
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

Bernard Jenkin MP
Chair, Public Administration Select Committee
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1A 0AA

31 March 2014

Dear Bernard

STATISTICS AUTHORITY'S PROGRAMME OF WORK ON ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

During our oral evidence to your Committee on 21 January 2014 on police crime recording, Ed Humpherson and I described the Authority's programme of work on administrative data. This programme is now underway and I am writing to set out the key areas on which the Authority will be focussing.

Our work will examine the use of administrative data in the production of official statistics. We will look across a wide range of statistics based on administrative data, and will address two main issues. Firstly, we will consider the extent to which these data are currently subject to audit and other forms of assurance - by producers of statistics or independent regulators and auditors - and the factors that producers should consider to determine what kind of assurance is appropriate in each case. Secondly, we will look at the issues that arise when such official statistics become the basis of performance targets. In addition, the National Statistician will develop guidance to producers of statistics within the Government Statistical Service. Finally, the Authority is currently conducting statutory assessments of a range of individual official statistics based on administrative data. These individual assessments will also help to identify the different practices adopted in different sectors.

Taken together, this programme of work will re-emphasise the importance that the Authority attaches to appropriate quality assurance for maintaining and enhancing public confidence in official statistics. These issues arose, of course, in the Authority's decision to remove the National Statistics designation from police recorded crime statistics because of a lack of assurance about the quality of the underlying data collected from police forces. The Authority has been concerned about this for some time. The Authority's (March 2012) Monitoring Brief 'Creating official statistics from administrative data'¹ addressed the issue of statistical audit as part of a wider review. The Authority's interest in this has increased over the last year or so following our work on a range of statistics underpinned by administrative data. Concerns have also arisen in other statistical areas, for example, in relation to hospital waiting time statistics following a recent report from the National Audit Office.²

¹<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/correspondence/letter-from-sir-michael-scholar-to-rt-hon-francis-maude---administrative-data---16032012.pdf>

²<https://www.nao.org.uk/report/nhs-waiting-times-elective-care-england/>

I have attached the outlines for the two reviews that we have recently announced which will form the core of our work on audit of administrative data and on the impact of targets on official statistics.³ The Authority intends to publish Monitoring Review reports in the summer of 2014, but in the meantime I would be very happy to expand on any aspect of this work if you or your Committee would like.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Dilnot". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and 'D'.

Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

³ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/administrative-data-and-official-statistics/index.html>