
Voluntary Application of the Code of Practice for Statistics

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Foreword

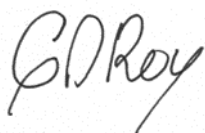
This is the Scottish Fiscal Commission's third edition of our Statement of Voluntary Application of the Code of Practice for Statistics. It is aligned with our Corporate Plan for 2025-28, shaped by the recommendations of the 2025 OECD review and our 2024 stakeholder survey.

This statement sets out how we put the Code into practice to guide what we do and give users confidence in our work. We are committed to regularly reviewing our actions to apply the Code, and to seeking external independent feedback on our performance to use as a basis for updating this statement.

We continue to receive positive feedback on how our voluntary application is helping us achieve our strategic objectives, producing authoritative forecasts and assessments which support effective decision-making and enrich public debate. We are pleased that the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) recognised the Scottish Fiscal Commission for demonstrating strong analytical leadership through our application of the Code.¹

Since the previous edition of this statement, we have continued to consider the nature of errors in our forecasts and we have refreshed our error corrections policy to ensure it is more fit for purpose. This is the main update included in this statement.

We will continue to follow the Code and to regularly update our statement, upholding our commitment to continuous improvement.



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October 2025

¹ OSR (2024) [Analytical leadership: Achieving better outcomes for citizens](#) (case studies 2E and 6B).

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Chapter 1

Statement of Voluntary Application

Introduction

- 1.1 The SFC seeks to adhere to the highest standards for analysis possible. As an Independent Fiscal Institution (IFI), we are guided by the OECD principles for such institutions.² While we produce forecasts rather than official statistics, we voluntarily apply as much as possible the principles of the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice for Statistics.³
- 1.2 The Code of Practice has three pillars: Trustworthiness, Quality, and Value. Figure 1.1 shows how these pillars provide a framework for the SFC to demonstrate voluntary application of many parts of the Code, in line with the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR)'s Guide to Voluntary Application.⁴
- 1.3 The OSR has recently consulted on a refreshed Code: Code of Practice for Statistics edition 3.0.⁵ This is expected to be released in late October 2025. The updated version of the Code preserves the core principles of Trustworthiness, Quality, and Value of the current version, while strengthening the standards relating to each of these three principles. Therefore, there are no specific changes which need to be made to this statement to align it to the new Code.

Figure 1.1: Voluntary application of the Code of Practice for Statistics

Principles	Our actions
Trustworthiness – trusted people, systems, and processes	• The SFC is accountable to the Scottish Parliament. The members of the SFC are appointed by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government after being approved by the Scottish Parliament. • We recruit professional analysts from a variety of different backgrounds, including the UK and Scottish Civil Service, academia, and the private sector. We also work with the Government Statistical Service (GSS), to ensure professional statistical standards are maintained and continuous professional development is offered. • We have a designated Lead Official responsible for ensuring voluntary application of the Code of Practice. • We have robust processes to protect data confidentiality, to ensure legal obligations are met.

² OECD (2014) [Recommendation of the Council on Principles for Independent Fiscal Institutions](#).

³ UKSA (2022) [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

⁴ UKSA – [Guide to Voluntary Application of the Code](#).

⁵ OSR – [Refreshing the Code of Practice for Statistics – have your say](#), OSR (2025) [Consultation on the Code of Practice for Statistics: Findings and next steps](#).

	• We publish a joint Protocol with the Scottish Government, which sets out the way we interact with the Government in producing our forecasts and other reports.⁶ • We have Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with data suppliers and key partners.⁷
Quality – robust data, methods, and processes	• We have a statutory duty to make explicit all assumptions and risks that underpin our forecasts. • We are transparent about methods and data used, sources of uncertainty, and the sensitivity of the forecasts to different assumptions. We publish spreadsheets and supplementary spreadsheets alongside all our reports with additional details of our forecasts and data used. • We draw on the best available sources of information, using statistics that are in the public domain and designated as Official Statistics or Accredited Official Statistics where possible. We note any uncertainties or limitations in data sources used. • To ensure the quality of our models and judgements, we consult with external experts such as academics or the Scottish Commission on Social Security.⁸ • We publish a biennial Statement of Data Needs which sets out the data we need to improve our forecasts.⁹
Value – statistics that serve the public good	• Our forecasts are used in the preparation of the Scottish Budget. They are used by Parliament in the scrutiny of the Scottish Budget, to inform debate and improve information on the public finances available to policy makers. • We make available all our forecasts, and determinants of our forecasts, in forms that encourage reuse. • We make our publications and website accessible to ensure they reach a wide audience. • We develop publications and analysis in response to user demand, such as through regular stakeholder surveys.

