Office for Statistics Regulation

The Office for Statistics Regulation's

Guide to the UK Statistical System

Last updated October 2026

The statistical system in brief

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Purpose of this guide

This Office for Statistics Regulation guide summarises the UK statistical system. It serves as an accessible overview for readers who wish to understand key features of the system.

We will be amending this guide periodically when information changes or new information becomes available.

If you have information you would like to share with us for inclusion in future issues of the guide, please contact regulation@statistics.gov.uk.

The statistical system in brief

OVERVIEW OF THE STATISTICAL SYSTEM

The UK statistical system includes those who collect, produce, disseminate, regulate and use official statistics, alongside central bodies that set strategic direction.

The production and publication of official statistics that inform the public and policy making is a core government function. This is a role delivered by organisations across central and devolved governments, alongside those working on their behalf and non-crown bodies set out in legislation.

The system is more than just production and publication of official statistics. Regulation of official statistics plays an important role too, as does other data and analysis produced outside government and central bodies which set strategic direction for the system. Users of statistics are a key part of the statistical system and external influences shape the context within which the statistical system operates.

The statistical system in brief

The UK statistical system is underpinned by the Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007), which led to the creation of the UK Statistics Authority (the Authority) and specified specific roles and requirements that make the system what it is today. The Authority is a central body responsible for setting strategic direction and oversight of the statistical system, and includes both the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). These two executive offices are distinct and separate from each other. This Act also prompted development of the Code of Practice for Statistics (the Code), which sets the standards that both producers of official statistics, and those involved in the public communication of statistics, should commit to.

OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Official statistics are statistics produced by crown bodies and other organisations listed within an Official Statistics Order, on behalf of the UK government or devolved governments. Accredited official statistics (called National Statistics in the Statistics and Registration Service Act, 2007) and official statistics in development are both sub-sets of official statistics.

PRODUCERS OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS

The statistical system produces and disseminates official statistics. Official statistics are statistics produced by any person acting on behalf of the crown, or by the bodies named in secondary legislation. Both crown and non-crown producers of official statistics form part of the statistical system, and these producers span all four UK nations.

The largest producer of official statistics in the UK is the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The ONS is the production arm of the Authority and is the UK's national statistical institute.

The collection, production and dissemination of official statistics involves a range of professions, and in the UK, Scottish and Welsh governments many of these individuals make up the Government Statistical Service (GSS). Statistical staff in Northern Ireland are not members of the GSS but maintain a close professional association with it.

At the latest counts, there were 3990 people recorded as statisticians in the UK civil service and 334 in the separate Northern Ireland civil service. But civil servants 'badged' as statisticians are not the only ones working on statistics in government.

REGULATION OF OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Official statistics are regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). OSR is the regulatory arm of the Authority. OSR maintains the Code of Practice for Statistics and accredits official statistics that meet its requirements for trustworthiness, quality

and value. It also reports publicly on systemwide issues and on the way statistics are being used, challenging publicly when they are not meeting standards.

USERS OF STATISTICS

Users play a key role in the statistical system; it is only through regular dialogue between producers and users that the system can ensure that official statistics remain responsive to user needs. Users of statistics can be varied, and their views should be at the heart of statistical decision making.

Users have a key role in providing challenge to the system and producers have a responsibility to seek views and respond to them. User engagement activities – such as the UK Statistics Assembly - aim to support statistic producers with this.

WIDER STATISTICS AND DATA ECOSYSTEM

Although this guide is focused on the UK official statistical system, in practice this is both part of and influenced by a wider statistics and data ecosystem. This ecosystem includes private organisations, intermediaries (those who connect producers with users), professional bodies, and international statistical organisations.

LEADERSHIP IN THE STATISTICAL SYSTEM

The statistical system has leaders at many levels, ranging from the Chair of the UK Statistics Authority who has a broad remit covering the ONS, OSR and GSS, to Heads of Profession or Senior Statisticians, who lead the statistical function in their organisation. The ONS has a permanent secretary who is responsible for the day-to-day running and sets the strategic direction of the ONS. The National Statistician is Chief Executive of the Authority, and Head of the GSS. The National Statistician is also the Authority's principal adviser on statistics.

GOVERNANCE OF THE STATISTICAL SYSTEM

The Authority reports directly to legislatures across the UK and has a selection of committees to support its statutory functions. The Authority Board is responsible for setting strategic direction and oversight of the statistical system.

The GSS also has a series of committees and groups, and is accountable to the National Statistician on professional statistical matters.

The Concordat on Statistics sets out the agreed framework for co-operation between the UK government and devolved governments in relation to the production of statistics, statistical standards and the statistics profession.

Different parts of the UK have their own governance arrangements and reporting structures, with Chief Statisticians in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland holding an important role.

