



Scottish House Condition Survey

*Scottish
Government*

Assessment Report 11

September 2009

Scottish House Condition Survey

September 2009

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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

Under the provisions of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007, the UK Statistics Authority has a statutory function to assess sets of statistics against the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, with a view to determining whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated, or to retain their designation, as National Statistics.

Designation as National Statistics means that the statistics are deemed to be compliant with the Code of Practice. Whilst the Code is wide-ranging, designation may be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics meet identified user needs; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are well explained.

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

Designation as National Statistics will sometimes be granted in cases where some changes still need to be made to meet fully the requirements of the Code, on condition that steps are taken by the producer body, within a stated timeframe, to address the weaknesses. This is to avoid public confusion and does not reduce the obligation to comply with the Code.

Designation is granted on the basis of the information provided to the Statistics Authority, primarily by the organisation that produces the statistics. The information includes a range of factual evidence and also assurances by the producer organisation. The views of users are also sought. Should further information come to light subsequently which changes the Authority's analysis, the Assessment report may be withdrawn and revised as necessary.

Once designated as National Statistics, it is a statutory requirement on the producer organisation to ensure that the set of statistics continues to be produced in compliance with the Code of Practice.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This is one of a series of reports to be prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*¹. The Act requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the Code of Practice for Official Statistics². The Act also allows Ministers or the National Statistician to request an assessment of other official statistics in order for them to gain National Statistics status. This report is in response to such a request. The report covers the *Scottish House Condition Survey*,³ produced by the Scottish Government. The survey combines a household interview with a physical inspection of dwellings. It provides statistics on the quality of Scottish houses, linked to statistics on the wellbeing of their inhabitants.
- 1.2 The assessment of the *Scottish House Condition Survey* was carried out alongside assessments of two other major Scottish surveys, the *Scottish Health Survey* and the *Scottish Crime and Justice Survey*. An assessment of a fourth major Scottish survey, the *Scottish Household Survey*, was due to be carried out shortly afterwards. Cross-cutting issues arising from the four assessments will be covered in a separate Monitoring and Assessment note.
- 1.3 The Statistics Authority will be inviting comments on both the process for assessment and the presentation of Assessment reports, with a view to further development of the arrangements in the coming months. The forward programme of Assessments can be found on the Authority's website⁴ along with further information on the principles and procedures for assessment⁵.

¹ http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pga/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf

² <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/code-of-practice-for-official-statistics.pdf>

³ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/SHCS>

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

⁵ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/principles---procedures/index.html>

1.4 The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

Section 2 Summary of findings, highlighting the main strengths and weaknesses in relation to the Code of Practice. This summary includes the UK Statistics Authority's decision in relation to designation as National Statistics.

Section 3 Subject of the assessment, an overview of the statistics and their history.

Section 4 The Assessment team's detailed assessment, providing more details about the assessment of compliance against each principle and protocol of the Code of Practice.

Annex 1 Suggestions for improvement

Annex 2 Summary of the assessment process and users' views.

1.5 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.

2 Summary of findings

2.1 Decision concerning designation as National Statistics

- 2.1.1 The Statistics Authority has determined that the *Scottish House Condition Survey* should be designated as a new National Statistics product, subject to the Scottish Government implementing the enhancements listed in section 2.4 below and reporting them to the Authority by January 2010.
- 2.1.2 Designation as National Statistics means that the statistics are deemed to be compliant with the Code of Practice, and thus that they meet identified user needs; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are well explained.
- 2.1.3 Designation also signifies that, subject to any caveats in this report, the Statistics Authority judges that the statistics are readily accessible, produced according to sound methods and managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

2.2 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 2.2.1 The Statistics Authority is satisfied that the *Scottish House Conditions Survey* is compliant with most aspects of the Code of Practice. The producers promote use of the statistics by providing training and web tables of analyses broken down by local authority.
- 2.2.2 The annual reports present data clearly and give explanations of methodology, data limitations, definitions and classification systems. Revisions to the 2007 annual report were announced and explained through the website. The downloadable report was updated with the revised figures, but the revisions were not made explicit in the report itself.
- 2.2.3 Reports, datasets, technical information and team contact details are easily accessible through dedicated survey pages on the Scottish Government website. Users can request specific data sets and analyses which is provided by the producers without charge. However, at the time of the assessment, data had not been submitted to the UK Data Archive since 2002.

