

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')

Routine Quarterly Improving Access to Psychological Therapies Data Set Reports - Final Q3 summary statistics and related information, England, Experimental Statistics
(<http://www.hscic.gov.uk/pubs/iapt1213q3f>)

Provisional Monthly Hospital Episode Statistics for Admitted Patient Care, Outpatients and Accident and Emergency Data - April 2012 to December 2012
(<http://www.hscic.gov.uk/catalogue/PUB10706>)

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

Andy Sutherland , Head of Profession (HoP) for Statistics
0113 254 2574

Andy.sutherland@ic.nhs.uk

HSCIC, Trevelyan Square, Boar Lane, Leeds, LS1 6AE

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2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Protocol 2 - Release practices:

Practice 4 - Issue statistical releases at the standard time of 09:30 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

16 April 2013

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

Release of the publications was delayed by 45 and 60 minutes respectively. This delay is due to an identified problem with code in a dynamic link library file (dll) and problems with the contingency plans to avoid delay to the publications.

The delay to the publications was discovered promptly at 09:30 as a part of routine internal checking procedures in the Statistical Governance team and was also identified by the web team; work began immediately to make the publication live. The issues were resolved within 45 and 60 minutes.

No notification was received from any external organisation or potential user that the delay was noted or caused a problem outside the organisation.

Reasons for breach

A bug had been discovered in one of the dll files provided by the provider of our new website which resulted in the delay to a publication earlier in the month (4 April 2013 and for which a breach report was filed on 8 April) when the website did not properly update to British Summer Time. The solution provided by the software supplier introduced a number of website related issues that required attention and resolution, and as a consequence the team was not confident that the automated system for releasing publications at 09:30 had been adequately tested. Therefore, a contingency plan was implemented to issue the three publications that were due for release at 09:30 on 16 April.

- One publication was published on time.
- Due to pressure on the website system of releasing three publications via the contingency plan and complications caused by technical difficulties with the friendly URLs, "Routine Quarterly Improving Access to Psychological Therapies Data Set Reports - Final Q3 summary statistics and related information, England, Experimental Statistics", was delayed by 45 minutes while "Provisional Monthly Hospital Episode Statistics for Admitted Patient Care, Outpatients and Accident and Emergency Data - April 2012 to December 2012" went live following a 60 minute delay.

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

The late release of these two publications was noted by the Statistical Governance, Media and respective production teams.

In response to enquiries following the non-appearance of the planned release of "Provisional Monthly Hospital Episode Statistics for Admitted Patient Care, Outpatients and Accident and Emergency Data - April 2012 to December 2012," publication documents were sent directly to individuals who had reported having been unable to download the report due to the aforementioned problems. Four individuals reported being unable to access the publication.

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

This breach was caused by a combination of technical problems and human error. The manual publication mechanism implemented to avoid a repetition of the error that caused a breach on 4 April was technically difficult to implement on the new website. This was compounded by errors in the friendly URLs that in the new content management system now redirect to a catalogued library of publication documents. The problems were recognised promptly at 09:30 and the solution was identified immediately. The remaining delay is attributable to the long processing time required to rectify the problem. The HoP was alerted as was the senior management. However, due to the amount of processing time needed, the publications could not have been released any earlier. The following measures have been implemented to avoid a recurrence:

- The coding error in the dynamic link library file has been removed by the software supplier and a revised version of the code has now been successfully tested and deployed. The error that caused the initial breach and which we sought to avoid on 16 April cannot now recur.
- The publication release practices that had released publications on time without a problem up to the start of British Summertime have been restored and the semi-automated processes – that struggled to cope with three publications for 09:30 – will not be required.
- The issue of friendly URL redirects will be avoided as publications from June onwards will be given a URL that points directly to its catalogue reference (e.g. <http://www.hscic.gov.uk/catalogue/PUB10706>) rather than redirecting to this from an alternative URL.
- Comprehensive checklists are being reviewed and updated to remove or reduce the likelihood of further human error.
- The HSCIC includes a lessons learned stage as a part of each review process and the outcomes will be incorporated into future working practices.

5. Links to published statements about this breach

- <http://www.hscic.gov.uk/pubs/calendar#cmsanchormonthApril>