

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)

Ad hoc release on General Government Final Consumption Expenditure – relates to a component of UK Economic Accounts Q1 2014

Name of Producer Organisation

Office for National Statistics

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

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2 Circumstances of Breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

1. Protocol 2 – Release Practices, Practices 7 and 8
2. Paragraphs 2 and 6(1) of the Schedule to The Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008

Date of occurrence

24 June 2014

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

General Government Final Consumption Expenditure is part of the expenditure measure of GDP. Every quarter an ad hoc request with further breakdowns is released to Bank of England which is then also published on the Internet in line with ONS ad hoc policy. In preparing for Friday's release, the ad hoc request was immediately published instead of being queued for release on Friday after the UK Economic Accounts were released which is the first time this component would be released.

The team spotted the issue and the ad hoc request was removed within 5 minutes. The ad hoc only gave details of General Government Final Consumption Expenditure and its components and did not contain any reference to headline GDP numbers or growths.

This was discussed with Andrew Walton (owner of UK Economic Accounts) and agreed given the details which were released, it would not be possible to infer trends in GDP growth and so agreed not to bring forward publication of UK Economic Accounts.

Reasons for breach

This breach was the consequence of human error.

3 Reactions and Impact (both within the producer body and outside)

There was no evidence that anyone outside saw this release in the short-time it was available on the website. There were no visitors to the page in the time the data were on the site.

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

Actions

- Training for team in how to queue ad hoc releases
- Review whether ad hoc material should be included in the quarterly bulletin rather than published as an ad hoc each quarter

ONS Corporate Centre Actions

- DG office is working with the Departmental Security Officer to review the process of sending pre-release access to identify areas for improvement.

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