

Information paper

Revision policy for the Retail Sales Index

Introduction

In official statistics, revisions to published estimates occur for a number of reasons: from the on-going incorporation of late survey data, to the less regular update of weights used to combine lower level estimates, as well as occasional methodological improvements and changes in international classifications and standards.

Revision policies are used to manage the timing of the release of revisions to published estimates. The National Statistics Code of Practice includes a Protocol on Revisions which provides a broad framework for how the release of revised estimates should be managed. Consistent with this Protocol, this information paper outlines the revision policy and revision information specific to the Retail Sales Index (RSI).

Revision policy for non-seasonally adjusted estimates

Typically, revisions to the non-seasonally adjusted estimates arise when data from surveys replace imputed values; when surveyed businesses revise their data for previous months; from changes to the weights used in the estimation process; from methodological changes; and from corrections to errors in source data.

The policy for the routine release of revisions to the non-seasonally adjusted RSI indices is:

- a) for all periods including and after the index reference year, revisions will be published as they occur;
- b) for periods before the index reference year, the non-seasonally adjusted series will not be revised.

There will be exceptional occasions when it will be desirable to revise the non-seasonally adjusted series for periods before the index reference year. For example, as part of the planned introduction of significant methodological

improvements, or when international standards or classifications change (e.g. revision to the Standard Industrial Classification).

Revision policy for seasonally adjusted estimates

Revisions to the seasonally adjusted estimates will follow from revisions to the non-seasonally adjusted series. However, even when there is no revision to the non-seasonally adjusted estimates, there may still be revisions to the seasonally adjusted series. These can occur due to changes in the parameters used as part of the seasonal adjustment process, or from the addition to the series of the latest data point.

The policy for the routine release of revisions to the seasonally adjusted RSI indices is:

- a) revisions will not be constrained or restricted, and may therefore occur along the full length of each series.

This will ensure that the most up-to-date accurate seasonally adjusted estimates are available for all periods.

Analysis of revisions

Analysis of revisions to non-seasonally adjusted and seasonally adjusted estimates provide an indication of the reliability of key indicators. For the RSI, considerable information is made available on revisions to the historical series as a routine part of the monthly release.

Table 1 is an example of a table which is included in the RSI First Release and shows summary information on the size and direction of the revisions which have been made to the seasonally adjusted estimates covering a five year period. A statistical test is applied to the average revision to determine if it is statistically significantly different from zero. The table uses historical seasonally adjusted estimates for the most recent sixty months, comparing the seasonally adjusted estimate at the first publication with the seasonally adjusted estimate published twelve months later. The table is updated on a monthly basis.

At the same time as the First Release, ONS also publishes a spreadsheet which includes a real time dataset of revisions to the RSI, for both monthly and three monthly growth rates. The spreadsheet also includes a test of the statistical significance of any bias in the revisions history of the RSI. The spreadsheet is available here:

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_economy/RSIRevisions.xls

Table 1: Summary of the difference between the first seasonally adjusted estimates and seasonally adjusted estimates published 12 months later¹

Volume seasonally adjusted	Growth in latest period (per cent)	Revisions between first publication and estimates twelve months later (percentage points)	
		Average over the last five years (mean revision)	Average over the last five years without regard to sign (average absolute revision)
Latest three months compared to previous three months	1.4	-0.11	0.23
Latest month compared to previous month	-0.1	-0.00	0.30

¹ For estimates published between November 2001 and October 2006

Further information

If you have a query about the revision policy for the Retail Sales Index please email: retail.sales.enquiries@ons.gsi.gov.uk

The National Statistics Protocol on Revisions can be accessed here: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about_ns/cop/downloads/revisions.pdf

The First Release of the Retail Sales Index is available here: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vLnk=870>

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