

# Official and National Statistics Policies

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## Official statistics

An essential feature of official statistics is that the producers apply the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) during their preparation, production and publication. The producers must also meet the standards of the [Pre-release Access Order](#) for their administration, if allowing pre-release access of the statistics in their final form for briefing purposes. The [producers](#) must be a crown body or have been put on a [statutory Official Statistics Order](#) by a minister (or Northern Ireland Department).

Applying the standards of the Code of Practice provides strong reassurance to users that they can have confidence in the official statistics – in their trustworthiness, quality and value. It is important that the provenance of statistics is clear; so, when publishing official statistics, the producer should clearly state that they are official statistics, to reassure users that the Code of Practice has been applied in their preparation.

The GSS Good Practice Team has published [guidance](#) for producers to assist them in deciding whether to label some data as official statistics. Producers should consider the public value of the numbers in making this choice. Where they decide it is not appropriate to label as official statistics, we strongly encourage producers to [voluntarily apply](#) the Code pillars in the preparation and publication of the outputs.

## The format of published statistics

Official statistics are disseminated in a variety of formats, such as: reports in PDF and printed formats, infographics and dashboards, statistical topic web pages and online tools for data tabulation and interrogation by users. The statistics are accompanied by supporting narrative and explanatory material about the data, methods, quality issues and guidance on use. They can range between simple aggregations of data to complex analyses. They also may be accompanied by source data and coding, to support the replication of the statistics.

Code of Practice edition 2.0 applies to ‘statistics’ rather than focusing on ‘statistical reports’, as was the case in the first edition. This change in emphasis reflects that official statistics are often not confined to being presented solely in a statistical bulletin. Instead they are released in more-flexible and varied ways and can be part of a wider package of information.

This package can extend from pre- and post-processing data tables to the final statistical presentations, such as with detailed analyses, statistical summaries, and narrative descriptions. The suite of material may also include related information that are not official statistics, such as transactional data and management information, where the source is often an administrative or operational system.

Statistical table compilations may be released, such as in open data format or Excel files, or in other forms, such as data cubes or large pre-designed table collections, through online tools, with charting, mapping and analysis functions.

As well as a variety of modes, the outputs may be published over time rather than in one batch – the release of statistics can vary from real time to annual. It is vital that clear navigation is provided across the range of related statistical material to ensure appropriate guidance and support is provided to users.

## National Statistics

Official statistics that have been assessed as fully compliant with the Code of Practice for Statistics are designated as **National Statistics**.

One of the main roles of the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) is to conduct assessments of official statistics, to award the designation of National Statistics. We regard National Statistics as meeting the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and value.

The designation is applied to the statistics themselves and not to the source data or supporting guidance; but our decision to designate considers the entire process to generate the statistics and an evaluation of the impact and public value of the statistics, informed by users.

We maintain a [list of National Statistics](#) on our website. It is a legal requirement that the producers maintain their compliance with the Code in producing and publishing their National Statistics.

## National Statistics designation information

For National Statistics, the NS logo must be prominently displayed alongside the statistics. The logo should be shown at the top of the first page of a report. Online, the logo is generally displayed in the top right of the web page. The logo would not be shown in the other supporting documentation, but these should make clear their relevance to the National Statistics.

As well as showing the National Statistics logo, producers should provide some information within the statistics release (such as the bulletin or associated webpages) about when the statistics achieved their designation and to outline how they have been subsequently developed. This information will help provide reassurance to users that the statistics continue to meet the standards of the Code. The relevant Head of Profession for Statistics (HoP) is responsible for determining the format this takes.



We anticipate statements will take different forms across organisations and outputs, depending on the product and how it is disseminated. All statements should:

- a. State when the National Statistics status was awarded through the most recent assessment or re-assessment against the Code of Practice for Statistics
- b. Refer to any compliance checks which have led to continued designations
- c. Outline how outputs have been developed since the latest confirmation of National Statistics status.

We adopted this policy (to provide statements about statistical developments since designation) in February 2019. We anticipate a gradual roll out of this new approach. Where feasible, the information should be included in the next publication of the output and we expect information will be provided as part of all National Statistics publications by March 2020.

