

Press Release

21 October 2008

Pre-release access to official statistics

The draft *Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008*¹ was laid before Parliament on 21 July 2008 and will be considered by Parliament over the coming weeks with a view to its provisions coming into force from December 2008.

Pre-release access to official statistics refers to arrangements for Government Ministers and officials to be granted advance access to statistics in their final form before publication. The Order is made by the Government under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*.

Speaking today, the Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Michael Scholar said:

“The Order is a welcome step forward in that it formally restricts pre-release access for the first time. But in the view of the Statistics Authority it still leaves government departments and ministers too much latitude. A system which continues to grant pre-access to statistics to ministers and officials, but not to other people, is unlikely to further our aim of promoting public trust in the statistical service.

“The Authority’s draft Code of Practice, the subject of a recent public consultation, promotes the principles of equality of access to statistics and the release of statistics at the earliest possible opportunity. Pre-release access sits uncomfortably alongside these principles and must be kept to the minimum.

“The Authority now wants to see government departments using the flexibility given to them in the Order progressively to reduce the amount of time that pre-release access is granted, and the number of individuals to whom privileged access is given.

“More generally, the Authority notes that the equivalent Order before the Scottish Parliament² is different from the Westminster Order in important respects. The Authority hopes that there will be a fresh debate across the UK administrations about whether, and why, pre-release access to official statistics should be regarded as undesirable.”

Under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*, the Authority will conduct an independent review of the impact of the new pre-release access arrangements about twelve months after their introduction.

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¹ http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2008/draft/ukdsi_9780110832203_en_1

² <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/06/18150515/13>. Correspondence between the Statistics Authority and the Scottish Government relating to this Order may be found at: <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/correspondence/index.html>