

# Guidance on the Standards for the Public Use of Statistics, Data and Wider Analysis

*For all those involved in the public communication of statistics, data and wider analysis*

The Standards for the Public Use of Statistics, Data and Wider Analysis are a core part of the Code of Practice for Statistics (the Code). They describe the three standards and required practices that all public bodies should adhere to when using and communicating statistics in the public domain. These Standards are based on the concept of [intelligent transparency](#) which is grounded in the core principles of the Code – Trustworthiness, Quality and Value.

This guidance sets out who is responsible for implementing these Standards, how the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) regulates against them, and provides practical advice for all those using statistics, data and wider analysis (including official statistics) in the public domain.

## What is the aim of the Standards for the Public Use of Statistics, Data and Wider Analysis?

Statistics, data and wider analysis are the lifeblood of democratic debate and so it is vital that they are used in a way that serves the public good. These Standards support that goal by ensuring that public bodies use statistics, data and wider analysis transparently, and with integrity, clarity and accuracy. This approach is fundamental in allowing individuals and organisations to reach informed decisions, answering important societal questions, and providing a mechanism for holding governments to account. As a result, public confidence in the numbers used by public bodies, and the decisions based on them, is built and strengthened.

These Standards apply to the public use of statistics, data and wider analysis beyond the publication of official statistics. When the term ‘public use’ is referred to in this guidance this includes any form of communication of statistics, data and wider analysis in the public domain including, but not limited to, press releases, blogs, social media posts, policy documents, speeches and interviews. References to ‘data and wider analysis’ includes management information, research and economic modelling.

It is important to note that ‘public use’ does not refer to the publication of official statistics, often referred to as statistical bulletins. The requirements for the production and publication of official statistics are set out in the [Standards for Official Statistics](#).

# What are the Standards for the Public Use of Statistics, Data and Wider Analysis?

## 1. Equality of access

Public bodies should make statistics, data and wider analysis used in the public domain available to everyone in a timely way  
*so that the public can easily access, scrutinise and verify claims and decisions made based on them*

## 2. Supporting understanding

Public bodies should use statistics, data and wider analysis with integrity and communicate them with clarity and accuracy  
*so that the public can easily understand the basis for claims and decisions made*

## 3. Decision making and leadership

Public bodies should seek and use impartial, expert advice when using statistics, data and wider analysis in the public domain  
*so that the public can have confidence that they have been used appropriately*

More information including required practices can be found in the **Standards for the Public Use of Statistics, Data and Wider Analysis**.

## Who are these Standards for?

Everyone has an important role to play in adhering to these Standards, not just analysts and statisticians. Public bodies need strong analytical leadership, within and beyond analytical professions, so these Standards are relevant to a wide range of professions and roles including communication professionals, policy professionals, analysts, Permanent Secretaries, Ministers and Special Advisers. The key roles and responsibilities are outlined later in this guidance.

## What is intelligent transparency and why is it important?

OSR [launched its intelligent transparency campaign](#) back in 2021 to address the increased use of statistics, data and wider analysis in the public domain during the COVID-19 pandemic. Following this, OSR published regulatory guidance to support the implementation of intelligent transparency by statistics producers in February 2022. Since this time, OSR has continued to develop its thinking on intelligent transparency and has undertaken a range of activities to embed it across Government.

[Intelligent transparency](#) means proactively taking an open, clear and accessible approach to the use of data, statistics and wider analysis in the public domain. Intelligent transparency should be the default approach so that public bodies build trust and confidence in how statistics, data and wider analysis are used and,

crucially, in the policies and wider decisions based on them. Intelligent transparency also enhances the reputation of public bodies, ensures that public conversations focus on the important issues, and minimises the risk of misinterpretation or misuse of statistics, data and wider analysis.

These Standards are built on the success of the intelligent transparency campaign and represent the strength of support for the principles of intelligent transparency.

