

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

School Achievement and Attainment Statistics in England

(produced by the Department for Education)

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About the UK Statistics Authority

The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body operating at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament. It was established on 1 April 2008 by the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*.

The Authority's overall objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. It is also required to promote and safeguard the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics, and good practice in relation to official statistics.

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

1. oversight of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – the executive office of the Authority;
2. independent scrutiny (monitoring and assessment) of all official statistics produced in the UK.

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ASSESSMENT AND DESIGNATION

The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* gives the UK Statistics Authority a statutory power to assess sets of statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*. Assessment will determine whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated as National Statistics.

Designation as National Statistics means that the statistics comply with the *Code of Practice*. The *Code* is wide-ranging. Designation can be interpreted to mean that the statistics: meet identified user needs; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are explained well.

Designation as National Statistics should not be interpreted to mean that the statistics are always correct. For example, whilst the *Code* requires statistics to be produced to a level of accuracy that meets users' needs, it also recognises that errors can occur – in which case it requires them to be corrected and publicised.

Assessment Reports will not normally comment further on a set of statistics, for example on their validity as social or economic measures. However, Reports may point to such questions if the Authority believes that further research would be desirable.

Assessment Reports typically provide an overview of any noteworthy features of the methods used to produce the statistics, and will highlight substantial concerns about quality. Assessment Reports also describe aspects of the ways in which the producer addresses the 'sound methods and assured quality' principle of the *Code*, but do not themselves constitute a review of the methods used to produce the statistics. However the *Code* requires producers to "seek to achieve continuous improvement in statistical processes by, for example, undertaking regular reviews".

The Authority may grant designation on condition that the producer body takes steps, within a stated timeframe, to fully meet the *Code's* requirements. This is to avoid public confusion and does not reduce the obligation to comply with the *Code*.

The Authority grants designation on the basis of three main sources of information:

- i. factual evidence and assurances by senior statisticians in the producer body;
- ii. the views of users who we contact, or who contact us, and;
- iii. our own review activity.

Should further information come to light subsequently which changes the Authority's analysis, it may withdraw the Assessment Report and revise it as necessary.

It is a statutory requirement on the producer body to ensure that it continues to produce the set of statistics designated as National Statistics in compliance with the *Code of Practice*.

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1 Summary of findings

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This is one of a series of reports¹ prepared under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*². The report covers 17 annual National Statistics releases on school achievement and attainment in England, produced by the Department for Education (DfE)³. The statistics provide information on the achievements of pupils in primary and secondary schools and colleges at Key Stages 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the National Curriculum. They also cover attainment by pupil characteristics for the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile. The full list of statistics is detailed in Section 2.

1.1.2 In addition DfE publishes three related sets of official statistics – Achievement and Attainment Tables (AATs) for Key Stages 2, 4 and 5 – which provide results at the levels of individual schools (see para 2.4). These AAT statistics are not formally part of this Assessment, because DfE has told us that they are being reviewed by the new Government.

1.1.3 This report was prepared by the Authority’s Assessment team, and approved by the Board of the Statistics Authority on the advice of the Head of Assessment.

1.2 Decision concerning designation as National Statistics

1.2.1 The Statistics Authority judges that the statistics covered by this report are readily accessible, produced according to sound methods and managed impartially and objectively in the public interest, subject to any points for action in this report. The Authority confirms that the statistics on school achievement and attainment for England included in the publications listed at para 2.2 are designated as National Statistics, subject to DfE implementing the requirements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by January 2011.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

1.3.1 DfE statisticians have regular contact with users in the department and in schools and local authorities. There is a review process involving representatives of schools and local authorities to consider changes to data collections. DfE statisticians have had less contact with users in the wider community but are looking to engage more proactively in the future.

1.3.2 DfE produces a comprehensive range of school and college attainment statistics. Each statistical release includes detailed tables and a summary of the main findings. There is some background information within each statistical

¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html>

² http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2007/pdf/ukpga_20070018_en.pdf

³ The Department for Education was formed on 12 May 2010 and is responsible for education and children’s services. These statistics were previously produced by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)

release, but this is often more suited to the expert user than the non-specialist. There is no overview of the main patterns emerging across Key Stages, drawing on findings from the 17 separate releases.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that DfE could strengthen its compliance with the Code. Those which the Assessment team considers essential to enable designation as National Statistics are listed in section 1.5. Other suggestions, which would improve the statistics and the service provided to users but which are not formally required for their designation, are listed at annex 1.

