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**Sir Andrew Dilnot
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority
Via email**

24 March 2015

Dear Sir Andrew,

Official Statistics and the Scottish Government

I wish to draw your attention to what appears to be a significant breach of the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA) code of practice by the Scottish Government. There is a particular obligation on Ministers and the Scottish Government to uphold the standards set by the UKSA. Ministers may of course take the professional advice of statisticians in the Government Statistical Service to ensure that good practice is followed.

On the 3rd March and the 9th March the Scottish Government published two analysis papers titled "Benefits of improved economic performance." These analysis papers detail a simulation exercise purporting to demonstrate how improvements in Scottish total factor productivity, investment and export performance could boost GDP employment and tax revenue. The March 9th version includes additional analysis of a scenario called "full revenue retention" of which no definition is provided. I have included a copy of both reports with this correspondence.

In setting out my concerns I have put to one side further questions around the partial nature of the analysis contained within the March 9th paper in relation to the Barnett formula and block grant. This economic analysis has been heavily criticised by Professor Brian Ashcroft, one of Scotland's leading economists at the University of Strathclyde.

The purpose of this letter is to outline specific concerns about the Scottish Government failing to follow the principles set by the UKSA code of practice. You will want to look at the both documents and the process around their release, but here are specific examples that I believe are worthy of highlighting.

The Scottish Government made the unusual decision to press release the report on 09/03/2015 at 04:00. So the press release at 4 AM preceded the analysis paper which followed at 09:44. The delay of 5 hours and 44 minutes would appear to breach the following guidelines which state that:

Protocol 2, Practice 4: Issue statistical releases at the standard time of 9.30am on a weekday, to maintain consistency and to permit time for users to understand and respond to the information during normal working hours.

Principle 3, Practice 1: Issue statistical reports separately from any other statements or comment about the figures and ensure that no statement or comment – based on prior knowledge – is issued to the press or published ahead of the publication of the statistics.

I would also note the following Protocol as the press release included ministerial comment:

Protocol 2, Practice 9: Ensure that government statements issued alongside official statistics, and referring to, or based upon, them: are labelled clearly as policy statements (or ministerial statements) and are readily distinguished from a statistical release.

Additionally, whilst the press release has a named Scottish Government communications contact, there are no contact details at all for the analysis paper. This would appear to breach the following guideline:

Protocol 2, Practice 6: Include the name and contact details of the responsible statistician in statistical reports.

These are matters of good practice and the Scottish Government should ensure they are always followed in future. There are further substantive concerns about the reports.

In the analysis paper reference is made to “*The analysis below therefore models the impact.*” However the actual model used is not stated in the paper and indeed the reader is left to infer that an economic model has been used to inform the analysis. This is a substantive omission which fails to meet the following Principle:

Principle 4, Practice 1: (part): ... Publish details of the methods adopted, including explanations of why particular choices were made.

As a result, experts and opposition parties were denied even the most basic information such as what model was used to generate the scenarios. This is not a view confined to those of us who happen to be of a different political view to the Scottish Government.

In a recent newspaper article and blog post Professor Brian Ashcroft commented on the use of statistics by the Scottish Government:

“I fear that this is a further example of the politicisation of the Scottish civil service. One would have expected in the past that the OCEA would have resisted pressure, had it occurred, to produce such a partial analysis.

This is an issue that clearly needs further discussion and debate.”

These are not trivial matters. The economic analysis in these reports is the basis for the Scottish Government’s policy of full fiscal autonomy, the consequences of which are of exceptional importance to the General Election campaign.

The National Statistics Authority has a crucial role to play in ensuring the integrity of statistics produced by the Scottish Government. Voters must be sure they can trust what the Scottish Government publishes so that they are reassured that statistical information is presented accurately with due process followed, rather than done so in a way that may mislead voters.

I note that a recent release from the Scottish Government, “Outlook for UK Public Spending Scottish Government” has again failed to follow the standards set by the UKSA. It does not include contact details at all for the report. I would therefore request that both the specific cases highlighted on the 3rd and 9th March, and the wider economic statistical publications from the Scottish Government be reviewed.

I will therefore be very grateful to have your views on this matter at your earliest possible convenience.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JMBaillie', written in a cursive style.

Jackie Baillie MSP
Shadow Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution, and the Economy