
Mary Gregory, Deputy Director for Regulation

Glyn Jones, Chief Statistician, Welsh Government
(by email)

29 March 2019

Dear Glyn

EXAMINATION RESULTS IN SCHOOLS IN WALES

As you are aware we recently carried out a short review of compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics of the [Examination Results in Schools in Wales](#) statistics as part of our ongoing programme of compliance checks. I am pleased to confirm that these statistics should continue to be designated as National Statistics. Your team has made continued efforts to add value to these statistics, assure their quality and support user access to the data. We were impressed by the steps being taken to minimise the risk of schools changing their behaviour to influence their performance ratings and your team's sense of responsibility about this issue. Our review identified some minor improvements for you to consider.

I would like to highlight your team's recent work to modernise the bulletin and how they have been helping users to understand the major changes introduced following the independent review of examinations in Wales. The targeted work with journalists and the opposition party education spokespeople in the Welsh Assembly are particularly strong examples of good practice. Your team identified these groups' interest in the statistics and delivered bespoke briefings to support their understanding of them. In recognition of this, we think it would be an excellent candidate for a case study for the online Code of Practice.

The rest of this letter sets out the main findings of our review, based around the three pillars of the Code.

Trustworthiness:

- We welcome your plans to add more details to your bulletin about how users can access the qualifications data that you deposit with the SAIL databank. Enabling greater access to data in this way expands opportunities for users to add valuable insights via secondary analysis, especially when the data are linked with other relevant data sources. To help build trustworthiness, we recommend you also include information about data safeguarding, as outlined in our regulatory [guidance](#) on data governance. The Five Safes can be a helpful way to present this information.

Quality:

- Maintaining consistent standards and quality can be challenging when collating data from multiple sources. To address this, these data undergo a series of appropriate automated and manual validation checks at multiple stages in the data collection

and collation process. The way that schools support the quality assurance process is particularly valuable and they clearly take their role in this process seriously.

- It might be helpful to provide more information about these processes in your Key Quality Information to help users of the statistics fully appreciate the steps taken to assure the quality of the underlying data.

Value:

- The recent changes to the format and contents of the bulletin are a major improvement: its key messages are clear, the graphs are very readable, and infographics help tell the story. You sought input from the Government Statistical Service Good Practice Team and users were consulted throughout. You are continuing to innovate and will soon be publishing in html format. Following our feedback, you will also be looking to provide additional insights about the geographic variations in attainment presented in the bulletin.
- The changes introduced following the independent review of qualifications in Wales mean that there is now limited time series data on attainment and comparability with GCSE performance in the rest of the UK is becoming more challenging. The bulletin illustrates the break in the time series very clearly and users are provided with detailed information about what kinds of cross-national comparisons can and can't be made.
- The team's close engagement with policy colleagues in Welsh Government helps to ensure that planned changes to the curriculum are adequately supported by independent statistical evidence.
- The classifications and definitions used to report educational attainment can be complicated for lay readers. Following our feedback, we welcome your commitment to add a summary of the main measures presented to the start of the bulletin. Additional clarification that the A level results in these statistics are for young people aged 17 *at the start of the school year* could also be helpful.
- These statistics cover qualifications taken in schools in Wales. The recently published experimental statistics on examinations taken in other settings are a very welcome development that will help provide a more comprehensive and coherent picture of post-16 attainment in Wales. We welcome your plans to provide more links between these two sets of statistics.

I would like to thank your team for engaging effectively with us during this review. I look forward to hearing more about the Welsh Government's plans to join up these data with other sources to add further insights for users.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Gregory". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mary Gregory
Deputy Director for Regulation