

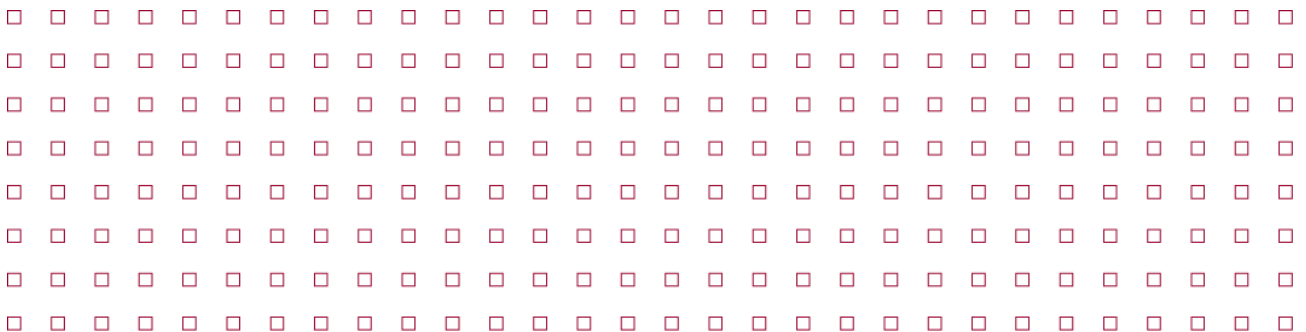


Ministry  
of Justice

# Ministry of Justice Statistical Policies and Processes

## Quality Strategy Principles and Processes

November 2016





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## Introduction

The Ministry of Justice aims to provide a high quality and transparent statistical service covering the whole of the justice system to promote understanding and trust. This statement sets out our policies for producing quality statistical outputs and the information we will provide to maintain our users' understanding and trust. This statement will apply to the Ministry of Justice and the following Ministry of Justice sponsored executive agencies, non-departmental public bodies and arm's-length bodies:

- National Offender Management Service
  - Her Majesty's Prison Service
  - National Probation Service
- Her Majesty's Court and Tribunals Service
- Legal Aid Agency
- Office of the Public Guardian
- Youth Justice Board for England and Wales
- Sentencing Council for England and Wales

It is one of five statistical policy statements explaining our statistical policies and procedures. The other statements are:

- Customer service and engagement statement
- Statement of administrative sources
- Statement of compliance with Pre-release Access Order 2008
- Revisions policy

These statements are located, along with this statement, at <http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/ministry-of-justice-statistics-policy-and-procedures>.

## Our vision

Our vision includes having a reputation for delivering a quality service that is progressive and innovative, and that our statistics are produced to the highest standards. Producing statistics that are of high quality and meet all the quality measurement principles and processes is essential to creating and maintaining trust and authority in the statistics we produce.

- Continue to be the experts for statistics and analytical advice on the justice system.
- Our statistical products are timely, relevant and produced to the highest standards.
- We have a single environment for access to a wide range of justice data.

- We have a reputation for delivering a quality service which is progressive and innovative.
- Our customers make effective use of our products and analysis.

### **Core Objectives**

We aim to deliver a service in line with our four core objectives:

- Provision of data which are accessible, consistent and fully documented.
- Production of statistics which clearly communicate the story and meet users' needs.
- Provision of analysis which is timely and based on robust methodology.
- Building capacity, capability and engagement.

Trust in statistics is important as statistics are fundamental to good government, to the delivery of public services and to decision making in all sectors of society, Statistics provide the parliament and the public with a window on society and the economy, and on the work and performance of government.

Assessing the quality of statistics is not a one off exercise. It must be done on a continuous basis. This document explains by what measures we will assess the quality of our statistics, what users can expect us to do, and the information we will provide to users to aid them in making their own assessment of the quality of the statistics we produce.

## Background

To help users understand our approach to measuring the quality of our statistics, this section provides a brief guide to the quality guidance and toolkits on which our quality strategy is based.

Principle 4 of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics (the Code) covers the requirements for producing quality statistics. In particular, it requires producers of official statistics to

*Ensure that official statistics are produced to a level of quality that meets users' needs, and that users are informed about the quality of statistical outputs, including estimates of the main sources of bias and other errors, and other aspects of the European Statistical System definition of quality.  
(Principle 4, Practice 2)*

The European Statistical System (ESS) Quality Assurance Framework (QAF)<sup>1</sup> is based on 12 principles grouped around three themes (Figure 1).

