

NATIONAL STATISTICS CODE OF PRACTICE

PROTOCOL ON RELEASE PRACTICES - COMPLIANCE STATEMENT (Revised December 2006)

Background

1. The Release Practices Protocol requires every organisation that releases National Statistics to publish and maintain a statement describing how it applies the standards set out in the Protocol to each of its releases.
2. This statement sets out the position for the Department for Education and Skills.

Application of protocol to National Statistics produced by the Department for Education and Skills

3. Most of the Department's statistical outputs are National Statistics, with the main exceptions being research reports and the school and college achievement and attainment tables. The scope of National Statistics is reviewed by the Secretary of State based on advice of the Head of Profession for Statistics in DfES (hereafter referred to as 'Head of Profession').
4. Unless otherwise indicated below, the Release Practice Protocol will apply in full to National Statistics releases.

Accessibility: number and types of releases

5. The Department publishes its statistical outputs classed as National Statistics in three formats: statistical first releases, bulletins and volumes. In the period October 2006 to September 2007 the Department expects to produce over 40 statistical first releases, 2 statistical bulletins and 4 volumes. Most of these are annual publications. None of the Department's statistical outputs are regarded as market sensitive.
6. Most statistical outputs classed as National Statistics are released in a choice of electronic formats as well as hard copy. Statistical first releases are always available in both formats and readers are encouraged to access the releases

via the Department's website¹. The majority of statistical bulletins and volumes are "Internet" only releases. However, The Stationery Office (TSO) publishes a few priced statistical bulletins and volumes on behalf of the Department. All are freely available on the Department's website for download.

7. The Department aims to release Internet and hard copy versions at the same time. Priority is given to the internet versions.
8. A small number of National Statistics publications are produced in conjunction with other agencies (e.g. the Learning and Skills Council, the Student Loans Company, and the Higher Education Statistical Agency). Each of these organisations maintains their own compliance statements.

Pre-announcement

9. In determining the actual dates of publication, the statisticians responsible for each publication make recommendations to the Head of Profession based on the key principles in the Code of Practice and Protocol on Release Practices. The Head of Profession then discusses the dates with the Director of Communications to check on any coincidence with other departmental announcements which might affect transparency and exposure; and with Ministers' diary managers to check on the availability of Ministers to answer questions. At this point the Head of Profession also decides whether to consult the National Statistician on any of the proposed dates. Using the information available to him, the Head of Profession alone makes the final decisions on the dates.
10. Release dates for the Department's statistical outputs classed as National Statistics are pre-announced in the ONS Press Release Calendar² and on the Department's website³.
11. At the end of March and September each year the Department publishes a statistical first release that provides a schedule of statistical publications classed as National Statistics for the following 12 months. The publications in the first six months of the schedule are deemed to be firm commitments; those in the second six-month period are deemed to be provisional. The schedule provides the month of intended publication (and from April 2007 the day in the month for certain publications), and expected title of the publication. This is supplemented at the end of each month by the release of the actual dates (day and month) for those publications being issued in the following month. This procedure can occasionally give rise to a situation where a publication date is within two weeks of being pre-announced; this is

¹ www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/index.shtml

² www.statistics.gov.uk/ReleaseCalendar/currentreleases.asp

³ www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/index.shtml

avoided wherever possible.

12. Where it proves necessary to change the pre-announced date of any publication (i.e. the day/month in the fixed part of the year ahead schedule or the actual dates for the calendar month ahead), an explanation is included in the ONS Press Release Calendar⁴ and on the Department's website⁵. Any explanation is provided as far in advance of the expected date of publication as possible.

Timing of Releases

13. Statistical publications classed as National Statistics are issued at 09:30 hrs on the pre-announced date. Priority is given to release via the Department's website.

