

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)

All Office for National Statistics Outputs 1 May – 31 August 2011

Name of Producer Organisation

Office for National Statistics

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

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1 May 2011

2 Circumstances of Breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2 Practice 4 – 9.30am Release

Date of occurrence

1 May – 31 August 2011

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

The Code requires National Statistics releases to be issued at 9.30 am on the day of publication.

Reasons for breach

ONS's current website systems do not enable releases to be published simultaneously, which means there is sometimes a delay beyond 9.30 am for parts of the release.

The new ONS web site will have improved search and navigation for users to be able to find the information they are looking for. This includes all content types from statistical bulletin to a dataset and news article.

This will be achieved through an enhanced search facility and filtering options alongside a taxonomy structure, based on the National Statistics Publication Hub, through which users can navigate to the theme and subject they are looking for e.g. economy and inflation. The new website will also enable timely release of outputs.

In addition the architectural solution will open up access to data in line with government policy and provide the potential for a wider joined up web strategy.

3 Reactions and Impact

Currently unknown. In the majority of instances to date, when a breach to the Code by the ONS website has resulted, the headline figure (where applicable) and the Statistical Bulletin have been published to time. Any delay has only been to supplementary figures, datasets and analysis. This has reduced the impact on users and ONS will continue to prioritise the headline figure and the statistical bulletin to ensure parity of access to all users.

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

ONS cannot guarantee an exact 9.30am web release. A number of short-term improvements have already been made to the ONS website. Given the timing of the release of the new website from the Web Development Programme, it has been agreed that no additional resources will be invested in short-term improvements to the current website which would be lost once the new website is launched. In addition, a moratorium on the changes to the 'static' pages came into effect at the end of September 2010 while all content is migrated to the new website.

ONS does not expect to be able to comply with the Code until the end of August 2011. ONS is submitting this collective breach of the Code from 1 May 2011 and agreed to log and report to the Authority details about delayed releases.

ONS will work as closely in line with the Code as possible, by ensuring that the number of releases delayed past 9.30am is minimised and will continue to prioritise market sensitive and key releases.

Please also refer to response to Section 3.

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

The Head of Assessment agreed an exemption from Protocol 2 Practice 4 for ONS until 30 April 2011. The exemption request, and the Head of Assessment's response are available on the Statistics Authority's website:

<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/exemption-requests/index.html>

Subsequently, ONS announced that it does not expect to be able to comply with this practice until the end of August 2011. The Assessment team asked ONS to submit a report describing the nature of the breach of the Code from 1 May 2011, and to log and report to the Authority details about delayed releases.