

REPORT OF A BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR STATISTICS



1. Core Information

Title and link to statistical output	Excess Mortality and Covid-19 related deaths in NI: March-June 2020 https://www.nisra.gov.uk/sites/nisra.gov.uk/files/publications/Bulletin-Excess-280720.pdf
Name of producer organisation	NISRA
Name and contact details of person dealing with report	Deborah Lyness tel 028 90 255390 Deborah.Lyness@nisra.gov.uk
Name and contact details of Senior Statistician/Lead Official	Siobhan Carey, NISRA Chief Executive and Registrar General, Siobhan.carey@finance-ni.gov.uk
Link to published statement about the breach (if relevant)	https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/monthly-deaths
Date of breach report	28/7/2020

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant principle(s) and practice(s)	Practice T3.4: The circulation of statistics in their final form ahead of their publication should be restricted to eligible recipients.
Date of occurrence of breach	27/7/2020 at 21:27
<i>Give an account of what happened including roles of persons involved, dates, times etc</i>	
<p>A joint pre-release submission was issued to the Department of Finance (DoF) and Department of Health (DoH) Ministers at 3.30pm on 27 July notifying them, along with a copy list of a number of senior officials who had been granted pre-release access, about the publication and the key findings. The submission was sent to Private Offices in both departments in order for necessary administrative support to the Ministers. A copy of the bulletin was provided along with the Statistical Press Notice.</p> <p>A response from the DoH Private Office was received at 9.27pm on 27th July indicating that the Minister had 'noted' the contents of the submission. However, this response was copied to two officials who were not specified on the PRA list: one (a member of the Private Office team) provides administrative support to the Minister; however the other recipient, the Minister's Special Advisor, should not have received early access.</p>	

3. Impact of the breach

<i>Provide details of the impact of the breach both inside the producer body and externally</i>
<p>Key statistics relating to excess deaths in NI were available to an individual not on the pre-release access list prior to their release. These statistics have high public and media interest.</p>

There is no evidence that the findings from the official statistics were shared any wider and there was no compromise of the statistics in a media or public forum prior to the 9.30am release on 28/07/2020.

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

Describe the short-term actions made to redress the situation and the longer term changes to procedures etc

The breach was discovered on the morning of 28th, however due to ongoing preparations for a media briefing on the statistics at the point of release, there was limited time for corrective short term action. By 11am the Vital Statistics Senior Principal Statistician had spoken with the relevant Private Office contact advising them of the issue and reminding them of their obligations with regard to pre-release access.

DoH Private Office did however advise that the DoH Special Advisor routinely sees all correspondence going to the Minister, a built in process and supported by the submission cover sheet template. While they were advised that any deviation from the named recipients is considered a breach and discussion at point of receipt of the submission could have allowed corrective action on this occasion, this is also a learning point for Vital Statistics Branch, that future submissions to the DoH Minister should include the DoH SpAd to accommodate Private Office protocols. (Weekly death releases are different as these issue directly to the DoH Minister's email without a submission note and thus this has not been an issue to date).

Any publications sent to the DoH minister via the Private Office will include the DoH Special Advisor on the PRA list.