Official statistics

Key facts about official statistics



Official statistics are statistics produced by crown bodies and other organisations listed within an Official Statistics Order, on behalf of the UK government or devolved governments



Accredited official statistics are called National Statistics in the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007. They are official statistics that have been independently reviewed by the Office for Statistics Regulation and found to comply with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics



Official statistics can lose their accreditation in cases of serious non-compliance, with accreditation being cancelled or suspended



Official statistics in development are official statistics that are undergoing a development, and is a label that can be applied to new or existing statistics

OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Official statistics are statistics produced by crown bodies and other organisations listed within an Official Statistics Order (set out in the Annex: Bodies named in secondary legislation that can produce official statistics), on behalf of the UK government or devolved governments. They provide a factual basis for assessment and decisions on economic, social and environmental issues at all levels of society.

Sub-sets of official statistics include accredited official statistics and official statistics in development.

ACCREDITED OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Accredited official statistics are a sub-set of official statistics that have been independently reviewed by the Office for Statistics Regulation and confirmed as complying with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice for Statistics (the Code). OSR maintains a list of the official statistics that it

has reviewed and accredited. Accredited official statistics are called National Statistics in the Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007).

In cases of substantial non-compliance with the Code, OSR will suspend or cancel the accreditation. An improvement notice will be issued by OSR explaining the decision and detailing the areas to be addressed, and an entry will be made in the List of Cancelled or Suspended Accreditations. Where a producer requests a cancellation of the accreditation and has plans for addressing the improvement areas within one year, OSR will suspend the accreditation for the duration and reassess the statistics once the improvements are complete.

OFFICIAL STATISTICS IN DEVELOPMENT

Official statistics in development are official statistics that are undergoing a development; they may be new or existing statistics, and will be tested with users, in line with the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value in the Code of Practice. They were formerly known as ‘experimental statistics’.

Official statistics in development is a temporary label. Even though the statistics are going through development and testing, the producer is confident that they are useful. The producer provides information with the statistics about the nature of the development and any implications for their quality, to guide the appropriate use of the figures.

After the development is complete and following testing with users, the producer will decide if the statistics should continue to be published. Producers can then remove the ‘in development’ label. They should always be clear with users why they are confident that their official statistics are suitable for use.

OFFICIAL STATISTICS POLICIES

OSR’s Policy and Standards team develops policies and guidance related to the Code of Practice for Statistics. These include Official Statistics Policies.

Producers of official statistics

Key facts about producers of official statistics



The Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007) states that any person acting on behalf of the crown can produce official statistics



The largest producer of official statistics in the UK is the Office for National Statistics



There are many other government departments, organisations and arm's length bodies across the UK who also produce official statistics as crown bodies



Statistics are produced by the devolved governments in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, as well as by UK government



Non-crown bodies named in secondary legislation can also produce official statistics



Around 4300 Great Britain and Northern Ireland civil servants are statisticians



The statistical system also includes professions other than statisticians, for example researchers, methodologists and communication specialists

Producers of official statistics

Bodies that produce official statistics

As set out in the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 (the 2007 Act), any person acting on behalf of the crown can produce official statistics. Examples of crown bodies are the Office for National Statistics (ONS), Scottish Government and Welsh Government.

The ONS is the largest producer of official statistics in the UK as well as the UK's recognised national statistics institute. The ONS is responsible for collecting and publishing statistics related to the economy, population and society at national, regional and local levels. It also conducts the census in England and Wales every 10 years.

In addition to statistical production, ONS provides services across the statistical system and beyond, for example the Methodology Advisory Service, and the Accredited Researcher Scheme. Much of the support for the Government Statistical Service (GSS) is also based in ONS, for example training courses and central recruitment. ONS is also home to the Data Science Campus, whose purpose is to apply data science and build skills for public good across the UK and internationally.

In Northern Ireland, official statistics are largely produced by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), which operates across multiple Northern Ireland government departments and also conducts the census in Northern Ireland. In Scotland, official statistics are mainly produced by Scottish Government, Public Health Scotland and National Records of Scotland. National Records of Scotland conduct the census in Scotland. In Wales, official statistics are most commonly produced by Welsh Government.

There are also numerous other central government and devolved government organisations that produce official statistics on behalf of the crown. In addition, non-crown bodies can produce official statistics if they are acting on behalf of another producer, for example when producers contract out statistical production to a third party. The 2007 Act states that non-crown bodies can be producers of official statistics if they are listed in secondary legislation. This secondary legislation names bodies that can produce official statistics (set out in the Annex: Bodies named in secondary legislation that can produce official statistics).

Size of the statistical system

There is no definitive measure of the size of the statistical system, however understanding the number of statisticians working in the statistical system gives an indication of its size.

As of 31 March 2026 (the most recent data), there were 3990 people recorded as statisticians in the UK civil service in published civil service statistics. Northern Ireland has a separate civil service, and as of 1 April 2024 (the most recent

published data), had 334 members of staff recorded as statisticians in their published personnel statistics. To be recorded as a statistician often means being 'badged' as a member of the Government Statistician Group (GSG) – the 'badge' reflects a specific recruitment or certification process, but it does not mean that badged statisticians are the only people working on statistics in government.

