

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

Malpractice in GCSE and GCE: June 2012 Exam Series (October 2012)

Access Arrangements for GCSE and GCE: 2011/12 Exam Series (October 2012)

Special Consideration in GCSE and GCE: June 2012 Exam Series (October 2012)

Name of Producer Organisation

Ofqual (Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation)

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

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2 Circumstances of Breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2.7 Subject to compliance with the rules and principles on pre-release access set out in legislation, limit access before public release to those people essential for production and publication, and for quality assurance and operation purposes.

Protocol 2.4 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

30 and 31 October 2012

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

1. Information released internally prior to publication during 24-hour pre-release window
2. The publications were not on the website at 09:30

Reasons for breach

- 1) A new member of Ofqual's media team sent the publications to a group of staff who were not on the pre-release access list. This group consisted of 6 internal staff from the Communications and Policy Directorate and Ofqual's IT services team. The breach occurred at 11:06 and was picked up by the statistics team immediately as they were included in the e-mail.
- 2) The three publications were not on the website at 09:30. The reason was that we were publishing statistics for the first time in a new content management system. There is a facility to publish pages at scheduled times which we were using for this suite of statistics. They were set to publish at 09:30. At 09:31 it became clear that the scheduled publishing hadn't worked so each report was published manually. The reports were published as follows:

Special considerations in GCSE and GCE published 09:39

Access arrangements for GCSE and GCE published 09:35

Malpractice in GCSE and GCE publish 09:33

3 Reactions and Impact

None reported.

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

Immediate communication was undertaken between the statistics team and communications to resolve the breach where possible. This included:

1. a phone call to our communication team to immediately resolve the problem with the reports not being on the website. This enabled the reports to be published within 10 minutes of the 09:30 publication time. The digital media manager

investigated the problem and a bug was found in the automatic publishing system which was set to publish at :00, :20 and :40 minutes past the hour. The scheduling system has now been altered to run every minute of the hour so this is unlikely to happen again and our altered process means that we now publish Official Statistics reports manually.

2. A face to face discussion with the chief press officer over the pre-release access. Given the e-mail was to internal staff only, no further action was taken.

A meeting also took place between the statistics team and communications team week commencing 12 November to discuss problems with Official Statistics. A discussion of the problems the teams were facing with Official Statistics publications were discussed, including the issues reported in this breach. The outcome of the meeting was the tightening up of procedures for future publications and an understanding of who was responsible for ensuring each step in the code is adhered to.

Future protocol will include new staff to be trained in Official Statistics procedures and their importance by the statistics team. A document is being created on Ofqual's Official Statistics procedures which will specify the responsibilities through each step of the production of the report.

Regular meetings between the statistics team and communications teams will take place to ensure all procedures are being followed and any problems addressed. A training session targeted at all staff will be undertaken in the new year to ensure that Ofqual understands why Official Statistics are important and what the procedures are.