

REPORTING A BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

Core Information

Title and link to statistical output	Northern Ireland Planning Statistics 2016/17 Annual Statistical Bulletin https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/northern-ireland-planning-statistics-april-2016-march-2017
Name of statistical producer	Department for Infrastructure
Name and contact details of person dealing with report	Suzanne Napier Analysis, Statistics and Research Branch, Department for Infrastructure, Clarence Court, 10-18 Adelaide Street, Belfast, BT2 8GB
Link to published statement about the breach (if relevant)	
Date of report	29/06/17

Circumstances of breach

Relevant principle/protocol and practice	Protocol 2: Release practices 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 of breach	28/06/17
<p><i>Give an account of what has happened including roles of persons involved, dates, times etc</i></p> <p>A policy submission was drafted by an official on the pre-release list and sent to the responsible DFI statistician at 16.40 on the 28/06/17 for a quality check. Within the email, the official copied a member of their staff who was not on the pre-release access list.</p> <p>The submission attached in the email contained some figures from the finalised Official Statistics report due to be released the following day at 9.30am.</p> <p>The DFI statistician had left work just after 4pm on the 28/6/17 and did not receive the email until 29/06/17 at 8.45am.</p> <p>The official who had been copied into the email had been on leave on 28/6/17 and was not back into the office until after 9.30am on 29/6/17. When finally contacted by telephone at 10.08am on the 29/6/17, they had not yet opened the email and were asked to delete it.</p>	

Impact of the breach

Provide details of the impact of the breach both inside the producer body and externally

The information contained in the submission had not been read by the unauthorised official before the actual publication date, and had not been further circulated, so although technically there had been a breach of pre-release access, there was no actual impact arising, either internally or externally.

Corrective actions (taken or planned) to prevent re-occurrence

Describe the short-term actions made to redress the situation and the longer term changes to procedures etc

Actions Taken:

- Relevant planning officials contacted at earliest opportunity to prevent further circulation and Departmental Senior Statistician notified.
- The responsible statistician for the publication met with the Planning official who had added the non-authorised recipient to discuss the incident and to obtain further explanation. It would appear that the planning official thought that their course of action would be ok as they were confident that the copy recipient would not see the email until after the publication had been released (which turned out to be the case). They had wanted the other official to quality assure and finalise the brief, following publication, but because they themselves were not sure whether they would be available the following day, they forwarded it early. The official was advised that this was an unnecessary risk and that it still constituted a breach.
- NI Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) contacted for advice.

Planned Action:

- Meet again with official who breached to go through the pre-release practices and to discuss ways in which the breach could have been prevented. The implications of further breaches will also be stressed including potential removal of pre-release access.
- As part of existing Dfl publication procedures, officials with pre-release access are notified 7 days in advance of publication that they will be receiving such access. Part of the rationale for this notification is to allow them to substitute individuals on the list who may not be available to receive early access (through leave, other work priorities, etc). This notification will be reviewed to see how this information, in particular, can be strengthened.
- Review Planning pre-release access list and justification for each individual receiving such access.
- Re-issue pre-release access guidance to Planning officials.
- Review pre-release material with a view to strengthening the wording where possible to ensure that it is clear that information should not be "shared with or sent to" individuals not granted pre-release access. Give more prominence to the note 'Early access to the information and figures in this release is strictly limited to recipients of this submission and should not be shared with anyone else in advance of publication, even for the purposes of assisting with the preparation of briefing.'