1.5 Requirements for designation as National Statistics

Requirement 1	Take steps to develop a more complete understanding of the use made of the statistics, the needs of current and potential users, and user views on the service provided. Publish the relevant information and assumptions and use them to better support the beneficial use of the statistics (para 3.3)
Requirement 2	Publish more information about the methods, quality and reliability of the statistics (para 3.11)
Requirement 3	Improve the commentary on school attainment statistics in order to clarify the findings (para 3.23)
Requirement 4	Draw attention in the relevant statistical releases to the availability of datasets of attainment statistics for individual schools, and make these datasets available on request with appropriate explanation to encourage informed use (para 3.26)
Requirement 5	Publish the name of the responsible statistician or the statistical Head of Profession in the school attainment statistical first releases (para 3.29)
Requirement 6	Revise and complete the Statement of Administrative Sources so that it covers all of the elements required in the Code (para 3.32)

2 Subject of the assessment

2.1 The 17 sets of annual National Statistics in this assessment present the results achieved by pupils and students in teacher assessments, tests and public examinations. They cover: the 'early years' foundation stage profile' (which is a measure of the intellectual, emotional and social development of children by the age of 5); Key Stages 1 and 2 at primary school; 14 year olds at Key Stage 3; GCSE and equivalent qualifications at Key Stage 4 at secondary school, and students undertaking GCE A level and equivalent qualifications (Key Stage 5). The Department has historically used the data to monitor progress against a number of Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets and National Indicators.

2.2 The following sets of statistics have been assessed:

Achievement and attainment

- National Curriculum Assessments at Key Stage 1 (Provisional)⁴
- National Curriculum Assessments at Key Stage 2 (Provisional)⁵
- National Curriculum Assessments at Key Stage 2 (Revised)⁶
- National Curriculum Assessments at Key Stage 3 (Provisional)⁷
- National Curriculum Assessments: Teacher Assessments at Key Stage 2 and 3⁸
- GCSE and Equivalent Results (Provisional)⁹
- GCSE and Equivalent Results (Revised)¹⁰
- GCE/Applied GCE A/AS and Equivalent Examination Results (Provisional)¹¹
- GCE/Applied GCE A/AS and Equivalent Examination Results (Revised)¹²

Progress measures

- National Indicators 93 and 94 – Percentage of Pupils Making Two Levels of Progress in English and Mathematics between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2¹³
- Percentage of Pupils Making Expected Progress in English and in Mathematics between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4¹⁴

⁴ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000867/index.shtml>

⁵ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000865/index.shtml>

⁶ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000893/index.shtml>

⁷ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000847/index.shtml>

⁸ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000883/index.shtml>

⁹ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000880/index.shtml>

¹⁰ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000909/index.shtml>

¹¹ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000881/index.shtml>

¹² <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000906/index.shtml>

¹³ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000916/index.shtml>

¹⁴ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000919/index.shtml>

Attainment by Pupil Characteristics

- Early Years Foundation Stage Profile Attainment by Pupil Characteristics¹⁵
- Key Stage 1 Attainment by Pupil Characteristics¹⁶
- Key Stage 2 Attainment by Pupil Characteristics¹⁷
- GCSE Attainment by Pupil Characteristics¹⁸
- GCE/VCE A/AS and Equivalent Attainment by Pupil Characteristics¹⁹
- Neighbourhood Statistics - Small Area Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, National Curriculum Assessment, GCSE and Equivalent and Post 16 Attainment by Pupil Characteristics²⁰

