
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Michael Scholar KCB

Rt. Hon. Alan Johnson MP
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1A 0AA

16 March 2010

Dear Home Secretary

VIOLENT CRIME STATISTICS

Thank you for your letter of 9 March.

In your letter you ask me to use my office to seek to ensure accuracy in the way politicians comment on crime statistics. I can confirm that the Statistics Authority will continue to comment publicly on the use of official statistics where we judge it appropriate to do so. We appreciate that political debate involves the selection and interpretation of statistics and other evidence to support an argument. However, where we see that official statistics have been presented or quoted in a way that seems likely to mislead the public, we will publicly draw this to the attention of those involved.

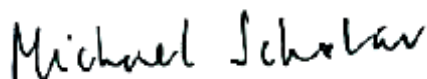
On the specific subject of violent crime statistics we have made our position clear. We have said that any comparison, without qualification, of police recorded statistics between the late 1990s and 2008/9 is likely to mislead the public; and we have said that we regard the British Crime Survey (BCS) as the best measure of the long-term trend in violent crime. The BCS does not, however, provide estimates of crime for local areas. There is an evident user need for this information, and we hope that the Home Office will consider how that user need may be met in the public interest.

Users of official statistics sometimes need, in order to present objectively and accurately the phenomena on which they are commenting, to draw on more than one statistical series, using different methodologies. Such methodologies may sometimes appear to point in different directions. In these cases the selective quotation of one series without regard to the other is often misleading. A balanced presentation of the matter would refer to all the relevant statistics, and to the relevant caveats and qualifications, so as to aid accurate and reliable interpretation of the figures.

As I said in my first letter to Mr Grayling, it would be inappropriate for the Authority to enter into political debate. What we can do is to publish our views robustly, clearly and impartially; then we must leave it to politicians and to the media to draw on our opinions as they see fit.

I am copying this letter as yours.

Yours sincerely



Sir Michael Scholar KCB