

Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation

John Pullinger
National Statistician
Office for National Statistics

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Dear John

I am today publishing a report summarising several related breaches of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. This consolidated breach report has been prepared by the ONS's Good Practice Team on behalf of all producers involved.

The breaches reflect a failure to publish statistics at the standard time of 9.30am on 23 March 2017. They arose because, following the terrorist attack at Westminster on 22 March, Heads of Profession received instructions from their departmental communications teams that no publications should be made from GOV.UK for a 24 hour period. As a result, some planned publications were not issued at 9.30 am, contrary to **Protocol 2, Practice 4**: "Issue statistical releases at the standard time of 9.30am on a weekday, to maintain consistency and to permit time for users to understand and respond to the information during normal working hours".

I would like to commend you and your teams, who acted quickly to ensure that a wide range of statistical releases were published instead on the ONS's back-up website on 23 March. It is important that statistics are available on the planned day of publication, and that the decisions on timing and content are made by the relevant statistical head of profession, and not by communications professionals, to avoid the risk that such decisions could be influenced by political concerns. By taking prompt action on behalf of the statistical system, you ensured continued provision of statistics even in understandably difficult circumstances.

As a result of these efforts, most of the planned releases were published on the ONS back-up website on 23 March, but not at 9.30am. The ONS's provision of a back up site on behalf of the statistical system means that the breach of the Code is relatively minor. As a result, I consider that it would be appropriate to grant a retrospective exemption to the Code of Practice to all those producers listed in the Annex. The exemption will be published under Principle 2, Practice 5 of the CoP.

I am copying this letter as evidence of an exemption to Heads of Profession.

Yours sincerely,



Ed Humpherson