

Student Loans Company Official Statistics Quality Guidelines

Introduction

These Quality Guidelines have been developed by the Student Loans Company (SLC) to comply with Principle 4: Sound Methods and Assured Quality of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics:

<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

Statistical Quality

The definitions of quality used by the SLC are in line with the six quality dimensions developed by the European Statistical System. These quality dimensions are as follows:

Relevance: This dimension covers the degree to which the statistical product meets user needs in terms of both coverage and content. This dimension is addressed primarily through user engagement. This process allows us to identify the users of our statistics and organise consultations to obtain feedback and suggestions in regards to our publications. Relevance also refers to the scope of the data source used for the statistical product and allows the user to determine if it is suitable for the intended use. For example the SLC data sources only include people who apply for student finance and the data includes no record of whether those who become students actually graduate. Hence, the data might not be suitable for users who are seeking statistics on all graduates. SLC publishes a Statement of Administrative Sources where the scope of each data source is described.

Accuracy: This dimension deals with facts that establish how 'fit for purpose' our statistical outputs are.

For survey data this is defined as the closeness between an estimated result and the unknown true value, where accuracy can be split into sampling and non-sampling errors. The SLC publications use administrative data rather than survey data but some of the survey data error categories need to be considered because the administrative systems involve a form of sample selection i.e. just those who apply for student finance:

- Coverage error
- Non-response error
- Model assumption error

For all data sources this is defined as how well the information is recorded and transmitted. The factors are:

- Completeness
- Timeliness of recording and data transfer
- Accuracy of recording data items
- Correct use of coding
- Correct interpretation

Factors such as the proportion of missing values for key items will allow users to decide whether there is sufficient data for them to perform analyses based on our statistical outputs.

Timeliness and Punctuality: This dimension of quality covers the lapse of time between publication and the time period to which the data published covers while the time lag between the actual and planned dates of publication is covered by the punctuality. To assess this measure of quality, we take into consideration the production time, frequency of release and punctuality of release.

Accessibility and Clarity: Accessibility deals with the ease at which users are able to access the data in relations to the format in which the data are available as well as the availability of supporting information. The Clarity of statistics refers to the quality and sufficiency of the metadata, illustrations and accompanying advice.

Comparability: This dimension refers to the degree at which data can be compared over domain and time. All changes to Student Finance regulations are described in the Notes because they have a significant bearing on comparability.

Coherence: This is the degree to which data derived from different sources / methods but which refer to the same phenomenon are similar. Coherence in our statistics is addressed in terms of coherence between the data produced at different frequencies, other statistics in the same socio-economic domain as well as sources and outputs.

Quality Planning and Continuous Improvement

For each publication SLC produces a Quality Plan. A standard feature of the Quality Plan is a review of what improvement is appropriate based on user engagement, lessons learned, and a review of changes that have occurred in the preceding period.