
Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation

Siobhan Carey CBE
Chief Executive & Registrar General
Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
(by email)

5 November 2020

Dear Siobhan

Transparency of data related to COVID-19

I am writing to draw your attention to the [statement](#) and [blog](#) published today by the Office for Statistics Regulation on communicating data during the pandemic and to ask you to raise awareness of the principles in the statement in relevant Departments in Northern Ireland.

Our aim is to uphold public confidence in statistics that serve the public good. During the pandemic there have been high profile public briefings, media interviews and statements in each of the four nations of the UK. These have rightly drawn on data and analysis.

We welcome the range of data that has been published and we recognise that those producing the data and advising Government face significant pressures.

However, the use of data has not always been supported by transparent information being provided in a timely manner. As a result, there is potential to confuse the public and undermine confidence in the statistics.

Our statement reinforces the principle that data should be published in a clear and accessible form with appropriate explanations of context and sources. We highlight three things which governments should do to support transparency:

- Where data are used publicly the sources of these data or the data themselves should be published alongside any press briefing and associated slides.
- Where models are referred to publicly, particularly to inform significant policy decisions, the model outputs, methodologies and key assumptions should be published at the same time.
- Where key decisions are justified by reference to statistics or management information, the underlying data should be made available.

I know that you take these principles very seriously and welcome your support in encouraging adherence to them. I would be grateful if you could bring the statement to the attention of relevant colleagues and of course I would be happy to work with you and your team to raise awareness of these principles more widely.

I am writing in the same terms to the UK Government's Chief Scientific Adviser and Chief Medical Officer for England, and the Chief Statisticians of the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government. I am copying this letter to Professor Sir Ian Diamond, National Statistician.

Yours sincerely

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

Ed Humpherson

Director General for Regulation