
Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation

Stephen Balchin
Head of Profession for Statistics
Department of Health and Social Care

21 September 2020

Dear Stephen

Publication of ad hoc statistics

On 16 September you published information on the Distance travelled for a coronavirus (COVID-19) test in England: 1 September to 14 September 2020. This information had previously been referred to publicly by the Department without being published.

It is really positive that these data are now published – the publication of the data along with the basis for the calculation means the limitations are now clear and there is transparency around the figures. However, there are known limitations to the data, many of which have been highlighted by other organisations. For example, these data are based on direct distance rather than distance an individual would need to travel, and they do not include those who have decided not to take a test because the appointment offered was too far from their home.

We would like to see improvements to the data, responding to user needs. For example, it may be possible to draw on the data analytics within the Test and Trace programme to obtain some insight on people who are offered a test but do not take it up. However, we recognise the challenging environment in which your department is working, and that improvements would depend to some extent on the user interest in the Test and Trace Programme remaining high.

More broadly, in May 2020 we published a statement outlining our expectations around the production and use of management information by government and other official bodies. The statement highlights our view that when management information is used publicly to inform Parliament, the media and the public, it should be published in an accessible form, with appropriate explanations of context and sources. I hope that the publication of management information, when quoted publicly, becomes standard practice.

I am copying this letter to William Wragg MP, Chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Select Committee.

Yours sincerely



Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation