

Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead

Prof Roger Halliday
Chief Statistician and Data Officer
Scottish Government
(by email)

17 February 2021

Dear Roger

Compliance Check of Scottish Prison Population Statistics

As you are aware, we recently completed our compliance check of the Scottish Government's [Scottish Prison Population statistics](#) against the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). This review was requested by the team responsible for the statistics with the aim of preparing for a potential assessment later in 2021.

It is positive to see a long-standing gap in Scottish prison statistics being filled with the publication of these experimental statistics. The relationship between the Scottish Government statistics team and the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) has been important in producing these statistics, and we commend both the team and SPS on forming an effective partnership to provide important insight into the Scottish prison population. This proactive communication between the statistics team and SPS will ensure the continued trustworthiness, quality and value of the statistics as they are developed.

This relationship is particularly important as changes and improvements are made to the operational systems that the statistics are derived from. We welcome the news that the statistics team will be closely involved in the next SPS management information project; collaborating on data-related projects will ensure both parties are aware of new developments and mitigate the risk of any management information undermining the official statistics in the future.

It is positive to see the level of granularity and the wide range of demographic information provided in the statistics. The comparisons between the proportion of certain sections of the prison population and the national population give users good insight into what groups are over-represented or under-represented in the prison population. This is a good example of where drilling down into the detail of the data gives greater understanding about the prison population.

We have highlighted some of the findings from our review below, to guide the team as they develop the statistics for the proposed assessment.

- [The information](#) on the quality of the data illustrates the strengths and weakness of the statistics well. For example, the data used are from an operational database maintained by SPS, which results in limitations around the recording of certain criteria, such as when a prisoner moves in and out prison on the same day. To mitigate the risks around using these data we encourage the team complete a review against our Quality Assurance of Administrative Data [guidelines](#) – this will enhance the information on the strengths and limitations of the data and ensure users about data integrity.
- The statistics team is planning a consultation event for the statistics this year. This will be a positive forum for engaging with current and new users of the statistics. We encourage the team to publish its development plans for the statistics after the consultation period; doing so will ensure continued value for users.
- The statistics provide good insight into the nature of a prisoner's living situation prior to incarceration. We welcome the work being done to develop the postcode data to provide insight as to where a prisoner is after leaving prison. This will increase the value of the statistics for users by illustrating the prisoner journey more clearly. In addition to this we encourage the team provide links to other relevant statistics such as homelessness statistics, to provide a more coherent picture of living situations.

Thank you to you and your team for the positive engagement throughout this review. Our crime and security team will continue to engage with you on the progress of the statistics and planning for the assessment in the coming months.

I am copying this letter to Sarah MacQueen; Lead Statistician for Prison Statistics; Amy Wilson, Head of Justice Analytics; Teresa Medhurst, Chief Executive of SPS and Robert Strachan, Head of Strategy and Improvement SPS.

Yours sincerely



Mark Pont
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