

REPORT OF A BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR STATISTICS

1. Core Information

Title of statistical output and link	Public Sector Employment
Name of producer organisation	Office for National Statistics (ONS)
Division and Branch	Labour Market and Household Division
Responsible Divisional Director (DD)	David Freeman
Name and contact details of person reporting the breach	Name: Debra Leaker Email: debra.leaker@ons.gov.uk Telephone: 01633 455874
Departmental Statistics Head of Profession	Debra Prestwood
Link to published statement about the breach (if relevant)	N/A
Date of breach report	16 March 2020

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant principle(s) and practice(s)	Trustworthiness: T3.6 Orderly release: Statistics should be released to all users at 9.30am on a weekday.
Date of occurrence of breach	16 March 2020
<p>Public Sector Employment (PSE) is published quarterly by the Office for National Statistics. The publication was scheduled to be released at 9.30am on 17th March 2020. The publication comprises of a statistical bulletin and a dataset.</p> <p>Colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) had previously experienced issues accessing some published labour market tables (including the PSE dataset) from the ONS website at 9.30am on publication day. This impacted their ability to brief ministers. DWP are the only known user to experience this issue. To mitigate this risk, the Labour Market team agreed to circulate the affected tables in an email at 9.30am on publication day. While testing the process the day before publication, pre-release information for PSE was attached and sent in error (email sent at 14.42pm 16 March 2020 to four DWP colleagues and a DWP team inbox).</p> <p>The error was recognised within a minute by the Labour Market team and the message was recalled (message recalled at 14.43pm on 16 March 2020). An email was also sent to DWP to ask them to delete the email (email requesting deletion sent at 14.49pm on 16 March 2020), to which our DWP colleagues responded to say they had deleted without opening.</p> <p>Senior managers and ONS Head of Profession office were informed.</p>	

3. Impact of the breach

<p>The impact of the breach was minor. While the PSE attachment included Labour Force Survey data on total employment, which is used to derive a private sector series, DWP did not access the data as the purpose of the email attachments were to simply test that they could be opened without error.</p>
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4. Corrective actions (taken or planned) to prevent re-occurrence

Staff have been reminded of the importance of safeguarding data prior to its publication and the practices to follow to comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics.

This was not a routine process and was aimed at finding a short term solution to help DWP on publication morning. The long term solution is to fix the affected tables so that DWP can access the datasets direct from ONS website at 9.30am. This fix was implemented in the April 2020 Labour Market release.