Roles in statistical production

Statistical production is not limited to the statistical analysis that statisticians specialise in, for example the responsibility of collecting data may fall to operational delivery professionals such as survey interviewers, questionnaire design often lies with social researchers, and methodologists can provide specialist technical perspectives such as on sampling.

While the Government Statistician Group (GSG) is made up of badged statisticians, the Government Statistical Service (GSS) is far wider, and includes over 12,000 civil servants working in the collection, production and communication of official statistics in the UK, Scottish and Welsh governments. The GSS may include members of the GSG, alongside data scientists, researchers, economists, policy professionals, business support teams, data journalists, data visualisation experts, methodologists, communications specialists and more.

In Northern Ireland, NISRA includes all government statisticians and some other staff working in the collection, production and communication of statistics. However, in departments other than the Department of Finance (Northern Ireland) and arm's length bodies, non-statistician staff working in these roles are employed directly by the host organisation and are not NISRA staff.

Regulation of official statistics

Key facts about regulation of official statistics

The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) is the UK's statistics regulator. Its principal roles are to set the Code of Practice for Statistics (the Code), assess compliance against it, accredit those statistics that are assessed to have complied, and report on concerns

OSR's main regulatory tools are assessing compliance against the Code, reviewing wider topic areas, and investigating reported misuses of statistics

The Code sets the standards that producers of official statistics should commit to

There are other regulatory bodies whose remits may overlap with that of OSR

Regulation of official statistics

Office for Statistics Regulation

Official statistics are regulated by the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR). OSR is the regulatory arm of the UK Statistics Authority (the Authority) and ensures that statistics are produced and disseminated in the public good.

OSR maintains the Code of Practice for Statistics (the Code) and accredits official statistics that it assesses to meet its requirements for trustworthiness, quality and value. It also reports publicly on system wide issues and on the way that statistics are being used, and challenges publicly when standards are not upheld. OSR's 3-year strategy sets out its priorities for 2026-2029. These are delivered through the annual business plan.

OSR's main regulatory tools are:

- Compliance reviews of official statistics against the Code
- Systemic reviews of statistics on a topic area to understand how well or poorly society's information need for that area is being served
- Investigating cases where reported misuse of statistics takes place.

The Code of Practice for Statistics

The Code sets the standards that producers of official statistics should commit to. It is based on a framework which together support public confidence in statistics:

- 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

Under each of these are principles which provide greater detail, and under each principle there are detailed practices that producers of official statistics should commit to when producing and releasing official statistics. Official statistics that are assessed by OSR as meeting the standards of trustworthiness, quality and value are referred to as accredited official statistics. Accredited official statistics are called National Statistics in the Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007).

The Code also provides standards that all public bodies should meet when communicating statistics, data and wider analysis in the public domain to help ensure transparency, integrity, clarity and accuracy.

Regulation of official statistics

Other regulators

There are other regulatory bodies whose remits may overlap with that of OSR. Bodies that regulate across multiple topic areas include:

- Advertising Standards Authority (ASA): ASA regulates advertising across UK media, therefore if an advert includes official statistics, it may be relevant to both ASA and OSR
- Information Commission's Office (ICO): ICO is the UK's independent body set up to uphold information rights, therefore the data that official statistics are based on fall under their remit, and the distinction between this data and the statistics is sometimes unclear
- Office of Communications (Ofcom): Ofcom is the UK regulator for communications services, therefore statistics being used on television or the radio (including parliamentary television) would fall under both their remit and that of OSR

In addition, there are also regulators for specific topic areas that may overlap with OSR. An example of topic-specific regulators may be for education in England, where there is Ofsted, Ofqual and the Office for Students which all have regulatory roles and produce official statistics. Some of these regulators may be governed by their own legislation, which (when conflicting) takes precedence over the Code. This is because although the 2007 Act requires the Code to be prepared, adopted and published, the specific wording and provisions set out in the Code is not specified in law.

Users of statistics

Key facts about users of statistics



The Code of Practice for Statistics states that users should be at the centre of decision making about statistics



Users of statistics are varied, and include individual citizens, organisations and governments. Users have a key role in providing challenge to the statistical system and producers have a responsibility to seek views and respond to them



It is only through regular dialogue between producers and users that the statistical system can ensure that official statistics remain responsive to user needs and serve the public good



User engagement can be at a team, organisation, or system level

Users of statistics

Statistics are valuable where they support society's need for information, including both public use and policy development and evaluation. Producers have a responsibility to communicate statistics in a way that is accessible to different types of users. Producers should also ensure that data quoted publicly, for example in parliament or the media, is made available to all in a transparent way.

Users play a key role in the system beyond just access to data; it is only through regular dialogue between producers and users that the system can ensure that official statistics remain responsive to user needs and serve the public good.

This is reinforced in the Code of Practice for Statistics (the Code) Standard 8 which states that 'producers must put users at the centre of decision making about the statistics'.

