

Statistics at NHSBSA

Statement on Statistical Quality

Guidelines for Official and National Statistics

Document Release Note

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About this document

This is the NHS Business Services Authority's (NHSBSA) statistics policy and procedure on quality principles and processes.

The NHSBSA is committed to producing accurate, timely, high quality official statistics that take in to account user needs, and which are produced and disseminated in accordance with the UK Statistics Authority's (UKSA) [Code of Practice](#). This document sets out the principles used by the NHSBSA to make sure we produce quality statistics.

In addition to the content included below the NHSBSA has a Data Governance and Quality Policy which establishes principles, responsibilities, and requirements for the development, maintenance, and implementation of data governance within the organisation. Its aim is to ensure that the correct data governance is used across all data collections to ensure that the right people are involved at the right time, in the right way, using the right data, to make the right decision, leading to the right solution.

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Section 1: Introduction

In accordance with the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice for Statistics ('Code of Practice'), all producers of Official Statistics are required to publish their quality guidelines.

The NHSBSA defines statistical quality as meeting users' needs with reference to:

- Relevance
- Accuracy and reliability
- Timeliness and punctuality
- Accessibility
- Coherence and comparability

The quality guidelines in this document apply to all statistics that we collect, analyse and report.

The quality of statistics is typically assessed using the European standard for [quality reporting](#), which contains eight quality dimensions specific to statistical outputs.

These principles guide us, and are complimented by the UK Statistics Authority's [Regulatory Standard](#) for the quality assurance of administrative data.

Section 2: Quality Principles

Relevance

Relevance of our statistical products is measured by the degree to which they meet their users' needs in both their coverage and content. Regular reviews of the relevance of each output consider four questions:

- Who are the users?
- What are their needs?
- How well does the publication meet these needs?
- Can we improve our processes, content, or, format to meet those needs better?

By reviewing the relevance of our products we aim to make sure that:

- NHSBSA statistics are fit for purpose and help our users understand important issues of the day that impact them.
- We do our best to anticipate and adapt to changing needs and priorities.
- We take advantage of innovative techniques and technologies where they can help us fulfil user requirements and drive improvements in our statistical outputs.

Accuracy and Reliability

Our statistical publications are derived from administrative data¹ sources. The definition of accuracy relates to how well the information is recorded and transmitted, including:

- The completeness of the data.
- The timeliness of recording and transmission of the data.
- The accuracy of recording, measuring or classifying data items or subjects.
- Correct use of reference data or codes if applicable.
- Correct interpretation of the data items, including the size, direction and importance of differences between categories or time periods.

We will assess and report on the accuracy and reliability of our statistics in several ways:

- All NHSBSA official statistical publications contain a description of major data quality issues known to relate to the release that is presented as clearly an accessibly as possible (see accessibility).

¹ Administrative data is information collected primarily for operational reasons rather than research. This type of data is collected by government departments and other organisations for registration, transactions and record-keeping, usually when delivering a service. Administrative data are often used for operational purposes and their statistical use is secondary.

- Any impact of data quality issues on a time series or comparisons between different groups covered by the statistic will be clearly explained to users.
- Where appropriate, our statistical releases are independently reviewed by external experts or by internal specialists who are separate from the production process.
- We publish information on our administrative data including how it is collected to allow users to understand its strengths and limitations. All Statistical publications are produced in accordance with our Revisions and Corrections Policy and therefore will include explanations and other information about revisions that is required by that policy.

Timeliness and punctuality

Timeliness here refers to the amount of time between release of a statistical publication and the period to which the data within it refers.

Punctuality refers to the amount of time between the actual date of publication and the planned date of publication.

We follow these guidelines to achieve timeliness and punctuality:

- Our statistical publications comply with the Code of Practice on pre-announcement dates of publications.
- We publish our releases as soon as possible after the relevant time-period.
- We will adopt a 'reproducible analytical pipeline' approach to reduce manual processing and speed up the production of our statistical releases
- We consider user requirements when deciding when statistical reports should be published and how frequently they are updated. Please see our Customer Service and User Engagement Policy for more information on how we work with our users.
- Our statistical publications will be produced in a timely manner and dates of release are pre-announced in accordance with the Code of Practice on our website. If the pre-announced date of release needs to be changed, we will provide an explanation on our website.
- We will provide information on pre-release access to our statistics alongside every publication.

Accessibility

Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data. It also relates to the format(s) in which the data are released and the availability of supporting information. This also include the clarity of our statistical output. Clarity here refers to the quality and sufficiency of the metadata², illustrations and accompanying advice or descriptions.

We follow these guidelines to make our statistics accessible and clear:

² Metadata is data that defines and describes other data.

- All of our official statistics can be found on the statistics section of our website.
- All publications aim to use Plain English, with clear and concise definitions that do not rely on jargon.
- The NHSBSA publishes statistics in lots of ways including via our Open Data Portal which is an online tool that lets you create and download customised statistical tables.
- Our methodologies, processes and practices are documented and published where appropriate. This documentation is reviewed every year – or more often – so that we can adapt to emerging best practice, learn from experience, respond to user feedback, and comply with changes to statistical governance and regulation.
- Our statistics webpages are produced in accordance with our accessibility policy and include a [statement of accessibility](#).

Coherence and comparability

Comparability is the degree to which data can be compared over time, spatial areas or between and within other groups of interest to users; for example age groups, or types of product or activity.

Coherence is the degree to which data from different sources or methods that is about the same thing can be used together to make a clearer or more complete description of the subject. In other words different sources ‘tell the same story’ and users can make sense of any differences that are seen.

The guiding principles we use to achieve coherence and comparability are:

- To review any variable or statistic that has changed a lot or looks unusual when compared to previous data, other groups of data and other sources of data as part of our quality assurance process.
- To understand the reasons for any significant differences and make these clear to users where appropriate
- To include relevant breakdowns in our official statistics releases so that users can make comparisons between different periods of time, subgroups or geographic areas.
- To add explanations of any large changes over time, or breaks in time-series either in our publications, on the statistics section of our web site or both.
- To pre-announce methodological changes that we intend to make to our users, either in a prior release or on the statistics section of our website. This is in accordance with our Revisions and Corrections Policy.
- To use harmonised concepts and definitions in our statistical publications. Where an established harmonised definition is available but not used, the reasons will be explained, and where possible information to help translate definitions will be included or referred to in our releases.

Section 3: General policy on quality

The NHSBSA always aims to produce Official Statistics of the highest possible quality; this is always balanced against our duty to use public resources efficiently and achieve good value for public money. We are committed to both the quality of the final output for our statistical publications and the quality of the processes, methods and tools used to produce our publications.

A quality note will be published to tell users about the quality of our statistics within National and Official Statistics publications. These will normally be updated on an annual basis, or when major changes occur to the production of the statistical output. Any updates to these quality notes will be published on the same day as the associated statistical outputs are released.

Section 4: Quality Management

We are sensitive to emerging trends, and recognise the potential of technological advances to improve our processes and open data dissemination. We embrace new technology and innovative approaches in producing and publishing our products.

We seek to build quality into our Official Statistics in a number of ways. We produce our statistical publications using reproducible analytical pipelines as standard. Adopting this approach allows us to reduce the time taken to create our releases and enables us to focus our resources on maintaining the quality of our products.

We recognise that quality involves a process of continuous improvement. As part of quality management, we review quality aspects and our underlying data collection and processes on a regular basis and conduct an annual quality and risk assessment of our National and Official Statistics.

Contact us

Feedback is important to us; we welcome any questions and comments relating to this document.

Please quote 'Statement on Quality Principles and Processes' in the subject title of any correspondence.

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