

Journalists have high confidence in Statistics Norway

Paper submitted by Statistics Norway¹

1. Negative press coverage aimed at Statistics Norway's figures rarely happens. Good relations with the media and preventive work secure positive press coverage. Keywords in our preventive work are openness, good routines and a high degree of service.

Example of openness:

In the spring of 1998 it was revealed that the growth in the Index of retail sales had been largely underestimated. The growth in 1997 and so far in 1998 was actually much higher than Statistics Norway had estimated. The positive about this, though, was that we revealed this ourselves. No one in the media had revealed this before us. Of course, we chose to be open about this and send out a press release explaining the whole matter. In such a matter it is important to describe to positive news in this mistake: After this correction we will have a much better product because of the adjustment.

Good routines and a high degree of service

2. The Press Office at Statistics Norway has two professional journalists. They have experience from the news media such as radio, TV or newspaper, and have qualifications from higher journalistic education and other academic education. Statistics Norway finds it important that the people working at the Press Office can talk the same "language" as the media and know the media's way of working.

3. "The weekly bulletin of statistics" includes a presentation of all the new statistics of that week and other statistical articles. The weekly bulletin has a "journalistic" style and is the main task and responsibility of the Press Office. The bulletin is a not only tool to release new statistics but also a tool explain and interpret the statistics. Most of our statistics comes with explaining and interprets and not only tables and graphs. The Press Office also edit news releases after receiving a draft from the statistical unit responsible in the matter.

¹ Paper prepared by Atle Jansson, journalist at Statistics Norway

4. We follow up the publishing of all new statistics of the statistical units, i.e. the planned time of release, way of distribution etc. The Press Office is responsible for the advanced release calendar.
5. The everyday verbal contact with the media is of great importance. As often as possible we are actively trying to get in contact with the media, whether it's radio-channels, TV-stations and newspapers, regional or national. Fax and e-mail are also used to a great extent.
6. The Press Office arranges press conferences four times a year presenting a survey of and an outlook for the Norwegian economy. The Director-general and the responsible research-officers from the Research Department are doing the presentations. These conferences are of great interest and are visited by financial brokers and journalists, and they are well-known in the Norwegian media and finance and banking sectors. The need for more press conferences occur when major surveys are released and when these surveys are of great interest to the general public and the media.
7. Statistics Norway has a responsibility to feed the whole society with new statistics and to show them how the society looks. Therefore we do not give any media exclusive rights to our statistics. All of the media have the same right to our new statistics. Although we have weekly discussions with journalists who wants exclusive rights to some of our new statistics the media respects this fair treatment to a great extent.
8. All new statistics and new publications are released on our web-site, but radio-channels, TV-stations and newspaper also get a free copy of all new publications. In that way they have easier access to our statistics and there are no obstacles in the way of broadcasting the statistics.
9. Statistics Norway is responsible and reporting to the Ministry of Finance. However nobody outside Statistics Norway, not even the Ministry of Finance, get any information in advanced in connection with the release of our statistics. There are no political control or interference. That is one of the things the media are happy about. Our statements in the media are not read as political statements but as technical and professional statements.

Interviews and requests

10. Whenever people from Statistics Norway are interviewed in the media the statements should always be backed up by what our figures show. Personal opinions or views are not allowed and does not happen. Employees who know how to deal with the media are always the ones who are giving interviews. The management should be informed if any controversial statements are made. If quoted, one should get the journalist to read the article on the phone or to have it faxed before print/release.
11. Requests and questions should be treated as fast as possible - journalists have deadlines. We should always remind the media to use Statistics Norway as source. Unpublished materials are not to be given to the media.

Critical and misleading reports

12. Wrong use of statistics, figures or graphs should be commented on by Statistics Norway as soon as possible and be adjusted correspondingly. If we discover poor use of source in the media the Press Office should be involved, which follows special routines in direct contact with the media. If the media gives a critical and misleading report or the reputation and image of Statistics Norway are at stake the Director-general should be involved.
13. In many cases reports and documents from our Research Department create a heated debate in the society. The debate often starts either in an editorial column or from a readers letter to a newspaper.

Many debates are positive to Statistics Norway but when our image and reputation are at stake and the debate are negative it is of great importance to give an interview or send a readers letter to a newspaper to sort it all out. It is important to keep an open mind, be positive and do not hide facts. A “no comment” is no answer and does not help us in improving the reputation.