National Statistics can be presented alongside official statistics or with other data. In these situations, it is essential that the provenance of the different types of data is explained. Clear information about the relative strengths and limitations of the data is vital.

Our regulatory guidance note [Publishing Official and National Statistics](#) illustrates how some producers make clear the provenance of their data and statistics, including a National Statistics web publication, an official statistics release, and the publication of (non-OS) management information.

## How does National Statistics designation apply to other types of statistical outputs?

### Secondary analyses and series of articles

Sometimes, additional secondary analyses (not just simply re-presentations of existing statistics) are published separately from the main statistical release but using the same methods and sources. These can be badged as National Statistics subject to us conducting a compliance check. Our primary focus would be to determine the extent to which users' needs relating to the secondary analysis have been established, and whether the statistics are presented, explained and caveated in ways that meet those needs.

Similarly, the National Statistics designation can extend to series of reports or articles published relating to a single broad theme using a common data source, but on different detailed topics (for example, the Health and Safety Executive's topic-specific reports: [causes of ill health and occupational disease](#)). We consider these as a single series, put together to common standards, even though the detailed topic of a particular report might vary from time to time. The National Statistics designation would apply across the suite of related outputs without a separate assessment being necessary.

### Compendium outputs

As with other official statistics, National Statistics are often not confined to being presented solely in a statistical bulletin. Instead they can be released in more-flexible and varied ways and can be part of a package of information. The Code encourages the presentation of comprehensive and coherent narrative for statistical topics. This type of overarching commentary may accompany related releases of statistics. It can be particularly helpful for users when statistics producers collaborate to provide greater insight of a topic.

Compendium publications draw together already-published sets of National Statistics (often including official statistics and possibly other data as well) into a single compilation:

- National Records of Scotland's [Annual Review of Demographic Trends](#), is an example of a wide ranging collection of National Statistics with detailed analyses presented in a PDF report, supported by Excel data tables and charts, as well as an [infographic summary](#).
- The Defra compendium, [UK Biodiversity Indicators](#), produced on behalf of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, a cross-government group, presents a wide range of National Statistics and official statistics. It has been designated as National Statistics in its own right.
- NHS Digital's [Statistics on Smoking, England](#) compendium presents an online collection of related statistics drawn from a wide range of sources, with

descriptions of the main statistics supported by charts, data tables, infographics and a summary PDF report.

Assessments of compendia relate to the processes involved in bringing together the particular sets of statistics into a single collection with an overarching narrative. The assessment would review the way that users have been engaged in relation to the producer body deciding which statistics are to be drawn together in the compendium, the adequacy of summary commentary about the various sets of statistics, and links to where the reader can find more information about the individual sets of statistics.

Designation of a compendium publication as National Statistics means that the producer body has, for example: identified and met user needs in terms of the content of the publication; considered the quality of each series for inclusion; and written appropriate commentary.

The assessment of a compendium does not mean therefore that any or all the individual sets of statistics within it are designated as National Statistics in their own right. Such designation would require that users' needs have been established and considered in publishing the individual sets of statistics – the user need might be quite different (in terms of timeliness, presentation and so on) for statistics presented on their own, compared with that for a compendium.

This means that:

- any sets of statistics being released for the first time as part of a compendium publication, would need to be assessed formally and specifically as part of the assessment of the compendium if they were to be granted National Statistics status in their own right;
- official statistics included within a designated compendium would similarly not be designated as National Statistics in their own right without specific, formal assessment against the Code; and
- other data within the compendium would not be classified as either official statistics or National Statistics simply by virtue of having been included within a National Statistics compendium.

## Scenarios relating to the transfer of statistical production from one body to another

### **National Statistics transferring to an existing producer of National Statistics**

Where National Statistics transfer to a producer that has demonstrated to OSR that its organisational practices comply with the Code, the National Statistics designation will generally be retained upon the assurance from the receiving Head of Profession for Statistics (HoP) (or Lead Official for arms-length bodies) that the new producer will continue to produce the statistics in compliance with the Code.

We would likely conduct a compliance check to verify the appropriate transfer of the statistics. Depending on their importance and an evaluation of risk, such statistics may be prioritised for early re-assessment once processes have been bedded down in the new producer.

