
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Andrew Dilnot CBE

Rt. Hon. David Cameron MP
Prime Minister
10, Downing Street
LONDON
SW1A 2AA

25 October 2012

Dear Prime Minister

PRE-RELEASE ACCESS TO OFFICIAL STATISTICS

I was made aware during the course of yesterday afternoon of your remarks at Prime Minister's Questions in respect of the economy, in particular your statement that "the good news will keep coming". This was ahead of this morning's Office for National Statistics release of the preliminary estimate of Gross Domestic Product for the third quarter of 2012, to which you receive pre-release access up to 24 hours ahead of publication.

A large number of commentators contacted my office to ask whether your remarks constituted a breach of the pre-release access rules. The *Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics Order 2008* states that recipients of pre-release access must not disclose 'any suggestion of the size or direction of any trend' indicated by the statistic to which the recipient has been given such access. It is clear from media reports that, although this may not have been your intent, your remarks were indeed widely interpreted as providing an indication about the GDP figures.

The Statistics Authority's position on pre-release access remains clear. We believe that the current practices for pre-release access to official statistics are unsatisfactory, not least because they put those who have received such access in a difficult position, especially when they have to speak in public after receiving access and before publication. The interpretation of your remarks is a clear example of the difficulties and risks created by the current arrangements. It is our view that the current pre-release access arrangements undermine public confidence in official statistics and the professional independence of statisticians. Since responsibility for determining the pre-release rules continues to rest with government, we would urge you to undertake a Review of these arrangements and I would be happy to meet your senior officials to help in taking this forward.

Yours sincerely



Andrew Dilnot CBE