
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

Bernard Jenkin MP
Chair, Public Administration Select Committee
House of Commons
LONDON
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Dear Bernard

STATISTICS ON CRIME IN ENGLAND AND WALES: STATUTORY ASSESSMENT

The Statistics Authority has today published a report following a statutory assessment of various sets of crime statistics under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*, and a copy of our report is attached.¹

The 2007 Act gives the Authority a statutory responsibility to assess sets of statistics against the Code of Practice for Official Statistics and, in doing so, to determine whether it is appropriate for the statistics concerned to be designated as 'National Statistics'. Designation as National Statistics means that the statistics comply with the Code of Practice, and in particular that the statistics meet identified user needs; are produced, managed and disseminated to high standards; and are explained well to users, including their strengths and limitations.

The sets of statistics that have been assessed are listed in part 1 of our report, and include statistics from the Crime Survey for England and Wales and recorded crime data collected from police forces in England and Wales. Our assessment was undertaken between June 2013 and January 2014, and we have also followed with close interest the Committee's inquiry into crime statistics since it began in November and the oral and written evidence that your Committee has recently received.

Several organisations are involved in the production of these statistics:

- Responsibility for the production and publication of crime statistics for England and Wales was transferred from the Home Office to the Office for National Statistics in April 2012 when the Government accepted the recommendations of an independent review by the National Statistician as part of a suite of measures designed to build public confidence in crime statistics.
- The Home Office, however, remains operationally responsible for the collection and validation of recorded crime data from police forces in England and Wales before these are passed to ONS for publication in various ONS statistical releases, notably the *Crime in England and Wales* statistical bulletin and other topic-based statistical reports on crime.
- Police forces are responsible for generating police recorded crime data, and each police force has a crime registrar who is responsible for overseeing compliance with the relevant standards, including Home Office counting rules, for recording crimes.
- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) conducts independent investigations into aspects of police operational performance which can include crime recording.

¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/assessment-reports/assessment-report-268---statistics-on-crime-in-england-and-wales.pdf>

There is accumulating evidence that suggests the underlying data on crimes recorded by the police may not be reliable. This evidence includes HMIC assessments of data recording practices (paragraph 3.15 of the report); ONS's own report, in January 2013, which raised concerns that the degree of compliance with the standards for police crime recording may be falling (paragraph 3.7); and high profile concerns raised at the Public Administration Select Committee and the Home Affairs Select Committee (paragraph 3.7).

Against this background, the Authority conducted its assessment. The Authority considers that ONS has not been given sufficient information about the quality of most police recorded crime data to provide assurance that the statistics based on these data meet users' needs. Nor does ONS have sufficient information about the quality of these data to ensure that users are made fully aware of the limitations of police recorded crime data and the resulting impact on their use of these statistics. The Authority is also concerned that its earlier requirements, notably around the need for a rigorous audit of the quality of the data, have not been fully addressed to date.

The Authority has, therefore, removed the National Statistics designation from statistics based on recorded crime data until such time as ONS, working with the Home Office, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, or other appropriate bodies, is able to demonstrate that the quality of the underlying data, and the robustness of the ongoing audit and quality assurance procedures, are sufficient to support the production of police recorded crime statistics to a level of quality that meets users' needs. When this has happened, the Authority will undertake a further re-assessment to determine whether or not police recorded crime data should be re-designated as National Statistics. Until further notice, the relevant statistical publications will clearly indicate that police recorded crime statistics have been de-designated as National Statistics and include a link to our assessment report published today.

The Assessment Report sets out a number of Requirements which must be met before the statistics can be re-designated as National Statistics. Among these, Requirements 5, 6 and 7 are crucial. They emphasise the fundamental importance of obtaining assurance on the quality of the data underlying police recorded crime figures; and of communicating regularly with users about the progress and results of evaluations of police recorded crime. The Report also sets as a Requirement the need for the ONS, as producer of the statistics, to publish more information on the uses of crime statistics, including how far they are used to guide assessments of police performance and to support operational decisions.

The Authority has confirmed that crime statistics which are based on sources other than police recorded crime and which are included in the relevant statistical bulletins will continue to be designated as National Statistics. This re-designation is subject to implementation by April 2014 of the enhancements that are listed in the report. We welcome the fact that ONS is already undertaking work to implement these enhancements.

We will be happy to elaborate on these and other matters in oral evidence to the Committee next week.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Dilnot', written in a cursive style.

Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE