
Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead

Sean Whellams
Head of Profession for Statistics
HMRC
(by email)

9 January 2018

Dear Sean

STATISTICS ON STAMP TAXES

As you are aware, we recently completed a high-level short review of your *Quarterly Stamp Duty and Annual UK Stamp Tax statistics* against the Code of Practice for statistics and this letter confirms our findings. There is an obvious public and commercial interest in property transaction and property price data, and in data about the resultant tax take, most recently of course following budget changes to the tax regime. We found that the statistics are prepared impartially, produced to good standards and provide useful insight to users. Additional strengths of the statistics include:

- they represent a near census of all the taxable property transactions
- the use of valuable feedback to help develop the statistics following consultation with users in 2015
- the availability of various geographical breakdowns according to standard units such as Government Office Region, local authority, parliamentary constituency etc, so regional breakdowns are comparable with other published statistics

There are five areas where we see potential improvement of these statistics:

1. The background quality report for these statistics is out of date; updating this would provide greater assurance to users about the quality of your statistics. In updating this, we suggest that you take into account our [quality assurance of administrative data \(QAAD\) toolkit](#), and communicate to users how any limitations could affect the statistics and their use.
2. Your property transactions data result in different estimates of the numbers of transactions from those provided by other government bodies' data about property transactions, for example in the devolved nations and with ONS's House Price Statistics for Small Areas. There is little information in the public domain about why these data do not align. We regard the existence of many sets of official statistics covering the same set of transactions that do not align as being potentially confusing to users. It is important that there be a public reconciliation, and as far as possible alignment, of the different estimates of numbers of property transactions for devolved nations and for the UK. We recognise that this needs to be a collaborative effort between yourselves and the various bodies. We will write to each of them suggesting collaboration to minimise potential confusion for users of the various statistics.
3. We have passed on to the statistics team some presentational enhancements that could be made to these statistics, for example better labels for the tabs in the data spreadsheets, better table headings in the statistical bulletin and better explanations of symbols.
4. The format for the presentation of the statistics is primarily a PDF document, with data also published in proprietary XLS format in spreadsheets. It may be helpful to review whether your presentation of the statistics reflects the range of users and their uses. Some users

might wish for greater ability to manipulate your data and commentary for use in their own analyses.

5. Users would gain a better understanding of the potential for volatility in the statistics if you explained the nature and extent of revisions at the same time that you release the statistics.

Thank you for engaging effectively with us during this short review. I would welcome updates from you as your work proceeds. Please let me know if there is any aspect of this letter that you wish to discuss.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Pont', with a horizontal line underneath.

Mark Pont
Assessment Programme Lead