



HM Treasury National Statistics: policy, principles, procedures and guidelines on quality

HM Treasury National Statistics are governed by the Code of Practice for Official Statistics¹, as determined and assessed² by the UK Statistics Authority³. The Code is intended to ensure that the range of National Statistics meets the needs of users; and that the statistics are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards, and explained well.

One of the main principles of the Code of Practice is that 'Statistical methods should be consistent with scientific principles and internationally recognised best practices, and be fully documented. Quality should be monitored and assured taking account of internationally agreed practices'.

Each HM Treasury National Statistics release includes specific information about the quality of the statistics contained in the release. However the general policy, principles, procedures and guidelines for managing quality in all these releases are set out in this statement, in accordance with the requirements set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

We aim to ensure that all our statistics are produced to a high level of quality that meets users' needs, and that our methods are robust, well documented, and consistent with relevant international standards and classifications.

We intend to be open and transparent about the quality of all the statistics we publish and to ensure that users of our statistics have easy access to comprehensive information about all quality-related aspects of our statistical releases.

Definitions

Statistical quality of the Treasury's statistical *outputs* is defined as meeting users' needs in relation to the relevant international standard as follows:

- Relevance,
- Accuracy,
- Timeliness and punctuality,
- Accessibility and clarity,
- Comparability, and
- Coherence.

In addition we also consider the quality of the underlying *processes* in the context of their:

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>

- efficiency and effectiveness,
- robustness, and flexibility,
- transparency; and
- integration.

General policy on quality

HM Treasury endeavours to produce statistical outputs of the highest possible quality, balanced against costs, consistent with our duties on efficient use of public resources, and taking into account the expected uses of the statistics. We maintain a dual focus on quality, considering this both in respect to our outputs (statistical releases) and also in relation to the underlying processes and methodologies that we use in producing our outputs.

New information will be communicated as it emerges on aspects of quality for our National Statistics releases. Relevant information will be disseminated in the releases themselves and on our website. All our releases will include information on quality related aspects of the statistics.

We review quality aspects of our outputs and our underlying data collection and processes on a regular basis. In particular we review:

- the results and effectiveness of the quality assurance processes for data collected onto the Treasury's central database, which records the spending of all central government departments, including the devolved administrations, and the wider non departmental government bodies which are funded by departments;
- the transparency and accuracy of the processes that are applied to compile the published statistics from the source data;
- particular issues concerning data that arise when data are processed in the run up to releases;
- our methodologies and classification systems, to ensure that we keep these up to date with the latest developments, both in terms of the classification of particular items of data, and in terms of developments in external frameworks, such as international classifications;
- our documentation and guidance, for instance to ensure that departments have clear and detailed guidance on how individual items of expenditure should be classified and recorded.

The Treasury's Head of Profession maintains sole responsibility for the content and format of all statistical outputs that are published as National Statistics.

Specific aspects of output quality in HM Treasury

Relevance

We aim to review our outputs regularly to ensure that they remain relevant to users' requirements. We intend to inform and consult users on our future plans to develop our statistics, and to ensure that these plans meet users' requirements, as far as our priorities and resources and data sources allow. We welcome all feedback from users on their detailed requirements, and the extent to which these are met by our existing releases and analyses, and our additional releases of underlying data. Our policy on user engagement is set out on the Treasury's website at: [Insert link to Attachment B].

Accuracy

The Treasury's National Statistical releases are all derived from government and wider public sector financial accounting data held on administrative data systems. Many of the administrative data are collected for reporting to Parliament, for instance for Parliament to approve spending plans, or they are collected for departments' financial management and control of public spending or tax. Some sources are taken directly from banking or accounting sources.

Where data are taken directly from audited financial data or final accounts, then the only concerns over accuracy are the read-across or mappings from the classifications of the source data system into the classifications of the Treasury's spending database, and the National Accounts.

The Treasury uses the following processes to ensure that data are correctly recorded and classified on the Treasury's spending database:

- we issue and maintain a comprehensive and consolidated set of guidance notes for finance teams in departments to refer to when inputting data from their finance systems. We also provide training to departments on how to record and code their data inputs;
- we work closely with departments to understand the processes involved in extracting data from their underlying financial systems;
- we conduct regular quality assurance checks to check that data inputs are complete and correctly coded;
- we require Finance Directors in departments to sign off and positively confirm that key aggregate inputs are accurate and have been suitably validated within the department;
- when provisional outturn data are replaced with final audited data, then we require departments to ensure the accuracy of their final inputs against their accounts.

When analyses are prepared for publication, then we use further quality assurance procedures, including:

- analyses of revisions (changes since the previous release) to ensure that the changes in the outputs can be accounted for in terms of known changes in inputs;
- cross-checks for consistency, both internally, and with external published sources wherever possible;
- we also ask key contributors and stakeholders to check relevant sections of final analyses, which provides both additional accountability and quality assurance.

Timeliness and punctuality

HM Treasury releases are released on a monthly or quarterly basis, with release dates scheduled as soon as latest data are ready for release.

All releases are released on the scheduled release data at 9.30am in order to maintain equality, transparency, and consistency of access.

Release dates are announced up to one year ahead, both on the Treasury's [own website](#) and on the [National Statistics hub](#).

Accessibility and clarity

We aim to make our releases as clear and as widely available and accessible as possible. This includes providing access to much of the underlying data, subject to the constraints of confidentiality. Further details of how we aim to do this are set out in our statement of user engagement at: [Insert link to attachment A]

All of our releases and data can be accessed from [our website](#)

Comparability

Comparability is the extent to which data can be compared over time and sphere.

We aim to use relevant international frameworks for concepts and definitions wherever possible, and to ensure that technical and methodological information is published in advance or alongside our releases. We try to minimise revisions as much as possible, and to ensure that any revisions to previously published data are taken as far back in time as possible. Revision policies are published with each release. Our revisions policy is available out on the HM Treasury statistics website at.

Coherence

Coherence is defined as the degree to which data derived from different sources or methods but which refer to the same concept are similar.

All HM Treasury statistics are internally coherent, consistent and reconcilable over a reasonable period of time, subject to caveats explained in each release. Statistics are compiled on the basis of common international standards with respect to scope, definitions, units and classifications.

We also aim as far as possible to be coherent with other departments' National Statistics in order to enable comparability and re-use of our data.

Protection of confidential data

We follow the procedures set out by Cabinet Office on protection of data within government, and we comply with all the principles and procedures related to confidentiality in the Code of Practice. In particular:

- all access to confidential data for statistical purposes is strictly limited to a narrow group of statistical staff who need to use it for statistical purposes;
- all staff with access to confidential data for statistical purposes are required to undergo training on the confidentiality aspects of the Code of Practice;
- all individuals with access to confidential data for statistical purposes sign a declaration that they will uphold the principles and practices of the Code in relation confidentiality.

Further details on our policies on protection of confidential data used for statistics are set out in our data confidentiality statement available on the HM Treasury statistics website.

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