

## 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')

**Statistical Bulletin – Cancer Survival by NHS England Area Teams: Adults diagnosed 1997 – 2012 and Followed up in 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

Glen Watson, Director General (DG), ONS  
[dg@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:dg@ons.gsi.gov.uk)  
01633 655252

### 2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2 release practices

Practice 8: "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. Report to the National Statistician immediately any accidental or wrongful release, and investigate the circumstances."

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 15 December 2014

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

- At 9.54am the ONS Pre-Release Access (PRA) Bulletin was circulated to a select number of colleagues who had been granted pre-release access with the following note:

“OFFICIAL SENSITIVE

Dear Colleagues

As previously advised, please find attached advance copies of:

Cancer survival by NHS England Area Team: adults diagnosed 1997-2012, followed up to 2013

**This will be published by ONS on their website at 9.30am on Tuesday 16 December 2014.**

These are National statistics - please treat as Official Sensitive. Only the individuals named in the attached pre-release access list have been given access to these statistics.

I am obliged to remind you that these are non-market sensitive National Statistics to which you have privileged access in advance of release. Any accidental or wrongful release should be reported immediately and may lead to an inquiry or result in action to prevent recurrence. Accidental or wrongful release includes indications of the content, including suggestions of the size or direction of any change or a substantive description, such as "favourable" or "unfavourable". Please prevent inappropriate use by treating this information as restricted.

This material is only for distribution to ONS-approved individuals. You are not permitted to distribute it to any person other than those listed on the attached pre-release access list. “

- A Press Officer was working on the Department for Health media statement in advance of the publication of statistics. The statement included key findings from the statistical bulletin.
- The Press Officer forwarded the submission by email to another Press officer for approval but this Press Officer had not been approved to receive pre-release access.
- The Press Officer who was requested to approve the statement soon realised it contained pre-release data and notified colleagues in the department who contacted the ONS output team.
- The e-mail was deleted and not forwarded to anyone else.
- The Press Office did not have access to the ONS Bulletin or excel data files containing a breakdown of the statistical information
- The Press Office did not have access to any of the links contained within the bulletin

Reasons for breach

- This was human error during a busy period in the press office, who forgot who was on the pre-release access list.

**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)**

- Press colleagues in Department for Health have been reminded about pre –release access protocols.
- Long term there may be a requirement for the Department for Health to submit a request for a second press officer to receive pre-release access.
- ONS DG office is working with the Departmental Security Officer to review the process of sending pre-release access to identify areas for improvement.

**5. Links to published statements about this breach**

**6. Any other relevant supporting material**