

***Email from Janet Allbeson, Senior Policy Adviser, Gingerbread, 18 February 2013***

Dear Sir/Madam

I am writing to report a breach of the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

**Name of Statistical Output**

It concerns the Child Support Agency Quarterly Summary of Statistics for Great Britain, and the release of the statistics for the quarter ending December 2012, which are due out on Wednesday 20th February.

**Producer Organisation**

These statistics are produced by the Department for Work and Pensions

**Circumstances of breach**

The breach relates to Principle 2 (Practices 1-3) and Protocol 2, in particular Practice 8. It also relates to Principle 3, Practice 1

The breach occurred on Sunday 17th February.

The breach consisted of an 'exclusive' story in "The Sun" newspaper, which said: "Figures out next week will show four in five fathers are now paying maintenance without the need to be chased for it....Just five years ago a third of parents had to be pursued by the state because they did not pay. But the latest statistics will show that has fallen to around 20 per cent."

The "Sun" piece, by journalist David Wooding, is clearly based on prior knowledge of the next CSA quarterly statistics, ahead of their publication on 20th February. It appears he has been given an indication of the substance of one element in the statistical report, prior to publication, with a view to garnering positive headlines for the Department for Work and Pensions and shaping the 'messaging' around the statistics. This is a clear breach of the Code.

Gingerbread is concerned because the figures in question are not uncontested. The QSS has a definition of 'paying maintenance' which is based on at least one payment of child maintenance (of whatever amount) having been made in the last three months. The definition used by DWP flatters its success in ensuring payment, and exaggerates the extent to which non-resident parents are actually meeting their legal obligations to their children, which – under the child support scheme – are due to be paid week in, week out and in full.

Giving a 'heads up' to "The Sun" gives favourable coverage to the DWP, whilst ensuring that voices that would contest this interpretation of the statistics are not heard.

I am happy to provide any further information you require, and would be grateful if you could confirm that this matter will be investigated.

Yours sincerely  
Janet Allbeson