

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)

Exclusions from Schools, 2010/11
(<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/schools2012/?lang=en> on 28 February 2012)

Name of Producer Organisation

Welsh Government

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.
Principal 2, impartiality and objectivity

Date of occurrence

Timeline:
2 February 2012 – unpublished data released
20 February 2012 – breach of protocols noticed due to press articles containing the data
22 February 2012 – public statement issued.
28 February 2012 – Statistical Release published, one week earlier than planned

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

A small subset of exclusions data for 2011 was included in a published answer to a Written Assembly Question (WAQ) on 2 February 2012 when the dataset was not scheduled for official release until 6 March 2012.

A local newspaper, the South Wales Echo, ran an article using the figures on 17 February 2012:

<http://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/2012/02/17/violence-in-welsh-classrooms-soars-as-attacks-on-teachers-rises-by-a-third-91466-30346457/>

Also the South Wales Evening Post published an article on 20 February 2012:

<http://www.thisissouthwales.co.uk/Attacks-teachers-rise-figures/story-15265063-detail/story.html>

Reasons for breach

Data had been collated and was in the live environment ready to be incorporated into the final release. We had answered a similar question previously and using the same query criteria brought the 2011 results through. Quality assurance of the answer was to check the accuracy of the figures and their inclusion was not challenged. The answer was cleared by the head of branch and the head of statistical services.

3 Reactions and Impact

Policy colleagues and the Minister for Education and Skills have been informed of the breach.

The article in the South Wales Evening Post has resulted in Swansea County Council submitting revised data after concluding that their original data submission was incorrect. This revised information was included in the first release published on 28 February 2012.

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

As soon as the breach was noticed, the publication date of the release was brought forward one week to 28 February 2012, with the aim of minimising any impact. We wrote to the Assembly Member who asked the question on 28 February to provide them with the revised data.

In line with other school data collections, the latest exclusions data will be kept in a separate database from historical data until the day of publication.

In future, summary data will be validated with local authorities prior to publication.

From 2014, exclusions data will be collected at pupil level. From our experience with other pupil level collections, this will allow more sophisticated validation and will ultimately improve the quality and robustness of the statistics.

We will also share the experience with the Welsh Government Statistical Quality Committee to ensure that lessons are learnt in other branches.

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

Public statement here issued on 22 February 2012

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/schools2012/120222/?lang=en>