2.3 Detailed recommendations

- 2.3.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that the Scottish Government could strengthen its compliance with the Code. Those considered essential to enable designation as National Statistics are listed in section 2.4 below. Other suggestions, which would improve the statistics and the service provided to users but which are not central to their designation, are listed at annex 1.

2.4 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

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|----------------------|---|
| Requirement 1 | Publish information on users' experiences of these statistics, data quality, and the format and timing of reports (para 4.3) |
| Requirement 2 | Pre-announce the publication date as soon as practicable and ensure that all releases are accessible via the Publication Hub (para 4.4) |
| Requirement 3 | Include the date of publication in the annual report to avoid any possible confusion with revised versions that may be published at a later date (para 4.6) |
| Requirement 4 | Publish a revisions policy for these statistics (para 4.7) |
| Requirement 5 | Publish the latest technical report without delay, and publish all future technical reports either as part of the Annual report, or separately but within a short and pre-specified period of the Annual Report's release (para 4.10) |
| Requirement 6 | Publish the arrangements for protecting confidential <i>Scottish House Condition Survey</i> data (para 4.16) |
| Requirement 7 | Publish information about average interview duration on an annual basis (para 4.18) |
| Requirement 8 | Submit without delay data sets from 2003 onwards to the UK Data Archive (para 4.25) |
| Requirement 9 | Draw attention to any statistics being released that are used to measure progress towards current government targets and provide a description of these targets (para 4.27) |

3 Subject of the assessment

- 3.1 The *Scottish House Condition Survey* is a national survey of housing undertaken in Scotland. It combines a household interview with an inspection of dwellings. This enables physical data on the quality of houses to be linked with social and economic data on the people who live in them.
- 3.2 The outputs of the survey are used within the Scottish Government to guide policy on housing, rural poverty and greenhouse gas emissions. The outputs also inform the Scottish Parliament's scrutiny of the effectiveness of these policies. Data are used to derive statistics on the proportion of households living in fuel poverty and the energy efficiency of Scottish houses. They are used to monitor progress towards government and local authority targets for fuel poverty and housing quality.
- 3.3 External users include academics, energy-related companies, the construction industry and third sector organisations involved in housing, preservation of historical buildings and environmental issues. Uses include: investigating the uptake of energy efficiency measures, investigating the use of traditional building materials in Scottish homes, and investigating the living conditions of vulnerable groups, such as the elderly.
- 3.4 Since 2003, the *Scottish House Condition Survey* has been a continuous survey with an annual sample size of around 3,000 households, reported on annually. Prior to 2003, there were three large scale, but infrequent Scottish House Condition Surveys. Surveys were conducted in 1991, 1996 and 2002 and typically consisted of sample sizes of around 15,000 households.
- 3.5 The Scottish Government has contracted the data collection for 2007 to 2011 to Ipsos-MORI. From 2007, the producers began reporting on a calendar year basis rather than an October to September cycle. Analysis and reporting is carried out by the survey team within the Scottish Government.
- 3.6 The annual cost of the *Scottish House Condition Survey* is in the region of £1.5 million.
- 3.7 National results are available annually, but the sample size is too small to produce reliable annual estimates for most local authorities. The producers thus make available on the web rolling three-year statistical tables containing local authority results.

4 Detailed assessment

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.

