



# Public Administration Select Committee (PASC)

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Rt Hon George Osborne MP  
Chancellor of the Exchequer  
HM Treasury  
1 Horse Guards Road  
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SW1A 2HQ

23<sup>rd</sup> June 2011

*Dear George*

## BREACH OF PRE-RELEASE ACCESS: CONSUMER PRICE INDICES

I am writing following a discussion in the Public Administration Select Committee (PASC) concerning the letter of 26 May from Sir Michael Scholar to you about the premature disclosure of market sensitive CPI statistics. I have also seen the letter from Valerie Isham, President of the Royal Statistical Society of 2 June.

In the previous Parliament, PASC recommended that the practice of pre-release of statistics within government should be abandoned. This was also the position of the Conservative Party in opposition. I am aware that the Government has decided that the current arrangements with regards to pre-release access to official statistics should be retained. The Cabinet Office review last year which found against a further reduction in the current twenty four hour limit was, I understand, based on a survey made up entirely of officials who, as might be expected, have an interest in maintaining the current system for reasons of administrative convenience.

It is not the first time this year that the UK Statistics Authority has had cause to investigate actual or suspected premature disclosure of economic data of this type. There is therefore a real risk, as Sir Michael has pointed out, that another such incident could lead to markets being manipulated for personal gain.

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Moreover, for as long as Ministers and officials retain prior access to statistics it will be impossible to fully dispel doubts about the potential for political interference in turn undermining confidence in the independence of official statistics. Indeed, such suspicions must undermine any political advantage of pre-release for the government.

I am copying this to the recipients of Sir Michael's letter.

*Yours ever*

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Bernard Jenkin".

Mr Bernard Jenkin MP  
Chairman