

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

## Statistics from the General Lifestyle Survey

*(produced by the Office for National  
Statistics)*

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

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

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

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

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

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

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## ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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# 1 Summary of findings

## 1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports<sup>1</sup> prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*<sup>2</sup>. The Act requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*<sup>3</sup>. The report covers the sets of statistics presented in *General Lifestyle Survey: Overview Report*<sup>4</sup> and *General Lifestyle Survey: Smoking and drinking among adults*<sup>5</sup>, produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

1.1.2 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 presented in *General Lifestyle Survey: Overview Report* and *Smoking and drinking among adults* are designated as National Statistics, subject to ONS implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by May 2011.

1.2.2 During the course of the assessment, ONS has decided to consult about the future of the GLF<sup>6</sup>. However, given that any decision on whether the survey will be discontinued won't impact until 2012, we think that the assessment retains its relevance for the statistics from the current survey.

## 1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

1.3.1 The General Lifestyle Survey (GLF) is a well-established, long-running survey using standard methods for social surveys. The GLF is now a module of the Integrated Household Survey<sup>7</sup>. ONS engages well with government users of these statistics, the EU and with academic users via the Economic and Social Data Service<sup>8</sup>. ONS publishes some information about use but this does not address wider uses of the data. We also saw little evidence of how users' needs feed into decision-making and timetables.

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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.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme\\_compendia/GLF08/GLFOverview2008.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_compendia/GLF08/GLFOverview2008.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme\\_compendia/GLF08/GLFSmoking&DrinkingAmongAdults2008.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_compendia/GLF08/GLFSmoking&DrinkingAmongAdults2008.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about/consultations/open-consultations/eusilc-integration-into-frs/index.html>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=15381>

<sup>8</sup> [www.esds.ac.uk](http://www.esds.ac.uk)

1.3.2 Two outputs are produced from the GLF, an *Overview Report* and *Smoking and drinking among adults*. The latter report is comprehensive and easily accessible, giving good commentary, context and quality information. The *Overview Report* provides a very brief narrative on the topics covered by the survey but includes no wider contextual information, commentary or graphical presentation. ONS publishes documentation about methods and quality although this could be more accessible in the *Overview Report*.

#### **1.4 Detailed recommendations**

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

#### **1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics**

<b>Requirement 1</b>	Take steps to develop a greater understanding of the use made of the statistics and publish the relevant information (para 3.3).
<b>Requirement 2</b>	Improve the commentary and presentation in the <i>Overview Report</i> to make the statistics more accessible to users and potential users (para 3.20).
<b>Requirement 3</b>	Publish the name and contact details of the responsible statistician in the <i>Overview Report</i> (para 3.26).

## 2 Subject of the assessment

- 2.1 The General Lifestyle Survey (GLF) has existed in some form since 1971; it was formerly known as the General Household Survey (GHS). The GLF is a continuous survey of around 9,000 households in Great Britain, collecting data on a range of topics such as smoking and drinking, health, family composition and households, housing and consumer durables, marriage and cohabitation, pensions and income. It was changed to become a longitudinal survey in 2005 to meet the requirements of the EU Statistics on Income and Living Conditions<sup>9</sup> (EU-SILC). The survey became a module of the Integrated Household Survey in 2008. ONS is proposing to stop the General Lifestyle Survey (GLF) in its current form from 2012. ONS is currently consulting on the implications of stopping the GLF and alternative sources of equivalent information.
- 2.2 The statistics from the survey are released in two reports, the *Overview Report* and *Smoking and drinking among adults*. The *Overview Report* has been produced in its current form since 2003. It replaced *Living in Britain*<sup>10</sup>. In contrast to *Living in Britain*, the *Overview Report* offers only a brief introduction to the statistical tables on the various topics covered in the survey. ONS also presents statistics from the GLF in other publications, such as *Pensions Trends*<sup>11</sup>, *Social Trends*<sup>12</sup> and *Health Statistics Quarterly*<sup>13</sup>.
- 2.3 *Smoking and drinking among adults* has been published since 2004; it provides a detailed narrative supporting the statistical tables. Statistics and commentary about smoking and drinking have been included in different forms in the survey publication since the 1970s. The NHS Information Centre (NHS IC)<sup>14</sup> currently funds the publication of the report.
- 2.4 Statistics from the GLF are used by government departments and other organisations for planning, policy and monitoring purposes and to present a picture of households, families and people in Great Britain. The statistics are used by: the Department of Health to supplement their own statistics on smoking and drinking and to provide estimates of life expectancy; the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) for information on pensions; HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) for the estimation of 'tax gaps' in relation to tobacco; and ONS, which uses fertility histories in producing population models and projections. Another important purpose of the GLF is to provide data to meet the requirements for statistics on living conditions of the EU-SILC. Data from the GLF are also widely used by academics for research and training purposes.
- 2.5 These outputs cost approximately £2 million to produce. This includes the costs of carrying out the survey, analysis and production of the reports.