- 4.1 In 2006 the Scottish Government carried out a full consultation about the *Scottish House Condition Survey*. In 2009 there was a consultation with users over minor proposed changes to the physical survey.⁶ The producers plan to carry out an extensive review of the survey in 2010. The findings from this review will inform plans for data collection arrangements from 2012 and beyond.
- 4.2 The Scottish Government provides a data analysis service in response to *ad hoc* enquiries from survey users. Users that we contacted spoke highly of the team's responsiveness to their enquiries. When the team receives a request for a certain analysis from one local authority, it routinely publishes tables with the data for all local authorities. Other forms of user engagement include advising and training local authorities on data use, speaking at conferences and policy liaison.
- 4.3 The Scottish Government keeps a database of all *ad hoc* enquiries and intends to use this to inform the planned review in 2010. User engagement could be improved by providing more information about users and user views on the survey website. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should publish information on users' experiences of these statistics, data quality, and the format and timing of reports⁷ (Requirement 1).

⁶ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/SHCS/Consultation>

⁷ In relation to Principle 1 Practice 5 of the Code of Practice

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

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

- 4.4 The Scottish Government's policy is to pre-announce the month of publication for statistical releases 12 months in advance and to pre-announce the actual date of release the month before the release. The list of forthcoming statistical publications is available on the Scottish Government website. At the time of the assessment, the *Scottish House Condition Survey* was not listed on the Forthcoming Publications web page for statistical releases; neither was it on the Publication Hub. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should pre-announce the publication date as soon as practicable and ensure that all releases are accessible via the Publication Hub⁸ (Requirement 2).
- 4.5 Since 2006 the publication date of the annual report has been brought forward from December to October to reduce the time lag between data collection and reporting.
- 4.6 Following the publication of the 2007 findings, the producers identified some errors in the published figures. They announced the errors and published the revised figures with full explanations of the reasons and the nature of the changes. The report was updated, but the version available on the website was not dated and there was no note in it to say which figures had been revised. The Scottish Government plans to update the 2007 report to show which figures have been changed and to direct users to the revision notes published on the website. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should include the date of publication in the annual report to avoid any possible confusion with revised versions that may be published at a later date⁹ (Requirement 3).
- 4.7 The Scottish Government is currently developing a revisions policy. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should publish a revisions policy for these statistics¹⁰ (Requirement 4).
- 4.8 The Scottish Government publishes a set of rates that it may charge for statistical services, although the final decision on whether to apply these charges is left to individual teams. The Scottish House Condition Survey team informed us that it has yet to charge for additional data or analyses.

⁸ In relation to Principle 2 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

⁹ In relation to Principle 2 Practice 7 of the Code of Practice

¹⁰ In relation to Principle 2 Practice 6 of the Code of Practice

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.

- 4.9 No incidents of political pressures, abuses of trust or complaints relating to professional integrity, quality or 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.

- 4.10 The annual report gives clear explanations of the method, definitions and classification systems used. It alerts the reader to data limitations, possible causes of bias and other sources of error. A separate technical report is produced, but the most recent version (for the 2007 survey) was not published at the time of the assessment. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should publish the latest technical report without delay, and publish all future technical reports either as part of the Annual report, or separately but within a short and pre-specified period of the Annual Report's release ¹¹ (Requirement 5).
- 4.11 The Scottish Government combines three years' of survey data to produce reliable estimates at local authority level. This produces a long lag time between data collection and availability. This is a particular problem for survey estimates of fuel poverty which are used to measure progress against local policy targets. To address this need, the Scottish Government combines survey data with more recent data on fuel prices, income and benefits to produce fuel poverty estimates for the most recent year.
- 4.12 Certain estimates for Scotland from the *Scottish House Condition Survey* such as fuel poverty cannot be compared with estimates used by the other three countries of the UK due to differences in definitions. The survey team is in regular contact with colleagues running similar surveys in other parts of the UK. A four-nation house condition survey group meets twice a year.¹² The group is investigating how the products might be adapted to allow greater comparability. As an initial step, they are analysing the differences in the way that the fuel poverty estimates are calculated.
- 4.13 The Scottish Government has a strategy for the harmonisation of the major Scottish surveys. This aims to meet information needs through a more coordinated approach to conducting surveys in Scotland.¹³ The *Scottish House Condition Survey* has incorporated the harmonised core questions developed as part of this strategy.

