

Code of Practice for Statistics WSA Compliance Policies and Statements



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Introduction

Workforce Statistics & Analysis is the statistical team embedded within People and Organisational Development within the Department of Finance (DoF) in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS). Consisting of statisticians from the Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency (NISRA), we are responsible for producing and disseminating a range of Official and Accredited Official Statistics relating to the HR functions of the NICS, including recruitment, promotion and equality; sickness absence; as well as pay forecasting and Equal Pay Audits. The full series of statistics published by WSA is available on the [NISRA Website](#).

Background

The [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) requires all producers of official statistics to ensure that the statistics serve the public. The framework for this Code is based on three pillars (each containing a number of principles and detailed practices):

- Trustworthiness;
- Quality; and
- Value.

WSA, as producers of official statistics, must comply with the Code. We do this through our commitment to transparency, coherence, accountability and a public focus. These short policies and statements of compliance with the three pillars demonstrate how WSA is committed to following the Code's principles and practices.

Trustworthiness

Confidence in the people and organisations that produce statistics and data.

Trustworthiness is a product of the people, systems and processes within organisation that enable and support the production of statistics and data.

Trustworthiness comes from the organisation that produces statistics and data being well led, well managed and open, and the people who work there being impartial and skilled in what they do.

- T1: Honesty and integrity
 - T2: Independence decision making and leadership
 - T3: Orderly release
 - T4: Transparent processes and management
 - T5: Professional capability
 - T6: Data governance
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Our commitment is to produce, manage and disseminate statistics for the general good, in an impartial manner that is free of political or personal interests.

Independence

The Head of Profession has sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases. Statistical outputs are always released separately from and before any political statement or comment.

Conflict of Interest

All staff working on the production of statistics must give notice of any potential conflict of interest and, to demonstrate impartiality, will not without proper approval, engage in any activity, in a private capacity which could be considered to be a conflict of interest with official business.

Engaging with Users

Through the publication of the [Customer Service and User Engagement Policy](#), WSA are committed to being transparent about our approach to public engagement with users, potential users and other stakeholders.

Announcing releases

In accordance with the Code of Practice, WSA publishes an annual [WSA Publication Schedule](#) to announce the month of release of statistics at least twelve months in advance and the exact date at least 4 weeks in advance. The date and time of publications is also announced on the [GOV.UK Release Calendar](#).

Changes to pre-announced release dates or times must be agreed by the Chief Statistician. Any changes will be announced and an explanation for the reason for the change provided.

Timing of releases

All published statistics are published at 9.30am on the scheduled weekday on the [NISRA Website](#) unless otherwise announced. Statistical Press Releases (containing summary results) may be issued through the DoF Media office at the same time.

Pre-release access to statistics

Access to statistics before their public release is limited to those involved in the production of the statistics, Ministers/Permanent Secretaries and a minimum number of relevant briefing officials, in accordance with the [DoF Pre-release Compliance Statement](#). Details of the publications and the job holders to which a maximum of 24 hour pre-release access has been granted, is accurately maintained and published on the [NISRA website](#).

Training and guiding staff

WSA statistics are prepared by staff trained in the production, management and dissemination of statistics. All staff undertake training on information assurance and the safe handling of data. Key procedures are documented in staff manuals that are regularly reviewed and updated. Staff training needs are reviewed bi-annually.

Data access

Statistical staff are granted continual, but limited, access to the administrative systems. The information extracted contains only the relevant data and statistical staff have no authority to directly alter any data contained within the systems. They can however, inform the administrative system managers of any errors they uncover, to aid the overall system maintenance.

Data governance

All statutory obligations governing the collection and management of data as well as confidentiality, data sharing, data linking and release are followed by WSA. We will continually develop our procedures to protect personal data. A detailed [Data Governance and Confidentiality Statement](#) is available on the NISRA website.

Fol considerations

Statistics being compiled by WSA prior to the published release date cannot be made available under the Freedom of Information Act as they are still in the course of completion.

Revisions and Corrections

A detailed [Revisions and Corrections policy](#) is available on the NISRA website.

Audit

Accredited Official Statistics produced by WSA are subject to periodic assessment, to ensure compliance with the Code of Practice. These assessments are conducted by the Office for Statistics Regulation, the regulatory arm of the UK Statistics Authority. It is an independent body operating at arm's length from government. Also, all aspects of the work undertaken by those involved in the production of statistics in WSA are subject to internal audit.

Quality

Data and methods that produce assured statistics

Quality means that statistics fit their intended uses, are based on appropriate data and methods, and are not materially misleading.

Quality requires skilled professional judgement about collecting, preparing, analysing and publishing statistics and data in ways that meet the needs of people who want to use the statistics.

