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Sir Michael

BREACH OF PRE-RELEASE ACCESS: CONSUMER PRICES INDEX RELEASE FOR NOVEMBER

Thank you for your letter of 19 December about the unauthorised internal disclosure by a BIS official of market-sensitive economic data last week.

As you note in your letter, I was heavily involved in the Parliamentary debate on the issue of Pre-release where the primary concern was to prevent politicians from gaining political advantages from early access to sensitive statistics. This is clearly not what has happened in the case.

However, there has been a breach of the technical rules here and the National Statistician has already received an apology from the Department, as well as a personal apology from the official concerned. I would like to add my apologies to those already expressed. I fully support the restrictions set out in the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics Order and the reasons for them. The Department will co-operate fully with the National Statistician to prevent any repetition of the error.

The Government published a review of the Pre-release Access Order in November 2010. This found that the current rules are working well and have reduced the average number of ministers and officials receiving pre-release access by 22%. The review also found that it is not necessarily the case that further tightening the rules on pre-release access would strengthen the public's perception of the independence of official statistics. Providing a Government response to an official statistic at the time it is released, however, does allow the public to more thoroughly hold Government to account.



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