

Parliamentary Office
MG.16
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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Mr Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation
UK Statistics Authority
1 Drummond Gate
London
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16 March 2016

Publication of Scottish Government statistics

Dear Ed,

I write concerning the recent publication of the Government Expenditure & Revenue Scotland 2014-15 (GERS). This is the Scottish Government's annual analysis of the nation's finances and as such it is designated to be a National Statistic.

The GERS publication was repeatedly amended following public issue. It appears the data tables, html version and pdf version have all been amended, some of them multiple times.

There is an acknowledgement saying "*Note: An error was identified in the initial version of the table below. This has now been corrected. No other tables in the publication were affected.*" However the note does not give an indication of the scale of the error or what changed in the table. It is not clear that users have been alerted to the error and there does not appear to be an audit trail available to say what was changed, how many times it was changed, and when it was changed. I would question whether the requirement to notify stakeholders has been satisfied.

Therefore the following questions arise:

- How many revisions were made after the original publication? When were these made?
- What were the reasons for the amendments?
- Which stakeholders were informed and when?
- Was the Scottish Parliament informed of the publication and subsequent revisions?

I believe that this raises wider questions about the Scottish Government's publication of statistics. The Finance Committee have considered this issue and have called for stronger oversight of the Government. I refer to the example of the publication of an Oil and Gas Bulletin on the 25th June 2015. This is a key publication on an issue of great significance to

the Scottish public finances being sneaked out on the last day of a Parliamentary term with no debate or oversight.

The Bean Review was published on Friday last week. The review noted that when management information is published that is likely to attract media attention "*it should be treated as an official statistic and published in a manner that is compliant with the Code of Practice*". This point in particular raises wider questions about the Scottish Government's publication of information like the Oil and Gas Bulletin.

For the Oil and Gas Bulletin to follow the Code of Practice, the Scottish Government should set out a publication schedule for the bulletin so it could be produced in an orderly manner. The Scottish Parliament's Finance Committee recently looked at the fitness for purpose of economic statistics in Scotland. I believe that in the light of the Bean review the UK Statistics Authority should consider if the Oil and Gas Bulletin should follow this and other aspects of the code of practice.

I believe that after the GERS report greater scrutiny is required to ensure the Scottish Government meets the standards of the UKSA. Last year I wrote to the Chair of the UK Statistics Authority concerning breaches of the code of practice by the Scottish Government in two publications titled "Benefits of improved economic performance." It is with regret that standards have not improved and I expect you will wish to consider the latest breaches in their wider context.

Yours sincerely

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

Jackie Baillie MSP
Labour Public Services and Wealth Creation spokesperson
Member of the Scottish Parliament Finance Committee