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**Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Michael Scholar KCB**

Rt. Hon. Keith Vaz MP  
Chair, Home Affairs Committee  
House of Commons  
LONDON  
SW1A 0AA

12 March 2012

Dear Mr Vaz

**MANAGEMENT INFORMATION ON TIER 4 COLLEGES**

Thank you for your letter dated 22 February. I was glad to have had the opportunity to speak to you about your Committee's attempts to obtain from the UK Border Agency the data that the Committee had asked for. I am told that the Committee has now been sent the data that had been requested.

The Statistics Authority will always do all that it can to support the work of Select Committees, particularly in ensuring that Committees have the official statistics and related advice that they need to enable them to fulfil their scrutiny role.

Although it is, clearly, highly desirable that the quality of data is checked before being made widely available, the Statistics Authority did not advise the Home Office that it should not send your Committee, or otherwise issue, management information about Tier 4 colleges unless it had been quality checked. Our advice is normally restricted to data that are already recognised as official statistics, or which we think should in future be treated as such.

The principles that the Statistics Authority apply in recommending to departments that they should publish a particular set of management information as official statistics, are set out in a published statement on our website. I have appended a copy of the statement to this letter.

We strongly support the Government's Open Data policy, but we will also continue to encourage departments to ensure that all statistical data and related analyses are carefully checked before dissemination and release, and that they have taken the advice of professional statisticians on the release of data that are not regularly published, as required by the former Cabinet Secretary's guidance on the matter.

Yours sincerely



**Sir Michael Scholar KCB**

# Statement

21 March 2011

## ***Management information and research data as Official Statistics***

*This Statement supersedes the Statements dated 27 September 2010 and 22 July 2009*

This Statement sets out the Statistics Authority's position in relation to numerical information that is not currently treated as official statistics. Typically this will be described as management information, research findings or estimates of the effects of policy changes.

The Authority acknowledges that government bodies need to collect management information, carry out research, and make estimates of various kinds in order to run their own businesses, and will often wish to make these numbers public in the interests of transparency. Whilst such data are sometimes described as statistics, they are not necessarily official statistics. Where they are not the Code of Practice for Official Statistics may not apply. In particular, two important requirements of the Code would not apply:

- the requirement to publish the statistics separately from political comment, and;
- the requirement to publish in the form of a statistical release before any political or other public use is made of the statistics.

There are circumstances under which the Statistics Authority will regard some such data – particularly where it is issued in aggregate form - as being official statistics; and expect it to be produced in accordance with the Code. In some fields this is normal practice. Crime records, hospital records, school records, social security records, among others, begin, at the local level, as management information and are then aggregated to create high profile and important official statistics. This raises the question of which sets of aggregate management information should, in the public interest, be treated as official statistics, and which may reasonably continue to be produced without reference to the Code.

The National Statistician has issued guidance on the principles to which government bodies should have regard in deciding whether or not a particular set of data should be treated as official statistics.<sup>1</sup> This guidance acknowledges that not all cases will be clear-cut; and there may be some in which the Statistics Authority will conclude that data that have not previously been published as official statistics should in future be treated as such, and that, in the interests of maintaining public confidence, the requirements of the Code should be observed.

In deciding whether to propose to Ministers or the senior official responsible for the producer body that a particular set of data produced by their organisation should in future be treated as official statistics, the Statistics Authority will place particular weight on two considerations:

- whether the data are used publicly by the organisation in support of major decisions on policy, resource allocation or other topics of public interest, or;
- whether the data attract public controversy when published and the Authority takes the view that public debate would be better informed if the figures were, in future, handled as official statistics.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/national-statistician/ns-reports--reviews-and-guidance/national-statistician-s-guidance/index.html>

The Authority will not press for data to be treated as official statistics where it believes that, despite the public use, they share few characteristics in common with what are accepted to be official statistics by Parliament or the public. This could apply to much financial data, to one-off estimates of future policy impacts, and to many ad-hoc research findings.

Where the Authority concludes that the data should be treated as official statistics, it will write to the Minister, or senior official, responsible for the producer body to explain its view. Depending on the circumstances, the Authority may further comment on the manner in which the figures have previously been published and indicate respects in which the requirements of the Code of Practice ought to have been, but appear not to have been, met. The Authority will publish all such correspondence.

The Authority will keep this Statement under review, and will amend it as necessary.