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**Director General for Regulation**

Guy Goodwin  
Chief Executive, National Centre for Social Research (NatCen)  
& Scottish Centre for Social Research (ScotCen)  
35 Northampton Square  
London  
EC1V 0AX

12 June 2018

Dear Guy,

Thank you for your letter highlighting your concerns with tourism statistics. We agree that these figures are important and that there is a strong interest in international and domestic tourism.

You have highlighted your concern that changes in trends in the International Passenger Survey (IPS) published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) may not reflect real changes in expenditure or number of visits from overseas residents, but may have come about as a result of discontinuities following methods changes (a move from paper to tablet based data collection). In particular you have outlined your disappointment that the changes have not been more clearly communicated in advance of being implemented and that you have not been able to find published information on the scale of the discontinuity resulting from the change.

You have also highlighted concerns related to methods changes for the GB Tourism Survey and GB Day Visits Survey, both official statistics publications. There has been some published information about the impact of the methods changes, but the published information leaves you with some unanswered questions. You felt that it would help commissioner and suppliers of surveys if OSR could identify and publish guidance and best practice on methods changes.

As you have noted, our 2018-19 work programme sets out our intention to do a compliance check on the Overseas Travel and Tourism publication. We have now considered the most effective way to look into the issues you have outlined and have broadened our plans to cover the following:

1. **Communications** – OSR will carry out a compliance check on the International Passenger Survey (IPS). This will not solely focus on tourism, but will look more broadly at the IPS with a specific focus on communications and transparency. We will review how changes to methods were communicated in advance of being introduced, as well as how ONS communicated publication delays and data quality issues. It will cover both tourism and migration estimates and will consider some of the concerns you have raised with us. We will publish our findings from these in autumn 2018. When we have completed this work, we will consider whether the compliance check on Overseas Travel and Tourism set out in our 2018-19 work plan is still necessary.
2. **Methods** – We will look at best practice on methods changes. This will look more generally at our expectations around methods changes for National Statistics and highlight best practice. It will not focus solely on the GB Day Visits Survey, GB Tourism Survey and IPS but will consider the issues you have raised and where there are lessons that can be learnt from them. We plan to start this work in the second half of 2018.

I hope our planned work will address the important areas you have highlighted in your letter as well as looking at some of the issues in a wider context. We will publish your letter and this response on our website and keep you updated as we progress with this work.

I am also copying this letter to Iain Bell, Deputy National Statistician with responsibility for the International Passenger Survey and Olivia Christopherson Head of Profession for Statistics at the department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.

Please don't hesitate to get in touch if you would like to discuss this further.

Your sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Humpherson', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ed Humpherson

Director General for Regulation