

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')

Further Parental Characteristics, England and Wales, 2011

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/further-parental-characteristics--england-and-wales/2011/index.html>

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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2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2 release practices

Practice 8: "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."

Protocol 2 – Release Practice

Practice 4: "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

6 March 2013

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

The landing page of the release, which contained some of the key points (only) was inadvertently published on the ONS website at 14:05. This was quickly spotted by the authors and the page was unpublished at 14:10.

Reasons for breach

- Human error.
- The output originally had a provisional release date of 28 February but this was changed on 31 January to a final release date of 09:30 7 March 2013.
- This change was entered in to the web publishing software by the authoring team, for the release calendar, the pre-release list, and the supporting tables. However the new release date was not amended correctly for the landing page (called release edition) - the day was changed to 7 but the month remained as February.
- On the afternoon of 6 March (day before publication), the output was finalised and approved by the authoring team at 14:00. The release approver intended to have the release dates of all the above elements checked but inadvertently approved them before this could be done. Upon this approval the release moved on to the next stage of the publishing process which is to wait for publication the next day.
- At 14.05, because the pre-release list and reference table had the correct publication date (7 March), they did not publish to the live site. The landing page (which contained the key points) was published to the live site as the publication date was in the past (7 February).
- The release authors quickly spotted this and the Publishing Support Team (PST) unpublished the landing page at 14.10.

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

No customer complaints/comments were received and there was no media or social media reaction. According to the web metrics software there were no views or visits to the landing page in the short period it was live.

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

- PST has produced a guidance note/process diagram, specifically targeted at this issue to clearly illustrate the requirements for changes to release dates. This was emailed out to users/research teams. A note will also be included in the next ONS Talk (internal communication across the organisation) advising of the issue, supplemented by a Daily article (intranet homepage including important news) reminder at the same time and an email to output managers.
- The Business Area release co-ordinator, who is responsible for sending their releases for publication to the release approver, has, with immediate effect, added to their timetable a weekly check of all release dates, for the next month's worth of their publications.

- Options for a process change has been investigated, however due to the effect that the proposed changes would have on the current publishing system, these options are not currently viable. Feasible solutions may arise as part of the ongoing enhancement program but currently there is no feasible process solution to eradicate this issue without negatively affecting the publishing system.
- We recognise that this isn't the first occurrence of this type of breach and we are centrally managing this issue across the office.