Institutional Environment	Statistical Processes	Statistical Outputs
Commitment to Quality Statistical Confidentiality Impartiality and Objectivity	Sound Methodology Appropriate statistical procedures Non-excessive burden on respondents Cost effectiveness	Relevance Accuracy and Reliability Timeliness and Punctuality Coherence and Compatibility Accessibility and Clarity

Figure 1: European Statistical System Quality Assurance Framework principles

The statistical output principles are the original measures of statistical quality referenced within the Code, with the other principles being added in recent years. The Government Statistical Service (GSS) focuses on measuring the statistical output principles, although recognises that it is important to report on the other principles in the ESS Quality Assurance Framework.

In addition to the ESS QAF, there are other guidance and toolkits available to statistical producers in defining a statistical quality strategy.

In March 2015, HM Treasury published The Aqua Book<sup>2</sup>. This is a guide to quality assurance in analytical (not just statistical) outputs. The Aqua Book is based on four principles of quality:

- proportionality of response
- assurance through development
- verification and validation

<sup>1</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/quality>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-aqua-book-guidance-on-producing-quality-analysis-for-government>

- analysis with RIGOUR<sup>3</sup>.

Within the UK statistical community, there are two important tools available to producers to guide and assess the quality of their statistics.

The first is the Office for National Statistics Quality Methods and Harmonisation Tool (QMHT)<sup>4</sup>. This is a questionnaire covering all aspects of quality, including user needs, use of administrative data, methodology, confidentiality and dissemination. The purpose of the tool is to assist statistical producers in becoming compliant with the Code.

In January 2015, the UK Statistics Authority produced the Regulatory Standard comprising of: the Quality Assurance of Administrative Data (QAAD) – Setting the Standard (QAAD) and the Administrative Data Quality Assurance Toolkit<sup>5</sup>.

These guide statistical producers in how to manage the quality of administrative data sources based on 3 types of actions:

- investigate
- manage
- communicate

Figure 2 illustrates the quality management actions of the QAAD framework.

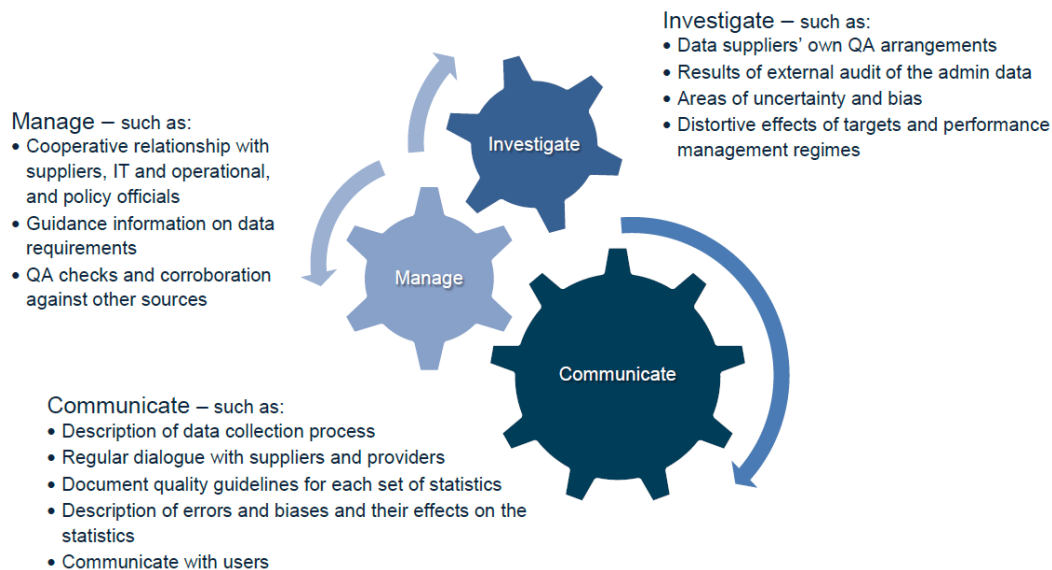


Figure 2 – Quality Management Actions in the Quality Assurance Administrative Data framework

<sup>3</sup> RIGOUR stands for Repeatable, Independent, Grounded in reality, Objective, Uncertainty managed, Robust. See The Aqua Book for more information.

<sup>4</sup> <https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/statistics/methodology-quality/quality-2/quality-resources/quality-methods-and-harmonisation-tool/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/administrative-data-and-official-statistics/index.html>



The QAAD Toolkit also contains a QA Matrix which producers can use to assess the level of quality assurance of the administrative data set. The matrix is based on 4 areas of practice associated with data quality that will be required for compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. These are:

- operational context & admin data collection
- communication with data supply partners
- QA principles, standards and checks by data suppliers
- producers' QA investigations and documentation

## Ministry of Justice Quality Strategy Principles and Processes

As required by the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, we will measure and report on our quality using a framework based around the five ESS QAF statistical output principles. Our strategy is devised using all the guidance and the toolkits identified in the background section.