## Questions to ask yourself

When using statistics, data and wider analysis in the public domain, ask yourself:

- ✓ **Is the source for the figure in the public domain?** If so, ensure you cite the source so others can easily find it. If not, engage promptly with analytical colleagues to agree the best way forward – there may be better, published data which should be used instead, or an ad hoc release may need to be published.
- ✓ **Are there limitations or caveats which impact how the figure should be used?** If so, ensure you communicate any key limitations and caveats clearly.
- ✓ **Is there context about the figure which impacts its interpretation?** If so, ensure you communicate the context clearly.
- ✓ **Could this figure be misinterpreted or misused if taken out of context?** If so, find ways you can reduce the risk of this happening in advance. For example, consider where and how key caveats are presented in your communication and whether it is necessary to ‘pre-bunk’ anticipated misuse or misinterpretations.
- ✓ **Would further support to ensure intelligent transparency is achieved be helpful?** If so, your analytical colleagues, including your Head of Profession for Statistics or Chief Statistician, should be your first port of call. They will be able to provide impartial, expert advice and guidance. You are also always welcome to [contact us](#) at OSR if you want a view on whether your plans meet our expectations.

## How do I implement these Standards?

### Seek impartial, expert analytical advice and input at the earliest stage

Seek impartial, expert advice at the earliest stage on the use of statistics, data and wider analysis from professional analysts, such as analysts from the relevant statistical or analytical teams and/or Chief Statisticians/Heads of Profession for Statistics/Directors of Analysis. Analytical colleagues will be able to provide expert advice and guidance, for example on the most reliable and high-quality source to use and how to clearly communicate key context or limitations to avoid misuse.

The **Standards for Official Statistics** state that producers must apply impartial, professional judgement to decide methods, standards and procedures, as well as the content, timing, frequency and mode of release, for regular and ad hoc official statistics with the approval of the Chief Statistician/Head of Profession for Statistics. The advice of analytical professions should also be central to decisions about the publication of other analytical outputs such as research, economic modelling and management information where relevant.

## Use the latest and most reliable published official statistics where possible

Where possible, public communications should draw on the latest and most reliable published official statistics. Access to official statistics must be limited before their public release in accordance with pre-release access legislation and must be published in line with the **Standards for Official Statistics**.

## Publish statistics, data and wider analysis in advance of their use in public communications and separately from related policy and ministerial statements

Statistics, data and wider analysis not already in the public domain should be published in advance of, or at the same time as, their use in public communications. They should be published with sufficient separation from any related policy and ministerial statements to provide confidence in their impartiality.

### *Publishing statistics, data and wider analysis*

All statistics, data and wider analysis should be released in a timely way to help the public understand the impacts of policy and hold governments to account.

The [Code Principles](#) should be applied whether the output is official statistics or other types of analysis. [Voluntary application \(VA\) of the Code](#) is available for any producer of data, statistics and wider analysis which are not official statistics, whether inside government or beyond, to help them produce analytical outputs that are high quality, useful for supporting decisions, and well respected.

As far as possible, data should be published in a structured form and accessible to a wide range of users. For example, following [best practice for releasing statistics in spreadsheets](#) and [guidance on writing about data](#).

### *Publishing ad hoc releases*

As well as routinely introducing new data into existing official statistics publications, public bodies should consider ways to be proactive and responsive in providing data to inform public debate such as making use of one-off and ad hoc releases.

Ad hoc releases are an effective way of supporting governments' announcements in fastmoving situations where new official statistics, management information, research or analysis help explain or support the announcement. Such releases do not need to be long or technical – they are a way of making the underlying analysis available in line with the principles set out above. The underlying analysis should be detailed enough to support any claims that have been made, there is not a requirement to publish raw data unless judged necessary. As these releases would simply be clarifying figures that have been or are due to be used in announcements, they should not require grid slots.

Examples of ad hoc releases which meet these criteria include [statistics relating to the Illegal Migration Bill](#), the [Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme in Scotland](#), [returns from the UK between July and August 2024](#), and information published about Omicron infections during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department for Work and Pensions also has a page dedicated to [ad hoc statistical analyses](#).

