

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)

Average Earnings Index (via Time Series Data functionality on the ONS website:
<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/ts-data.asp>)

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 Practices), Practice 8 (accidental release)

Date of occurrence

21 April 2010

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

Average Earnings Index estimates were accidentally released a week earlier than the pre-announced date, via the Time Series Data area on the ONS website. This was first reported

by the Low Pay Commission at 2:15pm on 21 April 2010.

Reasons for breach

- Computation of the AEI in April was completed earlier than is usual because of the nature of the production schedule, reflecting four and five week 'months' and to meet a request from National Accounts for early input to their computations.
- When the AEI was finalised the time series data were loaded into the correct area of the ONS website.
- The status of the estimates, the release time and date were set correctly, to "LMHOLD" and 09:30 28 April 2010 respectively. However, because the estimates were loaded ahead of the release of other labour market statistics with an earlier scheduled release date (the LMS Bulletin), when the publication system swept the holding area for available statistics with LMHOLD status it picked up AEI alongside others. Because the "publication" for AEI release on Statbase had not been removed, the data were published at 9:30 on the ONS website.

3 Reactions and Impact

The early release is a breach of the Code of Practice but the AEI's status as a supplementary indicator and its coincidence with other scheduled labour market statistics mitigates any consequences for financial markets and other users. At the time of writing, the author has been unable to identify any media or user reaction to the early release.

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

Upon receiving notification of the report Dennis Roberts (Director of SASD) was informed immediately and actions agreed. The ONS Director General was also informed of the breach.

The data was not withdrawn because the data had already been placed in the public domain, and at least one user had accessed it.

ONS created a new entry and amended existing entries in the National Statistics Publication Hub; creating an entry in the calendar for 21 April and amending the entry for 28 April, and on NS Online, to alert users of the error. The entries can be viewed at the following web addresses:

[21 April entry Publication Hub](#), [28 April entry Publication Hub](#), [NS Online](#)

Procedures within the production team have been changed so that AEI data will not be loaded onto WinCSDB prior to the publication of the Labour Market Statistics Bulletin publication. The particular publication on WinCSDB through which the data were published has been removed. In the longer term, AEI is to be withdrawn from publication after September 2010. Procedures for releasing the branch's other outputs are well-established.

The supplementary tables will be released as scheduled on 28 April since they were not available for release at the time of the inadvertent release. The entry on Publication Hub was amended to inform users of this position.

5 Any other relevant supporting material (including link to published statements about this breach)

The Release Practices Protocol requires that data be published if they are ready early. This was not ONS's intention in this case because:

- The release was scheduled to take place during a general election
- Not all of the Average Earnings Index outputs were ready for publication ahead of time – only those required by internal customers had been produced.