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Statistics Authority publishes *Overcoming Barriers to Trust in Crime Statistics: England and Wales*

The UK Statistics Authority today publishes its review about overcoming barriers to trust in crime statistics for England and Wales.

Most commentators would agree that measuring crime is inherently difficult. The crime figures for England and Wales, for which the Home Office is responsible, have been subject to many improvements over the years and, in terms of technical quality, the Statistics Authority believes they compare well with corresponding statistics for other countries.

Despite this, there continues to be public criticism of the statistics and mistrust of the way they are used and quoted. As far as the Statistics Authority can tell, this exceeds the level of criticism and mistrust in most other countries. Research and previous reviews have suggested that this mistrust is exacerbated by the nature of the ways in which the statistics are reported. This may, in part, reflect wider mistrust of official information, not just statistics, but there are factors specific to crime statistics that may also play a role, and which are discussed in the report.

Speaking today, the Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Michael Scholar said:

“There are two main statistical sources on crime, the crime figures recorded by the police and the results of the British Crime Survey. Both have known weaknesses but these are mostly intrinsic and unavoidable. It is the job of professional statisticians in government to filter the signal from the noise and explain the results in a way that is trusted.

“Having two different sources can undoubtedly cause confusion but the answer is not to change either of them fundamentally. The two sets of statistics throw different lights on the incidence and experience of crime, and we need both of them. The challenge is to compile and communicate the information from these two sources in ways that are accepted as open and impartial.

“This report sets out the UK Statistics Authority’s recommendations to enhance public confidence in official crime statistics. Our recommendations will now need to be considered by the new government in their wider agenda to restore public confidence in government, politics, and public services.”

In the report, the Statistics Authority makes a number of recommendations, including:

- The National Statistician should publish a full and regular commentary on trends and patterns in crime;

- The National Statistician, in conjunction with the relevant government departments and the Welsh Assembly Government, should draw up proposals for the development of statistical publications on crime and the criminal justice system in England and Wales;
- The National Statistician, Home Office and the Ministry of Justice should produce a conceptual framework for crime and criminal justice data; a free-standing guide that explains the strengths and limitations of different types of crime data; guidelines on the presentation and use of crime and criminal justice statistics in government documents and statements, and advice for the public about the interpretation of performance measures in the criminal justice system;
- The Home Office should establish a standing non-executive board to review and report on arrangements for the production of crime statistics to provide independent assurance of their impartiality and integrity, and to comment on methods and quality;
- The Home Office, in conjunction with the National Policing Improvement Agency, HMIC, ACPO, the Ministry of Justice and other relevant parties should review the local data on crime and criminal justice now available on a variety of government websites and consider whether there are opportunities to consolidate, share best practice and provide more comprehensive and consistent metadata; and supplement existing guidelines on the conduct of local surveys with good practice advice on the analysis, presentation and communication of results to the public; and,
- The Home Office should publish a description of the steps currently taken (i) to ensure that police crime records result from consistent application of the counting rules and (ii) to quality assure the statistics deriving from those records.

The report is available on the Authority's website at: <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/reports/index.html>.

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