### **National Statistics transferring to a producer body that does not produce any National Statistics**

Where statistics transfer to an official statistics producer that has not been subject to an assessment of its statistics, the National Statistics designation will generally be retained upon the assurance from the receiving HoP that the new producer will continue to produce the statistics in compliance with the Code. We would conduct a compliance check to confirm that the appropriate arrangements are in place. Depending on their importance and an evaluation of risk, we would prioritise such statistics for early re-assessment once processes have been bedded down in the new producer.

The producer should include a statement alongside the published statistics along the following lines:

“These statistics have not been formally assessed for compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics since their transfer from [sending organisation]. The Office for Statistics Regulation is planning to assess the statistics for compliance with the Code of Practice in the near future. We commit to producing and publishing the statistics in line with the Code pillars of Trustworthiness, Quality and Value.”

We encourage the producer to also publish its own brief statement of compliance with the Code, setting out its approach to the three pillars.

Where a set of statistics has recently been assessed and is addressing areas for improvement, the relevant HoP should discuss the arrangements for meeting the relevant assessment requirements with Office for Statistics Regulation.

Where the organisation is new to publishing official statistics, for example, is being placed on the Official Statistics Order, it can be helpful to initially voluntarily adopt the Code pillars as the producer becomes familiar with the standards of the Code – see the [online Code](#) for more information about voluntary adoption.



- For example, Qualification Wales initially adopted the Code pillars voluntarily when first publishing [Vocational and Other Qualifications Quarterly](#). It has since released the statistics as official statistics, applying the Code of Practice.

## Removing or Suspending the National Statistics Designation

National Statistics designation means that the statistics fully comply with the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#), demonstrating the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and value.

As the regulatory arm of the UK Statistics Authority, OSR assesses compliance of official statistics against the Code of Practice to award the National Statistics designation. We maintain the [list of National Statistics](#). It is a legal requirement that official statistics designated as National Statistics should continue to fully comply with the Code of Practice.

This statement sets out the principles that we consider in deciding whether to suspend or remove the National Statistics designation. The [register of de-designation](#) lists the official statistics where we have removed the designation of National Statistics, including the statistics which have had the designation suspended while steps are taken by the producer to address significant quality issues.

### Core aim

Our core aim is to preserve and enhance the integrity of the National Statistics designation. The National Statistics designation provides a clear public signal that statistics meet the highest standards of statistical practice.

The Code, taken as a whole, ensures that statistics published by government serve the public. When producers of official statistics comply with the Code, it gives users of statistics and citizens confidence that published government statistics are of **public value**, are **high quality** and are produced by people and organisations that are **worthy of trust**.

### Supporting principles

To achieve the goal of enhancing the National Statistics designation, we apply a series of supporting principles that enable us to make reasoned, proportionate judgements about suspending or removing the designation. But this list of principles is not exhaustive: it is fundamentally about enabling us to make agile, flexible decisions on National Statistic status.

The supporting principles are:

- i. **We encourage strong statistical leadership.** The Code of Practice encourages producers to maintain a good understanding of the strengths and limitations of their statistics. We welcome producers using their professional judgement in identifying when the standards of the Code are not fully being met and in raising their concerns with us and to users.

- ii. **We welcome early and open producer engagement.** When producers identify errors or other areas of non-compliance in their practices, they should inform the Director General for Regulation promptly. The Director General will always discuss producer concerns in confidence and constructively. We will support transparent public disclosure of errors and plans to improve processes by producers.
- iii. **We will remove the designation sparingly.** Where we have concerns about a producer's compliance with the Code, we will review whether to uphold a designation, to suspend the designation, or whether to de-designate the statistics.
- iv. **Non-compliance is clear** – it should not be a matter of judgement or interpretation. While it may sometimes require extensive investigation by the producer or on our part, the nature of the non-compliance with the Code should be capable of clear explanation. It is most likely to be related to the Quality pillar of the Code, to data issues (data completeness, accuracy or calculations based on data) or clear methodological flaws. It is less likely to relate to questions about commentary or supporting material. It could occur when the non-compliance impacts a significant numerical proportion of the overall statistics, or (if not numerical) would undermine the confidence a user would have in the statistics as a whole.