The first UK Statistics Assembly took place on Wednesday 22 January 2025. Delivered in partnership between the UK Statistics Authority and the Royal Statistical Society, it sought to bring together the widest possible range of users and producers of official statistics to discuss the priorities, opportunities and challenges facing the statistical system in the short to medium term.

The Assembly was established in response to a recommendation in the Independent Review of the UK Statistics Authority. It was attended by over 500 participants (in-person and online), including from central, local and devolved governments, business and industry, academia, civil society and charities, to discuss and advise on the statistical and data priorities for the UK.

The Authority asked Professor David Hand, Chair of the National Statistician's Expert User Advisory Committee, to produce an independent report distilling the discussions and recommendations from the day.

The Assembly exemplified that there are different types of users, and it is important that the system hears from a wide range of them through the different stages of development and production. Users have a key role in providing challenge to the system and producers have a responsibility to seek views and respond to them. Some types of users include:

- citizens
- voluntary organisations
- media
- business
- academics
- analysts from across and outside government
- policy makers
- Parliamentarians

Users of statistics

They may be:

- technical experts
- expert analysts
- interested members of the public
- survey respondents
- first time users of government statistics

They may be using statistics to:

- conduct research
- evaluate policies
- plan and allocate finances
- find answers to queries on topical matters such as health or education
- search for government statistics

Users of statistics can engage with producers through platforms such as StatsUserNetwork. StatsUserNetwork is a forum run by GSS for users and producers of official statistics to share knowledge, ask questions and discuss all things data. It is a new version of the online discussion forum, previously known as StatsUserNet. The forum was reworked and now has a number of new features including:

- better profile creation to connect users with similar interests
- reorganising the site by groups, so users can focus on the statistical topics that are important to them
- options for users to publish/share information in a variety of ways, from simple forum comments to content-rich blogs

The wider statistics and data ecosystem

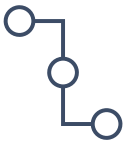
Key facts about the wider statistics and data ecosystem



The UK statistical system sits inside a wider ecosystem of statistics and data



Private organisations produce statistics which play a part in the ecosystem



Intermediaries have an important role in linking producers of statistics and data with the people who use them



Professional bodies for statisticians can support and influence the system



The UK system sits within a wider international system of statistics and data

The wider statistics and data ecosystem

The wider ecosystem

This guide focuses on the UK official statistical system, however this does not exist in isolation. The wider statistics and data ecosystem should be considered when looking at the UK statistical system. External influences shape the context within which the system operates.

Some of these external influences are:

- External data producers (those creating data or statistics outside of the statistical system)
- Intermediaries (those linking producers and users of statistics and data)
- Professional bodies for statisticians
- International organisations and producers

External producers

Statistics and data production is not unique to government: they are also produced by academics, the third sector, private companies, and parts of the public sector beyond government. This can be to improve understanding of a topic, as market research (which may play a similar role in public consciousness as official statistics) or to assess and improve their own competitive advantage. Individual citizens can choose to use these statistics in addition to or in replacement of official statistics. They can also freely access some data and can choose to pay for even greater access.

Reflections from Wesley Yung in a report titled 'The Evolution of Official Statistics in a Changing World' describe how data availability in combination with open-source software and free cloud computing services mean that 'everyone with an interest and some training can be an analyst' and can share their analyses with the world.

This has led to an abundance of data and research which was not present a few decades ago and has necessitated shifts in statistical systems globally. The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) described this in 2022 when looking at the value of statistics, in terms of how it means that statistics producers must re-think their role in an increasingly commercialised environment.

Intermediaries

Intermediaries are the link between statistics producers and the users. There are many different types of intermediaries – they could be the mainstream media, individual citizens sharing statistics on social media, or organisations such as the Institute for Government.

The Public Confidence in Official Statistics survey (2023) showed that almost two-thirds (60%) of respondents reported seeing statistics on the news at least several

times a week, demonstrating the influential role that the media and journalists have. This role was explored in 2022 research by the Economic Statistics Centre of Excellence (ESCoE), the role of journalists in economic statistics, which used the ONS labour market release as a case study. They made several recommendations for how to improve labour market communications to the wider public through media reporting.

Professional bodies

Professional bodies are organisations made up of members of a specific profession. Statistical professional bodies play an important role in the statistics and data ecosystem.

In the UK, the primary professional body for statisticians and data analysts is the Royal Statistical Society (RSS), although RSS members do not need to be UK-based. Two of the RSS's strategic goals are enabling a strong, diverse profession, for which they support mechanisms for networking, and facilitating innovation and growth, for which they organise events such as annual conferences and publish a monthly magazine. In addition, they strive to champion the public interest and support public understanding and engagement, for which they advocate, horizon scan and provide support for the identification, clarification and communication of key and topical statistics for and to the public. These types of activities are often participated in by members of the statistical system, and as such this professional body supports the system to flourish.

