

GSS Guidance on Experimental Statistics

Version 2.1 March 2019

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

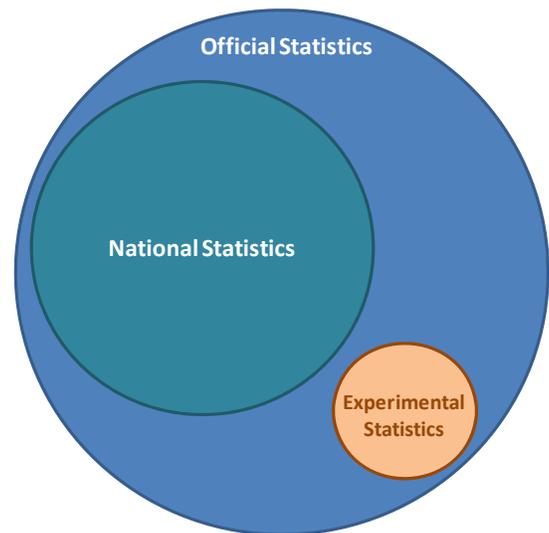
Next review: March 2020

Introduction

Experimental statistics are a subset of newly developed or innovative official statistics that are undergoing evaluation. Experimental statistics are developed under the guidance of the Head of Profession for Statistics and are published in order to involve users and stakeholders in the assessment of their suitability and quality at an early stage¹. The document “Assessment and Designation of Experimental Statistics”² sets out UK Statistics Authority policy on this topic.

Experimental statistics are, by definition, also official statistics. The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 refers only to official statistics and makes no mention of experimental statistics.

It is the sole responsibility of the producer body (with the guidance of the Chief Statistician or Head of Profession for statistics³) to decide when to label a set of official statistics as experimental and when to remove that label. The Office for Statistics Regulation and the GSS Good Practice Team are happy to discuss specific situations with producers as part of the decision-making process, but have no formal role in making the decisions.



When to use the experimental statistics label

Producers must use their judgement to decide when to use the experimental statistics label for a new output or a modification of an existing output. The following criteria may assist:

- There is a defined and time-limited work programme, either to develop new statistics or to improve existing outputs, and the output falls within the remit of that programme.
- New statistics are available that have considerable immediate value to users. Users are aware of the statistics' theoretical quality and limitations and can make qualified use of them before operational testing has been completed.
- New statistics remain subject to testing in terms of their volatility and ability to meet user needs as compared to other sources.
- New methods are being tested and are still subject to modification or further evaluation.
- There is only partial coverage (e.g. of industries) at this stage of the development programme.
- The statistics do not yet meet the overall quality standards necessary to be designated National Statistics.

As with any other set of official statistics, producer bodies should aim for experimental statistics to fully comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

¹ Code of Practice for Statistics Glossary <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/glossary/>

² <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/guidance-about-assessment/assessment-and-designation-of-experimental-statistics.doc>

³ Code of Practice for Statistics, [Principle T2, Practice T2.1](#) and [Principle V4, Practice V4.2](#)

Introducing experimental statistics

Experimental statistics should be produced with a view to achieving National Statistics standard and considering formal assessment. When introducing new experimental statistics, producers should:

- Explain what the experimental statistics are
- Describe how they might be useful
- Describe why they are experimental – what is new or different about them – and how they complement existing official statistics
- Explain how and when feedback will be sought and what feedback the producer would like
- Include a statement in releases and accompanying metadata setting out what the experimental statistics label means
- Set out when the producer expects to be able to remove the experimental statistics label.

Whenever possible, producers should also say whether and when they plan to request the UK Statistics Authority to assess whether the statistics comply with the Code of Practice so that they can be designated as National Statistics. In this way, there is a pathway from early development as experimental statistics, to the removal of that label, to assessment against the Code and, ultimately, designation as National Statistics.

Removal of the experimental statistics label

The experimental statistics label can be removed when a producer considers this to be appropriate, which may be as part of a planned transition to designation as National Statistics. It is up to the producer to decide when it is appropriate for the experimental statistics label to be removed. Factors to consider before removing the label include:

- Whether user feedback indicates that statistics are trustworthy, of high quality, and valuable;
- Whether the methods employed have proved sufficiently robust to suit the variety of circumstances material to the use of the statistics;
- Whether coverage has reached a sufficient level;
- Whether the defined development phase has ended;
- Whether it is judged that the statistics fully comply with the standards of the Code of Practice.

Statistics that have been assessed as fully compliant with the Code of Practice are, by definition, no longer experimental. As with all official statistics, a producer can ask the UK Statistics Authority to assess whether experimental statistics comply with the Code of Practice in order that they can be designated as National Statistics. Alternatively, the Authority may decide that it is appropriate to assess a set of experimental statistics and will notify the producer accordingly.

Producers may withdraw a set of experimental statistics if they do not meet user needs or are otherwise not fit for purpose. If experimental statistics are to be withdrawn, the Head of Profession for Statistics / Lead Official is responsible for deciding who to notify and whether to escalate changes of scope to the National Statistician or to consult the Good Practice Team. The GSS guidance document “Guidance on changing or ceasing to publish official statistics”⁴ is available from the GSS Policy Store and provides further details.

⁴ <https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/policy-store/cessations-and-changes-to-scope-of-official-statistics-guidance-for-heads-of-profession/>