- Q1: Suitable data sources
 - Q2: Sound methods
 - Q3: Assured quality
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Our commitment is to provide sufficient information on quality to allow users to decide whether data meets their needs. It is achieved by:

Accessing suitable data sources

When compiling statistics, we will consider the use of administrative data systems before seeking to collect information directly. We will select sources that are appropriate for the intended use and publish information on the quality of the administrative sources used. We will endeavour to have constructive relationships with data owners to ensure we fully understand the methods of collection, definitions and quality.

Applying scientific methods

Scientific principles are applied to the production of statistics and reports are accompanied by statements providing information on methods and factors giving rise to potential bias.

Promoting comparability

Comparability within the UK is achieved whenever possible through the adoption of common standards, concepts, sampling methods, definitions, statistical units and classifications. Where differences do exist these are identified and explained.

Ensuring continuity

When changes are made to methods or coverage, users are informed and, whenever possible, back series calculated and published to minimise breaks in data and maintain continuity.

Performing quality assurance checks

We will ensure that administrative data sources are monitored on an ongoing basis to ensure continued quality, through investigation of the quality assurance processes carried out by data suppliers, managing processes for provision of data and providing clear explanations for the strengths and limitations of data.

Statistical products are regularly evaluated to ensure key indicators (see the Dimensions of quality table on the following pages) such as relevance, timeliness, coherence and accessibility meet user requirements.

Quality Documentation

All statistics published by WSA are published alongside a 'Background Quality Report' and a 'Quality of Administrative Data' report. Information around the methodology used to produce statistics is also available for all statistics published.

Continuous improvement

All statistics are subject to regular review, including consultation with users, to ensure outputs remain fit for purpose. When necessary, steps are taken to address weakness in design, production and dissemination and to fill information gaps in existing provision.

Dimensions of Quality

Dimension	Key Components	Users of WSA statistics should expect
<p>1. Relevance</p> <p>The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs in both coverage and content.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Who are the users of the statistics; ➤ What are their needs; and ➤ How well does the output meet these needs? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ They will be appropriately consulted about quality principles and strategy in line with the Customer Service and User Engagement Policy.
<p>2. Accuracy and reliability</p> <p>The proximity between an estimate and the unknown true value.</p> <p>For administrative databases: how well the information is recorded and transmitted.</p>	<p>For administrative databases:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Completeness; ➤ Timeliness of recording and transmission; ➤ Accuracy of recording of data items; ➤ Correct use of coding and ➤ Correct interpretation. 	<p>Statistical publications will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Contain a full description of data quality issues relating to the release, and any impact that has on analysis of changes over time; ➤ Be compiled such that comparisons between different groups will be transparent to both lay and expert audiences; ➤ Be fully compliant with the published Revisions and Corrections Policy; ➤ Where applicable, include full information on sampling variability, confidence intervals, response rates and other relevant criteria to allow users to make informed judgements on the quality of the survey data; ➤ Include details of how administrative data is collected in order to allow users to understand its strengths and limitations.

Dimension	Key Components	Users of WSA statistics should expect
<p>3. Timeliness and punctuality</p> <p>Timeliness refers to the time gap between publication and the reference period.</p> <p>Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual publication dates.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Production time; ➤ Frequency of release; and ➤ Punctuality of release. 	<p>Statistical publications will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Comply with the Code of Practice of pre-announced dates of publication; ➤ Be published as soon as possible after the relevant time-period; and ➤ Be produced in line with our Customer Service and User Engagement Policy.
<p>4. Accessibility and clarity</p> <p>Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data, also reflecting the format in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of metadata, illustrations and accompanying advice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Needs of expert and non-expert users; ➤ Consistency of standard in relation to revisions, rounding, data suppression and spreadsheet type; ➤ Assistance to locate information; ➤ clarity; and ➤ dissemination. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ All publications will use plain English where possible.

Dimension	Key Components	Users of WSA statistics should expect
<p>5. Coherence and comparability</p> <p>Coherence is the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but refer to the same topic are similar. Comparability is the degree to which data can be compared over time and domain.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Comparability of time; <li>➤ Special domains e.g. sub-national, national, international; and <li>➤ Domain or sub-population e.g. reason for sickness absence, ethnicity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Harmonised concepts and definitions will be used in statistical publications wherever they are available; <li>➤ Any statistical publication which does not use harmonised definitions will clearly explain why the harmonised definition has not been used and any plans to move it to a harmonised basis; and <li>➤ As standard practice, related statistical publications will be released on the same day in order to aid user understanding unless: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ This would mean significant delay to one set of published figures in order to present the coherent set of releases; and/or <li>✓ User engagement suggests that separate releases on separate days would be preferable.
<p>6. Assessment of user needs and perceptions</p> <p>The process for finding out about users and uses, and their views on the statistical products.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Understanding users and uses; and <li>➤ Obtaining user views. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ There will be regular consultation to understand both their needs and the impact of developments and changes to methodologies; <li>➤ Open and easy-to-use routes to supply us with their views, queries and opinions will be available; and <li>➤ Regular feedback will be sought to gauge satisfaction.

