

Official Statistics Guidance for TEPoP Partners

What are Official Statistics?

'Official Statistics' are statistics periodically produced by specific categories of public bodies, including JNCC, under The Statistics and Registration Services Act 2007. The Act specifies that the production and publication of the statistics should follow the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). Official Statistics are also covered by further legislation governing the handling and sharing of official statistics prior to release.

The results of several surveillance schemes within the Terrestrial Evidence Partnership of Partnerships have been designated as Official Statistics. Whilst this comes with legal responsibilities and requirements, it is valuable in increasing the statistics' credibility and impact. The 'Official Statistics' includes any interpretative text released alongside the figures themselves. For example, in practice we treat the entire Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) and Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS) reports according to Official Statistics rules. (However, we note that if someone has contributed an article to the report without seeing and relating it to the figures reported then that particular article does not form part of the Official Statistic or need to be treated as such.)

What are the key requirements partners need to be aware of?

1. Safe handling prior to release

It is important that Official Statistics are handled carefully to maintain public confidence by demonstrating that their production is trustworthy and free from inappropriate manipulation or use – Parliament felt so strongly about this that it passed additional legislation (Pre-Release Access to OS Order) to protect Official Statistics. Access is limited to those with an essential contribution to help ensure the figures are correctly and well explained. Ministers/their staff may get access but only up to 24 hours in advance of publication and specifically to prepare for public questioning on the figures (note, this would be mediated via JNCC under a strict protocol). Safe handling requirements have a number of implications for the production of TEPoP Official Statistics:

- Results should be stored securely in advance of publication. This could involve having restricted access folders in internal networks, or password protecting documents.
- TEPoP partners may not share the results, or any indication of the results or interpretive text, in advance of 9:30 am on the release date to anyone not involved in the production, quality assurance (QA) process or operational purposes around publication of the results.
- When results are shared in advance for the purposes of production, QA and publication, partners should ensure that there is appropriate labelling to warn the recipient not to share. Some suggested wording that can be put at the top of emails is provided at the end of this guidance note. The email should also have 'Official Sensitive' in the subject line. If sending reports to be printed, the printing company needs to be aware of their confidentiality responsibilities.
- Official Statistics should not be shared via Google Drive as this is not considered secure enough (alternatives could include use of SharePoint, use of work emails, or providing a link to a test site (preferably password protected, but contact JNCC to discuss further if this is an issue or to discuss other suitable options)).
- Communications staff from the partner organisations involved may see the statistics in advance where this is necessary for them to be involved in the statistics production process in order to clearly communicate the results. (But note, they may not use this access for other purposes such as to prepare a lobbying position prior to publication, and although there is not a set limit on how many people can be involved, we should still minimise numbers involved as far as possible).
- Once partners have taken on board comments from QA reviewers and adjusted the Official Statistics accordingly, they should wait until the official release before sharing the product in its final form with the QA reviewers.

- A list of everyone involved in production, QA and publication should be shared with JNCC (preferably 10 days before publication, but it can be updated if necessary) as JNCC are required to keep a record of this.
- Press-releases that refer to the results are not to be sent out in advance of publication, even under embargo.

2. Considerations for producing and publishing the official statistics

- The Code of Practice covers the importance of producing the statistics to a high standard and states that we should be open about the impact of any data limitations. Explanation could be provided through accompanying text in reports/on scheme websites, as well as through an accompanying policy briefing and/or technical document. JNCC leads on production of policy briefings to accompany the statistics but rely on input from other scheme partners. See link to guidance below on communicating statistics.
- Best practice should be followed when presenting statistics visually, ensuring impartiality, clarity, and taking into account accessibility issues, e.g. consider colour blind people when producing graphs, and ensure compatibility with the most commonly used assistive technologies. See guidance on data visualisation and discuss with the JNCC project officer.
- The code states that 'statistics and data should be published in forms that enable their reuse'. Our Official Statistics are currently published in a range of formats, for example PDF, HTML, Excel files, CSV or ODS files, and printed reports. Whilst having multiple formats is fine, we should aim to have downloadable files in a machine readable, easy-to-use open source format wherever possible; ODS files are a good option where data are best presented in a spreadsheet with multiple tabs, whilst CSV format is suitable for simpler datasets.
- The Official Statistics should be clearly labelled as Official Statistics on the website, and state who was involved in its production and a key contact point. Some suggested text, using BBS as an example, is: 'Population trends of breeding birds in the UK, to 2019' is published as a JNCC Official Statistic and falls within the remit of the Office for Statistics Regulation, which promotes compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics and its key principles of Trustworthiness, Quality and Value. The statistic was produced by the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey partnership, with BTO having primary responsibility for the analysis. Quality Assurance was carried out by BTO, RSPB, and JNCC. For any queries, please contact [*staff.name@jncc.gov.uk*].

