
Mark Pont, Assessment Programme Lead

Professor Roger Halliday
Chief Statistician and Data Officer
Scottish Government
(By email)

3 April 2020

Dear Roger

RURAL SCOTLAND KEY FACTS STATISTICS

We recently conducted a review of the compliance of Scottish Government's [Rural Scotland Key Facts](#) statistics against the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). We are pleased to confirm that these statistics can continue to be designated as National Statistics, subject to your team addressing the recommendations highlighted below.

We recognise the impact that key policy areas have on rural communities, and the importance of having high quality statistics that provide insight into rural Scotland and feed into mainstream policy development. We found various examples of good practice linked to the quality and value of the [Rural Scotland Key Facts statistics](#). The Scottish Government's Urban Rural Classification, which is revised every two years to maintain relevance, provides a standard definition of rural areas in Scotland and is applied to the most up-to-date data sources to produce the statistics. These provide a strong evidence base that allows policy areas specific to Scotland to be addressed. We commend the detailed, insightful commentary and accompanying charts and graphs which eases the interpretation of these statistics.

We have identified four areas where we consider your team could further enhance the trustworthiness, quality and value of these statistics:

- Pre-release arrangements are not published on the Scottish Government website. Your team should record and publish the details of those granted pre-release access alongside clear justifications for access. We encourage the team to regularly review the list of recipients to keep it to a minimum.
- A wide range of well-established data sources are used to compile the Rural Scotland Key Facts statistics. However, further information on the nature and limitations of these data sources, including changes to data sources, would help users better understand the quality of the statistics. We also encourage your team to clearly label data sources designated as National Statistics throughout the bulletin to ensure users are clear on the quality and value of each statistic.

- We recognise that coherence of the Urban Rural Classifications across the UK is not possible due to the unique nature of each country's population structure and policy needs. Within Scotland there are differing variations of the Classification that are being developed and used by other organisations to help answer different questions about rural Scotland. We encourage your team to continue to engage with these organisations and, where appropriate, to signpost different Classification variations within the publication to raise awareness of the different ways of defining rural areas in Scotland. This will ensure that the statistical picture is as clear as possible to all users.
- Generally, the bulletin includes no indication of the level of uncertainty around the estimates, such as confidence intervals. We understand that the data suppliers quality assure the data and produce the estimates (by applying the Classification to their data) on the Scottish Government's behalf. Where possible, we encourage your team to work with the data suppliers to enable appropriate descriptions of the level of uncertainty. Integrating this information with the bulletin would clarify to users that the statistics are estimates and help them interpret trends in the statistics.

We would like to thank your team for their positive engagement throughout this review process.

Our Agriculture, Energy and Environment domain lead, Job de Roij, looks forward to continuing to engage with your team on these and related statistics.

I am copying this letter to Neil Henderson and Stephen Smith, the responsible statisticians, and Alastair McAlpine, the Senior Statistician for Agricultural Statistics, at the Scottish Government.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Mark Pont', with a horizontal line underneath.

Mark Pont
Assessment Programme Lead