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<sup>9</sup> [http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/income\\_social\\_inclusion\\_living\\_conditions/introduction](http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/income_social_inclusion_living_conditions/introduction)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/LIB2002/default.asp>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pensiontrends/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/socialtrends/>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hsq/hsqissue/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.ic.nhs.uk/statistics-and-data-collections>



### 3 Assessment findings

#### Principle 1: Meeting user needs

**The production, management and dissemination of official statistics should meet the requirements of informed decision-making by government, public services, business, researchers and the public.**

- 3.1 ONS consults with government users via the GLF Steering Group, which meets twice a year. The Group discusses updates and developments, and future requirements. The most recent meeting in June 2010 was attended by representatives from various topic divisions within ONS, and from the NHS IC, DWP and HMRC. Representatives from the Scottish Government and Welsh Assembly Government are also members of this Group. ONS engages with Eurostat, which uses GLF data to produce statistics on living conditions across the EU, via working groups and task forces involved in the development of EU-SILC.
- 3.2 ONS discusses survey developments with the wider research community in an annual user group meeting supported by the Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS). Papers and information about the group and its meetings<sup>15</sup> are available on ESDS's website, though there are no links to this information from ONS's website. ESDS also documents academic uses and users' experiences on its website. This user group primarily includes academics and other government departments although representatives from the media have attended occasionally. ONS is taking steps to become more actively involved in the user group by chairing and organising meetings jointly with ESDS. The Assessment team suggests that ONS provide a link to ESDS' website and publish information about the ESDS User Group.
- 3.3 The Summary Quality Report for *General Lifestyle Survey (GLF) Releases*<sup>16</sup> documents government use and users but it does not include non-government use and users, such as academics, businesses and the media. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should take steps to develop a greater understanding of the use made of the statistics and publish the relevant information<sup>17</sup> (Requirement 1). We suggest that ONS refers to the generic classes of use put forward in the Monitoring Brief: *The Use Made of Official Statistics*<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/esds/events/types/user/index.shtml>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/quality/qual-info-economic-social-and-bus-stats/quality-reports-for-social-statistics/summary-quality-report-for-general-lifestyle-survey.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> In relation to Principle 1 Practices 1, 2 and 5 of the Code of Practice

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-briefs/monitoring-brief-6-2010---the-use-made-of-official-statistics.pdf>

## Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

**Official statistics, and information about statistical processes, should be managed impartially and objectively.**

- 3.4 ONS publishes the GLF statistics free of charge on its website although they are not easily accessible on the National Statistics Publication Hub (see Protocol 2). The statistics are presented in an impartial and objective manner.
- 3.5 ONS discusses all changes with the GLF Steering Group and the ESDS User Group. In 2006 ONS made some changes to the methodology for estimating alcohol consumption, and it published a detailed report on the changes as part of the GSS Methodology Series<sup>19</sup>. This is referred to in *Smoking and drinking among adults*.
- 3.6 Statistics from the GLF are not subject to any scheduled revisions.

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=15067&Pos=&ColRank=1&Rank=272>

### **Principle 3: Integrity**

**At all stages in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics, the public interest should prevail over organisational, political or personal interests.**

- 3.7 No incidence of political pressure, abuses of trust or complaints relating to professional integrity, quality and standards were reported or identified by the Assessment team.

## Principle 4: Sound methods and assured quality

**Statistical methods should be consistent with scientific principles and internationally recognised best practices, and be fully documented. Quality should be monitored and assured taking account of internationally agreed practices.**

- 3.8 The GLF is a well-established survey using standard social survey methods for design and estimation. The survey was changed in 2005 to bring it into line with the EU-SILC specifications, redesigning the survey to become longitudinal. ESDS has published a paper<sup>20</sup> on its website outlining how the (then) GHS met the requirements of EU-SILC.
- 3.9 The quality of the statistics meets the needs of the main users, specifically government departments such as DWP and NHS IC, and Eurostat. Other users expressed concern over some issues, such as the reduction of the sample size following the survey becoming longitudinal and the quality of statistics on women's fertility histories. The Assessment team suggests that ONS include an explanation and analysis of such methodological issues in the *Summary Quality Report for General Lifestyle Survey (GLF) Releases*.
- 3.10 ONS publishes the statistics 13 months after the end of the reference period. ONS told us that it put back the publication by two months due to the integration of the GLF into the IHS and complex preparation of the longitudinal data. There is currently little information about how the GLF has been impacted upon by the IHS. We suggest that ONS explain the impact and benefits of the GLF's inclusion in the IHS. ONS told us that it does not intend to re-base the survey estimates for new weights following the 2011 Census. We suggest they inform users of this approach and explain the reasons why.
- 3.11 Extensive quality assurance procedures exist for GLF data, including: questionnaire piloting and testing, training for interviewers, frequency checks on data collected and peer review. These procedures are outlined in the *Summary Quality Report for General Lifestyle Survey (GLF) Releases* and appendices to the *Overview Report*. The topic-based analysis in the reports is checked by relevant topic experts within ONS, NHS IC and DWP.
- 3.12 ONS reviewed the survey in 1998/99, 2000/01 and 2005. It made significant improvements in 2001, such as: harmonising questions with the Census; expanding the section on families; and reducing the number of questions about education. ONS is proposing to stop the GLF in its current form from 2012, following the decision to transfer the EU-SILC component to the Family Resources Survey<sup>21</sup> (FRS). ONS is consulting on the future of the remaining components of the GLF. See comments in Principle 7.
- 3.13 The survey covers Great Britain and the associated reports present some data by Government Office Region and country. Similar data are collected in Northern Ireland in the Continuous Household Survey<sup>22</sup> run by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency but no information about this is given in

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.esds.ac.uk/government/ghs/links/GHSpaper.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> <http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/frs/>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.csu.nisra.gov.uk/survey.asp2.htm>

either report. The Assessment team suggests that ONS link to the Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey in the *Overview Report*.

## Principle 5: Confidentiality

**Private information about individual persons (including bodies corporate) compiled in the production of official statistics is confidential, and should be used for statistical purposes only.**

- 3.14 The GLF complies with ONS's confidentiality policy<sup>23</sup>. The GLF data tables follow the guidelines on disclosure control. A set of survey microdata is deposited in the UK Data Archive and ONS's Virtual Microdata Laboratory (VML) and is available to approved researchers. Previously, microdata have been available for use by researchers more widely but a lack of resources to protect the confidentiality of the longitudinal data in recent years has meant that such a dataset has not been made available. ONS is currently working with the ESDS to identify a smaller set of variables which could be made available to researchers.
- 3.15 The letter and brochure to respondents of the survey include details of how the confidentiality of the information provided will be protected.

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/disclosure/gss-policy-microdata.asp>

## Principle 6: Proportionate burden

**The cost burden on data suppliers should not be excessive and should be assessed relative to the benefits arising from the use of the statistics.**

- 3.16 ONS's *Simplification Plan 2009*<sup>24</sup> outlines the burden on respondents to the GLF. ONS provides GLF survey respondents with a brochure which includes information about the survey, its uses and the importance of the statistics.
- 3.17 The survey is one module of the IHS. The IHS is not a survey as such; it is a combined dataset of core variables from a number of household surveys, such as the GLF, the Living Cost and Food Survey (LCF) and the English Housing Survey (EHS). This has meant that the individual questionnaires for the GLF are slightly longer than previously, as they now cover an extra set of common questions. However, ONS has taken some steps to reduce the burden and costs, such as redesigning the survey to exploit the new longitudinal structure by rolling forward relevant responses from previous years, and making better use of administrative data.

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=14683>

## Principle 7: Resources

**The resources made available for statistical activities should be sufficient to meet the requirements of this Code and should be used efficiently and effectively.**

- 3.18 Approximately seven full-time equivalents work to produce the statistics from the GLF. ONS told us that there are a number of areas where developments have been limited due to the lack of resources, such as the construction of a longitudinal micro-dataset and investigations into detailed longitudinal effects. As a result neither of the statistical reports draws on the longitudinal element of the survey, which could potentially be exploited by ONS or other researchers. Some resource savings have been made following the inclusion of the GLF into the IHS, by the use of a joint survey development team and joint interviewer training.
- 3.19 ONS is currently determining the future of the GLF, and has established a project with DWP on the transfer of the EU-SILC component to the FRS. ONS is conducting a user consultation about the implications of stopping the survey and possible alternative data sources for the remaining information from the survey.



## Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

**Official statistics, accompanied by full and frank commentary, should be readily accessible to all users.**

- 3.20 ONS publishes two reports on the GLF statistics. The *Overview Report* is a very brief narrative on the different topics covered in the GLF. The report provides little commentary or contextual information and no accessible charts or tables. ONS told us that more comprehensive commentary on the different topic areas is published in other publications, such as *Social Trends* and *Pension Trends*. However there are no links to these publications or commentary in the *Overview Report*. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should improve the commentary and presentation in the *Overview Report* to make the statistics more accessible to users and potential users<sup>25</sup> (Requirement 2).
- 3.21 The NHS IC-funded *Smoking and drinking among adults* provides a good overall picture of smoking and drinking based on data from the GLF. The report also includes references to relevant tables and summary charts. ONS told us that NHS IC is reviewing its funding of the publication.
- 3.22 ONS publishes comprehensive information about quality and reliability in a number of annexes to the *Overview Report*. However, users responding to our consultation noted that they could not find basic quality information such as confidence intervals and sources of bias. This suggests that the quality information that ONS publishes is not sufficiently accessible for non-expert users. The Assessment team suggests that ONS publish more easily accessible information for non-expert users on the quality and reliability of the statistics in the *Overview Report*.
- 3.23 ONS provides statistical tables on its website in Excel format. Users mentioned a number of formatting and presentation changes that could make this information easier to re-use, such as a contents page in the Excel worksheet, deleting blank rows to support the charting of the data and age-standardising the results. We suggest that ONS review the statistical tables in Excel to ensure that these are presented in an appropriate way.

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<sup>25</sup> In relation to Principle 8 Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

## **Protocol 1: User engagement**

**Effective user engagement is fundamental both to trust in statistics and securing maximum public value. This Protocol draws together the relevant practices set out elsewhere in the Code and expands on the requirements in relation to consultation.**

3.24 The requirements for this Protocol are covered elsewhere in this report.

## Protocol 2: Release practices

**Statistical reports should be released into the public domain in an orderly manner that promotes public confidence and gives equal access to all, subject to relevant legislation.**