The RSS and other professional bodies also influence the statistical system in other ways. For example, the 1990 RSS paper 'Counting with Confidence' proposed that the UK needed a Statistics Act to safeguard the autonomy and constitutional position of official statistics. This paper was cited in the 1998 government green paper 'Statistics: A Matter of Trust', which fed through to the 1999 white paper 'Building trust in statistics'. The 1999 paper included a commitment to review the need for legislation, paving the way for the development of the 2007 Statistics and Registration Service Act that underpins the statistical system to this day. This demonstrates how research and campaigns by professional bodies can greatly influence the statistical system.

International statistical systems

The Government Statistical Service (GSS) International Strategy states that 'our ability to shape international standards, influence global agendas and access comparative data will strengthen the UK's position in an increasingly data-driven world', demonstrating why the UK is driven to engage internationally.

The Eurostat webpage on international organisations also explains why international co-operation is so important: 'to build on best practices and to improve the

coordination of methods as well as the comparability and quality of data… to guarantee integrated systems of collection, processing and dissemination of data.' For these reasons, the international statistics stage naturally influences the UK statistical system.

The statistical systems of many countries are described on the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) page on country profiles. The UK system is considered to be more decentralised than others and is also unusual in having a dedicated regulator separate from statistical production. In addition to National Statistical Institutes, there are also international organisations such as the UNSD, the International Statistical Institute (ISI) and Eurostat.

International organisations set out methods, definitions and principles that have global influence, for example the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics, the ten principles to which the UK is signed up.

Leadership in the statistical system

Key facts about leadership in the statistical system



The Chair of the UK Statistics Authority is a non-executive role covering the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) and the Government Statistical Service (GSS)



The National Statistician is the Government's principal advisor on official statistics and leads the GSS



The Director General for Regulation is the principal adviser on the assessment of official statistics and compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics (the Code), and leads OSR



Chief Statisticians are the leads for statistics in each devolved government



Heads of Profession for Statistics are the leads for statistics in every department, agency or public body with a significant GSS presence in England, Scotland and Wales



Senior Statisticians are the equivalent to Heads of Profession for Statistics in Northern Ireland



Lead Officials for Statistics are responsible for applying the Code in organisations with smaller numbers of official statistics

Leadership in the statistical system

Chair of the UK Statistics Authority

The Chair of the UK Statistics Authority (the Authority) is a Crown appointment made with the approval of Parliament, with a remit covering the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) and the Government Statistical Service (GSS). It is a non-executive role. Penny Young has been the interim Chair since October 2025.

National Statistician

The National Statistician is a Crown appointment, currently held by André Loranger. The National Statistician is:

- Principal adviser to the Authority, the Government and ministers on statistics
- An executive member of the Authority Board
- Head of the GSS

Director General for Regulation

The Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007) describes a post called the 'Head of Assessment', which is operationally known as the Director General for Regulation. This role has been held by Ed Humpherson since January 2014.

The Director General for Regulation is the Authority's principal adviser on the assessment of official statistics and their compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics (the Code). In practice, this means this role is the head of OSR and an executive member of the Authority Board.

Chief Statisticians

Statistical production in each devolved government is overseen by a Chief Statistician. The Code describes Chief Statisticians as the principal advisers on official statistics in their respective administrations, with overall responsibility for the implementation and co-ordination of professional statistical standards and for ensuring adherence with the Code. Chief Statisticians are accountable to the National Statistician on professional statistical matters.

In Northern Ireland, the Chief Statistician is Philip Wales, who has held the role of Chief Executive and Registrar General for Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) since February 2023. The Chief Statistician for Scotland is Alastair McAlpine, who has been in post since April 2022 and was appointed permanently in June 2023. The Chief Statistician for Wales is Stephanie Howarth, who has been in post since July 2020 and was appointed permanently in February 2021.

Leadership in the statistical system

Heads of Profession for Statistics

As detailed on the Authority website, every department, agency or public body with a significant GSS presence (in terms of statisticians involved in the production or use of official statistics) has its own designated Head of Profession for Statistics (Head of Profession). In the Welsh devolved government this role is filled by the Chief Statistician.

The Heads of Profession and their staff in each organisation are accountable on professional statistical matters to the National Statistician as the Head of the GSS. They are also accountable to their departmental management for day-to-day delivery.

The Code describes Heads of Profession as responsible for overseeing their own organisation's statistical functions and meeting their organisation's statistical needs. They are also responsible for implementing the provisions set out in statistical legislation and the Code, both within their own organisation and more generally across the UK statistical system. Heads of Profession play a key role in building public trust in official statistics.

There are Heads of Profession in 29 government departments. The list of Heads of Profession is maintained by the Authority's GSS Policy and Coordination team, which supports the appointment process and cross-GSS collaboration.

Senior Statisticians

As the Northern Ireland devolved government is not part of the GSS, there are no Heads of Profession for Statistics in Northern Ireland. Instead, Northern Ireland has Senior Statisticians who hold a similar role.

