

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')

This report covers the breaches of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, protocol 2, practice 4 (09:30 releases). The report covers the period 1 April to 30 June 2013 which follows on from the period covered by the previous combined report.

These breaches have occurred because of various issues, some technical, with the ONS website and release publication system which have led to delays in publishing. The breaches are being released as a combined report for this period since the root cause for all is the same. However, it should be noted that ONS has notified the UK Statistics Authority when the delays have occurred throughout the period. Other types of breaches of this protocol and practice are reported separately as they occur.

The table in section 2 lists all ONS breaches covered by this report from 1 April to 30 June 2013.

Name of Producer Organisation

Office for National Statistics (ONS)

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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See table below for a full list of outputs and dates

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2 release practices/Practice 4 issue releases at 09:30 - Issue statistical releases at the standard time of 09:30 on a weekday, to maintain consistency and to permit time for users to understand and respond to the information during normal working hours.

Date of occurrence

See table for a full list of outputs and dates.

Table of Breaches to Protocol 2, Practice 4 from 1 April – 30 June 2013

	Output	Date of release	Time of release of the statistical bulletin
1	Regional Labour Market Statistics, April 2013	17 April 2013	09:31:22
2	Regional Labour Market Statistics, May 2013	15 May 2013	09:31:38
3	UK Trade in goods analysed in terms of industry, Q1 2013	12 June 2013	09:31:38
4	Public Sector Employment, Q1 2013	12 June 2013	09:31:44
5	Regional Labour Market Statistics, June 2013	12 June 2013	09:31:54
6	Business Investment, Q1 2013 Results - By Sector and Asset	27 June 2013	09:31:19

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

Releases not published at 09:30 on the ONS website.

Reasons for breach

There are a number of factors that have contributed to the breaches listed in this report.

We are continually identifying improvements, both technical and process. The timeliness of market sensitive publications has improved significantly as we have made technical changes; however, there are several other factors that have also impacted timely publishing:

- The volume of content and shape of content that is published. Each release is made up of x number of items of differing sizes, complexity etc. Tables and datasets are particularly large and can impact publishing within 59 seconds of 09:30 - as we have found with the Labour Market Statistics and Regional Labour Market Statistics releases where there can be 130+ items including 50+ tables and datasets, resulting in the second release, Regional Labour Market Statistics, being delayed.
- Publishing data in an orderly and timely manner can also result in several market sensitive releases (with all their associated items) being scheduled for release on the same day, as was the case on 12 June (when the large Labour Market Statistics release published on time but three other releases were delayed as a result) and 27 June (when four market sensitive releases were published on time ahead of the Business Investment release, which was delayed as a result).
- Publication times may also be impacted by front-end website load. That is, a popular release can generate greater interest and, as users keep clicking URLs, the system resource usage can be increased which can leave less system resources available for publishing.

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

ONS did not receive any customer complaints about the delays, either directly to the team responsible for the release, the Customer Contact Centre, Media Relations Team, or via social media, on any of the four days when releases were delayed by between one and two minutes. This may in part reflect the fact that the day's headline data – that is, the main labour market figures in April, May and on 12 June and the latest GDP figures on 27 June – were released on time and ahead of the lower profile releases.

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

A number of improvements have been implemented in the last three months, are in progress and are planned relating to the publishing process.

These improvements include:

- Implemented new back-office hardware end May 2013 - The servers which support the back-office publishing system have been replaced by more powerful servers and extra servers added to separate the publishing components so that they are more efficient and if there are issues resolution will be quicker. Existing technical issues which impacted Business ability to input and approve content have reduced significantly.
- Remodelling the content repository - rationalisation will include removing unwanted database tables June 2013. Temporary database tables were not being deleted by Tridion. Bulk deletion has taken place and as a result database performance has improved. A regular task is now run to 'clean-up' all temporary database tables.
- Rationalisation of the publishing work flow process was implemented June 2013. This has a two-fold benefit:
 - more efficient process for content creators, editors and approvers;
 - increased stability and performance. Reduction in processing of complex work flow on the back-office publishing system.

These, and earlier, improvements have resulted and continue to result in a reduction in the number and severity of 09:30 breaches, but ONS recognise that there is still further work to do.

Proof of concepts for improvements have been developed which are planned to make potential efficiency improvements in the publishing process. A proof of concept to look at the performance of dataset publishing has been taken forward and is planned to be implemented by the beginning of November 2013, though this date is dependent upon Web Data Access going live. Performance improvements to dataset publishing are expected.

In addition to a number of other work streams as part of the Improving Dissemination Programme, progress will be regularly reported at Director and Board level.

ONS will implement a number of further steps to improve compliance with the Code of Practice in line with the recent monitoring review: Issuing ONS Market Sensitive Statistics at 09:30.