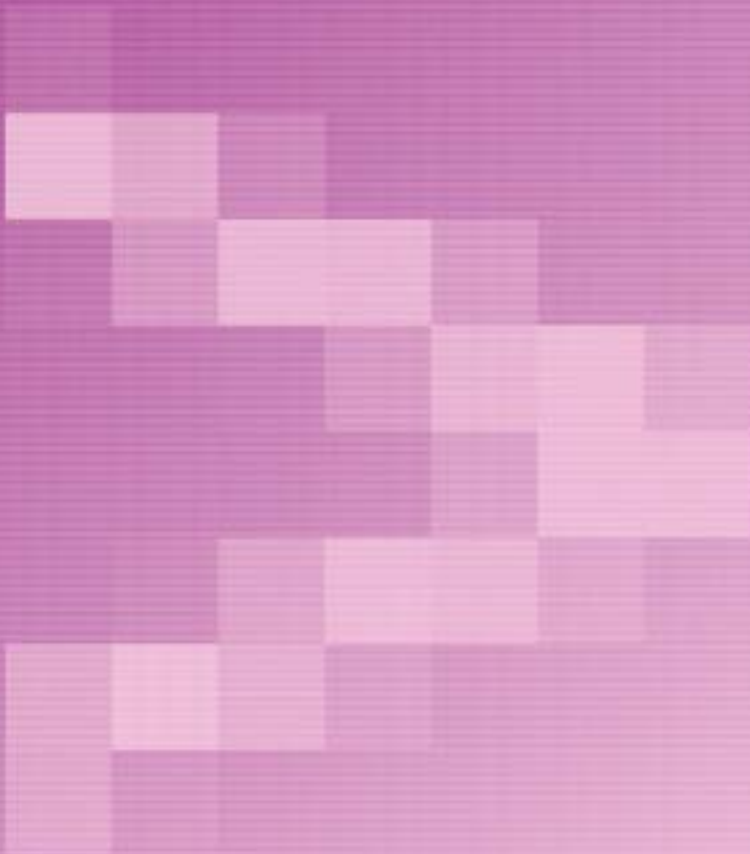


# National Statistics Code of Practice

## Protocol on Statistical Integration



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## **Protocol on Statistical Integration**

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# Summary of Principles – Statistical Integration

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## **Code of Practice – Statement of Principles**

Statistical systems will be designed in ways that maximise the potential to add value through data integration.

Common statistical frames, definitions, and classifications will be promoted and used in all statistical surveys and sources.

The value of administrative data in producing National Statistics will be recognised, and statistical purposes should be promoted in the design of administrative systems.

## **Additional principles embodied in this Protocol**

All producers of National Statistics will, wherever practicable, adopt common geographic referencing and coding standards.

All those involved in the production of National Statistics will promote the adoption of international standards and guidance.

Producers of National Statistics will indicate where their outputs do not follow or use common frameworks or guidance and explain why.

# Introduction

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For background information on this document please see *An Introduction to the National Statistics Code of Practice and its supporting Protocols*.

## **Purpose**

This protocol sets out how all those involved in the production of National Statistics will carry out their responsibilities for statistical integration – as outlined in the *Framework for National Statistics* and the *National Statistics Code of Practice*.

Integration can occur at all stages of the statistical process. It can produce significant benefits by reducing the cost of statistical collections and the load on respondents, whilst also increasing the value of outputs. Integration also allows data produced from different sources, and at different times, to be brought together to provide richer information. Over time, and across different collections, integration allows richer databases to be developed and used for more detailed and extensive analysis. Common methodology enhances coherence, while the use of statistical standards permits the repeated collection of comparable data.

However, integration can also carry some risks and costs. Use of common frameworks can sometimes reduce the flexibility required to meet specific user needs. It is important, therefore, to pursue integration in a way which recognises these risks and costs and ensures that benefits are obtained for the statistical system as a whole.

## Scope

The protocol describes how integration will be achieved through the use of common concepts, frames, definitions, questions, classifications and output categories – all of which will be available through the National Statistics website.

## Integration across the UK

The National Statistician, Heads of Profession, and Chief Statisticians in the devolved administrations will apply the principles set out in this protocol in accordance with the Concordat on Statistics (which forms part of the *Memorandum of Understanding between the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations*), and in ways set out in supplementary agreements between the two parties. Statisticians in the UK government and devolved administrations will work together to promote the provision of agreed coherent, reliable, consistent and timely statistics about and across the UK.