- 3.25 ONS does not adequately signpost the GLF statistics on the National Statistics Publication Hub. They are available but are still labelled as the General Household Survey. We suggest ONS ensure that the statistics are correctly signposted from the Publication Hub. ONS has published a timetable for the release of GLF statistical reports on the Publication Hub.
- 3.26 The *Overview Report* names several authors of the report and an email address directing enquiries to a general Social Surveys email address. As part of the designation as National Statistics, ONS should publish the name and contact details of the responsible statistician in the *Overview Report*<sup>26</sup> (Requirement 3).
- 3.27 ONS publishes a pre-release access list for *Smoking and drinking among adults*, which is a list of 14 officials, mainly from the Department of Health. ONS does not give pre-release access to the *Overview Report*.
- 3.28 The *Code* requires National Statistics releases to be issued at 9.30 am on the day of publication. ONS's website systems do not enable releases to be published simultaneously, which means there is sometimes a delay beyond 9.30 am. ONS informed us that this matter is being reviewed as part of its web development programme, which ONS expects to be implemented on 30 April 2011. The Head of Assessment has agreed an exemption from Protocol 2 practice 4 for ONS until the new website functionality is available. The exemption request, and the Head of Assessment's response are available on the Statistics Authority's website<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> In relation to Protocol 2 Practice 6 of the Code of Practice

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/exemption-requests/index.html>

### **Protocol 3: The use of administrative sources for statistical purposes**

**Administrative sources should be fully exploited for statistical purposes, subject to adherence to appropriate safeguards.**

3.29 Statistics from the GLF are based on survey data. Other survey data (that is from the Living Costs and Food Survey, the FRS and the Opinions Survey) are used in quality assurance.

## Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to the statistics from the GLF published by ONS, 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.

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| <b>Suggestion 1</b> | Provide a link to ESDS' website and publish information about the ESDS User Group (para 3.2).   |
| <b>Suggestion 2</b> | As part of documenting the use of these statistics (see Requirement 1), refer to the types of use put forward in the Monitoring Brief: <i>The Use Made of Official Statistics</i> <sup>28</sup> (para 3.3). |
| <b>Suggestion 3</b> | Include an explanation and analysis of methodological issues in the <i>Summary Quality Report for General Lifestyle Survey (GLF) Releases</i> (para 3.9).   |
| <b>Suggestion 4</b> | Explain the impact and benefits of the GLF's inclusion in the IHS (para 3.10).  |
| <b>Suggestion 5</b> | Inform users that ONS does not intend to re-base the survey estimates for new weights following the 2011 Census and explain the reasons why (para 3.12).  |
| <b>Suggestion 6</b> | Link to the Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey in the <i>Overview Report</i> (para 3.13).   |
| <b>Suggestion 7</b> | Publish more easily accessible information for non-expert users on the quality and reliability of the statistics in the <i>Overview Report</i> (para 3.22).   |
| <b>Suggestion 8</b> | Review the Excel data tables to ensure that these are presented in an appropriate way (3.23).   |
| <b>Suggestion 9</b> | Ensure that the statistics are correctly signposted from the Publication Hub (para 3.25).   |

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-briefs/monitoring-brief-6-2010---the-use-made-of-official-statistics.pdf>

## Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A2.1 This assessment was conducted from September 2010 to January 2011.

A2.2 The Assessment team – Cathy Kruger and Penny Babb – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of ONS in September. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 15 October. The Assessment team subsequently met ONS during November 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

A2.3 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.

A2.4 The Assessment team received 15 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Central government	7
Devolved Administration	1
Health sector	5
Academic	2

A2.5 Users were generally happy with the statistics, finding the long time series valuable. Users expressed some concerns about the quality of statistics from the GLF, due to its small sample size, and conflicts with other similar statistics, such as the statistics on smoking from the Health Survey for England. Academic users in particular felt that the lack of a set of longitudinal microdata restricted the usability of the data. Users mentioned a number of improvements which could be made to methodology, including: more timely data (earlier than a year after the reference period); better metadata for each series; age-standardised results; confidence intervals to enable robust statistical comparisons; and area codes to allow data linking.

A2.6 Users mostly found the presentation adequate although some felt that the commentary was quite brief and would benefit from more signposting, and better links between old data and new. Some users noted areas where the presentation could be improved: better explanation of what related surveys cover; better signposting; and better formatting to allow further analysis.

A2.7 Users were mostly positive about engagement with ONS, having regular contact with the statisticians via ad hoc requests or annual user groups. The user groups were helpful in picking up information about new or planned

developments, though some users would like to be notified by email or via the website instead.

### **Key documents/links provided**

Written Evidence for Assessment document





