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Classifying occupations

A new edition of the *Standard Occupational Classification*, the authoritative jobs classification used in producing occupational data and analyses, is published today by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in a two volume manual*.

Prepared by the Occupational Information Unit of the ONS and the Institute for Employment Research at the University of Warwick, the *Standard Occupational Classification 2000* (SOC 2000) is the most accurate and comprehensive occupational classification yet produced.

SOC 2000 will be essential for identifying occupational trends and developments in the labour market over the next decade. It updates the current edition of SOC, which was first introduced in 1990, reflecting changes in society since then.

This has meant a significant change to the classification. Major changes influencing the nature and shape of the revision were technological developments in the workplace and less directly, the greater range of skills brought to jobs by those entering the labour market, reflecting their higher educational attainment.

Volume 1 describes the classification, lists the structure and gives detailed descriptions of the unit groups. Volume 2 is the coding index; an alphabetical list of over 26,000 job titles each one linked to a unit group of both SOC 1990 and SOC 2000.

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****The Standard Occupational Classification.***

Volume 1. The Stationery Office £40. ISBN 0 11 621388 4.

Volume 2. The Stationery Office £39. ISBN 0 11 621389 2.

Prepared by the Government Statistical Service

The inclusion of two codes is a new feature and has been introduced to help users make the transition from SOC 1990 to SOC 2000, especially those wanting to assign codes from both classifications in one operation.

SOC 2000 puts jobs that are similar in terms of qualifications, training, skills and experience into groups within a framework that has different levels of detail.

Job titles are assigned to occupation unit groups, the lowest and most detailed level of the classification. The UK's Standard Occupational Classification has four levels; major groups, sub-major groups, minor groups and unit groups.

In the UK, the occupational classification, in combination with other information, is also used in allocating occupations to broad social classifications such as the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification, which is replacing Social Class based on occupation and Socio-economic groups.

SOC is used with all the main government data collections, that process occupational data such as the Census of Population, the Labour Force Survey, the New Earnings Survey and statistics on birth and death registrations. SOC is also widely used in the academic and research community, careers, training and insurance worlds.

SOC 2000 is the first revision of the Standard Occupational Classification. The job title coding index of SOC was revised and updated in 1995 but not the structure of the classification. For SOC 2000 both the structure of the classification and the coding index have been revised.

Users were consulted and most, including those who value continuity, wanted changes. Some users found that existing SOC unit groups were too mixed, others thought the old classification too narrow and yet others that it was too broad. Specific problems included insufficient definition in culture, arts and sport, IT, the care sector and tourism, and too many 'not elsewhere classified' groups.

Two other sources of pressure to revise SOC 1990 were the need to improve alignment with the International Standard Classification of Occupations and reflect the development of the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification.

BACKGROUND NOTES

1. The Occupational Information Unit in ONS managed the revision and contracted the expertise of academic consultants. The Institute for Employment Research at the University of Warwick won this two-year research contract, with Professor Peter Elias, who had designed the first edition of the classification, as the leading academic.
2. Various sources of information on the terminology of occupations and work content of jobs were used: a sample of approximately 116,000 records from the 1991 Census of Population; a sample of approximately 60,000 records from the Winter 96/97 Labour Force Survey; many thousands of job seeker and job vacancy records from the Employment Service; occupation coding queries from data collections within ONS; answers to queries from SOC users outside ONS; and information in job advertisements from various sources.
3. The Occupational Information Unit answers queries from users of the classification who are unable to find a job title in the index so that advice can be given on how best to assign a code. These queries are often new job titles. Information is gathered from advertisements for job vacancies and searches for information on the Internet. Information is also obtained from colleagues in DfEE who produce literature for careers advisors.

4. The Unit is always seeking to increase its knowledge of jobs, their titles and tasks and asks users of the classification to send information that will help with the compilation of the job title index and the revision of the classification. Occupational Information Unit, Office for National Statistics, Segensworth Road, Titchfield, Fareham, Hampshire, PO15 5RR. Telephone: 01329 813640. Email: occupation.information@ons.gov.uk
5. The job title coding index will also be available in an electronic file from the Occupational Information Unit. Professor Peter Elias is planning to re-develop the occupation coding package, Computer Assisted Standard Occupational Coding (CASOC), as CASOC 2000 before the end of this year.
6. Details of the policy governing the release of data, including a description of the release categories featured on the front page of ONS releases, are available from the press office.
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8. The Office for National Statistics works in partnership with others in the Government Statistical Service to provide Parliament, government and the wider community with the statistical information, analysis and advice needed to improve decision-making, stimulate research and inform debate. It also administers the registration of key life events. It aims to provide an authoritative and impartial picture of society and a window on the work and performance of government, allowing the impact of government policies and actions to be assessed.

