

# REPORT OF A BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR STATISTICS



## 1. Core Information [\[guidance\]](#)

<b>Title and link to statistical output</b>	<b>Pay in the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2019</b> <a href="https://www.nisra.gov.uk/system/files/statistics/NICS-Pay-Statistics-2019-Report.pdf">https://www.nisra.gov.uk/system/files/statistics/NICS-Pay-Statistics-2019-Report.pdf</a>
<b>Name of producer organisation</b>	<b>Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)</b>
<b>Name and contact details of person dealing with report</b>	<b>Tony O'Brien</b> <a href="mailto:Tony.O'Brien@nisra.gov.uk">Tony.O'Brien@nisra.gov.uk</a> 02890 388444
<b>Link to published statement about the breach (if relevant)</b>	<a href="https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/pay-northern-ireland-civil-service-statistical-bulletin-year-ending-march-2019">https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/pay-northern-ireland-civil-service-statistical-bulletin-year-ending-march-2019</a>
<b>Date of breach report</b>	<b>5 March 2020</b>

## 2. Circumstances of breach [\[guidance\]](#)

<b>Relevant principle(s) and practice(s)</b>	<b>Practice T3.3 and T3.4</b> Content of a statistical report has been shared before publication with someone not on the relevant pre-release access list.
<b>Date of occurrence of breach</b>	<b>13 December 2019</b>
<p>Publication of the above statistical bulletin had been pre-announced for 12 December 2019, but had to be delayed to 13 December due to the snap General Election. For this reason, NISRA chose not to provide the expected 24 hours pre-release access to the usual list of officials. This is consistent with the <a href="#">National Statistician's guidance on publishing official statistics on polling days</a>. However, after representations by Department of Finance (DoF) senior management, special pre-release access (PRA) was granted by NISRA senior management to a limited number of staff in DoF and was available from 12 noon on 12 December. This was agreed on the morning of 11 December.</p> <p>In order to provide a briefing, a DoF Director felt it necessary to discuss the findings of one table in the bulletin with a member of staff who was not on the agreed pre-release access list. The breach came to light when statistical staff, at the request of NISRA senior management, requested evidence of the use that was made of the special PRA that had been granted. This evidence took time to gather, hence the delay in reporting the breach.</p>	

## 3. Impact of the breach [\[guidance\]](#)

None. No statistical data or analyses were released to the public or media prior to publication. The findings of one table were discussed with one staff member not on the agreed PRA list. Under normal publication procedures (i.e. not at the time of a General Election) this member of staff would have been on the PRA list.
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## 4. Corrective actions (taken or planned) to prevent re-occurrence [\[guidance\]](#)

<p>Actions taken:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Once the breach was discovered, there was a telephone conversation between the Head of Branch and the official to determine the scale and scope of the breach. This breach occurred during special PRA (reduced list for a shorter duration) at the time of a General Election. If the report was published under normal circumstances, this person would have been on the pre-release access list.</li> </ul>
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Planned Action:

- Meet with official who breached to go through the pre-release practices and to discuss ways in which this breach could have been prevented. The implications of further breaches will also be stressed including potential removal of pre-release access.
- Review pre-release material with a view to strengthening the wording where possible to ensure that it is clear that information should not be discussed or shared (even in confidence) with individuals not granted pre-release access.
- NISRA will centrally review the approach taken for publications due to be released on polling day to ensure that the approach is not increasing the risk of a breach, and provide guidance to all NISRA staff prior to another relevant election or referendum.