

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')

Police workforce, England and Wales, 30 September 2013

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-workforce-england-and-wales-30-september-2013>

Name of Producer Organisation

Home Office

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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2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

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. Report to the National Statistician immediately any accidental or wrongful release, and investigate the circumstances.

Date of occurrence

29 January 2014

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

Due to an internal error, the data tables of the 'Police Workforce, England and Wales, 30 September 2013' statistical release were accidentally uploaded to the GOV.UK website at Noon on 29 January 2014, when the release date was actually 9:30 on 30 January 2014.

Reasons for breach

At the final publication stage, the data tables were incorrectly scheduled to be released immediately on GOV.UK, rather than with all the other documents scheduled for 9:30 on 30 January 2014. Although the Home Office publication team has a checking procedure in place, this scheduling mistake was not spotted.

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

Attempts were made to immediately remove the offending tables; however the removal from the website was not achieved until 13:07 on 29 January 2014.

The Nottingham Post reported the figures on-line before 13.00. This was probably as a result of a notification facility on GOV.UK to alert users to the latest publications. Similarly, some of the figures were being reported on Twitter before 14.00. The immediate media coverage centred around the figures themselves, rather than the earlier than expected release.

Following the breach, the Home Office Chief Statistician advised the National Statistician's Office. The Chief Statistician decided to bring forward publication forward for the entire release to 14:30 on 29 January 2014.

There is no major impact of the breach to report. Some media highlighted in their reports that the figures had been mistakenly published early and that as a result the release had been brought forward by a day.

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

To reduce the likelihood of this happening again, an improved checking procedure will be introduced in the publication team, making clear distinctions between releases that have a time specific publication and those that can be published immediately.

The Chief Statistician is exploring whether the processes around loading and removing information on GOV.UK could be improved.