



Full Fact
4 Dyer's Buildings
London EC1N 2JT

<http://fullfact.org> • 020 7242 3883 • team@fullfact.org

Andrew Dilnot CBE
UK Statistics Authority
1 Drummond Gate
London SW1V 2QQ

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Dear Andrew

Welcome to your new role as Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, and congratulations on your appointment. We look forward to working with you on the priorities you outlined in your pre-appointment hearing.

There is much to do to improve the communication of official statistics and to ensure that government publishing more and more data does result in better information reaching the public. I look forward to meeting and hearing more about your plans.

However, I am writing to raise a specific concern. A number of articles have appeared in the press lately derived from ad hoc statistical releases produced by the ONS. These have been described as 'exclusive' (Editor of the Spectator, 29 Mar), 'unpublished' (Guardian, 9 Mar) and even 'secret' (Mirror, 11 Mar).¹

Of course, they are not secret. The ONS provided us with the data when we asked for it. However, they were unpublished. This gives an impression that conflicts with the obligation under Code of Practice for Official Statistics to "make official statistics equally available to all" and will hardly have been helpful in fostering public confidence in how the figures were compiled and obtained.

Two years ago the Authority at our urging intervened to stop a similar practice at the Department for Work and Pensions. They were required to publish all their ad hoc statistical analyses online. I also note this was raised as an issue in the Eurostat peer review of the UK in 2007.

Please would you now intervene to ensure that similar procedures are put in place by the ONS and, indeed, by all government departments?

I am copying this letter to the Information Commissioner so that he can consider whether such releases should also be covered by the ICO's Model Publication Schemes or other guidance.

Yours sincerely

Will Moy
Director, Full Fact

¹ See http://fullfact.org/articles/exclusive_story_anyone_could_have_written-6966 for links.