

Press Release

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UK STATISTICS AUTHORITY PRESS STATEMENT IN RESPONSE TO THE TREASURY COMMITTEE REPORT *COUNTING THE POPULATION*

The UK Statistics Authority welcomes publication of the House of Commons Treasury Committee report *Counting the Population* which calls for urgent improvements to the current statistics on migration and population and tasks the Statistics Authority with taking a lead in finding solutions, drawing as necessary on data from across government.

Chairman of the Statistics Authority, Sir Michael Scholar said:

“This is an important report. The issues it raises require our urgent attention and we will be seeking to ensure that the Office for National Statistics, together with several government departments, achieves rapid progress in improving the statistics.

“The Authority notes that there is already a cross-government programme of work in place to improve estimates of migration, led by the National Statistician with the support of a Ministerial group.

“However, we recognise and share the Committee’s concerns about the length of time substantive improvements seem likely to take; and we are also concerned about whether enough is being done across government to provide ONS with the raw data needed to produce reliable estimates. We will therefore consider with a range of experts from inside and outside government what further specific steps should now be taken.

“We will in due course make a fuller response to the Committee’s report, independently of the Government response.”

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Notes to Editors

1. The Statistics and Registration Service Act gained Royal Assent in 2007 out of which The UK Statistics Authority came into existence on 1 April 2008. Since its official launch the UK Statistics Authority, and not Government Ministers, are in charge of the nation's main economic and social statistics produced by ONS. The Authority is fully independent and reports directly to Parliament, not through Government Ministers or departments so as to be sure that these figures are not subject to political interference or manipulation. In addition, the Authority have oversight of all UK official statistics, with statutory powers and the obligation to promote, improve and safeguard official statistics across the UK.
http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2007/ukpga_20070018_en_1
2. The level of trust in official statistics is currently very low in Britain, recognised by Government through the introduction of the legislation, with all-party support in both Houses of Parliament, and support from the devolved Administrations, to establish the new Authority. A recent survey released by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on 17 March 2008 found that only one in five people think figures are compiled without political interference. The UK came 27th out of 27 in a recent survey within European countries of trust in their Governments' statistics.
3. Sir Michael Scholar KCB was appointed Chair of the new Authority in September 2007 in open competition, and with Parliamentary approval under the new procedure. He is President of St John's College, Oxford. He has been a governor of the National Institute for Economic and Social Research since 2001. Previously he was Permanent Secretary to the Department of Trade and Industry (1996 to 2001), Permanent Secretary to the Welsh Office (1993 to 1996) and Private Secretary to the then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1981 to 1983).
4. The non-executive members of the authority were appointed in open competition and are:
Lord Rowe-Beddoe of Kilgetty (David Rowe-Beddoe), who will occupy the Deputy Chair post with responsibility for the governance of the Office for National Statistics.
Professor Adrian Smith FRS, who will occupy the Deputy Chair post with responsibility for promoting and safeguarding the production and publication of all official statistics across the UK.
Professor David Rhind CBE, FRS, FBA who was Chairman of the Statistics Commission and was Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the City University in London until July 2007.
He is a non-executive director of the Bank of England's Court of Directors, and until 1998 was Director-General of the Ordnance Survey.
Partha Dasgupta who is currently Chief Executive of the Pension Protection Fund and a former Managing Director at Barclays Global Investors.
Sir Alan Langlands FRSE who is Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Dundee. He was Chief Executive of the National Health Service in England 1994-2000.
Moirra Gibb CBE who is Chief Executive Officer of Camden Borough Council.
Professor Steve Nickell CBE, FBA who is Warden of Nuffield College, Oxford. He was a member of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee from June 2000 to May 2006.
5. The Authority also includes three executive members. These are: the National Statistician, Karen Dunnell; the Head of Assessment, Richard Alldritt; and the ONS Finance Director, Steve Newman.
6. The postal address for the UK Statistics Authority is, Statistics House, Tredegar Park, Newport, NP10 8XG.

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