### *Taking remedial action when unpublished statistics, data or wider analysis are used in public communications*

If unpublished statistics, data or wider analysis are referred to publicly, they should be published as soon as possible after any statement has been made, ideally on the same day as the analysis should already be available and a grid slot should not be required, or for more complex cases at most within 72 hours.

Care should be taken when using unpublished data or analysis such as management information for internal briefings, as there is a risk of an unpublished figure ending up in the public domain. To mitigate this risk, clear warnings and caveats should be provided alongside any unpublished figures.

## **Clearly and accurately communicate statistics, data and wider analysis to support understanding and prevent misinterpretation**

Numbers are subject to interpretation, and this will inform decisions made based on them. The use of statistics, data and wider analysis in public communications should clearly communicate any key context and limitations, such as the level of uncertainty, which impact how the figures can be interpreted and understood. You should be clear about where figures come from, for example, by citing sources in publications and on social media. You should also:

- Consider how the figures have been produced and collected and whether this impacts their interpretation (e.g. whether the data are sourced from administrative or survey data, and the geographies covered).
- Consider the definitions used for the figures and any impact on how they can be interpreted (e.g. are financial data in real or cash terms?).
- Understand whether there are any notable strengths and limitations, including levels of uncertainty, which might impact interpretation or use of the figures.
- Take care to avoid selective use of figures or use of figures without appropriate context as this can lead to misuse which damages public trust. In some instances, using only the most recent figure in a time series may be unhelpful, or even misleading, if it is not representative of the wider trends or other available evidence.
- Consider ways you can reduce the risk of misinterpretation or misuse in advance – for example, consider where and how caveats are presented in your communication and whether it is necessary to ‘pre-bunk’ anticipated misuse or misinterpretations. It is often helpful to stand in the shoes of a journalist and ask yourself which single sentence you would quote in a news story. Satisfy yourself that these key lines are not likely to mislead when taken out of context. The House of Commons Library has also published [excellent guidance on this topic](#).

OSR’s [Guidance for statements about public funding](#) provides further examples of things that should be considered in the specific context of public funding announcements.

## Consider data needs from the outset

It is important to think about what data will be needed to understand the impacts of policies, inform communication strategies and to enable the public to hold public bodies to account. Professional advice should be sought from analysts when developing and implementing new performance measures or making changes to existing measures.

When developing policies, management systems and communications strategies, you should:

- Determine the desired outcomes and specify what evidence will be used to monitor whether the outcomes are being achieved.
- Engage with a range of users, internal and external, to understand their data needs.
- Be open about plans to develop data and analysis and share progress against them.
- Review your understanding of data needs and the data collected at regular intervals.

## Roles and responsibilities

This section sets out the roles and responsibilities for those who play a pivotal role in ensuring that organisations adhere to these Standards. The section is not intended to be exhaustive; others will have a role to play beyond those listed below.

### Analysts

Analysts, including statisticians, social and operational researchers and economists, have a key role to play by working closely with colleagues from other professions to provide guidance on how statistics, data and wider analysis can and cannot be used; fact checking outputs such as press releases and briefings which use analysis; and proactively monitoring how their statistics, data and analysis are used in the public domain, escalating issues where required.

### Heads of Professions for Statistics, Chief Statisticians and Lead Officials

These individuals have a responsibility to ensure that processes and support are in place to implement the Standards. Where issues arise, these individuals are accountable for coordinating remedial actions, such as publishing ad hoc releases and implementing process improvements.

### Directors of Analysis and Communication and Permanent Secretaries

As senior leaders, these individuals play an important role in setting the expectation of these Standards being used as the default approach for communicating statistics, data and wider analysis in the public domain. Senior leaders should ensure that processes are in place across the organisation and encourage a transparent culture.

