

# Principles to guide the Statistics Authority's assessment of quality assurance practices relating to statistics produced from administrative data

## Introduction

This note sets out the principles that the Statistics Authority will take into account in determining the level of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics in respect of producer bodies' assurance and understanding of the quality of administrative data sources that are used in the production of official statistics.

We expect to refine these principles in the light of the findings from the team's ongoing Monitoring Review of the adequacy of statistical audit of administrative data from which official statistics are produced. In the meantime, the Authority will take a pragmatic stance by not introducing new Requirements for confirmations that are near completion until our standards are better developed. In determining its level of pragmatism, the Authority will have particular regard to points (1), (2) and (6) below. We will also defer confirmations where necessary while we further clarify our thinking,

## Principles

1. The Authority will work from the presumption that it is the producer body's responsibility to form its own judgement about:

- the level of quality of the statistics that users require;
- the appropriate level of assurance about the quality of the underlying data that it (and users) require; and
- what procedures are necessary to deliver that level of assurance.

*Forming this judgement should take into account issues such as:*

### Uses and users

- *the importance of the uses and users of the statistics, including their use in economic and social policymaking, resource allocation and their use in the production of other sets of statistics, for example the use of population statistics as the denominator for other statistical series*
- *the extent to which the statistics are used in setting, calibrating or measuring progress against government targets, and may therefore be subject to the effects of gaming*
- *whether the production of the statistics is required by legislation either in the UK or Europe*

### Data and data suppliers

- *the number of data suppliers*
- *the nature of the relationship between the body responsible for the statistics and the data suppliers*
- *the nature of the data, for example financial data, performance data or counts*
- *whether key concepts are defined in law, whether guidance is available and sufficiently detailed, precise and unambiguous*
- *the extent to which the underlying data are used by suppliers (or others) as performance indicators*

### Known concerns about the data

- *whether the statistics, the data that are used to produce them, or the systems underpinning those data have been the subject of recent Parliamentary scrutiny or equivalent scrutiny in the devolved administrations or the EU*
- *any known reservations or concerns about any aspect of the production of the statistics including any aspect of the quality of the input data*
- *the extent to which the statistics may be especially open to misuse, abuse, or misinterpretation, by politicians or others*

2. The Authority will consider the extent to which, in forming this judgement, and determining the range of audit and quality assurance measures necessary, the producer body has adopted a critical questioning mindset.

*Critical questioning requires the producer body to take a sufficiently large step back from the production process to undertake an objective and critical assessment of the process. In doing so, the producer body should adopt the stance of a sceptical observer and identify what hard questions might be asked about the quality of the statistics, the rigour and robustness of the processes in putting them together, and what kind of evidence/documentation would be needed to offer assurance about their fitness for purpose (purpose to include a wide range of uses).*

3. The Authority expects the producer body to communicate clearly and fully, alongside the statistics:

- its understanding of users' quality requirements in respect of the statistics;
- the steps that it and others take to assure the level of quality of the underlying data in order to meet users' quality requirements of the statistics; and
- its understanding of any weaknesses within the existing system of quality assurance and audit, including the implications for the use of the statistics or data, along with any improvement plans.

4. The Authority will adopt a presumption in favour of supporting producers as long as they have formed their own judgement, demonstrated that they have followed steps (1) and (2) in this note and clearly communicated the judgement, the rationale for it and the relevant consequential actions.

5. The Authority will not provide detailed guidance eg on what quality assurance techniques to adopt or % accuracy rates to seek.

*Through the Monitoring Review, the Authority will provide assistance to the producers in the form of questions that the producer should ask and tools to help think through the answer. The National Statistician's Office may wish to supplement this with more detailed guidance.*

6. If circumstances change or new evidence emerges, the Authority will expect a 'critical questioning' producer to reconsider its judgement. The Authority will also expect the producer to publish details explaining any new judgement, and the rationale for not changing its judgement if it decides not to do so.

7. The Authority reserves the right to disagree with the judgement on the assurance required or the weight to be placed on contra-evidence, but the Authority will adopt a proportionate approach carrying out a similar process to (1) above.