Format of releases

14. The Head of Profession maintains responsibility for the content and format of all statistical outputs classed as National Statistics (in consultation with the National Statistician as necessary).
15. The intended content and format of all statistical outputs is discussed with key users in advance of the availability of the information to be published. Commentary in statistical first releases tends to be limited and reflect the salient points arising from the key data being presented, together with any relevant background to the figures, guidance on interpretation, and appropriate technical and editorial notes. For statistical bulletins, the analysis is more comprehensive with more detailed commentary; the analysis often brings in information from other sources to provide a more rounded picture. Statistical volumes provide a set of more detailed statistical tables with relevant technical notes for reference.
16. Departmental Press Releases are released at the discretion of Ministers either at the same time or shortly after statistical releases (usually statistical first releases, much less so bulletins and volumes) so that Ministers can give their reaction to the latest figures.
17. Typically, DFES statistical publications will retain a core of standard tabulations/analyses from one issue to another. However, the content may vary to reflect the changing needs of users and public interest; to allow proper presentation and analysis of any new or particularly interesting results; and to reflect policy and other administrative changes. Any significant changes will

⁴ www.statistics.gov.uk/ReleaseCalendar/currentreleases.asp

⁵ www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/index.shtml

be announced in advance, as far as possible.

18. For Statistical First Releases relating to school statistics, where data revisions mean that National figures change significantly and a final release is not planned, revised National figures will be published via additional tables to the original release. These additions will be pre-announced on the Research and Statistics Gateway.

Pre-release access to statistics

19. The Department will maintain a record, available for public scrutiny, of all those who have pre-release access and the purpose of that access for all statistical outputs (including associated databases) classed as National Statistics. This includes those with access for management, briefing, and/or quality assurance purposes.
20. Each person given pre-release access is reminded of the embargoed conditions upon which they are being supplied with the data and that any accidental or wrongful release has to be reported to the National Statistician and may lead to an inquiry. These conditions, based on those in the Release Practices Protocol, are given at Annex A, B, C and D to this compliance statement.
21. Officials needing access in order to quality assure the information presented in the publication will be given that access when the quality assurance needs to take place. (Annex A)
22. Ministers and key officials are given access to “work in progress/emerging findings” normally some 2 to 4 weeks before publication. This applies to statistical first releases and bulletins, but not volumes. (Annex B)
23. Where published statistics are based on data generated by administrative systems, the emerging data from those systems may be used in advance of the publication for operational and management information purposes. In cases where data are available shortly before publication, possibly because the publication date has been set to ensure orderly release of the data, the Head of Profession may allow the use of the data for operational or management information purposes. A list of those granted access under these circumstances will be made available. (Annex C)
24. Ministers and key officials are given pre-release access to statistical first releases and bulletins a short period before publication. This period will be 72 hours (three normal working days). (Annex D)
25. Lists of those allowed to have;

- (a) access to “work in progress/emerging findings“;
- (b) access for operational and management purposes; and
- (c) pre-release access for Ministerial briefing,

can be accessed by clicking on the entry for each individual publication on the Department’s website⁶. Changes to the lists will be recorded similarly.

Availability of detailed results

26. The Department’s statistical publications classed as National Statistics cover a very wide range of information. To encourage fullest use of source data, there are a variety of arrangements in place for making additional and more detailed results available on request, subject to restrictions of confidentiality and data quality. These are described in the relevant outputs.

27. The Department makes use of additional tables attached to Statistical First Releases to enable the orderly and timely release of data. These are usually planned prior to publication and a timetable given for them within the Statistical First Release. They enable the Department to release the headline figures quickly and follow these up with more detailed information, most commonly tables with more variables or a finer split of existing variables. Each of these tables is subject to the same rigour of checking and standards as that applied to the main release.

28. In addition, the Department produces additional tables which have not been planned prior to publication. These are usually the result of interest in a particular area which has emerged after the main publication. Again, they are subject to the same rigour of checking and standards as that applied to the main release.

Details for individual releases

29. Details of arrangements for individual releases, including details of privileged pre-release access will be published on the Department’s website for each product. A hyperlink is on the electronic version of each output and is quoted in each hardcopy version.

Minimum standards to apply to official statistics not classified as national statistics

30. The Department also produces and publishes for management, policy and other purposes a range of statistics that are not classified as National

⁶ www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/index.shtml

Statistics. Examples include research reports and school and college achievement and attainment tables.

31. It is also inevitable that those who have access to management/administrative information within the Department and elsewhere may become aware of the likely results and key messages some time before these are finalised or published as National Statistics. Examples of this include the National Curriculum, GCSE and A level results.
32. The Department has practices in place for the management and release of such statistics that will not undermine confidence in National Statistics. As a minimum the Department will:
 - (a) provide publicly accessible information about all its statistics, including how and when information from each source is made available;
 - (b) put in place arrangements for controlling access prior to public release;
 - (c) put in place arrangements for release.

