



UK Statistics
Authority

Annual Review of Authority Casework 2017/18

September 2018



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What is Casework?

The *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* places a statutory requirement on the UK Statistics Authority to promote, monitor and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. The Authority's casework function plays an important role in building public confidence in the production and use of official statistics and thus supports the Authority's statutory requirements to operate for the public good.

In October 2017, the Authority published its Interventions Policy¹. This sets out our long-standing practices for interventions, explaining that we will intervene when "official statistics are leaked before publication; the advice of professional statisticians is ignored; or official statistics in a document or statement are presented in such a way that, in the Authority's opinion, they are liable to mislead the public or undermine the integrity of official statistics".

This report is the first of its kind to be published by the Authority, and has been produced in the interests of providing greater transparency around the casework process. This is part of an overall intention to provide more information and clarity around casework.

2017/18 in Casework

Over the past year, the Authority responded to 85 pieces of casework. While this is broadly consistent with the volume of casework processed by the Authority in previous years, there have been changes in both the subject and the impact of our correspondence.

As the following analysis sets out:

- i. 60% of all concerns raised with the Authority were in relation to the Code of Practice for Statistics²; the remaining 40% were regarding the use of statistics;
- ii. over a quarter of all concerns raised with the Authority were regarding health and care data;
- iii. following Sir David Norgrove's letter to the Foreign Secretary, there was a marked increase in concerns raised with us by Parliamentarians, and references made to the Authority's casework in Parliamentary debate.

¹ [Interventions Policy](#)

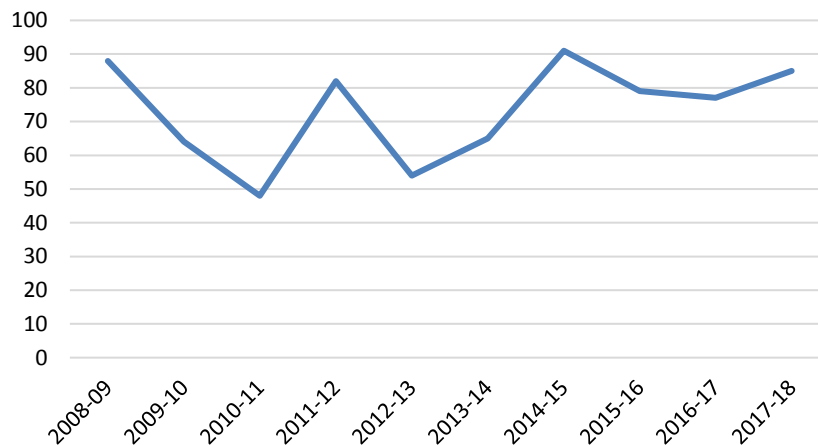
² [Code of Practice for Statistics](#)

Analysis

Quantity and substance of issues raised

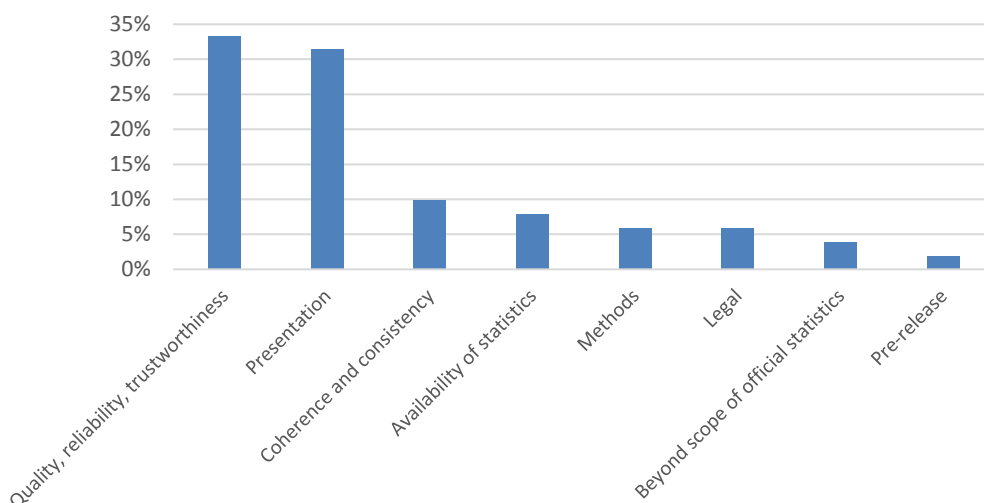
1. A total of 733 substantive issues have been raised with the Authority during the period 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2018. **Chart 1** shows the trend over this period.

CHART 1: ISSUES RAISED WITH THE AUTHORITY, 2008/09 TO 2017/18



2. A total of 85 issues were processed by the Authority between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018. This is fairly consistent compared with the last few years.
3. The number of concerns raised with the Authority climbed over the course of the year; while 34 pieces of casework were processed between April and September, 51 were processed during the second half of the year.
4. 4 per cent of cases were self-generated and raised internally. This represents 3 cases for the year, all of which were in relation to statements made by Parliamentarians. The remaining 96 per cent were raised by external parties.
5. 40 per cent of issues raised related to use/misuse of statistics, with the remaining 60 per cent in relation to compliance with the Code. As **Chart 2** shows, of the casework that related to Code compliance, 'Quality, Reliability and Trustworthiness' and 'Presentation' were the themes most commonly raised.

