

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')

Child and Working Tax Credits Statistics: finalised award statistics - small area data (LSOA and Data Zone) 2013 to 2014

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/personal-tax-credits-finalised-award-statistics-small-area-data-lsoa-and-data-zone-2013-to-2014>

Child and Working Tax Credits Statistics: finalised award statistics - small area data (LSOA and Data Zone) 2014 to 2015

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/personal-tax-credits-finalised-award-statistics-small-area-data-lsoa-and-data-zone-2014-to-2015>

Name of Producer Organisation

HM Revenue and Customs

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

Sean Whellams, Head of Profession for Statistics, HMRC, 16th March 2017

2. Circumstances of breach

Relevant Principle/Protocol and Practice

Principle 4 – Practice 3

3. Adopt quality assurance procedures, including the consideration of each statistical product against users' requirements, and of their coherence with other statistical products.

Date of occurrence

31st July 2015, 12th August 2016

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

- Finalised award tax credits statistics at Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) geographic level are published on an annual basis.
- The releases were published at 9.30am on 31st July 2015, and 9:30am on 12th August 2016.
- An external user contacted the department at 10:36 on 11th November 2016 with concerns relating to geographic data relating to the North West region.
- We contacted the user to discuss the issue in order to progress our investigations.

Reasons for breach

- The data for the North West region, published on 31st July 2015 contained incorrect information.
- This error was carried forward into the publication on 12th August 2016.
- When investigating this error, it was found that a similar error occurred in the West Midlands region in the 31st July 2015 publication.
- In the 31st July 2015 publication, incorrect lists of LSOAs used in the production of the final tables meant that data were assigned to the wrong LSOAs name labels within the tables for North West and West Midlands regions. This was replicated in the August 2016 publication for the North West region.
- The errors arose due to mistakes in copying and pasting LSOA codes in the production of these statistics. Quality assurance processes were insufficient to detect this prior to publication.

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

Once our investigations confirmed errors, the breach was discussed with the Deputy Head of Profession for Statistics, the team's lead statistician and the Head of Profession for Statistics.

Both publications were withdrawn at 12:00, 23rd February 2017, and work began immediately to fix the problem and check for other errors that could have existed.

We have contacted the user to confirm the errors, and also the 69 Local Authorities that cover the affected areas, and who are potential users of these data.

Our investigations are now complete. Therefore the corrected tables Child and Working Tax Credits Statistics: finalised award statistics small area data (LSOA and Data Zone) for 2013-14 and 2014-15 will be re-published at 09:30 on Thursday 23rd March.

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

The production of this publication has required LSOA codes to be copied and pasted manually from one spreadsheet into another. An error occurred in this process, leading to the incorrect assignment of LSOA codes and names within GOR regions. As this is done at LSOA level, the numbers reported in each LA within the affected GORs were incorrect.

A full review of the production and quality assurance process of this publication has been undertaken.

The review identified a number of improvements to the QA process, these have been signed off and agreed with the senior leadership, and includes:

- Review of the design of the spreadsheet to minimise risks of inadvertent mistakes;
- Addition of further automated checks to minimise human error;
- Introduction of a publication-specific QA review checklist to complete monthly to document the QA process and record when each part of the QA has been completed;
- Discuss checklist with staff and apply principles to all future publications; and
- Interviews with staff who worked on the previous publications, to understand what led to the error and to provide further assurance that no other errors are present.

We are already undertaking an ongoing review of National Statistics in this area an important part of which is to include reviewing quality assurance procedures across all the statistics we produce.

5. Links to published statements about this breach

6. Any other relevant supporting material