

Report of a breach of the Code of Practice for Statistics

Core Information

Information needed	Response
Title and link to statistical output	Annual Report on Complainant Satisfaction with services provided by the Police Ombudsman's Office in Northern Ireland, 2019/20 https://www.policeombudsman.org/Statistics-and-Research/Complainant-Satisfaction-Survey
Name of producer organisation	Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland (OPONI)
Name and contact details of person dealing with report	Lead Official for Statistics in the Police Ombudsman's Office info@policeombudsman.org
Name and contact details of Head of Profession for Statistics	Lead Official for Statistics in the Police Ombudsman's Office info@policeombudsman.org
Link to published statement about the breach (if relevant)	The breach statement is available on the following web page: https://www.policeombudsman.org/Statistics-and-Research/Complainant-Satisfaction-Survey
Date of breach report	11 January 2021

Circumstances of breach

Information needed	Response
Relevant principle(s) and practice(s)	Trustworthiness: T3.6 Orderly release – statistics not released at the scheduled time of 09:30
Date of occurrence of breach	11 January 2021

Please give an account of what happened including roles of persons involved, dates and times:

The 2019/20 Annual Report on Complainant Satisfaction, originally scheduled for publication in June 2020, was delayed to January 2021 due to limited access to the office, and source data, due to COVID-19 restrictions. The report was re-scheduled for publication on 5 January 2021 (others had been published earlier) but had to be delayed again due to closure of the office in January 2021 to all but essential workers meaning that the statistical team had no access to the office.

On 31 December 2020 it was discovered that there had been a breach of the Code of Practice and some of the official statistics from this report had been included within the Annual Corporate Report published on 23 October. A [breach report](#) was drafted, as soon as the email was picked up on 5 January, and efforts were made to publish the Annual Report on Complainant Satisfaction as soon as possible. A way of doing this was identified on 7 January.

On Friday 8 January the publication of the Annual Report on Complainant Satisfaction was preannounced for Monday 11 January 2021. The report and accompanying breach notification were scheduled for upload by a member of the statistical team. The Lead Official sent an email (at 2.43pm) to the Chief Executive notifying her of the release and

asking her to notify the other members of the senior management team who she did not have contact details for.

Early in the afternoon, the Acting Head of Communications contacted the member of the statistical team regarding another issue and on hearing that the publication and notification of the previous breach were scheduled for release on Monday asked that they be taken down as the Chief Executive had indicated that she wanted to consider the breach notification before the report was published and she was on leave that afternoon. The Head of Communications, who had been in post just under five days, was unaware of the requirement to publish statistics publications on their pre-announced dates, and when advised that such action would cause an issue, did not wish to go against the wishes of the Chief Executive. The Head of Communications sent an email to the Chief Executive at 2.21pm and subsequently called her at 4.41pm when she did not pick up the email. The Chief Executive confirmed that she did not wish the report to be published before she had had time to consider the impact of the breach and that she would look at it on Monday. During this conversation, she was not made aware that the report had been pre-announced and she had not looked at her emails as she was on leave.

Following this conversation, the Head of Communications contacted the member of the statistics team to confirm that the Chief Executive did not want the report published on Monday 11 January as it did not give her enough time to consider the breach. The member of the statistics team immediately contacted the Lead Official, who was also on leave, to explain the situation. This was just before 5pm. The Lead Official, having not received a reply to her previous email and with no other way of contacting the Chief Executive, contacted Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) Statistical Support for assistance. Further efforts were made (by email and telephone) to contact the Chief Executive with contact numbers left and the situation explained in an email. Unfortunately, the Chief Executive was on a half day's leave and due to the pandemic there was no one in the Chief Executive's office to take or forward a message. Efforts continued on Monday morning.

Having returned to the office on Monday morning, the Chief Executive read the emails and understanding the gravity of the situation (that the publication had been preannounced on 8 January for release on 11 January and that statistical publications must be released on their pre-announced date and at 9.30am) she contacted the Head of NISRA Statistical Support - at 9.30am exactly. After a very brief conversation, the Chief Executive contacted the relevant people and authorised the publication. The report was published and available to the public at 9.39am.

Impact of the breach

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

There has been little impact both internally and externally as a result of this breach.

Due to the corrective actions taken, the publication was available within 9 minutes of the scheduled release time. There have been no complaints regarding the breach.

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:

Immediate steps were taken by member of the statistical team (who explained the situation to the Head of Communications), the Lead Official and by NISRA Statistical Support to rectify the problem. Efforts were made (by both telephone and email) to contact the Chief Executive. When this was unsuccessful, the situation was explained by email and contact numbers left. The OPONI statistician also ensured that the web team had all the required material, should permission be granted. Efforts to contact the Chief Executive continued on Monday morning, despite the proximity to the release time. As soon as contact was established, the issue and urgency was explained quickly allowing the Chief Executive time to 'get off the phone' and address the issue.

Later that morning, a further conversation took place between the Head of NISRA Statistical Support and the OPONI Chief Executive regarding release times and the importance of publishing on pre-announced dates and at 9.30am.

When further details emerged, a similar conversation took place between the Head of NISRA Statistical Support and the Acting Head of Communications. Full (virtual) training will be provided to the Senior Information Officer (who is Acting Head of Communications) and the new Head of Communications as soon as this is practical.

While the factors that resulted in this breach are directly related to the pandemic (staff working from home, difficulty in contacting staff as phones are not diverted, inability to speak to staff face-to-face, delays to publications resulting in uncertainty about release dates) steps will be taken to minimise the risk of future breaches, including:

- greater clarity around release dates, including use of the GOV.UK release calendar
- improved communication should publications be delayed or re-scheduled
- (refresher) briefing on the Code of Practice for OPONI Senior Management and Communications staff, particularly around release practices