

13 March 2008

Sir Michael Scholar, KCB
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Dear Michael

RELEASING OFFICIAL STATISTICS

I have pleasure in enclosing the final research report of the Statistics Commission, *Releasing Official Statistics: A review of Statistical First Releases*. I hope it will be of value to all the bodies that produce official statistics and to the UK Statistics Authority.

Statistical releases are the most public face of the statistical service. This report reviews a selection of them, looking both at their content and the practices and arrangements under which they are issued. We look at how effectively they communicate the messages from the statistics and how this might be improved. We selected releases we thought were particularly interesting or important and aimed for a wide spread across the producer bodies.

In order to make judgements about how effective each release was, we developed a set of six main criteria and 27 sub-criteria. We show in the report the results against the main criteria for each release. Of course the releases were prepared before we drew up the criteria and in some cases we focus on matters that were not the key concern of the producer bodies. However, the criteria do reflect our understanding of user needs.

We have emphasised the importance of relating the strengths and weaknesses of the statistics to the uses to which they are likely to be put. That is a theme that runs through the Commission's dialogue with users of statistics and is also to be found in international guidance. We were not looking for perfection here, but rather a helpful steer to the user. It is clear however that there is still some way to go.

The releases did much better in terms of being objective and professional and we detected little to suggest spin or undue political influence. In seeking to make the service better we must keep in mind that there is a lot that is good about it now.

The detail of the criteria we have developed and our assessments against them are not perhaps our main message. We were looking to the way forward in making statistical first releases more relevant and useful. The report contains seven recommendations which we hope the UK Statistics Authority will support and find helpful.

Yours sincerely