## Exclusions

The procedures for data matching and linking which also promote integration are covered in the *Protocol on Data Matching*.

## A guide to putting the principles into practice

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1. Statistical systems will be designed in ways that maximise the potential to add value through data integration.
  - a) The integration strategy for National Statistics will aim to provide a mutually consistent and supportive portfolio of complementary statistical resources derived from a variety of sources that would otherwise be disparate in timing, form and subject. The strategy will be implemented at each stage of the statistical production process:
    - i. Before any collection is commissioned to meet a newly identified statistical need, existing sources will be examined to see whether, singly or through integration, they can provide the required data.
    - ii. When a new statistical collection is commissioned, integration will be promoted as a key means by which new data will not only meet a particular need, but will add value to the whole statistical system in a variety of ways.
    - iii. Similar post-collection efforts will be made to achieve integration across all National Statistics products.
  - b) Data collection will be co-ordinated with a view to maximising the potential uses of each dataset and minimising the potential respondent burden.
  - c) Data processing will be integrated as far as possible to enable the benefits of common technology, methods, tools and processes to be fully exploited.

- d) Where practicable, information technology and information management will be developed in a way which facilitates the flow of information across National Statistics.
  - e) Statistical analysis will aim for a coherent understanding of the subject matter, enabling statisticians to maximise the value of each statistical collection and using the best available sources for any particular analytical use.
  - f) Access to data, metadata and commentary on the National Statistics website will be organised to ensure that each type of user can make the most effective use of the available material.
2. **Common statistical frames, definitions and classifications will be promoted and used in all statistical surveys and sources.**
- a) The National Statistician, Heads of Profession, and Chief Statisticians in the devolved administrations will develop and promote the use of common statistical frameworks, questions, definitions and classifications across the Government Statistical Service in order to promote harmonisation across National Statistics products.
  - b) Standards for the harmonisation of National Statistics will aim to cover:
    - i. classifications – for example, geographical, social, and economic;
    - ii. statistical units – for example, business (enterprise, company, establishment), social (family, census family, economic family, household, dwelling);
    - iii. definitions – standard concepts and variables;

- iv. harmonised questions and question modules;
  - v. frameworks – common frameworks, such as the National Accounts, which provide a basis for consolidating statistical information;
  - vi. variable names.
- c) The harmonisation of data over time, and across different sources, will aim to:
- i. minimise:
    - the time invested in, and costs of, developing data collections;
    - respondent load;
    - unnecessary duplication across sources.
  - ii. maximise:
    - the quality and value of information gained from any single source;
    - opportunities for the cross-analysis, exchange and re-use of data;
    - users' understanding of statistical information.
- d) All those responsible for standards and classifications will:
- i. Provide support and advice to users on the standards and classifications for which they are responsible.

- ii. Undertake regular reviews of the standards and classifications for which they are responsible and integrate these reviews with the National Statistics Quality Review process. The aim of these reviews will be to ensure that standards are still relevant and to achieve a balance between reflecting contemporary circumstances and maintaining consistency over time.
  - iii. Publicise and disseminate any updates or revisions as soon as possible.
  - iv. Develop and promote further standards in order to facilitate a harmonised approach to business and social surveys, and, where possible, to administrative sources.
- e) All of the standards and classifications adopted for National Statistics will be available via the National Statistics website. Guidelines on the adoption and use of standards and classifications and a series of practical guides on the application of standards will be developed and will be available via links within the website.
- f) National Statistics quality assurance procedures will include an assessment of how well each statistical product and its associated source complies with the standards outlined in this protocol and harmonises with data obtained from other sources. This assessment will include an evaluation of how well such compliance addresses user need.

3. **The value of administrative data in producing National Statistics will be recognised, and statistical purposes should be promoted in the design of administrative systems.**
  - a) As far as possible, and for the purposes of National Statistics, the principles outlined in this protocol will be applied equally to all data sources, including administrative sources, in order to extend the advantages of statistical integration. In promoting statistical purposes in the design of administrative systems, care will be taken to maximise the potential for the integration of administrative data with data from either surveys or other administrative sources.
  - b) Where possible, standards will be set for the use of administrative data in producing National Statistics to ensure that data quality and metadata standards are met, that confidentiality and disclosure control processes will be adhered to, and that agreed standards for consistency in geographic referencing and coding will be used. A key aim will be to consider these standards and approaches in the design of new administrative data systems to ensure their potential for meaningful statistics is addressed.
  - c) The value of consistency of survey estimates with administrative data sources is recognised, and the intention will be to promote consistency where this does not have an adverse effect on other quality attributes.

