
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Michael Scholar KCB

Jeremy Heywood CB
Permanent Secretary
10, Downing Street
London
SW1A 2AA

12 December 2008

Dear Jeremy

TACKLING KNIVES ACTION PROGRAMME – RELEASE OF HOSPITAL ADMISSION STATISTICS

I am writing, as Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, to express my concern about yesterday's announcement of statistics related to knife crime.

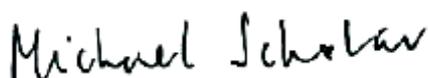
It has been reported to me by the National Statistician's Office that officials or advisers in No. 10 Downing Street caused the Home Office to issue a Press Release which prematurely published provisional statistics for hospital admissions for knife or sharp instrument wounding. This Press Release said that "the number of teenagers admitted to hospital for knife or sharp instrument wounding in nine...police force areas fell by 27 per cent according to new figures published today." These statistics were not due for publication for some time, and had not therefore been through the regular process of checking and quality assurance. The statisticians who produced them, together with the National Statistician, tried unsuccessfully to prevent their premature, irregular and selective release.

I hope you will agree that the publication of prematurely released and unchecked statistics is corrosive of public trust in official statistics, and incompatible with the high standards which we are all seeking to establish.

I would be grateful for your comments, and for your assurance that there will be no repetition of this breach of the National Statistics Code of Practice.

I am copying this letter to the Cabinet Secretary and to David Normington at the Home Office; and, because the UK Statistics Authority reports directly to Parliament, to Tony Wright MP, Chair of the Public Administration Select Committee and to Keith Vaz MP, Chair of the Home Affairs Select Committee.

Yours sincerely



Sir Michael Scholar KCB