

Early Release of Balance of Payments Q2 2009 data to Eurostat

Issue

Financial account data for Q2 2009 from the UK Balance of Payments was sent to Eurostat on Friday 25 September, in advance of its publication on Tuesday 29 September. This is in breach of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, Protocol 2, Practice 8 which states:

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. Report to the National Statistician immediately any accidental or wrongful release, and investigate the circumstances.

Recommendation

To treat as a minor breach. Eurostat were made aware of the error almost immediately and have confirmed in writing that will keep the file as confidential until after we have published in the UK, and indeed had no plans to publish the data until 22 October.

Background

In common with other Member States, the UK is required to send quarterly Balance of Payments data to Eurostat by the end of the following quarter. Hence, quarter 2 data is due to be sent by 30 September, one day after publication in the UK. Our performance in meeting this deadline has, in the past, been patchy and the team have been reminded of the need to meet the Eurostat deadline. Against this background, one member of the London team, who was going to be on leave when the submission was due to be sent, mistakenly sent the file early. It was simple human error and he realised almost immediately his mistake, contacted Eurostat and got confirmation that they would treat the file as confidential until the data was published in the UK.

The London BoP team has been carrying a high vacancy rate for all of 2009 and it has become the convention for individuals responsible for putting together the different 'international' datasets to send them on to the relevant international organisation at the appropriate time. As the individual(s) involved have been successfully completing this process for many years, there has been limited motivation to develop a set procedure for sign off and transmission of these data sets. From next quarter, when responsibility for the work will have transferred to Newport, we plan to introduce a "sign off" for the international returns which will reduce the likelihood of a repetition. Also, the process of relocating has in itself resulted in a review of desk instructions to make sure these points are adequately covered and appreciated by staff.