

Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics

Statistics on vital events in Scotland

*(produced by the General Register Office for
Scotland)*

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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.

Contact us

Tel: 0845 604 1857

Email: authority.enquiries@statistics.gsi.gov.uk

Website: www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk

UK Statistics Authority
Statistics House
Myddelton Street
London EC1R 1UW

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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 Act requires all statistics currently designated as National Statistics to be assessed against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*³. The report covers the National Statistics on vital events in Scotland produced by the General Register Office for Scotland (GROS):

- *Births, Marriages and Deaths Quarterly Figures*⁴;
- *Births, Marriages and Deaths - Preliminary Annual Figures*⁵;
- *Drug-related Deaths in Scotland*⁶;
- *Increased Winter Mortality*⁷;
- *Vital Events Reference Tables*⁸; and
- *Weekly Data on Births and Deaths Registered in Scotland*⁹
- *Monthly Data on Deaths Registered in Scotland*¹⁰.

This report also covers the compendium publications, *Scotland's Population – the Registrar General's Annual Review of Demographic Trends*¹¹ and *Council Area Profiles: Demographic Factsheets*¹².

1.1.2 The Act also allows Ministers to request an assessment of other official statistics in order for them to gain National Statistics status. This report covers the following publications in response to such a request:

- *Babies First Names*¹³;
- Time-Series Data: *Births*¹⁴; *Marriages*¹⁵; *Divorces*¹⁶; *Deaths*¹⁷;
- Reports on specific causes of death: *Alcohol-related Deaths*¹⁸; *Clostridium Difficile Deaths*¹⁹; *MRSA Deaths*²⁰, and *Deaths which are*

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

⁴ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/general/bmd-quarterly/index.html>

⁵ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/general/bmd-preliminary/index.html>

⁶ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/deaths/drug-related/index.html>

⁷ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/deaths/increased-winter-mortality/index.html>

⁸ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/general/ref-tables/index.html>

⁹ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/general/weekly-monthly-births-death-data/index.html>

¹⁰ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/general/weekly-monthly-births-death-data/index.html>

¹¹ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/at-a-glance/annrev/index.html>

¹² <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/at-a-glance/council-areas-map/index.html>

¹³ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/births/popular-names/2009/index.html>

¹⁴ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/births/time-series.html>

¹⁵ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/marriages-and-civil-partnerships/time-series.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/divorces-and-dissolutions/time-series.html>

¹⁷ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/deaths/time-series.html>

¹⁸ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/deaths/alcohol-related/index.html>

¹⁹ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/deaths/cdiff/index.html>

²⁰ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/deaths/mrsa/index.html>

*the Result of Intentional Self-harm or Events of Undetermined Intent (Probable Suicides)*²¹.

- 1.1.3 Assessments of compendium publications against the *Code of Practice* relate to the processes involved in preparing the publication, rather than in producing the statistics that are included. Those sets of statistics will normally be subject to separate assessment. Designation of a compendium publication as National Statistics therefore means that the producer body has, for example: identified and met user needs in terms of the content of the publication; considered the appropriateness of each series for inclusion; and written appropriate commentary.
- 1.1.4 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 Statistics Authority confirms that the statistics published in the outputs listed in paragraph 1.1.1 are designated as National Statistics, and has determined that those listed in paragraph 1.1.2 can be designated as new National Statistics products, subject to GROS implementing the enhancements listed in section 1.5 and reporting them to the Authority by June 2011.

1.3 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.3.1 GROS has regular contact with the main users of its vital events statistics and *Scotland's Population*. GROS responded to user needs for information on specific causes of death by developing new statistical outputs.
- 1.3.2 GROS publishes a comprehensive range of information on vital events and presents the statistics clearly, using commentary, summary tables, charts and maps to explain the main patterns.
- 1.3.3 GROS uses robust demographic methods and provides background information to explain the coverage of the data. It has strong relationships with its counterparts in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, to ensure that consistent statistics are produced wherever possible.

