

The UK's Code of Practice for Official Statistics: Realising the Benefits

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Many statistical organisations have adopted Codes of Practice, to provide guidance to staff and to demonstrate to external commentators the standards to which producers work. The UK has been no exception to this pattern. However, two (inter-related) sets of issues in the UK have led to changes in the codification of statistical good practice. First, the UK statistical system is unusually decentralised, with over two hundred separate producers of official statistics. Second, levels of trust in UK official statistics are comparatively low. In response to this problem of trust, the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2008 required the UK Statistics Authority to publish a Code of Practice for Official Statistics, and to assess producers' compliance with it. Those sets of statistics judged to be compliant may then be designated as National Statistics.

The Code of Practice was published in January 2009. It relates to the production, management and dissemination of official statistics, although in two important respects it goes beyond this – it supports the practice of statistical experts commenting on the subsequent misuse of statistics, and it sets out a number of requirements relating to government statements issued alongside the release of statistics.

This paper briefly describes the Code and the process of assessment. It then outlines some ways in which the scope of the Code is evolving – in relation to the question of what constitutes *statistics* (as opposed to social research, or management information, for example). It also outlines some more general guidance (issued by the Head of the UK Civil Service) for non-statistical officials, describing how they should engage with statisticians, which in many respects sets standards which go beyond the Code.