



Office for
Statistics Regulation

Futureproofing the Code of Practice for Statistics

Call for evidence

September 2023

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Introduction

The second edition of the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) was released in February 2018. It established a framework for the standards of statistics production grounded on three core principles or ‘pillars’:

- Trustworthiness – confidence in the people and organisations that produce statistics and data
- Quality – data and methods that produce assured statistics
- Value – statistics that support society’s needs for information

Since that time the Code has been firmly embedded into the work of official statisticians and by a community of practitioners beyond official statistics. OSR’s [review](#) of the National Statistics designation heard from heads of profession for statistics and analysts about how the Code guides their work. The voluntary application of the Code has grown steadily, with now more than 30 organisations represented in our list of adopters. The Code has proved itself a valuable tool to guide decision-making.

In setting out the reasons for producing a second edition of the Code of Practice its introduction highlighted the changing landscape of statistics and data – with more abundant data used in ever more sophisticated ways. This changing environment has continued to evolve, arguably in more complex ways.

Our review, [The State of the Statistics System](#), has highlighted how well over recent years producers have responded to urgent needs for data and statistics and have continued to innovate in challenging circumstances – such as during the COVID-19 pandemic and since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. However, declining response rates, sample biases, and data privacy concerns can have a significant impact on the quality of statistics. In a wider landscape of technological advances, statistics need to remain relevant, accurate and reliable – the increasing use of new and alternative data sources and advances in technology are opportunities for the statistical system to embrace.

The role of the Code is to provide a clear steer for those producing statistics on the standards to be applied to ensure that statistics command public confidence. We would like to hear from stakeholders across a wide range of settings on their thoughts about the suitability of the Code and on how it can be adapted to meet the challenges and opportunities on the horizon.

As well as this written call for evidence, we are hosting a series of public events over the coming months to help challenge our thinking and we encourage you to join in. We are inviting influential thinkers about data and statistics to share their thoughts in three panel discussions which look further into aspects of the changing landscape:

- **26 September, 11am-12.30pm:** In the light of concerns about survey response rates, use of personal data, and wider perceptions of the loss of trust in institutions, what can be done to manage risks to data quality?
- **18 October, 11am-12.30pm:** What are the key ethical issues in the era of AI: how do we balance serving the public good with the potential for individualised harms?

- **23 November, 1-2.30pm:** In an age that demands real-time data and increasing automation, how can official statistics remain relevant?

More information about the event series, and how to sign up, is available through our [Code Review webpage](#).

This call for evidence has two main parts. The first gathers views about the Code of Practice and any ways it can be strengthened. This is the primary focus of this call for evidence and is what will drive our thinking and any plans for future changes to the Code itself. The second part seeks your views on two related OSR projects: our review of the National Statistics designation and our Voluntary Application scheme. Please give as much information as you would like to provide in the response boxes.

There is an opportunity at the end to tell us anything else you would like to share and to give some background information. We provide further information about the call for evidence and directions on how to respond in the [annex](#).

Thank you for taking the time to consider these questions.

Part 1 (a) How well does the Code support official statistics to serve the public?

Before going into more detailed ways that you think the Code can be strengthened, we are interested in hearing your thoughts about the case for changing the Code of Practice.

The second edition of the Code was intended to support statistics commanding public confidence by being built around commitments to Trustworthiness, Quality and Value (TQV): compliance with the Code gives confidence to all that statistics are of public value, are of high quality and are produced by departments and public bodies that can be trusted. It was intended to be adaptable and reflect the changing landscape, and to be grounded on pillars that are universal, not relevant only to official statistics.

1. It is important that statistics serve the public and in doing so answer society's important questions. **In what ways do you see the Code achieving or not achieving these ambitions?**

If it's helpful, please consider:

- The extent to which the Code is achieving its aim to ensure official statistics serve the public
- The greatest threats and opportunities you see in the evolving landscape which may impact data and statistics and the Code
- The extent the current framework of Trustworthiness, Quality and Value (TQV) supports organisations to produce statistics that serve the public
- Whether trustworthiness, quality and value, as fundamental principles that can relate to all data, statistics and analysis, are being effectively applied by organisations inside and outside government

Question 2 is aimed at producers of official statistics – please move on to question 3 if this is not relevant to you.

2. The Code sets the standards for official statistics, which are relevant for the whole organisation, not just for analysts. These standards should be applied to ensure that a producer's outputs command public confidence. **How well or poorly do you think the Code supports both analysts and others in your organisation to deliver and use statistics that serve the public good?**

If it's helpful, please consider:

- The extent the Code supports you in producing statistics that serve the public good, or if there any ways in which the Code is a barrier
- The extent your organisation applies the standards of the Code beyond official statistics, for example in relation to management information outputs

- Whether the standards of the Code are understood and adhered to by non-analysts in your organisation involved in producing and using statistics or if the Code could be improved to better support this

(b) How can the Code be strengthened?

Within the three pillars, the Code has 14 principles that between them have 87 detailed practices, providing increasing levels of specificity in guiding practice. There are also three cross-cutting themes of transparency, collaboration and coherence, that reflect the areas of practice that are common to all three pillars.

You may have observations for how principles do not capture all aspects of an important area of statistical practice or that some language within the Code can be updated to reflect current understanding.

