



UK Statistics  
Authority

# Questions that define a certification scheme

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# Questions

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1. What do you want the scheme to achieve?
2. Where does your authority flow from?
3. How and by whom will success be judged?
4. What tests will define 'satisfactory'?
5. What happens when standards not met?
6. What happens when action not taken?
7. Which official statistics are not covered?
8. How much of scheme in public domain?

# But first, some background on UK Statistics Authority....

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## Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007

CHAPTER 18

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Explanatory Notes have been produced to assist in the understanding of this Act and are available separately

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# The Authority's objective in law:

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The Authority has the objective:

‘...to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that **serve the public good**’

This means safeguarding:

‘...the quality of official statistics...  
good practice in relation to official statistics, and...  
the comprehensiveness of official statistics’

# The Authority's functions

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- **Scrutiny** of the UK official statistical system; we call this 'Monitoring' and 'Assessment'. Head of Assessment is the statutory official.
- **Oversight** of the Office for National Statistics. National Statistician and ONS Director General are statutory officials.

# UK Statistics Authority - governance

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- Reports directly to Parliament (Public Administration Committee), not to a Government Minister
- Chair of Authority – senior independent public appointment subject to parliamentary approval.
- Chair is supported by a Board with **8** ‘non-executive’ members from business, universities, public service
- **3** executive Board members – the National Statistician, Head of Assessment, and Director ONS
- Head of Assessment appointed by the non-executives, not the government.

# Characteristics of the UK statistical system

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- **Decentralised**

- Office for National Statistics +
- 40 Government Departments +
- About 200 other public bodies
- Statistics Authority responsible for oversight of all official statistics they produce

- **Devolved**

- UK Government (not just England)
- Scottish Government
- Welsh Government
- Northern Ireland Executive

# The scrutiny role has two parts

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- **Monitoring** production, publication and use of official statistics, independently reporting concerns to Parliament and news media, challenging Ministers
- **Assessment** of all official statistics against the Code of Practice, and designating as 'National Statistics' those that are Code-compliant.



# Reporting to parliament

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***“The UK Statistics Authority should be  
Parliament’s enforcer of impartial statistics”***

(Bernard Jenkin MP, Chair of the Public Administration Select Committee,  
2011)

# Code of Practice for Official Statistics

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- 74 required 'Practices'
- Strong focus on needs of users
- Wide scope
- Aimed at employer organisations
- Consistent with European Statistics Code of Practice and UN Principles.



# Back to Questions

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# 1. What do you want the scheme to achieve?

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- Reassure parliament and public that standards **are** being met. (*passive*)
- Identify areas in need of improvement and **require** improvements to be made. (*active*)



- Is it clear exactly what you plan to achieve with certification?

## 2. Where does authority flow from?

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- Legislation actively backed by a Parliamentary Committee. The Committee can publicly challenge government ministers.
- News media credibility of Statistics Authority gained by interventions on matters of concern.



- **Will there be public intervention? Will parliament and others support?**

### 3. How and by whom will success be judged?

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- Parliamentary Committee, influenced by ‘opinion formers’
- Opinion formers will decide if the scheme is fixing the things they think need fixed
- Government Ministers and Departments must at least tolerate the scheme



- **Who are the powerful players? Will Government Ministers dominate?**

## 4. What tests will define 'satisfactory'?

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- Code of Practice for Official Statistics is mostly clear but some parts needed more detail to ensure consistent judgements.
- Some standards higher than current practice.
- Several levels of quality assurance to make sure consistent standards being applied.



- **Will tests be clear enough; QA strong enough?**

## 5. What happens when standards not met?

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- Legislation allows UK Authority to make 'Requirements'
- Requirements are published in reports and rarely challenged.



- **Will there be a public statement of what is wrong and what should be done?**



## 6. What happens when action not taken?

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- Threat to remove ‘National Statistics’ designation would be politically damaging to producer body.
- Risk of criticism in a published letter from the Chairman of the Authority; press criticism.



- **Can the certification scheme stand up to the producer bodies and win?**

## 7. Which official statistics are not covered?

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- Some official statistics not covered, or not clear.
- Mechanism to bring them into the scheme.
- Could reduce credibility if too much outside scheme.



- Coverage wide enough to maintain confidence?

## 8. How much of scheme in public domain?

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- All reports on sets of statistics are published and distributed (200 so far)
- Background papers, summary reports and main bits of correspondence published



- **Will enough be public to show the process is working and robust?**