### Communication professionals

Communication professionals play a unique role in translating numbers to stories and have considerable influence over how statistics, data and wider analysis are communicated in the public domain. As such, communication professionals play a vital role in ensuring adherence to the Standards. This could be by ensuring that statisticians or analysts are included in the sign off process for communications, citing sources in written communications and ensuring that key information on context and limitations is provided, for example through notes for editors.

### Policy professionals

Policy professionals are one of the most important users of statistics, data and wider analysis across government, making decisions about how the government will operate. When communicating policy decisions, proposals or evaluations to the public, for example in impact assessments or white papers, policy professionals should ensure that they use the most up-to-date official statistics where possible and that they do not include internal analysis unless this is released in advance of, or at the same time as, the policy document.



## Special Advisers and Ministerial Private Offices

These individuals play a unique role in briefing Ministers for their public communications, often acting as a bridge between Ministers and the rest of the department. This means that they play a vital role in ensuring that what the Minister communicates publicly is based on the most recent published statistics and in a way that supports understanding.

## Ministers

Ministers should adhere to these Standards in all their public communications and set the expectation that the Standards are followed within their departments. Ministers should respect statistical independence and not interfere with the orderly release of statistics, data and wider analysis by communicating them in the public domain before they have been published. Ministers should be aware that the Ministerial Codes for the UK Government, Welsh Government and Scottish Government require that Ministers must be mindful of the Code of Practice for Statistics. Ministerial Guidance for Northern Ireland also requires Ministers to follow good practice in relation to the Code of Practice for Statistics.

## How does OSR regulate against these Standards?

The primary way that OSR regulates against these Standards is through [casework](#), which is the process by which OSR investigates concerns about the use of statistics. OSR's [interventions policy](#) outlines when OSR will publicly intervene on the use of statistics, data and wider analysis. OSR publishes an annual review of casework which provides details of the volume and types of cases looked at and explores common themes and issues.

OSR will support public bodies to embed these Standards, highlighting areas of good practice and considerations for improvements. If you would like support with embedding these Standards within your organisation, you can contact us at [regulation@statistics.gov.uk](mailto:regulation@statistics.gov.uk).

These Standards will not form a core part of assessments and compliance reviews of official statistics. However, regulators may review how the official statistics in question are used in the public domain in line with these Standards to determine how an official statistics producer body supports general adherence to the Code. Accreditation decisions (awarding, removing, or retaining) will not be based solely on adherence to these Standards.

## Where else can I find guidance on these Standards and intelligent transparency?

OSR offers specific guidance on the following topics:



- Publishing, pre-announcing and labelling official statistics including ad hoc releases: OSR's [regulatory guidance on publishing official and National statistics](#) and [guidance on understanding the difference between Official Statistics and published Management Information](#).
- Publishing official statistics and management information: [National Statistician's guidance on management information and official statistics](#)
- Evaluation: OSR's explainer on [how the Code can help support evaluation](#) highlights that users and the intended use should be at the centre of the evaluation. Published data and analysis should be made equally available to all, being open about the nature of the evaluation and how it serves the public good.
- Models: OSR's [Guidance for Models](#) provides information on how the principles in the Code can support good practice and transparency in designing, developing and using models.
- Leadership: OSR published its review of [Statistical Leadership: Making Analytical Insight Count](#) in February 2021, which looked at how statistical leadership can be strengthened across governments. Statistical leadership can help ensure the right data and analysis exist, that they are used at the right time to inform decisions, and that they are communicated clearly and transparently in a way that supports confidence in the data and decisions made on the basis of them.
- Social Research: The [Government Social Research: Publication Protocol](#) details five principles that should be adhered to in the publication and release of all government social research products. These five principles are consistent with the Standards for the Public Use of Statistics, Data and Wider Analysis. The Publication Protocol clearly sets out how social research conducted by or for government should be released; who should be responsible for the release; the timing of the release and the independence of the research. It states that *"There should be no public comment on unpublished findings; where this occurs an immediate release of the findings would be required to ensure equality of access. This doesn't necessarily mean all of the research but should be sufficient to provide understanding."*