

Press Release

4 February 2010

Statistics Authority sets out position on violent crime figures

The UK Statistics Authority is concerned that recent political and media debate about trends in violent crime has misrepresented the data and is, therefore, damaging trust in official statistics. We have looked in particular at comparisons between recorded violent offences in the late 1990s and 2008/09 which have been the subject of recent controversy in the national media. We regard a comparison, without qualification, of police recorded statistics between the late 1990s and 2008/09 as likely to mislead the public.

Sir Michael Scholar, Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, has today written to the Shadow Secretary of State for Home Affairs, Chris Grayling MP. Sir Michael's letter and an accompanying Monitoring and Assessment Note are reproduced below. The Note sets out the Statistics Authority's views in more detail.

- ENDS -

For more information please contact: 07786 892263, 07990 795693 or 07971 186710

Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Michael Scholar KCB

Chris Grayling MP
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1 0AA

4 February 2010

Dear Mr Grayling

VIOLENT CRIME STATISTICS

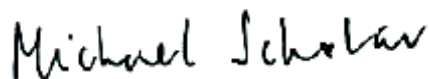
I do not wish to become involved in political controversy, but I must take issue with what you said yesterday about violent crime statistics, which seems to me likely to damage public trust in official statistics.

The Statistics Authority's views on this matter are set out in the Note below.

I would be grateful if you would take account of our views in your future use of, or comments upon, these official statistics.

I am sending a copy of this letter to the Leader of the Opposition, Rt. Hon. David Cameron MP, to the Home Secretary, Rt. Hon Alan Johnson MP, and to Dr. Tony Wright MP, Chair of the Public Administration Select Committee.

Yours sincerely



Sir Michael Scholar KCB

M&A Note 1/2010
4 February 2010

Discussion of trends in violent crime

The UK Statistics Authority is concerned that recent political and media debate about trends in violent crime is damaging trust in official statistics. We have looked in particular at comparisons between recorded violent offences in the late 1990s and 2008/09 made by the Conservative Party spokesman in the national media.

- We regard a comparison, without qualification, of police recorded statistics between the late 1990s and 2008/09 as likely to mislead the public.
- Police recorded crime statistics were affected by the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard in 2002/03. This led to increases, caused by definitional change, in police recording of crimes involving violence against the person.
- National Statistics publications contain high-profile comments on the effect of the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard. For example: *“It is known that this change inflated the overall number of violence against the person and criminal damage offences ... Due to this change, it is not possible to directly compare figures prior to 2002/03 with those for later years”*. (Home Office Statistical Bulletin 01/10 p. 39)
- The British Crime Survey (BCS) provides a more reliable measure of the national trend in violent crime. This is because the BCS is not affected by changes in reporting, police recording and local policing activity, and has been measuring crime in a consistent way since the survey began in 1981.
- The BCS does not provide estimates of violent crime for local areas, such as constituencies. However, it does present important evidence on the national picture and that should be recognised in any presentation of the police statistics, whether at national or local level.
- The evidence from the BCS is that there has not been an increase in respondents' experience of violent crime between the late 1990s and 2008/09; and that the growth in violent crime recorded in the police statistics should be attributed, at least in large part, to a change in recording practice.

The Authority appreciates that political debate involves the selection and interpretation of statistics and other evidence to support an argument. It would not be appropriate for the Authority to seek to intervene in political debate directly. However, where we see that official statistics have been presented or quoted in a way that seems likely to mislead the public, we will publicly draw this to the attention of those involved.

The Statistics Authority recently published an interim report *Overcoming Barriers to Trust in Crime Statistics* and will soon be finalising that report and pursuing its recommendations with government.¹

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¹ *Overcoming Barriers to Trust in Crime Statistics – England and Wales: Draft Interim Report*, UK Statistics Authority, December 2009 <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring-reports/index.html>