
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir David Norgrove

Miles Briggs MSP
M2.15
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
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(by email)

30 July 2020

Dear Mr Briggs,

Thank you for your letter of 9 July about a comparison made by the Scottish Government of COVID-19 prevalence in Scotland and England.

The sources used for this comparison were not immediately apparent. As the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) has made clear in past statements,¹ when this kind of information is used publicly to inform Parliament, the media and the public, it should be published in an accessible form, with appropriate explanations of context and sources. In this instance, the Scottish Government did not do so.

As you say in your letter, the sources you were provided with do not allow for a meaningful comparison to be made. The Scottish Government have since clarified to OSR that their initial source for prevalence in England was an unpublished estimate by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. We do not think that these sources allow for a quantified and uncaveated comparison of the kind being made here.

I enclose a copy of a letter from Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation, to Roger Halliday, Scottish Government Chief Statistician, setting out our conclusions in more detail. In future we expect to see clear communication of any data sources used and any limitations or uncertainties appropriately reflected.

Yours sincerely,



Sir David Norgrove

¹ <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/covid-19-production-and-use-of-management-information-by-government-and-other-official-bodies/>