Statistical quality in the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is defined as meeting users' needs with particular reference to the **relevance, accuracy, timeliness, accessibility, comparability and coherence** of the statistics collected, analysed and reported.

Four key aspects underpin the delivery of statistical quality in the Ministry of Justice:

1. Users are identified and dealt with in a spirit of consultation and responsiveness, and their needs prioritised and met within available resources
2. Suppliers are respected and collaborative relationships with them are established and managed ethically, legally and effectively
3. Methodologies, processes and practices are documented to the correct level of detail for their purpose, kept up to date and made available where appropriate
4. Statistical processes and outputs are monitored and measured against standards with a view to their maintenance and improvement

For each of the 5 principles in our definition of quality, we've provided a **definition** of the principle and its **key components**. The definition expands on the short heading of the principle and the key components list a selection of examples of how a statistical output meets that definition.

For each principle, it is then explained **what we will do** to meet the principle and the **information we will provide** to the user to enable them to use the statistics and to do their own assessment of the quality of the data. 'What we will do' focuses on 'behind the scenes' process and procedures, and 'information we will provide' focuses on the quality principle information that we will publish in the statistical publication or in separate guidance. The MoJ regards transparency about all data sources, issues and processing of the data to be essential for users to maintain trust in the statistics produced.

It is important to recognise that the required level of quality as measured by each principle for any statistical series may be different depending on the purpose to which it is put, the type of data collection and the public interest in the statistics. The MoJ Quality Strategy prescribes the processes that we set out to do if appropriate to the statistical series. In measuring quality, statistical producers will assess their outputs against 'what we will do' and 'the information we will provide' and use professional judgement as to the level of quality required for each statistical series.

## Principle 1: Relevance

### Definition

The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs for both coverage and content

### Key Components

A statistical output will be relevant if it meets users' needs. The producer will need to identify categories of users and potential users, establish their needs, and assess whether the available data meets those needs.

### What we will do

Statistical producers will adopt the measures set out in the Customer Service and Engagement Strategy to ensure relevance to users and their needs.

We will identify groups of users in all our publications. To assess whether our outputs are meeting user needs, we will encourage feedback from users on each statistical publication and maintain a log of queries and other contact from users. We will consult with users on any proposed changes to a statistical publication as a result of methodological changes, changes in classification and on the removal of specific statistics within the publication.

For administrative data, statistical producers will establish strong and effective working relationships with data suppliers and work with them to understand how any changes to data required for operational purposes will affect the ability to meet user needs. They will also work with data suppliers to understand the definitions and data collection and processing methods to determine the relevancy to user needs.

### Information we will provide

In our publications or in guidance published alongside our publications, we will identify categories of users and briefly describe how each uses the statistics. Where changes have been made to the publication, we will explain the reasons for the changes and responses to user consultation.

The source of data for each statistical series, along with how it is collected and processed, will be explained to make it clear to users how it is relevant to identified user needs. We will describe all key concepts in the data source and define all classifications and categories used in the statistical tables. We will explain where there are limitations to the data source that fall short of meeting user needs, including where we need to apply statistical disclosure control to protect the confidentiality of individuals, establishments and businesses. Further details about data sources are provided in the Statement of Administrative Sources.

## Principle 2: Accuracy and reliability

### Definition

The closeness of the estimated or observed result and the (unknown) true value.

### Key Components

For survey data, this can cover sampling error and non-sampling error where non-sampling error includes coverage error, non-response error, measurement error, processing error and model assumption error.

The different forms of non-sampling error also apply to administrative data.

### What we will do

For administrative data, we will use the QA Matrix in the Administrative Data Quality Assurance Toolkit as a basis of assessing the level of quality assurance of the data sources.

We will work with data suppliers to understand the data collection methods and processes to assess the potential different forms of error and estimate the accuracy of the statistics.

In designing surveys or requesting changes to administrative systems to meet user needs, we will not put undue burden on survey respondents or operational colleagues in collecting data to avoid potentially reducing the quality of data or responses elsewhere in the data source. This includes avoiding data collection requirements that may introduce bias or lead to a drop in response rates.

To provide as complete and honest responses or data provision as possible, we will reassure suppliers and survey respondents that we will meet all our obligations in protecting the identity of individuals and confidentiality of their information. This will include application of an appropriate disclosure control policy to prevent releasing information that could identify an individual in statistical outputs and complying with the Data Protection Act in holding and presenting data.

For administrative data, we will work with policy and operational stakeholders to know and understand how the data is used in an operational environment and any bias that may be created where the data is used for performance metrics or other operational requirements.

Where available we will use other sources of related information to inform our view of the accuracy of the data and where we may need to investigate further to determine the level of accuracy of the data.

