

Quality assurance framework for statistical publications



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Introduction

This document outlines Ofqual's approach to ensuring that its publications and the data on which they are based are robust and fit for purpose. Ofqual acts both as a regulator and as a producer of official statistics. To distinguish between these two functions in this document the terms 'Ofqual-the-regulator' and 'Ofqual' are used, with the latter referring to the statistical production function.

Ofqual-the-regulator's responsibility is to maintain standards and confidence in qualifications by regulating GCSEs, A levels, AS levels and a wide range of vocational qualifications in England.

While independent, Ofqual-the-regulator gives advice to government on qualifications and assessment based on research into these areas.

Ofqual-the-regulator does so by recognising and monitoring organisations that deliver qualifications and assessments as set out in the Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 and the Education Act 2011.

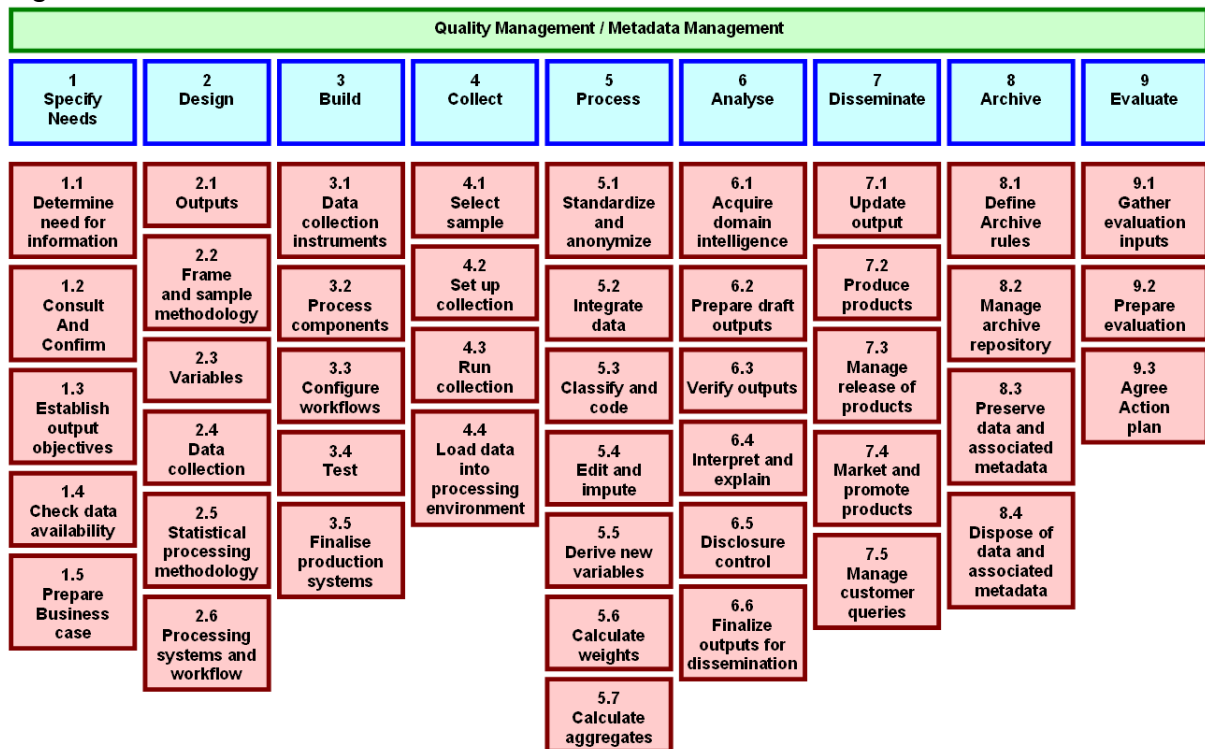
Ofqual is responsible for producing a series of statistical publications that are crucial to discharging these roles.

Quality assurance – Ofqual’s approach

Ofqual’s approach to assuring the quality of its statistical publications is governed by (1) the Code of Practice for Official Statistics issued by the UK Statistics Authority – the principal adviser on official statistics to the government (www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html), (2) the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (see figure 1) and (3) the following set of principles:

- Engagement with the organisations that provide the data and with users of the publications in a spirit of consultation – through regular communication with providers and through surveys and general requests of readers of the publications. All collections undergo lengthy internal and external specification and design phases to ensure that the information requested and the uses to which it will be put are both necessary and proportionate.
- Identification of users’ needs to ensure that all products are fit for purpose – through general information requests issued with each publication and by ongoing targeted surveys
- Ensuring that methods, processes and practices are based on best practice, documented, continually reviewed and made publicly available where appropriate
- Ensuring that staff are appropriately trained and qualified as required by both the civil service competency framework and by the Government Statistical Service statistician competence framework in particular
- Ensuring that staff are appropriately insulated from political pressures that either could, or could appear to, influence the production or presentation of statistical publications
- Continual review by using internal and external quality assurance methods (for example, the Quality Methods Harmonisation Tool advocated by the Government Statistical Service) of data collection, collation, statistical process and output methodologies, and by continuous measurement of user satisfaction

Figure 1: Generic Statistical Business Process Model



Note: This model was produced by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and Eurostat and is used to guide the development and production of new and existing Ofqual statistical publications.

