

Scottish Government Social Research Publication Protocol

Introduction

The purpose of this protocol is to set out the principles which must be adhered to in the publication of social research by the Scottish Government. The principles are derived from the UK-wide Government Social Research (GSR) Publication Protocol. Their detailed provisions in the Scottish Government context are set out below.

The principles apply to government social research that is not defined as official or national statistics, where procedures for publication are regulated by the independent UK Statistics Authority.

Summary of Principles

GSR Publication Principles		
	Principle	Provision in Scottish Government
Principle 1	The products of government social research will be made publicly available.	Findings from government social research and, where possible, research data will be made available to all.
Principle 2	There will be prompt release of all government social research.	Research reports will be released as soon as practicable to an agreed timetable. Agreed final outputs will be published within 12 weeks.
Principle 3	Government social research must be released in a way that promotes public trust.	Publication of findings and report content should not be influenced by political concerns.
Principle 4	Clear communication plans should be developed for all social research produced by government.	Details of research commissioned by the SG will be published. Dissemination strategies should be drawn up for all in-house and externally commissioned research.
Principle 5	Responsibility for the release of social research produced by government must be clear.	Final responsibility for the content, format and timing of publications rests with the Scottish Government's Chief Researcher or their nominee.

The Five Principles in Detail

Principle 1: The products of government social research will be made publicly available

- All Social Research commissioned by the Scottish Government should be published on the Scottish Government website.
- Research should be released in formats which facilitate widespread access and informed debate.
- Research requested under Freedom of Information will be made publicly available unless exemptions apply and publication is not considered to be in the public interest.
- Under exceptional circumstances a decision not to publish may be made if research is of poor quality; incomplete; or there are serious concerns about the robustness of the research findings.
- Decisions not to publish commissioned research must be approved by the Chief Researcher or their nominee and a note of the reasons recorded.
- As a general principle (and as part of the Government's commitment to openness) where practicable research data should be made available to users.

Principle 2: There will be prompt release of all government social research

- All externally commissioned Social Research should be published within 12 weeks of being signed off by the project manager (special conditions apply in the run up to elections).
- Publication may be timed to link to policy announcements, decisions or events.
- Ministers should be given a minimum of 5 working days to consider handling and lines to take.
- Research officers should notify their local Communications team 4 weeks prior to publication.
- For longer term research projects (e.g. projects lasting over a year) opportunities for releasing interim findings should be proactively considered.
- Requests to see draft and interim reports should be dealt with in accordance with Freedom of Information legislation.

Principle 3: Government social research must be released in a way that promotes public trust

- Press releases must take an objective approach to reporting research findings. Report content should be kept clearly distinct from Ministerial views.
- Research output must not be altered, withheld or delayed for political reasons.
- Ministers may be briefed on emerging findings at any point during the research in order to inform policy decisions (with the caveat that preliminary findings may be subject to change).
- Ministers and policy officials must avoid commenting publicly on research findings prior to publication.
- The final wording of press releases referring to Scottish Government social research must be agreed by the research lead prior to being signed off.

Principle 4: Clear communication arrangements will be in place for all research

- Details of all social research contracts (including cost and proposed end date) must be published on the Public Contracts Scotland Portal.
- Details of all research commissioned by the Scottish Government must be published on the Scottish Government website.
- Dissemination strategies should be drawn up for all in-house and externally commissioned research as part of the commissioning process.
- Pre-release access to embargoed research reports may be granted at the discretion of the Chief Researcher or their nominee.

Principle 5: Responsibility for the release of government social research must be clear

- Final responsibility for the content, format and timing of publication of government social research rests with the SG Chief Researcher or their nominee.
- Ministerial approval must be received for all externally commissioned research. Approval may be sought for an individual research project or through Ministerial sign off of a programme of analytical work.
- Ministers will be advised on the content of research and timing of release (see above) but once Ministerial approval to commence the work has been granted Ministers will not subsequently be asked to comment on whether or not the research should be published.
- Where there is dispute or uncertainty about appropriate practice on publication, the Chief Researcher (or their nominee) will provide advice, consulting the Chief Statistician if responsibilities overlap.
- Accidental or wrongful release of research information must be reported to the SG Chief Researcher or their nominee as soon as it is discovered.