

REPORT OF A BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR STATISTICS



1. Core Information [\[guidance\]](#)

Title and link to statistical output	DCMS Coronavirus Impact Business Survey https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dcms-coronavirus-impact-business-survey
Name of producer organisation	Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
Name and contact details of person dealing with report	Alex Bjorkegren and Penny Allen, statistics.hop@dcms.gov.uk
Name and contact details of Head of Profession for Statistics/Lead Official	Post currently vacant, covered by Alex Bjorkegren and Penny Allen, statistics.hop@dcms.gov.uk
Link to published statement about the breach (if relevant)	N/A
Date of breach report	02/07/2020

2. Circumstances of breach [\[guidance\]](#)

Relevant principle(s) and practice(s)	T6.4
Date of occurrence of breach	17/06/2020
<p><i>Give an account of what happened including roles of persons involved, dates, times etc</i></p> <p>This account relates to a failure to apply proper disclosure control to survey data. As the data are not official statistics, the event does not constitute a formal breach of the Code of Practice for Statistics. We recognise the importance of transparency to building public trust, and are therefore voluntarily reporting this event and corrective actions.</p> <p>The department's COVID analysis team set up a survey to improve the department's understanding of the effect of COVID-19 on the businesses in its sectors. The DCMS Coronavirus Business Survey was launched on 23rd April 2020 and closed on 22nd May 2020. It ran simultaneously through DCMS stakeholder engagement channels and via a YouGov panel. A total of 3,936 responses were received from DCMS stakeholder engagement channels (2,369) and via YouGov (1,567). Towards the end of May, the statistics head of profession (at the time) and the central statistics team agreed that these results should not be considered official statistics. This was due to concerns about the robustness of the data given the non-statistical sampling approach and consequently the non-representative sample. However, as the data would be used to inform policy, it was also agreed that they should be published under the principle of equal access to information. To this end, broad headline findings and a brief description of the methods and limitations were published on the 10th June.</p> <p>The COVID Sector Intelligence analysis team were asked to provide briefing by the 15th June on the economic impact of COVID-19 on the DCMS sectors, drawing on the survey results. They therefore prepared the sector level results for publication. This included a check that there were no direct identifiers in the summary tables, however no further disclosure control was applied. This data were raw (unweighted) counts of responses to the DCMS Coronavirus Impact Business Survey by DCMS topic areas. In some cases, the cell counts were below the thresholds that the COVID analytical team had been advised to apply to minimise the risk of disclosure of respondent identity. The Head of Evidence Strategy and the Head of the COVID Sector Intelligence analysis team cleared the sector level results for publication towards the end of the week commencing 8th June, and they were published on gov.uk on the 17th June.</p> <p>On the 22nd June a member of the central statistics team noticed that the summary tables included the potentially disclosive data and removed the tables from gov.uk the same day.</p>	

The COVID analytical team and the central statistics team sought advice on what actions were needed from the departmental data protection officer, the departmental legal team, and the GSS Good Practice Team.

3. Impact of the breach [\[guidance\]](#)

Provide details of the impact of the breach both inside the producer body and externally

There were very few cases where a respondent could have potentially identified themselves in the data. We estimate the risk that someone else could have identified a respondent or their responses from the summary tables as exceedingly low. On this basis we believe the external impact to be low. However, we are currently discussing the matter with the departmental data protection officer.

4. Corrective actions (taken or planned) to prevent re-occurrence [\[guidance\]](#)

Describe the short-term actions made to redress the situation and the longer term changes to procedures etc

The tables were removed from the website on the same day that the issue with the disclosure control was spotted. Revised tables have been prepared and are awaiting sign off for publication.

The senior management team have agreed that the survey should continue to be run by the COVID analytical team, but with an increased focus on seeking professional expertise throughout the process, in particular regarding Quality Assurance. A statistician has been assigned as a single point of contact to the COVID analytical team to provide advice when requested. It has also been agreed that a comprehensive publication of the survey findings will move to being 'proactive' rather than in response to briefing requests – this will allow sufficient time to be built into the process for the materials to be published to be signed off by a member of the central statistics team.