

**STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE  
with the  
PRE-RELEASE ACCESS TO OFFICIAL STATISTICS ORDER 2009**

**Introduction**

This statement sets out the Office of the Police Ombudsman's operational arrangements for giving the Police Ombudsman Senior Management Team, Ministers and their briefing officials pre-release access to official statistics once they are in their final form prior to publication. These arrangements are designed to ensure that such access is justified, limited, controlled and publicised and complies with statutory requirements.

The purpose of these arrangements is to maintain public confidence in the integrity of official statistics while allowing the Police Ombudsman or Ministers to comment immediately on the implications of statistics covering policy areas for which they, themselves, are democratically responsible.

This statement is published in conformance with Paragraph 9 (c) of the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order (Northern Ireland) 2009.

**Exclusion**

Different arrangements apply to officials' access to the organisation's own administrative or management data where those data subsequently form the basis for published official statistics. Details of these arrangements can be found in the [Use of Administrative or Management Information](#).

Details of the administrative or management data systems used by the Office in compiling official statistics are set out separately in the [Statement of Administrative Sources](#).

**Authority**

These arrangements have been drawn up by the Office's senior statistician in consultation with the Senior Management Team. Decisions on pre-release access to official statistics will be led by the senior statistical professionals responsible for producing them. This means that in practice, the decision making process for pre-release access, including ensuring awareness of the rules, monitoring compliance, determining which statistics are eligible for pre-release and who gets pre-release access, is being led by the senior statistician. These activities will be assessed by the UK Statistics Authority for compliance.

## **General Principle**

The Office operates under the general principle that pre-release access to official statistics must be:

- limited to the minimum number of persons deemed necessary to allow the Police Ombudsman or Minister to:
  - provide responses to questions, or make statements about those statistics at, or shortly after, their time of publication;
  - take action just before, at, or shortly after the time of publication.
- allowed in circumstances where the public benefit likely to result from such access outweighs the detriment to public trust in official statistics likely to result from so doing.

## **Grant of advance access**

The arrangements set out in this statement are confined to those persons who meet the eligibility criteria set out in Annex A (i) attached. Recipients can, in addition, share their access with their immediate administrative support staff even though those staff may not directly engage with the statistics in question. Their advance access is limited to statistics which meet the eligibility criteria set out in Annex A (ii) attached, and which are in their final form prior to being published for the first time.

## **Documentation and Publication**

In the interests of openness and transparency, Annex A (iii) sets out a public record of the titles of the statistical releases to which these arrangements apply, as well as the job titles of all those persons to whom pre-release access is granted, and the organisations to which they belong.

## **Period of access**

In line with the legislative rules, pre-release access to the Office's official statistics is restricted to a maximum of 24 hours before their public release on the following day – usually at 09.30.

In exceptional circumstances only, and in accordance with Paragraph 5 of the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order 2009, the senior statistician may grant pre-release access in excess of 24 hours. They will only do this if, in their opinion, the public benefit outweighs the detriment to public trust which is likely to result from such extended access. When this happens, the senior statistician will publish on the Office's website the reason for granting extended access, and will also inform the UK Statistics Authority. Please see Annex A (iii).

## **Conditions of access**

Those persons who are given access to the Office's official statistics ahead of their release must keep the statistics secure and under embargo, and they must abide by certain conditions of access. They must avoid:

- disclosing the statistics or any part of a publication containing those statistics to any person not listed as a pre-release recipient;
- providing any indication of the size or direction of any trend revealed by the statistics;
- using such access for personal gain, or taking any action for political advantage;
- exploiting such access to change or compromise the content, presentation, or timing of publication of official statistics.

### **Special circumstances**

Aside from the circumstances described above, the senior statistician may also allow access to statistics ahead of their release to a limited number of persons in a limited number of special circumstances, sometimes for more than 24 hours. In each case, such access will be documented in the relevant release. For example:

- access may be given to the compilers of complementary reports due to be published at the same time as, or shortly after the statistics so that they can incorporate the latest available figures. Such access may also be longer than 24 hours;
- international organisations may gain access in order to compile supra-national statistics; and
- in exceptional circumstances pre-release access may be extended to someone who is not an 'eligible person' as defined in the Order. In this case the UK Statistics Authority will be informed and the reason for such exceptional access published.

