

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')

UK Labour Market, January 2016

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 20 January 2016

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

A member of the digital media team in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) emailed 296 people indicating the direction of the statistics in the Labour Market bulletin. The email was sent at 09:22, 8 minutes before the statistics were published. The email came from Basecamp, an information sharing platform which is used across government. The person in the digital communications team who sent this email was not approved to receive pre-release access (PRA) by ONS and had not signed a declaration form.

The list of DWP staff with PRA access to this release includes a member of the digital communications team who prepared information that was published on social media once the labour market statistics were released. The officer approved to receive PRA was on leave on the day of release so had put the text of a draft tweet in a locked drawer overnight for a team member, who does not have PRA, to open and send out after 09:30. The team member accessed this tweet before 09:30. The e-mail sent at 09:22 was to alert recipients that the labour market statistics release was happening that day. The officer did not realise that referring to record employment, which was already the case based on the previous month's release, would be seen as indicating the direction of the statistics. The email was sent to a member of the ONS social media team. They contacted the ONS Statistical Head of Profession's office who notified DWP that the breach had occurred.

Reasons for breach

This breach was the consequence of human error. The person, who sent the email was not aware of the rules regarding PRA and did not realise indicating the direction of the statistics was a breach.

Note that the procedures currently in place to prevent early PRA in DWP are set out in section 6 of this report.

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

ONS is not aware of any reaction or impact to this breach. Following a UK Statistics Authority response to the breach, it was reported in the media.

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

When the breach was flagged by ONS, the DWP took immediate investigatory action. DWP Communication Directorate are revisiting procedures to help prevent a re-occurrence:

- the whole team were reminded of the importance of strict adherence to pre-release access rules
- another training session is scheduled for those who work with official statistics in the Directorate (these training sessions are routinely held 3-4 times a year)
- ensure that anyone who works with pre-release access statistics has completed the appropriate training or otherwise has approval from the Statistics Deputy Head of

Profession

- refresher of data security training for all staff in the Directorate
- consideration will be given to adding Code of Practice training to the induction package for all new members to the Directorate
- The Deputy Head of Profession has carried out a wider review of what happened on this occasion and what additional steps should be taken to prevent a reoccurrence. PRA training will now be included as part of induction training for analysts. Mandatory training for all DWP staff who receive PRA access will also be required on an annual basis.
- Following the review of the breach, the National Statistician and ONS Statistical Head of Profession took the decision to remove the digital communications team off the PRA list for February's Labour Market release. They will be required to complete the training sessions in DWP and will be required to reapply to be reinstated on the PRA list for any future releases.

5. Links to published statements about this breach

<https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/breach-of-pre-release-access-2/>

6. Any other relevant supporting material

DWP has strong procedures around adherence to the Codes of Practice. It is unfortunate that on this occasion the usual high standards were not met.

Processes are in place that tightly controls access to Official or National Statistics – usually only 1 or 2 named individuals from Communications. For DWP produced statistics, the Deputy Head of Profession personally challenges and signs off all requests for Pre Release Access

There is a rigorous clearance process in place, working closely with analysts to ensure the principles of sharing data responsibly and accurately are upheld.

Any DWP commentary around published statistics are cleared with the relevant analysts

Appropriate security markings strictly are adhered to and it is made clear that no-one who is not on pre-release should ever see the statistics. All emails during the Pre-release access period carry strongly worded warnings around inappropriate release, which read:

You are reminded that these are Official 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. Wrongful release includes indications of the contents, including descriptions such as 'favourable' or 'unfavourable' or forwarding this email to someone not on the distribution list. Please prevent inappropriate use by treating this information as Official Sensitive and not for further circulation.

Regular training sessions are held between DWP Communications Team and the Statistical Deputy Head of Profession.

A week before PRA was sent, the ONS Labour Market team contacted DWP to confirm if there were any requests to amend the PRA list of recipients. Once the list was confirmed, the ONS team also ensured all recipients of PRA had signed declaration forms. The ONS team sent PRA securely to DWP. The documentation was encrypted and sent to DWP and the password sent separately. ONS will continue this process for sending PRA.