

# PEER REVIEW REPORT

ON COMPLIANCE WITH THE CODE OF PRACTICE AND  
THE COORDINATION ROLE OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTE

## UNITED KINGDOM

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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The main components of the statistical system of the United Kingdom (UK) are the Statistics Board (hereinafter referred to as the UK Statistics Authority) and the Government Statistical Service (GSS), which is the community of all those involved in the production of official statistics in the UK. The GSS includes the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which is the executive office of the UK Statistics Authority, the largest producer of official statistics in the UK and the UK's National Statistical Institute.

The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body established by the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007. It operates at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament. The main functions of the UK Statistics Authority are oversight of the production and publication of official statistics across the UK statistical system; promotion, safeguarding and monitoring of quality, comprehensiveness and good practice in relation to all official statistics; production of a "Code of Practice for Official Statistics" (hereinafter referred to as the UK Code of Practice) and assessment of official statistics against that Code; and governance of the ONS.

The UK statistical system has increased in strength over the last few years. The UK Statistics Authority issued the current UK Code of Practice in January 2009. Since that time, the Authority has systematically assessed the quality of official statistics against the UK Code of Practice and monitored statistical releases and use of statistics by government and public institutions, commenting publicly on any misuse observed. The Statistics Act 2007 and the regulatory activities of the UK Statistics Authority have greatly added to the professional independence of the conduct of official statistics. It has also raised the level of quality of the statistics and confidence in the outputs of the GSS has increased.

UK official statistical activities have been supported by a code of practice since 1995. The current UK Code of Practice applies across the whole area of official statistics, i.e. the entire GSS, including the devolved administrations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. It is significant that the UK Code of Practice extends to statisticians and all other officials and advisors either involved in the production of official statistics or who use those statistics. It appears to be well known by producers and main users and is evidently observed and largely respected in the statistical community.

The ONS is a professionally independent institution which operates transparently and openly. It is headed by the National Statistician who is also head of the GSS. It has close contact with users and consults them frequently on various aspects of its activities. The ONS pursues and enjoys good relations with the statistical scientific community and frequently consults academic statisticians on issues of methods and procedures. It places much emphasis on managing and developing the quality of its operations and outputs. A Quality Management Strategy is in place and posted on the ONS website together with various other documents on quality and methodology. The quality work is carried out within three areas: (i) the Quality Centre within the Survey Methodology and Statistical Computing division, which manages and monitors quality initiatives and provides guidance, support and expertise; (ii) an Internal Audit Unit; and (iii) a 'Continuous Improvement Zone', which focuses on process improvements.

The Peer Review team finds that the operations of the UK Statistics Authority and the ONS are largely in compliance with the European statistics Code of Practice (CoP). This notwithstanding, there are a few areas of weakness for which the Peer Review team recommends improvement

actions in order to raise the credibility of and confidence in UK statistics, to increase efficiency of the statistical operations and to enhance quality.

The use of administrative microdata for statistical purposes is relatively limited in the UK, mainly due to cultural and legal obstacles. The Peer Reviewers are of the opinion that removing the current obstacles and allowing the use and linking of administrative data under proper governance and confidentiality arrangements would result in cost reductions, greatly improve operational efficiency and increase the supply of data and statistics. Another area identified as a weakness and subject to controversy in the UK is the widespread practice of granting government ministers and ministerial staff privileged pre-release access to statistical releases. The Peer Reviewers find this to be excessive, not in compliance with the CoP and recommend that this practice be severely restricted and ultimately abolished. The Peer Review team also makes recommendations for increasing the efficiency of the system, mainly through increased standardisation and strengthening of efforts to modernise data collection practices which are currently somewhat old fashioned and inefficient. There is a great need to make UK statistics more accessible than they are at the present time. A major challenge for the ONS and the GSS is the lack of well-developed websites enabling users to find and access UK statistics quickly and easily. Hence, the Peer Reviewers recommend not only that the current efforts to renew the ONS website should be strengthened but also that the overview of and access to UK statistics should be improved at the level of the GSS, either through a dedicated portal or a common website solely for UK statistics. Finally, the Peer Review team makes a few recommendations on improving the clarity, coherence and independence of the UK statistical system.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Using administrative data**

1. The United Kingdom Statistics Authority and the Office for National Statistics should continue to seek agreements on new legislation which would authorise, encourage and facilitate the use of administrative data for statistical purposes, subject to proper governance and confidentiality arrangements. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 2, indicator 2.2, Principle 8, indicators 8.7, 8.8 and 8.9, Principles 9 and 10.)

### **Restricting pre-release access**

2. The current practice by the Government of the United Kingdom and the devolved administrations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales of granting pre-release access to official statistics should, at a minimum, be severely restricted and ultimately abolished. As long as this practice is maintained, it should be controlled by the United Kingdom Statistics Authority. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 6, indicator 6.7.)

### **Increasing the efficiency of the statistical system**

3. The Office for National Statistics should implement standardised software and tools across subject-matter areas and production processes, including standardised applications for editing and imputation. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 7, Principle 8, indicator 8.5, and Principle 10.)

4. The Office for National Statistics should ensure that descriptions of divergences from existing European methodologies cover all European statistics. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 7, indicator 7.1.)
5. The Office for National Statistics should use the Standards and Guidance database to assist in the standardisation of methods, procedures and tools. The use of the database should receive greater attention and even be made compulsory. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 7.)
6. The Office for National Statistics should resume regular consultations with business associations and work with representatives of data suppliers in order to minimise the impact of data requests and to enable greater understanding of the use of their data. It should prepare a communication plan targeting different data provider groups. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 8 and 9.)
7. The Office for National Statistics, preferably in cooperation with other relevant institutions of the Government Statistical Service, should intensify its efforts to modernise its data collection in order to reduce cost and response burden. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 8, 9 and 10.)
8. The Office for National Statistics should review the structure and content of its metadata (both producer-oriented and user-oriented metadata), to make a plan to ensure the consistency with the Single Integrated Metadata Structure (SIMS), to train staff in the use of the European standards, and to harmonise procedures for producing quality reports for domestic and European purposes. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 10 and 14, Principle 15, indicator 15.5.)

#### **Making UK statistics more accessible**

9. The United Kingdom Statistics Authority should see to it that solutions are implemented at Government Statistical Service level that provide an enhanced overview of and access to United Kingdom statistics in general, either by a portal with links to different statistics websites or through a common site for United Kingdom statistics. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 15, coordination.)
10. The Office for National Statistics should continue and intensify its efforts to upgrade its website in order to make statistical information more accessible for different types of users and to offer more flexible possibilities for data extraction, e.g. by implementing a statistical database with detailed data for all subject areas. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 15.)
11. The United Kingdom Statistics Authority should initiate actions at Government Statistical Service level to establish a common template for describing the metadata of different outputs in a user-friendly way and to ensure that there are close links between publications, releases, tables and the relevant descriptions. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 12 and 15, coordination.)
12. The Office for National Statistics should develop and implement remote access to microdata for research purposes and lay down specific protocols for such access. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 15, indicator 15.4.)

## **Improving the clarity, coherence and independence of the UK statistical system**

13. The United Kingdom Statistics Authority should continue to systematically engage with ministers and department Heads of Profession, i.e. the senior statistical advisers in government departments, on the use of the designation of official/National Statistics to ensure that its guidance is correctly interpreted and implemented and that recurrent administrative and management statistics are compiled according to the Code of Practice for Official Statistics and labelled accordingly. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 1, 6, 7, 8, 12 and 15.)
14. The United Kingdom Statistics Authority should continue its efforts to sharpen the boundaries between statistical and administrative roles within the Government Statistical Service. This means that all statistical releases are controlled by Heads of Profession on behalf of the relevant departments and that responding to requests for statistics from departments is the responsibility of the Heads of Profession. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 1, indicator 1.6, Principles 5, 6 and 15.)
15. The United Kingdom Statistics Authority and the National Statistician as Head of the Government Statistical Service should strengthen their efforts to harmonise United Kingdom statistics in order to ensure coherence and comparability in the production of official statistics within the United Kingdom, over time and among producers of statistics. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 10, 14 and 15, coordination.)
16. The United Kingdom Statistics Authority should review and update the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, based on the experience gained so far and with a view to harmonising it with the principles and indicators of the European statistics Code of Practice. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 1 and 14.)

