

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')

Producer Prices Index, January 2013

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/ppi2/producer-price-index/january-2013/index.html>

Name of Producer Organisation

Office for National Statistics (ONS)

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 – Release Practice

Practice 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

12 February 2013

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

- The release was scheduled to publish at 09:30, however, due to the presence of an incorrect release date in the system, automated actions were not triggered at 09:30 am within the publishing system and the release did not publish on time.
- The problem was detected by staff checking the website at 09:30 am and remedial action began straightaway. However, identifying the underlying cause of the publishing failure and then manually republishing this market sensitive release in an orderly manner, ensuring there would be no further process issues, took just under an hour in total.
- The statistical bulletin was available on the ONS website from 10:19, and the final item in the release, a time series dataset file, was published at 10:28:56.

Reasons for breach

- The breach occurred due to an oversight. The planned date of the release had been changed some months earlier, but the original release date had not been updated in a part of the publishing system that controls the publishing process. For this reason, on the correct release date, no actions triggered and the release did not publish automatically.

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

- Five telephone calls were received enquiring why the data was not available on the ONS website. These included calls from the Bank of England, Barclays Bank and Bloomburys.
- One enquiry was received via Twitter at approximately 10:10 and a link to the producer prices data that had published on time was tweeted in reply. Once it became available, a link to the statistical bulletin was tweeted by ONS at 10:55.

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

- As soon as the problem was discovered, the central Publishing Support Team (PST) was alerted and remedial action was started.
- To avoid this error in future, new processes have been put in place by the Business Prices Branch to check and, if necessary, correct the release date embedded in the specific part of the publishing system that had been overlooked on this occasion. The date embedded in this part of the system will be double checked at a key stage in the publishing process when automated activities first trigger one month before the publication date.
- Processes in place at the moment have been reviewed, highlighted to staff, and re-timetabled to include two extra checks: one prior to publication to ensure that timed actions in the system have been triggered as expected and items have moved into the publishing queue; a second on the morning of publication to check the status of

the release at this time.

- Corrective actions have been agreed and responsibility for ensuring these are carried out has been assigned to the publications manager and the head of business prices. Implementation of the corrective actions takes effect immediately.
- Options for a process change has been investigated, however due to the effect that the proposed changes would have on the current publishing system, these options are not currently viable. Feasible solutions may arise as part of the ongoing enhancement program but currently there is no feasible process solution to eradicate this issue without negatively affecting the publishing system.
- We recognise that this isn't the first occurrence of this type of breach and we are centrally managing this issue across the office.