

18 December 2020

Dear Ed and team,

Would you be able to respond to the questions in my blog:

<https://simonbriscoeblog.wordpress.com/2020/12/18/national-statistics-exaggerate-the-uks-crisis/>

These are repeated below.

In essence, I am sure you'll agree that something is not right:

- the UK numbers are differently constructed and not comparable with most other countries, requiring strong warnings
- the UK's public services responded uniquely poorly to the pandemic
- most other countries are producing lower quality or inflated figures compared to the UK

Many thanks,
Simon

1. Was it right of ONS to introduce new untested methodology into key data at such a critical time?
2. How reliable are the new indicators that now drive GDP trends in the UK?
3. To what extent did other countries follow suit in adopting new measures?
4. Were sufficient warnings given by ONS about the distortion to UK GDP figures, that (probably) rendered them no longer comparable with other countries?
5. Does the statistics regulator (OSR) think these GDP numbers are worthy of National Statistics status? (Surely they should be experimental to use their terminology.)
6. Does the ONS think that some/most/all other countries produced sub-standard data by not incorporating accurate methodology? (They could choose to do this to hide the true fall in GDP as a result of Covid-19.)
7. Or, if all the statistics are fine and comparable, the huge public policy question arises – why did the UK's public services perform so very badly relative to other countries? What does the NHS, DHSC and DfE think about that and do they agree?
8. More broadly, is this another major governance failing by UKSA? Is this a repeat of the 2010 RPI fiasco with the ONS statisticians naively rushing into untested changes without due consideration of the impact on users?