

Irish Statistical System

Self-assessment Questionnaire on the implementation of the Irish Statistical System Code of Practice (ISSCoP)

**I. General presentation of the peer review exercise**

1. The Irish Statistical System (ISS) comprises those parts of the public sector involved in the collection (whether directly or indirectly), processing, compilation or dissemination of [official statistics](http://www.isscop.ie/officialstatistics/). In Ireland, official statistics are produced by the Central Statistics Office ([CSO](http://www.cso.ie/)), as well as a range of other government departments, agencies and state bodies.

The CSO has a formal coordination role to play across the public service in relation to official statistics. This coordination role is set in a legal context in both national ([Statistics Act, 1993](http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1993/en/act/pub/0021/)) and EU legislation (EC [Regulation No. 223/2009](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2009:087:0164:0173:en:PDF)).

1. Official Statistics are defined in the [Statistics Act, 1993](http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/1993/en/act/pub/0021/) as statistics compiled by the CSO or any other public authority whether under the Statistics Act, 1993 or otherwise. For the purpose of the ISSCoP, ‘Official Statistics’ will be agreed between the Director General of the CSO and the head of the relevant public authority where they are considered to be of sufficient public interest and satisfying the following criteria:

* produced by or on behalf of a public authority
* continuous i.e. there should be a reasonable expectation that the published statistic will be updated with new data to provide comparability over time
* where a statistic is produced as a “one-off” the Director General of the CSO, in consultation with the responsible public authority, may deem the statistic an Official Statistic if it is considered to be of public interest
* in the public domain.

1. The [Public Service Reform plan](http://per.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/Public-Service-Reform-pdf3.pdf) (recommendation 2.10) of the 17 November 2011 required the CSO to develop a code of practice and standards for the gathering and use of data for statistical purposes in the Public Service.
2. The ISSCoP sets down five principles for producing and disseminating Official statistics. The code is available at [www.isscop.ie](file:///C:\Users\hickeya\AppData\Local\Temp\notes1E9E7C\www.isscop.ie).
3. The Irish Statistical System [Code of Practice (ISSCoP)](http://www.isscop.ie/codeofpractice/) was launched on the 23rd November 2013. The cooperation of the ISS to commit itself to respect the principles of the Code and to work towards its implementation using a self-regulatory approach is to be encouraged.

**II. Explanatory notes/Guidelines for the preparation of the self-assessment by organisations**

**The rationale for a Self-assessment Questionnaire**

* The Self-assessment Questionnaire (SAQ) has been prepared as the starting point for organisations in their implementation of the ISSCoP. It allows for an effective identification of the activities that document and supports the CoP (Code of Practice) implementation. It raises awareness on the strengths of the organization and on the areas where improvement is still needed. It is an effective instrument for identification of relevant improvement actions. Furthermore, it increases the awareness and interest about issues of quality of statistics and about the CoP implementation and communication throughout the organisation.

**The Scope and structure of the Self-assessment Questionnaire**

1. The SAQ requests that for each of the 5 principles of the ISSCoP, the activities and procedures put in place to comply with it are detailed.
2. The questionnaire also requires the documentation of strengths, weaknesses, good practices and follow-up for each of the principles of the ISSCoP.

Further explanation on degree of implementation

1. To help organisations in completing this self-assessment questionnaire, guidance is provided, where relevant, on the indicators that support implementation of the principles at institutional level and at product/process level.
2. The organisation is asked to address its professional independence both in institutional terms as well as regarding the responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases.
3. The answers should refer to the statistical processes and outputs produced by the organisation, either based on administrative data or on surveys or a combination of both.

# Principle 1 - Professional Independence

**The production of Official Statistics is based on the application of independent, transparent and objective standards and is free from any political or other external interference. The objective is to ensure credibility and public trust in Official Statistics.**

Indicator 1.1: Official statistics are compiled in a professional and independent manner free from

political and other external interference.

Indicator 1.2: Statistical units or those involved in the compilation of Official Statistics within public authorities are independent in the exercise of the following:

1. the statistical methodology and professional standards to be applied;
2. the content of statistical outputs to be issued;
3. the timing and methods of dissemination of statistics compiled on behalf of that organisation.

