

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')

Police Service Strength, England and Wales, 30 September 2012

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/police-research/hosb0113/>

Name of Producer Organisation

Home Office

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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2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2, Practice4:

"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

31 January 2013

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

The National Statistics release 'Police Service Strength, England and Wales, 30 September 2012' was intended for release by Home Office Statistics on Thursday 31 January 2013 but did not appear on the Home Office's website at the pre-announced time of 09:30. Publication was delayed until 11:50. The issue was immediately spotted, and every effort was made to expedite publication.

Reasons for breach

Technical issues relating to publishing on the Home Office website, which prevented all new pages being published over this period. There was a fault in the software used to host the website which in this case was producing 'false-positive' results – which initially gave the impression that the website had been updated. Also, this disguised the fact that the physical link between the hosting (or building) server and the live server was broken.

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

While there was a delay in publication, the 'Police Service Strength' release was being anticipated by media and other data users and had been previously released under embargo according to arrangements for pre-release access. For example the Association of Chief Police Officers, one of the recipients, commented on the Police Strength release on their website. This was first seen after 09:30 (and there is no reason to suggest that it appeared before 09:30).

Given Business Questions in the House that morning where the figures were likely to be asked about following the previous day's announcement on future police recruitment, and notification that the BBC was planning to report on the figures, David Blunt took the decision to release the final publication, by email, to the data users on our pre-release access list (noting the technical difficulties). This pre release access list included all of our known users.

Press officers also agreed to make the document available to home affairs correspondents on request.

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

Whilst the failure of the Home Office website was being investigated, plans were made to load the report onto the Publication Hub as a contingency (but the release appeared on the HO website this was actually enacted). Communications Directorate in the Home Office are doing all they can to ensure this does not occur again. For example, it is insisting on greater vigilance by our server suppliers on days when we are publishing.

From 24 March, all Home Office web content will be assured by the Cabinet Office, who are managing www.gov.uk (the website to which all Home Office content will migrate). This means that responsibility for technical issues is taken on by Cabinet Office from that date.