

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')

Benefit Sanctions official statistics, May 2013

Name of Producer Organisation

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

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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11 April 2013.

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2, 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

28 March 2013

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

On 28 March, the Guardian published a report showing what they refer to as a "scorecard" for benefit sanctions, based on DWP management information (MI). Whilst it is not directly comparable to any official statistics, it does cover similar ground:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2013/mar/28/jobcentre-scorecard-areas-stopping-benefits>

The report shows details of the number of Job Seekers Allowance and Employment Support Allowance sanctions, caused by claimants failing to fulfil certain conditions of receiving the benefit. As well as the number of sanctions, the report also shows the caseloads for Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) and Employment Support Allowance (ESA), broken down by each Job Centre Plus (JCP) district.

This MI is routinely used throughout JCP to monitor performance and identify anomalies.

Reasons for breach

DWP are conducting a formal investigation into how this information was released to the Guardian. This investigation will follow standard departmental procedures.

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

DWP takes the unlawful release of information very seriously and is conducting an internal inquiry into the source of this breach.

Official statistics on JSA sanctions will be released in May 2013. This will be the first edition of a new regime for the statistics, based on new policies for benefit sanctions. These statistics will be presented at JCP office level. At the same time we will also publish, due to the increasing demand for this information, a more granular version of the back series of JSA sanctions, by office - previously these have only been published at JCP District Level.

Statistics based on a new methodology for ESA sanctions, alongside a revised historical series and a working paper explaining the differences between the methodologies, will be published in July 2013 and aligned with JSA sanctions in future releases.

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

DWP are conducting an inquiry into how this information was released into the public domain. This will involve investigative techniques, which can include targeted searches on the Department's IT infrastructure, to establish the potential source of the data leak.

We will review whether any of our current procedures need to change based on the findings of this inquiry.

We have also reaffirmed the guidance governing the department's use of management

information and raised the National Statistician's guidance on the use of Administrative Data and Management Information with senior analysts and their policy areas.

5. Links to published statements about this breach

A copy of this breach report will be published in the relevant areas of the UK Statistics Authority website and referenced from DWP's website.