear and useful commentary to help users interpret the statistics, but they do not all include sufficient information about methods and data quality. The Scottish Government publishes more granular analysis of the attainment and leaver destinations statistics at LA-level in separate spreadsheets; however, *Attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living* does not contain any analysis of this information, or provide users with a clear understanding of what statistics are available.

## **1.4 Detailed recommendations**

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

## 1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

- Requirement 1** Clearly identify which leavers destinations statistics in *Attainment, leavers destinations and healthy living* have previously been released, including information about whether these have been subject to revision (para 3.3).
- Requirement 2** Provide information about the quality of the SSLN statistics – particularly in relation to use and potential use – and include links in *SSLN* to published information about the quality of the statistics (para 3.4).
- Requirement 3** Provide more information about methods and data quality in *Attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living* and *Schools in Scotland*, including the impact of recording differences between LAs (para 3.5).
- Requirement 4** Investigate the impact of the changes to the data collections relating to schools and pupils, and take this information into account in future statistical planning (para 3.6).
- Requirement 5** Publish information about the costs to LAs and other data suppliers for providing the school-level data (para 3.8).
- Requirement 6** Provide commentary and analysis in *Attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living* to support the range of information that is published in supplementary tables, and improve the commentary in *Schools in Scotland* and *SSLN* to help aid interpretation (para 3.9).
- Requirement 7** Draw attention in the relevant statistical reports to the availability of school-level attainment statistics and supporting datasets (para 3.10).



## 2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 Education in Scotland is a devolved responsibility of the Scottish Government, with the curriculum and resulting statistics differing quite markedly from those in other countries of the UK. The three sets of statistics covered in this report provide a wide range of information about Scottish schools, including attainment levels and the destinations of school leavers; the characteristics of pupils and teachers; attendance rates; and the levels of literacy and numeracy in primary and early secondary age children.
- 2.2 The Scottish Government previously published 17 different statistical reports containing information about schools and pupils in Scotland. These statistics were the subject of an earlier assessment and reported in Assessment report 50<sup>11</sup>, which resulted in their designation as National Statistics, subject to the Scottish Government implementing eight Requirements by January 2011. However in September 2010, the Scottish Government consulted with users about implementing significant changes to both the coverage and timing of the statistics<sup>12</sup>. The consultation proposed that the Scottish Government would cease the publication of statistics on a range of topics such as children educated outwith schools, exclusions, expenditure on schools, and the Independent School Census<sup>13</sup>. The Scottish Government explained that the rationale behind the changes was to reduce the burden of data collection on schools and LAs; to avoid duplication; and to remove products that were affected by variations in policy and practice at school and LA level. Its aim was to establish a set of high quality and relevant statistics which would enable users to understand the key aspects of the Scottish school system and delivery against Scottish Government priorities.
- 2.3 *Summary statistics for attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living (Attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living)* presents information about qualifications (adjusted for any changes on appeal), initial and follow-up school leaver destinations – such as further or higher education, training or employment – the uptake of school meals (free or paid for) and the percentage of schools meeting Scottish Government targets for the provision of physical education. The report presents statistics at a national level, and the Scottish Government makes LA-level statistics and further analysis available through supplementary datasets. The statistics are produced from data supplied by LAs, the Scottish Qualifications Authority<sup>14</sup> (SQA) and Skills Development Scotland<sup>15</sup> (SDS). SDS publishes some initial information about leaver destinations in March of each year, around three months before the Scottish Government publishes statistics from the follow-up survey.
- 2.4 *Summary Statistics for Schools in Scotland (Schools in Scotland)* includes information about class sizes and pupil teacher ratios, teacher numbers, the employment of recently qualified teachers, pupil and teacher characteristics, pre-school education, and the school estate. Statistics on attendance, absence and exclusions from school are included every other year. The information is

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<sup>11</sup> See footnote 6

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/scotstat/PastCons>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/04/23144208/0>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.sqa.org.uk>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/>

drawn from an annual census of pupils and teachers, a census of pre-school education centres and a survey of LAs designed to collect information about the school estate.

