

National Statistics 2001 area classification for local authorities user guide

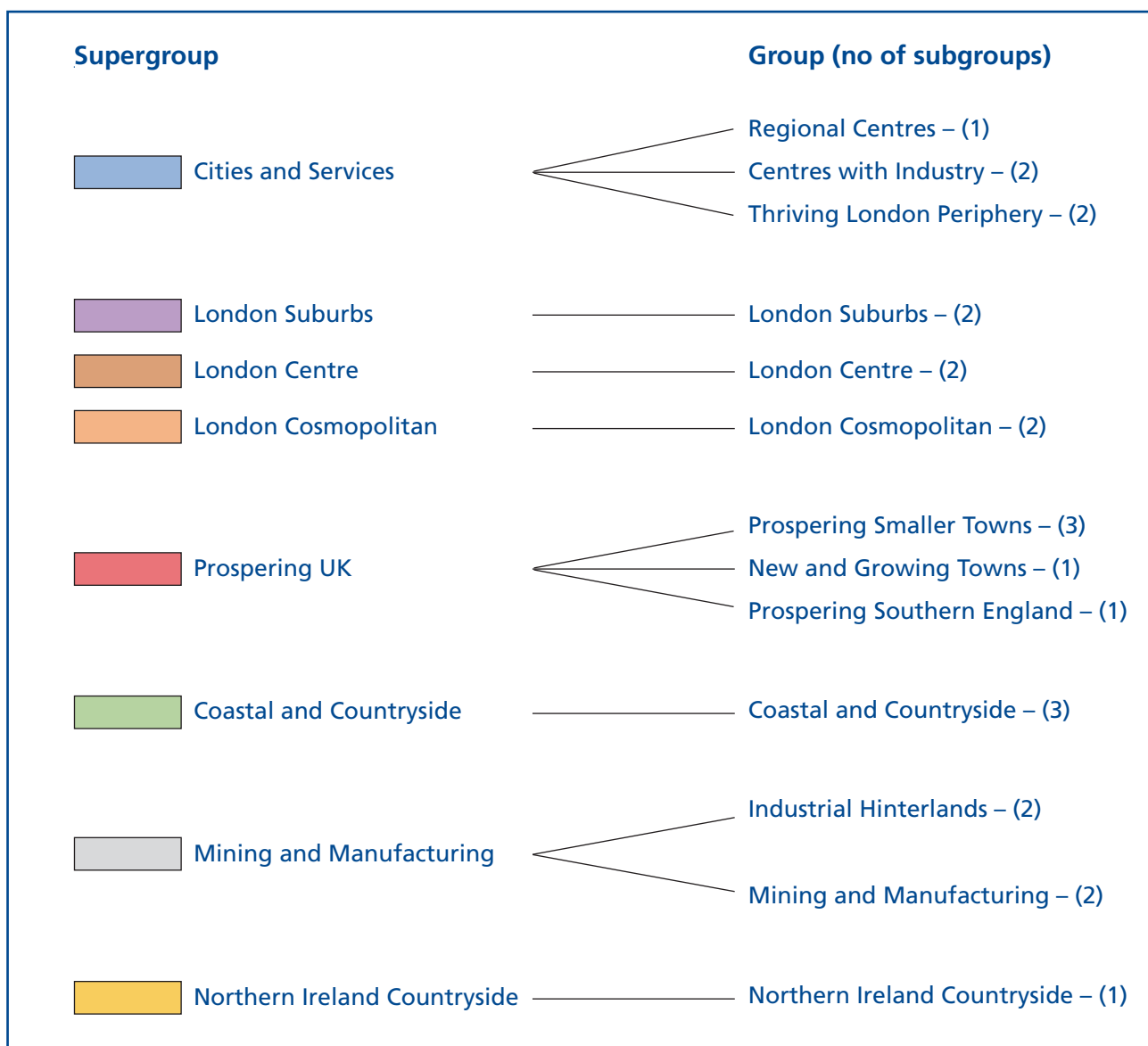
Introduction

This user guide aims to give an overview of the results of the 2001 area classification. It provides an example of its application, and explains the radar chart and its interpretation.

Summary of results

The area classification has been produced at three hierarchical levels, supergroup, group and subgroup. There are eight clusters at supergroup level, thirteen clusters at group level and twenty-four clusters at subgroup level. For most purposes the 13 groups will be the optimum, but if required these can be collapsed into supergroups or expanded into subgroups. Names have been given to each supergroup and group. These names have been chosen to represent the group as a whole and may not accurately describe each individual local authority. However all local authorities within a group share similar population characteristics.

The eight supergroups split into thirteen groups and twenty-four subgroups as shown below:



Example of an application

The area classification can be used as a variable to provide an area-related context for analysis, based on the population characteristics. Local authorities in the same group will be similar in terms of population characteristics. The classification can be used to make fairer comparisons. For example, consider the Standardised Mortality Ratios (SMRs), a general measure of the level of mortality, for four local authorities. Two from **Industrial Hinterlands** (Swansea – 101.2 and Falkirk 117.4) and two from **Prospering Southern England** (North Hertfordshire 100.4 and Guildford 78.2). It may be unreasonable to compare the SMRs without taking relevant population characteristics into account. Comparisons within groups (e.g. between Swansea and Falkirk) are more valid than comparisons of areas in different groups (e.g. between Swansea and Guildford). There are still variations within groups (e.g. between Guildford and North Hertfordshire), which are more likely to be related to population and other area characteristics not included in the area classification.

Radar chart

There is a radar chart for each supergroup, group and subgroup, characterising that cluster.

Before the cluster analysis program was run the data were 'standardised' using an inter-decile range standardisation, which put the different variables on a comparable scale in the classification. The radar chart makes it easier to make comparisons across variables – it is possible to compare the cluster values for each variable with the **UK mean** (the average of all local authorities in the UK).

The radar chart shows the difference between a cluster and the **UK mean**. In the example the difference between **Cluster A** and the UK mean for lone parent households is 0.27 and for households with two adults and no children is -0.52. This means that there is an above average proportion of lone parent households in **Cluster A** and a below average proportion of households with two adults and no children. If say **Cluster B** had values of 0.64 for lone parent households and -0.87 for households with two adults and no children then it would have a greater proportion of lone parent households and a smaller proportion of households with two adults and no children than **Cluster A**.

For more information on the methodology used to produce the area classification see the methods paper.

Example – Cluster A