Indicator 1.3: Public authorities designate a statistical co-ordinator with responsibility for monitoring

standards across data sources.

Taking into account the Indicators of this Principle, please give details of the activities and procedures put in place to comply with this Principle. In particular details of:

* The head of the statistical unit or those involved in the compilation of Official Statistics:
  + Confirmation that the head of the statistical entity (i.e. unit, structure, office,…) has the sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases
  + Description of his/her responsibilities, indicating to what extent he/she can ensure that statistics are developed, produced and disseminated in an independent manner.
  + Nature of reporting arrangements to, or the oversight by, the Director General of Central Statistics Office (DGoCSO), Mr. Padraig Dalton.
  + Administrative level of the head of the statistical unit
* The statistical releases:
  + Are they regularly issued?
  + Are they clearly distinguished and issued separately from political/policy statements?

**Strength and weaknesses:**

Please state below the main areas of *strength* with regard to **Professional Independence** of your organisation.

Please state below the main areas of *weakness* with regard to **Professional Independence** of your organisation.

**Good Practices:**

Please state below the *good practices* with regard to **Professional Independence** within your organisationthat you can enumerate.

**Follow up:**

On the basis of the above mentioned weaknesses please list below actions you would like to take to improve the situation concerning the **Professional Independence** of your organisation.

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| Action | Timeframe |

**Principle 2 – Timeliness and Punctuality**

**Official statistics are released in a timely and punctual manner**.

Indicator 2.1: Timeliness and periodicity of statistics takes into account user requirements.

**Methods at product/process level**

1. **Quality indicator(s) on timeliness**. Quality indicator(s) on timeliness are regularly calculated

and published. User needs are included here.

2. **Analysis and assessment of quality indicator(s) on timeliness**. Quality indicator(s) on

timeliness are regularly analysed and assessed to improve the statistical process, if relevant.

Indicator 2.2: Advance release calendars are made available publicly with a ‘not later than’ publication date

**Methods at institutional level**

1. **A release/dissemination policy**. A release/dissemination policy is defined and published. The release/dissemination policy distinguishes between different kinds of publications (e.g. press releases, specific statistical reports/tables, general publications) and their corresponding release procedures.

2. **Publication of a release calendar.** A release calendar is published covering all statistics which includes metrics such as standard daily time for releases.

Taking into account the Indicators of this Principle, please give details of the activities and procedures put in place to comply with this Principle. In particular details of:

* Quality indicators on timeliness.
* Interaction with users on statistical products and their frequency
* The dissemination policy addressing the following issues:
  + Release dates (pre-announced calendar, deviations and justifications)
  + Revision policy
  + Dissemination of preliminary results

**Strength and weaknesses:**

Please state below the main areas of *strength* with regard to the **Timeliness and Punctuality of release of Official Statistics** by your organisation.

Please state below the main areas of *weakness* with regard to the **Timeliness and Punctuality of release of Official Statistics** by your organisation.

**Good Practices:**

Please state below the *good practices* with regard to **Timeliness and Punctuality of release of Official Statistics** within your organisation that you can enumerate

**Follow up:**

On the basis of the above mentioned weaknesses please list below actions which you would like to take to improve the situation concerning the **Timeliness and Punctuality of release of Official Statistics** by your organisation.

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| Action | Timeframe |

# Principle 3 – Accessibility and Clarity

**Official Statistics are presented in a clear and understandable form, released in a suitable and convenient manner, and available and accessible on an impartial basis with appropriate supporting information.**

Indicator 3.1: Official Statistics are listed on the ISSCoP website (www.isscop.ie).

Indicator 3.2: Standard statistical outputs and products are made available to everyone free of charge.

Indicator 3.3: Official Statistics are made available in a readily accessible format.

Indicator 3.4: Users are informed of the methodology and any changes to the methodology will be

communicated to users.

Indicator 3.5: Data systems are designed or are capable of being adapted to allow for the extraction

of raw data for analytical purposes. Section 31 (2) of the Statistics Act, 1993 sets out the legislative framework for co-operation between the CSO and public authorities on these issues.