- 2.5 *Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy (SSLN)* provides information about the attainment of pupils in school years P4, P7 and S2<sup>16</sup>. The survey was developed to support new classroom-based assessment practices for pupils in the first four stages of the Curriculum for Excellence<sup>17</sup> (CfE). It is carried out annually to allow the Scottish Government, Education Scotland<sup>18</sup> and SQA to monitor national performance in literacy and numeracy, and focuses on literacy in one year and on numeracy the next. The Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy (SSLN) was developed in 2009, with the first survey on numeracy conducted in May 2011; the results from this were published in March 2012. In April 2013, the Scottish Government published the results from the first SSLN literacy survey, conducted in 2012.
- 2.6 As part of the development of CfE there is now more focus within the Scottish education system on the attainment of pupils when they leave school in their senior phase (S4-S6), rather than attainment at a set point during their education. The assessment of pupils' progress and achievement up to the end of S3 is largely based on teachers' classroom assessment. The changes to the assessment focus are evidenced in *Attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living*, which now provides information about the attainment of school leavers, while the statistics in *SSLN* provide information to help monitor the national progress of general attainment during the early years of education.
- 2.7 Most of the statistics presented in these reports are based on data collected by schools, LAs, SQA and SDS for their own operational purposes. Data are generally submitted by LAs directly to the Scottish Government through ScotXed<sup>19</sup>, an electronic data-exchange partnership between the Scottish Government and LAs.
- 2.8 The statistics are also used by the Scottish Government to help inform its *Scotland Performs* Outcome to ensure young people are successful learners<sup>20</sup> – with specific indicators to improve the levels of educational attainment<sup>21</sup> and increasing the proportion of young people in learning, training or work<sup>22</sup>. The statistics in *SSLN* are used by Education Scotland to help develop classroom resources for improved learning, teaching and assessment.
- 2.9 The schools reports are published in PDF and HTML, with supplementary tables published in Excel format. This equates to a level 2 rating under the Five

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<sup>16</sup> In Scotland, pupils attend primary school for seven years (P1-P7), before progressing to secondary level (high school) for a further six years (S1-S6). Pupils can opt to leave high school in S4, which is the last compulsory year of education.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/thecurriculum/whatiscurriculumforexcellence/index.asp>

<sup>18</sup> An executive agency of the Scottish Government: <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/> – Education Scotland was established in 2011 with a remit to support quality and improvement in Scottish education.

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.scotxed.net/default.aspx>

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Performance/scotPerforms/outcome/youngpeople>

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Performance/scotPerforms/indicator/attainment>

This particular indicator uses data collected from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) which is carried out every three years by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/Performance/scotPerforms/indicator/youngpeople>

Star Scheme proposed in the *Open Data White Paper: Unleashing the Potential*<sup>23</sup>.

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<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 Scottish Government engages with the users of its school statistics through its ScotStat<sup>24</sup> network, and has a dedicated consultation page<sup>25</sup> for these statistics which provides users with links to information about formal and informal user engagement. In June 2011, the Authority published its SER about the significant changes that the Scottish Government had made to its suite of school statistics (see paragraph 1.1.2). This concluded that the Scottish Government was responsive to the views expressed in the course of its consultation, but that it would have been useful to have supplemented the information gathered through the online questionnaire with other forms of dialogue before making such extensive changes. The Authority recognised that users may find the new compendia more useful than the previous statistical reports, but noted that the compendia would provide a more limited set of statistics. The SER also noted that it would be helpful if the Scottish Government could consult users about their views of the first of the new publications issued in December 2010 and publish the findings. The Scottish Government subsequently consulted with users in autumn 2011 and published the findings<sup>26</sup> in August 2013 (during the course of this assessment). It has not had any detailed consultation with users about the new presentation of the statistics since 2011 and the remaining information about its consultation page and associated links dates from 2010 or earlier. We suggest that the Scottish Government publish more up to date information about how it engages with users of the school statistics.
- 3.2 The views of the main SSLN stakeholders are represented through a dedicated Project Management Board that brings together the partnership organisations that are responsible for running the survey; this Board includes the Scottish Government, SQA, Education Scotland and the Association of Directors of Education in Scotland<sup>27</sup>. The Scottish Government also brings together different partners and users from across the education system through its Operational Project Team and Literacy and Numeracy Reference Groups. The Scottish schools statisticians told us that they have attended relevant events to engage with local users and to disseminate the results of the survey. The Scottish Government has not published any papers or minutes from these meetings or events, but we were told papers would be made available to users on request. We suggest that the Scottish Government should make the SSLN Project Management Board papers available on the SSLN web pages.
- 3.3 *Attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living* includes information about the different destinations of young people after they have left school. SDS collects the data about pupils through two surveys; an initial survey in the September after the pupils leave school, with a follow-up survey six months later in March. The report includes data from both the initial and follow-up survey – supplied by SDS – and explores some of the changes between the two data points; it also includes a short time series. However, the report does not indicate that the initial survey results are released as management