As with Heads of Profession, Senior Statisticians are responsible for overseeing their own organisation's statistical functions and meeting their organisation's statistical needs. They are also responsible for implementing provisions set out in statistical legislation and the Code, but unlike for Heads of Profession this responsibility is within their own organisation rather than more generally across the UK statistical system. Instead, Senior Statisticians have an additional responsibility of liaising with relevant parties across the UK.

Unlike in England, Scotland and Wales, in Northern Ireland Senior Statisticians are professionally accountable to the Northern Ireland Chief Statistician, rather than the National Statistician. As with Heads of Profession, they are accountable to their departmental management for day-to-day delivery.

Leadership in the statistical system

Lead Officials for Statistics

Guidance about Heads of Profession states that organisations producing a limited number of official statistics may appoint a Lead Official for Statistics in lieu of a Head of Profession or Senior Statistician. Arm's length bodies usually appoint Lead Officials, who are supported by the Head of Profession or Senior Statistician in their sponsoring department. Lead Officials have the same responsibilities as Heads of Profession and Senior Statisticians to lead on professional statistical matters in their organisations, including ensuring their organisation complies with the Code. In England, Scotland and Wales they are accountable to the National Statistician on professional statistical matters, and in Northern Ireland they are accountable to the Northern Ireland Chief Statistician.

Governance of the statistical system

Key facts about governance of the statistical system



The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 provides the legal basis for the UK statistical system and established the UK Statistics Authority (the Authority)



The Authority reports directly to legislatures across the UK rather than having direction set by a specific minister. It has a selection of committees to support its statutory functions



Government Statistical Service (GSS) governance includes committees and groups, and although there is professional accountability to the National Statistician, different departments also have their own governance arrangements



The Concordat on Statistics sets out the framework for cooperation between the UK Government and devolved governments



Different parts of the UK have their own governance arrangements and reporting structures, with Chief Statisticians in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales holding an important role

Governance of the statistical system

The Authority governance

The UK statistical system is governed by the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 (the 2007 Act) and subsequent secondary legislation. The 2007 Act established a Statistics Board which is known in practice as the UK Statistics Authority (the Authority). The Authority has the statutory objective of 'promoting and safeguarding the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good'.

The 2007 Act sets out what official statistics are and who can produce them, as well as specific responsibilities the Authority has. For example, in addition to statistics production, this includes monitoring and reporting of official statistics, the ability to lay a report before parliament about any matter relating to the exercise of its functions and responsibilities for developing, maintaining, and promoting the use of definitions, methodologies, classifications and standards for official statistics.

The Authority operates at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department and reports directly to the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament, Senedd Cymru (the Welsh Parliament), and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Authority Board has oversight of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) and the Government Statistical Service (GSS) and is overseen by the Chair. Within the Authority, ONS is currently led by the Permanent Secretary of the ONS, and OSR by the Director General for Regulation. Both senior leaders are part of and accountable to the Authority Board.

Membership of the Authority Board includes executive members (representing ONS and OSR) as well as non-executive members, who are in the majority.

The Authority Board has committees to support its statutory functions and get advice on matters within the Authority's remit. These committees may include persons who are neither members of the Authority nor its employees.

These committees are:

- Audit and Risk Assurance Committee
- Regulation Committee (formerly Assessment Committee)
- Remuneration Committee

The National Statistician also has a set of advisory committees and panels to provide advice on specific topics, as well as the statutory Research Accreditation Panel.

The Authority Board has published their priorities for the statistical system, with the following values underpinning their work:

- **Openness**, in engaging with users of statistics, with a willingness to listen, respond and collaborate.

- **Innovation**, where this is a means to better serve their core purpose.
- **Efficiency**, in how to prioritise, use and share resources and data.
- **Rigour**, in analysis, assessment and quality assurance.

GSS governance

National Statistics Executive Group (NSEG) is the senior executive committee supporting the National Statistician. It focuses on system-wide statistical and analytical matters, and provides direction and oversight in the governance of the GSS. Sub-committees of NSEG have varying degrees of a GSS-wide remit The GSS also has its own committees and groups that form part of its governance including:

- GSS Heads of Profession Group
- Inter-Administration Committee (explored further under the Concordat)
- GSS People Advisory Group
- GSS International Committee

Although Heads of Profession across the GSS are accountable to the National Statistician, members of the GSS and Heads of Profession are employed by individual government departments, so are accountable thorough departmental governance structures as well as through GSS governance.

Pre-release access

The Authority webpage about pre-release access describes how under the 2007 Act, Cabinet Office Ministers and Ministers in the devolved governments are responsible for determining the principles and rules governing pre-release access to official statistics in their final form before publication. This is done through secondary legislation in respective parliaments, which is set out in a series of Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics Orders:

- Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008 sets out the rules and principles relating to the granting of pre-release access to official statistics produced by the UK Government – came into force on 1 December 2008.
- Pre-release Access to Official Statistics (Scotland) Order 2008 sets out the equivalent for official statistics which are wholly Scottish devolved statistics – came into force on 1 December 2008.
- Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order (Northern Ireland) 2009 sets out the equivalent for official statistics which are wholly Northern Ireland devolved statistics – came into force on 1 April 2009.

