

Cessations or Changes of Scope for Official Statistics

Version 2.0, February 2018

Owner: GSS Good Practice Team

Date of next review: February 2019

The Code of Practice for Statistics emphasises that official statistics should support society's information needs. Statistics have public value when they are useful, easy to access, remain relevant and support understanding of important issues. Producers of statistics should have a good understanding of how their statistics are being used and regularly review their relevance and usefulness through appropriate user engagement activities. You should consider revising, stopping or replacing statistical outputs whenever it is appropriate to do so to maintain public value.

Changes to official statistics and cessations of statistical outputs should never be a surprise to users. The Head of Profession for Statistics or Lead Official, or the Chief Statistician in devolved administrations, is responsible for deciding who to notify and when / whether to do so if official statistics are to change in scope or if a statistical series will cease.

What does the Code of Practice say?

The [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) addresses these issues under Principle V1 – Relevance to Users, Principle V2 – Accessibility and Principle V3 – Innovation and improvement.

V1 Relevance to Users - producers should maintain a sound understanding of how statistics are used, review user satisfaction regularly and maintain an open dialogue with users, making use of all appropriate channels and using proactive, formal and informal engagement to ensure that user views are considered. Practices V1.1 through to V1.6 are key here. Cessation of outputs, in particular, should be carried out with the full knowledge of users and their views should be taken into account when stopping a statistical series.

V2 Accessibility – Practice V2.6 emphasises that statistics should continue to be publicly available and should be archived as required by relevant legislation. You should consider whether historical back series should be maintained even if a statistical series will not have future releases, and support users in transitioning to new statistical series and understanding differences between old and new outputs if an existing series is discontinued and replaced.

V3 Innovation and improvement – The Code encourages producers to improve and enhance statistical outputs, but emphasises the need to involve users in ongoing development so that the statistics remain relevant and useful. Practices V 4.1 through V4.7 are relevant here. The [GSS Guidance on Experimental Statistics](#) may also be helpful.

Formal Consultations

Departmental statisticians may decide to carry out a consultation to understand user views about proposed changes, revisions or new outputs. Formal consultations should be:

- **Informed** – by relevant [central guidance](#) on how consultations should be conducted; and by the views of user groups on the best means of obtaining views;
- **Efficient** – by balancing the importance of the issue and the likely impact of users' views against the time and resources available, so as to obtain good value for money from the consultation process; by liaising and co-ordinating with other producers to avoid duplication of effort and to minimise burdens; and by exploiting different methods of consultation;

- **Clear** – by describing the consultation, and expressing the issues, as simply and concisely as possible; and by publishing the timetable for each consultation; and
- **Responsive** – by publishing the records of decisions and actions following a consultation, together with explanations for them; and by publishing individual responses, unless anonymity is requested.

More general central guidance is available in the Cabinet Office [consultation principles](#). These were updated in January 2016 and this [blog](#) looks at how and why they were refreshed.

Notifying the UK Statistics Authority about changes or cessations

Change is a normal part of the process of producing and publishing official statistics, so it is not normally necessary to consult with the UK Statistics Authority or National Statistician about proposed alterations. There are some circumstances (for example where external pressure means that a statistical series is at risk regardless of the impact on public value, trustworthiness or quality) where such notification would be appropriate. The Head of Profession, Lead Official or Chief Statistician in a devolved administration must be informed in such cases, and would normally decide what action to take.

Consider the impact of the change, and whether this is sufficient to require escalation. This is a matter of judgement - if the statistics in question were numbers of high national value then if there was a proposal to cease production rapidly or change them substantially in scope (for example due to resource reduction or instruction from a Minister) there would be a strong case for bringing this urgently to the attention of the Office for Statistics Regulation and the National Statistician. If, on the other hand, the numbers in question were for a specialist audience who were aware of and supportive of the proposals, this would be much less of an issue.

Who can I contact for help and advice?

The GSS [Good Practice Team](#) are happy to provide advice on specific cases - you can always call us to discuss the best approach with regard to any potential changes of scope or cessation. As a rule of thumb, if you have concerns about proposed changes, please notify us so that we can support you appropriately.

GSS Good Practice Team (goodpracticeteam@statistics.gov.uk)