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

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/scotstat>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/scotstat/PastCons>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.adescotland.org.uk/>

information by SDS before the release of *Attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living*. As part of the designation of National Statistics, the Scottish Government should clearly identify which leaver destinations statistics in *Attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living* have previously been released, including information about whether these have been subject to revision<sup>28</sup> (Requirement 1).

- 3.4 The Scottish Government told us that it publishes *SSLN* each spring to provide LA users and schools time to incorporate the results into their planning for the next school year. The timing is also designed to allow users in Education Scotland to use the results in developing a set of Professional Learning Resources<sup>29</sup> for schools and teachers at the start of the new school year. The Scottish Government told us that the survey was designed to be representative at Scotland level, in line with policy requirements to monitor national performance in literacy and numeracy. The *SSLN*'s small school-level sample size was proposed following feedback from schools and teachers regarding the burden the larger sample size used within the survey's predecessor (the Scottish Survey of Achievement, which ran from 2004 to 2009) imposed on schools. The Scottish Government also told us that producing LA breakdowns using *SSLN* data would be unreliable due to the small sample size and expected large margins of error. However, some LAs told us that they are still unsure about the utility of the national-level statistics for the local planning of education services. *SSLN* provides users with information about confidence intervals, which are presented on the charts within the report. However, it does not provide clear information about how the confidence intervals should be interpreted by users, and what the limitations of the statistics may be. The survey's design document contains more-detailed information about the methods used and the quality of the statistics, but it is not easily accessible from *SSLN*. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should provide information about the quality of the *SSLN* statistics – particularly in relation to use and potential use – and include links in *SSLN* to published information about the quality of the statistics<sup>30</sup> (Requirement 2). In meeting this Requirement, we suggest that the Scottish Government provide guidance to LAs about the use of the statistics in *SSLN* at a local level, including a clear explanation about why lower geographies cannot be produced.
- 3.5 *Attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living* and *Schools in Scotland* both include some information about sources, methods and data quality. However, there are a number of gaps, including the methods used in the pupil and teacher censuses and leaver destination surveys, and the quality of the census and SQA data. *Schools in Scotland* does not include links to the data collection instruments or guidance, and does not describe how the data are validated. It discusses the different ways that LAs might record 'centrally employed teachers' and 'visiting specialists', but it does not provide any indication of the impact and extent of these differences across LA areas. The report also notes that 'figures are not necessarily comparable over time', but does not provide

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<sup>28</sup> In relation to Principle 2, Practices 1 and 6 of the *Code of Practice*

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<http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/learningteachingandassessment/assessment/ssl/ssl/resources/numeracyprofessionallearningresource/index.asp>

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

any information about how users should interpret the time series. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should provide more information about methods and data quality in *Attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living* and *Schools in Scotland*, including the impact of recording differences between LAs<sup>31</sup> (Requirement 3).

