
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

Professor Allyson Pollock and Mr Peter Roderick
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Dear Professor Pollock and Mr Roderick

ANALYSIS OF PRIMARY CARE DATA

Thank you for your letter dated 7 April in which you asked for the Authority Board's view on a direction given by NHS England to the Health and Social Care Information Centre regarding the collection and analysis of primary care data held by General Practitioners as part of the care.data programme.

Principles 5 and 6 and Protocol 3 of the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics*¹ set out the practices that the Statistics Authority expects to see underpinning the use of administrative data for statistical purposes. In summary, the Authority supports the wider use and increased sharing of administrative data held within government and other public bodies for the purposes of producing official statistics, but only where arrangements for confidentiality protection are sufficient to protect the privacy of individual information. In effect we require producers of official statistics to consider risk-utility trade-offs.

In our 2012 report *Statistics from administrative data*² we made a number of observations which remain relevant:

- the government needs to find ways to make it easier for statisticians to identify and use administrative sources that have the potential to produce valuable statistics;
- bodies that control those administrative sources need to reduce the barriers to statistical use;
- arrangements for cost-effective statistical audit (checking that records are what they appear to be) need to be strengthened;
- definitions and standards in different administrative sources need to be harmonised where possible;
- the nature of the confidentiality safeguards for sharing administrative data for statistical purposes should be more openly debated; and
- where administrative systems are used to produce statistics, statisticians should be centrally involved in the design and operation of those systems. They would add value, help to secure the quality of the data, and ensure that statistical producers are aware of data changes.

¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

² <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/correspondence/letter-from-sir-michael-scholar-to-rt-hon-francis-maude---administrative-data---16032012.pdf>

The future value of the statistical service to government and the public will depend, in large part, on the extent to which these recommendations are implemented. Indeed, the Authority itself is undertaking a programme³ of work associated with administrative data including the important issue of statistical audit.

I hope that you find these thoughts useful.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Dilnot". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and 'D'.

Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

³ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/statement---administrative-data-and-official-statistics.pdf>