All statistical producers will conduct appropriate quality assurance procedures, including, but not limited to, assessing their outputs against the last published statistics and investigate any anomalies found and check for internal consistency of the statistics produced. All publications will, separately, be quality assured by a peer not directly involved in the production of the publication.

All our statistical publications will be fully compliant with our published Revisions policy.

### **Information we will provide**

With each statistical publication, we will provide a full description of the collection and processes related to each data source(s) used to produce the statistics, and provide a full explanation of any data quality issues, including the potential for reporting bias. This will include an assessment against each of the forms of error listed above. An explanation of how any changes to data definitions or data sources have affected statistics over time will be provided.

Where applicable, we will provide full information about uncertainty including publishing confidence intervals, response rates and other relevant criteria to allow the user to make informed judgements on quality.

All statistical publications will contain details of how they are applying our published revisions policy. Each publication will contain a detailed description of any revisions made and a full and clear reason for the revision, along with an assessment of their impact.

## Principle 3: Timeliness and Punctuality

### Definition

Timeliness refers to the lapse of time between publication and the period to which the data refer. Punctuality refers to the time lag between the actual and planned dates of publication.

### Key Components

The time taken to produce statistics from the period to which the statistics relate. The frequency of the statistical releases. Releasing statistics that meet common standards.

### What we will do

Statistical producers will work with data suppliers so that data are provided as early as possible after the end of the period to which the statistics relate. We will publish statistics as soon as possible after the relevant time period, subject to the release procedure outlined in the coherence principle.

We will assess whether our publication schedule meets user needs.

All our statistics will be published in compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics release protocol.

### Information we will provide

We will inform users of the timeliness of receiving the data source from our supplier and explain the reasons for any significant lag in the receipt of the data.

Where the frequency or the time lag in the release of a statistical series from the period to which it relates changes, we will explain the reasons for this and how it meets users' needs.

## **Principle 4: Accessibility and clarity**

### **Definition**

Statistics are presented in a clear and understandable form, released in a suitable and convenient manner, available and accessible on an impartial basis with supporting metadata and guidance.

### **Key Components**

Accessibility will be measured by the assistance required to locate the information; whether the form in which it is disseminated meets users' needs; and that users have equal access.

Clarity will be measured by impartial and informative commentary; documentation including, description of data sources, data quality and limitations, disclosure control and rounding conventions and other metadata.

### **What we will do**

All statistical releases will be required to comply with our Customer Service and Engagement Strategy. In producing statistics and associated commentary, we will take account of the different level of understanding of the subject matter amongst our users (e.g. expert versus non-expert). We will pre-announce all statistical releases on the gov.uk official statistics announcements calendar and include next release date within each publication to ensure clarity of the date of the next release and equal access to all.

All publications will comply with the MoJ Internet Accessibility policy and use plain English where possible.

### **Information we will provide**

We will provide impartial and informative commentary in all statistical publications, explaining where known changes in policy or social environment may have driven trends or changes in trends. We developed and implemented commentary improvement plans for each of our statistical bulletins during 2015/16.

The release date of all official statistics will be obtainable on the gov.uk official statistics announcements calendar. Each publication will include the date it was released, the date of the next publication and what period the next publication will cover.

Each publication will contain contact details for further information on the statistics.

All statistical series will include, or publish separately, guidance on using the statistics, the data sources, coverage, data limitations and other relevant information to enable users to interpret and apply the statistics correctly, judge the quality of the data and assess the relevance of the data to their needs.

## Principle 5: Comparability and Coherence

### Definition

Comparability is the degree to which data can be compared over time, by region or other domain.

Coherence is the degree to which the statistical processes, by which two or more outputs are generated, use the same concepts and harmonised methods.

### Key Components

Comparability should be addressed in terms of comparability over time, geographic areas, domain or sub-population (e.g. crime/offence type, ethnicity)

Coherence should be addressed in terms of data produced at different frequencies, other statistics in the same domain, sources and outputs, coverage of different databases, and definitions and coding used for different databases.

### What we will do

We will use harmonised concepts and definitions wherever they are available.

We will release all related statistical publications on the same day to aid user understanding, unless this would mean significant delay to one set of published statistics in order to present the coherent set of statistics; or user engagement suggests that separate releases on separate days would be preferable.

### Information we will provide

Where a statistical publication does not use an available harmonised definition it will clearly explain the reasons for it not being used and how it differs from the harmonised definition.

Where related measures are published across several publications we will make it clear to users where the related information can be found.

Where differences occur in definitions or statistics covering a similar subject matter an explanation will be provided explaining the reasons for the difference, and if applicable, any plans to bring the two series into line.

We will publish a user guide to MoJ statistics to help users find the right publication containing statistics on the subject of their interest.







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