

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 Tourism Statistics (October 2012 – September 2013) official statistics (experimental) output:

<http://www.detini.gov.uk/quarter3.pdf>

Name of Producer Organisation

Department of Finance & Personnel (NISRA)

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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Report Completed on 6 February 2014

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2 (Release Practices); The Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order (Northern Ireland) 2009

Date of occurrence

The breach occurred and was detected on the 5 February 2014.

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

A limited number of senior officials and press office staff in the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment (DETI) (seven) and the Northern Ireland Tourism Board (NITB) (three) were copied into a Ministerial submission from NISRA relating to a forthcoming tourism statistics publication, under 24 hr pre release access conditions.

However, one of the DETI officials subsequently sent a Ministerial briefing (at 16:09 on 5

February), based on the NISRA briefing, and copied this to five other persons who had not been included on the original NISRA circulation list. The briefing was also copied to a generic email box in DETI tourism policy branch and the NITB, which are accessed by small groups of administrative staff. Both generic mailboxes were accessed prior to the 09:30 release on 6 February and NITB staff forwarded the email to nine NITB officials, six of whom were not included in the original NISRA circulation list.

The subsequent DETI briefing quoted extensively from the tourism statistics included in the earlier NISRA briefing.

Those recipients not covered by pre release access included the DETI Assembly Private Secretary, two DETI Under Secretaries and two personal secretaries supporting these officials. These individuals had not signed confidentiality declarations for this statistical output.

The breach was discovered by the NISRA statistician responsible for tourism statistics just after the DETI briefing was sent and she immediately informed the responsible senior statistician. The senior statistician was at another meeting and addressed the matter on return later that evening.

The senior statistician attempted to phone a number of the copy recipients to advise them of their obligations but was only able to speak to one of the Undersecretaries. The senior statistician subsequently issued an email (at 17:57 on the 5 February) to the DETI official advising him that his briefing constituted a breach of the pre release access conditions. This was also copied to the NISRA Chief Statistician and other recipients including the DETI Permanent Secretary.

Those other persons who had inadvertently received the official tourism statistics were also advised by email at that time that they were now in receipt of official statistics under pre release access conditions and were cautioned regarding any onward transmission. This email was forwarded to the NITB officials who also inadvertently received the official tourism statistics.

Reasons for breach

The breach was due to human error on the part of the DETI official. The individual did not distinguish between those officials who were on the original circulation list and covered by PRA undertakings and those who were not entitled to receive pre release access.

The DETI official who committed the breach had signed a pre release access confidentiality declaration as had other officials on the original circulation list.

The briefing from NISRA DFP clearly stated the pre release nature of the material and that recipients had an obligation not to forward the material or comment on it.

The pre release access email from the senior statistician also highlighted the pre release access conditions.

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

DETI officials acknowledged the error. No evidence of any other impact in terms of onward transmission or complaints from within or outside the producer body.

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

The senior statistician informed the copy recipients including the Permanent Secretary that a breach had occurred and that a report of the breach would be produced.

The NISRA Chief Executive was copied into the email issued on the 5 February.

Guidance was re-issued to the person responsible for the breach and other copy recipients including those who inadvertently received the material, within two hours of the breach occurring.

Also, details of the breach have been included on the relevant statistics website. In the long term NISRA will review in line with any UK Statistics Authority / Office for National Statistics (ONS) developments of procedures used to grant pre-release and to ensure that those receiving it acknowledge their responsibilities.

The guidance will be strengthened to ensure that individuals are aware of the implications of breaching pre release.

The pre release access list for tourism statistics will be reviewed with DETI and NITB asked to provide new business cases for all recipients.

Requests for pre release access to Northern Ireland data will be required at least one week in advance of the release date.

The senior statistician discussed the matter with the Under Secretary and senior official responsible for the breach and advised them of pre release access conditions.

James Gillan (Senior Principal Statistician) and Patricia Wyers (Principal Statistician) of NISRA will be responsible for implementing the actions noted above.

The corrective actions will be in place before the next quarterly publication.

5. Links to published statements about this breach

<http://www.detini.gov.uk/deti-stats-index/tourism-statistics.htm>