- 2.3 The exam results from the different awarding bodies are linked together for the same pupil (Key Stages 4 and 5), then linked to data that schools provide as part of the School Census, and subsequently linked to pupil records on the National Pupil Database. Similarly, National Curriculum assessment results (Key Stages 1-3) for each pupil are linked to their record on the National Pupil Database. This enables further analyses of the results by pupil characteristics such as ethnicity, eligibility for free school meals, special educational needs, English as a first language, and a measure of deprivation based on the pupil's postcode.
- 2.4 Three sets of official statistics (not part of this assessment²¹) provide results at the level of individual schools and colleges, and can be grouped by local authority areas. These school level statistics are made available so that schools are accountable for their performance and to help parents and pupils with school choice. They are widely reported in the press - often with large separate 'league table' style supplements.
- 2.5 The progress of children between Key Stages 1 and 2, and between Key Stages 2 and 4, is compared with expectations (given the level achieved at the earlier stage) and reported in further statistical releases. Similar measures of progress, based on national patterns, feed into a 'value added' score for each school, which is then 'contextualised' by taking into account pupil characteristics that are outside the school's control, such as those listed at 2.3.
- 2.6 DfE publishes each of the 17 outputs included in this assessment as Statistical First Releases (SFR). One of the SFRs announces and signposts the availability of small area data released by DfE on the Office for National Statistics' Neighbourhood Statistics website.
- 2.7 The Department has published statistical information about achievement and attainment for many years. The scope and content of its statistical releases has varied over the years reflecting changes in the curriculum, the introduction of

¹⁵ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000911/index.shtml>

¹⁶ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000899/index.shtml>

¹⁷ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000889/index.shtml>

¹⁸ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000900/index.shtml>

¹⁹ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/index.shtml>

²⁰ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000926/index.shtml>

²¹ DfE has told us that these Achievement and Attainment Tables are being reviewed following the change of Government in May 2010

Key Stages and the mix of teacher assessments, tests and public examinations taken at each Key Stage. DfE has set out to collect more information at individual level. It has collected individual level data in the School Census since 2002 which has facilitated the development of the suite of statistics looking at attainment by pupil characteristics.

- 2.8 The data on teacher assessments and pupil characteristics originate from schools, while examination and test results are supplied by the 100 plus awarding bodies and the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Authority (QCDA), respectively. Linked data on pupils, and examination and test results are subsequently checked by schools and are subject to change. Changes can occur because of appeals, from earlier data errors and linking problems, so some of the SFRs are issued in provisional and revised versions. Matching of pupil characteristics to test and examination results is undertaken by a commercial contractor.
- 2.9 The annual cost of producing the statistics covered by this assessment is in the region of £0.5 million.

3 Assessment findings

Principle 1: Meeting user needs

The production, management and dissemination of official statistics should meet the requirements of informed decision-making by government, public services, business, researchers and the public.

- 3.1 In March 2010 DfE published a policy statement on meeting user needs through engagement with users²². This includes plans to produce a quarterly newsletter for users of all DfE statistical publications containing information about statistical developments, new consultations, updates to the publication schedule and changes to policies and procedures.
- 3.2 DfE engages with users in local authorities (LAs) and schools through the Information about Children, Education and Schools²³ (ICES) conferences - a forum for the exchange of information about school and pupil data. It meets three times a year. Representatives from LAs and schools attend, as well as from other organisations interested in school and pupil information such as Ofsted. DfE also invites LA representatives to attend annual School Census workshops. Written feedback is requested from participants and responses given.
- 3.3 DfE told us that it would like to engage more proactively with users of school attainment statistics and is seeking ways to do this. The Department has, in the past, sought feedback from teachers' unions and parents on its plans for developing new ways of summarising school performance in the Achievement and Attainment Tables and other school accountability tools²⁴. DfE intends to consult a wide range of users for its current review of the suite of attainment by pupil characteristics SFRs. However no formal consultation document has been issued and neither the remit nor the timescale of the review are clear. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DfE should take steps to develop a more complete understanding of the use made of the statistics, the needs of current and potential users, and user views on the service provided, DfE should publish the relevant information and assumptions and use them to better support the beneficial use of the statistics²⁵ (Requirement 1).

