



**David Bell**  
Permanent Secretary

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT  
tel: 020 7925 6938/6236 fax: 020 7925 6924 permanent.secretary@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk

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

18 March 2008

**SCHOOL ADMISSIONS AND ADMISSIONS COMPLIANCE**

Thank you for your very prompt response to my letter of 14 March 2008.

I appreciate that your letter recognises that my Department takes its responsibilities towards publishing information very seriously. Your letter also explains that the Statistics Commission intended to be supportive of the Department in the comments made to the Press Association on 12 March, and I am grateful for this clarification.

I would like to respond on a point made in your letter about the two issues of admissions preferences and admissions compliance being considered in a single Ministerial press conference. We took the most open and transparent approach possible to the release of the school preferences data. We did not seek to detract from the data or conflate the issues, but to increase coherence by explaining our concerns about compliance at the same time. Two separate Written Ministerial Statements were published, and Ministers handled the issues in turn during the press conference. This approach ensured that the press had the fullest opportunity to question Ministers on admissions. I agree with the approach of being careful about the separation of statistics and policy statements, but I believe that the way we handled the publication of this information was responsible and in keeping with the Code of Practice.

I remain concerned about the way in which the Commission handled the media enquiry from the Press Association on 12 March. The Commission responded to the Press Association before getting a response from my Department. The Commission could not have been certain that it had the correct understanding of the issue, and by simply reiterating its policy position, it appeared to serve as a 'caution' to the Department in the subsequent press reports.

May I suggest in future that it would be helpful to contact my office or our Press Office if you have concerns about an issue before responding to press enquiries.

Best wishes.

Yours ever

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'D' followed by a series of connected, sweeping lines that form the rest of the name.

DAVID BELL