## 2. INTRODUCTION

This peer review report is part of a series of assessments, the objective of which is to evaluate the extent to which National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) and the European Statistical System (ESS)<sup>1</sup> comply with the European statistics Code of Practice (CoP).

The CoP, which sets out a common quality framework for the ESS, was first adopted in 2005 by the Statistical Programme Committee and updated in 2011 by its successor, the European Statistical System Committee. The CoP – 15 principles and related indicators of good practice – covers the institutional environment, the statistical production process and the output of European statistics. The ESS is committed to fully complying with the CoP and is working towards its full implementation. Periodic assessments review progress towards reaching this goal.

The first global assessment, a round of peer reviews in 2006–2008, explored how the NSIs and Eurostat were progressing in implementing the parts of the CoP relating to the institutional environment and dissemination of statistics (principles 1–6 and 15). This resulted in reports for each NSI and Eurostat, available on the Eurostat website<sup>2</sup>. These reports also include a set of improvement actions covering all the principles of the CoP; these informed the annual monitoring of the implementation of the CoP in the ESS in the period 2009-2013.

The scope of this second round of peer reviews is broader: the assessment of CoP compliance covers all principles; the CoP compliance of selected other national producers of European statistics (as well as the NSI) in each country is assessed; and the way in which statistical authorities coordinate the production and dissemination of European statistics within their statistical systems is explored.

It should be underlined that there is a fundamental difference between the reports in the previous round of peer reviews conducted in 2006-2008 and the reports from this round. In the 2006-2008 round compliance with principles 1 to 6 and 15 of the CoP was assessed by means of a four-level scale (fully met; largely met; partly met and not met) and improvement actions were agreed on all 15 principles. After five years of continuous development most of the improvement actions have been implemented and significant progress towards full compliance with the CoP has been made. Therefore, rather than stating the state of play for all principles of the CoP, the reports from the 2013-2015 round mainly focus on issues where full compliance with the CoP has not been found or further improvements are recommended by the Peer Review team.

In order to gain an independent view, the peer review exercise has been externalised and an audit-like approach, where all the answers to the self-assessment questionnaires have to be supported by evidence, has been applied. As in 2006-2008, all EU Member States, the EFTA/EEA countries and Eurostat are subject to a peer review.

Each peer review in the Member States and EFTA/EEA countries is conducted by three reviewers and has four phases: completion of self-assessment questionnaires by a country; their assessment by Peer Reviewers; a peer review visit; and the preparation of reports on the outcomes. The peer

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<sup>1</sup> The ESS is the partnership between the Union statistical authority, which is the Commission (Eurostat), the national statistical institutes (NSIs) and other national authorities responsible in each Member State for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics. This Partnership also includes the EFTA /EEA countries.

<sup>2</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/quality/first-round-of-peer-reviews>

review of Eurostat has been conducted by the European Statistical Governance Advisory Board (ESGAB).

To test and complete the methodology, it was piloted in two countries, Iceland and Slovakia, over the summer of 2013.

The peer review of the United Kingdom (UK) was conducted by Hallgrímur Snorrason (chair), Jan Byfuglien and Hilkkka Vihavainen, who conducted a peer review visit to Newport on 5 – 9 January 2015. The programme of the visit is in Annex A and the list of participants in Annex B.

This report focuses on compliance with the CoP and the coordination of European statistics within the UK statistical system. The report highlights some of the strengths of the UK statistical system in these contexts and contains recommendations for improvement. Improvement actions developed by the UK Statistics Authority and the ONS on the basis of this report will be published within the four-week period starting when the final report is sent to the NSI.



### **3. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM**

The UK statistical system is defined as all the organisations and people responsible for producing official statistics in the UK. The main components of the statistical system are:

- the Statistics Board, which operates under the name of the United Kingdom Statistics Authority, responsible for promoting and safeguarding the production and publication of all official statistics, to ensure they serve the public good;
- the Government Statistical Service (GSS), which is the community of all those involved in the production of official statistics in the UK. The GSS includes the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which is the executive office of the UK Statistics Authority, the largest producer of official statistics in the UK and the UK's National Statistical Institute.

#### **History**

The collection of official statistics in the UK has a long history and has been uncentralised throughout. The origins of the current statistical system can be dated to 1941, when the Central Statistical Office (CSO) was established to improve the coherence of statistics. In 1960, the Business Statistics Office and the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) were established, and in 1996, the CSO merged with the OPCS to form the Office for National Statistics (ONS). In 1968, Lord Moser developed the concept of the GSS which is still in operation today.

Between 2000 and 2008, the UK statistical system was governed by the non-statutory Framework for National Statistics. The Framework established the non-statutory Statistics Commission and the role of National Statistician, and introduced concepts such as National Statistics and the former National Statistics Code of Practice. The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007, which came into effect on 1 April 2008, retained some features of the previous statistical system but also notably provided for the creation of the Statistics Board (the legal name of the UK Statistics Authority).

#### **The UK Statistics Authority**

The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body operating at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament. The Authority's statutory objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. It is also required to promote and safeguard the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics, and ensure good practice in relation to official statistics. The UK Statistics Authority's statutory areas of responsibility are:

- oversight of the production and publication of official statistics across the UK statistical system, which includes UK government departments and the devolved administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales;
- promotion, safeguarding and monitoring of quality, comprehensiveness and good practice in relation to all official statistics;
- production of a Code of Practice for Official Statistics (hereinafter termed UK Code of Practice to distinguish it from the European statistics Code of Practice, abbreviated to CoP) and assessment of official statistics against the UK Code of Practice;
- governance of the ONS, its executive office.

The Authority is accountable to the UK Parliament through its Public Administration Select Committee (PASC) and to the devolved legislatures (Scottish Parliament, National Assembly for Wales and Northern Ireland Assembly). Membership of the Authority's Board comprises:

- the Chair of the Authority;
- seven other non-executive members;
- three executive members – the National Statistician and two other employees of the Authority appointed by the non-executive members, currently the Director General for Regulation and the Director General of the ONS.

The National Statistician is the Authority's and the government's principal adviser on official statistics, Head of the GSS, and the Authority's Chief Executive and Permanent Secretary. The Director General for Regulation is the Authority's principal adviser on the assessment and reassessment of official statistics, their compliance with the UK Code of Practice and designation/de-designation of National Statistics.

### **The Office for National Statistics (ONS)**

The ONS is the UK's largest independent producer of official statistics and is the recognised National Statistical Institute for the UK. Its main responsibilities are:

- The collection, compilation, analysis and dissemination of a range of key economic, social and demographic statistics about the UK (over 650 statistical releases each year). About 80% of the UK's European statistics are produced by the ONS.
- Statistical leadership and methodological advice for the benefit of UK official statistics.
- Representation of the UK internationally as the National Statistical Institute.

The ONS is the only UK government department with the production of statistics as its main role. It is led by the National Statistician. The number of staff (full-time equivalents) is around 3100, located in Newport (1750), Titchfield (750) and London (50); there is also a field force of survey interviewers (550) located around the country.

### **The Government Statistical Service (GSS)**

The GSS is the community of civil servants working in the collection, production and communication of official statistics. All in all, the GSS engages around 7000 statistical staff members. It is a network of people across many different organisations, including government departments, agencies and the devolved administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Members of the GSS come from a range of professions, including statisticians, economists, social researchers, analysts, IT professionals and communicators who provide high-quality information, analysis and advice to decision-makers. The most senior statistician in each organisation is the Statistical Head of Profession or lead official for smaller bodies. Heads of Profession are professionally accountable to the National Statistician who is the Head of the GSS. The coordination of and cooperation within the GSS is supported by a structure of committees with representatives from the various GSS bodies including the devolved administrations. The National Statistician is also responsible for the coordination of European statistics.

