
Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead

Professor Roger Halliday
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Scottish Government

16 July 2020

Dear Roger

SCOTTISH INDEX OF MULTIPLE DEPRIVATION 2020 STATISTICS

I am writing to you following our review of the Scottish Government's [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2020 \(SIMD\)](#) statistics against the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). The statistics were reviewed against the three pillars of the Code: trustworthiness, quality and value.

SIMD statistics are an important tool for identifying the most disadvantaged areas and for supporting decisions about addressing local needs. They are widely used by central and local government and community organisations to target their services. The statistics have been considered as part of a wider review of the indices of deprivation statistics in Great Britain, alongside our compliance checks of the statistics produced by the Welsh Government and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).

I am pleased to confirm that these statistics should continue to be designated as National Statistics, subject to the required actions that we describe later in this letter.

We found several positive examples in the way Scottish Government engages with others to produce the statistics:

- The [statistical bulletin](#) contains a mix of infographics, maps and high level commentary which draw out the key findings from the statistics. The bulletin uses data visualisation effectively to compare individual domains with the overall SIMD for regions, which helps illustrate to users that areas do not have to be deprived across all measures to experience deprivation.
- The Scottish Government has a clear understanding of the uses and users of the statistics and engages regularly with domain experts and key stakeholders to inform the development of the statistics. The frequency of SIMD is tailored to user need as the team told us that it can be a burden on local authorities and third sector organisations, who used SIMD in their own analyses, if SIMD is updated too regularly.
- The team has sought to bring out the public value of SIMD and its impact on local areas in Scotland, as part of the materials it publishes. The bulletin contains case studies from Scotland's Regeneration Forum and the University of Glasgow's Dumfries Campus, to demonstrate the relevance of the statistics to users.
- The team spoke highly of its relationship with the other nations. The 'four nations group' meets regularly and works collaboratively to make guidance and presentation across the deprivation statistics more consistent. The definition of deep-rooted deprivation, introduced previously to SIMD, has been adopted by the Welsh Government as a result of this collaboration.

We have identified several areas where we consider that some improvements would benefit users in understanding how SIMD is put together and would ensure that SIMD fully meets the requirements of the Code of Practice relating to trustworthiness and public value of the statistics:

- We commend the Scottish Government for seeking to contextualise SIMD by using case studies throughout its products and in particular, to demonstrate its relevance beyond looking at rural areas. However in some instances, the case studies appear to dominate the products and the data are somewhat lost. For example the [SIMD Illustrated Story](#), in comic-book style, is the second link on the landing page before any technical information. While a valuable example of use, some of the content is about the area being illustrated – its potential, and recent developments, for example – and with such prominence risks the perception of the independence of the statistics and the statisticians. We consider that it would be better for this to have lower prominence on the website.
- The methodology report has not been updated for SIMD 2020 and the landing page currently directs users to technical guidance for SIMD 2012, despite a comprehensive methodology report having been produced for SIMD 2016. The 2012 guidance does not illustrate to users how the SIMD is constructed. Scottish Government should produce an update for SIMD 2020, bringing out the relevant elements of the 2012 and 2016 guidance as appropriate, and improve the signposting of information relating to SIMD.
- The team told us that it faced delays in receiving the income and employment data for SIMD 2020 as a result of needing to establish contacts with data suppliers and the relevant data management teams. To build resilience in the team, Scottish Government should look to document how the legal gateway for accessing the data was determined, and who was involved in this process, so that this can be referred to in the next iteration of SIMD.
- The ability to combine and compare indices of deprivation across the devolved nations continues to be an area of interest for some users. Each of the producers we spoke to said they deal with queries relating to this on a regular basis, despite their joint effort to set out in the statistical releases how the statistics can and can't be used. Scottish Government, as part of the 'four nations group', should look to ensure that appropriate resource is devoted to developing updated UK-wide guidance and insight.

Our Labour Market and Welfare team will continue to engage with you and your team in the coming months to follow up on areas that have been highlighted for improvement. In particular, we think it would be helpful if the improvements to the technical guidance and signposting of information were made by September 2020. We would like to thank the team for its engagement and cooperation throughout the review process.

I am copying this letter to Elizabeth Fraser, the responsible analyst.

Yours sincerely



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