

BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

A breach of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics occurs where one or more provisions of the Code were not followed in situations where an exemption or exception had not been approved by the UK Statistics Authority's Head of Assessment, as required in paragraph (xii) of the Code's preamble. Rules on pre-release access to statistics are covered in the relevant Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics Orders; the Code applies as if it includes these orders.

1 Background Information

Name of Statistical Output (including web link if relevant)

Producer Price Indices

Name of Producer Organisation

Office for National Statistics

Name and contact details of person submitting this report

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2 Circumstances of Breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2, Practice 8 – accidental and wrongful release by HMT during the period of pre release access

Date of occurrence

10 February 2011

Nature of breach (including links with previous breaches, if any)

At 14:02 on 10 February an internal HM Treasury email which included a brief on the PPI statistics was incorrectly forwarded to a general email inbox ('macroeconomic briefing'). This inbox is a secure public folder accessible to those with HM Treasury email accounts and is not available to anyone outside the organisation.

The email was recalled after 4 minutes, but still appeared available in the inbox, and was removed from the inbox after 18 minutes. The email did not appear in individuals' inboxes, and would have only been visible to those who actively went into the macroeconomic briefing inbox and opened the Word attachment.

We are unable to confirm whether anyone did access the macroeconomic briefing inbox during that period. The Word document was clearly marked as restricted under the National Statistics Code of Practice until 9:30 on 11 February.

Reasons for breach

See above

3 Reactions and Impact

None – immediate corrective procedures minimised the potential for those outside the pre-release access list viewing the information. No information was sent outside the department.

4 Corrective Actions Taken (include short-term actions, and long-term changes made to procedures)

The email was recalled within 4 minutes, and deleted fully in 18 minutes. We are reviewing our procedures around this inbox. Going forward we will remove the inbox from appearing in the general address book thus in future preventing HM Treasury officials accidentally sending pre-release material to this public inbox. This will ensure that accidental sharing of pre-release material cannot happen by incorrectly forwarding or copying of this mailbox.

Future guidance will be even more explicit in highlighting which email addresses are permitted to receive information under pre-release. All those who receive information under privileged pre-release will be reminded of their obligations to prevent a comparable event happening in the future.