## **Strategy for UK Statistics**

In October 2014, the UK Statistics Authority published its Statement of Strategy – Better Statistics, Better Decisions – which brings together the three strategies previously published by the Authority, the ONS and the GSS into a single strategy. The document sets out:

- a collective mission for the UK Statistical System – to provide high-quality statistics, analysis and advice to help Britain make better decisions;
- a vision for 2020, when data will be available real-time, official statistics will be digital by default, and the quality of advice and insight will earn official statisticians the right to be involved in decision-making at the highest level;
- how this vision will be achieved by focusing on five perspectives – being helpful, professional, innovative, efficient and capable.

The GSS is currently working to develop business plans for 2015/2016 and beyond that set out how its activities relate to the new strategy.

## **4. COMPLIANCE WITH THE CODE OF PRACTICE AND THE COORDINATION ROLE WITHIN THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL SYSTEM**

### **4.1 STRENGTHS OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTE IN RELATION TO ITS COMPLIANCE WITH THE CODE OF PRACTICE AND TO ITS COORDINATION ROLE**

The UK statistical system has increased in strength over the last few years. Since the issue of the UK Code of Practice in January 2009, the UK Statistics Authority has systematically assessed the quality of official statistics against the UK Code of Practice. The assessment involves evaluating the quality of the statistics which may be designated 'National Statistics' if they are found to be produced and disseminated in accordance with the UK Code of Practice and to be of sufficient quality. At the same time, the Statistics Authority has closely monitored statistical releases and use of statistics by government and public institutions and commented publicly on any indications of misuse that have been observed. The enactment of the Statistics Act 2007 and the regulatory activities of the Statistics Authority have greatly added to the professional independence of the conduct of official statistics by the GSS (CoP Principle 1). It has also raised the level of quality of the statistics and confidence in the outputs of the GSS (CoP Principle 4). The UK Statistics Authority completed its first full round of assessments in 2012.

The ONS is the executive office of the UK Statistics Authority. It is headed by the National Statistician, a Crown appointment, who is also head of the GSS. It is of interest to note that the appointment of the Board of the Authority is based on professional competence and open procedure. Another important feature is that the Statistics Authority operates at arm's length from government and is directly accountable to Parliament (CoP Principle 1).

UK official statistical activities have been supported by a code of practice since 1995 (originally named the Official Statistics Code of Practice, it became the National Statistics Code of Practice in 2000). The current UK Code of Practice from 2009 applies across the whole area of official statistics, i.e. the entire GSS, including the devolved administrations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. It is significant that the UK Code of Practice extends to statisticians and all other officials and advisors either involved in the production of official statistics or who use those statistics. The UK Code of Practice appears to be well known by producers and main users and is evidently observed and largely respected in the statistical community (CoP all Principles).

The UK Statistics Authority is charged with the responsibility of overseeing the UK official statistical system, i.e. the GSS. In the course of the Authority's operations, the coordination and integration of the GSS seem to have been enhanced. The National Statistician spends considerable effort on harmonising the statistical functions of the GSS and facilitating cooperation between GSS bodies. Those efforts are planned to be increased in early 2015 with the appointment of the current Director General of the ONS as Deputy National Statistician who will work with the National Statistician on coordination and cooperation within the GSS (coordination).

The ONS is the NSI of the UK. It is a professionally independent institution which operates with a high degree of professionalism and integrity (CoP all Principles). Judging both from discussions with various user groups with whom the Peer Review team met and from the most recent user satisfaction survey, the ONS has earned a lot of trust and credibility.

One of the strengths of the ONS, in the opinion of the Peer Review team, is that its operations are characterised by a high degree of transparency and openness. Hence, the manner in which the ONS carries out its functions can easily be evaluated by users (CoP Principle 6).

The ONS strives to have close user relations and consults users widely by different modalities. Requests for consultations and their outcomes are presented on its website. The consultations concern many different aspects of ONS activities, such as reviews of and changes in methods and products, proposed new products and curtailment of existing ones. In the years 2011–2013, the ONS carried out 10–20 such consultations annually receiving in some cases several hundred responses (CoP Principles 11 and 15).

The ONS pursues and enjoys good relations with academia. It has cooperated closely with research centres and academics on the issue of access by researchers to microdata as well as the utilisation and sharing of administrative data by government institutions. It frequently consults academic statisticians on issues of methodology and strategy (CoP Principles 6, 7 and 11).

The ONS has over recent years changed its media approach emphasising transparency in its operations and permitting and encouraging staff members to interact with journalists and assist them in understanding and explaining statistical issues and outcomes (CoP Principles 1, 6, 8 and 11).

The ONS places much emphasis on the quality of its statistical operations and outputs. The work on quality is carried out by the Quality Centre within the division of Survey Methodology and Statistical Computing and encompasses both development work and monitoring. The work follows a Quality Management Strategy based on the UK Code of Practice and the ONS Vision, all of which have been made public on its website. Further quality-related work is also conducted by an Internal Audit Unit and a Continuous Improvement Zone focusing on process improvements. The Quality Centre is responsible for managing and monitoring quality initiatives for statistical output areas. It provides guidance, support and expertise on statistical quality and response burden. Its main functions are quality management, assurance and improvement; management and monitoring of quality reviews; management of and support for quality reporting; and measuring and reporting on response burden. A noteworthy feature of the attention to quality is the existence of a network of ‘quality champions’ across the ONS, i.e. staff members who work on a voluntary basis alongside their normal duties to promote attention to quality within their divisions. The ONS organises three types of training courses to support and promote the quality policy: ‘improving quality at ONS’, recommended for all ONS staff; ‘quality assurance for staff in output areas’, compulsory for output managers; and ‘quality and statistics’, which is open to GSS staff (CoP Principle 4).

The ONS has made efforts to utilise modern dissemination tools in order to better reach its customers. Thus, interactive data visualisations and infographics are used to increase understanding of statistical releases and web-based tools have been developed for this purpose. It also makes considerable use of social media channels, in particular Twitter ([twitter.com/ONS](https://twitter.com/ONS)), to widen dissemination of ONS statistics (CoP Principle 15).

The ONS organises, carries out or facilitates a lot of training for its staff. This ranges from short statistical courses to more extensive courses leading to academic qualification. There is a Statistical Training Unit whose remit covers the whole of the GSS and whose aim is to ensure that numerical and statistical training needs are met and appropriate training courses are offered (CoP Principle 7).

The ONS applies a policy of rotating staff between different fields of work and specialisation. This seems particularly important for enhancing skill levels, for professional development, and for job satisfaction (CoP Principles 4 and 7).

The Peer Review team learned of several innovative actions and improvements of practices which have been undertaken recently with the objective of raising confidence in UK statistics, improving coordination of the UK statistical system and enhancing statistical operations. Of such innovative practices, the following seem particularly important:

- The establishment and the activities of the UK Statistics Authority with responsibility to issue the UK Code of Practice, which is binding for all official statistics; assess the statistical production of departments and institutions within the GSS against the Code; and to monitor statistical practices of government.
- The extensive user consultations carried out by the ONS by posting requests for consultations and their outcomes on its website. The consultations concern many different aspects of ONS activities, such as reviews of and changes in methods and products, proposed new products and curtailment of existing ones.
- The establishment and activities of a 'Good Practice Team' to promote and advise on good practices and to work with departments and institutions within the GSS on sharing experience and adopting good practices.