- 3.6 The Authority's SER on Scottish school statistics noted that the Scottish Government was unable to provide information about the impact of discontinuing five sets of statistics, or the expected saving to the Scottish Government or to data suppliers. The consultation in 2011 found that while the majority of respondents were positive about the commentary in the new publications, they were less likely to feel that their needs for statistical data were being met. The consultation did not ask about the impact of changes to specific data collections, but some users told us that they are still unclear about the rationale for cancelling some items and changing the frequency of others. In particular, the data used to produce attendance, absence and exclusion statistics are now collected every two years rather than annually, but LAs and Education Scotland told us that this information is still required annually for other purposes, and that the change in the frequency with which the Scottish Government collects data makes it more difficult for them to compare different LA areas in a timely manner. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should investigate the impact of the changes to the data collections relating to schools and pupils and take this information into account in future statistical planning<sup>32</sup> (Requirement 4).
- 3.7 *Attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living* includes a short section about UK comparisons at the end of the report and provides a link to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation OECD and Programme for International Student Assessment results (PISA)<sup>33</sup>, which it recommends for making comparisons between UK countries; however, it does not provide any links to similar – although not directly comparable – statistics produced by other administrations. *SSLN* and *Statistics for Schools* do not provide any information about the availability of similar statistics produced across the UK. We suggest that the Scottish Government should provide information about the availability of (or lack of) comparable data for the other UK administrations in these reports.
- 3.8 The statisticians told us that staff costs for analysing the data and producing these reports are approximately £250,000 each year, excluding overheads. The Scottish Government has published information about the costs to SDS for conducting the destinations survey in *Attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living*, but it has not produced any estimates of the costs incurred by LAs to provide data requested from them for its healthy living survey. Similarly, it has not published compliance costs for the SSLN, or for the pupil and teacher censuses. The statisticians told us that they had found the calculation of a single compliance cost difficult due to the variation in estimates provided by LAs; this is discussed further in a document<sup>34</sup> on the Scottish Government's website. The statisticians also told us that schools are currently compensated by the Scottish Government for their participation in SSLN. This funding, which

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<sup>31</sup> In relation to Principle 4, Practices 1, 2 and 3 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>32</sup> In relation to Principle 1, Practices 4 and 5 and Principle 7, Practice 2 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/>

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/Compliancecosts>

is paid via LAs, amounts to £80 for each school. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should publish information about the costs to LAs and other data suppliers for providing the school-level data<sup>35</sup> (Requirement 5).

- 3.9 *Schools in Scotland* contains information collected from the pupil and teacher censuses, and presents information about the numbers of pupils and teachers and relative class sizes; the report provides some further information about class size policies in section 3.5, but this is not clearly linked to the analysis. *Attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living* provides useful summary charts and tables at the start of the report; however, the main body of the report is dominated by large reference tables, which could potentially hinder interpretation of the results. The Scottish Government also publishes more granular analysis of the attainment and leaver destinations statistics at LA-level in separate spreadsheets; however, the report does not contain any analysis of this information, or provide users with a clear understanding of what statistics are available. *SSLN* provides useful information about the background to the survey, and how the results will be used – as well clear explanations about the statistics presented. However, *SSLN* provides little explanation about why S2 pupils tend not to perform as well within their levels as those in P7. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should provide commentary and analysis in *Attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living* to support the range of information that is published in supplementary tables, and improve the commentary in *Schools in Scotland* and *SSLN* to help aid interpretation<sup>36</sup> (Requirement 6). We suggest that in meeting this requirement the Scottish Government should consider the points detailed in annex 2.
- 3.10 In August 2013, the Statistics Authority published a Monitoring Review *School-Level Examination Statistics*<sup>37</sup> about the presentation and accessibility of school-level attainment statistics across the different UK administrations. The Authority stated that it supports the publication of results at the level of the individual school in the form of official statistics that allow comparisons between schools and provide, alongside the statistics, professional statistical advice to guide users to make informed comparisons. The Scottish Government does not publish school-level statistics in any official statistics publication, although it does make these datasets available on request. Assessment report 50 required the Scottish Government to draw attention to the availability of information about the attainment statistics for individual schools, and make its attainment datasets available on request with appropriate explanation to encourage informed use. However, such information has not been included in the revised *Attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living*. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should draw attention in the relevant statistical reports to the availability of school-level attainment statistics and supporting datasets<sup>38</sup> (Requirement 7).

