

REPORT OF A BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR STATISTICS

1. Core Information

Title and link to statistical output	Department for Infrastructure (DfI) Driver, Vehicle, Operator, and Enforcement Statistics https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/publications/dfi-driver-vehicle-operator-and-enforcement-statistics-2019-20-quarter-1
Name of producer organisation	Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) Statistics Branch, Northern Ireland
Name and contact details of person dealing with report	Manny Fitzpatrick Manny.fitzpatrick@nisra.gov.uk 028 90 547934
Link to published statement about the breach (if relevant)	Link will be placed on this page: https://www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/topics/statistics-and-research/driver-vehicle-agency-statistics
Date of breach report	15 October 2019

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant principle(s) and practice(s)	Trustworthiness: T3.3/T3.4 Orderly release
Date of occurrence of breach	4 October 2019
<p>A local media query was received in Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA) from the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) press office on the morning of 4 October 2019. Part of the query asked specifically: ‘How many people failed to turn up for an MOT test during August and September’. These are commonly referred to as FTA (Failure to arrive) and these numbers are part of DVA National Statistics quarterly reporting. This request came the day after industrial action across DVA test centres, and when there was high local media interest on the impact this action had on MOT testing in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>The request for FTA figures was passed for reply to both the director of testing operations and the head of vehicle testing. The head of vehicle testing phoned an operations member of staff with access to the relevant administrative system to produce and return the FTA figures requested asap. Collated FTA figures for July, August and September were provided the next day at 1:40pm by the director of testing operations to the chief executive’s office, who passed them onto the DfI press office for release to local media. These FTA figures were subsequently published in local newspapers on the 7 October 2019. Their release was noticed by a DVA statistician on the morning of 7th when copies of local press clippings were circulated throughout DfI. Although the FTA figures released were not in final form and their date of actual release as National Statistics has yet to be confirmed, an indication of trend from previously published quarterly FTA figures was released into the public domain in advance of the formal publication of these figures as DVA National Statistics.</p>	

3. Impact of the breach

This breach was accidental. The FTA figures released constituted essentially one figure in one table and its release has not compromised other statistics due for publication in November 2019. There is generally low levels of interest in FTA and their release has not and is not expected to impact the department, the DVA or users of these statistics in any meaningful way.

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

This breach though accidental could and should have been avoided. It happened due to a mistake/oversight by DVA officials arising from recent local interest in testing operations in the immediate aftermath of industrial action, and from internal time pressure to provide figures in reply to a request for statistics from local media.

Once the breach was discovered prompt action was taken to request the DVA chief executive's office to issue an e-mail to senior staff that **all** requests for statistics are reviewed by in-house statisticians before being returned to the chief's office. An e-mail to this effect was issued on 8 October 2019.

An initial meeting with the director of DVA testing operations took place on 11 October to discuss their requirement to comply with pre-release protocols.

We have also reviewed options to address potential increased local interest in specific statistical series and how this might be addressed going forward. Some initial suggestions included more frequent statistical releases, or ad-hoc releases in response to specific circumstances such as those arising from industrial action.

Other actions will include notices to all DVA staff regarding the need to comply with protocols and to provide an aide memoir detailing guidance/best practice relating to handling official statistics. Colleagues in NISRA have already offered good advice and power point materials we could use as a starting point for refresher presentations to relevant DVA officials with access to management information from DVA administrative systems.

In addition to these DVA statistics branch are working to prepare a formal public consultation on the future reporting of National Statistics, in terms of content, formats and timeliness. It is expected this consultation will be launched late 2019 or early in 2020.

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) will re-issue the guidance on Management Information and Official Statistics to all NISRA branches and non-NISRA producers of official statistics. This guidance provides helpful advice and can be used in conversations with officials who have access to management information used in the production of official or National Statistics.