
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Michael Scholar KCB

Sulafa Halstead
Head of Assembly Committees
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
CARDIFF
CF99 1NA

23 September 2010

Dear Ms Halstead

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY: WALES

I am advised that, in the absence of an Assembly Committee with a specific remit covering the work of the UK Statistics Authority in respect of wholly devolved Welsh official statistics, that we should write to you to bring to the attention of the National Assembly for Wales our Annual Report for 2009-10. The report has now been laid before the Assembly, and I would like to offer some observations on how the Authority sees its role in relation to Wales and to seek the Assembly's support in certain respects. I am also writing in similar terms to Jane Hutt AM, as the responsible Minister in the Welsh Assembly Government.

The legislation that established the Authority contains provisions that make specific reference to the Welsh Assembly Government. For example, the non-executive members of the Authority must include at least one person appointed after consulting Welsh Assembly Ministers; in preparing or revising the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, the Authority must consult those Ministers; and there are a number of other matters in relation to which Ministers in Wales have specific powers or must be consulted including, under certain circumstances, the power to direct the Board of the Authority. Thus, there is a formal statutory framework which defines the relationship in a number of respects.

However, in practice, most of our dealings with the Welsh Assembly Government are not of a kind that will require the direct involvement of Ministerial or committees of the National Assembly for Wales. Our office in Edinburgh leads on the assessment of devolved official statistics against the Code of Practice but of course both the Statistics Authority and the Office for National Statistics have offices in Newport which aids liaison with Cardiff. Communication between the statisticians in the Welsh Assembly Government and our own staff is, we believe, effective and constructive.

From time to time more intractable or high profile issues arise and, where that happens, we will write to the National Assembly as appropriate. One case in point has been the topic of pre-release access to official statistics on which the positions of the Welsh Assembly Government and that of the Statistics Authority are unreconciled. I hope that this will not impede constructive dialogue in other areas.

Another, sometimes difficult, area is ensuring that where it would be of value at a UK national level, the four administrations work together to produce comparable sets of statistics. In

practice, this should not, and will not, restrict the freedom of the Welsh Assembly Government to commission official statistics specifically tailored to the Welsh legal, administrative or policy environment. But it may involve contributing to some additional work across the administrations to examine definitional differences and put together estimates on a common basis. I would ask for the Assembly's support in general terms on this point.

At a time when all administrations are looking to contain expenditure where possible, I would assure the National Assembly that the Statistics Authority does not see its role as the unquestioning defence of statistical activities. A sharper focus on meeting clear needs, which in turn deliver demonstrable value to the citizen, is central to much of our work. We would ask however that all the benefits of evidence-based decision-making in government, business, and the voluntary and personal sectors, be fully weighed in the balance. Reducing expenditure on statistical work may be straightforward; determining the consequences is much harder. Such matters must be approached with an eye to the longer term public interest. The Authority will offer impartial advice on this where it can.

One special case, relating both to resources and the need for co-operation, is the conduct of the 2011 Census and, more specifically, consideration of the longer term options to replace the traditional Census. Whilst we are aware of the close working arrangements that already exist among government statisticians on Census issues, they are not purely professional matters and have a substantial political and policy dimension. The Statistics Authority will be happy to engage with all the political and other interests, with a view to discussing where the best interests of the UK and its constituent countries lie.

These are, I submit, substantive agenda items with both shorter and longer term implications. I hope that the approach above will commend itself to the National Assembly for Wales.

I would be most grateful if you would bring this letter and the Authority's Annual Report to the attention of those Assembly Committees who would be interested to see it.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael Scholar".

Sir Michael Scholar KCB

Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Michael Scholar KCB

Jane Hutt AM
Minister for Business and Budget
Welsh Assembly Government
Cardiff Bay
CARDIFF
CF99 1NA

23 September 2010

Dear Ms Hutt

UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY: WALES

I am writing to bring to your attention our Annual Report for 2009-10, which has now been laid before the Welsh Assembly, and to offer some observations on how the Authority sees its role in relation to Wales and to seek your support in certain respects. I am also writing in similar terms to your ministerial counterparts in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

As you may know, the legislation that established the Authority contains provisions that make specific reference to the Welsh Assembly Government. For example, the non-executive members of the Authority must include at least one person appointed after consulting Welsh Assembly Ministers; in preparing or revising the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, the Authority must consult those Ministers; and there are a number of other matters in relation to which Ministers in Wales have specific powers or must be consulted including, under certain circumstances, the power to direct the Board of the Authority. Thus, there is a formal statutory framework which defines the relationship in a number of respects.

However, in practice, most of our dealings with the Welsh Assembly Government are not of a kind that will require the exercise of Ministerial powers. Our office in Edinburgh leads on the assessment of devolved official statistics against the Code of Practice but of course both the Statistics Authority and the Office for National Statistics have offices in Newport which aids liaison with Cardiff. Communication between the statisticians in the Welsh Assembly Government and our own staff is, we believe, effective and constructive.

From time to time more intractable or high profile issues arise and, where that happens, we will write to you as appropriate. One case in point has been the topic of pre-release access to official statistics on which the positions of the Welsh Assembly and that of the Statistics Authority are unreconciled. I hope that this will not impede constructive dialogue in other areas.

Another, sometimes difficult, area is ensuring that where it would be of value at a UK national level, the four administrations work together to produce comparable sets of statistics. In practice, this should not, and will not, restrict the freedom of the Welsh Assembly Government to commission official statistics specifically tailored to the Welsh legal, administrative or policy environment. But it may involve contributing to some additional work across the administrations to examine definitional differences and put together estimates on

a common basis. I would ask for your support in general terms for government statisticians giving constructive attention to such matters when they arise. As part of this, the National Statistician has some UK-wide responsibilities and I hope that all the devolved administrations will recognise that at times this involves her advising the chief statisticians on the priority to be given to the UK dimension.

At a time when all administrations are looking to contain expenditure where possible, I would assure you that the Statistics Authority does not see its role as the unquestioning defence of statistical activities. A sharper focus on meeting clear needs, which in turn deliver demonstrable value to the citizen, is central to much of our work. We would ask however that all the benefits of evidence-based decision-making in government, business, and the voluntary and personal sectors, be fully weighed in the balance. Reducing expenditure on statistical work may be straightforward; determining the consequences is much harder. Such matters must be approached with an eye to the longer term public interest. The Authority will offer impartial advice on this where it can.

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These are, I submit, substantive agenda items with both shorter and longer term implications. I hope that the approach above will commend itself to you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Michael Scholar".

Sir Michael Scholar KCB