## **4.2 ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

As already mentioned, the UK Statistics Authority issued the UK Code of Practice in 2009. This code was based on earlier such codes and drawn up in view of the European statistics CoP then in force and the United Nations Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics. For this reason, the objectives and main content of the UK Code of Practice and the CoP are quite similar, while the two instruments differ in structure. There are also some differences in emphasis, largely explained by different backgrounds and cultures. The policies pursued by the UK Statistics Authority under the Statistics Act over the last 7–8 years have been aimed at and succeeded in strengthening the statistical system. In particular, the activities of the Statistics Authority in assessing official statistics against the UK Code of Practice and monitoring government compilation and use of statistics have resulted in improved concordance between the UK statistical system and the principles of the CoP, thus strengthening compliance of the UK statistics with the CoP. At the same time, the GSS operations have strengthened due to increased observance of the UK Code of Practice and improved coordination of the GSS.

Nevertheless, the Peer Review team is of the opinion that, in a few areas, the statistical practices of the ONS and the GSS should be brought into closer concordance with the CoP. In some instances, UK practices seem to be in line with the UK Code of Practice while less in line with the CoP, because of different emphasis of the two codes. Hence, the Peer Review team makes several recommendations for changes in UK practices in order to improve their quality and efficiency in accordance with the guidance provided by the principles of the CoP.

### **4.2.1 USING ADMINISTRATIVE DATA**

The CoP places considerable emphasis on the use of administrative data for statistical purposes under Principle 8 on Appropriate Statistical Procedures, Principle 9 on Non-excessive Burden on Resources and Principle 10 on Cost Effectiveness. In recent years, many European countries have purposefully increased their use of administrative data. As a result, the availability of source data has increased and the NSIs have succeeded in augmenting their existing survey data or even replacing their own surveys with the use of administrative data. The combined effects have been

increased data supplies for statistical purposes, reductions in response burden and cost by businesses and households, and cost reductions and increased efficiencies for the NSIs.

Such developments have only taken place to a limited extent in the UK where there are substantial cultural and legislative obstacles to utilising administrative microdata for statistical purposes. These obstacles severely restrict the exploitation of the potential for increasing or enriching source data, reducing response burden, and realising cost reductions and efficiencies in the collection of data. In some instances, use of administrative data may facilitate quicker response to policy considerations than sole reliance on conventional survey data collection. This happens in particular as the coverage of administrative data is often much larger than that of conventional surveys and allows the generation of new statistics and analysis based on large and integrated data files. The Peer Review team is of the opinion that the UK statistical system would gain much by adopting policies and practices in this respect similar to those applied in many European countries. Hence, the team would like to encourage the UK Statistics Authority and the ONS to continue working towards reaching agreements on new legislative provisions which would allow, encourage and facilitate the use of administrative data for statistical purposes, subject to proper governance and confidentiality arrangements. This would also meet the requirements of the revised regulation on European statistics in granting access to administrative data. In order to reap the full benefits of the availability of administrative data, a law on this subject would need to provide the following:

- it should be mandatory for holders of official administrative records and registers to submit such microdata and relevant metadata to the ONS as it may request for its statistical operations;
- the ONS should be authorised to link its microdata with data held by other producers of national statistics under appropriate governance and confidentiality arrangements;
- holders of administrative registers, which are or may be used for statistical purposes by the ONS, should be obliged to inform and consult the ONS on planned changes to the registers and on their design and specifications in order to make them fitter for statistical utilisation.

In light of this and to enhance the compliance with the CoP, **the Peer Reviewers recommend:**

- 1. The United Kingdom Statistics Authority and the Office for National Statistics should continue to seek agreements on new legislation which would authorise, encourage and facilitate the use of administrative data for statistical purposes, subject to proper governance and confidentiality arrangements. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 2, indicator 2.2, Principle 8, indicators 8.7, 8.8, and 8.9, Principles 9 and 10.)**

#### **4.2.2 RESTRICTING PRE-RELEASE ACCESS**

The CoP Principle 6 on Impartiality and Objectivity emphasises that all users shall be treated equitably by statistical authorities. Indicator 6.7 reads as follows: “All users have equal access to statistical releases at the same time. Any privileged pre-release access to any outside user is limited, controlled and publicised.” In the UK, the Statistics Act stipulates (section 11(1)): “The Code of Practice may not deal with any matter relating to the granting of pre-release access to official statistics.” Instead, the appropriate authorities, i.e. Minister of the Cabinet Office and the devolved administrations, “may for the purpose of the Code by order provide for rules and principles relating to the granting of pre-release access to official statistics” (section 11(2)). On this basis, these authorities have laid down rules on this subject and, with the exception of the

devolved administrations of Scotland and Wales, have published lists of those to whom pre-release access may be granted as well as the period during which such access may be granted.

Judging from the published lists of those who enjoy privileged pre-release access and from discussions during the peer review visit, the practice of granting ministers and members of ministerial staff pre-release access to statistical releases extends to a large number of people in the UK. Several countries of the ESS have abolished all such privileged pre-release access. The granting of pre-release access is subject to considerable discussion and controversy in the UK. In its review in 2013 of the operation of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007<sup>3</sup>, the House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee (PASC) states that pre-release access presents a risk to public confidence and that the government should bring forward legislation to transfer responsibility for determining policy on pre-release access to the Statistics Authority. This is in line with the stance taken by the Authority from the outset of its operations. The minutes of the first meeting of the Authority in 2008 state the Authority's view that pre-release policy is central to the improvement of public confidence in statistics and as such should be within the Authority's powers. In his reply to the PASC review, the responsible minister stated that pre-release access is vital to ministers and officials to account for their areas of responsibilities and to be fully informed in order to be able to respond to the media and make accurate judgements of the need for immediate actions.

With regard to the CoP, the Peer Reviewers are of the opinion that privileged pre-release access constitutes a case of unequal access, undermines public trust in official statistics and is detrimental to official statistical activities. The delays caused by pre-release access are also in conflict with the CoP principles of timeliness of releases. The Peer Reviewers consider the UK practices in this respect to be excessive and therefore not in line with the CoP. In England and Northern Ireland, the pre-release access period is normally 24 hours while in Scotland and Wales the corresponding period is 5 working days. In Scotland, lists of those having pre-release access are not publicised. The practice in Scotland and Wales of granting pre-release access for a whole work week and the absence of published lists of those having pre-release access in Scotland, are considered to constitute a breach of the CoP as users are not treated equitably and timeliness and relevance are greatly reduced.

In order to increase public trust in official statistics, the Peer Reviewers are of the opinion that the current practice of allowing ministers and ministerial staff pre-release access to statistical findings should, at the very least, be severely restricted and ultimately abolished. They also consider that as long as this practice is maintained, it should be brought under the control of the UK Statistics Authority as recommended by the PASC.

In order to achieve compliance with the CoP, the **Peer Review team recommends:**

- 2. The current practice by the Government of the United Kingdom and the devolved administrations of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales of granting pre-release access to official statistics should, at a minimum, be severely restricted and ultimately abolished. As long as this practice is maintained, it should be controlled by the United Kingdom Statistics Authority. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 6, indicator 6.7.)**

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<sup>3</sup> House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee. Public Trust in Government Statistics: A review of the operation of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007. Published on 25 February 2013: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmpublicadm/406/406.pdf>.



## **4.2.3 INCREASING THE EFFICIENCY OF THE STATISTICAL SYSTEM**

### ***Standardisation and harmonisation of methods and tools***

The CoP places emphasis on the standardisation of methods, applications and procedures for reasons of ensuring quality and efficiency in the statistical production processes. Standardisation sets uniform norms and standard processes, for example using a standardised methodology or a standardised disclosure control process. Harmonisation is about finding pragmatic ways of reaching a desired level of comparability between statistics which have been collected for different purposes under different collection regimes using different standards and methodologies. The ONS has several activities in place to assure the knowledge of these approaches within the organisation:

- quality management system;
- regular review of methods;
- enterprise architecture project based on the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM);
- separate data collection methodology team;
- separate harmonisation and classification team;
- links with universities and other professional bodies;
- wide range of statistical training.

