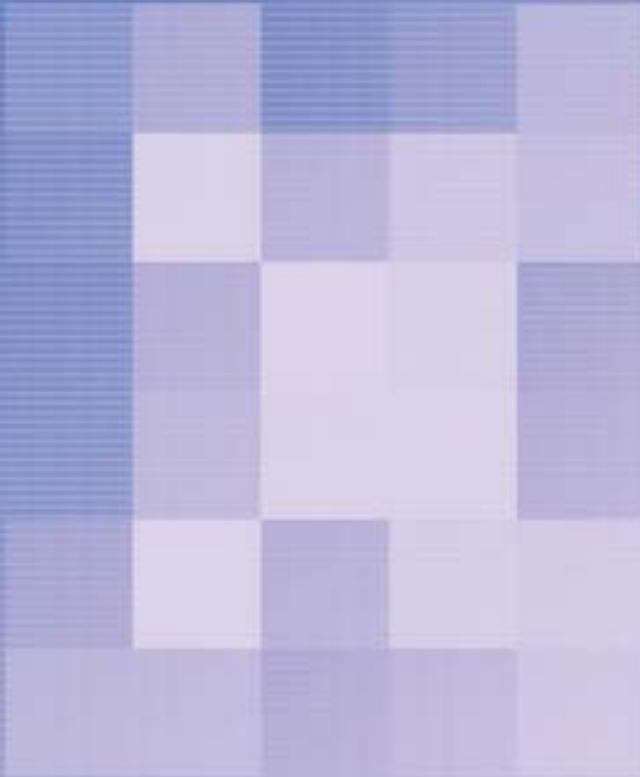


National Statistics Code of Practice

Protocol on Revisions



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Summary of Principles – Revisions

Code of Practice – Statement of Principle

Substantial methodological changes will be announced before the release of statistics based on the new methods.

Additional principles embodied in this Protocol

Each organisation responsible for producing National Statistics will publish and maintain a general statement describing its practice on revisions.

Key outputs, or groups of key outputs, which are subject to scheduled revisions will have a published policy covering those revisions.

A statement explaining the effect of revisions will accompany the release of all key outputs subject to scheduled revisions.

Revisions will be released in compliance with the same principles as other new information.

Timeliness of release will be balanced with the need to avoid frequent revisions.

Producers of National Statistics will minimise the possibility of unexpected revisions but, if they occur, they will be released as soon as practicable and in an open and transparent manner.

Substantial revisions will be accompanied by an explanation of their nature and extent.

The long-term effects of revisions on key outputs will be monitored with a view to improving the quality of those outputs.

Introduction

For background information on this document please see *An Introduction to the National Statistics Code of Practice and its supporting Protocols*.

Scope

This protocol sets out how all those involved in the production of National Statistics will carry out their responsibilities for handling all revisions to National Statistics outputs, whether scheduled or not.

Purpose

Statistics are by their nature subject to error and uncertainty. Initial estimates are often systematically amended to reflect more complete information. Improvements in methodologies and systems can help to make revised series more accurate and more useful.

Revisions need to be as accurate, robust and freely available as new statistics, and they should be accompanied by the same supporting and explanatory information. For any set of statistics, the risks and causes of revisions should be clear. Users should know when they are due and be aware of them as they arise. Users need to be confident that revisions applied across National Statistics meet known and agreed principles for handling revisions, and that these principles are applied in a consistent way.

Definitions

A **revision** is a change to any National Statistic once it has been placed in the public domain, whether through a printed document or electronically. Statistics made available under **embargo** will be deemed to have been placed in the public domain. Statistics distributed under early access arrangements, including a **lock-up** will be treated as unreleased for the purposes of revisions.

