

## 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)

Crime in England and Wales: Quarterly Update to December 2010  
<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/hosb0611/>

#### Name of Producer Organisation

Home Office

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

David Blunt, Home Office Chief Statistician, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor Peel Building, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF; tel 020 7035 3402; 21/04/11

### 2 Circumstances of Breach

#### Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2: Release Practice  
Practice 8 (early release of information to media)

#### Date of occurrence

20 April 2011

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

The Association of Police Authorities (APA) issued an embargoed press release at 07:30 on the day of publication, 2 hours before the statistics were released. This press release included figures from the Quarterly Update.

### **Reasons for breach**

As a result of inexperience of new staff at APA, a press release containing figures from the bulletin was drafted and shared with others in APA not on the pre-release access list and then issued to the press under embargo by an APA Press Officer. This was a genuine mistake resulting from the member of staff not understanding such action represented a breach of the pre-release access.

### **3 Reactions and Impact**

None initially. As far as we are aware, none of the recipients of the press release used the material prior to the 9:30 am release. Press coverage of the figures happened at the same time scale as usual with such publications.

Has potential to create a poor impression in terms of compliance with Code of Practice, at a time when we are seeking to maximise public (and particularly media) trust in crime statistics and how they are handled through the National Statistician's Review.

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

On the day of the breach:

- We notified the APA of the breach and requested an explanation;
- We reviewed the content of the 24 hour pre-release e-mail, and ensured it gives clear and precise information about the conditions of pre-release;
- We informed National Statistician's Office; and
- We received a written apology for the breach from the Chief Executive of the APA.

We are reassured, by the APA's letter that this was a genuine mistake caused by staff newly in post being unclear on the details of pre-release practices. We will reply requesting that they ensure that steps are taken so that future staff turnover does not have the same effect; and stating that any future breach will result in removal of pre-release access.

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

One Policy Officer at the APA regularly receives pre-release access to the bulletin to enable them to prepare for any questions that maybe asked of the APA at the time of the release.

It came to our attention that there was a breach of pre-release access to the National Statistics publication 'Crime in England and Wales: Quarterly Update to December 2010' published at 9.30am on 20 April 2011 by this person sharing the findings with a Press Officer who then issued an embargoed press release containing information from the bulletin.

The Chief Executive of the APA apologised for this breach which they explained arose from a genuine mistake due to inexperience of new staff. We have been assured that procedures will be put in place to ensure there isn't a recurrence.