Changes in the major group titles

Although there are still nine major groups in the top tier of the classification, the titles have been changed to reflect the change in content.

SOC 1990 Major groups

- 1 Managers and administrators
- 2 Professional occupations
- 3 Associate professional and technical occupations
- 4 Clerical and secretarial occupations
- 5 Craft and related occupations
- 6 Personal and protective occupations
- 7 Sales occupations
- 8 Plant and machine operatives
- 9 Other occupations

SOC 2000 Major groups

- 1 Managers and senior officials
- 2 Professional occupations
- 3 Associate professional and technical occupations
- 4 Administrative and secretarial occupations
- 5 Skilled trades occupations
- 6 Personal service occupations
- 7 Sales and customer service occupations
- 8 Process, plant and machine operatives
- 9 Elementary occupations

A considerable number of jobs have moved between unit groups, many between minor groups and more than a few between major groups.

How is SOC 2000 different from SOC 1990?

One of the first decisions made on the structure of the classification was to bring the sub-major groups into the numbering system.

SOC 1990 Example of the numbering system

Major group	2	Professional occupations
Sub major group	2a	Science and engineering professionals
Minor group	20	Science professionals
Unit group	200	Chemists

SOC 2000 Example of the numbering system

Major group	2	Professional occupations
Sub major group	21	Science and technology professionals
Minor group	211	Science professionals
Unit group	2111	Chemists

How are jobs classified in SOC 2000?

For example, the job title “Journalist” is classified

in the occupation unit group

“3431 Journalists, newspaper and periodical editors”

which is in the minor group

“343 Media associate professionals”

which is in sub-major group

“34 Culture, media and sports occupations”

which is in the major group

“3 Associate professional and technical occupations

What are the main changes to the content of the classification?

Many jobs that were considered managerial in SOC 1990 and classified in **Major group 1**, such as administrators, were found to involve a high level of clerical work so for SOC 2000 have been repositioned in **Major group 4**.

There are new minor and unit groups in **Major group 1** for quality and customer care managers. **Major group 1** also includes new unit groups for:

Quality assurance managers

Customer care managers

Natural environment and conservation managers

Conference and exhibition managers

Leisure and sports managers

Recycling and refuse disposal managers.

In **Major group 2** two new unit groups have been created for information and communication technology professionals:

IT strategy and planning professionals

Software professionals.

Also in **Major group 2**, research professionals are now separated by the

type of research they perform.

Major group 3 has a new unit group for paramedics. In the minor group for therapists there are unit groups for

Physiotherapists
Occupational therapists, and
Speech and language therapists.

There are three minor groups and fourteen unit groups in **Major group 3** to cover the growth of occupations in the arts, literature, media, sports and fitness.

There is an area for business and finance in **Major group 3**, which includes the brokers that have moved here from **Major group 7**.

Many of the jobs moved from **Major group 1** have been re-classified in **Major group 4**. Occupation unit groups that have moved include credit controllers and Civil Service executive officers. Newly identified unit groups include school secretaries, market research interviewers, and pensions and insurance clerks.

Major group 5 has a new minor group for agricultural trades that includes farmers. Some unit groups have been combined. Six separate unit groups in SOC 1990 have been put together into one unit group for metal machining setters and setter-operators.

In SOC 1990 junior ranks of the armed forces and the emergency services were classified within **Major group 6** Personal and protective service occupations. Research has shown that these occupations have more in common with those in **Major group 3**, so for SOC 2000 they have re-positioned there and form a new minor group 331 Protective service occupations.

Major group 6 contains a new minor group for animal care occupations and in the minor group for leisure and travel service occupations there are new unit groups for:

Sports and leisure assistants, and
Travel and tour guides.

In **Major group 7** there is a new minor group for customer service occupations.

The number of persons in many groups in **Major group 8** has declined so

unit groups have been combined, unless distinctions are important for the analysis of occupational hazards and health statistics. The SOC 1990 unit group for drivers of roads good vehicles has been divided into separate groups for

Heavy goods vehicle drivers, and
Van drivers.

Major group 9 now has a number of unit groups repositioned from other major groups, including bar staff, and waiters and waitresses. A new unit group has been created for school midday assistants.

Where are some of the new jobs in SOC 2000?

Job title	SOC 2000 unit group	
Aerobics instructor	3443	Fitness instructors
Aromatherapist	3229	Therapists not elsewhere classified
Call centre operator	7211	Call centre agents/operators
Desk top publisher	3421	Graphic designers
Kissogram	9229	Elementary personal services occupations nec
LGV driver	8211	Heavy goods vehicle drivers
Software architect	2131	IT strategy and planning professionals
Theme park attendant	9226	Leisure and theme park attendants
Web designer	3421	Graphic designers