

REPORT OF A BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR STATISTICS



1. Core Information

Title and link to statistical output	<p>General Dental Service Statistics for Northern Ireland, Quarter 1 2020/21 http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3173.htm</p> <p>General Medical Services Statistics for Northern Ireland, Quarter 1 2020/21 http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3174.htm</p> <p>Community Pharmaceutical Service Statistics for Northern Ireland, Quarter 1 2020/21 http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3176.htm</p> <p>General Ophthalmic Service Statistics for Northern Ireland, Quarter 1 2020/21 http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3175.htm</p>
Name of producer organisation	Health and Social Care Business Services Organisation, Northern Ireland (BSO)
Name and contact details of person dealing with report	<p>Martin Mayock martin.mayock@hscni.net Tel: - 028 95363687</p>
Name and contact details of Senior Statistician/Lead Official	<p>Martin Mayock martin.mayock@hscni.net Tel: - 028 95363687</p>
Link to published statement about the breach (if relevant)	<p>General Dental Service Statistics for Northern Ireland, Quarter 1 2020/21 http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3173.htm</p> <p>General Medical Services Statistics for Northern Ireland, Quarter 1 2020/21 http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3174.htm</p> <p>Community Pharmaceutical Service Statistics for Northern Ireland, Quarter 1 2020/21 http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3176.htm</p> <p>General Ophthalmic Service Statistics for Northern Ireland, Quarter 1 2020/21 http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3175.htm</p>
Date of breach report	7th August 2020

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant principle(s) and practice(s)	T3.6 - Statistics should be released to all users at 9.30am on a weekday.
Date of occurrence of breach	6th August 2020
<p><i>Give an account of what happened including roles of persons involved, dates, times etc</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There were four separate official statistics releases due to issue from BSO's Family Practitioner Services (FPS) Information Unit at 9:30 am. Around 8:50 am, one of the statisticians tried to log onto website in preparation for loading their release (having tested it earlier the previous evening – 5th Aug). She received a database server error and 	

immediately alerted the other statisticians with impending releases who also tried and received same error. A high priority call was then logged with BSO IT Support (ITS) at 8:57am.

- With no sign of the issue being fixed, NISRA were notified around 9:15am and asked if they could help publish the documents on the GOV.UK website (in line with NISRA's new website failure protocol).
- Approaching 9:30am, we also managed to directly contact the BSO systems analyst with responsibility for the website to see if they could help resolve the issue.
- NISRA managed to get the four publications released on GOV.UK (replacing the web links) at 9:36am, 9.36am, 9.37am and 9.34am respectively so the publications were available to users from these times.
- ITS managed to resolve the website issue and the publications were uploaded to their usual site at 9:52am, 9.54am, 9.55am and 9.57am respectively.
- Users were circulated just after 10:00am notifying them that the publications had been released. This is later than normally would happen.
- BSO ITS were asked for an explanation of the issue. They have advised that at some point on the evening of 5th August, or overnight, the connection between the central management server and database server (where the content is stored) was broken and did not restart automatically. This meant that webpage editors could not log in as usual. They state that this happens very rarely (perhaps once a year in practice) and it can be difficult to trace the cause – it could be due to scheduled server updates and security patching, server errors, network problems, etc. They have a fix for this, known to the website team which, although not guaranteed (dependent on the nature of the issue), can be successful in a few minutes. In this case it was successful but it would seem that website calls are only accorded Tier 3 priority status by the helpdesk so the website team was not notified sufficiently quickly to apply the fix which would have allowed publication to proceed at 9:30 as scheduled.

3. Impact of the breach

Provide details of the impact of the breach both inside the producer body and externally

This is considered only a very minor breach. These were quarterly tabular updates to the main annual publications and not considered high profile. Moreover, some of the headline figures had previously been released early to Users in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The impact of the small delay was further mitigated by the direct publication of the official statistics on GOV.UK between 9.34am and 9.37am, so the publications were available to users from this point and the GOV.UK pages usually appear first on a web search. No complaints from users have been received and none are expected.

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

Short-Term

- ITS and NISRA were notified at the earliest opportunity, and continued efforts made to contact the relevant ITS specialist.
- The four publications were released on GOV.UK and available to users within four, six and seven minutes of the release time, in advance of the website fix.
- A statement was included beside each publication on the website notifying users of the minor breach to the release time.

Longer-Term

- IT providers have informed that there can be a multitude of reasons for the link between the servers being broken and thus difficult to pinpoint a particular cause. In addition, this type of event is a rare occurrence that can usually be resolved quickly when discovered.
- In light of this, the BSO Senior Statistician will write to head of ITS Infrastructure requesting that official statistics website issues are afforded the highest priority response status, and to explore whether or not it would be possible for ITS to be automatically notified in the event the server link is broken again, so that no time is wasted in applying the standard fix (or other appropriate actions, if necessary).
- BSO will provide feedback to NISRA on how the website failure protocol worked in practice and if there are any places where it can be improved, e.g. move to contingency measures quicker.
- In future, BSO will stagger quarterly publication release dates to minimise multiple adverse impact from a website failure.
- Should a similar situation re-occur, producers will move to the GOV.UK contingency arrangement at an earlier point in the process.