Updating procedure

33. The Department undertakes to ensure that these notes on release arrangements and complementary information on Departmental and National Statistics websites are regularly reviewed and updated as necessary. At a minimum they will be reviewed every six months as part of the process of releasing information about the statistical outputs classed as National Statistics for the next 12 months.

ANNEX A : DfES security statements/markings to cover early release for quality assurance.

The marking "RESTRICTED -STATISTICS" will appear as a watermark on all pages in any attachment with the statement below in the accompanying message:

"You have been given privileged access to these figures as part of an agreed quality assurance role. Please prevent inappropriate use by treating this information as restricted, refrain from passing on or discussing with others who have not been given privileged access; and use it only for the purposes for which it has been provided.

Release into the public domain or any public comment on these statistics prior to the official publication would undermine the integrity of these statistics. Any accidental or wrongful release should be reported immediately and may lead to an inquiry. Wrongful release includes indications of the content, including descriptions such as "favourable" or "unfavourable". If in doubt, the DfES Head of Profession for Statistics should be consulted."

ANNEX B : DfES security statements/markings to cover the release of “work in progress/emerging findings”.

The marking “RESTRICTED -STATISTICS” will appear as a watermark on all pages in any attachment with the statement below in the accompanying message:

“You are reminded that you have privileged access to the summary figures and commentary in this document. The underlying figures are still being carefully checked and quality assured, and as a consequence the messages may change, in advance of their publication as National Statistics. Therefore, they need to be treated securely and with caution. **Please prevent inappropriate use by treating this information as restricted, refrain from passing on or discussing with others who have not been given privileged access; and use it only for the purposes for which it has been provided.**

Release into the public domain or any public comment on this information prior to the official publication would undermine the integrity of these statistics. Any accidental or wrongful release should be reported immediately and may lead to an inquiry. Wrongful release includes indications of the content, including descriptions such as “favourable” or “unfavourable”. If in doubt, the DfES Head of Profession for Statistics should be consulted.

No extension to the list of those granted privileged access can be made without reference to the DfES Head of Profession for Statistics or the person responsible for this document. Privileged access is only granted on a strict need to know basis.”

ANNEX C : DfES security statements/markings to cover early release of figures for operational and management purposes prior to their release as National Statistics.

The marking “RESTRICTED -STATISTICS” will appear as a watermark on all pages in any attachment with the statement below in the accompanying message:

Header:

“You must not forward this email or discuss the contents with people it has not been sent to. It contains restricted statistics which are embargoed under national statistics rules – see details below”

Footer:

“You have been given privileged access to these figures generated by administrative systems, for operational and management purposes only. **Please prevent inappropriate use by treating this information as restricted, refrain from passing on or discussing with others who have not been given privileged access; and use it only for the purposes for which it has been provided.**

Release into the public domain or any public comment on these statistics prior to the official publication would undermine the integrity of these statistics. Any accidental or wrongful release should be reported immediately and may lead to an inquiry. Wrongful release includes indications of the content, including descriptions such as “favourable” or “unfavourable”. If in doubt, the DfES Head of Profession for Statistics should be consulted.”

ANNEX D : DfES security statements/markings to cover early access release (i.e. 72 hours, 3 working days, prior to publication as National Statistics) to Ministers and key officials for briefing purposes and preparation of any departmental statement.

The marking "RESTRICTED -STATISTICS" will appear as a watermark on all pages in any attachment with the statement below in the accompanying message:

Header:

"You must not forward this email or discuss the contents with people it has not been sent to. It contains restricted statistics which are embargoed under national statistics rules – see details below"

Footer:

"You are reminded that you have privileged access to an advance copy of this statistical publication. **Please prevent inappropriate use by treating this information as restricted, refrain from passing on or discussing with others who have not been given privileged access; and use it only for the purposes for which it has been provided.**

Release into the public domain or any public comment on these statistics prior to the official publication would undermine the integrity of these statistics. Any accidental or wrongful release should be reported immediately and may lead to an inquiry. Wrongful release includes indications of the content, including descriptions such as "favourable" or "unfavourable". If in doubt, the DfES Head of Profession for Statistics should be consulted.

No extension to the list of those granted privileged access can be made without reference to the DfES Head of Profession for Statistics or the person responsible for this document. Privileged access is only granted on a strict need to know basis."