Source: Scottish Fiscal Commission.

Our Approach

- 1.4 Our commitment to the principles of the Code of Practice for Statistics is entrenched in our strategic objectives, set out in our Corporate Plan.¹⁰
- 1.5 In our Corporate Plan for 2025-28, we have updated our strategic objectives to: ensure our forecasts and analyses are of most value to Parliament, media, and broader audiences; and include the areas of work we are developing in response to user needs,

⁶ Scottish Fiscal Commission (2025) [Protocol for Engagement with the Scottish Government](#).

⁷ Scottish Fiscal Commission – [Memoranda of Understanding](#).

⁸ [Scottish Commission on Social Security](#).

⁹ Scottish Fiscal Commission – [Statements of Data Needs](#).

¹⁰ Scottish Fiscal Commission – [Corporate Plans](#).

feedback from our 2024 stakeholder survey, and recommendations from the 2025 external independent review of our performance by the OECD.¹¹

1.6 Our strategic objectives are:

- Provide authoritative, independent, official forecasts of Scotland's economy, devolved tax revenues, and social security spending, and explain what these mean for the Scottish Budget.
- Provide insightful, impartial analysis of the Scottish Government's funding and spending.
- Analyse and report on issues with major impacts for the long-term fiscal sustainability of the Scottish Budget.
- Be an effective and efficient organisation with skilled, knowledgeable people.

1.7 Our Annual Report describes in detail how we ensure that these strategic objectives are met.¹²

1.8 Our organisation's values also reflect the principles of the Code of Practice for Statistics. Everyone can trust our work because:

- We are independent – we are impartial, honest, and objective.
- We work well with others.
- We are transparent and we promote transparency in Scottish public finances.
- We explain complex matters clearly and make our work easy to access.
- We produce quality work which informs public debate.

1.9 We want to make sure that our work and our assessments can be trusted. Having the right values, and embodying them in all that we do, is essential for that. These principles guide how we go about everything we do and how we approach any new work, and they help us to be mindful of our longer-term vision in our daily work.

1.10 Chapter 2 sets out our approach to handling publication errors and corrections, referred to as our error policy. This policy ensures we are transparent about the source and impact of any publication errors. We keep an internal record and review it regularly to ensure errors are minimised and to improve our work.

1.11 We will review and update our statement of voluntary application and our error policy at least every three years as part of our Corporate Plan publication cycle.

1.12 As set out in the following sections, we also have some practical policies which describe how we seek to achieve voluntary application.

¹¹ JRS (2024) [Scottish Fiscal Commission Stakeholder Survey – June 2024](#), OECD (2025) [OECD Review of the Scottish Fiscal Commission 2025](#).

¹² Scottish Fiscal Commission – [Annual Reports](#).

Approach to forthcoming publications

- 1.13 To ensure that all stakeholders are aware of when the SFC will publish reports, we give advance notice of forthcoming publications on our website and to our mailing list.¹³
- 1.14 These notices will comply with the following principles:
- The month of publications will be announced as far as possible in advance.
 - The exact date of publications will be announced at least a month in advance where possible.
 - Publications will be published at 9.30 am, unless there is a reason this is not possible, such as being tied to Parliamentary procedures. Our two forecast publications are usually published immediately following a parliamentary statement by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government.
 - The notices will cover all the Scottish Fiscal Commission's analytical publications and commentaries. We will not normally pre-announce our corporate and governance publications.
 - The notice will be published in the first week of every month.

