

## 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')

Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings - ASHE

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

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### 2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Principle 5, Practice 2: Keep confidential information secure. Only permit its use by trained staff who have signed a declaration covering their obligations under this Code.

Date of occurrence

24 April 2013

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

Two boxes of questionnaires containing personal information were labelled incorrectly and sent to the wrong address. Further details are give below:

- The questionnaires sent out for the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings contain the name and title of an individual, and her National Insurance Number (e.g. Mr JP SMITH YZ5922153D).

- For respondents with over 100 employees being included in the survey, we box the questionnaires, label the boxes and despatch them via Parcel Force. Two boxes were mis-labelled.
- We received a telephone call received from a respondent from Leicester City Council on Wednesday 24 April 2013 to tell us that they had received a box of questionnaires relating to the University of Leicester NHS Trust.
- Our conversations with the two respondents assures us that each respondent looked only at the first questionnaire in the box (in order to compare a reference number with the covering letter) then sealed the box and returned it to us. There had been no dispersal of the questionnaires within the organisation, no copying etc that would signal a serious disclosure of personal information.
- Similar breaches have occurred in each of the last two survey rounds - and both were addressed through action plans designed to minimise a re-occurrence.

#### Reasons for breach

- Two boxes of questionnaires were mislabelled
- A new, rigorous manual checking process was implemented for this year's despatch because of the same difficulty last year. It was followed for most of the despatch this year but the mix up of labels was caused by a combination of an experienced person going on leave, and a delay in printing the labels for four boxes of questionnaires because the despatch area had to check something with the ASHE team.

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

#### **SUMMARY**

The contacts at both Leicester City Council and the University of Leicester NHS Trust have reacted calmly and, from our conversations with them, there is no indication that they will want to escalate the issue. Although they both looked at questionnaires that did not belong to them, they complied with our request to seal them immediately and return the box to ONS. Both boxes of questionnaires have been returned to ONS and, to date, we have received no complaint from them and there has been no media coverage of the breach.

#### **TIMELINE**

##### **Wed 24 Apr 13**

- Received call from Leicester City Council in the afternoon so data analyst contacted the University of Leicester NHS Trust to check what questionnaires they had received. It was clear that they had the questionnaires relating to Leicester City Council so both contacts were asked to return their questionnaires via Parcel Force to ONS.
- The ASHE Survey Manager and associated line management were informed (after 15.00). From the initial report of the respondents' conversation, the risk of embarrassment to ONS was judged to be low.

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##### **Fri 26 Apr 13**

- University of Leicester NHS Trust questionnaires returned to ONS.

##### **Mon 29 Apr 13**

- Leicester City Council questionnaires returned to ONS.

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

##### **1. In future**

- Involvement of experienced staff from outside the immediate area who are skilled in quality checking. So, for all ParcelForce despatches, they will work with the Print and Despatch Manager to introduce a more robust process and will then take responsibility for this aspect of the work. Completed: the new procedure was trialled during the re-despatch of the two boxes of questionnaires.
- The despatch area will also ensure that the final stage of processing (securing label and checking name/address) will be carried out strictly in accordance with the agreed procedure. Completed as part of the re-despatch.
- Desk instructions will be reviewed and amended to include changes to procedure. Completed 29 Apr 13.
- A structured walkthrough of the process with observers (including the senior managers) reviewing the process with a view to error-proofing it -will be completed by end Jun 13.

##### **2. Those involved in the incident**

- Managers will reiterate the importance of the quality checks and will hold a training session outlining the risks and impact of despatch errors on ONS reputation. Complete
- Consider whether attendance at the new White Belt LEAN 6 Sigma course being developed should be mandatory for all staff working in a process driven environment. Target: End May 13

##### **3. Corporate Action:**

Details of the breach will be submitted to the ONS Board. The corrective actions are being tracked to closure by the business area and the corporate centre.