

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')

- National Statistics Cervical Screening Programme, England - 2013-2014 [NS]
<http://www.hscic.gov.uk/catalogue/PUB15968>

Name of Producer Organisation

- Health and Social Care Information Centre – (HSCIC)

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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25 November 2014

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

- Protocol 2 - Release practices
 - Practice 7
Subject to compliance with the rules and principles on pre-release access set out in legislation, limit access before public release to those people essential for production and publication, and for quality assurance and operational purposes. Publish records of those who have access prior to release.
 - 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.

Date of occurrence

- 24 November 2014

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

- Pre-release access had been granted to named individuals from Public Health England (PHE) and the material, clearly marked as pre-release and confidential until 09:30 on 25 November 2014, was sent to the briefing co-ordinator within PHE for circulation to the named individuals on the approved list
- Later that day, the PHE briefing co-ordinator issued a statement to the Press Association that quoted HSCIC figures
- The Press Association queried whether the statement, which was embargoed, should be issued before the date and time of publication and contacted PHE and HSCIC for clarification
- HSCIC sought assurances from the Press Association that they would not circulate PHE's statement before the publication was released at 09:30 on 25 November 2014
- We sought confirmation from PHE that their statement had not been issued to any other organisations.

Reasons for breach

Human error occurred despite the instructions in the email, which clearly stated that the material must not be shared, circulated, published or otherwise discussed with anyone not on the approved list prior to the official publication date and time.

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

The statement was not circulated by the Press Association in advance of the publication date and time and thus the figures were not made available before their official release.

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

- Advised the Head of Profession in PHE of the breach and asked that responsibilities with the organisation when requesting and handling pre-release access material; the need to comply with the regulations and the consequences of non-compliance be clarified and emphasised within the organisation. We have been advised that this took place.
- Discussed the breach with the PHE briefing co-ordinator and sought assurances that this will not recur.
- We have placed additional emphasis on the need to maintain the confidentiality of the pre-release access material in both the emails issued to notify the PHE briefing co-ordinator that a pre-release access request has been approved, and then again in the pre-release access email itself.