1.4 Detailed recommendations

- 1.4.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that GROS 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

²¹ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/deaths/suicides/index.html>

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 | Publish the quality guidelines used in managing the production of vital events statistics (para 3.13). |
| Requirement 2 | Extend the explanatory information in <i>Scotland's Population</i> (Para 3.19). |
| Requirement 3 | Provide cross-referencing in each chapter of <i>Scotland's Population</i> to the relevant detailed tables in the <i>Vital Events Reference Tables</i> (para 3.21). |
| Requirement 4 | Provide sufficient commentary and explanatory information about the methods and data to enable better interpretation of the adoption statistics (para 3.22). |

2 Subject of the assessment

2.1 The General Register Office for Scotland (GROS) is responsible for the registration of births, marriages, deaths, civil partnerships and adoptions (among other functions). The work of local registrars is governed by instructions and guidelines set by the Registrar General for Scotland under the *Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages (Scotland) Act 1965*²². Most of the statistics covered by this assessment are derived, wholly or in part, from registration records.

- *Scotland's Population – the Registrar General's Annual Review of Demographic Trends*²³ was first published for the year 1855 and has been produced annually since then. It is a compendium which draws from a range of statistics produced by GROS. Until 2000 the main content was detailed tables, but since 2001 the tables have been published separately (*Vital Events Reference Tables*). The format was changed to bring out key trends and issues more clearly for a wider audience, putting recent trends in Scotland into a wider historical and geographical context.
- *Vital Events Reference Tables* are available annually on the internet. They are grouped into eight sections: Summary; Adoptions and re-registrations; Births; Stillbirths and infant deaths; Deaths; Deaths by cause; Marriages; and Divorces, civil partnerships and dissolutions of civil partnerships.
- *Births, Marriages and Deaths – Quarterly Figures* and *Births, Marriages and Deaths - Preliminary Annual Figures* provide tables and time series of the number of events by local authority and health board areas in Scotland. They have been published since the early 1990s.
- *Drug-related Deaths in Scotland* is an annual publication that has recently undergone a wide-ranging review in consultation with users. It shows the numbers of drug-related deaths with information on the age, sex, cause of death, drugs involved and area.
- *Increased Winter Mortality* is an annual publication providing estimates of the winter increase in mortality in recent years by age-group and health board area. It was first published in 2002.
- *Weekly data on Births and Deaths Registered in Scotland* provides weekly statistics on births and deaths in Scotland since the start of 2004, while *Monthly Data on Deaths Registered in Scotland* provides monthly statistics on deaths in Scotland and each NHS Board area since 1990. The tables have been available since 2005, when they were introduced in response to a user request.
- *Babies First Names* is an annual publication which lists the most popular first names given to babies born in Scotland. GROS has published annual lists of babies' first names since the 1990s, and it is usually the subject of considerable media coverage.

²² <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1965/49>

²³ Previously called the *Registrar General's Annual Report*

- Time Series Data for *Births, Marriages, Divorces, and Deaths* are published alongside *Scotland's Population*. Some of these time series go back as far as 1855.
 - Reports on specific causes of death for *Alcohol-related deaths; Clostridium Difficile Deaths; MRSA Deaths; and Probable Suicides* are normally updated when *Scotland's Population* is published. These outputs were added in 2008 and 2009 in response to requests from users.
 - *Council Area Profiles: Demographic Factsheets* were first produced in August 2010. They are a collection of PDF and Excel files (for each of the 32 Scottish council areas) which present tables, charts and commentary on key demographic trends.
- 2.2 The Information Services Division of NHS Scotland (ISD) publishes some related statistics on maternity and birth. The equivalent vital events statistics for England and Wales are published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), and for Northern Ireland by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).
- 2.3 Statistics on vital events inform the development of policy on many health-related topics; for example:
- Statistics on drug-related deaths are used by bodies such as the National Forum on Drug-related Deaths and the Scottish Government's Drugs Policy Unit.
 - Statistics on deaths from *Clostridium difficile* and MRSA are used to assess the performance of individual hospitals.
 - The Scottish Government has National Indicators²⁴ (NI) for reducing mortality from cancer, strokes and heart disease, progress against which is measured using these statistics. Statistics on suicides are used to monitor progress against an NI to reduce suicides in Scotland by 20% by 2013.
 - The Scottish Longitudinal Study²⁵ uses vital events statistics and makes them available alongside statistics from other sources for demographic research projects. The statistics are used extensively in academic research²⁶.
 - Organisations including ONS, Eurostat and the World Health Organisation use vital events statistics to produce UK totals and to compare the patterns in different countries. The statistics are also used as key inputs to estimating the size of the population, and to provide estimates of life expectancy in Scotland.
- 2.4 GROS estimates that it takes a total of approximately 0.5 person years to prepare and check updated editions of these statistics. This does not include the cost of development, user consultation, data collection, checking and processing, IT resources or other overheads.

