



# HM Treasury

## HM Treasury National Statistics: user engagement

HM Treasury's National Statistics are governed by the Code of Practice for Official Statistics<sup>1</sup>, as determined and assessed<sup>2</sup> by the UK Statistics Authority<sup>3</sup>. The Code of Practice is intended to ensure that the range of official statistics meets the needs of users; and that the statistics are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards, and explained well.

The Code of Practice requires producers of official statistics to identify users and their uses of the statistics, and to engage with them on many aspects of the statistics. The Code therefore contains many practices that relate to user engagement. Principle 1 of the Code is that "the production, management and dissemination of official statistics should meet the requirements of informed decision-making by government, public services, business, researchers and the public", and another is that "effective user engagement is fundamental both to trust in statistics and securing maximum public value."

This statement of user engagement aims to set out the main ways in which the Treasury will engage with users and help them to understand and make the best possible use of the Treasury's published statistics.

Our intention is to be open and transparent about all our statistics, and to ensure that users have easy access to our statistical data. We aim to help users to understand and make the best possible use of our products by publishing clear supporting commentaries, and comprehensive background information and material, and by encouraging users to contact us with feedback and queries.

### Users and uses

We aim to ensure that our statistical products meet the needs of all our users, both internal and external. Our main users are:

- Treasury Ministers and Treasury officials;
- Parliament, including the Treasury Select Committee and the Public Accounts Committee;

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

<sup>2</sup> The Treasury's National Statistics outputs were assessed against the requirements of the Code of Practice by the UK Statistics Authority in 2011. The assessment reports for [Public Sector Finances](#) and [Public Spending](#) are available from the Authority's website.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk>

- other government users, including the Office for National Statistics, devolved administrations and local government;
- the Bank of England;
- financial markets;
- international organisations, including the European Commission, Eurostat, IMF, OECD, and other overseas governments;
- the Institute for Fiscal Studies;
- academics and researchers;
- other research bodies and think tanks;
- the media; and
- the general public.

We publish information about our expected users on all of our National and Official Statistics releases.

We recognise that our users will have a variety of different requirements and uses for our statistics, which we need to engage with fully and understand. 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, resources and data sources allow.

Many of our statistical outputs are key information to help the Treasury achieve its main strategic objectives as a finance ministry, including maintaining sound public finances and managing public spending. The statistical outputs are also used to assess the extent to which the Government meets key economic objectives.

## **Networking and consultation**

Engagement between Treasury statisticians and key users or user groups takes place regularly, via a range of channels, from formal meetings and conferences to ad hoc events and professional forums. For example, the Treasury and Office for National Statistics held on 22 February 2012 at the Treasury, a public workshop and user consultation event mainly focussed on the Public Sector Finances statistical bulletin but also including a short discussion on Public Sector Expenditure Analysis (PESA). The event gave users the opportunity to discuss issues with the statisticians directly involved in producing the release, understand more of its content and context as well as feedback their own ideas to improve the release and critique our own. Details of the event can be found [here](#). The ONS have also staged a number of events in 2013 and 2014 to explain to users the impact of the revisions to the Public Sector Finances from the implementation of the European System of Accounts 2010, the revised EU-wide accounting standards for National Accounts and the ONS's review of Public Sector Finance Statistics.

In addition, within the Treasury, statisticians regularly engage with policy colleagues and senior officials to ensure effective and appropriate use is made of statistical resources.

Treasury statisticians take part in meetings of the Central and Local Information Partnership (CLIP) a forum to enable central and local government to work together to develop efficient and effective statistical information. More information on CLIP is available on the [CLIP website](#).

The Treasury consults users on any proposed or scheduled changes in content or format of our statistical releases.

A full public user consultation was recently carried out on the PESA National Statistics release from December 2011 to March 2012. Full details can be found at the following link: [PESA consultation website](#). A number of content and presentational changes were introduced to meet user needs better.

The ONS carried out a user consultation as part of their 2013 Review of Public Sector Finance Statistics. Responses and further details of the review can be found at the following link: [2013 Review of Public Sector Finance Statistics](#).

Statisticians within Treasury respond to a large number of queries on our releases and data sources. This includes formal requests under the Freedom of Information legislation, as well as more informal requests from the public and colleagues across government. We endeavour to respond to all requests as quickly as possible and in all cases within 20 days.

## Feedback and queries about our statistics

We welcome comments or queries on our releases from all our users and each release has a point of contact for specific enquiries related to that release. In addition, the Treasury maintains a dedicated point of contact for general statistical enquires: [statistics-enquiries@hmtreasury.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:statistics-enquiries@hmtreasury.gsi.gov.uk).

We also periodically collect more structured user feedback on our statistical releases via voluntary online user surveys, linked from the releases themselves. The most recent surveys were of users of the [Public Sector Finances](#) and UK Official holdings of international reserves statistical releases. The latter received too few responses for us to be able to publish a summary on the website.

