

NATIONAL STATISTICS CODE OF PRACTICE - PROTOCOL ON RELEASE PRACTICES

COMPLIANCE STATEMENT BY NORTHERN IRELAND DEPARTMENTS AND THE NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE

Background

1. The Release Practices Protocol requires each Department/Administration 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 statistical releases in Northern Ireland Departments and the NIO.

Application of Protocol to National Statistics Produced by Northern Ireland Departments and the NIO

3. National Statistics in Northern Ireland are as detailed in the attached annex. The Release Practice Protocol will apply in full to all National Statistics releases in Northern Ireland.

Accessibility: Number and types of releases

4. In the current year Northern Ireland Departments and the NIO expect to produce about 70 statistics releases. The volume of output varies year on year.
5. The publications are released in hard copy or electronic format, often in both formats. A number of these hard copy publications are available free of charge whilst others are charged for. Everything published on the Internet can be downloaded free of charge. Where NI Departments and the NIO release Internet and hard copy versions it is aimed for this to be done at the same time.
6. Northern Ireland Departments and the NIO have 2 statistical outputs which are regarded as market sensitive:
 - Index of Production
 - Labour Market Statistics
7. Release dates for all Northern Ireland Departments and the NIO for statistical outputs are pre-announced on Departmental websites.
8. This programme of releases will be maintained and regularly updated for a full year ahead.

9. For all market sensitive releases and regular releases (monthly/quarterly) there are established timetables for their preparation and exact publication dates are given 6 months in advance. For other outputs, month of publication is given 6 months ahead and the exact date at least 2 weeks ahead.

Timing of Releases

10. Publication is usually announced by means of a Statistical Release from the appropriate Departmental Press Office, issued at 9.30 during a normal working day.

Format of Releases

11. The Senior Statistician in each Department, in consultation with the Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency as necessary, maintains responsibility for the content, format and timing of all statistical outputs.
12. Releases will normally be in the form of a short summary of the key results, intended primarily to assist the media in reporting on the results. Occasionally, the extent of the material being releases is such that only a very short Statistical Release is produced – this is often where the Release is providing “headline” or key statistics, and a more detailed statistical bulletin will be issued subsequently.
13. Any statements about policy by a Minister is issued separately from the statistical release.
14. Typically, annual publications will retain a core of standard tabulations, but content may vary to reflect needs of users and to allow proper presentation and analysis of any new or particularly interesting results. They may also include academic articles and comments on research findings.

Pre-release Access to Statistics

15. The Northern Ireland Departments and the NIO maintain a record, available for public scrutiny, of those individuals or posts who have pre-release access and the purpose of that access for each individual release. Any such access is in line with the Protocol. This includes those with access for management, briefing and/or quality assurance purposes.
16. For market sensitive statistics, privileged early access is provided no earlier than 40.5 hours before release, that is at 5.00pm on day one in advance of release at 9.30am on day three.
17. For non market sensitive statistics, privileged early access is provided no earlier than 5 working days ahead of publication, (again in line with the Protocol).

Availability of Detailed Results

18. Northern Ireland Departments and NIO statistical publications cover a wide range of information. To encourage the 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.

Details for Individual Releases

19. Details of arrangements for individual releases will be publicly available on each Department's website.

Pre-announcement of Changes

20. Changes affecting releases are subject to a formal and transparent procedure:
 - Any alteration to a pre-announced date will be made public as early as possible and accompanied by an explanation for the change.
 - Significant changes to content, format or publication arrangements will first be subject to user consultation, and then pre-announced and the reasons made publicly available.
 - Methodological changes that will affect frequent periodical releases will be announced at least one release period earlier.

Updating Procedure

21. Northern Ireland Departments and the NIO will ensure that these notes on release arrangements and complementary information are regularly updated.