Dimension	Key Components	Users of WSA statistics should expect
<p>7. Trade-offs between output and quality components</p> <p>The extent to which different aspects of quality are balanced against each other.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Description of trade-offs that have been analysed; <li>➤ Basis decisions made; and <li>➤ statements concerning trade-offs that should have been analyse but have not been. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ They will be fully informed where trade-offs are required.
<p>8. Performance, cost and respondent burden</p> <p>The effectiveness, efficiency and economy of the statistical output.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Operational costs; and <li>➤ Respondent burden. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Respondent burden will be kept to a minimum.
<p>9. Confidentiality, transparency and security</p> <p>The procedures and policy used to ensure sound confidentiality, security and transparent practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Procedures on confidentiality and security. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Appropriate confidentiality and security procedures are documented and followed to ensure that confidentiality of statistical data is maintained.

Value

Statistics that support society's needs for information.

Value means that the statistics and data are useful, easy to access, remain relevant, and support understanding of important issues.

Value includes improving existing statistics and creating new ones through discussion and collaboration with stakeholders, and being responsible and efficient in the collection, sharing and use of statistical information.

- V1: Relevance to users
- V2: Accessibility
- V3: Clarity and insight
- V4: Innovation and improvement
- V5: Efficiency and proportionality

Our commitment is to make our Official and Accredited Official Statistics accessible to the widest possible community and to maximise the use of our statistical information – subject to resource constraints and the need to comply with legal, ethical and confidentiality conditions. Through our [Customer Service and User Engagement Policy](#), this is achieved by:

Knowing our customers

The content of our resources and products, and the supporting information we provide, are informed by an understanding of our customers' needs.

We regularly meet with our users formally and informally through regular customer contact. We periodically undertake surveys on users' satisfaction with outputs. We invite comments from our users through our publications and our internet releases.

We recognise that different users have different needs and we try to accommodate the requirements of all our users. We undertake bespoke analyses to meet individual user needs and to maximise data use.

Informing our users

We will help customers and users understand and make the best possible use of our products by publishing supporting and background material. We will provide contact details on our publications and statistics and encourage customers to contact us with queries.

Suitable data sources

WSA publish information on the quality of the HR administrative sources used to source the data for Official and Accredited Official statistics. We will endeavour to have constructive relationships with data owners to ensure we fully understand the methods of collection, definitions and quality.

A data extraction facility is available to allow statistical staff to perform ad hoc data extractions from the relevant administrative databases, thus reducing the involvement of system administrators and ensuring consistency of the data extractions.

Number of types of releases

WSA produces annual and quarterly publications each year with no statistical outputs that are regarded as market sensitive.

Web focus

In order to promote widespread access we use online as our main channel for dissemination of statistics. This means all statistical publications are available free of charge at the [NISRA website](#) or via links from the [GOV.UK Release Calendar](#).

Accessibility

We make it easy for users to find and understand our published data by using appropriate signposting and standard documentation procedures. NISRA has a corporate commitment to make the website useable and accessible to all users, regardless of ability and browsing technology. The website is designed to adhere to Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, striving to meet or exceed the provisions of "AA" standards.

We also actively promote accessibility and usage by:

- publishing as much information as possible to meet identified user needs, subject to quality, legislative and practical limitations and making routinely produced statistics available free of charge on the [NISRA website](#)
- orderly publication of statistics in line with publication schedule;
- publishing information in a range of formats including HTML, Excel and Open Document Spreadsheet in order to maximise access and promote reuse;

- employing user friendly methods of presenting information including commentary, tables and charts;
- using a wide range of dissemination methods including web publication, email distribution lists and social media;
- populating data websites with disaggregated datasets where possible, for example the NI Open Data portal;
- publishing supporting documentation such as user guides alongside the statistics to promote understanding and appropriate usage;
- responding to requests for additional information as fully as possible and applying no charges for the production of bespoke information; and
- providing users with confirmation of receipt for information requests within five working days, with the aim of providing a full response within 20 working days of the date on which the correspondence is received. The response will either be an answer to the issue raised, or a holding reply stating that provision of the information may take longer than the initial 20 day period, along with a date by which WSA intend to provide a full response, or a date by which WSA will be in contact with a progress update.

Format of releases

The NISRA Head of Profession maintains responsibility for the content, format and timing of all statistical outputs.

Releases are normally in the form of an Executive Summary of the key findings followed by detailed analysis.

Statistical releases are issued separately from any policy statement or comment about the figures by a Minister.

Feedback

We welcome feedback from users on our Compliance with the Code of Practice Statement. Please send any comments to workforcestatisticsandanalysis@finance-ni.gov.uk.