

# 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')

This report covers the breaches of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, protocol 2, practice 4 (09:30 releases). The report covers the period 1 March 2012 to 31 March 2013. These breaches have occurred because of performance issues with the ONS website and release publication system which have led to delays in publishing. The breaches are being released as a combined report for this period since the root cause for all is the same. However, it should be noted that ONS has notified the UK Statistics Authority when the delays have occurred throughout the year. Other types of breaches of this protocol and practice are reported separately as they occur.

The table in section 2 lists ONS breaches of protocol 2, practice 4 from 1 March 2012 to 31 March 2013 and the time that they were published. On some occasions, the additional datasets, including time series data, that accompany the statistical releases may have taken longer than this due to the reasons given in Section 2. As shown in the table, there were no 09:30 breaches in January to April 2012 that were the result of these performance issues. A number of improvements had led to a reduction in the amount of 09:30 breaches in the first quarter of the year. However, an improvement to the web site search facility, together with increased external website load and a number of factors mentioned in Section 2, then led to a number 09:30 breaches.

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

[dg@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:dg@ons.gsi.gov.uk) tel:01633 655252

See table below for a full list of outputs and dates

## 2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2 release practices/Practice 4 issue releases at 09:30 - Issue statistical releases at the standard time of 09:30 on a weekday, to maintain consistency and to permit time for users to understand and respond to the information during normal working hours.

Date of occurrence

See table below for a full list of outputs and dates

**Table of Breaches to Protocol 2, Practice 4 from 1 March 2012 – 31 March 2013**

	<b>Output</b>	<b>Date of Release</b>	<b>Time of Release</b>
1	Output in the Construction Industry, March and Q1 2012	11/05/2012	09:41:00
2	Consumer Prices Index, April 2012	22/05/2012	09:37:00
3	House Price Index, March 2012	22/05/2012	09:35:00
4	UK Trade, April 2012	15/06/2012	09:31:52
5	Consumer Price Indices, May 2012	19/06/2012	09:32:47
6	Labour Market Statistics, June 2012	20/06/2012	09:31:07
7	Regional Labour Market Statistics, June 2012	20/06/2012	09:42:56
8	Public Sector Employment, Q1 2012	20/06/2012	09:35:06
9	Balance of Payments, 1st Quarter 2012	28/06/2012	09:50:53
10	Business Investment, Q1 2012	28/06/2012	10:01:05
11	Quarterly National Accounts, Q1 2012	28/06/2012	09:40:34
12	United Kingdom Economic Accounts, Q1 2012	28/06/2012	09:40:58
13	Regional Labour Market Statistics	18/07/2012	09:31:11
14	Labour Market Statistics, August 2012	15/08/2012	09:31:11
15	Regional Labour Market Statistics, August 2012	15/08/2012	09:31:00
16	Labour Market Statistics, September 2012	12/09/2012	09:31:53
17	Regional Labour Market Statistics, September 2012	12/09/2012	09:31:36
18	Consumer Trends, Q2 2012	27/09/2012	09:31:31
19	Balance of Payments, Q2 2012	27/09/2012	09:31:21
20	Quarterly National Accounts, Q2 2012	27/09/2012	09:31:51
21	Index of Production - August 2012	09/10/2012	09:36:05
22	UK Trade - August 2012	09/10/2012	09:36:13
23	Producer Price Index, October 2012	13/11/2012	09:33:17
24	Regional Labour Market Statistics, November 2012	14/11/2012	09:35:14
25	Regional Labour Market Statistics, December 2012	12/12/2012	09:31:59
26	Public Sector Finances - November 2012	21/12/2012	09:31:33
27	Regional Labour Market Statistics, January 2013	23/01/2013	09:31:59
28	Regional Labour Market Statistics, February 2013	20/02/2013	09:32:03
29	Public Sector Employment, Q4 2012	20/03/2013	09:31:42
30	Business Investment, Q4, 2012	27/03/2013	09:31:21
31	Balance of Payments, 4th quarter and annual 2012	27/03/2013	09:31:11

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

Releases not published at 09:30 on the ONS website.

**Reasons for breach**

The new website, launched in August 2011, did not provide the improvement expected in meeting these requirements of the Code to publish at 09:30. Initial performance issues with the website were resolved resulting in occurrences and the severity of delays to publications being reduced.

One of the reasons for the continued breaches is due to the volume of information being published. Current volumes of items being published by ONS exceed the volumes for which

the publishing system was designed and built. This is largely as a result of changes in ONS publishing policy (e.g. publishing all ad-hoc requests and publishing corrections alongside the original version). These have all increased the publishing volumes, and were not foreseen in the design of the publishing system. It was expected that 11,000 items would be published each year. In fact, in the twelve months to November 2012, 205,000 items had been published. Further, the shape and number of market sensitive releases have changed significantly since the website went live.

The timeliness of Market Sensitive publications has improved as we have made technical changes, however there are several factors that have impacted timely publishing.

Each release is made up of a potentially large number of items, all of differing sizes, complexity etc. Tables and datasets are particularly large and can impact publishing within 59 seconds – as we have found with Labour Market statistics and Regional Labour Market statistics releases where there can be 130+ items including 50+ tables and datasets.

Publication may also be impacted by front-end website load - i.e. if it is a popular release, then it could generate greater interest and as users keep clicking URLs the system resource usage can be increased which can leave less system resources available for publishing. These issues have led to the breaches listed in section 2.

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

The Customer Contact Centre received some complaints from customers relating to the breaches. Some of the delay received negative coverage on social media where there was a delay of more than a few minutes. Overall, particularly since December 2012, the short delays have meant that no or very minimal external user reaction through any medium has been received.

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

A number of improvements have been implemented, are in progress and are planned relating to the publication process.

These improvements include:

- Increased hardware;
- Software efficiencies;
- Performance tuning and configuration.

Some specific examples of improvements that have been made include:

- reduced logging of actions within the system;
- avoidance of background administrative tasks at the time of publication;
- extra processing power and memory added to the publishing system at Landmark (server system)
- changing Tridion (content management system) workflow to better distribute the publications across the queues.

Further improvements are also planned to be implemented, which include:

- Implement new back-office hardware
- Remodelling the content repository - rationalisation will include removing unwanted database tables

These improvements have resulted and continue to result in a reduction in the number and severity of 09:30 breaches, but ONS recognise that there is still further work to do. Proof of concepts for improvements have been developed which are planned to make potential efficiency improvements in the publishing process. In addition to a number of other work streams as part of the Improving Dissemination Programme, progress will be regularly reported at Director and Board level. Improvements will continue to be made to the system to further improve publishing performance.