Various statistics have been developed using a range of statistical and information technology (IT) tools and methods. Some systems are fairly old and form a major risk for the production of statistics. Out-of-date hardware and software are still in use. In recent years many new tools have been tested and taken as standards. The enterprise architecture project aims at identifying areas where still more standardisation is needed. The Peer Review team was told that particularly due to the shortage of IT resources, the process for adopting and implementing standardised methods and tools is slow. It is evident that there is considerable scope to strengthen the use of standardised methods, procedures and applications.

The CoP indicator 7.1 envisages that the overall methodological framework used for European statistics follows European and other international standards, guidelines and good practices. This is partly implemented at the ONS, according to the SAQ. On the issue of divergence from existing European and international methodological recommendations, the ONS explains in the SAQ that it mostly follows international recommendations and, where the ONS diverges from these, this is usually explained in the quality methodology information reports published for each output.

The ONS produces a lot of documentation and guidance on its operations. The Standards and Guidance (StaG) database is used to document desk instructions, guidance and methodology, currently storing some 16,000 such documents covering most areas of work. As regards guidance to exploit standards and methods, the StaG database could be a good tool for further standardisation. Thus, it might contribute to overall standardisation of the statistics production process if it were used to document in a standardised way all the working processes, quality assurance guidelines and methods as well as to show which of the methods and tools are to be preferred. Currently its use is voluntary and the extent to which it is being used is not properly monitored.

To further enhance the compliance with the CoP, the **Peer Reviewers recommend**:

3. **The Office for National Statistics should implement standardised software and tools across subject-matter areas and production processes, including standardised applications for editing and imputation. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 7, Principle 8, indicator 8.5, and Principle 10.)**
4. **The Office for National Statistics should ensure that descriptions of divergences from existing European methodologies cover all European statistics. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 7, indicator 7.1.)**
5. **The Office for National Statistics should use the Standards and Guidance database to assist in the standardisation of methods, procedures and tools. The use of the database should receive greater attention and even be made compulsory. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 7.)**

### ***Modernisation of data collection***

The ONS relies heavily on data collection by conventional surveys. This applies to the collection of both social and business data. Data collection from households mainly takes place by using either computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) or computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) methods. For business data collection, the common form of obtaining data is paper-based. Opportunities for systematic collection of data directly from the information systems of firms have not been exploited, although a pilot of extraction of data directly from company files using 'eXtensible Business Reporting Language' (XBRL) has been implemented. It is well understood in the ONS that the business data collection model in particular is out of date. Two programmes of modernisation, namely the electronic data collection (EDC) programme and the administrative data programme, have started with the aim of reducing the cost of data collection and reducing the response burden. The EDC programme has a target to shift business surveys to online data collection by the end of 2018. So far a test ("alpha") version of a registration and survey management system has been developed and is being used by a small number of respondents to pilot the transfer of data securely to ONS. Iterative pilot testing of electronic questionnaires is also taking place with a limited number of survey respondents to understand the potential for mode effects. For online household surveys there is a testing phase to study the possibilities for online data collection in the labour force survey (LFS) as well as for preparing for the use of online data collection in the 2021 Census programme.

The EDC programme aims at reaching the following outcomes:

- high levels of online response for business surveys;
- improved reputation for the ONS;
- reduced printing, postage and scanning costs;
- increased data accuracy at the point of first receipt due to online validation;
- reduced editing and validation costs;
- increased potential to generate income by running surveys for other government departments.

While there are a number of administrative datasets available for use by the ONS, for example in national accounts, the majority is only available in aggregate form as microdata is not provided to

the ONS. The lack of access to unit-level records hinders the capacity of the ONS to integrate this data with its own survey results. Integration of information at more detailed levels could reveal inconsistencies and errors that may exist across datasets.

The administrative data programme aims at the following:

- improve quality of statistical outputs;
- make it possible to produce new outputs to answer specific policy questions and improve the speed with which change can be analysed and reported;
- reduce response cost and burden on businesses and other respondents;
- reduce survey costs;
- improve indexing, matching and linking;
- improve accuracy of sample frames and survey variables.

Use of administrative data is extremely important for business statistics as it reduces response cost and burden on the businesses. The Peer Review team was told that hundreds or even more variables from company tax records would be useful for structural business statistics to replace the data currently collected by ONS surveys directly.

Alongside the EDC and administrative data programmes, the ONS has experimentally started to work with big data. The on-going pilot on big data is due to end in March 2015. The aim of the project is to investigate the potential use of big data within official statistics while developing an understanding of the challenges. Pilot research into the use of mobile phone data, Internet price data, Twitter, and smart meter data on the use of electricity and gas has shown real potential, such as for early delivery of data in the field of price indices, population movement statistics and as input to construction of an address register for the 2021 Census. Big data sources have considerable potential for official statistics, but at the same time their use can be very challenging. Such data sources are privately owned and there can be legal constraints in using them.

The Peer Review team was told that regular communication with the business community in their capacity as data providers has decreased during the last few years, partly because of resource constraints and partly because of the focus on user engagement. Electronic and administrative data collections change how the ONS works with respondents and therefore call for a change in communication and respondent policies.

The issues raised here do not only apply to the ONS but to the whole of the GSS. Hence, efforts to modernise the data collection methods should be extended beyond the ONS, preferably in joint development projects. A common approach, including the setting up of accounting and other standards, would be important for increasing efficiency and for ensuring uniformity in data collection among businesses, local administrations, non-profit institutions and households.

To further enhance the compliance with the CoP, the **Peer Reviewers recommend**:

6. **The Office for National Statistics should resume regular consultations with business associations and work with representatives of data suppliers in order to minimise the impact of data requests and to enable greater understanding of the use of their data. It should prepare a communication plan targeting different data provider groups. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 8 and 9.)**
7. **The Office for National Statistics, preferably in cooperation with other relevant institutions of the Government Statistical Service, should intensify its efforts to modernise its data collection in order to reduce cost and response burden. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 8, 9 and 10.)**

#### ***Harmonisation of the compilation of quality reports***

The ONS Quality Centre coordinates the production and publication of Quality and Methodology Information (QMI) reports. In addition, it provides output areas with guidance and support on how to present quality information to users. QMI reports are published for all statistical bulletins, providing users with information which enables them to assess whether the data are suitable for their needs. The QMI predominantly contains “static” quality information, i.e. information which does not change regularly with the output (e.g. the sample size). Dynamic quality information that is specific to each release is included in the statistical bulletin itself (e.g. information on standard errors or response rates).

Quality reports for European statistical purposes (based on legal requirements) are produced by subject-matter areas and their compilation is not coordinated by the Quality Centre. The Peer Review team was told that there is therefore limited central knowledge of recent European developments regarding the Single Integrated Metadata Structure (SIMS) and the ESS handbook for Quality Reports 2014. The production of various quality reports is quite time consuming if the required metadata and their structures are not harmonised.

To further enhance the compliance with the CoP, the **Peer Reviewers recommend**:

8. **The Office for National Statistics should review the structure and contents of its metadata (both producer-oriented and user-oriented metadata), to make a plan to ensure the consistency with the Single Integrated Metadata Structure (SIMS), to train staff in the use of the European standards, and to harmonise procedures for producing quality reports for domestic and European purposes. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 10 and 14, Principle 15, indicator 15.5.)**

## **4.2.4 MAKING UK STATISTICS MORE ACCESSIBLE**

### ***Websites for dissemination of UK statistics***

A major challenge for the ONS and the GSS is the lack of well-developed websites enabling users to find and access UK statistics quickly and easily. The difficulty of obtaining an overview of UK statistics has increased, especially as the UK statistical yearbook no longer exists.