Designation as National Statistics can be **suspended** when:

- a. **The non-compliance with the Code of Practice is isolated** – where it is notable but limited in scope, a suspension is more appropriate than de-designation.
- b. **Corrective action can be delivered in a timely way** – a suspension will be appropriate when the producer expects to correct the problem within a defined, reasonable period of time.

The **removal of the designation** as National Statistics (or 'de-designation') can result following an assessment of the statistics by OSR against the Code of Practice in which we identify more deep-seated and comprehensive concerns in compliance.

### **Experimental statistics**

Experimental statistics development is applicable to and valuable for National Statistics. Where a producer undertakes substantial re-development of some National Statistics, it should seek permission from OSR to suspend the National Statistics designation. The statistics will be added into the de-designation list, clearly marked to indicate that they have been re-classified as experimental statistics.

## Transparency

**De-designation or suspensions will always be made public:** we require a de-designation or suspension to be clearly visible to users alongside the statistics. We also will include the statistics in our [register of de-designations](#).

The producer should include a prominent reference to the suspension or de-designation, including a clear explanation of the quality issues, for example, flagging whether it affects solely an individual release of statistics (such as, the most recent edition of a quarterly release) or a whole series. The statement should include any text required by OSR. For National Statistics that are re-classified as experimental statistics, producers should follow the [regulatory guidance on experimental statistics](#).

**A clear action plan:** we require the producer to have a clear action plan to address the concerns and lead towards the re-designation of the statistics. Producers should ensure to involve users in the ongoing development of the statistics and maintain an open approach. Once the producer is satisfied they have completed their action plan, we will conduct a compliance check or assessment to confirm compliance with the Code and reinstate the designation. The re-designation will be shown on our [website](#).

## Experimental statistics

Experimental statistics are a subset of newly developed or innovative official statistics undergoing evaluation. They are developed under the guidance of the Head of Profession for Statistics (HoP) and published to involve users and stakeholders in the assessment of their suitability and quality at an early stage. The goal is to develop statistics that after their successful development can be produced to the standards of the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

The Code of Practice has a strong emphasis on innovation and improvement in ensuring the enduring public value of official statistics. The world doesn't remain static – change is an inevitable part of life. Consequently, it is essential for producers of statistics to remain vigilant:

- to identify the opportunities to use new sources and methods,
- to recognise fresh needs for information among users, and
- to review existing statistics to ensure that they continue to meet the needs of users.

An essential element of experimental statistics is the involvement of users in their evaluation. Producers need to be open and transparent about their approach to the development of their statistics, setting out their plans and timetables, and explaining the scope and nature of the development. They need to enable users to contribute to the development and testing of the experimental statistics.

OSR has published [regulatory guidance](#) about experimental statistics which sets out our expectations of producing these statistics in relation to the Code of Practice. The GSS Good Practice Team has published [guidance](#) to assist producers in developing experimental statistics.

Once the evaluation of the experimental statistics is completed and, having decided that they are suitable and of public value, the producer may wish for the statistics to become designated as National Statistics. The same process would be followed as for other official statistics, with a HoP contacting OSR and requesting an assessment.

A key consideration for OSR will be whether the redeveloped statistics were part of existing National Statistics, or if they are to be designated for the first time. When the statistics have been designated previously as National Statistics, OSR will consider whether a compliance check is appropriate. A full assessment will be required when the experimental statistics are new official statistics.

## Further information – useful links

### OSR guidance and link:

- [The List of National Statistics](#)
- Guidance for official statistics producer on the assessment process: [Guidance about Assessment](#)
- Regulatory guidance: [Publishing official and National Statistics: answering some frequently asked questions](#): answering some frequently asked questions.
- Regulatory guidance: [Experimental statistics – official statistics in development](#)

### GSS Good Practice Team guidance:

- [Labelling official statistics](#)
- [Writing about statistics](#)
- [Experimental Statistics](#)

Contact Penny Babb, Head of Policy and Standards in OSR, if you have any queries by emailing [regulation@statistics.gov.uk](mailto:regulation@statistics.gov.uk).