²⁴ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/scotPerforms/outcomes/healthierlives>

²⁵ <http://www.lscs.ac.uk/sls>

²⁶ For example: <http://alcalc.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2010/09/16/alcalc.agq056.abstract>
[http://www.publichealthjrn.com/article/S0033-3506\(10\)00033-8/abstract](http://www.publichealthjrn.com/article/S0033-3506(10)00033-8/abstract)

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 The vital events statistics and *Scotland's Population* have a wide range of users. GROS statisticians have regular contact with colleagues in Scottish Government and ISD. GROS engages with users through ScotStat²⁷, an open forum for users and providers of Scottish Official Statistics. ScotStat circulates email alerts to registered users and provides opportunities for direct contact through an enquiry point, an annual conference and the Scotstat working groups such as the Population and Migration Statistics (PAMS) Committee²⁸. PAMS includes users from local authorities, academia, ISD and ONS. GROS consults this user group about changes it proposes to its vital events statistics, for example, extending the range of statistics given in the *Time Series Data on Births and Deaths* to provide information by local authorities and NHS Board areas²⁹.
- 3.2 GROS published information explaining the nature of its statistical service³⁰ and its Demography Division's Statistics Plan³¹ for 2010/11. The plan sets out examples of how GROS's statistics inform national and local policies and the ways it engages with users. GROS has published information³² on the range of uses of its statistics and told us that it will bring it to the attention of users through user meetings and update every few years.
- 3.3 GROS consulted users in 2007 about their experiences of using its website. The *Statistics Customer Survey*³³ showed that users were broadly satisfied with the website. Users suggested some improvements to both the website, such as its navigation and reducing the use of jargon, and the range of statistics presented. GROS is consulting users on its Demography statistical work programme³⁴, to ensure that its statistical outputs reflect users' priorities. The consultation will feed into GROS's 2011/12 business plan. We suggest that GROS document the ways user feedback informs its statistical planning and presentation of its statistics.
- 3.4 GROS also consults expert groups, for example the National Forum on Drug-Related Deaths³⁵ which has a wide ranging membership³⁶ with representatives

²⁷ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/scotstat>

²⁸ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/user-consultation-groups-seminars/pams/index.html>

²⁹ Paper 9: <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/user-consultation-groups-seminars/pams/pams-17-may-2010.html>

³⁰ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/about/what-we-do/index.html>

³¹ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/about/what-we-do/stats-plan/2010-11.html>

³² Uses of Vital Events Statistics: <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/general-bckgr-info/index.html>

³³ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/user-consultation-groups-seminars/customer-survey-07.html>

³⁴ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/user-consultation-groups-seminars/demography-consultation.html>

³⁵ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Justice/law/Drugs-Strategy/drugrelateddeaths/NationalForumDRD>

³⁶ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2010/07/30140320/11>

from the health service, voluntary sector and criminal justice system. GROS changed the data collection form completed by pathologists about drug-related deaths after requests from the suppliers and discussions with the Forum. GROS has also developed new statistical outputs in response to user demands, such as the publications on specific causes of death by MRSA and Clostridium difficile.

Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity

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

- 3.5 GROS publishes its vital events statistics and *Scotland's Population* in an impartial and orderly manner. The statistics are available free of charge on its website.
- 3.6 GROS has adopted the Scottish Government Statistician Group Revisions Policy³⁷. GROS clearly states on this webpage which outputs it has revised and states the reasons for the changes. It also announces corrections when required and provides an explanation of the nature and impact of the changes. GROS released a correction notice³⁸ about changes to divorces data in 2008, together with revisions to the historic time series and an explanation³⁹ of the improvements to the production process to prevent a repetition of the error.
- 3.7 GROS told us that it announces significant changes to classifications and methods such as the introduction of the Tenth Revision of the International Classification of Diseases⁴⁰ (ICD). It coded deaths for 1999 according to both the Ninth and Tenth ICD to enable users to see the effect of the change.

³⁷ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/about/revisions-corrections.html>

³⁸ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/press/news2009/more-divorces-in-2008-than-previously-thought.html>

³⁹ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/divorces-and-dissolutions/points-to-note/index.html>

⁴⁰ <http://www.who.int/classifications/icd/en/index.html>

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.

- 3.8 No incidents of political pressures, abuse of trust or complaints relating to professional integrity, quality or standards were reported to or identified by the Assessment team.

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 The data for the vital events statistics come from the registration of births, marriages, civil partnerships and deaths recorded by registrars, while data on adoptions, divorces and dissolutions come from Scottish Court Service records. Records are forwarded to GROS which validates and loads them onto a statistics database. The demographic data for the two compendium publications, *Scotland's Population* and *Council Area Profiles*, are from other outputs produced by GROS. The Scottish Government has taken over responsibility as the main publisher of statistics on divorces and dissolutions through its Civil Justice Section. GROS makes this clear in *Scotland's Population* and on its website.
- 3.10 GROS told us that it uses robust demographic methods for producing its vital events statistics, and that the methods are consistent with those used in the UK and internationally. GROS has regular meetings with the producers of corresponding statistics in the other countries of the UK and generally follows ONS's methods unless circumstances or policies differ between the countries. For example, in defining suicide, GROS does not need to allow for a coroner's pending verdict, as ONS does in England and Wales. GROS signposts⁴¹ users to other sources of related statistics for Scotland, such as from the Scottish Public Health Observatory. We suggest GROS signpost users to corresponding vital event statistics produced for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.
- 3.11 GROS provides explanations of the methods used alongside the vital events statistics, such as notes and definitions documents for each of the *Vital Events Reference Tables*⁴², and detailed explanations of the coverage of the specific causes of death such as for *Alcohol-related Deaths*⁴³, *MRSA Deaths*⁴⁴ and *Probable Suicides*⁴⁵.
- 3.12 GROS has outlined the process for the supply of data from registration offices and its quality assurance procedures⁴⁶ on its website. It has detailed quality checks for identifying and correcting errors in records. These include checking the totals held for each type of vital event with each registration office and resolving any discrepancy.
- 3.13 GROS follows the Scottish Government's statistical guidelines. The Scottish Government is currently developing quality guideline procedures⁴⁷. As part of

⁴¹ For example, for deaths: <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/deaths/stats-on-other-sites.html>

⁴² <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/general/ref-tables/2009/index.html>

⁴³ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/deaths/alcohol-related/coverage-of-stats.html>

⁴⁴ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/deaths/mrsa/coverage-of-stats.html>

⁴⁵ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/deaths/suicides/index.html>

⁴⁶ Quality of GROS data on Vital Events: <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/general-bckgr-info/index.html>

⁴⁷ <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/About/NatStats>

the designation as National Statistics, GROS should publish the quality guidelines used in managing the production of its vital events statistics⁴⁸ (Requirement 1).

- 3.14 GROS produces consistent time series data, where appropriate, when it makes changes to methods. For example, it provided a revised time series of vital events for NHS boards and local authorities following changes to the geographical classification. It also published statistics on drug-related deaths⁴⁹ by old and new methods following changes to the data collection, and presented a comparison of the figures.

⁴⁸ In relation to Principle 4, Practice 4 of the Code of Practice

⁴⁹ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/deaths/drug-related/drug-related-deaths-in-scotland-2008/index.html>

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.

