

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)

UK Labour Market – December 2016
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/dec2016>

Name of Producer Organisation

Office for National Statistics

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

Protocol 2, Release 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

13 December 2016

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

Monthly labour market statistics produced by the ONS are shared with a limited number of Welsh Government officials for briefing purposes under the Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008. This is to ensure appropriate briefing is provided to Ministers who may be required to comment at, or soon after, release of the data at 9.30am.

On this occasion, Labour market statistics were shared before publication with two media officials and one special advisor who were not on the agreed pre-release access list when lines to take were being prepared for the First Minister.

Reasons for breach

Statistical releases and briefings are stored within secure locations on the Welsh Government electronic records management system and links to those files can only be accessed by named individuals on the pre-release access list (this can and has provided protection if anyone is inadvertently included in the email list). On this occasion one official - who was on the pre-release list - prepared and emailed lines to take outside the electronic file share system.

This occurred despite the original pre-release email being designated as OFFICIAL SENSITIVE – STATISTICS and including a warning not to report on, forward or save the statistics outside the secure system.

3 Reactions and Impact

Statisticians noticed the breach had occurred within the 24 hour pre-release access period and the Chief Statistician was immediately informed. Assurances were received from two of the officials that they recognised they should not have access to the information and the emails were deleted. The third official was out of the office and did not receive the email ahead of the publication date. The ONS Head of Profession was informed shortly after publication of the output and once the circumstances had been ascertained.

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

We will remind colleagues of their responsibilities under the pre-release access arrangements. This will include a briefing session with communications officials. The individual who is responsible for the breach has already been reminded of the pre-release access obligations.

We will amend the process of preparing lines to take by ensuring they are added into the secure file sharing system by media colleagues. This will ensure lines to take can only be accessed by named individuals on the pre-release access list.