

13 March 2008

Sir Michael Scholar, KCB
Chair
UK Statistics Authority
D4/05
1 Drummond Gate
London, SW1V 2QQ

Dear Michael

REFLECTIONS ON THE STATISTICS COMMISSION 2000 – 2008

In my five years as Chairman of the Statistics Commission I have written covering letters to numerous reports. This letter covers our fortieth and final report. It may be the last report but I suspect it is the first to have no formal conclusions or recommendations to which I can draw your attention!

We took the decision to write our own history about a year ago, prompted in part by awareness that the collective memory of public administration is remarkably unretentive; and partly because nobody else was likely to write it. We soon realised that, although we had only existed for some eight years, these had been amongst the most eventful years in the much longer history of UK official statistics and we had quite a lot to say about those events. The report that we have now completed is thus more than a recounting of what happened when. It includes some reflections and opinions both on the Statistics Commission itself and on the big developments, such as the evolution of the new statutory framework, to which we contributed.

Looking back on what the Statistics Commission did and what it achieved, the report notes some things that are likely to leave a lasting impression on the UK statistical service. These included establishing beyond argument the value of involving outsiders in the business of official statistics; pressing the case for legislation more effectively (and successfully) than had been done before; demonstrating an effective approach to independent review; and developing a set of closely argued positions about the role of official statistics in the business of government and society. Chapter 2 of the report expands on these themes.

It is fair to say that not all the Commission's views were, or are, universally accepted inside or outside government. But the purpose of engaging in public debate on these matters was not solely to win an argument; it was to prompt thoughtful dialogue that would lead to progress. This we believe we did.

It remains only for me to thank the members and staff of the Statistics Commission for all their work over the years and to thank all the very many people with whom we have done business. Perhaps, after all, the report should have one conclusion – the Commission helped change the statistical world for the better and its relatively short existence was well worthwhile.

Yours sincerely