²² <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/nat-stats.shtml>

²³ <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/ims/newsinfo/>

²⁴ The School Report Card, a development under the previous Labour administration, was designed to give an overall score for a school and present performance information on a range of outcomes (including data from the AATs) showing the relative priority given to each outcome, and provide an indication of the degree of challenge faced by each school
<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/downloadableDocs/A%20School%20Report%20Card%20consultation%20document%201.doc>

²⁵ In relation to Principle 1, Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

Official statistics, and information about statistical processes, should be managed impartially and objectively.

- 3.4 DfE publishes the school attainment statistics in an impartial and orderly manner. The statistics are available free of charge on DfE's website and via the National Statistics Publication Hub.
- 3.5 A revisions policy²⁶ for DfE statistics was published in March 2010. DfE has stated that this will be reviewed every six months.
- 3.6 DfE announced changes to the arrangements for collecting statistics on Key Stage 2 science assessment²⁷ when it moved to the use of a sample of schools.

²⁶ http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/ns_revisions.pdf

²⁷ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway>

Principle 3: Integrity

At all stages in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics, the public interest should prevail over organisational, political or personal interests.

- 3.7 DfE has told us that the Head of Profession for Statistics has sole responsibility for determining the methods, content and timing of the school attainment statistics published in the SFRs.
- 3.8 DfE told the Assessment team that statements made by policy colleagues around the time of the publication of the statistics are commented on by the statistical production team prior to being issued.

Principle 4: Sound methods and assured quality

Statistical methods should be consistent with scientific principles and internationally recognised best practices, and be fully documented. Quality should be monitored and assured taking account of internationally agreed practices.

- 3.9 DfE collects data about teacher assessments from schools (for Key Stage 1) through its system, COLLECT and teacher assessment data for Key Stage 2 and 3 are collected via a QCDA data collection website. Key Stage 2 tests data are provided to the Department by QCDA via a data collection website. DfE collects data on examinations for Key Stages 4 (GCSEs and their equivalents) and 5 (A levels and their equivalents) from the awarding bodies.
- 3.10 DfE publishes provisional releases based on data produced prior to the checking by schools, to enable the timely release of the attainment results. These results cannot be finalised until appeal procedures have been completed – appeals only apply to tests and public examinations and not to teacher assessment. Schools check their data via a secure website. DfE has a review process to deal with possible errors. LAs organise moderation of the assessments at Key Stage 1 by schools. Ofsted makes use of the Key Stage 1-4 data and asks for examples of pupils' work, so this also helps to ensure that the data are quality assured.
- 3.11 DfE gives information on the methods used in technical notes included in the statistical releases and explains the differences between provisional and revised statistics. The explanations in the statistical releases could be clarified for the non-specialist user, for example making clear how school year groups, Key Stages, levels and qualifications map together, and stating the strengths and limitations of the data. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DfE should publish more information about the methods, quality and reliability of the statistics²⁸ (Requirement 2). We suggest that DfE publish a guide to the statistical series, explaining the data sources and the main concepts and measures, such as Key Stage and levels.
- 3.12 DfE has published a statistical policy statement on *Statistical Quality: Principles and Procedures*²⁹ which sets out quality guidelines.
- 3.13 DfE contributes to UK-wide statistical outputs such as Regional Trends³⁰ produced by the Office for National Statistics. The Department also leads work on the International Standard Classification System to promote international comparability of statistics. It is difficult to compare pupil attainment statistics for England with statistics for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland because of the different examination systems. Other school statistics, for example, on attendance, may lend themselves more readily to comparisons across administrations. We suggest that DfE work with the Scottish Government, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Department of Education, Northern Ireland to investigate options for producing comparable statistics across the four administrations.

²⁸ In relation to Principle 4, Practices 1 and 2 of the Code of Practice

²⁹ http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/ns_quality.pdf

³⁰ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/product.asp?vlnk=836>

Principle 5: Confidentiality

Private information about individual persons (including bodies corporate) compiled in the production of official statistics is confidential, and should be used for statistical purposes only.

- 3.14 DfE assured us that it has adequate arrangements in place to ensure the protection of individual pupil information. DfE includes an explanation of the methods used in the footnotes to each table.
- 3.15 We were told that secure transfer systems are used to exchange data between DfE and schools, LAs and external contractors.
- 3.16 DfE requires researchers requesting pupil-level data to complete confidentiality agreements and for the agreements to be approved by the statistical Head of Profession. The department has published a confidentiality statement³¹ on its website; this sets out the steps it takes to protect individuals' private information.

