



# PACAC (Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee)

House of Commons · London SW1A 0AA

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Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP  
Prime Minister  
10 Downing Street  
London, SW1A 2AA

18<sup>th</sup> May 2020

*Dear Prime Minister,*

On Wednesday last week, my Committee heard from the National Statistician and the Statistics Regulator about the Covid-19 data available to Government when making decisions, and what data is available to Parliament and the public when scrutinising those decisions.

The National Statistician confirmed that it is his belief that although the country is through the current peak of deaths from the virus, the reduction is not as quick as he would like and he also expressed caution that we should not seed a second peak.

It is vital that Parliament can hold Government to account for its decisions in coming days and weeks. In order to do that, we must have access to the same data that the Government is using to make those decisions. The National Statistician, who attends SAGE, told us that he believes Government should publish the papers discussed by SAGE. I am writing to ask you to start publishing those papers immediately. If for any reason you are unable to publish a paper, I would like you to write outlining what that paper contains and why it cannot be published.

Additionally, the Statistics Regulator told us that government should not quote from data that is not published in its entirety. Publishing the data enables parliamentarians and the public to interrogate it and come to a judgement on whether it is being used correctly. The Regulator gave recent examples where statistics had been quoted from data that was not published. I have written separately to the Regulator and asked him to notify me if he becomes aware of this happening again with relation to Coronavirus data. That will enable the Committee to request the data and hold the appropriate Ministers and officials to account if it is misused.

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Both the National Statistician and the Regulator confirmed that the most complete data on deaths was the weekly official statistics produced by ONS. While the Regulator welcomed improvements to the daily briefing data (which now includes care homes), he stressed that daily data was not complete. However, lags in producing the weekly official statistics mean that they cannot be used to track the spread of the virus in real time. It is, therefore, vital that the weekly official statistics can be produced more quickly but the legislation does not allow for deaths to be registered electronically and gives a time frame of 5 or 14 days. We would like the Government to move quickly to amend legislation to mandate electronic death registrations and shorten the time frame for registration.

I would be grateful for a response by Thursday 21 May. I will be placing this letter and your response in the public domain.

Yours,

*With best wishes,*



**William Wragg MP**

**Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee**