

## BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

A breach of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics occurs where one or more provisions of the Code were not followed in situations where an exemption or exception had not been approved by the UK Statistics Authority's Head of Assessment, as required in paragraph (xii) of the Code's preamble. Rules on pre-release access to statistics are covered in the relevant Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics Orders; the Code applies as if it includes these orders.

### 1 Background Information

Name of Statistical Output (including web link if relevant)

Regional Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI)

Name of Producer Organisation

Office for National Statistics

Name and contact details of person submitting this report, and date of report

Dr Norman Caven, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency CE, 8 April 2011.

### 2 Circumstances of Breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2 Principle 8 has been breached. Principle 8 states "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."

Date of occurrence

29 March 2011.

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

Dept. of Finance and Personnel, Northern Ireland breached pre-release access arrangements by circulating ONS GDHI data to individuals not listed on the pre-release access list. ONS were due to publish regional GDHI statistics at 9.30 am on 30<sup>th</sup> March. Three people in NI received pre-release access 24 hours in advance, as part of the ONS pre-release arrangements, including the DFP Minister. On receipt of the pre-release copy the Minister's office inadvertently further distributed to five people who were not on the ONS pre-release access lists (as well as internal Private Office staff). Four out of the five are members of NISRA, so the risk for onward transmission or external publication was small, and the fifth was the Permanent Secretary who is used to handling sensitive information.

Reasons for breach

Administrative error. The covering email marked the data as 'restricted' but did not refer specifically to them as an Official Statistics release, subject to the pre-release protocols. The actual submission, however, did so.

### **3 Reactions and Impact**

None.

### **4 Corrective Actions Taken (include short-term actions, and long-term changes made to procedures)**

NISRA will remind DFP Private Office of their responsibilities under the Pre-release legislation and Private Office, DFP, will discuss internally and reaffirm the proper procedures with staff. Managers will consider the need for further training and guidance for new members of staff.

Although ONS followed current ONS guidance on e-mails containing statistics being circulated for pre-release, NISRA staff will discuss with ONS colleagues, the need for such covering emails to precisely describe the accompanying release as subject to pre-release legislation, particularly when such information is intended for a busy Private Office. Specifically it will be suggested that covering e-mails should include the text, "Official statistics - please treat as ....(insert either Protect for non-Market Sensitive or Restricted for Market Sensitive), for named individuals or identified post-holders only. Not for sharing with anyone else or to be used in other documents before publication."

NISRA will seek to inform Private Office in advance as to when to expect an ONS publication for which Minister has been given pre-release access.