

Compendium

Background notes

Information about the compilation of the latest national accounts including quality and reliability issues.

Contact:
Blue Book Coordination team
blue.book.coordination@ons.gov.uk
+44 1633 456103

Release date:
31 October 2024

Next release:
To be announced

Table of contents

1. [Feedback](#)
2. [Release policy](#)
3. [Continuous improvement of sources, methods and communication](#)
4. [National accounts classification decisions](#)
5. [Economic context](#)
6. [Important quality issues](#)
7. [The quality of Blue Book estimates](#)
8. [Reliability](#)
9. [Further information](#)
10. [Code of Practice](#)
11. [Cite this chapter](#)

1 . Feedback

We welcome your feedback on this publication. Please email blue.book.coordination@ons.gov.uk if you would like to get in touch.

2 . Release policy

This release includes data up to 2024. Data are consistent with:

- our [Index of Production bulletin](#), published on 11 October 2024
- our [Index of Services bulletin](#), published on 11 October 2024
- the current price trade in goods data within our [UK trade: August 2024 bulletin](#) published on 11 October 2024
- the [Construction output price indices dataset](#), published on 15 August 2024
- our [Balance of payments bulletin](#), published on 30 September 2024
- our [GDP quarterly national accounts bulletin](#), published on 30 September 2024
- the [UK Economic Accounts dataset](#), published on 30 September 2024

3 . Continuous improvement of sources, methods and communication

During 2024, we published a series of articles detailing changes that will affect Blue Book 2024. These articles can be found on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) website using the following keywords: BlueBook2024, BB24 and National Accounts.

4 . National accounts classification decisions

The UK National Accounts are produced under internationally agreed guidance and rules set out in the [European System of Accounts: ESA 2010 \(PDF, 6.4MB\)](#) and the accompanying [Manual on Government Deficit and Debt: Implementation of ESA 2010 to 2016 edition \(MGDD\) \(PDF, 3.7MB\)](#).

In the UK, we are responsible for the application and interpretation of these rules. Therefore, we make [classification decisions based on the agreed guidance and rules](#).

5 . Economic context

We publish economic commentary, giving commentary on the latest gross domestic product (GDP) estimate and our other economic releases. The next commentary will be published on 23 December 2024.

6 . Important quality issues

Commonly occurring issues in interpreting the series include:

- expectations of accuracy and reliability in early estimates are often too high
- revisions are an inevitable consequence of the trade-off between timeliness and accuracy
- early estimates are based on incomplete data

Very few statistical revisions arise because of "errors". All estimates, by definition, are subject to statistical "error". In this context, the word refers to the uncertainty inherent in any process or calculation that uses sampling, estimation, or modelling.

Most revisions reflect either the adoption of new statistical techniques or the incorporation of new information, which allow the statistical error of previous estimates to be reduced. Only rarely are there avoidable "errors", such as human or system failures, and such mistakes are made clear when they do occur.

7 . The quality of Blue Book estimates

Unlike many of the short-term indicators we publish, there is no simple way of measuring the accuracy of the Blue Book dataset. All estimates, by definition, are subject to [statistical uncertainty](#).

For many well-established statistics, we measure and publish the [sampling error and non-sampling error](#) associated with the estimate, using this as an indicator of accuracy. Since sampling is typically done to determine the characteristics of a whole population, the difference between the sample and population values is considered a sampling error. Non-sampling errors are a result of deviations from the true value that are not a function of the sample chosen, including various systematic errors and any other errors that are not because of sampling.

The Blue Book dataset, however, is currently constructed from various data sources, some of which are not based on random samples or do not have published sampling and non-sampling errors available. This makes it very difficult to measure both error aspects and their impact on gross domestic product (GDP). While development work continues in this area, like all other G7 national statistical institutes (NSIs), we do not publish a measure of the sampling error or non-sampling error associated with this dataset.

8 . Reliability

Estimates for the most recent quarters are provisional and are subject to revision in the light of updated source information. We currently provide an analysis of past revisions in the gross domestic product (GDP) and other statistical bulletins that present data time series.

Our [revisions to economic statistics web page](#) brings together our work on revisions analysis, linking to articles and revisions policies. Revisions to data provide one indication of the reliability of main indicators.

9 . Further information

You can see all of our latest releases on the [Office for National Statistics \(ONS\) release calendar](#).

Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the [UK Statistics Authority](#).

We are committed to ensuring that all information provided is kept strictly confidential and will only be used for statistical purposes. Further details regarding confidentiality can be found in our [Respondent charter for business surveys](#) and [Respondent charter for households](#).

10 . Code of Practice

National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet user needs. They are produced free from any political interference.

11 . Cite this chapter

Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 31 October 2024, ONS website, compendium chapter, [Background notes, UK National Accounts, The Blue Book: 2024](#)