

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)

National Statistics Statistical First Release (SFR) 13/2009: Admissions Appeals for Maintained Primary and Secondary Schools in England, 2007/08

Name of Producer Organisation

Department for Children, Schools and Families.

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

Malcolm Britton, 19 June 2009

2 Circumstances of Breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Principle 4: Sound methods and assured quality
Statistical methods should be consistent with scientific principles and internationally recognised best practices, and be fully documented. Quality should be monitored and assured taking account of internationally agreed practices.

Practices

2. Ensure that official statistics are produced to a level of quality that meets users' needs, and that users are informed about the quality of statistical outputs, including estimates of the main sources of bias and other errors, and other aspects of the European Statistical System definition of quality.

The six dimensions of the European Statistical System Quality Framework are: relevance, accuracy, timeliness and punctuality, accessibility and clarity, comparability, and coherence.

Punctuality refers to the time lag between the release date of data and the target date when it should have been delivered.

Date of occurrence

The decision to postpone was taken and made public on the DCSF Research and Statistics Gateway and the UK National Statistics Publications Hub on 17 June 2009. The decision was taken before any pre-release access to the SFR was provided and such access has

been withheld.

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

The SFR was due to be released at 0930 on Thursday 18 June. The release was postponed to July. A specific date in July will be set when some further analysis has been completed.

Reasons for breach

Credibility checks raised concerns about the validity of the results on the numbers of new admissions, the numbers of appeals and the rates of appeals these numbers produce. Further data quality analysis is required to confirm validity and/or enable sufficient explanation to users to be included in the release. Such postponements are avoided whenever possible but the priority here was to ensure that users were not misled by the statistics in question (as required by the requirement in principle 4 to ensure that outputs are produced to a level of quality that meets user needs and that users are informed about the quality of statistical outputs).

3 Reactions and Impact

No feedback has been received to date.

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

We placed an announcement to inform users of the delay on the DCSF Research and Statistics Gateway Home Page on 18 June, as follows:

Admissions Appeals Statistics

SFR13/2009: Admissions Appeals for Maintained Primary and Secondary Schools in England, 2007/08 was due to be released at 09:30 on Thursday 18 June. The responsible statistician has decided, before any pre-release access to the statistics was given, that the release should be postponed. This decision is based on statistical concerns, i.e. around the quality of data on admissions and appeals. Further analysis is being carried out and a new release date in July will be publicised on this site as soon as possible.

We placed a link from the entry on the UK National Statistics Publication Hub Release Calendar to the announcement on 18 June.

DCSF Press Office alerted key contacts to the announcement, in case they were preparing to make early use of the SFR.

Further data analysis is underway.

There will be a lessons learned exercise immediately following the publication of the admissions appeals data in July. This will examine the extent to which the problems experienced could have been foreseen and built into the management of risks. The findings will then be incorporated into working procedures for future releases of admissions appeals data; and their relevance to other statistical releases considered.

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

The announcement of the delay can be found at the following link:

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/>