### **Breach of conditions of release**

In the event of the Office becoming aware of a breach of the principles and rules set out in the legislation and described in this statement, the senior statistician will consider the need to notify the Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, who may then inform the UK Statistics Authority. In the event that this is necessary, the Chief Executive will report the breach to the National Statistician for onward transmission to the Authority.

Where the senior statistician considers that a breach was minor in nature, and resulted in no damage to the integrity of the statistics involved, the senior statistician may choose to deal with the matter informally through internal discussion.

### **Sanctions against non-compliance**

The senior statistician may, for a period, withdraw pre-release access from any person judged to have breached the conditions of their access.

In addition, a heavier sanction can be imposed by the UK Statistics Authority which has a statutory duty to assess the extent to which any organisation's official statistics comply with the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008 and with the associated obligations set out in this statement. The Authority can, for instance, challenge an organisation where it considers that pre-release access is not justified or where an organisation is failing to conform with these arrangements.

In the event of any such challenge or any such withdrawal the senior statistician will publish the Office's response on the Office's website along with plans for achieving conformance.

## **DEFINITIONAL NOTES:**

### **(a) Pre-release access**

In the context described above, the phrase 'pre-release access' covers privileged access to statistical releases in their final form prior to being placed in the public domain. It does not cover pre-release access available to:

- those staff intimately engaged in the process of producing and disseminating the statistics in question (including those responsible for overseeing this process);
- those persons requested by the producers of statistics to quality assure the statistics before their public release.

However the restrictions listed under 'Conditions of access' above do apply to the above.

### **(b) Senior Statistician**

Departments/bodies which employ a large number of government statisticians or produce a large number of official statistics will normally appoint a senior statistician. In the Office of the Police Ombudsman the senior statistician is the Deputy Principal Statistician, who is employed on secondment from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

ANNEX A  
 CRITERIA FOR GRANTING PRE-RELEASE ACCESS

(i) - Categories of persons within government to whom the Office of the Police Ombudsman would normally grant pre-release access to its statistical releases:

- The Police Ombudsman Senior Management and those Ministers who have policy or operational responsibility for a particular subject-matter covered by a statistical release; who are accountable to Parliament/the Assembly and the electorate for their stewardship of that policy; and who may need to respond to questions about the statistics, or take appropriate action, at the time of release of those statistics. In practice this will normally be the Minister for Justice for Northern Ireland;
- Other Departmental or Agency officials who have been assigned the specific responsibility to brief Ministers or Chief Executives about the statistics in question (e.g. Special Advisers, Policy Advisers, Analysts) ; and
- Departmental Press Officers responsible for managing the Police Ombudsman’s or Ministers’ interface with the media with respect to the policy or statistics in question.

(plus any immediate ancillary staff who support the above)

(ii) - Categories of statistical release to which the Office of the Police Ombudsman would normally grant pre-release access:

- Releases which incorporate statistics which are used to monitor or measure the government's performance (either generally, or against formal targets);
- Releases which have the potential to impinge substantially on the formulation, implementation, or monitoring of government policy;
- Releases which have the potential to inform, or impact on, decisions about the allocation of public funds;
- Releases which have, demonstrably and historically, had a high public profile (i.e. regularly generate column inches in the print media or regularly attract the attention of the broadcast media) and on which Ministers or Chief Executives with responsibility for the subject-matter might reasonably be expected to comment at the time of release; and
- Releases which cover matters of wide public interest.

(iii) – Releases to which pre-release access is granted and persons with pre-release access:

Annual Statistical Bulletin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland</li> <li>• Office of the Police Ombudsman Chief Executive</li> <li>• Office of the Police Ombudsman Director of Information</li> </ul>
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Note: Pre-release access is not granted to any other statistical release.