3. Timings

- JNCC and partners need to agree a publication date in advance (a provisional date should be agreed as early as possible, and this needs to be confirmed *at least* a month in advance). JNCC complete Official Statistic Announcement forms, the contents of which are added to the Government release calendar.
- Once confirmed, the publication must go ahead on this date, unless there are quality assurance issues that cannot be resolved in time. Whilst ensuring the quality and integrity of the statistics is the highest priority, JNCC would obviously prefer to avoid last minute delays where possible. As such, we are keen for partners to plan the work scheduling to have the final version ready two weeks in advance of the release date, so that if any unexpected last minute issues arise we can deal with them without having to postpone the release. This is also important to allow sufficient time for QA of policy briefings and any press releases so that they can be finalised several days (or preferably a week) prior to the publication date. Partners should raise any significant concerns on timescales with JNCC as soon as possible after they become aware of them.
- Official Statistics must be published at exactly 9:30 am on the declared publication date. Note, JNCC also follows an official pre-release access process to allow a limited number of named government officials 24hr earlier access to results for specified reasons such as preparing a ministerial briefing. JNCC complete relevant forms to allow this to occur, and are responsible for sharing the results, so this should have no implications for partners.

4. Reporting breaches

- Partners should inform JNCC as soon as possible if there has been a breach that compromises the impartiality, objectivity, integrity or confidentiality of the statistics. In practice this is most likely to involve someone wrongfully being made aware of the results before publication, or incorrect timing of publication (either before or after 9:30 on release day, although note there are a couple of minutes leeway after 9:30 to allow for technology issues). Breaches should be reported to JNCC on the day of the breach, or the first working day after the breach if it occurs on a non-working day. JNCC would lead on the breach reporting process, but would need to liaise with partners to ensure a clear understanding of the situation. See GSS guide to reporting breaches (link below) for further information.

Useful information

Release dates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government release calendar: https://www.gov.uk/search/research-and-statistics JNCC Official Statistics calendar: https://jncc.gov.uk/about-jncc/corporate-information/jncc-official-statistics-list-and-release-dates/
Code of practice for statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Code of Practice for Statistics: https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/the-code/
Presenting statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government Statistical Service Introduction to communicating statistics: https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/guidances/communicating-statistics/#guidance Government Statistical Service Introduction to data visualisation: https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/policy-store/introduction-to-data-visualisation/ JNCC report on the FAIR principles of findability, accessibility, interoperability, and reusability: United Kingdom Terrestrial Evidence Partnership of Partnerships data products: improving opportunities for re-use: https://hub.jncc.gov.uk/assets/0054348c-40a5-461d-b150-39cfe89ffe0
Evidence quality assurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> JNCC EQA policy: https://hub.jncc.gov.uk/assets/5f7aa652-69b5-48ab-8239-dbccc5333d09
Safe handling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> JNCC guidance on sharing of management information ('management information' includes data linked to the official statistic, but not in its final form): This is a JNCC internal unpublished document: email feedback@jncc.gov.uk if you don't have a copy and would like one. Example of email label to use when sharing results for QA purposes: OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE These statistics are being sent to you under the provisions of Principle T3 practice 3 of Edition 2 of the Code of Practice for Statistics for the sole purpose of providing quality assurance prior to their public release. Do not forward this or associated information such as a technical document or datasheet to, or show or discuss the statistics with, anyone not on the circulation list. This includes any indication of the content or trends (including description such as 'favourable' or 'unfavourable'). Any accidental or wrongful release must be reported immediately to [add relevant JNCC project officer] and will be investigated as a breach of the Code of Practice. The statistical information will be published on [date], at 9.30am at which point the protective marking and restriction on circulation will expire. If you have any questions, please contact [JNCC project officer: Name; phone number; email address]
Breaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government Statistics Services guide to reporting breaches of the code of practice: https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/policy-store/reporting-breaches-of-the-code-of-practice-for-official-statistics/