

22nd July 2020

Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation
Office for Statistics Regulation

Dear Ed,

I am writing to ask you to consider a temporary suspension of the National Statistics status for the international travel and tourism estimates based on the International Passenger Survey (IPS).

The IPS stopped interviewing on 16th March 2020 due to safety concerns arising from the Covid-19 situation. It has been possible to produce estimates both for March and for the first quarter of 2020, but we are unable to confirm that the estimates fully meet the required quality standards demanded of National Statistics.

This is partly because the volume of data is greatly reduced for March. Also, we cannot be certain that the data obtained for March are representative: that the characteristics of passengers interviewed in the first half of the month represent those travelling in the second half of the month. Traveller numbers were decreasing at this time but had not yet fallen to the extremely low numbers seen from April onwards.

We have investigated the impact that the lack of data for the last two weeks of March will have on the Q1 2020 and March 2020 estimates. The data is weighted to the total traffic numbers provided at a monthly and quarterly level by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and the Department for Transport (DfT). Therefore, we are weighting an incomplete dataset to the complete traffic figures which are not suitable for weighting at a weekly level. Travel started to be significantly affected towards the end of March as COVID-19 restrictions started to come into force. Hence, our investigation suggests that the IPS estimates for March and Q1 2020 have a degree of uncertainty that makes it preferable to suspend National Statistics status for this period. We have nonetheless made every effort to ensure that the estimates are of the highest possible quality in the circumstances.

Given the constraints on data collection experienced by the IPS, I am requesting temporary de-designation of travel and tourism statistics based on the survey on the basis set out by the published [COVID-19 guidance on the suspension of National Statistics status](#).

Subject to your agreement, we propose to remove National Statistics labelling for March and Quarter 1 of 2020 outputs in the first instance. The survey's output is suspended for the period from April 2020 until interviewing resumes. It may be advisable to continue the suspension of National Statistics status for a further limited period after interviewing resumes, depending on our assessment of the quality of data obtained.

Yours sincerely,



Peter Benton
Director of Population and Public Policy Operations, Office for National Statistics