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

<sup>36</sup> In relation to Principle 8, Practices 2 and 3 of the *Code of Practice*

<sup>37</sup> <http://statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/correspondence/letter-from-sir-andrew-dilnot-to-rt-hon--david-laws-mp.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> In relation to Principle 8, Practices 3, 4, 5 and 6 of the *Code of Practice*

3.11 Education Scotland makes school-level attainment information available through its Schools Online<sup>39</sup> website; however, this website has no facilities to allow users to compare schools or to download such information. In addition, neither the Scottish Government nor Education Scotland has produced any guidance for users wishing to make informed comparisons between individual schools. The Scottish Government told us that it does not consider that there is much user demand for this type of analysis. The Scottish Government also told us that it is working with Education Scotland to produce a new Senior Phase Benchmarking Tool<sup>40</sup> (SPBT) that will allow LAs and schools to benchmark their performance with other individual schools and LAs from August 2014. The SPBT will use the data underpinning the statistics in *Attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living*, and will be made available to schools and LAs, as well as other educational providers; it is not intended that this tool will be made available to the public. We consider that this is a useful and valuable development that will allow users to make informed comparisons between individual schools. We suggest that the Scottish Government consider whether to make SPBT publicly available – in liaison with Education Scotland – and ensure that parents and other users are provided with appropriate information and guidance to make informed comparisons between schools.

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<sup>39</sup> <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/scottishschoolsonline/index.asp>

<sup>40</sup> <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/thecurriculum/howisprogressassessed/qualifications/benchmarking/index.asp>



## Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to the Scottish Government's school 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> | Publish more up to date information about how the Scottish Government engages with users of the schools statistics (para 3.1)  |
| <b>Suggestion 2</b> | Make the SSLN Project Management Board papers available on the SSLN web pages (para 3.2).  |
| <b>Suggestion 3</b> | Provide guidance to LAs about the use of the statistics in <i>SSLN</i> at local-level, including a clear explanation about why lower geographies cannot be produced (para 3.4).  |
| <b>Suggestion 4</b> | Provide information about the availability of (or lack of) comparable data for the other UK administrations in the schools reports (para 3.7)  |
| <b>Suggestion 5</b> | Consider the points detailed in annex 2 when improving these statistical reports (para 3.9).   |
| <b>Suggestion 6</b> | Consider whether to make the SPBT publicly available – in liaison with Education Scotland – and ensure that parents and other users are provided with appropriate information and guidance to make informed comparisons between schools (para 3.11). |

## **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>41</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 these school 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 The reports contain impartial commentary written in straightforward language, include clear definitions of technical terms and provide key points that are consistent with the statistics. The reports also contain useful information about the educational policies that could have an impact on the statistics.
- A2.4 The Scottish Government publishes useful supplementary statistics in spreadsheet format alongside the reports. However, the reports themselves do not provide users with a clear understanding of what additional statistics are available.

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

- A2.5 The reports provide information about the general use of the statistics at the start, and provide more specific examples of the use of the statistics in each of the sections. For example, paragraph 3.1 of *Attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living* notes that the information about the destinations of pupils after they leave schools is used to inform the 16+ Learning Choices<sup>42</sup> policy, which is designed to ensure that adequate support is provided for young people who may require help with entering and sustaining an education, employment or training destination.
- A2.6 *SSLN* provides clear information about why the statistics are produced and how they will be used by the Scottish Government; however, the report does not provide information about the utility of these statistics to schools and LAs.

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

- A2.7 Each report contains a background notes section at the end that provides summary information about the data sources, definitions and data quality, but some of this information is incomplete (paragraph 3.5). *SSLN* presents some confidence intervals for the statistics, but the report does not provide information about how users should interpret these quality measures. *SSLN* is also supported by a more-detailed survey guide that provides information about

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<sup>41</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/standards-for-statistical-reports.html>

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/03/30180354/0>

the methods used to produce the statistics and the quality of the statistics, but this is not easily accessed from the main report.