'Scheduled' revisions will be managed systematically, pre-announced and reflected in dissemination plans. They can occur for the following reasons:

- i. where they form a normal part of the release process for a given series. This is common in highly aggregate series which are often first released in a less than complete state in order to meet the needs of users for timely information. Results based on more complete responses and analyses are then released at a later date;
- ii. as a result of seasonal adjustment, benchmarking or rebasing exercises. Examples include regular monthly updates to take account of seasonal re-analysis; rebasing of an index to take account of new information, such as updated population estimates; an annual survey replacing the results of quarterly or monthly surveys;
- iii. changes – for example – to the underlying methodology, or to sources or classifications, or changes to administrative, health or local authority boundaries.

'Unexpected' revisions are those which do not fit into the managed pattern of revisions normally associated with the statistics in question. They can occur, for instance, at an unusual point in the revision cycle, or have an impact on the statistics which was not anticipated. They can be caused, for example, by errors, by unforeseen changes in methodology, by the unexpected acquisition of new data, or by the effects of changes that may be made, for both statistical and non-statistical reasons, to any administrative or management systems that

contribute data to National Statistics. It will generally be possible to handle changes to administrative or management systems in a similar or even identical way to methodological changes.

The principles governing the treatment of 'scheduled' revisions should also apply in situations where there is no formal schedule, but where a potential requirement for a revision can be anticipated at an early stage.

'Substantial' revisions, whether 'scheduled' or not, are those which lie outside the range of revisions normally associated with the statistics in question and which tend, therefore, to have a more significant impact.

A guide to putting the principles into practice

1. **Each organisation responsible for producing National Statistics will publish and maintain a general statement describing its practice on revisions.**
 - i. This Statement will form part of each organisation's overall Statement on Compliance, will describe its overall approach to revisions, and will list which of its outputs are subject to scheduled revisions. It will be available on the web.
 - ii. The Statement will also list any key outputs which are deliberately not revised, and the reason why.
2. **Key outputs, or groups of key outputs, which are subject to scheduled revisions will have a published policy covering those revisions.**
 - a) Each specific revisions policy should reflect the ways in which the key output is used and the resources available for its production. The revisions policy – and any material changes – should be subjected to consultation with users, agreed with the National Statistician or the appropriate Head of Profession or Chief Statistician in a devolved administration, documented and published.
 - b) Any revisions policy should be stable over time and consistent across related outputs.
 - c) Revisions policy and practice should be considered for inclusion in any review or quality assurance process undertaken for the particular output affected.

d) The statement of revisions policy should cover, as appropriate:

Dissemination – how and when users will be made aware of any revisions and how and where revisions will normally be published, in whatever media.

Timing – i.e. when revisions are to be expected (and how far back) during the normal publication cycle.

Historic and comparative data – an indication of how much back data will normally be given and whether parallel tables will be provided.

3. A statement explaining the effect of revisions will accompany the release of all key outputs subject to scheduled revisions.

- a) Information on revisions practice will form part of the notes associated with the release of any key output and will be made available via the National Statistics website or Departmental website. Content should normally include:
- i. A link to the revisions policy covering that output;
 - ii. A note that identifies revisions (if any) to already published data and, if appropriate, explains the significance;
 - iii. An indication of the status of figures, that is whether or not they are subject to revision.
- b) The relevant statistical Press Notice or publication should include a prominent signpost to any major revisions likely to lead to a different interpretation of recent economic or social developments and, where appropriate, include a weblink or reference which provides the detail of those revisions.

4. **Revisions will be released in compliance with the same principles as other new information.**
 - a) The standards and rules on publication set out in other parts of the *National Statistics Code of Practice*, particularly those set out in the *Protocol on Release Practices*, will also apply to revisions except where this is impractical, for example in the case of pre-announcement.
 - b) Privileged early access, as specified in the *Protocol on Release Practices*, and consultation, as specified in the *Protocol on Consultation Arrangements between the National Statistician and UK Government Ministers*, will apply as practicable.
 - c) Where a revision – whether scheduled or not – is likely to affect significantly financial markets or public policy, the National Statistician, and appropriate Head of Profession or Chief Statistician in a devolved administration, must be notified, as far as possible in time to formulate a response prior to any initial announcement, and to take a lead as appropriate in any public explanations. For market sensitive statistics the process of release of revisions must not itself create uncertainty.

