

Ed Humpherson
Director General
Office for Statistics Regulation

[by email]

23 March 2020

Dear Ed,

We are currently working through our contingency planning on many aspects of statistical production and publication in light of the disruption being caused to the UK's society by COVID-19.

One aspect of our work that is coming under immediate pressure is our secure briefing facility or 'lock in' process. As set out on our website (<https://www.ons.gov.uk/aboutus/transparencyandgovernance/prereleaseaccess>) certain newswires are given access to market-sensitive releases prior to publication in a secure environment within the ONS offices in London. This arrangement allows for an orderly release of information that would otherwise be difficult through other channels.

COVID-19 itself and Government guidance related to the corona virus makes sustaining the current arrangement challenging as it requires people to travel to ONS offices for lock-ins. The security arrangements and processes in place to protect the orderly release of market sensitive information mean there is no way of making this a virtual process.

Having considered the options, we plan to move to publication of market sensitive releases at 07.00 without a prior briefing from today. This is before UK markets open and so all the information will be in the public domain before UK trading starts. The first release that this will affect is Price statistics on Wednesday 25 March 2020. The other releases that are affected by this decision are included at Annex A.

The Code of Practice sets 09:30 as the release time for official statistics (T3.6), and our approach will therefore deviate from the letter of the Code. However, we think it is consistent with the orderly release of statistics and therefore the principles of the Code.

I would be grateful if you could indicate your support for this, given it represents non-compliance with the requirements of the Code.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Diamond'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping 'D' at the end.

Ian Diamond
National Statistician | Office for National Statistics

Publications affected by the new process:

- **Quarterly/monthly GDP** – including the associated Services, Production, Construction and trade publications
- **Consumers Prices** – alongside the related Producer Prices publication
- **Labour Market Overview**
- **Retail Sales**
- **Public Sector Finances**
- **Quarterly National Accounts, alongside Balance of Payments and Sector & Financial Accounts**