

Sir Michael Scholar KCB
UK Statistics Authority
Statistics House
London EC1R 1UW

& by email to:

ross.young@statistics.gsi.gov.uk

22 April 2010

Dear Sir Michael

“Brown gets key figures before debate” ~ 20 April 2010

Your letter of 21 April has been passed to me by the Editor. For the reasons that follow the Telegraph denies that the above report was materially or significantly inaccurate, whether as you suggest or at all.

Following established convention, the quotes attributed to you would not have been seen as a “personal comment” but as a statement of the position of the UK Statistics Authority, as presented by its Chair.

A further example of this convention is the 18 March publication by the UKSA of its own report *Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics*. There you were quoted presenting the UKSA’s position. Readers would have no more seen this as “personal comment” by you than they would the quotes attributed to you in the Telegraph report.

In the foreword to that document, and in the press release that accompanied its publication, you stressed the importance of “equality of access” and the need for current practices to change. You said

“All the parties to public debate should, as far as possible, have the same information available at the same time, and only the minimum number of people should see statistical results before they are published.

“The current 24-hours advance access by Ministers and their advisers contains too many dark hours during which no-one can see what is happening ... we believe that the recommendations in our report will minimise the opportunities for political influence or exploitation.

It was appropriate, in the context of a newspaper report, to summarise this statement of the UKSA's position as being that the status quo was 'unacceptable' and needed to change. Corroboration for this proposition is found in the report itself, in which both Michael Fallon and Lord Newby were quoted in support of the UKSA's recommendations, stating that the current practices were "unacceptable".

On 19 April, in preparing its report for publication, the Telegraph sought and received from the UKSA a statement of its position, specifically in response to the news that the Prime Minister would receive statistical data in advance of the forthcoming leaders' debate. The UKSA's response was, as you say, in effect a re-statement of its position as you had presented it on 18 March.

In the circumstances the Telegraph remains firmly of the view that it was both fair and accurate for this matter to be reported in the way that it was.

We note that you have published your 21 April letter on the UKSA website. In order that readers may have an accurate and balanced representation we would ask that either it be removed forthwith or this letter be posted there immediately and with equal prominence. We shall consider what further to publish about this matter in light of your response.

Yours sincerely



Chris Evans
Assistant Editor