

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')

1. **Quarterly National Accounts, Q2 2014** - <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/naa2/quarterly-national-accounts/q2-2014/index.html>
2. **United Kingdom Economic Accounts, Q2 2014** - <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/naa1-rd/united-kingdom-economic-accounts/q2-2014/index.html>
3. **Balance of Payments, Q2 2014** - <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/bop/balance-of-payments/q2-2014/index.html>
4. **Index of Services, July 2014** - <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/ios/index-of-services/july-2014/index.html>
5. **Business Investment, Q2 2014 Revised Results** - <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/bus-invest/business-investment/q2-2014-revised-results/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

Glen Watson, Director General, Office for National Statistics, Government Buildings, Cardiff Road, Newport, NP10 8XG
22 October 2014

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2 release practices/Practice 4 issue releases at 09:30 am
Issue statistical releases at the standard time of 9:30 am 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

30th September 2014

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

Technical issues affecting the ONS publishing system were identified and immediate action was taken at 8:50 am to rectify the problem. Support staff therefore needed to intervene from 9:30 to manually resubmit items for publishing.

The volume of publishing on the day was high and included seven market sensitive outputs comprising 133 component parts including 5 statistical bulletins and 5 dataset files.

The table below holds information on the outputs that are included in the breach, the time when all components were published and any additional supporting information.

Output	Time Published	Additional Comments
Quarterly National Accounts, Q2 2014	09:34:12 – 09:51:53	One reference table was identified as being inaccurate by the statistical team responsible for it and was removed from the publishing queue at 09:20. The data was re-worked and published on the live website at 5:24pm. This table contained no data that had not been previously published elsewhere.
United Kingdom Economic Accounts, Q2 2014	09:37:17 – 09:47:50	
Balance of Payments, Q2 2014	09:46:06 – 09:59:20	
Index of Services, July 2014	09:49:18 – 09:55:29	
Business Investment, Q2 2014 Revised Results	09:57:49	The time series dataset was identified as being inaccurate by the team responsible for the data and was removed from the publishing queue at 9am. The dataset was reworked and it was published to the website at 12:48; however, the data was already available in a reference table and key users had been alerted to this.

Reasons for breach

Every morning as part of the usual checks, the IT support team check the health of the publishing system. There are indicators that they look for to determine whether or not systems need to be restarted - on rare occasions they do need restarting. On all previous occasions, restarting has not caused any issues with publishing data to the website.

This is the first time there have been issues as a result of restarting. The root cause of the failure has been identified.

Publishing processes occur in two phases. Phase 1 should have completed by 08:40, however when checked it was still running which, along with an irregular memory profile,

suggested that the system had stalled. Immediate action was taken at around 8:50 to restart the Phase 1 process.

At this point, the Web Support Team thought that the issue had been resolved by restarting the system, as the logs did not show an issue. Between 09:00 and 09:22, the Web Support Team were keeping an eye on the system status, but did not notice that some content items were taking longer than usual to publish and were still "In progress". At the time they were distracted by a late request to remove data out of the publishing system, as errors in the data had been identified by output managers. The result was that at 9:30, publishing failed.

This meant that at 09:22, the Publishing Support Team were notified and had to manually publish all the content.

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

No complaints about the delayed publication were received via ONS's social media channels or by Customer Contact Centre or Media Relations Office. However, at 09:37 Robert Peston did mention on Twitter that he had received an email from Treasury ahead of the ONS confirmation.

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

There will be an increased level of checking before and after IT systems are restarted. This was an unfortunate error; lessons have been learned and processes updated.

5. Links to published statements about this breach

6. Any other relevant supporting material

7. Comments from the UK Statistics Authority