- Pre-release Access to Official Statistics (Wales) Order 2009 sets out the equivalent for official statistics which are wholly Welsh devolved statistics – came into force on 21 October 2009.

The Concordat on Statistics

The Concordat on Statistics (the Concordat) sets out the agreed framework for co-operation between the UK Government and devolved governments in relation to the production of statistics, statistical standards and the statistics profession. The most recent Concordat was published in October 2021. Areas of joint working set out in the Concordat are:

- Statistical coherence
- International standards and obligations
- Data sharing
- Consultation and wider collaboration
- Professional standards and statistical staff

The implementation of the Concordat is overseen by the Inter-Administration Committee (IAC) which promotes coherence across the administrations of the UK and resolves inter-administration issues at a strategic level. The IAC is chaired by the National Statistician, and membership includes the Chief Statisticians and Registrar Generals for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), an executive agency within the Department of Finance (Northern Ireland), is the principal source of official statistics and social research. All government statisticians in Northern Ireland work for NISRA but can be based in other Northern Ireland departments or arm's length bodies. The NISRA Chief Executive is also the Chief Statistician for Northern Ireland.

The majority of Northern Ireland Official Statistics are published by NISRA statisticians who are positioned in Government departments or in arm's length bodies. However, some official statistics are produced by other official statistics producers which do not have NISRA staff. The NISRA website lists the 11 official statistics producers without NISRA branches.

All nine Ministerial Departments in Northern Ireland have a Senior Statistician, as well as one Non-Ministerial Department and two arm's length bodies. Other arm's length bodies which are smaller or don't have any NISRA staff have Lead Officials. All Senior Statisticians and Lead Officials in Northern Ireland have professional accountability to the Northern Ireland Chief Statistician.

Governance of the statistical system

Scotland

In Scotland, official statistics consist mainly of regular and planned statistics and analysis produced by statistics units in the Scottish Government, National Records of Scotland (NRS) and Public Health Scotland, as well as non-crown bodies set out in secondary legislation (detailed in the Annex: Bodies named in secondary legislation that can produce official statistics).

The Chief Statistician in the Scottish Government has overall responsibility for the implementation and coordination of official statistics standards in the Scottish Administration. The Scottish Administration is defined as the Executive Agencies and the Non-Ministerial Departments. Additionally, the Chief Statistician has responsibility for arm's length public body producers which have been named by Order as producers of official statistics. Most arm's length bodies have a Scottish Government contact.

Heads of Profession, or lead analysts, are appointed for all other Scottish producers of official statistics (including Public Health Scotland and National Records of Scotland). The Chief Statistician acts as Head of Profession for all Scottish Government directorates and executive agencies.

National Records of Scotland is a Non-Ministerial Department of the Scottish Government. The Chief Executive fulfils the role of the Registrar General for Scotland and Keeper of the Records of Scotland. The Registrar General is responsible for planning and running the census in Scotland.

Wales

In Wales, most official statistics are produced by the Welsh Government. A small number are also produced by other crown organisations and non-crown bodies set out in secondary legislation (detailed in the Annex: Bodies named in secondary legislation that can produce official statistics).

The Chief Statistician in Wales is responsible for the leadership of the statistical system in Wales, including setting and maintaining professional statistical standards. This covers both crown and non-crown producers of official statistics. The Chief Statistician also acts as Head of Profession for Welsh Government and other official statistics producers in Wales. Lead Officials from official statistics producers meet twice a year to discuss professional matters.

Annex: Bodies named in secondary legislation that can produce official statistics

England and UK statistics bodies

List of bodies as named in the Official Statistics Order (2023):

The Arts Council of England

The Board of the Pension Protection Fund

The British Film Institute

The British Tourist Authority

The British Transport Police Authority

The Care Quality Commission

The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service

The Coal Authority

The Commission for Equality and Human Rights

The Consumer Council for Water

The Consumer Panel established under section 16 of the Communications Act 2003

The English Sports Council

The Environment Agency

The Financial Conduct Authority

The Gambling Commission

His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services

The Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England

The Homes and Communities Agency

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

The Independent Office for Police Conduct

JISC

The Joint Nature Conservation Committee

The Judicial Appointments Commission

The Marine Management Organisation

The National Health Service Litigation Authority

Natural England

The NHS Business Services Authority

NHS England

The Office for Students

The Office of Communications

The Parole Board

The Passengers' Council

The Pensions Regulator

The Regulator of Social Housing

The Sentencing Council for England and Wales

The Service Complaints Ombudsman

Skills for Care Limited

The Student Loans Company Limited

The Trade Remedies Authority

The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority

The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales

Annex: Bodies named in secondary legislation that can produce official statistics

Northern Ireland statistics bodies

List of bodies as named in Official Statistics Order (Northern Ireland) (2012) and the 2021 amendment:

Agri-food and Biosciences Institute

Arts Council of Northern Ireland

Chief Constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland

Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment

Livestock & Meat Commission for Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland Cancer Registry at Queens University Belfast

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Northern Ireland Library Authority

Northern Ireland Policing Board

Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland

Probation Board for Northern Ireland

Regional Business Services Organisation

Sport NI

The Regional Agency for Public Health and Social Wellbeing

Education Authority

Invest Northern Ireland

Labour Relations Agency

Scotland statistics bodies

List of bodies as named in Official Statistics (Scotland) Order (2008), and 2010, 2012, 2019, and 2026 amendments:

Common Services Agency for the Scottish Health Service

Higher Education Statistics Agency

Student Loans Company Ltd.

