

Director General for Regulation

Mr Clifford Miller

23 May 2016

Dear Mr Miller

ASSESSMENT OF AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS STATISTICS

Thank you for your correspondence of 9 February and 13 March 2016 about the National Statistics produced by the Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC): *Autism Spectrum Disorders in adults living in households throughout England - report from the Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey 2007(ASD 2007)*, and decisions taken by the Authority in respect of these statistics in 2009.

The Authority published today its assessment of these statistics against the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics* and the principles that form the foundation for National Statistics designation – trustworthiness, quality and value in Assessment Report 326: *National Study of Health and Wellbeing in England: Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey*¹. During our assessment, we considered each of the points raised by your correspondence in respect of the ASD statistics which, together with the wide range of evidence we have reviewed as part of this assessment², have informed some Requirements for improvements to the statistics. Subject to HSCIC meeting these Requirements, the Authority judges that the statistics are readily accessible, produced according to sound methods and managed impartially and objectively in the public interest. The Authority has asked HSCIC to report on how it has met the Requirements by the end of July 2016, after which time the Authority will publish its final decision. I will ensure that you are alerted to this publication.

With regard to the decisions taken by the Authority in respect of these statistics in 2009, I am comfortable with the rationale for the decision taken by my predecessor to delay assessment of the Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey statistics, and related outputs, from our 2010/11 work programme until 2015/16. An important dimension to our assessments is the consideration of the public value of the statistics. As these statistics are published only every seven years, it made sense that our advice be timely in respect of the next planned publication.

However, following our review, I consider that had we been assessing the ASD 2007 statistics prior to their publication in 2009, and applying our current practices and the weight of experience gathered in the intervening years, it is likely that I would have advised HSCIC to publish these statistics as experimental rather than National Statistics. I think this approach would have recognised that *ASD 2007* represented the first time internationally that statisticians had sought to measure the prevalence of ASD in adults in households using this

¹ <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Assessment-Report-326-National-Study-of-Health-and-Wellbeing-in-England-Adult-Psychiatric-Morbidity-Survey.pdf>

² Please note that since the Department of Health (and partners) fund HSCIC to run the APMS every seven years, this Assessment has taken place ahead of the publication of the main survey outputs. The Assessment of the survey outputs has therefore been based on a combination of outputs previously published in 2009 (from APMS 2007) and early draft documents for APMS 2014 due for publication in September 2016

method, and it would have been sensible for the producer to identify a set of quality criteria that that the statistics would need to meet to be considered robust enough for National Statistics designation. My assessment team has advised me that HSCIC is sympathetic to this view, and that the statisticians are working positively towards meeting the Requirements of the Authority's assessment.

Finally, I would like to reiterate my thanks for contacting us as part of this assessment. The issues that you have raised have had a significant impact on our thinking. If you would like to discuss any aspect of this further with us, I would be very happy to arrange a meeting with my senior leadership team. I am copying this letter to John Pullinger, the National Statistician, and to Chris Roebuck, the Head of Profession for Statistics at HSCIC.

Yours sincerely

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

Ed Humpherson