Approach to making information accessible

- 1.15 The SFC is committed to making our work as accessible as possible. For example, we produce non-technical summaries, infographics, and videos to explain complex matters clearly.
- 1.16 We are responsive to user needs, and we survey our stakeholders periodically to make sure we understand those needs. We raise awareness of our work, for example through holding our own media conferences and open public events following the Scottish Budget. We have also produced a series of explainer videos on our website to help users understand the context in which our forecasts are produced and used.
- 1.17 We have made progress towards ensuring that our web content meets the requirements for accessibility as set out in the Public Sector Bodies (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No. 2) Accessibility Regulations 2018.¹⁴ In accordance with the regulations, we have also published an accessibility statement which we regularly review.¹⁵ Our website was last tested in September 2023 against the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 AA standard. It was found to be partially compliant as there are some parts which are not yet fully accessible. We acknowledge the existence of these concerns and are proactively engaged in efforts to achieve full compliance as a longer-term development.

¹³ Scottish Fiscal Commission (2025) [News](#).

¹⁴ The National Archives (2018) [The Public Sector Bodies \(Websites and Mobile Applications\) \(No. 2\) Accessibility Regulations 2018](#).

¹⁵ Scottish Fiscal Commission (2024) [Accessibility statement for Scottish Fiscal Commission](#).

Approach to quality assurance

- 1.18 This section sets out our approach to quality assurance (QA) of our products. Having rigorous QA procedures is crucial to ensuring public confidence in our work. Our QA processes are aligned with GSS guidance.¹⁶
- 1.19 For the purposes of quality assuring the output of our forecasting models, we follow clear and stated model QA guidance, including a checklist. We summarise this in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2: Model QA checklist

Area	Description
Model instructions	Do the model instructions include the following? • Description of model objectives, model scope, and key outputs • List of data sources • Overview of model methodology • Key assumptions and judgements • Model schematic
Version control log	• Does the version control log enable forecast comparison and evaluation?
Efficiency	• Are automated processes such as Reproducible Analytical Pipelines used where possible?¹⁷
Structure	• Does the model have a clear layout? • Are the data, assumptions, calculations, and outputs clearly identified? • Are the model code and calculations annotated? • Are key assumptions highlighted?
Formatting	• Is it clear which values in the model need to be updated? (for example, differentiation of input values and calculations by colour coding) • Does the model output follow a clear rounding convention?
Internal verifications	• Are there functions that check model output is correct and help identify any errors? • Are calculations robust?
Data	• Is it possible to clearly identify when data was last updated and when the next update is? • Are data sources clearly recorded? • Is data visualised to understand trends in historic data and identify outliers? • Are data limitations recorded?
Reporting	• Are outputs and analytical reports automatically generated by the model to minimise transcription error?

¹⁶ Government Analysis Function – [Quality](#).

¹⁷ Government Analysis Function – [Reproducible Analytical Pipelines \(RAP\)](#).

	• Is the model output assessed against other sources of analysis where available?
Model documentation	• Does the available documentation provide sufficient detail? • Are there any particular sections of the documentation that could be improved?

Source: Scottish Fiscal Commission.

1.20 We undertake different rounds of QA on the final documents and spreadsheets for publication. This includes checking for:

- Report readability.
- Internal document consistency.
- Consistency of the document with the SFC's style guide and with external references.
- Consistency between the document and supporting spreadsheets.

1.21 We also share our near-final publications with external stakeholder organisations to comment on the factual accuracy of relevant material in our reports.

Chapter 2

Approach to publishing errors and corrections

Introduction

Why we have an error corrections policy

- 2.1 We have robust quality assurance processes in place to minimise the risk of errors occurring. We have developed an internal culture of continuous improvement for our forecasts. Sources of improvement can be new data, better models, or corrections of historic errors. We also work with our stakeholders to review our models and processes to reduce the risk of errors. However, even with these processes in place, occasional errors are still inevitable. Our error corrections policy sets out how we will handle errors in a timely, transparent, and consistent manner.
- 2.2 Our approach to corrections is guided by the following principles:
- Be transparent with users about the source and impact of the errors.
 - Minimise the impact of errors on decision-making.
 - Ensure our response is proportionate and orderly.

What is an error?

- 2.3 We use the term ‘error’ in a few different ways. Forecast error is simply the difference between our forecasts and outturn data. A degree of forecast error is inevitable and is caused by a range of factors including unexpected global developments and shocks, modelling error, and outturn data revisions.
- 2.4 Broadly speaking, modelling error is when one of our models is not working as expected. Forecast revisions are any changes in our forecasts over time. Finally, publication error is when we inadvertently publish a figure in our report which is different from the figure we intended to publish.
- 2.5 For clarity, we describe these terms below:
- **Forecast error:** the difference between our forecasts and outturn data. Each year, usually in August or September, we publish a Forecast Evaluation Report which provides information on our forecast errors.
 - **Forecast revisions:** any changes in our forecasts over time. These may be because of developments in what we are forecasting or in our modelling processes and input judgements, because of new data or information to use in our forecasts, or because of revisions to underlying external data sources.

- **Modelling error:** when a model is not working as expected. For example, this may be because of a mistake in a line of code or because data was incorrectly transcribed.
- **Publication error:** when a figure published in our report does not match what we intended it to be. For example, we put an incorrect number into a published table that was different from the forecast judgement arrived at by the Commissioners.
- **Corrections:** when a publication error is corrected.
- **Assumption:** in the absence of full information, something we accept as true in our models and forecasts. These can be based on convention, on partial data, or most importantly on judgement.
- **Judgement:** refers to decision-making under uncertainty. Assumptions in our models and forecasts are often set by Commissioner judgement. The Commissioners will use their expert opinion and experience to make judgements.

Updating our error corrections policy

- 2.6 Since our April 2022 statement, we have continued to consider the nature of errors in our forecasts.¹⁸ Forecasts are different from statistics. While statistics have an objectively correct value (or at least a range of values), our forecasts are ultimately judgements by the Commissioners. Our forecasts will be informed by data-driven modelling, including many individual assumptions and judgments, as well as other inputs, including a range of quantitative and qualitative information not necessarily used directly in our modelling. Throughout this error corrections policy we refer to forecasts, but the policy also applies to our long-run projections which are published as part of our fiscal sustainability work.
- 2.7 For example, for our short-term Gross Domestic Product (GDP) forecasts, we look at a range of indicators showing what is happening in the economy. We have a number of data sources and models we look at which might suggest different near-term growth rates for GDP. In some instances, we will average them together to get a value. Even then, however, the Commissioners may judge that a somewhat different pathway for GDP in the coming quarters is a better forecast, for example based on softer non-quantifiable evidence about the economy.
- 2.8 In practice, we will often go through several iterations, which involve setting judgements and reviewing the outputs of models, before further adjusting our forecasts and input judgements to arrive at a forecast output that meets the Commissioners' expectations.
- 2.9 Given the nature of this process, and the important role of judgement, the impact of an error in one of our models is hard to evaluate. If we find an issue in our previous models, to what extent (if any) did it affect the final judgement in our previous forecast? Looking back at previous forecasts, we cannot say with any certainty what our judgement would have been at the time had we known about an error in a model. It is reasonable to assume that the impact of any error could be countered by other data, model averaging,

¹⁸ Scottish Fiscal Commission (2022) [Statement of Voluntary Compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics and Error Policy](#).

and qualitative intelligence that was considered at the time, and this is an important part of the use of judgement.

- 2.10 Our formal error corrections process will now focus on errors in our reports where essentially a published figure does not match what we intended it to be (that is, publication errors). For example, we put an incorrect number into a published table that was different from the forecast judgement arrived at by the Commissioners.