Scottish Children's Reporter Administration

Scottish Consortium for Learning Disability

Scottish Environment Protection Agency

Scottish Further and Higher Education Funding Council

Scottish Natural Heritage

NHS 24

Scottish Ambulance Service Board

Scottish Social Services Council

Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland

Sustrans Limited

Annex: Bodies named in secondary legislation that can produce official statistics

Bòrd na Gàidhlig

NHS Education for Scotland

Public Health Scotland

Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

Qualifications Scotland

The Skills Development Scotland Co. Limited

Visit Scotland

Wales statistics bodies

List of bodies as named in Official Statistics (Wales) Order (2017), and 2021 and 2024 amendments:

Arts Council of Wales

Children's Commissioner for Wales

Commissioner for Older People in Wales

Data Unit Wales, known as Data Cymru

Emergency Ambulance Services Committee

Finance Wales

Future Generations Commissioner for Wales

Meat Promotion Wales

National Centre for Learning Welsh

Natural Resources Body for Wales, known as Natural Resources Wales

Public Health Wales National Health Service Trust

Qualifications Wales

Social Care Wales

Sports Council for Wales, known as Sport Wales

Transport Wales

Velindre National Health Service Trust Shared Services Partnership

Welsh Ambulance Services National Health Service Trust

Welsh Language Commissioner

Welsh Revenue Authority

Digital Health and Care Wales

Commission for Tertiary Education and Research

Annex: Glossary

Abbreviation	Meaning
ASA	Advertising Standards Agency, the UK media regulator
ExCo	Executive Committee, the UK Statistics Authority committee focussing on business delivery in the Office for National Statistics
GSG	Government Statistician Group, statisticians working in government who have passed a ‘badging’ exercise
GSS	Government Statistical Service, a community of all civil servants involved in the collection, production and dissemination of official statistics in the UK, Scottish and Welsh governments
IAC	Inter Administration Committee, a GSS committee that promotes coherence across the administrations of the UK and resolves inter-administration issues at a strategic level
ICO	Information Commissioners Office, the UK's independent body set up to uphold information rights
ISI	International Statistical Institute, the independent international statistical organisation
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, an executive agency within the Department of Finance (Northern Ireland) that is the principal source of official statistics and social research. All government statisticians working in Northern Ireland are employed by NISRA, but can be based in other Northern Ireland departments or arm’s length bodies.
NSEG	National Statistics Executive Group, the senior executive committee for system-wide statistical and analytical matters
Ofcom	Office of Communications, the UK regulator for communications services
ONS	Office for National Statistics, the largest producer of official statistics in the UK and the UK’s National Statistical Institute
OSR	Office for Statistics Regulation, the regulatory arm of the UK Statistics Authority
RSS	The Royal Statistical Society, a professional body for statisticians and data analysts
The 2007 Act	The Statistics and Registration Service Act (2007), the legislation that underpins the UK statistical system
The Authority	The UK Statistics Authority, an independent body at arm's length from government with a statutory objective of promoting and safeguarding the production and publication of official statistics that 'serve the public good'.

Annex: Glossary

The Code	The Code of Practice for Statistics, the document produced by OSR which sets the standards that producers of official statistics should commit to
The Concordat	The Concordat on Statistics, the framework for cooperation on statistical matters between the UK Government and devolved governments
UNSD	United Nations Statistics Division, the central mechanism in the United Nations to serve statistical needs and coordinate activities

Annex: Amendments to guide

Issue	Publication date	Amendment
Issue 1.0	28 June 2023	
Issue 1.1	02 August 2023	Page 7 revision to text, from ‘are not affiliated with NISRA’ to ‘working in these roles are employed directly by the host organisation and are not NISRA staff.’
Issue 1.2	August 2023	Amended to align with new Statistics Order, new content added about pre-release statistics, new content added about StatsUserNet.
Issue 1.3	Sept 2023	Adapted the content to align with the new wording around official statistics types and accreditation. New official statistics section added.
Issue 1.4	Oct 2026	Updated postholder numbers and hyperlinks to OSR strategy and business plan. Updated to reflect the 2024 amendment to the Official Statistics (Wales) Order, the 2026 amendment the Official Statistics (Scotland) Order, and senior GSS leadership changes.