
Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation

Iain Bell
Director for Data and Education Standards Analysis
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

28 November 2016

Dear Iain,

Thank you for updating me on the improvements you are making to your statistics including those arising from our recent correspondence on access to education attainment data¹ and earlier in 2016 on the National Pupil Database (NPD)².

I am pleased to hear about the various actions you have taken and that are in progress to provide clearer information to users of attainment statistics in the Performance Tables, and that these have involved user testing. And I consider that the actions you are taking to improve secure access to education data, together with those to provide greater transparency about data access, demonstrate clearly how you are working to maintain the balance between the provision of reasonable access to data underpinning official statistics and the protection of individuals' confidentiality.

We asked you to keep the demand under review to address the potential gap in coverage arising from the absence of information on performance in international GCSEs and I am particularly pleased to hear about how you have involved users of the NPD as you develop your data access. Your view – confirmed by NPD users – that the need was to assess and research performance in the round is entirely consistent with our own thinking, informed by our investigation into the gap in coverage in the statistics on educational attainment as raised by the recent correspondence.

As I said in my previous letter to you, I believe that the changes you are making have the potential to encourage more use and to extend the public value of the Performance Tables and the underlying NPD data. I look forward to seeing more of the changes introduced over the coming months and would be pleased to receive a second update on your progress in three months time.

Thank you as well for informing me about issues related to data access that have arisen more recently. I am aware that the issue of advance notice of publication had caused concern among NPD users. While your clarification of what you intended, including the revised Clauses for Access, is helpful, I would be interested to hear the outcome of your further discussions with NPD users in due course.

¹ <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/access-to-education-attainment-data/>

² <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/national-pupil-database/>

The second issue – of concerns expressed about new data items on nationality, country of birth and English language proficiency that you collected through the school census in 2016 – is clearly important and your clarification is welcome. Maintaining trust is essential and requires ongoing commitment to clear communication and transparency of conditions and of communication of purpose. But it's just the start and we recommend an ongoing process of clear and transparent communication with the public. One way of demonstrating a commitment to transparency is by undertaking and publishing reviews of controls and processes. I would therefore like to ask you to set out your plans for ongoing review; and report those plans to us and, of course, more widely.

I am copying this letter to John Pullinger, National Statistician.

Yours sincerely

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

Ed Humpherson