

REPORT OF A BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR STATISTICS

1. Core Information

Title and link to statistical output	School census results 2018 https://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/schools-census/?lang=en
Name of producer organisation	Welsh Government
Name and contact details of person dealing with report	Sue Leake/Steve Hughes Sue.leake@gov.wales , Stephen.hughes@gov.wales
Link to published statement about the breach (if relevant)	
Date of breach report	20/7/2018

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant principle(s) and practice(s)	Trustworthiness T3.4 Statistical content has been made public or supplied to parties not essential for statistical production without prior permission for access, through accidental or wrongful release.
Date of occurrence of breach	13/7/2018
<p>The data on pupil numbers and free school meal entitlement were wrongfully released to external individuals, prior to the publication of the data which is due on the 25 July 2018.</p> <p>The school census data are used in distributing funding to local authorities. For 2018-19 this data was used to distribute over £1.7 billion. The local government finance policy team are allowed pre-release access to data for quality assurance purposes under practice T3.3, and in line with practice Q3.2, given the importance of this data in allocation of funding to public services. This team assists the statistical producer team in the validation of the data with local authority chief financial officers.</p> <p>The data was provided to local government finance policy in a secure folder on the 13 June, which only allowed access to 4 named individuals. The data provided was clearly marked for internal use only. However, the data was used to produce a paper looking at the impact of the latest data for a local authority meeting which took place on 18/7/18 at 11am. The meeting is attended predominantly by local authority chief finance officers, Welsh Government officials working on Local Government Finance, and three independent members (from other public services or academia).</p> <p>The paper in question was circulated electronically, via unsecured email, at 15:37 on the 13/7/18, to 14 individuals to allow the group to feed their comments in at the meeting. The paper contained a table showing the pupil and FSM data for each local authority. 7 individuals within the Welsh Government also were provided access to a copy of the paper.</p> <p>On the morning of the 19 July, the follow up actions involved the Local Government finance policy team to check some of the commentary in the statistical release. A member of the team noticed that the webpage still contained the historic data and that the 2018 data was not due to be published until the 25 July 2018.</p> <p>The Head of Profession for Statistics was made aware of the breach at 10:02am on 19 July.</p>	

3. Impact of the breach

The data in question are high profile and always attract some media attention. The paper was circulated to 14 individuals outside of the Welsh Government and 7 individuals inside the Welsh Government, of which 4 were the named individuals who were allowed access for quality assurance purposes. Currently no press reports have been published as a result of the wrongful release of this data and no complaints have been received.

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

Short term actions:

Since being notified of the release of this data prior to publication the Local Government Finance policy team, advised by the relevant statistician has contacted all individuals that received the paper, via telephone and e-mail, to ensure that all paper and electronic copies of the data are destroyed. We have also made the individuals aware that they should treat this information as confidential and it should not be discussed or commented upon until publication.

The original email was sent to 14 individuals, with a possibility that these individuals could have shared the paper wider. We have asked individuals to recall any circulated emails containing the paper. At time of writing, 9 individuals have confirmed in writing that they have deleted the information. One of the individuals the email was sent to is currently on long term sickness absence, so is unlikely to have seen the information.

Longer term actions:

We will undertake a full review of these pre-release access arrangements for this data, to include:

- An assessment of whether the aims of quality assuring the data can be achieved through other means which do not involve providing direct access to local government policy officials in the Welsh Government
- Whether a phased release of data could be warranted, so that some of the key information can be released earlier in the year for the benefit of users
- Should the data sharing continue, further training and clarifications on the basis upon which the data are shared and clearer guidance on what can and can't be done with the data