³¹ http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/ns_confidentiality.pdf

Principle 6: Proportionate burden

The cost burden on data suppliers should not be excessive and should be assessed relative to the benefits arising from the use of the statistics.

- 3.17 Most requests for the collection of additional data from LAs or changes to existing data requirements are submitted to the Star Chamber Scrutiny Board, comprising head teachers, LA representatives and DfE. DfE told us that each request is critically appraised, taking account of the burden on suppliers. For example, DfE ended the collection of the results of non-core subjects at Key Stage 3 (including ICT, geography, and modern foreign languages) to reduce the collection burden on schools.
- 3.18 We were told that policy colleagues occasionally make ad hoc requests to LAs for data. We suggest that DfE ensure that all such requests are considered by the Star Chamber.

Principle 7: Resources

The resources made available for statistical activities should be sufficient to meet the requirements of this Code and should be used efficiently and effectively.

- 3.19 The cost of producing the 17 outputs covered by this assessment, DfE's statisticians' involvement in the collection of Key Stage 1-3 data and DfE statisticians' input into the development and production of the achievement and attainment tables is estimated to be £535,000.
- 3.20 Relevant competency frameworks and recruitment processes are used throughout DfE and statisticians maintain a log of continuing professional development.
- 3.21 The data provided to DfE are drawn from management information systems and collections required by statute to provide schools and parents with information about the performance and progress of pupils and students.
- 3.22 The Data Services Group of DfE, which is responsible for the production of statistics on children and schools, has a business plan and a work programme listing deliverables and staff resources and costs. It has a time recording system used for monitoring spend against budget and for planning purposes.

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

Official statistics, accompanied by full and frank commentary, should be readily accessible to all users.

- 3.23 DfE provides fairly brief commentary in each statistical release which presents the key findings from the detailed tables along with some summary charts and tables. Some relevant background information is also provided. The commentary tends to be technical and more suited to expert users than the non-specialist user. It also rarely explains the reasons for the patterns and trends in the data, even where these are known, such as a change in policy having a known effect. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DfE should improve the commentary on school attainment statistics in order to clarify the findings³² (Requirement 3). We suggest that DfE publish an annual commentary that provides an overview of the trends in attainment in schools across the various stages of education.
- 3.24 The Assessment team found the gateway³³ to the National Statistics on achievement and attainment confusing. The numerous products in this area are listed by date rather than by topic, and navigation is made harder by the number of descriptions and summary findings on a single web page. We suggest that DfE simplify the layout and navigation of the gateway.
- 3.25 A number of users in LAs told us that they have difficulty matching the DfE statistics to their own data. DfE provides details of the methods used to produce the school attainment statistics available on request. We suggest that DfE publishes details of the methods used to produce the school attainment statistics on its website.
- 3.26 DfE publishes three sets of official statistics (not part of this assessment³⁴) on attainment at the level of individual schools and colleges. These are given in a web presentation tool for displaying the results for a selected school and in pdf files grouped by local authorities. The data are also available in spreadsheet form to support further analysis by users, although DfE does not make this clear on its website. School-level is a natural level of disaggregation for these statistics; it will support a range of analyses of interest and can be safely supported given confidentiality constraints. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DfE should draw attention in the relevant statistical releases to the availability of datasets of attainment statistics for individual schools, and make these datasets available on request with appropriate explanation to encourage informed use³⁵ (Requirement 4).

³² In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

³³ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/>

³⁴ DfE has told us that these Achievement and Attainment Tables are being reviewed following the change of Government in May 2010

³⁵ In relation to Principle 8 Practices 3 and 6 of the Code of Practice

Protocol 1: User engagement

Effective user engagement is fundamental both to trust in statistics and securing maximum public value. This Protocol draws together the relevant practices set out elsewhere in the Code and expands on the requirements in relation to consultation.

3.27 The requirements for this Protocol are covered elsewhere in this report.

Protocol 2: Release practices

Statistical reports should be released into the public domain in an orderly manner that promotes public confidence and gives equal access to all, subject to relevant legislation.

