

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')

Prescription Cost Analysis – England, 2012 [NS]
<http://www.hscic.gov.uk/catalogue/PUB10610>

Name of Producer Organisation

Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC)

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

Release practices, Protocol 2, Practices 3 and 4

Date of occurrence

4 April 2013

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

The publication was unavailable on the HSCIC's website and inaccessible via the URLs published on the National Statistics Publication Hub for 40-60 minutes after the planned release time.

Reasons for breach

The HSCIC has recently moved to a new website provider and is the first of its customers to require timed publications. The customised computer code written to accommodate this requirement contained an error in a dynamic link library file (dll) that affected the system time and did not allow for daylight savings time changes. As a consequence, British Summer Time was not properly recognised and release of the publication was delayed because the server time at one step in the publication process was still set to Greenwich Meantime.

Since all other server clocks had updated automatically, and this system time was hard coded by the service provider, this issue could not have been anticipated – particularly since all internal servers held the correct time – and was only identified when the publication failed to go live at the expected time.

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

The delay to publication was found promptly at 09:30 as a part of routine internal checking procedures and work began immediately to make the publication live. The web team were able to provide a temporary solution that made the publication available from the HSCIC website home page within approximately 40 minutes and resolved the problem after an hour.

No notification was received from any external organisation or potential user that the delay was noted or caused a problem outside the organisation.

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

The website provider has removed the bug in the software that caused this problem. The revised code has been successfully deployed and the issue resolved. The breach caused by this particular coding error will not recur.

Despite the fact that the coding error has been removed, the internal team responsible for the website has nonetheless implemented a plan to double-check the synchronicity of all system and server clocks whenever British Summer Time begins or ends.

5. Links to published statements about this breach

<http://www.hscic.gov.uk/pubs/calendar#cmsanchormonthApril>