

BREACH OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

This document reports a breach of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, or the relevant Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Orders, to which the Code applies as if it included these orders.

1. Background information

Name of Statistical Output (including weblink to the relevant output or 'landing page')

Student Loans for Higher Education in Northern Ireland: financial year 2013-14

<http://www.slc.co.uk/official-statistics/student-loans-debt-and-repayment/northern-ireland.aspx>

Name of Producer Organisation

Student Loans Company (SLC)

Name and contact details of the statistical Head of Profession (Lead Official in an Arm's Length Body) submitting this report, and date of report

Student Loans Company Lead Official for Statistics:

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Report date: 18 June 2014

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Principle 2, Protocol 2, Practice 7 - Breach of Pre release practice

Date of occurrence

18 June 2014

Nature of breach (including links with previous breaches, if any)

SLC passed the publication pre-release to the statistician within the Department for Employment and & Learning in Northern Ireland (DEL) specified on the SLC pre-release list.

When the onward pre-release email was circulated by the DEL statistical team to the pre-release access list within DEL, the email address of the DEL Permanent Secretary was incorrect and it went to the Permanent Secretary in another Northern Ireland Department instead; Department of Culture, Arts & Leisure (DCAL). The DCAL Permanent Secretary informed the DEL Permanent Secretary that it had been received in error, immediately deleted the email and subsequently confirmed that the email had not been forwarded to any other staff.

Reasons for breach

The breach was due to a human administrative error within DEL. Prior to the publication pre release, DEL-produced Higher Education statistical fact sheets, had been released at 09:30. This pre release list had been checked thoroughly prior to release and it was also planned to use this list for the publication pre release with only one change relating to the named manager responsible for the different policy area.

A copy of this list was emailed to the statistician in the team who was preparing the publication pre release, indicating the only change to the list should be the policy manager who was specified.

The appropriate change to the policy manager was made. However, in the course of this he accidentally deleted the DEL Permanent Secretary email address and accessed the email system to look up the address. The DEL and DCAL Permanent Secretary email addresses were beside each other on the address list and when selecting the DEL Permanent Secretary he accidentally clicked on the DCAL address which looks quite similar.

Prior to the publication pre release the details of the pre release contacts were checked again by a manager and while it was noted that the correct change to the policy manager had been made it was not noticed that the Permanent Secretary details had changed slightly, as the address of both appears quite similar on the email list and were in the same place as the first address on the email. This change to the Permanent Secretary address was not spotted and the email was approved for release.

3. Reactions and impact (both within the producer body and outside)

The DEL Permanent Secretary immediately informed the manager who informed the senior statistician in DEL. No other impact or external reaction.

The Permanent Secretary of DCAL has confirmed that he did not pass on or otherwise disseminate the email he received in error.

4. Corrective actions taken to prevent reoccurrence of such a breach (include short- term actions, and long-term changes made to procedures)

With a view to minimising the risk of human error, all staff in the DEL statistical team will be reminded about the importance of the accuracy of PRA release emails and an additional step for checking all PRA emails will be introduced for formal 'sign-off' by Deputy Principal Statistician.