

REPORTING A BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

1. Core Information

Title and link to statistical output	Graduate outcomes (LEO): 2015 to 2016 https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/graduate-outcomes-2015-to-2016
Name of statistical producer	Department for Education (DfE)
Name and contact details of person dealing with report	Alison Judd Alison.JUDD@education.gov.uk
Link to published statement about the breach (if relevant)	Not applicable
Date of report	23 March 2018

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant pillar, principle and practice	<p>T3.3 Access to statistics before their public release should be limited to those involved in the production of the statistics and the preparation of the release, and for quality assurance and operational purposes.</p> <p>T3.4 The circulation of statistics in their final form ahead of their publications should be restricted to eligible recipients</p>
Date of occurrence of breach	14 March 2018
<p>The statistical output “Graduate outcomes (LEO): 2015 to 2016” was due for publication at 9.30am on 15th March.</p> <p>The pre-release documents were circulated at 09:30 on Wednesday 14 March to named colleagues with agreed pre-release access. The email included in bold, red font the following information at the top of the email:</p> <p><i>The attachments contain restricted statistics which are embargoed under the rules for national and official statistics until <u>09:30 on Thursday 15 March 2018</u>.</i></p> <p><i>You must not forward this email or discuss the contents with people it has not been sent to – this includes indications such as “favourable” or “unfavourable”. If you think that somebody else needs to have Pre-Release Access (PRA) to these statistics, please contact <stats lead>, Mike Jones, or Neil McIvor to discuss.</i></p> <p><i>Any correspondence containing figures from these statistics before publication must replicate this text and be restricted to those on the PRA list.</i></p> <p>At 16.31 on 14th March the lead press officer on the pre-release access list e-mailed the lines to take and key findings from the publication to the ministerial mailbox, policy colleagues and key statisticians involved in the release, requesting clearance of the lines and media handling. Unfortunately, the restrictive text was not copied across when the press officer started a new email chain containing the lines to take.</p> <p>In addition to those on the pre-release list, the e-mail was also copied to: 2 members of private office not named as the key contacts the general press office news desk mailing list and the post-16 & skills communications mailing list.</p>	

At 16.52 the lead statistician for the release, who was copied into the email and was monitoring the copy list, noticed that information had been sent to 16 non-eligible recipients. They promptly e-mailed the press officer involved alerting him to the error and requesting that the e-mail was recalled and re-sent to just those on the pre-release list.

At 17.12 the press officer spoke to those who received the e-mail in error asking them to delete the e-mail. At 17.16 the e-mail was re-sent just to those on the pre-release list and all subsequent correspondence was exchanged using the corrected copy list.

3. Impact of the breach

No data was released externally prior to the publication time. Those who received the e-mail in error deleted the e-mail and did not forward to others or use the information contained.

4. Corrective actions (taken or planned) to prevent re-occurrence

Short term

The press officer in question was explicitly reminded of the pre-release access rules by the lead statistician earlier on the same day before the breach occurred, and was reminded of the correct pre-release protocol after the event.

Long term

All press officers were invited to attend a training course on use of statistics including pre-release access on 08 December 2017. While the majority of press officers took part, the press officer in question was not able to attend the course. We will be delivering this training course again to the press officer in question and all other press officers including those who attended previously.

We are reviewing our processes for granting pre-release access to make sure those with access are aware of their responsibilities, including requiring all individuals to sign a declaration before they are granted early access. We are also updating our guidance materials and individuals will be required to read these materials before being granted access.

We are trialling using restricted file sharing software to share statistics under pre-release access, instead of using email attachments, to remove the risk of restricted statistics being copied to those not on the pre-release access list.