At the present time, statistics produced by the UK statistical system are accessible through the gov.uk website, the ONS website, websites of the devolved administrations and websites of other producers of official statistics. There is no one place where it is easy to find and retrieve statistics from across the many areas of the GSS. Efforts have been made to incorporate statistics from

different producers on the gov.uk website. However, this website does not appear to have well-developed functionality for finding and accessing statistics as it is rather document oriented and with a thematic structure not well adapted to statistics. As a matter of principle it might also be better to separate official/National Statistics from other governmental information.

The ONS website is rather rich, with much information and detailed geography and mapping possibilities. However, one message from the ONS Customer Satisfaction Survey 2013/2014 was that customers are not satisfied with the ONS website. The ONS is responding to these concerns by implementing a major project (within the Improving Dissemination Programme, IDP) to develop a new and more user-friendly website. At the present time, the ONS website does not have a statistical database with detailed data across all statistical areas allowing flexible retrieval of data according to user needs. This issue is not currently within the scope of the IDP. The Peer Reviewers find this to be an important issue which should be addressed urgently. For Census data, the Data Explorer software ("beta" version) is available, making it possible to explore datasets, customise tables and download data in a number of open formats. Detailed Census tables are also available from the 'NOMIS' and Neighbourhood Statistics portals too. In addition, an Application Programming Interface is available from all three portals which allows machine to machine interrogation and integration of data.

The ONS website provides a number of large economic time-series datasets that can be downloaded in a range of formats including the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX) format. Most data are now available in Excel files that can be rather large and difficult to further manipulate and print. Other producers of statistics appear to have a similar approach to disseminating statistics. One exception is the 'uktradeinfo' site by Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs where users can construct their own tables based on detailed data on imports and exports.

To further enhance the compliance with the CoP, the **Peer Reviewers recommend:**

**9. The United Kingdom Statistics Authority should see to it that solutions are implemented at Government Statistical Service level that provide an enhanced overview of and access to United Kingdom statistics in general, either by a portal with links to different statistics websites or through a common site for United Kingdom statistics. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 15, coordination.)**

**10. The Office for National Statistics should continue and intensify its efforts to upgrade its website in order to make statistical information more accessible for different types of users and to offer more flexible possibilities for data extraction, e.g. by implementing a statistical database with detailed data for all subject areas. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 15.)**

#### ***Access to user-oriented metadata***

The ONS website has a lot of information on many surveys under the heading 'Guidance and Methodology'. There are also links from the statistical bulletins to the relevant QMI reports but such links may be to specific topics rather than to specific documents. There seem to be no links, however, from the reference tables and datasets to the relevant metadata. Hence, there is a challenge to make metadata more visible and accessible to users. For other producers and websites disseminating official statistics, the situation regarding user-oriented metadata appears to be more difficult; a lack of structured, user-oriented metadata linked to the publications/releases/tables.

To further enhance the compliance with the CoP, the **Peer Reviewers recommend**:

- 11. The United Kingdom Statistics Authority should initiate actions at Government Statistical Service level to establish a common template for describing the metadata of different outputs in a user-friendly way and to ensure that there are close links between publications, releases, tables and the relevant descriptions. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 12 and 15, coordination.)**

#### ***Remote access to microdata***

The Virtual Microdata Laboratory (VML) is an ONS facility for providing secure access to sensitive, detailed data for the purposes of statistical research that serves the public good. Access is provided for approved researchers working on defined and approved projects. Available data sources include business surveys, social surveys and Census samples. Data accessed in this way cannot be downloaded. Once approved, researchers have to be specially trained; they analyse the data remotely from their desks in government institutions or in safe rooms at various sites across the UK. ONS desktops include statistical and office software for the analysts' convenience. Security procedures and specialist statistical controls are in place to ensure that sensitive details are not disclosed in the results of the analyses. In general, the researchers with whom the Peer Reviewers met were quite content with this service. It was acknowledged, however, that research access would be used more widely if it could be provided remotely. This is envisaged in the CoP and such arrangements are in place in several European countries. ONS is currently upgrading the VML with the intention of exploiting the secure Public Services Network; this new system will be launched in April 2015 and will significantly expand opportunities for remote access.

To further enhance the compliance with the CoP, **the Peer Reviewers recommend**:

- 12. The Office for National Statistics should develop and implement remote access to microdata for research purposes and lay down specific protocols for such access. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 15, indicator 15.4.)**

## **4.2.5 IMPROVING THE CLARITY, COHERENCE AND INDEPENDENCE OF THE UK STATISTICAL SYSTEM**

### ***The designation of official and National Statistics***

As outlined earlier, the UK Statistics Authority has systematically assessed the quality of official statistics against the UK Code of Practice. The assessment involves evaluating the quality of the statistics which may be designated 'National Statistics' if they are found to be produced and disseminated in accordance with the Code and to be of sufficient quality.

The designation of statistical datasets as National Statistics and the boundaries of National Statistics and other statistics were discussed with some users and have also been discussed in the 2013 PASC report on public trust in government statistics. One issue of concern is whether users understand the difference between official statistics and National Statistics. The PASC report accounts for several statements by users that the difference has little or no meaning for them. The report concludes: "We are concerned that the 'National statistics' label lacks meaning; it is at best confusing and at worst genuinely misleading." In a meeting held by the Peer Reviewers with a BBC journalist/statistics editor, a contrary opinion was stated; the term National Statistics was said to be considered a guarantee of authenticity and quality. In a discussion in the Board of the UK Statistics Authority on 2 October 2014 (UK Statistics Authority minutes), it was noted that there

were signs of increasing awareness of the National Statistics designation, but that there was still insufficient widespread recognition of the National Statistics brand. This view was confirmed by some users during the visit, but it was noted that some progress had been made. In the Peer Reviewers' opinion, the recent practice of the Statistics Authority to temporarily withdraw the label National Statistics if the statistics are seen to deteriorate in quality or to be out of line with the UK Code of Practice seems likely to underscore the meaningfulness of the label National Statistics.

Another demarcation issue concerns the distinction between National Statistics and other statistics that may be termed management, administrative or research statistics. The PASC report considers that the situation where departments can circumvent the obligation to meet the standards of the UK Code of Practice by using alternative designations, such as those already mentioned, poses a serious threat of undermining public confidence in the statistical system. In the peer review discussions it was underlined that this is a growing challenge as more producers want to disseminate statistics, but without taking on the burden to follow the UK Code of Practice. In this connection it was noted that the GSS has published a "National Statistician's Guidance: Identifying Official Statistics". Recent efforts by the UK Statistics Authority to monitor the use of "alternative" statistics and to investigate their compilation in terms of the UK Code of Practice, thus bringing them under the label of "National Statistics" as relevant, seem particularly pertinent and likely to strengthen credibility.

To further enhance the compliance with the CoP, the **Peer Reviewers recommend:**

- 13. The United Kingdom Statistics Authority should continue to systematically engage with ministers and department Heads of Profession on the use of the designation of official/National Statistics to ensure that its guidance is correctly interpreted and implemented and that recurrent administrative and management statistics are compiled according to the Code of Practice for Official Statistics and labelled accordingly. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 1, 6, 7, 8, 12 and 15.)**

#### ***Organisation of statistical activities within other bodies producing statistics***

It is a feature of the UK's statistical system that, with the exception of ONS, its members are organisations where the production of statistics is an activity carried out alongside policy-making and other general administrative tasks. The Heads of Profession, i.e. the senior statistical advisers in government departments, and the Chief Statisticians of the devolved administrations are responsible for ensuring that the UK Code of Practice is followed within the departments and administrations. Continuous monitoring by the UK Statistics Authority also aims at ensuring that the statistics in question are produced in line with the UK Code of Practice. However, there are some issues that deserve attention: one is the question of who in fact decides on statistical releases and is responsible for contact with the media; another is the separation of the use of microdata collected for statistical purposes from data collected for administrative purposes. According to the UK Code of Practice, the Head of Profession has "the sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases". This is the role which is prescribed for both heads of NSIs and other statistical authorities in the CoP (CoP indicator 1.4).