3.15 GROS has assured us that it takes all necessary steps to protect the confidentiality of the data it collects. This includes researchers completing a declaration of confidentiality and privacy in order to access individual record-level data for research purposes. The NSS Privacy Advisory Committee advises GROS (and ISD) on privacy matters and in some cases will review applications to approve data sharing. The vital events statistics and *Scotland's Population* present aggregated data at levels that minimise the risk of disclosure of personal information. GROS has published details of its confidentiality policy⁵⁰.

⁵⁰ Enquiries for Vital Events Statistics: <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/general-bckgr-info/index.html>

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.

3.16 GROS produces its vital events statistics from data collected through administrative processes, such as the registration of births, marriages and deaths, with adoptions and divorces notified by the Scottish Court Service. GROS revised several of the forms used to provide information following requests to reduce the burden on suppliers. These included changes to the form completed by pathologists on drug-related deaths and the form completed by Procurators Fiscal about probable suicides. GROS developed these forms through consultation with the data suppliers. The Scottish Court Service developed an electronic system for transferring data on divorces and civil partnership dissolutions to GROS and the Scottish Government, which has led to a saving in staff time for data entry and quality assurance.

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.

- 3.17 The producers told the Assessment team that adequate resources are available to deliver the vital events statistics and *Scotland's Population*. The Demography Division of GROS has published its business plan⁵¹ listing deliverables and staff resources and costs.
- 3.18 GROS has adopted the Scottish Government's recruitment and continuing professional development procedures.

⁵¹ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/about/what-we-do/stats-plan/2010-11.html>

Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility

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

- 3.19 GROS has published documents⁵² about the quality of its vital events statistics which outline the various stages of checking and the completeness of registration data. GROS also explains⁵³ the reasons underpinning the fluctuations in the births, marriages and deaths registration statistics, such as in the weekly data or for local authorities. It has published detailed notes⁵⁴ discussing the coding of death and estimated the completeness of death coding on its statistical database⁵⁵. It also has provided notes⁵⁶ explaining the limitations of the divorces data collected by the Scottish Court Service. While it gives links on the individual topic web pages to the quality documents held on the general background web page, these links do not clearly signpost users to information about the quality of the statistics. Since GROS presents the quality information in a series of individual PDF documents, it can be difficult for the user to get an overall understanding of the quality and reliability of the vital events statistics. We suggest that GROS consolidate its presentation of the quality information and ensure that it is clearly signposted. The compendium report, *Scotland's Population*, provides some definitional information but little information about the quality of the statistics or where to find this. As part of the designation as National Statistics, GROS should extend the explanatory information in *Scotland's Population*⁵⁷ (Requirement 2).
- 3.20 GROS provides commentary on the main trends and patterns in the registration data, primarily in *Scotland's Population*, as well as in the *Council Area Profiles*. It also contributes to the *High Level Summary of Statistical Trends*⁵⁸ (not part of this assessment) which publish the main findings on the births, deaths and marriages topics, as part of a wider series. It supports the text with charts, summary tables and maps.
- 3.21 GROS presents more detailed tables in the *Time Series Data* and *Vital Events Reference Tables*. These datasets are released at the same time as *Scotland's Population*. *Scotland's Population* does not direct users to the relevant detailed tables given in the *Vital Events Reference Tables*. As part of the designation as National Statistics, GROS should provide cross-referencing in each chapter of *Scotland's Population* to the relevant detailed tables in the *Vital Event Reference Tables*⁵⁹ (Requirement 3).
- 3.22 GROS presents brief commentary on adoptions with little explanation of the main patterns or contextual information in *Scotland's Population*, the only source of commentary for this topic. The chapter also presents unrelated

⁵² <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/general-bckgr-info/index.html>

⁵³ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/deaths/bckgr-info/fluctuations/index.html>

⁵⁴ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/deaths/bckgr-info/index.html>

⁵⁵ See note: Cause of Death Text and Codes: <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/deaths/bckgr-info/index.html>

⁵⁶ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/divorces-and-dissolutions/>

⁵⁷ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

⁵⁸ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/at-a-glance/high-level-summary-of-statistics-trends/index.html>

⁵⁹ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 of the Code of Practice

statistics on gender recognition⁶⁰. In addition, GROS publishes adoptions statistics in *Vital Events Reference Tables* with statistics on re-registrations (of births). We suggest that GROS review the structure of *Scotland's Population and Vital Events Reference Tables*. As part of the designation as National Statistics, GROS should provide sufficient commentary and explanatory information about the methods and data to enable better interpretation of the adoption statistics⁶¹ (Requirement 4).

