

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)

Table 16.4, Property Transaction Completions: Analysis by Type of Buyer and Range of Price.
http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/stats/survey_of_prop/table16-4.pdf

Name of Producer Organisation

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC)

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

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2 Circumstances of Breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Principle 1, Practice 4: Publish statistical reports according to a published timetable that takes account of user needs.
Protocol 2, Practice 1: Release statistical reports as soon as they are judged ready
Protocol 2, Practice 4: Issue statistical releases at the standard time of 09:30 on a weekday

Date of occurrence

29 June 2012

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

One of the tables published on property transactions (Table 16.4) was not released onto the website until the 5 July, six days after the pre-announced date.

Reasons for breach

On the day of release, the web publishing team did not update the link on the HMRC website to point at the new version of Table 16.4 and it continued to display last year's version. The links for the other property transaction tables published at the same time were updated correctly.

Unfortunately it is not possible for users of HMRC Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) equipment to check that National Statistics tables have been correctly published on the website at the time of release. This is because of an ongoing technical issue where, although the new content is visible to external users, the webpage is not updated for some time for users within the government secure intranet (GSI). However, the web-team did confirm that the tables had gone live on the website.

The webpage was checked again the following week and was still showing the old version of Table 16.4. A non-HMRC internet connection was then used to confirm that the webpage had, in fact, not been correctly updated and the issue was raised with the web-team to get the problem solved as a matter of urgency. The updated version of the table was then linked to the website on Thursday 5 July.

3 Reactions and Impact

There have been no reactions to the delay to publication, and we have not had any feedback from any users (internal or external).

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

There are two issues that need to be addressed:

1. Ensuring the HMRC web-team place National Statistics publications on the website correctly and on time; and
2. National and Official Statistics production teams across HMRC need to have the facilities to check that publications have gone live at the correct time in order to correct any mistakes in a timelier manner.

For 1) our coordination team are now actively engaging with the central publication team to ensure that future statistical information is released in compliance with the Code of Practice. The HMRC deputy HoP has also now held a telephone conference with the central publication team. The aim and result of the telephone

conference was to significantly raise the awareness of the central publication team of the importance of publishing the release and other National and Official Statistics releases at the pre-announced time. In addition it enabled the central team to appreciate fully the Code of Practice and the principles, protocols and practices of it, to which they have a duty to abide by in their supporting role of the statistical releases being published by them. The central publication team have now also taken steps to ensure that when releases are sent through to them, they are now immediately recognised in their team and prioritised to minimise any future human error by them resulting in timing issues for statistical releases.

For 2) all HMRC National and Official Statistics production teams will now be identifying standalone computers that are not connected to the GSI or else another standalone device that can check (as an external user of the statistics would) that the statistical release is live and therefore released on time and as planned. This will now be standard practice for all HMRC National and Official Statistics production teams; to ensure that the time taken to identify any potential delays in publication will be minimised and any necessary further action can be taken in the timeliest manner.

In relation to communicating the changes; the HMRC deputy HoP will also be emailing out to the HMRC National and Official Statistics producers alerting them to this breach, the publication of this report and the actions needed which this breach has given rise to. In doing this the HMRC deputy HoP will further raise the awareness of the significance of the Code of Practice and its principles, protocols and practices that need to be followed and ensure that the HMRC producers further recognise the importance of making the actions highlighted here part of their standard processes.

5 Any other relevant supporting material (including link to published statements about this breach)

A statement about the breach was made on the HMRC Statistics Announcements page: http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/stats/ann_index.htm