

REPORT OF A BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR STATISTICS



1. Core Information

Title and link to statistical output	Mortgages Bulletin October to December 2018 (provisional figures) High Court Bulletin October to December 2018 (provisional figures) County Court Bulletin October to December 2018 (provisional figures) https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/articles/nicts-statistics-and-research
Name of producer organisation	NI Courts & Tribunals Service (NICTS), Department of Justice (DoJ)
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Link to published statement about the breach (if relevant)	https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/articles/nicts-statistics-and-research
Date of breach report	19 th February 2019

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant principle(s) and practice(s)	Principle T3 – Orderly Release Practice T3.3, T3.4 – Content of a statistical report has been shared before publication with someone not on the relevant pre-release access list
Date of occurrence of breach	14 th February 2019
<p>As part of pre-release access (PRA) agreements, an email with an attached 'Note to the Chief Executive' was circulated to the relevant staff members at 9.30am on 14th February 2019. This note, circulated in addition to the publications, contained a high level summary of figures for the Mortgages, High Court and County Court Bulletins for the period October to December 2018. The attachment highlighted that the information was classified as 'Official Sensitive' and embargoed until 9.30am on 15th February 2019. Text was also included within the body of the email highlighting the security marking of the note.</p> <p>Another email was sent separately to a Senior Civil Servant, on the PRA list, providing possible explanations of key figures and trends. There was no tag in the title of this email referring to the restricted nature of the contents, nor a warning in the body of the email.</p> <p>For briefing purposes, an email containing the 'Note to Chief Executive' and explanatory email was forwarded from this Senior Civil Servant to another Senior Civil Servant, who also worked within DoJ and was named on the PRA list. The recipient replied at 1.10pm on 14th February 2019, including both the attachments, and copied in three additional colleagues within DoJ who were not on the PRA list. This breach was noticed by statistics staff, also</p>	

copied in, at 2.00pm. Discussions were arranged at the earliest opportunity to report the breach.

A meeting with the NICTS Chief Executive took place at 10.00am on 15th February 2019 to draw attention to the breach. Due to sickness absence, discussions with the Senior Statistician in DoJ could not take place. Instead, NISRA Statistical Support Branch were contacted and advised on how to proceed with reporting the breach.

3. Impact of the breach

Three Senior Civil Servants within DoJ, who were not on the PRA list, had access to some of the headline results prior to release. None of the recipients forwarded this email on or discussed findings with anyone prior to publication of the figures, meaning the breach was contained amongst a small number of senior staff members within DoJ. No statistics were released in advance of publication.

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

Statistics staff within NICTS met with the Chief Executive to discuss the matter and stress concerns about PRA breaches. These concerns will be communicated to all parties involved.

Statistics staff have also implemented corrective actions to ensure that all emails containing restricted information are clearly marked, including reminders of the restricted nature of the contents within the email title, the body of the email and on all attachments. This will be applied to all outgoing emails containing information relating to publications prior to release.