REPORTING A BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

1. Core Information [guidance]

Title and link to statistical output	Retail Sales Index – August 2017 https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/retailindustry/ bulletins/retailsales/july2017
Name of statistical producer	**Office for National Statistics**
Name and contact details of person dealing with report	**Kate Davies**
Link to published statement about the breach (if relevant)	
Date of report	**15/09/2017**

2. Circumstances of breach [guidance]

Relevant principle/protocol and practice	Accidental or wrongful early release (Protocol 2, principle 8)
Date of occurrence of breach	**14/09/2017**

Give an account of what has happened including roles of persons involved, dates, times etc

The Retail Sales Index (RSI) August 2017 release was due for publication on the 14th of September but due to technical difficulties was postponed until the 20th of September. However, there are a number of scheduled / automated tasks that are run before publication. These include tasks in the Central Shared Data Base (CSDB) that publish data to the website, and also to 'publ' status. Once data has a 'publ' status it is picked up by HM Treasury (HMT), the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) by scraping the CSDB and published to the Bank of England (BoE).

On the 14th the CSDB support team took immediate action at 8am to cancel and stop the tasks to publish to the website and publ, and this was successful. However, the task that runs to publish to BoE was only partially stopped and as a result unpublished data was sent to the BoE at 9:30.

On discovering this problem at 9.35, the team immediately spoke with BoE and instructed them to not use the data in any way and if possible to delete it. It was not possible for BoE to delete the data and so the RSI team worked with CSDB colleagues to create and publ a new data set to overwrite the data already received by the BoE, restoring it to the July publication data with no data for August. The BoE confirmed at 11 am that this operation had been successful.

At the same time, the team spoke with HMT and OBR to determine whether they had access to the data. While both confirmed that they did not, they also explained that the data could appear the following day after publ status was scraped. Both departments confirmed on Friday that their scraping of publ status did not result in access to any unpublished RSI data.

The Head of National Accounts was informed of this problem immediately as well as other areas including Media Office and the Office for Statistics Regulation

3. Impact of the breach [guidance]

Provide details of the impact of the breach both inside the producer body and externally
Two BoE officials had temporary access to the data before it was erased and restored to its previous form. They did not process or use the data at their end except to work with ONS to erase the data and to confirm that the data held by BoE was restored to its previously published status from July.

No other departments had access to the data.

There were no press reports on this early access breach.

4. Corrective actions (taken or planned) to prevent re-occurrence[guidance]

Guidance on completing the template

If any further guidance is needed, please contact the Good Practice Team via email in the first instance: goodpracticeteam@statistics.gov.uk

1. Core Information

Please provide the name and contact details of the person who would be best placed to deal with any correspondence relating to the breach.

Published statements about the breach may not be available at the time of reporting, in which case this box can be left blank.

2. Circumstances of breach

Please indicate which part of the Code of Practice the breach relates to e.g. 'Principle 2, practice 3' or 'Protocol 2, principle 4'. This will help us to monitor which parts of the Code the most common breaches relate to.

Provide details of the nature and circumstances of breach in a way that would be clear to a user of the statistics. This should clearly identify how and why the breach occurred, and include references to previous breaches in the same area (where relevant).

The level of detail needed is likely to depend on the exact circumstances, but for minor breaches (e.g. related to minor delays to publication) brief details will be sufficient.

3. Impact of the breach

Please give brief details of the impact of the breach, covering impacts both inside and outside the producer body.

The information supplied will depend on the type of breach, but for example where the breach relates to accidental or wrongful release useful information might include the number of people accessing the statistics, and whether any press reports were published before the official release.

4. Corrective actions

Please provide as much detail as possible to help users and the Authority to understand how the breach has been addressed.

Appropriate actions will depend on the circumstances and severity of the breach; as a guide, some examples of considerations and suitable actions for the most common types of breach are below

Accidental or wrongful early release (Protocol 2, principle 8)	
Things to consider: - How sensitive are the statistics and how long is it before the scheduled publication date? - How many people are likely to have accessed the statistics? - Has pre-release access to the statistics been restricted? Should you ask people with pre-release access not to disclose or discuss the statistics until further notice?	Possible corrective actions: - Withdraw the data as soon as possible. - Bring forward the time of the general release. - Issue a statement on your organisation's website alerting users to the problem.

Pre-release data shared with someone not on the pre-release list (Protocol 2, principle 7)	
Things to consider: - How many people received the statistics in error and who? - Are the statistics high profile or market sensitive? - How long have the recipients had access to the data before the error was discovered? - Have the recipients shared or discussed the data with others? - Can the offending email or statistics be recalled or deleted? - Was the correct security marking applied to the pre-release access email?	Possible corrective actions: - Recall the data. - If the statistics have been forwarded by somebody that was eligible to receive pre-release access, consider removing their pre-release access. - Remind staff about correct pre-release protocol. - Strengthen the wording of all text accompanying pre-release material. - Consider further training to educate staff on their obligations under the Code of Practice. - Increased management control of the processes. - Should stronger words be used in the text that is sent out with pre-release access?

Statistics published after the required time of 9.30am (Protocol 2, principle 4)	
Things to consider: - How sensitive are the statistics and how long is the delay likely to be? - Has pre-release access to the statistics been restricted? Should you ask people with pre-release access not to disclose or discuss the statistics until further notice? - Can social media channels be used to acknowledge or apologise for the delay?	Possible corrective actions: - Consider emailing key users a copy of the release. - Issue a statement on your organisation's website alerting users to the problem - Consider whether there is another way to publish the release.