

## 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)

Mortality statistics: Deaths registered in 2008:  
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=15096>  
Birth summary tables, England and Wales, 2009:  
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=14408>  
Death registration summary tables, England and Wales, 2009:  
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=14409>  
Marriage statistics, England and Wales, 2007:  
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=14275>

Name of Producer Organisation

Office for National Statistics (ONS)

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

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### 2 Circumstances of Breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2, practice 4: Issue statistical releases at standard time of 9.30am.

Date of occurrence

29 October 2009 – Deaths annual reference volume 2008  
24 March 2010 – Marriage statistics 2007  
21 July 2010 – Birth and death summary tables 2009

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

Late release time (around 10.30 to 10.45 am)

Reasons for breach

These tables are required to be laid before parliament under legislation (section 19 of Registration Service Act) before becoming available to the public. The Journal Office at the House of Commons does not open until 9.30am. By the time the laying process has been completed, the ONS notified and the web team publishes the data, the release time is more likely to be around 10.30 am.

### **3 Reactions and Impact**

No users have queried the one hour delay in the release of birth, death or marriage summary tables.

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

In 2009, ONS Legal Services and Publishing teams agreed the process to follow for laying documents before parliament and publishing on the Internet.

Wording was provided on the Publication Hub and ONS website to indicate that the release time was likely to be delayed.

Publication Hub:

This document is to be laid before Parliament before publication. Consequently, it may not be released until after 9.30 am.

Example for deaths annual reference volume on ONS website:

29/10/2009 - Information notice: Deaths Registered in 2008 (DR) is to be laid before Parliament before publication. Consequently, it may not be released until after 9.30 am. There are no other options available. The Journal Office will not open earlier. A Cabinet Office official has agreed to wait for the Journal Office to open to speed up the process and notify the ONS as quickly as possible when this is completed. If the publication was released the next day at 9.30am this would mean all members of parliament would have pre-release access to the publication.

An exemption will be sought from the UK Statistics Authority for the future publication of summary tables on births, deaths and marriages.

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

At the beginning of March 2010, the Minister agreed to the ONS proposals to change the format of the annual abstracts laid before parliament. Therefore, from 2010 onwards only a few key summary tables for births, still-births, deaths and marriages have been laid before parliament (in March for marriages and July for births and deaths). Before 2010, much larger annual reference volumes on these topics were laid before parliament (in March for marriages, October for deaths and December for births).