

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')

UK Labour Market, September 2015

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 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."

Date of occurrence

Wednesday 16 September 2015

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

ONS sent Pre-Release Access (PRA) to Scotland Office and they later shared figures from the release with three individuals not approved to receive PRA. The figures were shared with a press officer in Scotland Office not approved to receive PRA, who later forwarded the figures onto individuals in Cabinet Office and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) The timeline of events is listed below.

- Monday 14 September - ONS sent a password protected e-mail containing the Labour Market Statistical bulletin directly to Scotland Office. The e-mail clearly stated the release was considered PRA and listed the two individuals who were approved to receive PRA.
- Tuesday 15 September - 09:30 ONS sent a text message with the password to Scotland Office for them to have access to the Labour Market statistical release.
16:42. A Press Officer in Scotland Office sent an e-mail to two individuals; one in Cabinet Office and one in DWP with figures which were still considered Pre-Release.
17:57 The e-mail was forwarded by the individual in DWP to another individual in DWP to confirm the figures were correct. The person in DWP who received the email was approved to receive PRA.
18:35 DWP informed Scotland Office they had shared figures with two individuals not approved to receive PRA.
19:16 The Scotland Office Press Officer confirmed the figures were obtained from a draft press release and did not realise the figures shared were PRA figures.
- Wednesday 16 September - 08:14 ONS were notified of the breach via e-mail from DWP.

Reasons for breach

This breach was a consequence of human error.

The three individuals in Scotland Office, Cabinet Office and DWP who were not approved to receive PRA, were all co-ordinating media statements and infographics for their relevant departments.

The Scotland Office press officer obtained the figures in a press release being drafted in Scotland Office which contained the figures they should not have had access to. The Scotland Office then sent the figures for fact checking to the Cabinet Office and DWP as they did not realise the figures were still considered PRA.

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

ONS is not aware of any reaction or impact to this breach. We are not aware of the information being disseminated beyond the secure government network to which it was sent.

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

ONS were notified of the breach an hour before publication. The person approved to receive PRA in DWP had notified the recipients of PRA that were not approved to receive these figures that they had breached the PRA Order to Official Statistics.

ONS requested and received the correspondence which contained the breach and spoke to Scotland Office to understand how the breach occurred.

Scotland Office explained that currently with the roles approved to receive Labour Market they struggle to keep PRA securely and work effectively to prepare the Secretary of State to comment publically on the statistics shortly after publication.

ONS has reminded Scotland Office of the importance of ensuring all PRA information is kept securely and if there are any doubts on the rules they should confirm with ONS first.

Scotland Office will be considering submitting a business case to the ONS Statistical Head of Profession to request a press role is added to the PRA list for Labour Market. If approved, the Press Officer would receive the appropriate training and sign the PRA Declaration form which explains the rules of PRA. This would help to ensure a breach like this does not occur again.