
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Michael Scholar KCB

To: Leaders of major UK political parties

29 January 2010

POLICY PRIORITIES OF THE UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY

I am writing ahead of the forthcoming General Election to let you know the views of the Statistics Authority on what future policy should be in relation to UK official statistics. I am writing a similar open letter, in identical terms, to the leaders of the major UK political parties.

As you may be aware, recent surveys have shown that public confidence in official statistics is low and there is a perception that official statistics are subject to political interference. The Statistics Authority believes that building confidence in the trustworthiness of official statistics should be at the heart of the programme of action which the new House of Commons will – we assume – want to put in place, in order to restore trust in Parliament and Government.

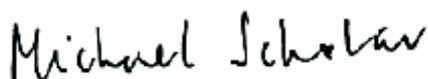
In our view, progress has been made in recent years – notably through the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* – in building the trustworthiness of official statistics. But more needs to be done:

- the arrangements for ensuring the independence and impartiality of statisticians in all Government Departments (not just in the Office for National Statistics) need to be further strengthened and entrenched;
- more use needs to be made of the Statistics Authority, for example in decisions, during this time of great financial austerity, about the allocation of statistical resources, so as to ensure both that Government has the necessary statistical evidence to guide policy-making and that the public have the information needed to judge the performance of Government; and
- in order to attack the widespread belief that official statistics are manipulated by Ministers and their advisors before their publication, the Statistics Authority should be asked to determine the pre-release access arrangements for all official statistics.

I am ready to discuss these matters with you and your colleagues if you would find that useful.

I am copying this letter to the Cabinet Secretary, Sir Gus O'Donnell, and to Dr. Tony Wright MP, Chair of the House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee.

Yours sincerely



Sir Michael Scholar KCB