In the Peer Reviewers' meeting with the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the Head of Profession explained that he or other statisticians were responsible for the preparation of statistical releases but that, once published, he did not have direct contact with the media. Questions about statistical releases are handled in Defra by its press office.

In a situation where a common reason for distrust of official statistics is the belief that government has a vested interest in the results of statistics and that politicians and the media misrepresent the findings, as shown in the report *Public Confidence in Official Statistics 2009*<sup>4</sup>, it is important to make all efforts to ensure and document the independence of official statistics.

To further enhance the compliance with the CoP, **the Peer Reviewers recommend:**

- 14. The United Kingdom Statistics Authority should continue its efforts to sharpen the boundaries between statistical and administrative roles within the Government Statistical Service. This means that all statistical releases are controlled by Heads of Profession on behalf of the relevant departments and that responding to requests for statistics from departments is the responsibility of the Heads of Profession. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principle 1, indicator 1.6, Principles 5, 6 and 15.)**

#### ***Coherence and comparability of UK statistics***

Principle 14 of the CoP states that European statistics are consistent internally, over time and comparable between regions and countries. Principle 4, practice 6 of the UK Code of Practice states that comparability within the UK and internationally should be promoted by, for example, adopting common standards, concepts, sampling frames, questions, definitions, statistical units and classifications. Ensuring consistency appears to be a major challenge for UK statistics with four different administrative systems (England and the three devolved administrations) in some areas and many producers of official/National Statistics.

The Peer Review team was informed about the GSS national statistics harmonisation group. This group is addressing specific topics, for instance classifications, demographic information, crime statistics and education statistics. In a newsletter from the group (Harmonisation newsletter no. 8) it is mentioned that harmonisation will play an increasing role in the production of statistics in the future. It is also recognised that the ‘softly, softly’ approach used so far has probably reached its limits and that a new approach is required.

To further enhance the compliance with the CoP, **the Peer Reviewers recommend:**

- 15. The United Kingdom Statistics Authority and the National Statistician as Head of the Government Statistical Service should strengthen their efforts to harmonise United Kingdom statistics in order to ensure coherence and comparability in the production of official statistics within the United Kingdom, over time and among producers of statistics. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 10, 14 and 15, coordination.)**

#### ***Updating the UK Code of Practice for Official Statistics***

The UK Code of Practice was adopted by the UK Statistics Authority in January 2009. The Code has been an important tool for enforcing common principles and providing guidance for the production of official statistics in the UK and thus enhancing trust in the UK statistical system. As mentioned earlier, the UK Code of Practice has many similarities with the CoP, which was first adopted in February 2005 and updated in 2011 by the European Statistical System Committee (ESSC).

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<sup>4</sup> Public Confidence in Official Statistics 2009, report prepared by the National Centre for Social Research for the UK Statistics Authority, March 2010: <http://www.natcen.ac.uk/media/25384/public-confidence-official-statistics-2009.pdf>.



During the peer review it became clear that the CoP is not well known in the UK, whereas there is much awareness of the UK Code of Practice, both among producers and users.

The UK Code of Practice has already been in force for six years. For that reason, and as the CoP was revised in 2011, the Peer Reviewers are of the opinion that the UK Statistics Authority should consider revising the UK Code of Practice in light of the experience gained and with regard to the differences between it and the CoP.

To further enhance the compliance with the CoP, **the Peer Reviewers recommend:**

- 16. The United Kingdom Statistics Authority should review and update the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, based on the experience gained so far and with a view to harmonising it with the principles and indicators of the European statistics Code of Practice. (European statistics Code of Practice, Principles 1 and 14.)**

### **4.3 NATIONAL STATISTICAL INSTITUTE VIEWS WHERE THEY DIVERGE FROM PEER REVIEWERS' ASSESSMENT**

The ONS has no diverging views from the Peer Reviewers' findings.

## ANNEX A - PROGRAMME OF THE VISIT

### PEER REVIEW VISIT TO THE UK

5–9 JANUARY 2015

To be held at The Office for National Statistics (ONS), Room 1.003, Government Buildings, Cardiff Road, Newport, South Wales, NP10 8XG

**Peer Review team**  
Hallgrímur Snorrason, Chair  
Jan Byfuglien, Reviewer  
Hilkka Vihavainen, Reviewer

**National Coordinator team**  
Tricia Dodd  
Kieron Mahony  
Emma Wright  
Laura Clarke  
Becky Phillips

**Eurostat Observer**  
Pierre Bischoff, Adviser

Time	Programme	Participants
<b>Day 1 – Monday, 5 January 2015</b>		
09.00–10.00	1 Peer Review team internal meeting.	Peer Review team
10.00–10.45	2 Preparatory meeting with the NSI coordinator team and, possibly, other national participants in the visit to discuss practical aspects of the visit.	Tricia Dodd, Kieron Mahony, Emma Wright Laura Clarke, Becky Phillips
10.45–11.00	Break	
11.00–13.00	3 Welcome and introduction of the programme. General information session with a description of how the NSS is organised (bodies, distribution of responsibilities, relations between authorities).	Glen Watson, Matthew Shearing, Pam Davies Tricia Dodd, Kieron Mahony, Emma Wright, Laura Clarke, Becky Phillips
13.00–14.00	Lunch	
14.00–15.00	4 Institutional environment (professional independence, mandate for data collection, statistical confidentiality, impartiality and objectivity, CoP Principles 1, 2, 5 and 6).	Pam Davies, Kieron Mahony; Nicola Shearman Paul Wearn, Laura Dewis
15.00–15.30	5 Adequacy of resources and cost effectiveness (CoP Principles 3 and 10).	Paul Layland, Kieron Mahony, Nicky Bloomer, Jan Jones, Adrian McCormick, Lambros Hajilambi
15.30–17.00	6 Coordination role of the NSI.	Pam Davies, Kieron Mahony, Matthew Shearing
17:00–17:30	7 Cooperation/level of integration.	Pam Davies, Kieron Mahony, Matthew Shearing
<b>Day 2 – Tuesday, 6 January 2015</b>		
09.00–10.30	8 Commitment to quality (CoP Principle 4)	Tricia Dodd, Emma Wright, Ria Sanderson, Graham Sharp, Lisa Winstone, Sanjiv Mahajan, Helen Patterson, Debra Prestwood
10.30–10.45	Break	

Time		Programme	Participants
10.45– 12.15	9	Statistical processes (sound methodology, appropriate statistical procedures, non-excessive burden on respondents, CoP Principles 7–9).	Tricia Dodd, Ria Sanderson, Emma Wright, Pete Brodie, Ben Humberstone, Ed Dunn, Debra Prestwood, Jason Bradbury, Pete Benton
12.15– 13.15		Lunch	
13.15– 15.15	10	Meeting with main users – ministries and other public/private institutions.	Tricia Dodd, Steve Farrington (via video link), Mark Robson and Matthew Corder (via video link), David Blunt (via video link), Mike Batley (via video link), Deana Leadbeter (via video link)
			This will be conducted via video conference from Drummond Gate
15.15– 15.30	-	Break	
15.30– 17.15	11	Statistical output (relevance, accuracy and reliability, timeliness and punctuality, coherence and comparability, accessibility and clarity, CoP Principles 11–15).	Tricia Dodd, Emma Wright, Ria Sanderson, Graham Sharp, Lisa Winstone, Sanjiv Mahajan, Helen Patterson, Ole Black, Laura Dewis
<b>Day 3 – Wednesday, 7 January 2015</b>			
09.00– 10.30	12	Meeting with junior staff.	Martina Aumeyr, John Lewis, Marina Wright, Nathan Williams, Chris Hedges, Chris Wojcikowski, Laura Mulcahy, Wesley Harris, Jodie Withers, John Marchrones, Lauren Cooksey, Tom Pegg, Grace Edgar
10.30– 10:45		Break	
10.45– 12.45	13	Meeting with main data providers/respondents.	Tricia Dodd Steve Woodland, Shaun Witney and Louise Crown on behalf of Field Interviews and Managers Sanjiv Mahajan, Alun Gwilt
			This will be conducted via video conference from Drummond Gate
12.45– 13.15		Lunch	
13.15– 15:15	14	Meeting with academia, researchers, etc.	Tricia Dodd Vanessa Cuthill and Peter Elias, (via video link) Jill Leyland, (via video link) Keith Dugmore, (via video link) Peter Smith,
			This will be conducted via video conference from Drummond Gate.
15.15– 17.30	15	Meeting with other national authorities (producers): Scottish Government, Defra, HM Revenue and Customs.	Kieron Mahony, Julie Wilson, Neil White, Mairi Spowage, Peter Helm, Sean Whellams, Andrea Prophet, Matthew Shearing
<b>Day 4 – Thursday, 8 January 2015</b>			
10.00– 12.00	16	Meeting with the media.	Tricia Dodd, Martin Nicholls, Helena Hird, Anthony Reuben, BBC
			This will be conducted via video conference from Drummond Gate
12.00– 13.00	17	Lunch	

