

USER INFORMATION GUIDE

BRES 2010: Guide to use of potentially confidential data

Important: there are legal penalties for the improper use of confidential data. This guide tells you how to use the data without breaching the confidentiality rules. If you have any doubts about how to apply the guidance please contact:

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The Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) is conducted under the Statistics of Trade Act (STA) 1947, as were its predecessors, the Annual Business Inquiry (ABI), the Annual Employment Survey (AES) and Census of Employment (CoE). This Act imposes restrictions on the way that data collected during the survey may be used. The provisions of the STA are importantly further regulated by the Employment and Training Act 1973 (ETA) as amended by the Employment Act 1989, which states that local planning authorities may only use confidential data for purposes that relate to development plans.

The main aim of these restrictions is to protect the identity of individual enterprises, who have made statistical returns, from being disclosed or otherwise deduced.

Disclosive Aggregate

Aggregate data can be potentially disclosive and, therefore, potentially confidential. In theory, a 'disclosive' cell of data is one which either directly, or by deduction, would make known the identity of an enterprise who made a statistical return. In practice, the ONS operates standard rules which are used to test each data-cell: those cells which pass these 'suppression' tests are deemed non-disclosive; those which fail are disclosive.

The rules are given at:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/best-practice/disclosure-control-policy-for-tables/index.html>

The BRES outputs published on the National Statistics website have already been subjected to the suppression tests and so the issue of confidentiality does not arise.

However, the following BRES output has not been suppressed and contains potentially disclosive cells:

(i) Employment information extracted by users of the Nomis database. Access to Nomis is restricted, by the provisions of the ETA 4(3)(f), to holders of a Notice.

As this output has not been subject to suppression users of the output (i) above are personally responsible for ensuring that any information which they publish or pass on to other users not named on their Notice, does not contain disclosive data.

Users who derive customised tables, which include cells marked '!' (exclamation mark) must ensure that the general rules for hard and soft suppression described below are not breached.

1. Hard suppression. Users of Nomis must suppress (i.e. blank out), for publication purposes, any data-cell which is marked with an '!' (exclamation mark). This is referred to as Hard suppression and is designed to prevent any disclosure of data that allows a particular business to be identified and rules of confidentiality to be broken. The primary rule of disclosure as applied to BRES is: *at least 3 enterprise groups in a cell and the total of the cell less the 2 largest local units must be greater than or equal to 10% of the value of the largest local unit*. If a data-cell fails this rule then it is considered disclosive and marked with an '!' (exclamation mark).

2. Soft suppression. Nomis does not apply soft suppression and it is the users responsibility to undertake this. Where 'hard suppression' is applied to a single cell in a row or column, it will follow that the value of the blank cell could easily be derived by simple subtraction from the total employment given in that row or column, or from sub-totals within the table. In such cases, hard suppression must be supplemented by what is called 'soft suppression'. 'Soft suppression' is where another cell in the row or column is blanked out to avoid this deduction by subtraction. Candidates for soft suppression may include cells with zero employment.

Rounding

Users of Nomis in any publication derived from the BRES outputs must also apply the general rule that any employment value in a data-cell must be rounded to the nearest 100. Therefore figures of less than 50 should not appear. Any publication derived from BRES outputs should thus be subject to hard suppression, followed by soft suppression followed by rounding to the nearest hundred.

Percentage figures

The rule of suppression that applies to absolute employee figures also applies to percentage values. This means that both hard and soft suppression should be applied to percentages marked with '!' (exclamation mark).

Workplace Analysis

This only applies to any analysis derived from the ABI, AES or CoE. The rules of suppression that apply to absolute employee figures also apply to the number of data units (workplace analysis). This means that both hard and soft suppression should be applied to data units marked with '!' (exclamation mark). However, the rounding rule does not apply in this instance.

Maps

Any estimates represented in the form of a map (either generated from the bespoke map option on NOMIS or derived from downloaded estimates) are also subject to the rules of primary and secondary suppression. Users must ensure that no flagged estimate is represented on a map and that secondary suppression is undertaken if required. If users are producing their own map from downloaded estimates they must first apply primary and secondary disclosure to the estimates before using them for map generation.

Quality of estimates

Users should note that BRES is a sampled survey estimating the number of employees which gives rise to sampling errors. Non-sampling errors are not easy to quantify and include errors of coverage, measurement, processing and non-response. Model variance increases as the geographies get smaller and this should be taken into account when considering the quality of sub-national estimates.

More detail on estimates and measures of these errors can be found on the ONS website at:

[All releases of Business Register Employment Survey](#)

Publishing BRES data

Details of the policy governing the release of new data are available from the press office. Also available is a list of the names of those given pre-publication access to the contents of this release.

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