
Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation

William Wragg MP
Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

05 November 2020

Dear Mr Wragg,

Today I have written to Sir Patrick Vallance, UK Government Chief Scientific Adviser; Professor Chris Whitty, Chief Medical Officer for England; Stephany Howarth, Interim Chief Statistician, Welsh Government; Professor Roger Halliday, Chief Statistician and Data Officer, Scottish Government; and Siobhan Carey, Chief Executive and Registrar General, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. This is regarding the transparency and communication of important COVID-19 data to the public. I have included the letter to Sir Patrick Vallance below for the Committee's information; I wrote in similar terms to all recipients.

The Office for Statistics Regulations also published a statement¹ and blog² today reinforcing the principle that data should be published in a clear and accessible form with appropriate explanations of context and sources.

As you know, we set out our expectation in a statement on 18 May that when management information is used publicly by ministers or officials to inform Parliament, the media and the public, it should be available to all in an accessible form, with appropriate explanations of context and sources. I also wrote to the Committee to confirm that I would raise any instances of the use of unpublished information in public by the Government.

Yours sincerely



Ed Humpherson

Director General for Regulation

¹ [OSR Statement regarding transparency of data related to COVID-19](#) – 5 November 2020

² [Why trust and transparency are vital in a pandemic](#) – 5 November 2020

Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation

Sir Patrick Vallance
UK Government Chief Scientific Adviser
(by email)

05 November 2020

Dear Sir Patrick
Transparency of data related to COVID-19

Thank you for taking the time to speak to Sir David Norgrove, Chair of the UK Statistics Authority yesterday. I am writing to draw your attention to the [statement](#) and [blog](#) published today by the Office for Statistics Regulation on communicating data during the pandemic.

Our aim is to uphold public confidence in statistics that serve the public good. During the pandemic there have been high profile public briefings, media interviews and statements in each of the four nations of the UK. These have rightly drawn on data and analysis.

We welcome the range of data that has been published and we recognise that those producing the data and advising Government face significant pressures.

However, the use of data has not always been supported by transparent information being provided in a timely manner. As a result, there is potential to confuse the public and undermine confidence in the statistics.

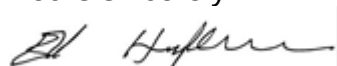
Our statement reinforces the principle that data should be published in a clear and accessible form with appropriate explanations of context and sources. We highlight three things which governments should do to support transparency:

- Where data are used publicly the sources of these data or the data themselves should be published alongside any press briefing and associated slides.
- Where models are referred to publicly, particularly to inform significant policy decisions, the model outputs, methodologies and key assumptions should be published at the same time.
- Where key decisions are justified by reference to statistics or management information, the underlying data should be made available.

I know that you take these principles very seriously and welcome your support in encouraging adherence to them.

I am writing in the same terms to the Chief Medical Officer for England, and the Chief Statisticians of the Scottish Government, the Welsh Government and the Northern Ireland administration. I am copying this letter to Professor Sir Ian Diamond, National Statistician.

Yours sincerely



Ed Humpherson