Time		Programme	Participants
13.00– 15.00	18	Meeting with members of the UK Statistics Authority.	Andrew Dilnot, John Pullinger, Ed Humpherson, Rob Bumpstead, Kieron Mahony, Matthew Shearing  This will be conducted via video conference from Drummond Gate
15.00– 15.15		Break	
15.15– 17.00		Clarifications, remaining or additional issues and focus areas.	Tricia Dodd, Kieron Mahony
<b>Day 5 – Friday, 9 January 2015</b>			
09.00– 11.00	19	Peer Review team discussion.	Peer Review team
11.00– 14.00	20	Meeting with senior management: conclusions and recommendations.  To include lunch	John Pullinger, Glen Watson, Pam Davies, Rob Bumpstead, Tricia Dodd, Kieron Mahony, Emma Wright, Laura Clarke, Becky Phillips  Other Directors of the ONS invited: Guy Goodwin, Ian Cope, Joe Grice, Neil Wooding, Peter Fullerton, Pete Benton
14.00– 15.00	21	Preparation of the report: task sharing.	Peer Review team

## ANNEX B - LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

	<b>Peer Review Team</b>
1	Hallgrímur Snorrason, chair
2	Jan Byfuglien, peer reviewer
3	Hilkka Vihavainen, peer reviewer
	<b>Eurostat observer</b>
4	Pierre Bischoff, Adviser, Eurostat
	<b>NSI management</b>
5	John Pullinger, National Statistician
6	Glen Watson, <i>Director General</i>
7	Joe Grice, <i>Chief Economic Advisor</i>
8	Guy Goodwin, <i>Director of Analysis and Dissemination</i>
9	Ian Cope, <i>Director of Population and Demography</i>
10	Peter Benton, <i>Director of Data Collection</i>
11	Neil Wooding, <i>Director of Strategic Planning, Performance and Capability</i>
12	Paul Layland, <i>Director of Finance</i>
13	Peter Fullerton, <i>Acting Director of Data Collection</i>
	<b>National coordinator team</b>
14	Tricia Dodd, <i>Chief Methodology Officer &amp; Deputy Director, Survey Methodology and Statistical Computing</i>
15	Kieron Mahony, <i>National Statistician's Office, UK Statistics Authority</i>
16	Emma Wright, <i>Assistant Deputy Director, Population Methodology and Statistical Infrastructure</i>
17	Laura Clarke, <i>Assistant Statistician, Survey Methodology and Statistical Computing</i>
18	Becky Phillips, <i>National Statistician's Office</i>
	<b>Other NSI staff members</b>
19	Pam Davies, <i>Deputy Director, National Statistician's Office</i>
20	Matthew Shearing, <i>Head of International Relations, National Statistician's Office</i>
21	Nicola Shearman, <i>Head of Legal Services</i>

22	Paul Wearn, <i>Legal Services</i>
23	Nicky Bloomer, <i>Deputy Director, Portfolio Delivery Unit, Strategic Planning, Performance and Capability</i>
24	Adrian McCormick, <i>Deputy Director, People and Performance, Strategic Planning, Performance and Capability</i>
25	Jan Jones, <i>Deputy Director, Strategic Planning, Strategic Planning, Performance and Capability</i>
26	Lambros Hajilambi, <i>Head of HR Analytics, Strategic Planning, Performance and Capability</i>
27	Laura Dewis, <i>Deputy Director, Digital Publishing</i>
28	Ria Sanderson, <i>Head of Quality Centre</i>
29	Graham Sharp, <i>Head of Continuous Improvement</i>
30	Lisa Winstone, <i>Head of Internal Audit</i>
31	Sanjiv Mahajan, <i>National Accounts International Coordination</i>
32	Helen Patterson, <i>Assistant Deputy Director, Analysis and Dissemination</i>
33	Debra Prestwood, <i>Deputy Director, Business Data</i>
34	Pete Brodie, <i>Deputy Director, Population Methodology and Statistical Infrastructure</i>
35	Ben Humberstone, <i>Deputy Director, Administrative Data</i>
36	Ed Dunn, <i>Deputy Director, Social Surveys</i>
37	Jason Bradbury, <i>Deputy Director, Data Collection</i>
38	Ole Black, <i>Deputy Director, Public Policy Analysis</i>
39	Martin Nicholls, <i>Media Relations</i>
	<b>Junior Staff</b>
40	Martine Aumeyr
41	John Lewis
42	Nathan Williams
43	Grace Edgar
44	Chris Hedges
45	Chris Wojcikowski
46	Laura Mulcahy
47	Wesley Harris

48	Jodie Withers
49	John Marchrones
50	Lauren Cooksey
51	Tom Pegg
	<b>UK Statistics Authority Board</b>
52	Sir Andrew Dilnot, <i>Chair of the UK Statistics Authority Board</i>
53	Ed Humpherson, <i>Director General for Regulation</i>
54	Robert Bumpstead, <i>Deputy Director, Central Policy Secretariat</i>
55	Ross Young, <i>Private Secretary to Chair of the UK Statistics Authority Board</i>
	<b>Other National Authorities</b>
56	Julie Wilson, <i>Scottish Government</i>
57	Neil White, <i>Scottish Government</i>
58	Mairi Spowage, <i>Scottish Government</i>
59	Peter Helm, <i>Head of Profession for statistics, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs</i>
60	Sean Wellams, <i>Head of Profession for statistics, HM Revenue and Customs</i>
61	Andrea Prophet, <i>HM Revenue and Customs</i>
	<b>Representatives of main users</b>
62	Steve Farrington, <i>HM Treasury</i>
63	Mark Robson, <i>The Bank of England</i>
64	Matthew Corder, <i>The Bank of England</i>
65	David Blunt, <i>Head of Profession for Statistics, Home Office</i>
66	Mike Batley, <i>Senior Statistician, Department of Health</i>
67	Deana Leadbeter, <i>Statistics User Forum</i>
	<b>Representatives of media</b>
68	Anthony Reuben, <i>BBC</i>
	<b>Representatives of main data providers/respondents</b>
69	Steve Woodland, <i>Head of Survey Operations</i>
70	Shaun Witney, <i>on behalf of Field interviewers and Managers</i>



71	Louise Crown, <i>on behalf of Field interviewers and Managers</i>
72	Alun Gwilt, on behalf of Business Data Division
	<b>Representatives of the scientific community</b>
73	Vanessa Cuthill, <i>Economic and Social Research Council</i>
74	Peter Elias, <i>Economic and Social Research Council</i>
75	Jill Leyland, <i>Royal Statistical Society</i>
76	Keith Dugmore, <i>Demographic User Group</i>
77	Peter Smith, <i>Southampton University</i>