

# Statement

30 March 2010

## Future Policy for UK Official Statistics

I wrote to the leaders of the major political parties on 29 January 2010, letting them know the views of the Authority on what future policy should be in relation to UK official statistics. In that letter I said that progress has been made in recent years in building confidence in the trustworthiness of official statistics, but that more needs to be done:

- (i) the arrangements for ensuring the independence and impartiality of statisticians in all Government Departments need to be further strengthened and entrenched;
- (ii) more use needs to be made of the Statistics Authority in setting budgets; and
- (iii) the Statistics Authority should be asked to determine the pre-release access arrangements for all official statistics.

As Chair of the Statistics Authority I believe that the following steps might be taken in order to bring these changes about:

- (i) the independence and impartiality of statisticians in Departments outside the ONS would be strengthened by giving formal recognition of the role of Departmental Heads of Profession reporting to the National Statistician as manager on all professional matters. In addition, Departments should be required to secure the National Statistician's agreement before making decisions about the performance, grading, placement and numbers of their statistical staff.
- (ii) Ministers in charge of Departments should be required to consult the Statistics Authority about any proposed significant changes to their expenditure on statistics, or to their statistical outputs, and to publish their statistical budgets. Alternatively, budgets could be determined by a central process managed by the Treasury or Cabinet Office, acting under advice from the Statistics Authority.
- (iii) pre-release access arrangements for official statistics should follow the recommendations in the Statistics Authority's report published on 18 March 2010, to bring the 24-hour limit down to 3 hours, to introduce a 1-hour voluntary restraint on political announcements relating to a statistical release, and to give the Authority in future the task of determining pre-release access arrangements.

Whichever of these steps is taken it will be important for an incoming government to lend strong political support to the policy on statistics set out in the Guidance sent to all Departments in 2009 by the Cabinet Secretary, following the Authority's intervention in respect of knife crime statistics.

This Guidance (copy attached) requires all officials and advisors, and not only government statisticians, to observe the Code of Practice for Official Statistics; to consult Government Statistical Service professionals when preparing publications containing statistics, including those drawn from administrative or management information; not to quote selectively from unpublished datasets; and to raise any concerns with their departmental Head of Profession, or with the National Statistician.

This Guidance should also be incorporated in the general guidance sent by the Prime Minister to all Ministers.

These steps can all be taken within the framework of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*.

**Sir Michael Scholar**  
**Chair of the UK Statistics Authority**

## **Good Practice in the use of Official Statistics: Guidance for non-statistical staff**

### **Background**

The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 established the UK Statistics Authority and required it to draw up a Code of Practice for official statistics.

The Code of Practice was published in January 2009 and provides a statement of good practice to be applied to official statistics in the United Kingdom.

### **The key points to note are:**

- When preparing any publication containing statistics, including those drawn from administrative or management information, you must involve statistical professionals at the earliest opportunity
- You must not use unpublished statistics without the advice of a statistical professional
- You must not selectively quote favourable data from any unpublished dataset
- Decisions taken by statistical professionals are final
- Any publication containing official statistics must provide information relating to their quality, reliability and usability
- Pre-release access to official statistics is a privilege. You must not disclose any information, nor seek to alter it in any way
- Ignoring any of the above may constitute a breach of the Code and result in an investigation by the UK Statistics Authority and a published report to Parliament.

### **Further Help**

If you are unclear about what course of action to take, or with any of the advice provided above:

- Contact your departmental Head of Profession for Statistics who is

***[Add Details for your department]***

- If you cannot reach them or a deputy you can contact the National Statistician through the Helpline on 01633-455528
- The Code of Practice for Official Statistics is available at

<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>