



David Bell
Permanent Secretary

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Professor D Rhind
Chairman
Statistics Commission
HM Treasury
Room G/07
1 Horse Guards Road
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SW1A 2HQ

14 March 2008

Dear Professor Rhind,

SCHOOL ADMISSIONS

We spoke yesterday about the complaint the Commission has received concerning the release of admission statistics and the associated Ministerial statements on 11 March. I expressed my disappointment with the way that this had been handled by the Commission.

We take our responsibilities towards publishing any information very seriously and strongly rebut any suggestions to the contrary. While the statistics concerned are not classified as National Statistics and therefore not subject to the particular protocols associated with such releases, we have been open and transparent in the way the admission preference figures and associated statements were released.

We published two separate Written Ministerial Statements to Parliament at 11:30am on Tuesday 11 March: one on the preference figures; one on the new measures to strengthen admissions law. At the same time, Ministers held a media briefing with the national education correspondents where the admissions preference figures were presented and discussed openly. We published the figures proactively to the public and media on our website and they received widespread national and regional media coverage.

Your officials alerted the Department to the complaint and the nature of your intended response on Wednesday afternoon. However, within a short space of time, your officials issued your response to a journalist, without waiting for anything more than a one line acknowledgement of receipt from the Department. You could not have been certain that you had a correct understanding of the issue and a balanced response. This has had the unfortunate effect of fuelling adverse comment about our Ministers' integrity which is unjustified. I also think that this reflects a certain discourtesy to my Department.



In addition, the preference figures show that vast majority of children are offered their first choice school – an issue Ministers and the Department had been openly discussing and debating in national and regional media for the previous two weeks. However, it was also important that we acted this week on the basis of internal management information to introduce new measures to strengthen the school admissions system to ensure fairer admissions for next year. School admission arrangements for September 2009 have to be determined and published by April 15 this year.

Along with all departments, we are considering the implications of the new Statistics and Registration Act for the release of the Department's statistics.

I would be grateful if you would respond to this letter by close today.

Yours sincerely,

pp. O'Leary (PRIVATE SECRETARY)

DAVID BELL