
Professor Sir Ian Diamond | National Statistician

Chloe Smith MP
Minister for Constitution and Devolution
Cabinet Office
70 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2AS

02 August 2021

Dear Minister,

Following our meeting on 29 June, I promised to follow-up with reflections on how the UK Statistics Authority can engage Parliament to make more use of UK wide data, for better comparisons of devolved policy between the administrations. Thank you also for your letter of 21 July recognising the success of Census 2021; we are working hard on processing the initial results and this will provide another opportunity for parliamentary engagement.

First, for improved parliamentary scrutiny of devolved policy issues, UK-wide data needs to be readily available and accessible. Second, its value needs to be demonstrated to parliamentarians, so its usefulness for improving policy is recognised and the demand for UK-wide analysis from statisticians grows.

As previously discussed, we are working to improve the availability of UK-wide data through the updated Concordat on Statistics, which will provide for a joint work programme to improve coherence of data infrastructure and standards. Furthermore, the Integrated Data Programme (IDP) is central to improving data linkage and analysis across countries and statistical producers. It will also improve the scope for research on cross-UK data.

While a better picture of UK-wide data is important, we are also working on improving the granularity of data to inform other policy priorities, such as levelling-up and the post COVID-19 recovery of our economy and society. The IDP will help with informing these policy questions as well, as a lead facilitator in the delivery of critical national data assets for analysts across Government.

Promoting awareness of the IDP is key to its success. I have previously written to the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) Chair to note the programme¹, and will be wanting to discuss further with that Committee and others as it progresses. Equally, your support in promoting the benefits of the IDP would be extremely appreciated.

¹ <https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/submission/ons-written-evidence-to-the-public-administration-and-constitutional-affairs-committees-inquiry-on-data-transparency-and-accountability-covid-19/>

A big part of the coherence work currently being undertaken by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) is to ensure that the UK-wide data that is available is easier for users to navigate. As Sir David Norgrove and I have previously noted, we are actively working to improve the coherence, accessibility and dissemination of a variety of published statistics including income and earnings, health, adult social care, climate change and migration, as well as COVID-19. We hope the 2021 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) will provide an opportunity to significantly expand our work on coherence, and have provided bids to that effect.

Requesting and using UK-wide data should be important to all parliamentarians across the UK. We actively contribute to inquiries across all UK parliaments, noting where data is England only/England and Wales/GB wide, publishing our evidence on the Authority website². The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) has highlighted to the Health and Social Care Committee³ the importance of UK-wide health data, as has the Authority to PACAC⁴. The issue of gaps in UK-wide data has featured in other OSR evidence too, such as to the Lords Public Services Committee for their inquiry into levelling up and public services⁵.

We are working more closely than ever before with PACAC after embedding our first ONS secondee within the Committee staff. This is helping to elevate their scrutiny of data issues, with their recent inquiry on '*data transparency and accountability: COVID-19*' one example. We would like to not only extend our offer of Data Masterclasses to Ministers, but also to PACAC members and perhaps all parliamentarians, to increase statistical literacy. In addition, the Census provides an opportunity for us to ensure coherent UK-wide census results once the Scottish census is complete next year, and we elaborated on how we will do so in a letter to PACAC last month⁶.

The House of Commons Library and Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology (POST) are key collaborators and users of ONS data, the latter recently co-hosting a Census 2021 event for parliamentarians. We also provided a similar event in the Welsh Parliament ahead of Census 2021. We will commit to discussing with the Library how we can work together to elevate data from constituency level to UK wide data within their publications, and perhaps more usefully, in training or an event for parliamentarians. If successful, we would look to do the same with the devolved parliaments information services.

We have collaborated with Sense about Science on their annual Evidence Week in Parliament since 2018, and in 2021 they are aiming to have the first Evidence Week in the Scottish Parliament too. These weeks focus on championing the use of high-quality evidence to develop policy, where parliamentarians and the public can highlight data gaps directly with researchers, analysts and statisticians. For the 2021 Evidence Weeks, the

² <https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/parliamentary-committee-submissions/>

³ <https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/submission/office-for-statistics-regulation-written-evidence-to-the-health-and-social-care-committees-inquiry-on-social-care-funding-and-workforce/>

⁴ <https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/submission/uk-statistics-authority-and-office-for-statistics-regulation-written-evidence-for-the-public-administration-and-constitutional-affairs-committee-inquiry-on-data-transparency-and-accountability-covid/>

⁵ <https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/submission/office-for-statistics-regulation-written-evidence-to-the-lords-public-services-committees-inquiry-into-levelling-up-and-public-services/>

⁶ <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/6988/documents/72843/default/>

Authority will highlight and promote the importance of UK-wide data to parliamentarians, making this a key theme of our involvement.

I am copying this letter to William Wragg MP, Chair of PACAC, so he is aware of our joint aim to improve the availability and accessibility of, demand for, and interest in, UK wide data in parliaments across the UK.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Ian Diamond', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond