
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Michael Scholar KCB

Rt. Hon. Francis Maude MP
Minister for the Cabinet Office
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Dear Francis

MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

Thank you for your letter of 19 July and your support for the work of the Authority.

I have now had the opportunity to discuss the issues relating to management information with the Board of the Authority. The Authority wholly accepts, and shares, your view that well-run organisations must have regular access to, and control of, their management information. Nothing in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, or in anything we have said or done, should be interpreted as being inimical to this view. We have been, and are, very careful to ensure that we do not stand in the way of improvements in Departmental management information. Indeed, statisticians can help with this.

But when data collected initially as management information are aggregated into statistics that are used in public in support of government policy, we may need, under the Statistics Act, to comment publicly if these statistics are not compiled and issued in accordance with the statutory Code of Practice. In the case of the public sector employment statistics the Authority notes that a set of National Statistics, produced by the ONS, already exists. The new management information collected by the Cabinet Office goes wider but partly covers the same ground as the published statistics. External observers thus see two sets of figures that are not reconciled with one-another. We are therefore asking Cabinet Office officials to ensure that any further published aggregates from the management information on this topic are reconciled with the official statistics. This need not mean that the two sets should fully agree, only that any differences are clearly explained. This, too, is part of being transparent. In pressing Cabinet Office officials to quality-assure the data released a few weeks ago, the National Statistician was properly concerned about the need for such reconciliation.

There is a further consideration here. The wider scope of the new management information on public sector employment suggests that the coverage of the official statistics should be reviewed. This review will not involve the Cabinet Office except as a customer of the ONS. The Board of the Authority has therefore invited ONS to review the desirability and affordability of producing a wider range of statistical data on the topic.

The Authority has looked again, in the light of the points you made to me at our meeting and in your letter, at its published guidance on management information and official statistics. It has concluded that the guidance requires amendment to make more clear the points in the

first main paragraph of this letter. We have therefore asked our officials to amend the guidance accordingly.

I am copying this letter to Gus O'Donnell and Jil Matheson, the National Statistician.

Yours sincerely

Michael Scholar

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