

Regulatory Guidance

Guidance on Statistical Practice for Statistics Producers during the Coronavirus Crisis

March 2020

Office for Statistics Regulation

We provide independent regulation of all official statistics produced in the UK. Statistics are an essential public asset. We aim to enhance public confidence in the trustworthiness, quality and value of statistics produced by government.

We do this by setting the standards they must meet in the *Code of Practice for Statistics*. We ensure that producers of government statistics uphold these standards by conducting assessments against the *Code*. Those which meet the standards are given National Statistics status, indicating that they meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and value. We also report publicly on system-wide issues and on the way statistics are being used, celebrating when the standards are upheld and challenging publicly when they are not.

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Changes to data collection, statistics production and release

You are very likely considering the implications of the current crisis on data collection and the safety and needs of your teams, suppliers, respondents, and other partners. It is also very important to consider the impact on the quality of the data and the statistics and the implications for their use.

Uppermost in making any choice will be the safety of anyone involved in collecting data – both those giving their information and those collecting it.

Once you have determined suitable means for data collection, do factor in the nature of the impact on use. The public interest served by the statistics is vital in making a choice on the right course of action – consider what are the priorities for information now: who needs what information, when and how often?

Think also about the scale and nature of the impact of any changes to your methods and processes.

Whatever your selected approach, it is important to be open and transparent in your decision making. Let your stakeholders and users know about your decisions and the reasons for them. Let them know when they can expect the statistics and keep them informed of further developments.

The Code supports you in making changes to pre-announced released dates where necessary – critically, it is about doing it in ways that support confidence in the official statistics. The independence of the statistics remains vital – it should be the statisticians and Head of Profession that lead the decision making.

In thinking about the quality of the data and statistics, you will need to consider aspects such as the impact of changes in coverage, and whether you are less confident in the accuracy of the numbers as a result. These issues would need explaining with the statistics when they are released.

Where you need to put out new numbers or change the composition of an existing release, think about the impact on the coherence of the statistics. While maintaining coherence could be a significant challenge, the key is to support users in understanding how your numbers fit together and how this feeds through to effective use.

Designation as National Statistics

OSR appreciates that there may be a need to produce new statistical outputs to meet the information needs of our current situation. We have developed an approach for rapid National Statistics designation for new statistical outputs that extend existing National Statistics. Please see this [guidance note](#) on the approach. Do contact OSR if you are interested in rapid NS designation.

For existing National Statistics, you may wish to consider suspending the designation if the quality reduction is of concern, or if there is a greater risk of misinforming use. This is something that Heads of Profession can discuss with OSR's head of compliance, Mark Pont, or your usual domain contact in OSR.

Our roles – where to go for advice

OSR's role as regulator is to ensure the Code of Practice is being applied appropriately. In turn, the Code requires statisticians and Heads of Profession to make professional judgements and to use its standards to guide these decisions. There are many factors you will have to weigh up in making your decisions about statistics production and release – statisticians should seek advice and guidance from their Chief Statistician/Head of Profession for Statistics.

You are always welcome to ask advice – the Best Practice and Impact Division is available for statistical advice (email: gsshhelp@statistics.gov.uk).

And feel free to contact the Office for Statistics Regulation for advice around Code compliance ([find your domain contact here](#)).

We appreciate the pressure that producers will be facing. OSR aims to be very supportive of changes producers make – we recognise the uniqueness of the circumstances.

Trustworthiness, Quality and Value remain the benchmarks to guide your decisions. The Code can help you – just think TQV!

