

## Temporary suspension – guidance

1. In June, the Authority decided to suspend temporarily the National Statistics designation for the ONS's April trade statistics publication. This was the first such suspension that the Authority has imposed. The relevant exchange of correspondence is [here](#).
2. In light of the precedent-setting nature of the decision, this note sets out the issues the Authority will take into account when it considers temporary suspension of National Statistics designation in future.
3. The Authority's core aim will be to preserve and enhance the integrity of the National Statistics designation. The National Statistics designation provides a clear public signal that statistics meet the highest standards of statistical practice, complying in full with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. The Code, taken as a whole, ensures that statistics meet the needs of users; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are well explained.
4. To achieve the goal of enhancing the National Statistics designation, the Authority will adopt a series of supporting principles to enable it to make reasoned judgements about temporary suspensions. But this list of principles is not exhaustive: this is fundamentally about the Authority's ability to make agile, flexible decisions on National Statistic status.
5. The supporting principles are:
  - i. **We welcome early producer engagement.** When producers identify errors or other breaches in their practices, they should inform the Authority's Head of Assessment promptly. The Head of Assessment will always discuss producer concerns in confidence and constructively. And in situations where the producer has communicated concerns promptly, the Authority will not seek to criticise the producer for their prompt action. We will also support transparent public disclosure of errors by producers.
  - ii. **We will deploy the tool of temporary suspension sparingly.** Where the Authority has concerns about a producer's compliance with the Code, our standard response will be to conduct an assessment against the Code, and to de-designate or uphold a designation on that basis, as opposed to suspending the designation temporarily.
  - iii. We will only use the tool of temporary suspension where:
    - a. **The breach or error is clear** – the breach should not be a matter of judgement or interpretation. While it may sometimes require extensive investigation by the producer or on our part, the breach of the Code should be capable of clear explanation. It is therefore most likely to be related to data (data completeness, accuracy or calculations based on data), or clear methodological flaws, as opposed to questions of commentary or supporting material (which might require a fuller assessment by the Authority).
    - b. **The breach is material** – it represents a significant numerical proportion of the overall statistics, or (if not numerical) would undermine the confidence a user would have in the statistics as a whole.
    - c. **The breach of the Code of Practice is isolated** – in other words, we will always consider whether a fuller assessment against the Code is warranted.
  - iv. As part of the temporary suspension, we will **require commitment to a clear action plan on the part of the producer.**

- v. Temporary suspensions will **always be made public** and we will **require the temporary suspension to be clearly visible to users**. This should include a clear reference to temporary suspension by the producer, and a clear history. The prominent reference could include text required by the Authority, and the suspension should be in the format (eg a watermark, or different shaded badge) proposed by the Authority. The communication of the suspension will depend on the nature of the problem – for example, whether it affects an individual statistical release or a whole series.
  - vi. **Temporary should mean temporary** and such a suspension will usually include a defined period within which we would expect the producer to correct the problem. If they do not, full assessment (and de-designation) will be warranted.
  - vii. **We will reinstate National Statistics designation only once the producer can demonstrate clearly that it has implemented the action plan.**
  - viii. If we become aware that a producer has avoided communication with the Authority (to avoid temporary suspension) **we will criticise the producer publicly for a lack of early disclosure**, and launch a full assessment of the statistics.
6. As we implement this policy, it will be important to distinguish between:
- i. *temporary suspension* of a designation – because of a specific error or breach, which is the subject of this note. The Authority must be confident that the errors can be rectified in a timely fashion;
  - ii. *full de-designation* resulting from more deep-seated and comprehensive concerns about compliance with the Code of Practice following an assessment; and
  - iii. *not granting a designation* because a producer has failed to meet the Authority's Requirements in a timely fashion. The Authority will increasingly look to adopt a firm position in this last scenario – where a producer has failed to meet the Authority's Requirements without good reason.