In addition, users are welcome to comment on any aspect of Treasury statistics, or on our policies relating to National Statistics, which are available here on our website: [Standards and Polices for HM Treasury Statistics](#).

## Outputs

The Treasury will publish timely, relevant, high quality statistics in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. In particular, the Treasury will:

- publish statistics on pre-announced dates. We publish a timetable of statistical releases for twelve months ahead, which is available on our website, and from the National Statistics Publication Hub:
  - [Timetable for Treasury statistical releases on the UK National Statistics Publication Hub](#);
  - [Timetable for Treasury statistical releases on the HM Treasury website](#);
- release our statistics at the standard time of 9.30am on a weekday, to maintain consistency and to allow time for users to understand and respond to the information within normal working hours;
- issue all statistical releases separately from Ministerial policy statements;
- release our reports as soon as they are judged ready;

- ensure that all our National Statistics releases are made available via the Treasury website immediately upon release;
- provide open and accessible routes to allow users to comment or ask questions;
- respond quickly and accurately to questions and enquiries, or to any complaints; and
- be transparent if ever we are unable to meet any of these commitments.

## **Publication Strategy: making data as widely available, and accessible as possible**

We aim to make our National Statistics accessible to the widest possible community and to maximise the use of our statistical information by as wide a range of users as possible, subject to the need to comply with legal, ethical and confidentiality constraints. The Treasury publication strategy is based on the following key principles:

- all our National and Official Statistics releases are available on the Gov.UK website;
- all our National and Official Statistics releases are published on-line and are free to download. (The PESA White Paper is published by TSO as a Command Paper. It is available free to download on our website, and it is available in hard copy for a charge that covers the costs of printing and publication);
- to aid understanding and use of our statistics, all relevant technical and methodological information will be published in advance or alongside our releases;
- much of the underlying data from our public spending National Statistics releases are now made available to download for free from our [website](#) or [data.gov.uk](https://data.gov.uk). This enables end users to carry out their own supplementary analyses, and increases the usability of our data; and
- revisions to previously published data will be included as far back as possible, to maximise the usability of our data.

## **Revisions policy, including pre-announcement and consultation on proposed changes to formats of releases, methods or classifications**

Our intention is to be open and transparent about any revisions we make to National Statistics and to ensure that users of our statistics have easy access to comprehensive information about those revisions.

Statistical releases will be prepared to a standard format, that will be changed infrequently, and only then with good reason. Our aim will be to maintain consistency as far as possible and to give a full account of any changes to the presentation of our releases. When we do have to make changes to our statistical releases we will give as much notice and forewarning as possible, and we welcome user comments on the proposed changes.

Further information on our approach to revisions is set out in our [Revisions Policy](#) available on the website.

## Data quality

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.

Further information on our policies on data quality is set out in our [Quality Statement](#) available on our website.

## Pre-release access

In some cases it may be necessary for senior officials or ministers to have advance sight of statistical releases before they are made available to the general public. This access ahead of publication is known as pre-release access. Under legislation that came into force in December 2008 (the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008), this pre-release access is strictly controlled and subject to clear limits and rules.

The Treasury is fully compliant with the procedures and regulations on pre-release. Pre-release access is limited to a narrow pre-published list of ministers and senior official post-holders for a maximum period of 24 hours, for the purposes of giving ministerial advice and allowing ministers to be able to respond to figures immediately after they are published. Full details of the Treasury's pre-release access arrangements are set out in a [compliance statement](#) available on our website.

The Treasury publishes lists of post-holders with privileged pre-release access to its National Statistics releases as follows:

- [Public Spending Statistics pre release access list](#)
- [Public Sector Finances Monthly First Release pre-release access list](#); and
- [Help to Buy: mortgage guarantee scheme pre-release access list](#).

In some exceptional cases, the legislation provides for additional pre-release access in excess of 24 hours, where the statistical release is relevant to a third party publication that is going to be published at the same time or shortly afterwards. The Treasury used this special provision in March 2009 to ensure that data from the Public Sector Finances statistical bulletin, which was released at 9:30am on Budget day, could be incorporated into the Budget document published later that same day. The special arrangements for this exceptional pre-release access were agreed with the National Statistician and were published on the Treasury website:

- [Public Sector Finances Monthly First Release special pre-release access list for 22 April 2009](#)

## **Resources**

In line with the principle in the Code of Practice on resources it is the intention of the Head of Profession in HM Treasury that adequate resources are devoted to the production of National Statistics releases in order to meet user needs.

### **Data sources for the Treasury's statistical releases**

The Treasury's National Statistics releases are all mainly derived from government and wider public sector financial accounting data held on administrative data systems. As well as for statistical purposes, the data are collected for reporting to Parliament, for instance for the approval of spending plans, or they are collected for departments' financial management and control of public spending and the wider public finances. Some data are taken directly from banking or accounting sources. Because the key public finance aggregates are compiled using the internationally recognised definitions and frameworks of the National Accounts, the data collection specifications are adapted as far as possible to meet the requirements of the National Accounts.

Tom Orford

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