

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')

Alcohol-related deaths in the United Kingdom, 2011
<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/subnational-health4/alcohol-related-deaths-in-the-united-kingdom/2011/alcohol-related-deaths-in-the-uk--2011.html>

Name of Producer Organisation

Office for National Statistics (ONS)

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

Glen Watson, Director General (DG), ONS
Government Buildings, Cardiff Road, Newport, NP10 8XG
dg@ons.gsi.gov.uk
01633 655252

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2 release practices

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

29 January 2013

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

The statistical bulletin went live on the ONS website at 08:11 rather than 09:30 on 29 January 2013.

Reasons for breach

- Human error.
- The output originally had a provisional release date of 09:30 24 January 2013 but this was changed in December 2012 to a final release date of 09:30 29 January.
- This change was entered in to the web publishing software but was only successful in changing the publication date of the landing page (called release edition) upon which the content of the output appears. However the release date was not amended for the statistical bulletin.
- On the afternoon of 28 January (day before publication), the output was finalised and put into the web software's 'publishing queue'. This is where outputs sit and wait in the system for the time and date of publication, as noted above.
- At 17:30 the Publishing Support Team (PST) spotted the statistical bulletin publication date was incorrect but was under the impression that it was the publication date of the landing page (release edition) that was the controlling date. This is not the case. PST therefore advised that no action should be taken until the next day rather than risk 09:30 publishing as there was nobody available in the business area with the necessary permissions in the system to re-approve the output. If it had been re-approved the next morning the output would have missed the next key stage of the process which begins at 08:00.
- At 08:10, on 29 January (publication day), when the software took the normal next steps towards publication, it found a publication date of 09:30/24 January for the statistical bulletin and 09:30/29 January for the landing page (and excel tables). It therefore allowed the bulletin through to live (as the publication date was in the past) but correctly held back the landing page/tables (as the date was in the future).
- The landing page was not published or accessible until 09:30 but the statistical bulletin for the output was accessible - but only by searching for it online.
- This early release was spotted by the Media Relations Office (MRO) at approximately 09:10. As this was so close to 09:30 there was nothing that could be done.

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

- No customer complaints/comments were received and there was no media or social media reaction.
- There was one viewing of the statistical bulletin between 08:00 and 09:00. It is not possible to retrospectively measure the number of views in time bands of less than one hour. Data on the number of viewings between 09:00 and 09:30 is therefore not available.

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

- A new check has been applied to the business area production process. When an output has had its publication date finalised for the release edition, the business area will ensure that all the publication dates and times are correct for all the existing elements of

the output.

- The Publishing Support Team (PST) have communicated the correct advice to Business Areas on this issue (that changes to the publication date of the landing page (release edition) are not carried over to parts of the output already on the system, and that the publication dates for these need to be manually updated). PST managers have actioned this communication to all PST members.
- Options for a process change has been investigated, however due to the effect that the proposed changes would have on the current publishing system, these options are not currently viable. Feasible solutions may arise as part of the ongoing enhancement program but currently there is no feasible process solution to eradicate this issue without negatively affecting the publishing system.