

# REPORT OF A BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR STATISTICS



## 1. Core Information

<b>Title and link to statistical output</b>	<b>Weekly Deaths Bulletin, 2020</b> <a href="https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/weekly-deaths">https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/weekly-deaths</a>
<b>Name of producer organisation</b>	<b>Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)</b>
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<b>Statistical Head of Profession</b>	<b>Siobhan Carey</b>
<b>Link to published statement about the breach (if relevant)</b>	
<b>Date of breach report</b>	<b>24/04/2020 - initial report;</b> <b>full report submitted on 06/05/2020</b>

## 2. Circumstances of breach

<b>Relevant principle(s) and practice(s)</b>	Trustworthiness: Practice T3.3 and T3.4 – Content of a statistical report has been shared before publication with someone not on the relevant pre-release access list.
<b>Date of occurrence of breach</b>	<b>24/04/2020</b>
<p>As part of the member update at the daily Northern Ireland Civil Contingencies Group (CCG) COVID-19 response meeting, on the morning of 24 April 2020, a Senior Department of Finance (DoF) official (who had received the publication the evening before on pre-release) shared orally some of the key findings regarding deaths in care homes from the Weekly Deaths National Statistics release with attendees. The CCG meeting on Friday 24 April was attended by 33 senior officials from across central and local government, including 3 Assembly Ministers.</p> <p>The key findings from the statistics were then included in an unauthorised note of the meeting which was circulated at 9.09am to all NI HUB<sup>1</sup> liaison officers. There were 13 NI HUB liaison officers on duty on 24 April, with a further 25 staff (not on duty) having access to at least one of these mailboxes.</p> <p>The DoF NI HUB liaison officer subsequently forwarded the note at 9.12am to their Departmental Operations Centre (DOC) mailbox. Also before 9.30am, the Department of Health (DoH) NIHUB liaison officer forwarded the note to the DoH DOC mailbox and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) liaison officer forwarded the note to two PSNI line managers. A total of 17 staff have access to the DoF DOC mailbox and 35 staff have access to the DoH DOC mailbox.</p> <p>A member of the DoF DOC team subsequently forwarded the note for information to the NISRA Situational Report coordinator (at 10.40am) who sent it to the NISRA Chief Executive &amp; Director of Analysis at which point the breach was discovered.</p> <p><sup>1</sup> The role of the NI HUB is to compile insights and information from each of the Government departments and communicate this to the Northern Ireland Civil Contingencies Group.</p>	

### **3. Impact of the breach**

Key statistics relating to deaths in care homes were available to 122 individuals who were not on the pre-release access list, prior to their release. These statistics have high public and media interest. The primary recipients, the CCG meeting, included senior officials from inside and outside central government, and three ministers who had not been granted pre-release access.

Despite the extent of the breach, there has been no evidence that the findings from the official statistics were shared with the media or in a public forum prior to the 9.30am release. This may be due to the sensitive and confidential marking attached to most of the information shared with CCG and the retention of the 'embargoed to 9.30am marking' accompanying the statistics on the note.

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

The breach was discovered at 10:45am on 24 April 2020, at which time the official statistics had already been published.

Once the breach was discovered, steps were taken to identify which pre-release access recipient had shared the information. The NISRA Chief Executive then spoke to the senior DoF official, who had shared the key findings with the CCG meeting, reminding them of their obligations with regard to pre-release access and that these obligations still apply, even under the current circumstances.

A subsequent conversation (by email) took place between the Head of Statistical Support in NISRA and the NIHUB Chief of Staff, explaining that official statistics are governed by both the Code of Practice and pre-release legislation and that this could not be circumvented. Arrangements were made for NISRA to share the Weekly Deaths statistics with the NIHUB (which includes the CCG) each week on release at 9.30am.

Pre-release access has since been withdrawn for these National Statistics as allowed for under the pre-release access legislation.