

BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

This document reports a breach of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, or the relevant Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Orders, to which the Code applies as if it included these orders.

1. Background information

Name of Statistical Output (including weblink to the relevant output or 'landing page')

2013 Labour Force Survey Northern Ireland Religion Report.

<http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/equality-and-strategy/pfg-economics-statistics/equalityresearch/research-publications/labour-force-religion-reports.htm>

Name of Producer Organisation

Office of the First and deputy First Minister NI, Statistics & Research Branch (NISRA)

Name and contact details of the statistical Head of Profession (Lead Official in an Arm's Length Body) submitting this report, and date of report

Mr Dave Rogers (Senior Principal Statistician OFMDFM)

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Release date 17 Dec 2014

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2 / Practice 8 - Ensure that no indication of the substance of a statistical report is made public, or given to the media or any other party not recorded as eligible for access before publication. Report to the National Statistician immediately any accidental or wrongful release, and investigate the circumstances.

Date of occurrence

16 December 2014

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

24 hour pre release access (PRA) to the publication was given in the form of a submission to ministers, private secretaries and those on the PRA list at 09:32 on 16 December 2014. An email was received from central correspondence unit at 12:00 to note that the submission had been received. This email (and attachments) was copied to a number of officials not on the PRA list. All those who received the email were departmental officials/private office or press office staff. No one from outside OFMDFM received the email.

Reasons for breach

The breach was due to human error on the part of the official within the Central Correspondence Unit.
A number of individuals not on the pre release access list received access to a National Statistic during the 24 hour PRA period.

3. Reactions and impact (both within the producer body and outside)

At 12:30 the Senior Principal Statistician wrote to the Central Correspondence Unit reminding them of the pre release access statement and noting that a breach of pre-release access had occurred. The Principal Statistician noted that appropriate procedures would commence and advised that the relevant email must be recalled.

At 12:57 the Senior Principal Statistician wrote to those individuals who had incorrectly received the publication to advise them to delete the email and confirm deletion. A request to delete the material was also sent by the Central Correspondence Unit at 13:17. Confirmation of deletion was received by 13:19 from all those who received PRA in error.

The breach has resulted in an adverse impact on staff time.

4. Corrective actions taken to prevent reoccurrence of such a breach (include short-term actions, and long-term changes made to procedures)

2 weeks in advance of the release date statisticians met with relevant officials in press office to refresh knowledge surrounding the official statistics code of practice and to advise specifically on release practices. Written advice was also provided at this time.

Immediately after the breach was discovered an instruction was issued to all those who received pre release access in error asking that they recall the relevant email and delete it. The Senior Principal Statistician also contacted Head of Profession / Chief Statistician to inform him of the breach.

The Principal Statistician spoke with private office to provide advice and to arrange a meeting in the near future to enact change in private office procedures with regard to

statistical submissions. A meeting took place in January with Private Office and Press Office staff to discuss the breach and to refresh knowledge on release practices and the Code of Practice. Further mitigating actions have been agreed in order to avoid the risk of such an event occurring again. The pre release access list has now been amended and agreed with the relevant staff – only the named individuals will receive access and all are clear that this is not to be forwarded on under any circumstances. The Principal Statistician agreed that a more stringent note to accompany PRA is to be sent with the data to ensure responsibilities are not misunderstood.

In the longer term the Principal Statistician will re-iterate advice to private office staff and other relevant officials regarding the Official Statistics Code of Practice and produce short, user friendly guidance on this.

5. Links to published statements about this breach

<http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/index/equality-and-strategy/pfg-economics-statistics/equalityresearch/research-publications/labour-force-religion-reports.htm>