

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)

College Performance Indicators 2010-11
http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/Statistics_FE_PIs/College_performance_indicators_2010-11.pdf
Performance Indicators for Individual colleges
<http://www.sfc.ac.uk/nmsruntime/saveasdialog.aspx?IID=9912&SID=2202>

Name of Producer Organisation

Scottish Funding Council (SFC)

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

Roger Halliday
Chief Statistician, Scottish Government, St Andrews House, Regent Road,
Edinburgh, EH1 3DG;
Roger.Halliday@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

2 Circumstances of Breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Principle 3: Integrity
Protocol 3: Ensure that the relevant statistical Head of Profession has the sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases.

Date of occurrence

1 March 2012

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

Prior to publication, senior management at the Scottish Funding Council asked for the removal of Tariff Scores for prior school qualifications of College enrolments within the publication. This followed discussion of their planned inclusion with the appropriate User Group. The figures were also deemed by the responsible statistician at the SFC to add useful context to the statistics. This would have been the first time these scores were published. Senior management was informed that its intervention could be seen to be a breach of the code.

Reasons for breach

Senior management at the SFC intervened due to concerns about (a) insufficient justification for providing the additional information and (b) insufficient consultation with users about these proposals.

3 Reactions and Impact

The intervention has the potential to undermine public confidence that official statistics are produced free from any undue influence.
Buy in from users to the consultation process may be damaged.
Interpretation of performance indicators may be made more difficult for users of statistics by not including this contextual information.

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

The Scottish Government Chief Statistician and the SFC Chief Executive have agreed that some awareness raising of roles and responsibilities in relation to the Code of Practice is needed and an event is planned for the Senior Management Team at SFC.

The Chief Statistician plans similar events for the SMT's at all of the Public Bodies now producing Official Statistics in Scotland.

The Scottish Funding Council has also invited the UK Statistics Authority to assess the statistics published in College Performance Indicators. This will provide an opportunity for the Authority to identify any additional steps that may be needed to strengthen SFC's compliance with the Code of Practice in relation to these statistics.

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

None