Handling modelling errors

- 2.11 Occasional errors are an inevitable part of modelling. Our models are constantly being refined, developed, and subjected to scrutiny and quality assurance. When we find a model is not working as expected, we will update it for our next set of forecasts. When we make significant refinements, developments, or corrections to our models, we will use judgement to decide how best to communicate these changes to our users. For example, we may provide an update as part of our core forecasting report (Scotland's Economic and Fiscal Forecasts, or SEFF), our Forecast Evaluation Report (FER), or in a stand-alone methodology paper. However, for the reasons discussed above, we will no longer treat internal modelling errors as part of our formal error corrections process.

Handling publication errors and corrections

- 2.12 When a publication error is identified we consider a number of factors to determine the best course of action, which are set out below.

What is the scale of the publication error?

- 2.13 We assess the scale of each error when determining our response. We do this based on materiality and importance. We usually consider errors individually, but if multiple errors have occurred for one area it may also be appropriate to consider these together. Errors should be classified within both categories: as material or non-material and as important or non-important. We set out our materiality policy in Chapter 3.
- **Materiality:** this is based on the financial impact of the error on the Scottish Budget. We classify errors over our threshold to be material and errors under our threshold to be non-material. For Income Tax and Non-Domestic Rates, we use our 'small' threshold (£10 million). For other taxes and social security, we use our 'negligible' threshold (£5 million).
 - **Importance:** this allows a degree of judgement to be introduced into the classification. We classify errors as important if they might have led to different decisions being made in the Scottish Budget, or if they are particularly high-profile or politically sensitive. More recent errors, for example applying to the current budget year, will be judged to have a higher level of importance than older errors.
- 2.14 Errors which are difficult to classify will be discussed within teams and, where appropriate, with our senior management team or Commissioners to ensure the correct response is taken.

Correcting publication errors

2.15 We respond to errors in a number of ways, depending on their materiality and importance, as set out in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: Materiality and importance matrix

Responses	Material and important	Material and non-important	Non-material and important	Non-material and non-important
Record in internal error log	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Inform the Scottish Government	Yes	Yes	Optional	No
Inform other interested stakeholders	Yes	Yes	Optional	No
Publish corrected documents and a correction note on the website [1]	Yes	Yes	Yes	Optional

Source: Scottish Fiscal Commission.

[1] A correction note can be in the form of a paragraph of text notifying that the documents have been corrected and explaining why.

2.16 Our error log is an internal document to store a record of publication errors, the assessment made, and any responses. This document allows us to review errors frequently and update quality assurance processes to reduce the chances of a similar problem recurring in the future.

2.17 We also have a **£100,000 ‘de minimis’ error threshold**, below which the application of our error policy is not required, although corrections are still made internally to models and reflected in future publications.

Re-publication of corrected documents

2.18 For publication errors, we have a process for re-publishing the corrected version of documents and their accompanying spreadsheets in an orderly and transparent way. This process involves:

- Updating the document’s cover sheet to reflect that the document has been corrected.
- Adding a ‘Version Log’ in the corrected document.
- Recording the errors in a ‘Log of Changes’ and publishing this separately on the publication webpage. This log contains a description of the errors, the affected documents and spreadsheets, and the elements which have been corrected.

- Updating the publication webpage to include a notification that the documents have been corrected, with an explanation of why they were corrected, and to clearly rename documents.

Handling forecast revisions

- 2.19 Our forecasts are revised each time we publish, as we adjust our outlook in line with the latest available data and information. Revisions to previously published forecasts can result from different factors, including:
- The availability of more and fuller data or information on which to base our forecasts.
 - Updates to our assumptions and judgements.
 - Developments in our modelling processes.
 - Revisions in the historical data which feeds into our models, for example because of improvements to statistical methods or error corrections in that data.
- 2.20 Our approach to revisions is guided by the following principles:
- To ensure the SFC is transparent with users about the source and impact of any revisions.
 - To ensure that decisions are not based on significantly superseded information.
 - To ensure the orderly revision of time series within the SFC's publications.
- 2.21 We provide detailed information in our Scotland's Economic and Fiscal Forecasts (SEFF) report and Forecast Evaluation Report (FER) to help users understand how and why our forecasts have changed, explaining the cause of the revisions and their effect on the forecasts.

