

## 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)

Statistics on International Development

<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/About-DFID/Finance-and-performance/Aid-Statistics/Statistic-on-International-Development-2010/>

Name of Producer Organisation

Department for International Development (DfID)

Name and contact details of person submitting this report, and date of report

Kenny Osborne, Senior Statistics Adviser, Finance and Corporate Performance DFID, Abercrombie House, East Kilbride G75

### 2 Circumstances of Breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Principle 2: Impartiality and Objectivity - Practice 3, "Make official statistics equally available to all, subject to statutory provisions for pre-release access".

Protocol 2: Release Practices - Practice 7, "Subject to compliance with the rules and principles on pre-release access set out in legislation, limit access before public release to those people essential for production and publication, and for quality assurance and operational purposes".

Date of occurrence

30 September 2010

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

The National Statistic, *Statistics on International Development* (SID) is a detailed compendium of a wide range of UK aid statistics. The publication was published in October 2010 and contained a wide range of information already in the public domain which was accessible via DFID's Annual Report which was published in July 2010.

SID also includes final out-turn data for “UK Official Development Assistance as a proportion of Gross National Income (the ODA:GNI ratio)”. This figure was published in provisional form in April, also as a National Statistic.

Prior to publication of SID in October 2010, reference to the final out-turn ODA:GNI ratio was included in a submission to DFID ministers, DFID’s Management Board and a Press Office representative on 30 September (4 working days) in advance of the 24 hour limit for pre-release access. As far as we are aware the submission was not circulated further internally within DFID or outside DFID. Certainly none of the content appeared in the public domain until the formal release of SID on 7 October.

While the final ODA figure was almost identical to the provisional figure published in April DFID accepts that the submission revealed some statistics in their final form and as such constituted a breach of agreed pre-release practice.

#### Reasons for breach

The production of Statistics on International Development (SID) took place during the 2010 Spending Review. A key issue in the Spending Review in the context of international development was the allocation of Official Development Assistance to DFID and other government departments.

During the Spending Review Process DFID worked closely with all other government departments involved in spending ODA to ensure that we had a comprehensive understanding of the systems and methodologies used for measuring aid volumes. This was necessary to provide confidence that the Government would meet its commitment to spend 0.7% of GNI as ODA by 2013. From a DFID perspective it was important to understand the precise contribution from other government departments as this would have a direct impact on DFID’s overall budget.

During the Spending Review DFID statisticians provided frequent updates to senior management and Ministers on changes to the underlying baseline and forward ODA projections. Close to finalisation of the final 2009 ODA figures for publication in SID, DFID received notification from the UK Border Agency of changes to the underlying methodology for calculating figures of the cost of supporting refugees in the UK which forms part of the ODA calculation. The extent of this particular revision was deemed material to ongoing discussion between DFID, HM Treasury and the Home Office on the final overall ODA SR10 settlement.

Discussions with DFID’s Secretary of State on this issue had suggested a preference to publish details of other government departments revised ODA alongside the Spending Review announcement on 20<sup>th</sup> October.

But given the revised methodology was relevant to historic data DFID statisticians took the decision that the Secretary of State should be informed that revised historic figures would be published as part of Statistics on International Development on 7<sup>th</sup> October consistent with its pre-announcement date.

A submission was prepared on that basis. In order to provide context for the scale of the revision comparison was made to the overall ODA volume. While only a small part of the Statistics on International Development compendium, the reference in the submission to statistics in their final form represents a breach.

### **3 Reactions and Impact**

None. The figure was not disseminated further or released publicly prior to its official publication date. No amendments were made to statistical or wider press communications as a consequence of wider pre-release access.

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

DFID is confident that this breach is primarily the result of loose drafting in the relevant submission rather than the deliberate provision of privileged access to the statistics.

Nevertheless DFID has taken steps to clarify and separate internal responsibilities for the production of UK ODA statistics. Until recently DFID statisticians had responsibility for oversight of in-year projections of ODA out-turn, internal management reporting and liaising with non-DFID parties involved in ODA spending in addition to retrospective reporting of final UK aid volumes to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation Development as well as UK National Statistics.

In-year management and profiling and non-DFID liaison are now overseen by a separate management accounting function. DFID statisticians are now only responsible for the statistical reporting aspects of UK aid. This should ensure that any information provided in advance of statistical releases is of a genuine administrative nature and/or preliminary estimates.

Following the formal announcement of UK ODA:GNI targets for the next 4 years DFID is also developing a full monitoring and reporting strategy with HM Treasury and other contributing departments. This strategy will reflect the need to balance genuine demand from DFID and HMT for real time management information with the desire to conform to National Statistics standards. We aim to have this strategy in place early in the 2011/12 financial year.

### **5 Any other relevant supporting material (including link to published statements about this breach)**

Not applicable. We will make available our full ODA monitoring strategy in due course.