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**Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir David Norgrove**

Mr Bernard Jenkin MP  
Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

23 November 2017

Dear Bernard,

Thank you for your letter following last week's oral evidence session on the work of the UK Statistics Authority.

During the session I committed to examine statements made by Sir Vince Cable in a *New Statesman* article. There he suggested that revisions to official data about our international investment position showed that "our economy is in real trouble."<sup>1</sup> Sir Vince's quote appears to be drawn from a fuller press release, published on his party's website.<sup>2</sup>

His statement followed an announcement made by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on 29 September, regarding the impact of methodological changes to the National Accounts.<sup>3</sup>

Sir Vince was not alone in commenting on these methodological changes. ONS's announcement was covered widely, including among others the Daily Telegraph, the Sun, the Independent, and the Daily Mail. Most articles suggested Britain was £490 billion 'poorer' than previously thought and some saw a 'collapse' in the international investment position.

On 23 October ONS's Deputy National Statistician for Economic Statistics, Jonathan Athow, issued a blog.<sup>4</sup> This provided more context around the international investment position, and there has been very little comment on these figures since.

Having reviewed Sir Vince's statement, alongside broader coverage of ONS's announcement, it is my view that ONS could have done a better job to explain its methodological changes in the first place. Its subsequent blog clarified the situation, but should have been issued more quickly to address the confused coverage of its announcement. Against that background I do not think it would be appropriate for me to comment to Sir Vince or to others who discussed the ONS announcement.

Yours ever



**Sir David Norgrove**

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<sup>1</sup> New Statesman (16 October 2017): [Is the UK really 'missing billions' after the Brexit vote?](#)

<sup>2</sup> Liberal Democrats (16 Oct 2017): [Shock ONS figures show economy in trouble](#)

<sup>3</sup> ONS (29 Sep 2017): [National Accounts article: Impact of method changes to the national accounts and sector accounts: Quarter 1 1997 to Quarter 2 2017](#)

<sup>4</sup> ONS (23 Oct 2017): [Has £500billion really gone missing?](#)