4. **All producers of National Statistics will, wherever practicable, adopt common geographic referencing and coding standards.**
  - a) The National Statistician, Heads of Profession and Chief Statisticians in the devolved administrations will:
    - i. ensure that all producers of National Statistics apply the following geographic standards unless there are strong operational reasons for doing otherwise:
      - Standard names, codes and presentation orders for administrative, electoral, health and other statistical areas;
      - measurements of the extent of statistical areas;
      - urban and rural area definitions and other area classifications;
      - standards for presentation of geographically referenced data;
      - hierarchies for the aggregation of data by area.
    - ii. encourage the development and promotion of further geographic standards, a harmonised approach to geographic referencing and data visualisation, and the use and sharing of standard digital boundary data sets, referencing data and gazetteers.
  - b) All those responsible for the production of National Statistics will:
    - make use of existing geographies or standard geographic building blocks wherever possible and where this meets user needs;

- work to minimise the impact of the introduction of new statistical geographies;
  - ensure that clear metadata describing the geographies for which they produce statistics are made available via the National Statistics website;
  - conform to the agreed National Statistics policy on minimising the impact of boundary change on statistics. This policy harmonises the approach on producing statistics by implementing all electoral and administrative boundary changes for statistical purposes on 1 April in the year following the calendar year in which the boundary change is published in a statute.
- c) Responsibility for central co-ordination of geographic standards and approaches on behalf of National Statistics will be clearly defined. It is recognised that in some cases responsibility for defining specific standards may rest with individual departments or administrations but wherever possible these will align with wider standards. All agreed geographic standards will be clearly published on the National Statistics website.
5. **All those involved in the production of National Statistics will promote the adoption of international standards and guidance.**

National Statistics producers, including those in devolved administrations, will work together to ensure that the UK makes an effective contribution to the harmonisation of international statistics by:

- a) Supporting co-operation between international organisations such as the European Commission, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, and the United Nations and, in particular, promote the use of common standards across the international statistical community.

- b) Adhering, wherever possible and appropriate, to any frameworks, standards and definitions promoted by international organisations in order to allow for international as well as national comparability.
    - i. The approach to be followed should be to secure coherence with international standards at the top level, allowing some scope for national differences where these are justified.
  - c) Engaging with international statistical organisations to ensure the UK makes an effective contribution to international statistical developments and, in particular, the development of, or revisions to, common frameworks and classifications.
  - d) Working with colleagues, particularly across the administrations, to seek to ensure that international standards reflect the diversity of the UK statistical structure and its governance arrangements.
  - e) Use their influence to ensure that EU legislation in the statistical area is only that which is necessary and relevant, follows the principle of subsidiarity and does not harm UK interests.
6. Producers of National Statistics will indicate where their outputs do not follow or use common frameworks or guidance and explain why.
- a) Where the common standards referred to in 2(b) and 5(a) are adopted this will be made clear and referred to in the accompanying metadata.

- b) Non-compliance with agreed standards, or inconsistencies in their application, can constrain the interoperability and interpretability of statistical products. In certain situations, however, organisational and policy differences may mean that the responsibility for defining specific standards rests with individual departments or administrations, and harmonisation is not possible.
- c) On occasions, and for good operational reasons, producers of National Statistics may need to employ non-standard frames, definitions or classifications, or apply them in different ways. On these occasions, producers of National Statistics will:
- i. be transparent about their use of non-standard statistical frameworks, questions, statistical units, data definitions and classifications and publish information about any differences within the metadata that will accompany their National Statistics. This information will include:
    - an outline of the actual definitions, standards and sources used;
    - details of any differences from the standard approach;
    - an explanation of why a different approach was taken;
    - where practicable, information quantifying the differences and measuring the impact on comparability.
  - ii. where possible, provide a reconciliation or linking mechanism between the non-standard approach and the National Statistics standard.

## References

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'Classifications' section within the 'About National Statistics' website  
[www.statistics.gov.uk/methods\\_quality/classifications.asp](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/methods_quality/classifications.asp)

'Geography' section within the 'About National Statistics' website  
[www.statistics.gov.uk/geography/default.asp](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/geography/default.asp)

and, in particular:

Beginner's Guide to UK Geography  
[www.statistics.gov.uk/geography/beginners\\_guide.asp](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/geography/beginners_guide.asp)