Statistical quality

Ofqual judges the quality of its statistical publications against the five quality dimensions identified by the Office for National Statistics. Below are the dimensions and the ways in which Ofqual seeks to follow them. In addition, and for external reference, each publication has an associated online user satisfaction survey designed to continually measure users' views of the reports along the same quality dimensions.

1. Relevance

Relevance is the degree to which the statistical product meets user needs for both coverage and content. This is base-lined and continually improved by regularly asking users whether the information is relevant to them and for any ways in which it could be improved. The *User Engagement Strategy for Statistics Users* provides further information (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ofquals-statistics-policies-and-procedures>).

2. Accuracy and reliability

The Head of Profession for Statistics, or their deputy, signs off reports as being both as accurate and as reliable as possible, having first ensured due diligence with the data, its collation and subsequent reporting processes. Quality data underpins all statistical outputs. In general, Ofqual works with data that has been provided by third parties to specifications provided by Ofqual following a collaborative design phase (as required by the Code of Practice and the General Statistical Business Process Model).

- For survey data, accuracy is the degree of closeness between an estimate derived from the survey data and the (unknown) true value.
- For standardised data collections, accuracy is the degree to which:
 - the collected data is complete and correct;
 - the collation of that data is accurate;
 - any further manipulation of the data or extrapolations from it are properly performed and reported.

Ofqual continually manages this process by:

- ensuring that data suppliers are clear about what is required of them – a process helped by ensuring that providers are fully consulted during the initial design and any subsequent change phases;

- reminding all providers (if appropriate) that, as a condition of them being regulated, all data must be completely accurate;
- being alert to unexpected changes in the data submitted by comparing individual returns over time from the same supplier;
- actively challenging any unexpected results with the data providers;
- working with Ofqual colleagues to understand and explain emerging trends;
- having a proportionate data auditing framework in place allowing for auditing of providers' information collection, collation and delivery processes as necessary, using a wide range of tools, from questionnaires to on-site process audits;
- having a quality checking team external from the report writing to assure accuracy and quality of reports.

3. Timeliness and punctuality

Timeliness is a measure of the gap between the date when the data was collected and the date when the final report was published. All reports, along with a 12-month schedule, are published at the earliest opportunity on <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements> .

Punctuality is a measure of the gap between the date a publication was predicted to appear and the actual date it did appear. Reports are always published as close as possible to their predicted publication date. The latest publication dates are on <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements> .

4. Accessibility and clarity

Accessibility measures how easy it is to find the reports and to obtain copies of them. Ofqual strives to make access as easy as possible from the website and to provide background data tables to support the publications where feasible. Colour schemes are chosen to be discernible to persons with colour blindness. Text sizes within reports are selected to be readily discernible by a clear-sighted person. Large print editions of reports are made available on request.

Clarity measures how easy it is to understand the reports. They are written to be free from jargon, easy to read, and for all tables, graphs and illustrations to be clearly labelled. All staff involved in producing statistical publications are suitably trained and qualified in statistical processes, methods, report writing and presentation skills to ensure that statistical reports are written in a clear and intelligible manner.

5. Coherence and comparability

When something is coherent, all its parts fit together well, logically and consistently. Coherence of statistics is a measure of the extent to which they can be reliably combined in different ways and for various uses. Ofqual ensures that all the sections within an individual report are coherent, and that all similar reports are coherent over time.

Ofqual sense checks reports against other publications and datasets to ensure that the findings within the report are meaningful and where new emerging trends appear they are checked against other data sources to ensure accuracy and understanding.

Comparability is a measure of how well information can be compared over time, across reports and different organisations. Ofqual strives to ensure that its publications are as comparable as possible and wherever possible to provide historical background data to allow the reader to conduct their own analysis.

Data security and confidentiality

It is imperative that the information Ofqual collects is held and processed securely. To ensure this, data is:

- stored and processed on secured IT platforms;
- held in highly secured buildings with reception staff;
- only available to named staff members;
- and requiring different identification passes and protocols for access to the:
 - buildings;
 - computer systems;
 - actual storage areas for the data;
 - analysis programs and resultant reports.

In addition, all authorised staff are fully trained in data protection principals and in the relevant civil service codes. All data is held and used within legal requirements such as the General Data Protection Regulation.

We wish to make our publications widely accessible. Please contact us at publications@ofqual.gov.uk if you have any specific accessibility requirements.



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