

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')

Regional Gross Domestic Household Income (RGDHI)

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/regionalaccounts/grossdisposablehouseholdincome/bulletins/regionalgrossdisposablehouseholdincomegdhi/2014>

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 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.

Date of occurrence

23/05/2016

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

ONS shares the RGDHI statistical release in advance of publication with BIS who help quality assure the statistical release.

ONS confirmed one individual in BIS would complete the quality assurance exercise. The person agreed was unavailable on that day and forwarded onto another colleague to complete. This replacement was not confirmed with ONS. The individual then forwarded the unpublished data onto three people who were not on the peer review list (but were on the pre-release access list).

Reasons for breach

The official who completed the brief and emailed three further people was providing cover for the usual person responsible. None of the three people who saw the peer review release were on the peer review access list.

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

None

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

As a result of this breach BIS will be refreshing handover/holiday notes on the process and security around quality assurance. More officials will be trained on the procedure to prepare releases. More formal procedures for production statisticians will also be introduced.

ONS included the following note on the email to BIS when requesting assistance with quality assurance.

“These are official statistics sent under the National Statistics protocol guidelines and as such should be treated as ‘OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE’. These statistics are for named individuals only (not for sharing with anyone else or to be used in other documents before publication). Any accidental or wrongful release should be reported immediately and may lead to an inquiry. Wrongful release includes indications of the content or the trend of the figures including descriptions such as ‘favourable’ or ‘unfavourable’. If you think you need to discuss and share with anyone not on the circulation list please contact me immediately.”
ONS will now also require recipients to confirm receipt of the email so we are aware it has been received.