Chapter 3

Materiality policy

Introduction

- 3.1 The SFC produces policy costings alongside our forecasts to show the impact that changes made by the Scottish Government have on tax revenues and social security expenditure. We produce forecasts to accompany the Scottish Budget and the Scottish Government's Medium-Term Financial Strategy, and cost policies announced at these fiscal events. In addition, we produce costings to accompany secondary legislation in areas within our remit where we have not already costed the policy.
- 3.2 Annex A of our Scotland's Economic and Fiscal Forecasts report sets out the costings for policies announced since our last publication which we have not already costed. Our supplementary tables provide information on revised estimates of previously costed policies, known as recostings.
- 3.3 Some policies announced by the Scottish Government will have a small effect relative to the size of the total Scottish Budget. This chapter sets out our approach to handling policies we do not consider to be material in cost.
- 3.4 We also consider materiality in our approach to error corrections, as detailed in Chapter 2, where we categorise errors based on materiality and then use this to help us decide on an appropriate response.
- 3.5 Our approach to materiality was first set out in our December 2018 forecast report.¹⁹ We have subsequently reviewed the materiality thresholds alongside our January 2021 and May 2023 forecast reports.²⁰ Our approach to materiality is now included in this statement rather than in our forecast report. As part of this updated statement, we have decided to increase our materiality thresholds to account for inflation.
- 3.6 We plan on reviewing our materiality policy at least every three years alongside our statement of voluntary application of the Code of Practice for Statistics and our error policy.

¹⁹ Scottish Fiscal Commission (2018) [Scotland's Economic and Fiscal Forecasts – December 2018](#).

²⁰ Scottish Fiscal Commission (2021) [Scotland's Economic and Fiscal Forecasts – January 2021](#), Scottish Fiscal Commission (2023) [Scotland's Economic and Fiscal Forecasts – May 2023](#).

Materiality thresholds

Negligible policies

- 3.7 The SFC has set thresholds under which policies will not be costed. The threshold for negligible policies is **£5 million**. This is an increase from our previous threshold of £2 million.

Small policies

- 3.8 For policies over £5 million but under a threshold of £10 million, we will decide whether to cost the policy or not. Our threshold for small policies of **£10 million** is an increase from our previous threshold of £5 million.
- 3.9 Our criteria for when not to cost a small policy require some, or all, of the following:
- A high degree of confidence that the cost of the policy is low, even if there is a high degree of relative uncertainty as to the precise cost.
 - That the cumulative changes being made do not push the policy above the materiality threshold.
 - Limited risk of significant behavioural response.
- 3.10 We also consider the likely level of political and media interest in our decision on whether to cost a policy.
- 3.11 Details of any policies the SFC has decided not to cost are included in the tax or social security chapter of our Scotland's Economic and Fiscal Forecasts report. We will keep under review the policies we have previously not costed to ensure that none of these are now above the thresholds.

Additional information

Abbreviations

FER	Forecast Evaluation Report
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GSS	Government Statistical Service
IFI	Independent Fiscal Institution
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSR	Office for Statistics Regulation
QA	Quality assurance
RAP	Reproducible Analytical Pipeline
SEFF	Scotland's Economic and Fiscal Forecasts
SFC	Scottish Fiscal Commission
UK	United Kingdom
UKSA	United Kingdom Statistics Authority
WCAG	Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

A full glossary of terms is available on our website: [Glossary | Scottish Fiscal Commission](#).

Professional standards

The SFC is committed to fulfilling our role as an Independent Fiscal Institution, in line with the principles set out by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).²¹

Correspondence and enquiries

We welcome comments from users about the content and format of our publications. If you have any feedback or general enquiries about this publication or the SFC, please contact info@FiscalCommission.scot. Press enquiries should be sent to press@FiscalCommission.scot.

For specific enquiries on our analytical policies and procedures, including our voluntary application of the Code of Practice for Statistics, please contact:

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²¹ OECD (2014) [Recommendation of the Council on Principles for Independent Fiscal Institutions](#).

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