Taking into account the Indicators of this Principle, please give details of the activities and procedures put in place to comply with this Principle. In particular details of:

* How the dissemination policy aligns to this principle
* How data and metadata are disseminated
* How users are kept informed about the methodology of the statistical processes and the quality of their outputs
* The type of dissemination service(s) available to users
* Custom designed analysis and products for satisfying user requests
* Accessibility of microdata

**Strength and weaknesses:**

Please state below the main areas of *strength* with regard to **Access and Clarity** within your organisation.

Please state below the main areas of *weakness* with regard to **Access and Clarity** within your organisation.

**Good Practices**

Please state below the *good practices* with regard to **Access and Clarity** within your organisationthat you can enumerate.

**Follow up:**

On the basis of the above mentioned weaknesses please list below actions which you would like to take to improve the situation concerning **Access and Clarity** within your organisation.

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| Action | Timeframe |

# Principle 4 - Commitment to Quality

**All compilers of official statistics systematically and regularly review processes to support continual improvement in process and product quality.**

Indicator 4.1: Official statistics are assessed against the principles of relevance, accuracy and

reliability, timeliness and punctuality, coherence and comparability, accessibility and

clarity, sound methodology and appropriate statistical procedures.

**Methods at institutional level**

1. **A quality commitment statement/policy is in place**. A Quality Commitment Policy is made public, laying out principles, practices and commitments related to quality in statistics which are consistent with the goals set out in the Mission and Vision statements of the Organisation.

**Methods at product/process level**

2. **Procedures are in place to monitor process quality**.Procedures are in place to monitor the quality of different stages of the statistical production process, e.g. according to a quality assurance plan, regular expert group meetings.

3. **A quality assurance plan is in place**.The quality assurance plan or any other similar scheme, describes the working standards, the formal obligations (such as laws and internal rules) and the set of quality control actions to prevent and monitor errors, to evaluate quality indicators and to control different points at each stage of the statistical production process.

The quality assurance plan or any other similar scheme:

* Takes users’ needs into account and checks the relevance of the statistical process
* Ensures effective technical and organisational design of the statistical production process
* Assures the quality of data collection, including the use of administrative data
* Assures the quality of data treatment (coding, editing, imputation and estimation)
* Ensures the systematic examination of possible trade-offs within quality
* Makes sure that the information described above is accessible and comprehensible to users and included in the quality reports
* Makes sure that reactions/feedback from users are regularly collected and assessed
* Ensures suitable metadata is provided to users to aid their understanding of quality

Taking into account the Indicators of this Principle, please give details of the activities and procedures put in place to comply with this Principle. In particular details of:

* Your Quality Commitment statement and/or policy
* The procedures to assure the quality of the statistical processes and outputs
* The methods of monitoring the quality of your official statistics

**Strength and weaknesses:**

Please state below the main areas of *strength* with regard to the **Commitment to Quality** within your organisation.

Please state below the main areas of *weakness* with regard to the **Commitment to Quality** within your organisation.

**Good Practices**

Please state below the *good practices* with regard to **Commitment to Quality** within your organisation that you can enumerate.

**Follow up:**

On the basis of the above mentioned weaknesses please list below actions which you would like to take to improve the situation concerning **Commitment to Quality** within your organisation.

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| Action | Timeframe |

# Principle 5 – Statistical Confidentiality

**Public authorities ensure that statistical outputs do not lead to the direct or indirect identification of an individual person or entity.**

Indicator 5.1: Staff sign legal confidentiality commitments on appointment.

**Methods at institutional level**

1**. Mandatory confidentiality commitments**. Commitments for the observance of statistical confidentiality exist within the organisation and are signed by all relevant staff in place or on appointment as well as by external parties who undertake statistical work on behalf of the organisation. In case of modification, such agreements should be updated and signed again by all staff or parties concerned.

Indicator 5.2: Penalties are prescribed for any wilful breaches of statistical confidentiality.

**Methods at institutional level**

1. **Existence of provisions based on legal framework**. There are national provisions in place in the statistical law or other legal provisions on administrative, penal and disciplinary sanctions for violation of statistical confidentiality.

2. **Provisions on sanctions are available to the public**. Users of official statistical information are aware of the existing provisions on sanctions for violation of statistical confidentiality as this information is publicly available and accessible to them.

Indicator 5.3: Guidelines and instructions are provided to staff on the protection of statistical confidentiality in the production and dissemination processes. The confidentiality policy is made known to the public.