Substantial revisions

- d) Decisions on the content, format, and timing of releases which incorporate substantial revisions will be made on the authority of the National Statistician, or the appropriate Head of Profession or Chief Statistician in a devolved administration.

Unexpected revisions

- e) Subject to Section 5, publication of unexpected revisions will be as soon as possible, with a pre-announcement at 9.30 am on a normal business day and the release following within two hours. The National Statistician, Head of Profession, or Chief Statistician in a devolved administration can vary this guideline if they consider that it would be inconsistent with market stability.

5. Timeliness of release will be balanced with the need to avoid frequent revisions.

Revisions which are frequent and uneven will undermine user confidence. In general, revisions, whether scheduled or not, should only be incorporated in the data and published when they can make a significant contribution to good decision-making, or are consequent upon, for example, published changes to sub-aggregate components, or changes in the availability of data.

6. Substantial methodological changes will be announced before the release of statistics based on the new methods.

- a) Where any substantial methodological change is planned, or where a methodological change has a substantial effect on the publication of data, an indication should be given in advance of the likely effects. In the case of key outputs, this would normally include an information paper available on the National Statistics or Departmental website describing the changes, and giving an explanation of the background, reasons for the chosen approach, likely risks and expected impact. Where appropriate, there should also be explanatory articles in appropriate publications, such as *Economic Trends*, along with special seminars for media and other key users.

- b) Pre-publication material should not reveal unpublished data. However, in some circumstances, for non-market sensitive statistics, an experimental dataset or series may be made available, developed on the basis of the new methodology but using published data from past periods. This should be clearly labelled and documented to avoid the risk of the developmental work causing damaging speculation about the underlying value of the published estimates (For more details on ‘Experimental Statistics’ see the *Protocol on Data Presentation, Dissemination and Pricing*).
 - c) Where an advance announcement is judged not to be practicable, an explanation should be given when figures incorporating the methodological change are first released.
7. **Producers of National Statistics will minimise the possibility of unexpected revisions but, if they occur, they will be released as soon as practicable and in an open and transparent manner.**
- a) Revisions outside the normal pattern will usually only be made where a change results from an error, or from an administrative change that has a substantial statistical impact.
 - b) Administrative and management changes will normally be dealt with in the same way as methodological changes in terms of public notification and information on the likely impact on National Statistics.
 - c) Where errors occur, those involved will be expected to judge an appropriate response – which should reflect the scale and impact of the revision (see Section 5). The response should be open and transparent and any ensuing action should be timely and primarily focused on the affected user group(s).

- d) Organisations responsible for the regular dissemination of key National Statistics outputs will maintain and work to a published policy on dealing with errors. This will cover public notification and explanations, the authority necessary to change or withdraw information or to deviate from the published revisions policy, and procedures for dealing with minor, obvious and literal errors.
- 8. Substantial revisions will be accompanied by an explanation of their nature and extent.**
- a) Any substantial revision, whether scheduled or not, will be accompanied by documentation to explain its nature – for example, whether it derives from an accumulation of more complete data, or a change in process or methodology – and to what extent the output has changed. Where appropriate, the explanation should state why the change is needed, an analysis of the difference between the original and revised series and the effect on any previously published commentary or interpretation.

Back data

- b) The value of a series being consistent over time should be recognised and any revision should include consistent back data where practicable. Inclusion will depend on the availability of consistent data as well as resources, the reasons for the change and the value of providing the back data.
- 9. The long-term effects of revisions on key outputs will be monitored with a view to improving the quality of those outputs.**
- a) Records should be kept, in electronic format where possible, showing the different historical versions of published statistics, and should be made available to users on request.

- b) Regular revisions to key outputs should also be analysed periodically to check for systematic bias. If such biases are found, their causes should be investigated and users should be informed.
- c) Substantial revisions and revision biases should be used as diagnostic tools to monitor and improve quality. To make such analyses possible, data custodians will need to maintain adequate records of published data and the reasons for historical revisions.

Protocol on Revisions