- 3.23 GROS publishes the *Preliminary Annual Figures* in March each year but removes them from its website when it publishes the *Vital Events Reference Tables* in August. We suggest that GROS keep the *Preliminary Annual Figures* on its website and clearly flag when the data are superseded by the final figures.

⁶⁰ GROS maintains the Gender Recognition Register for registering the birth of a transsexual person whose acquired gender has been legally recognised.

⁶¹ In relation to Principle 8, Practice 2 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.

3.24 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.

- 3.25 GROS publishes a timetable of releases for the twelve months ahead. It also pre-announces the release of the vital events statistics and *Scotland's Population* through the National Statistics Publication Hub.
- 3.26 GROS releases its vital events statistics and *Scotland's Population* at 9.30am on the day of publication. GROS has put in place procedures to ensure that *Scotland's Population* is laid before Parliament at the same time as it is released on its website.
- 3.27 GROS told us that it releases its statistics as soon as practicable. It has developed quarterly outputs of weekly, monthly and quarterly statistics and a preliminary release of annual statistics, to improve the timeliness of the release of vital events statistics.
- 3.28 The name of the Head of Demography Division is given in the vital events statistical releases.
- 3.29 GROS's pre-release access to its statistics complies with *The Pre-release Access to Official Statistics (Scotland) Order (2008)*⁶².

⁶² <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2008/399/schedule/paragraph/2/made?page=5>

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.

3.30 GROS has published its Statement of Administrative Sources⁶³ which includes information for the vital events statistics. The Statement sets out the current administrative systems from which it sources its data.

⁶³ <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/about/national-and-official/index.html>

Annex 1: Suggestions for improvement

A1.1 This annex includes some suggestions for improvement to GROS's vital events 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.

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|---------------------|--|
| Suggestion 1 | Document the ways in which user feedback informs statistical planning and presentation of statistics (para 3.3). |
| Suggestion 2 | Consolidate the presentation of quality information and ensure that it is clearly signposted (para 3.19). |
| Suggestion 3 | Review the structure of <i>Scotland's Population and Vital Events Reference Tables</i> (para 3.22). |
| Suggestion 4 | Keep the <i>Preliminary Annual Figures</i> on the website and clearly flag when the data are superseded by the <i>Vital Events Reference Tables</i> (para 3.23). |

Annex 2: Summary of assessment process and users' views

- A2.1 This assessment was conducted from October 2010 to February 2011.
- A2.2 The Assessment team – Penny Babb and Joe Cuddeford – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of GROS in October. The Written Evidence for Assessment was provided on 12 November. The Assessment team subsequently met GROS during November 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 12 responses from the user consultation. The respondents were grouped as follows:

ISD	5
Scottish Government	2
Other health professionals	2
Voluntary sector	2
Local government	1

A2.5 The users reported using a range of vital events statistics, particularly the deaths statistical releases. They were all satisfied with the nature of their engagement with the GROS team and with the speed of the response to queries. The users were also content with the quality and relevance of the statistics. Two users said that additional detail on alcohol-related deaths would be helpful, such as age standardised death rates⁶⁴. Several users who sent us their views commented that they found it hard to find the tables they wanted on GROS's website⁶⁵.

Key documents/links provided

Written Evidence for Assessment document

⁶⁴ Age-standardised alcohol-related death rates are available for Health Board and Council areas.

⁶⁵ GROS's website has since been restructured. GROS has received positive feedback from users about the ease of navigating the site.

