

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')

Statistical First Release (SFR): Staff at higher education providers in the United Kingdom 2015/16

<https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/19-01-2017/sfr243-staff> (link will be live at 9:30AM on Thursday 19 January)

Name of Producer Organisation

The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

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, principle 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

Date of occurrence

11 January 2017

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

A draft version of the HESA Staff Statistical First Release (due to be published at 9:30am on Thursday 19 January) was mistakenly made live on the HESA website. It was live for just over 30 minutes (from 12:53 to 13:27). It was unpublished as soon as the mistake was recognised.

By publishing the SFR, the document itself was visible. It also appeared as a link in the 'Latest news' feed in the footer of the HESA website (this list displays the title of the SFR< but not any of the data). It did not appear elsewhere on the site.

Reasons for breach

The breach was caused by human error. The SFR webpage is produced collaboratively between HESA's statisticians and the Communications team. A member of the Communications team mistakenly set the SFR to 'publish' rather than to 'draft' following making some routine updates.

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

No-one has contacted HESA about the breach. The discovery was made by another member of HESA staff and has only been discussed internally.

Google Analytics revealed that one external user accessed the page for around 25 seconds. We cannot identify this person or determine their actions on the page. We also cannot be sure this was a genuine user as opposed to a bot.

The member of the Communications team responsible has confirmed that it was human error and did not have a wider impact on HESA's suite of embargoed publications.

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

In the short-term, the page was unpublished immediately the error was discovered. The member of the Communications team confirmed it was human error, and that they understood the severity of the issue and would show more diligence in future. The need for compliance with pre-announced publication schedules has been reinforced with all other staff involved in web publication processes.

HESA is currently developing a new website. One of the required features is enabling the scheduling of pages to a specific time and day. This functionality would have prevented this problem occurring as even if the SFR was mistakenly published, it would not be visible to external users until the embargo date had passed.

This functionality is currently being tested by HESA's Communications team. It is expected to be in place by the end of January.

5. Links to published statements about this breach

n/a

6. Any other relevant supporting material

n/a