**Be professionally sound**

A2.8 The reports make good use of tables and charts to support the commentary. However, some tables in *Statistics for Schools* present unusual ranges for class-sizes without providing any explanation about why these ranges were chosen for analysis; the report does provide some further information about class size policy in section 3.5, but this is not clearly linked to the analysis.

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

A2.9 The reports all have clear titles and statements about the frequency of release. The reports also provide contact details for the responsible statistician and for the Chief Statistician in Scotland.

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

A3.1 This assessment was conducted from July to September 2013.

A3.2 The Assessment team – David Duncan-Fraser and Jill Barelli – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of the Scottish Government in July. The Written Evidence for Assessment for the SSLN statistics was provided on 9 August. Other written evidence was provided for *Attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living* and *Schools in Scotland* on 17 September. The Assessment team met with the Scottish Government during August and September 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 13 responses from the user and supplier consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Local authority data suppliers/users	7
Academia	2
NHSScotland	1
Skills Development Scotland	1
Education Scotland	1
Teachers' trade union	1

A3.5 Users said that the statistics largely met their needs, although some concerns were raised about the timeliness of the attainment and attendance statistics following the Scottish Governments review of its schools publications in 2010. Most LA data suppliers – who also use the final statistics – told us that the statistics provide useful information that allows them to benchmark their area against similar LAs and the national picture.

### Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

## Annex 4: Summary of Requirements from Assessment Report 50

A4.1 The school statistics in this assessment, excluding those from the SSLN, were assessed in Assessment report 50 and published in July 2010<sup>43</sup>. They have been re-assessed because the presentation of the statistics covered in the previous Assessment report has changed substantially; these changes were also discussed in the Authority's SER on Scottish Schools<sup>44</sup>.

A4.2 Assessment report 50 identified the following Requirements in relation to the statistics being re-assessed here:

<b>Requirement 1</b>	Take steps to develop a more complete understanding of the use made of the statistics, the needs of current and potential users, and user views on the service provided. Publish the relevant information and assumptions and use them to better support the beneficial use of the statistics.
<b>Requirement 3</b>	Investigate and seek to improve methods for estimating entitlement to free school meals.
<b>Requirement 4</b>	Publish annually the estimated compliance cost on suppliers of data for these statistics.
<b>Requirement 5</b>	Ensure that information is provided about classification systems used for these statistics.
<b>Requirement 6</b>	Adopt formats of presentation which enhance clarity; provide commentary and analysis that aid interpretation; and provide factual information about the context of these statistics.
<b>Requirement 7</b>	Draw attention in the relevant statistical releases to the availability of datasets of attainment statistics for individual schools, and make these datasets available on request with appropriate explanation to encourage informed use.
<b>Requirement 8</b>	Publish information on the arrangements for auditing the quality of the administrative data used to produce these statistics.

A4.3 The Statistics Authority confirmed the National Statistics designation of these statistics in a letter to the Scottish Government on 3 October 2011<sup>45</sup>. The letter noted that the Scottish Government was planning further steps to improve the presentation, commentary and analysis.

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<sup>43</sup> <http://statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/assessment-report-50---schools-for-scotland.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> <http://statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/correspondence/letter-from-sir-michael-scholar-to-john-swinney-msp-14062011.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> <http://statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/confirmation-of-designation-letters/letter-of-confirmation-as-national-statistics---assessment-report-50.pdf>

A4.4 Requirements 4, 5, 6, 7 and several suggestions in this report relate to aspects of *Code* compliance that resulted in Requirements in Assessment report 50. These concern user engagement, compliance costs, commentary, and access to school-level attainment data. Requirement 7 repeated a previous requirement – for the Scottish Government to draw attention to the availability of information about the attainment statistics for individual schools and make them available on request. The Scottish Government did not include this information in the revised *Attainment, leaver destinations and healthy living*.

