

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')

Student Loans in England, Financial Year 2013-14
<http://www.slc.co.uk/official-statistics/student-loans-debt-and-repayment/england.aspx>

Name of Producer Organisation

Student Loans Company (SLC)

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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Report date: 18 June 2014

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Principle 2 - Impartiality and Objectivity, Protocol 2 - Release practices, Practices - 7 and 8

7. Subject to compliance with the rules and principles on pre-release access set out in legislation, limit access before public release to those people essential for production and publication, and for quality assurance and operational purposes. Publish records of those who have access prior to release.

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.

Paragraphs 2 and 6(1) of the Schedule to The Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008

Date of occurrence

18 June 2014

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

SLC passed the publication pre-release to the statistician within the Department for Business Innovation & Skills (BIS) specified on the SLC pre-release list.

When the publication pre-release email was circulated to the pre-release access list within BIS by statisticians, a pre-release access recipient within BIS forwarded the briefing email to several BIS colleagues without pre-release access.

Some members of the statistical team were copied in on this forwarded email and immediately told the unauthorised recipients to delete the email and attachments. Unfortunately the covering email from the pre-release access recipient included some figures. The original email and the attachments from the statistics team included warnings about the pre-release status of the information, and that the information should not be shared.

Reasons for breach

The recipient was unaware that the pre-release access restrictions applied within BIS as well as externally.

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

None. The statistics have now been released on the pre-announced date.

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

The person responsible in BIS was instructed to recall the email forwarded to those without access to the pre-release material. The recipients were also instructed to delete the email forwarded to them.

BIS will be undertaking a programme of education about pre-release access to ensure that recipients understand the restrictions, and also developing stronger warnings to place on all pre-release access emails and documents.