



HM Treasury National Statistics: arrangements for protecting the confidentiality of information used for statistical purposes

HM Treasury's National Statistics are governed by the Code of Practice for Official Statistics¹, as determined and assessed² by the UK Statistics Authority³. One of the main principles of the Code is that "Private information about individual persons (including bodies corporate) compiled in the production of official statistics is confidential, and should be used for statistical purposes only."

Definition

Data are defined as containing confidential information when the information:

- relates to an identifiable entity (including members of the public or corporate organisations); and
- is not in the public domain; and
- if disclosed would cause them damage, harm or distress.

Policy

All HM Treasury staff are required to complete *Protecting Information Level 1*, a short training package that has been developed by Cabinet Office and the National School of Government, which outlines the standard rules and procedures that all staff must follow for handling of sensitive data.

Within the Treasury a number of statisticians produce analyses and compile statistical releases using administrative or statistical data, where some of the data contain confidential information relating to individuals or organisations. All access and use of these confidential data for statistical purposes is in line with the principles and practices laid out in the Code of Practice. In particular:

- all confidential data for statistics are stored on separate areas of the internal network and access is strictly restricted to a limited number of statistical staff who need it for statistical purposes and who undergo the training and sign the declaration described below;
- all statistical staff involved in the production of statistical analyses and official statistics from datasets that include any confidential data are required to undergo training on the confidentiality aspects of the Code of Practice, and to sign a declaration that they will uphold the principles and practices of the Code in relation to confidentiality. This declaration is available on the Treasury website:
- all statistical staff ensure that no confidential information is disclosed in any release of official statistics or underlying data, or in response to any request for further information.

¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/code-of-practice-for-official-statistics.pdf>

² The Treasury's National Statistics outputs are due to be assessed by the UK Statistics Authority in Summer 2011, to ensure that we comply with the requirements of the Code of Practice.

³ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/about-the-authority/index.html>

Where requests for information are dealt with under the provisions of the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Acts, then Sections 41 and 43 of the Freedom of Information Act protect information provided in confidence or where release would prejudice commercial interests. The Data Protection Act also protects personal data.

Philippa Todd
Head of Profession for Statistics, HM Treasury