
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Michael Scholar KCB

Rt. Hon. Tessa Jowell MP
Minister for the Cabinet Office
Cabinet Office
70 Whitehall
LONDON
SW1A 2AS

18 March 2010

Dear Minister

PRE-RELEASE TO OFFICIAL STATISTICS: A REVIEW OF THE STATUTORY ARRANGEMENTS

The UK Statistics Authority has today published an independent review of the statutory arrangements for pre-release access to official statistics in the four UK administrations. A copy of our report is enclosed.¹

The Authority has concluded that, bearing in mind the need to demonstrate the practical independence of the statistical service, the current statutory arrangements provide advance access to too many people and for too long. Pre-release access arrangements also apply to too many statistical releases. In the interests of building public confidence in the work of government statisticians, the Authority makes four main recommendations, set out in section 1.8 of the report.

In abbreviated form:

1. All four UK administrations should amend their Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics Orders to adopt a maximum period of pre-release access of three hours, in line with the recommendation made by the House of Commons Treasury Committee in 2006;
2. The four administrations should also work together to ensure consistency between the statutory arrangements as they apply to their official statistics;
3. To maximise attention on statistical releases, and to minimise any impression that there has been collusion to align statistical releases with ministerial statements, an interval of one hour should be respected, on a voluntary basis, between the release of statistics and the release of ministerial comment about them; and,
4. Provisions in the Orders allowing 24 hours embargoed release of statistical reports to journalists should be deleted. They allow the news media to have statistical information ahead of Parliament and we think this is neither necessary nor desirable.

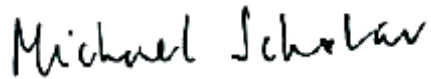
While the Statistics Authority is presently precluded under the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*, from determining the rules on pre-release access, we think that it would be in the interests of public confidence in official statistics if the Authority were given the lead

¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/reports/pre--release-access-to-official-statistics--a-review-of-the-statutory-arrangements.pdf>

role in determining these arrangements in future and this proposal is included in the report. Our aim is to respect the internationally recognised principle of equal access to official statistics and to enhance the independence and utility of the statistical service by ensuring that it is seen to be beyond any inappropriate influence.

I am copying this letter to Dr. Tony Wright MP, Chair of the House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee; to Rt. Hon. Francis Maude MP; to Andrew Davies AM in the Welsh Assembly Government; to Sammy Wilson MP MLA in the Northern Ireland Executive; and to Jim Mather MSP in the Scottish Government.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Scholar". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Sir Michael Scholar KCB