¹¹ In relation to Principle 4 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice.

¹² See annex A2.6

¹³ The harmonisation programme covers The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey, The Scottish Health Survey, The Scottish House Condition Survey and The Scottish Household Survey. See <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/About/Surveys>

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.

- 4.14 Respondents to the survey are given assurances that individuals cannot be identified in the final published data and that no information which could be used to identify them will be made available without their consent. Respondents are asked to sign consent forms to provide a record of this.
- 4.15 The Scottish Government confirmed that individual level data from the survey are held securely. The team carries out disclosure control before releasing data.
- 4.16 The Scottish Government is currently drafting a Corporate Policy Statement on Confidentiality which covers statistical disclosure control. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should publish the arrangements for protecting confidential *Scottish House Condition Survey* data¹⁴ (Requirement 6).
- 4.17 In 2008, the Scottish Government explored the possibility of providing an external contractor with individual addressed records as part of a research project commissioned by the Scottish Government. After extensive consideration, the Chief Statistician (Head of Profession) decided not to provide this information as it would not have been consistent with the assurances provided to respondents regarding confidentiality. The survey manager reported that he was put under considerable pressure to release the data, although the final decision rested with the Chief Statistician. The Scottish Government does not have any office-wide process that would allow it to consider, on a consistent basis, individual cases for the release of disclosive data to a third party. For example, the ONS has a Microdata Release Panel that fulfils this function. We suggest that the Scottish Government carries out a “lessons learned” review from this case with a view to strengthening its approach to the legitimate release of disclosive data.

¹⁴ In relation to Principle 5 Practice 4 of the Code of Practice.

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.

- 4.18 The Scottish Government has taken steps to reduce the length of interviews by imputing household income and using administrative data on connection to the gas mains grid and council tax bands. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should publish information about average interview duration on an annual basis¹⁵ (Requirement 7).
- 4.19 Sampled households receive a letter along with a leaflet that provides information about the survey and how the information provided is to be used. This includes a link to the survey website. Some Scottish Government survey websites have dedicated sections for respondents,¹⁶ but there are no dedicated sections for respondents on the Scottish House Conditions Survey pages on the Scottish Government website. We suggest that the producers develop web pages that are specifically designed to provide information for households that are invited to participate in the *Scottish House Condition Survey*.

¹⁵ In relation to Principle 6 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

¹⁶ See for examples <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/16002/Interviewees> and <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Health/scottish-health-survey/faqs>

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.

- 4.20 The Scottish Government employs five staff on the *Scottish House Condition Survey*. It has assured us that this level of resources is sufficient.
- 4.21 The Scottish Government has a dedicated Training and Development intranet that includes a competence framework and provides learning and development opportunities for staff. It also has well-established procedures for recruiting staff.
- 4.22 The Scottish Government is the budget and contract manager for the *Scottish House Condition Survey*. The data collection and initial processing is managed by Ipsos-MORI which was awarded the contract through a competitive tender. A member of the Scottish Government survey team visits Ipsos-MORI on a weekly basis.
- 4.23 Ipsos-MORI employs the property surveyors involved in data collection for the *Scottish House Condition Survey*. The Scottish Government is involved in the recruitment and training. It delivers a five-day initial training course and a two-day refresher course for property surveyors. It also produces a property surveyors' manual.

