

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')

Northern Ireland Planning Development Management Statistics 2013/14 – First Quarterly Statistical Bulletin (April – June 2013: provisional figures).

http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/tools/about-statistics/statistical_bulletin_q1_2013_14.pdf

This is an Official Statistics publication, released on 10 Oct

Name of Producer Organisation

Department of the Environment (DOE)

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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10 Oct 2013

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2, Practice 8: Release Practices:

“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

9 Oct 2013

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

An official from DOE Planning (named on the pre-release access list) used the publication to update a general briefing document on the Department's electronic record management system during the pre-release period. However, the briefing document in question was not locked down and was accessible by all DOE staff in order that they could similarly make their own updates.

Reasons for breach

Whilst both the covering e-mail and Ministerial submission contained a clear caution relating to not sharing official statistics, the official was under a time pressure to update the briefing document and did not take sufficient time to consider whether others outside of the pre-release list could also have access to it on the system. In addition, the official has only newly been given pre-release access in their briefing co-ordinating role (this was the first report to which they had such access), and they are still familiarising themselves with their pre-release access responsibilities.

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

It is estimated that the data was accessible internally within DOE for a period of 2-3 hours before the breach was discovered at which point the information was immediately deleted from the briefing document. There is no evidence that anyone else took cognisance of the information during this period and there were no public leaks or comment prior to official publication. The official has apologised for the accidental breach and has provided an assurance that it would not happen again.

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

Short-term actions:

- The DOE Senior Statistician contacted the official to discuss the circumstances surrounding the breach, check whether any other persons not on pre-release access list had been given access, and remind them of their responsibilities under the Pre-release legislation.
- The DOE Statistician immediately informed the Grade 6 Statistician at the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency with responsibility for Official Statistics.
- A published statement was added to the DOE website at point of access to the statistics.

Longer-term actions:

- A summary guidance document highlighting the “dos and don’ts” with respect to pre-release access, specifically aimed at Planning staff, will be produced and circulated in advance of next quarterly publication.
This will be particularly useful for those who are new to the requirements of the Pre-release Access legislation and the stringent controls that this necessitates when handling Official Statistics material.
- The Senior Statistician will issue a statement to all Senior Officials in the Department highlighting that a breach has taken place within the Department and reminding them of their responsibilities under the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

5. Links to published statements about this breach

<http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/tools/about-statistics/common-eplanning-stats-publications.htm>