

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.

All breach reports are published on the UK Statistics Authority's website and need to explain (clearly and concisely) what happened to cause the breach and what is being/has been done by the statistical Head of Profession (HoP) to ensure the risk of recurrence is minimised.

1. Background information

Name of Statistical Output (including weblink to the relevant output or 'landing page')

Quarterly conceptions to women under 18 - Q4 2013

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."

Breach of practice 8 – accidental sharing of data with a colleague within Department for Health who wasn't on the pre-release access list.

Date of occurrence

Monday 23 February 2015

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

- ONS follows a process for sending pre-release access to the Department for Health (DH)
 1. ONS contacts named official at DH to request names of staff requiring access for the next quarter's data;
 2. DH returns a list of names to ONS having first checked those named on the list are available to receive pre-release data on the day;
 3. ONS then:
 - a. check that a completed and signed pre-release access declaration is held for each named person on the list
 - b. send out a form directly to anyone for whom a completed and signed pre-release access declaration is not held
 - c. send out pre-release tables (to those for whom a signed pre-release access declaration is held) together with a list of who the information can be given to.
- DH requested two new individuals (who would be in roles already approved to receive pre-release access by the National Statistician) and ONS did not have signed declarations for them.
- ONS sent the declaration form template to the new individuals directly and requested the form was returned ahead of pre-release being sent. Only one of the two new recipients returned the declaration form.
- As one of the new recipients did not return the declaration form, ONS sent the pre-release access but did not name the new person as a named individual to receive pre-release. ONS does not send pre-release to all individuals approved to receive pre-release access and sends to a selected few (which is agreed with DH in advance) who will then forward on the pre-release data to the others.
- DH individuals who directly receive the pre-release were unaware that the new recipient was not listed as an individual because they had not returned a declaration form and forwarded on the pre-release to the new person.

Reasons for breach

This was human error during a busy period.

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

No complaints received

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

The breach was only identified by ONS after the release had been published. An e-mail chain forwarded to ONS staff provided the evidence showing pre-release access had been

sent to an individual who had not signed a declaration form. This was reported to National Statisticians Office immediately. As ONS had gone direct to the new recipient to request the declaration and not notified other DH recipients about the missing declaration they were not aware this individual did not have permission to view PRA

- In line with previous agreements between ONS and DH, pre-release access operational issues should be handled by a one to one liaison between an official in the statistical release team (“the data owner”) and an official in the DH team responsible for briefing Ministers (“the briefing lead”).
- It is the briefing lead’s responsibility to secure all declaration form signatures, and to handle all communications within DH – which includes the direct supply of pre-release materials supplied by ONS and the confidential policy advice to Ministers. Routine substitutions and changes to pre-release access lists (e.g. where a new private secretary replaces his/her predecessor, or where a new Minister is appointed) are handled by the data owner and briefing lead. Requests for additional names should be handled by the ONS pre-release case format and subject to consultation / agreement by DH Head of Profession (HoP) and Office of the Chief Analyst on the one side and ONS HoP and Pre-Release support on the other side.

5. Links to published statements about this breach

Include a link to information about this breach issued on the departmental website

6. Any other relevant supporting material