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

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

- 4.24 The annual report for 2007 gives clear explanations of the methods, data limitations, possible causes of bias and other errors. Confidence intervals, response rates and sample sizes are provided. The report includes clear definitions and an explanation of classification systems. It could be improved through the inclusion of a list of acronyms and abbreviations.
- 4.25 The data have not been submitted to the UK Data Archive since 2002. The producers informed us that they were aware of this shortcoming, but they had not treated it as a priority since the data were already available through the website and through the *ad hoc* service. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should submit without delay data sets from 2003 onwards to the UK Data Archive¹⁷ (Requirement 8).
- 4.26 High-level summary statistics with trends (fuel poverty and Scottish Housing Quality Standard) are currently only updated to 2006 on the Scottish Government website. We suggest that these are updated as soon as they are available.
- 4.27 The Scottish Government has told us that the *Scottish House Condition Survey* is used to measure progress against government targets for fuel poverty and Scottish Housing Quality Standard. The annual report for 2007 mentions that the *Scottish House Condition Survey* is used to assist in the monitoring of Ministerial targets, but it does not mention these specific targets, nor does it highlight the relevant statistics. As part of the designation as National Statistics, the Scottish Government should draw attention to any statistics being released that are used to measure progress towards current government targets and provide a description of these targets¹⁸ (Requirement 9).

¹⁷ In relation to Principle 8 Practice 7 of the Code of Practice.

¹⁸ 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.

4.28 See Principle 1.

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.

4.29 During the preparation of the report, selected data tables are shared with two named policy colleagues for quality assurance purposes. The Scottish Government stores the correspondence relating to pre-release access to these statistics in its records management system. A list of individuals with pre-release access to the statistics in their final form, together with information on how long these individuals have pre-release access and the reasons for granting access, is available on request. This is in accordance with section 8 of the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics (Scotland) Order 2008. We suggest that the Scottish Government publishes records of those granted pre-release access to these statistics in their final form.

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.

4.30 The Scottish Government uses administrative data on council tax bands and connection to the gas mains grid as part of the *Scottish House Condition Survey* (see para 4.18). Administrative data on fuel prices, benefits and incomes are used to make estimates of fuel poverty more up to date (see para 4.11).

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to the *Scottish House Condition Survey*, 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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| Suggestion 1 | Carry out a “lessons learned” review from the case mentioned in para 4.17 with a view to strengthening its approach to the legitimate release of disclosive data |
| Suggestion 2 | Develop web pages that are specifically designed to provide information for households that are invited to participate in the <i>Scottish House Condition Survey</i> (para 4.19) |
| Suggestion 3 | Include a list of acronyms and abbreviations in the annual report (para 4.24) |
| Suggestion 4 | Update high level statistics trends on fuel poverty and Scottish Housing Quality Standard (para 4.26) |
| Suggestion 5 | Publish records of those granted pre-release access to these statistics in their final form (para 4.29) |

Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A2.1 This assessment was conducted from June to August 2009.

A2.2 The Assessment team met representatives of the Scottish Government at an initial meeting in June 2009. Some background information was provided by the Scottish Government during June and July. Written Evidence for Assessment was provided in draft form on 17 July and in finalised form on 5 August. The Assessment team met with the producer department during August 2009 to confirm and clarify the written evidence provided.

Summary of users and stakeholders contacted, and issues raised

A2.3 The Assessment team received 9 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Scottish Government	5
Other National Administration	1
Academic	2
Third Sector (Housing)	1

A2.4 The general level of satisfaction among the users who sent in their views on this product was high, with 8 of the users giving overall positive feedback. Three of the users reported particular satisfaction with the user engagement, and the quick response to *ad hoc* enquiries. Users also praised the quality of the report, comprehensiveness of the data and the accessibility of web tables of local authority level data. Points of dissatisfaction included the accessibility and format of the data, frequency of the publication and the fact that local level data were not available in the annual reports.

A2.5 The assessment team met with the contractors who carry out the data collection and verification for *Scottish House Condition Survey*.

A2.6 The assessment took into account views from producers of House condition surveys in the other countries of the United Kingdom.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/SHCS/Downloads>

<http://www.shcs.gov.uk/>

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/SHCS/Consultation>

Documents not available on the Web:

Ipsos-MORI (2008) *Scottish House Condition Survey - Technical report 2007*

Scottish Government (2006) *Continuous Scottish House Condition Survey: Surveyors Manual 2006-2009*

Information leaflet provided to respondents (written by Scottish Executive and Ipsos-MORI (2007))

