

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)

Households Below Average Income 1994/95 – 2010/11 - June 2012 release

Name of Producer Organisation

Department for Work and Pensions

Name and contact details of person submitting this report, and date of report

David Frazer,
Head of Profession for Statistics,
DWP.
12 July 2012

2 Circumstances of Breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2, Practice 7 – limit access before public release to those people essential for production and publication, and for quality assurance and operational purposes.

Protocol 2, 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.

Date of occurrence

13 June 2012

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

Starting at 20:59 the day before release, three departmental officials, on the Pre-Release Access list, forwarded an e-mail containing a Ministerial handling submission for the HBAI publication to several colleagues informing them of their availability the following day, discussing logistics for the Ministerial speech talking about the statistics.

The briefing submission, which contained restricted statistics excerpted from the full HBAI publication, was attached to both e-mails. The email was marked as 'RESTRICTED (STATISTICS)' and the attachment set out when the information was embargoed to.

In total, five officials who have not been granted Pre-Release Access saw the statistics.

Reasons for breach

We have no reasons to believe that these were anything other than simple oversights caused by attachments being automatically included in forwarded e-mails. None of the breach e-mails referred to the attached brief.

3 Reactions and Impact

When the analysts involved in producing the HBAI report saw the e-mails, they informed the Head of Profession that a breach had taken place. They also contacted the officials who had sent the e-mails, informing them that their actions had caused a breach, and reminding them of their responsibilities under the Code, given their privileged access.

The Chief Statistician will also write to all departmental officials who receive Pre-Release Access and stress the importance of maintaining its integrity.

There was no adverse impact, as the information was not used in advance of its official release.

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

As stated above, all officials who transmitted or received the restricted submission have been informed of the breach and reminded of the need to limit Pre-Release Access.

When sending National Statistics publications, Ministerial Submissions and press releases to officials with Pre-Release Access, DWP's statisticians already inform recipients of their privileged access. They also state that the contents are not to be released further, even to describe them as "favourable" or "unfavourable".

Although included in the e-mail announcing the statistical release and submission, this usual text was not included in the e-mail sending the policy handling submission. In future, departmental statisticians involved with official statistics that require policy submissions will liaise with policy colleagues to reinforce that the usual Code of Practice text must be included when documents including embargoed statistics are circulated. Any subsequent e-mails sent by policy officials will only be sent to personnel on the Pre-Release Access list, thus if any e-mails are sent that do not include this text, any members of the analytical community can intervene and directly contact the sender and receivers of the e-mail.

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

A copy of this breach report will be published in the relevant areas of both DWP's and the UK Statistics Authority's websites.