3. The Code provides producers of official statistics with the detailed pillars and practices they must commit to when producing and releasing official statistics. **How do you think the Code could be strengthened and improved?**

If it's helpful, please consider:

- Any gaps in the Code which, if filled, would strengthen the standards we expect of statistics produced by government
- Any areas of the Code which require updating for the Code to remain relevant
- Any parts of the Code which are no longer relevant in the production of data and statistics

Part 2 (a) National Statistics and official statistics labelling

National Statistics are official statistics that OSR has independently reviewed and confirmed comply with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics. Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) has been [exploring](#) how National Statistics designation is understood and how to make sure it is useful today. In January 2022, the [UK Statistics Authority Board](#) approved an exploration of ways to adapt and clarify the label of 'National Statistics'.

As a result, in September we will introduce the explanation that 'National Statistics are accredited official statistics'. We will rename 'experimental statistics' as 'official statistics in development'.

To help clarify the status of different types of official statistics and their relationships to one another, we have developed some new badges that could be shown on published official statistics. These new badges draw on the language we are introducing to help better explain different types of official statistics, and aim to highlight more clearly when something is an official statistic (currently only National Statistics have a badge).

We would like to know your views about whether badges will be helpful. Please tell us your views on the badge designs.

4. **Would you prefer to keep the 'National Statistics' badges or replace them with ones for 'accredited official statistics'?**

Current National Statistics badges:



Proposed Accredited Official Statistics badges:



5. **What are your thoughts on introducing badges for other official statistics, which have not been accredited by OSR?**

Proposed Official Statistics badges:



6. **'Official statistics in development' is the new name for 'experimental statistics'. What are your thoughts on introducing badges for 'official statistics in development'?**

Proposed Official Statistics in Development badges:



7. **Please tell us any other comments you have about signifying the different types of official statistics.**

(b) Applying the Code beyond official statistics

[Voluntary application of the Code](#) (or VA) is where a producer of data, statistics and analysis which are not official statistics chooses to apply the Code pillars to help them produce analytical outputs that are high quality, useful for supporting decisions, and well respected. The VA scheme began in May 2018, just a few months after the publication of the second edition of the Code. The scheme has grown over the past five years, and we now have 36 adopters in our [VA list](#) with published statements of compliance.

We firmly believe that the Code pillars of Trustworthiness, Quality and Value (TQV) are universal and can be useful in all kinds of situations for producing information that is not official statistics. Government analysts are part of our scheme for their work producing other kinds of analysis and information. Other adopters come from a wide range of settings, such as local government, commercial organisations, think tanks, and the charity sector. The scheme has an active community of practice enabling anyone with an interest in TQV to hear from others applying the pillars in areas outside of official statistics.

We established an award for Statistical Excellence in Trustworthiness, Quality and Value, in partnership with the Royal Statistical Society and Civil Service World. We have had a range of winners: the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government for their Building Safety Programme Monthly Data Release, the Scottish Fiscal Commission, the Greenhouse Gas Inventory team in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the COVID-19 Dashboard Team from the UK Health Security Agency, and most recently, Fable Data.

8. We believe that the Code pillars of Trustworthiness, Quality and Value (TQV) are universal and can be useful in all kinds of situations for producing information that is not official statistics. **How would you like to see voluntary application evolve?**

If it's helpful, please consider:

- Whether the name 'voluntary application' is sufficiently transparent and appealing and any ideas for alternatives
- Ways to better market the scheme to analysts and organisations
- The sort of guidance and support that could help the application of TQV
- What accountability would you expect those voluntarily applying TQV to have
- How to encourage continuous improvement in the application of TQV

9. **Please tell us any other comments you have about developing voluntary application of the Code pillars.**

Part 3 Any other comments

10. **Please let us know any other comments on the proposals in this call for evidence.**

Part 4 About you

OSR would like to collect information about you; however, these questions are not compulsory to complete your submission for this call for evidence. We may wish to contact you about your response to the consultation; please indicate if you would be happy to be contacted.

We aim to be as open as possible in our decision-making process. As part of this, we plan to publish an anonymised summary of the responses we receive. We will not publish names or other personal data of any individual respondent. However, the names of all organisations and groups responding to the consultation will be published in a list of respondents. Names of organisations and groups will not be ascribed to any comments without prior permission.

Please be aware that, as a public authority, we are subject to the Freedom of Information Act and can never completely guarantee that names and responses will not be published. You can find out more about our [privacy policy](#) on our website.

11. What is your full name?

12. What is your email address?

13. Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

14. What is the name of your organisation?

15. Are you happy for OSR to contact you about your submission?

Thank you for sharing your views in this call for evidence.

The Code Review project team in OSR will review all responses and prepare a findings paper and recommendations to be considered by the UK Statistics Authority Board. We will publish our findings and planned next steps around March 2024.

Annex: Call for evidence details

Why we are conducting a call for evidence

This call for evidence seeks feedback from a wide range of stakeholders on the Code of Practice for Statistics. The information provided will inform the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR)'s decision making on whether changes are required to the Code and in what areas improvements need to be made. The call for evidence will also inform how we support organisations that produce statistics who wish to apply the standards of the Code in a voluntary way.

Issued: 18 September 2023

Respond by: 11 December 2023

Enquiries to: regulation@statistics.gov.uk

Feedback on the call for evidence process: If you have any comments or complaints about the way this call for evidence has been conducted, please email: regulation@statistics.gov.uk.

How to respond

Please submit your response to this call for evidence by completing this [MS Form](#); alternatively email your response to regulation@statistics.gov.uk or return by post to:

Office for Statistics Regulation
UK Statistics Authority
Statistics House
Cardiff Road
Newport
South Wales
NP10 8XG

We will publish a summary of the views we receive and the outcome of the review in around spring 2024.