

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')

Personnel Statistics for the NICS, Based on Staff in Post at 1 April 2012

This is an Official Statistics publication, released on 23 January 2013.

http://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/Analysis_of_Personnel_Statistics_NIDepts.html

Name of Producer Organisation

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

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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23 January 2013

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2, Practice 7: Release Practices:

"Subject to compliance with the rules and principles on Pre-Release Access (PRA) set out in legislation¹, limit access before public release to those people essential for production and publication, and for quality assurance and operational purposes. Publish records of those who have access prior to release"

Protocol 2, Practice 8: Release Practices:

"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.”

¹ The PRA to Official Statistics Order (Northern Ireland) 2009 sets out the rules and principles relating to the granting of PRA to official statistics that are wholly Northern Ireland devolved statistics.

Date of occurrence

22 January 2013

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

A Department for Education (DfE) official, who was on the approved PRA list, inadvertently sent (via his Blackberry) the official statistics to 13 individuals within his Department who were not on the PRA list. There is no suggestion that the unauthorised recipients were at fault.

The DfE official was informed by one of the recipients that issuing the official statistics report to unauthorised individuals are contrary to the PRA to Official Statistics Order (Northern Ireland) 2009. The DfE official responsible for the breach immediately contacted the Grade 6 statistician at NISRA who has responsibility for the official statistic, to inform about the breach.

Reasons for breach

While the Ministerial Submission included the necessary cautionary text, the cover e-mail did not state either in the subject line or body of the e-mail that the statistics were for the named individual only and were not for onward transmission.

The official inadvertently overlooked the requirement specified in the Ministerial submission that accompanied the official statistics, which states:

“The statistics are being published at 09:30 on the NISRA website as pre-announced in line with normal arrangements for official statistics. PRA access has been granted to the Minister and listed copy recipients only, in accordance with the PRA to Official Statistics Order (Northern Ireland) 2009.

“Prior to publication tomorrow the statistics are not for sharing with anyone else or to be used in other documents before publication. Any recipient who thinks he/she needs to discuss and share with anyone not on the circulation list should first contact me, as the senior statistician with responsibility for personnel statistics. Any accidental or wrongful release should be reported immediately and may lead to an inquiry. Wrongful release includes indications of the content or the trend of the figures, including descriptions such as

‘favourable’ or ‘unfavourable’.”

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

There is no evidence of data leaks or comment prior to publication.

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

Short-term actions taken once the breach was discovered

- On becoming aware of the breach the DfE official rang the Grade 6 statistician at NISRA with responsibility for the official statistics to explain what had happened and followed up this phone call with an e-mail.
- When alerted to the breach the NISRA Grade 6 statistician reported the breach to the NISRA Chief Executive.
- A published statement on the breach was added to the release page on the NISRA website.

Medium-term actions planned to avoid reoccurrence

One problem identified was that while the PRA requirement was specified in detail in the Ministerial submission that accompanied the official statistics, this was not made clear in the title of the e-mail to which the statistics were attached. The following actions will be undertaken:

- The heading of the e-mail to which the official statistics are attached will make it clear that they should not be sent to anyone. The cover e-mail will include specific advice on handling of the information.
- Staff will be reminded of the correct procedures to be followed when issuing PRA material.

5. Links to published statements about this breach

On the statistics release page.

“Heading: **Breach of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics**

Prior to the publication, the document was shared in error with officials not on the agreed PRA list, contrary to Protocol 2 Practice 8 of the code.

This breach has been reported to the Chief Executive of NISRA’s office and remedial action is in hand”

http://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/Analysis_of_Personnel_Statistics_NIDepts.html