**Methods at institutional level**

1. **Confidentiality policy**. A confidentiality policy is made publicly available, laying out principles and commitments related to statistical confidentiality which is consistent with the goals set out in the Mission and Vision statements.

2. **Organisational structure on the protection of statistical confidentiality**. An appropriate organisational structure exists in the statistical unit to ensure confidentiality and to provide guidelines, recommend appropriate methodologies and periodically examine methods used for data protection.

3. **Guidance to staff**. The statistical unit prepares and provides the staff with written instructions and guidelines in order to preserve statistical confidentiality when dissemination of disaggregated statistical data occurs.

4. **Methods for ensuring confidentiality**. The ongoing research in the field of confidentiality is observed permanently. The methods in use are selected in a way to counteract the trade-off between the risk of identification and the loss of information in an optimal way.

5. **Awareness of respondents regarding commitments to confidentiality**. Respondents contacted during data collection are made aware that the statistical unit commits itself fully to data protection and statistical confidentiality and that the data is only used for statistical purposes and personal data is under no circumstances forwarded.

**Methods at product/process level**

6. **Statistical disclosure control methods**. Provisions are in place to ensure that prior to the release of statistical information (aggregate data and microdata), statistical disclosure control methods are applied.

7. **Output checking**. Whenever access to confidential statistical information takes place in a secure environment (e.g. remote access, safe centre, remote execution), all output is checked for disclosure before release. Processes are in place preventing the release of output without checking for disclosure.

Indicator 5.4: Physical, technological and organisational provisions are in place to protect the security and integrity of statistical databases

**Methods at institutional level**

1**. IT security policy.** An IT security policy for the protection and security of confidential and sensitive data is in place, covering the whole business, technical, legal, and regulatory environment in which the statistical authority/unit operates. The policy is widely known to the staff of the statistical authority/unit.

2. **Security processes and measures.** The statistical authority has appropriate physical and logical security measures and processes in place to check that data security is ensured and to prevent data breaches and violation of statistical confidentiality.

3. **IT security audits.** Regular and systematic security audits on the data security system of the statistical authority/unit are carried out. The audit evaluates every tool and safeguard there is to protect the security and integrity of statistical databases.

4. **Secured storage and monitoring of access to data.** All statistical data is stored in secured environments that prevent access by unauthorised persons. All access to statistical databases is strictly monitored and recorded. User rights are recorded and kept up-to-date to prevent unauthorised access. Names and addresses or other personal identifiers are deleted as early as possible.

Indicator 5.5: Strict protocols apply to external users accessing statistical microdata.

**Methods at institutional level**

1. **Conditions for access to confidential data for scientific purposes.** Clear conditions for granting researcher access to confidential data for scientific purposes are set in the statistical law or relevant regulations. These conditions are publicly available on the website of the statistical authority/unit.

2. **Safeguards for researcher access to confidential data for scientific purposes.** The statistical authority/unit ensures that all legal, technical and logical safeguards are in place to protect confidential information. Users are bound to sign an agreement on rules of usage of microdata.

3. **Control over data duplication.** The statistical authority/unit has appropriate measures in place to prevent duplication of data (data illegally copied or not deleted after use).

**Methods at product/process level**

4. **Monitoring the use of microdata.** The use of microdata sets is monitored to identify any circumstance in which data confidentiality may be breached. Procedures are in place to ensure immediate corrective action.

Taking into account the Indicators of this Principle, please give details of the activities and procedures put in place to comply with this Principle. In particular details of:

* The legal basis that requires full respect for Statistical confidentiality
* The protocols applied
* The guidelines and instructions provided to staff and the confidentiality commitments signed by staff
* The physical, technological and organisational provisions to protect security and integrity of databases

**Strength and weaknesses:**

Please state below the main areas of *strength* with regard to **Statistical Confidentiality** within your organisation

Please state below the main areas of *weakness* with regard to **Statistical Confidentiality** within your organisation

**Good Practices**

Please state below the *good practices* with regard to **Statistical Confidentiality** that you can enumerate within your organization

**Follow up:**

On the basis of the above mentioned weaknesses please list below actions which you would like to take to improve the situation concerning **Statistical Confidentiality** within your organisation.

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| --- | --- |
| Action | Timeframe |