- 3.28 DfE publishes a timetable of releases for the twelve months ahead. It also pre-announces the school attainment statistics for England on its website and through the Publication Hub. DfE releases the school attainment statistics at 9.30am.
- 3.29 DfE gives the name of the responsible statistician in some statistical first releases and general contact details in others. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DfE should publish the name of the responsible statistician or the statistical Head of Profession in the school attainment Statistical First Releases³⁶ (Requirement 5).
- 3.30 DfE publishes the pre-release access circulation lists³⁷ for each school attainment release on its website. The department has published a *Statement of Compliance with the Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008*³⁸.

³⁶ In relation to Protocol 2 Practice 6 of the Code of Practice

³⁷ For example, the pre-release access list for Key Stage 2 attainment by pupil characteristics in England, 2008/09: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000889/release.shtml>

³⁸ <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/cs1.pdf>

Protocol 3: The use of administrative sources for statistical purposes

Administrative sources should be fully exploited for statistical purposes, subject to adherence to appropriate safeguards.

- 3.31 DfE bases its school attainment statistics on data extracted from schools' administrative and management systems, and data supplied by examination bodies.
- 3.32 The Department has published an interim Statement of Administrative Sources³⁹ on its website. This includes references to the sources of school attainment statistics but does not present information about quality assurance procedures or security arrangements. As part of the designation as National Statistics, DfE should revise and complete its Statement of Administrative Sources so that it covers all of the elements required in the Code⁴⁰ (Requirement 6).

³⁹ http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/ns_adminsources.pdf

⁴⁰ In relation to Protocol 3, Practice 5 of the Code of Practice

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to DfE's school attainment statistics, in the interest of the public good. These are not formally required for designation, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| Suggestion 1 | Publish a guide to the school attainment statistical series, explaining the data sources and the main concepts and measures, such as Key Stage and levels (para 3.11) |
| Suggestion 2 | Work with Scottish Government, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Department of Education, Northern Ireland to investigate options for producing comparable statistics across the four administrations (para 3.13) |
| Suggestion 3 | Ensure that all requests to local authorities for data are considered by the Star Chamber Scrutiny Board (para 3.18) |
| Suggestion 4 | Publish an annual commentary that provides an overview of the trends in attainment in schools across the various stages of education (para 3.23) |
| Suggestion 5 | Simplify the layout and navigation of the gateway that gives access to these statistics (para 3.24) |
| Suggestion 6 | Publish details of the methods used to produce the school attainment statistics on DfE's website (para 3.25) |

Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

A2.1 This assessment was conducted from October 2009 to July 2010.

A2.2 The Assessment team – Penny Babb and Jill Barelli – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of the Department for Education (DfE) in October. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided during March, April and May. The Assessment team subsequently met with DfE during May 2010 to review compliance with the Code of Practice, taking account of the written evidence provided and other relevant sources of evidence.

Summary of users contacted, and issues raised

A2.3 Part of the assessment process involves our consideration of the views of users. We approach some known and potential users of the set of statistics, and we invite comments via an open note on the Authority's website. This process is not a statistical survey, but it enables us to gain some insights about the extent to which the statistics meet users' needs and the extent to which users feel that the producers of those statistics engage with them. We are aware that responses from users may not be representative of wider views, and we take account of this in the way that we prepare assessment reports.

A2.4 The Assessment team received 7 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Local authorities	4
Academics	2
National bodies	1

A2.5 While generally satisfied with the statistics, several respondents said that DfE took too long to publish them and that the format in which the data were supplied made it difficult to load into their own IT systems. Two of the LAs had difficulty reconciling the DfE data with their own figures and two mentioned changes and inconsistencies from one year to the next. One person said that DfE collected too much data and that some requests duplicated requests by DfE and by other government departments.

A2.6 Five respondents had had some contact with the producer team. Two (both from LAs) commented on deficiencies in the way that they were consulted. One said that consultations were not targeted at the right people (for example, directors rather than researchers). The other said that (in their view) decisions on value added measures and post-16 progress measures had already been made.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

