

From: Mark Svenson  
To: Ed Humpherson  
Cc: National Statistician, Joe Cuddeford  
Date: 19 August 2015

**Subject: Excess deaths**

Ed

This is my update to the specific and general points you made about ministerial use of data in your letter of 24 July. I continue to work with the DH Chief Analyst and our ministerial Private Office to promote transparent and effective use of facts and evidence in ministerial speeches and statements. I appreciate your comments that you welcome our general approach to data used by Ministers in public and I am pleased to elaborate on our work, for example:

- As part of the process around developing strategic ministerial speeches we have put in place a template covering key points of Policy, Finance etc. This currently has a Fact Checking element which we will reinforce by making it a Fact Checking and Sourcing element, to reinforce the point that quoted facts should be in the public domain, i.e. already published or published as an accompanying document to the speech.
- To enable our Media Centre to respond rapidly to queries from the media and from organisations such as Full Fact concerning the source of facts in ministerial speeches, we have put in place an internal Media Centre Data Document for speeches which is designed to have the weblink and lead officials / analysts for each fact included. (The lesson learned from recent experience is to put these processes in place at the outset of speech development, and to continue to review them up to the point of speech delivery).
- In 2014 I developed, in partnership with my then HSCIC counterpart Andy Sutherland, checklist guidance for staff on the public use of unpublished adhoc statistical data.
- The DH Chief Analyst and Chief Medical Officer are in the process of considering how best to publish internal DH analysis which supports policy announcements, and how best to heighten the transparency of the research we commission. This is drawing on the Govt Social Research Publication Protocol.

It is right for us to consider how figures on estimates of excess deaths have been used. The estimate used in the speech had been circulated within NHS England and DH in the context of policy development and advice. It was based on unpublished analysis of previously published research. It was not clear to all those receiving the estimate that it was unpublished and this does represent a shortfall in process. Medical research into the pattern of deaths associated with hospital admissions on different days of the week is continuing, and will be published according to standard protocols for commissioned research.

In terms of supplementing the information in the public domain, it has been decided to publish a statement of clarification on the Research and Analysis section of GOV.UK – an outcome I encouraged.

I value UKSA encouragement of Departmental transparency in the use of figures in Ministerial statements – this is consistent with the government's own transparency agenda, and we accept comment if we fall short of our ambitions. However I have reflected that the most recent two issues raised by UKSA with DH, accounts data and research data, both technically fall outside the scope of official statistics and does limit my ability to provide a full resolution to such issues. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss respective remits when we next meet up or for a wider discussion at a GSS HoPs meeting.

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