
**Sir Michael Scholar KCB
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority**

Shailesh Vara MP
House of Commons
London
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Dear Mr Vara

I am writing in response to your comments made in the House of Commons on 24 April about the Integrated Household Survey (IHS) carried out by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). As you will be aware, the ONS since April 1st 2008 is no longer under Governmental control, but is directed by the UK Statistics Authority.

Following recent publicity about the IHS, Karen Dunnell, the National Statistician, has written to the Mail on Sunday, Daily Mail and the Daily Telegraph to explain the context and content of the survey. I attach the letter.

I echo the National Statistician's comments. In essence, the IHS brings together four existing surveys which have been carried out across the UK for decades. Combining these surveys is more cost effective and produces better statistics at regional and local level. The personal questions help to build data on family life and relationships which are not available from other government sources. This contributes to better policy-making and more informed public comment.

For example, questions about health and the use of health services have been run since the General Household Survey began in 1971 and are vital to understand the health of our ageing population. We know that people are living longer, and the survey questions are used to provide information on how long people are spending in good health or without disability. Figures on healthy life expectancy at birth and at the age of 65 are used, for example, by the Department of Health for health monitoring and infrastructure planning.

Information about contraception is needed for policy planning and informed comment on public health and family planning issues. Similarly, information about cohabitation is needed to understand developments in the family and the position of children, given recent marriage rate trends.

I would also like to reassure you that all the Office for National Statistics surveys are confidential. Personal details are separated from responses so that no identifiable information about individuals can be linked to the name and address of individuals.

I should add that responses to household surveys are voluntary: no-one is obliged to answer any of the questions in them.

In conclusion, it is a priority for the UK Statistics Authority to rebuild trust in official statistics. I hope that we can count on your support and would welcome the opportunity to discuss these matters further with you.

Yours sincerely

Michael Scholar

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