CHART 2: CASES RELATING TO CODE COMPLIANCE, PRIMARY SUBSTANCE, 2017/18 (PROPORTION)



Casework response times

6. Response times in 2017/18 were broadly consistent with earlier years. Since 2008, the average time to respond to an item of casework has been 28 days. In 2017/18, the average time to respond was 29 days.
7. As shown in **Table 1** below, by percentage of total cases to which a response was sent, the majority of cases (74 per cent) were resolved in 30 days or less, with 30 per cent responded to within 10 days.
8. The time taken to respond to a piece of casework can relate to a number of factors, such as complexity and urgency of the issue. A delay to a response can also be the result of external factors, for example, waiting for an upcoming publication before a judgement can be made, or the requirement to conduct a wider compliance check or review.
9. If a piece of casework is likely to require a significant investigation time – such as over a month – the team will usually issue a holding response, and where appropriate, provide incremental updates on the case investigation. The days to respond measure applies to the date that the final response is sent, and the case is considered closed.

TABLE 1: BREAKDOWN OF DAYS TO RESPOND (PROPORTION OF TOTAL CASES)

Days to respond	Proportion (%)
0 – 10	29.6
11 – 20	18.5
21 – 30	25.9
31 – 50	11.1
51 – 100	8.6
101 +	6.2

Themes by domain

10. **Table 2** shows the general themes of casework from 2017/18. These themes broadly correlate to the Office for Statistics Regulation domains.
11. Health and Social Care accounted for over one quarter (26 per cent) of all pieces of casework processed by the Authority. This was up from 18 per cent in the previous year. Of the Health and Social Care cases, the majority of concerns raised related to statistics produced by bodies such as NHS Digital, NHS Scotland, and NHS Information, rather than by the Department of Health.
12. The second most common theme about which concerns were raised was Children, Education and Skills (representing 16 per cent of all casework for the year), primarily on Department for Education statistics. This fell slightly year-on-year; during 2016/17 Children, Education and Skills was the most commonly represented theme in the Authority's casework, accounting for 22 per cent of all received.
13. The proportion of casework relating to the Economy fell between 2016/17 and 2017/18. Having accounted for 21 per cent of all casework in 2016/17, it accounted for 12 per cent of all casework in the most recent year.

TABLE 2: PRIMARY CASEWORK THEMES, 2017/18 (PROPORTION)

Primary Theme	Proportion (%)
Health and Social Care	26
Children, Education and Skills	16
Economy	12
Crime and Justice	9
General / Other	7
Government	7
Labour Market	5
People and Places	5
Population	5
Travel and Transport	4
Agriculture and Environment	2
Business and Energy	2

Engagement with Parliament and Government

14. In total 12 cases were raised by Parliamentarians and Government Ministers in the period 2017/18 (14 per cent of total casework). This was broadly similar to the number received from Parliamentarians in the previous reporting year, during which 13 cases were received. Unlike the previous year, this included two cases from the Devolved Administrations³ and one from Local Government⁴.
15. There were two high-profile interventions during 2017/18 involving Parliamentarians (but not raised by Parliamentarians). These were raised internally, and are therefore categorised separately from other Parliamentary engagement, and excluded from the figures above.
- i. August/September 2017 – An exchange between Sir David Norgrove and then Home Secretary, Rt Hon Amber Rudd MP, regarding the disclosure of Home Office migration statistics⁵.
 - ii. September 2017 – An exchange between Sir David Norgrove and then Foreign Secretary, Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP, regarding the use of the ‘£350 million per week’ figure to describe UK’s financial contributions to the European Union⁶.
16. During 2017/18, there was a marked increase in the number of times Members of Parliament mentioned their correspondence with the Authority during Parliamentary debate compared with the previous year.
17. In the period 2016/17, only 29 per cent of MPs or peers who had written to us mentioned their interaction with the UK Statistics Authority during debate, either in the context that they had written to the Authority or that we had recently responded to an issue they had raised. In 2017/18, this increased to 64 per cent, with 7 Members of Parliament or peers noting their interactions with the Authority during chamber debates, Prime Minister’s Questions or Points of Order.

³ [Carwyn Jones AM, First Minister for Wales](#) and [Lewis Macdonald MSP](#)

⁴ [Royal Borough of Greenwich](#)

⁵ [Letter from Sir David Norgrove to the Home Secretary, 31 August 2017](#)

⁶ [Letter from Sir David Norgrove to the Foreign Secretary, 17 September 2017](#)

Casework from members of the public

18. In the period 2017/18, 41 cases were raised by a member of the public, which equated to 48 per cent of all casework for the year. This is an increase of 9 per cent on the previous year (2016/17), but only 3 per cent more than in 2015/16.
19. Casework from the public generally aligned with the overall trends in casework for 2017/18. The top theme in public casework was Health and Social Care (32 per cent). 46 per cent of these cases were in relation to the use/misuse of statistics.
20. The average time to respond to public cases was 27 days.