



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Monica Lennon
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Sir David Norgrove
UK Statistics Authority
Via email: david.norgrove@statistics.gov.uk

11 June 2020

Dear Sir David,

Following your recent correspondence with the UK Government, I am writing to seek your guidance on Scottish Government statistics in relation to COVID-19 testing.

Proper and transparent use of statistics and data by governments is important at any time but especially during a national crisis. The Scottish Government have regularly stated that they believe that they publish more information and data on the COVID-19 situation than any other UK nation. You may be able to advise if this is the case. My immediate concern, however, is that there are serious issues with the data that is being made available, and the impact this is having on scrutiny.

On that basis, can you advise what assessment the UK Statistical Authority have made of the Scottish Government publications and other public bodies in Scotland?

In your letter to the UK Secretary of State for Health and Social Care you noted both existing issues and suggestions for future publications. I believe a number of these also apply to Scottish data and would welcome your advice on what can be improved in the Scottish context as:

- The connection between the number of people tested and the number of tests carried out is unclear. Although the publication delineates between the numbers tested through NHS Scotland labs and the UK test centres, there is no information on how many people have been tested through the latter route. Furthermore, it is not clear how many people from either route have been tested more than once, or how many tests results have been void or inconclusive.
- The information available does not give a full picture of the epidemiology in Scotland. The number of positive cases is likely to be an underestimate as it does not include positive cases identified through UK test centres. The Scottish Government are also carrying out community surveillance programmes but data from these is not regularly published.
- There is very limited information on the employment of people being tested. Key worker testing is only presented as a total figure, broken down by proportion for types of employment. This makes it more challenging to monitor increases in how many medical staff, care staff, police staff etc. have been tested. There is no detail on how many of these key workers have tested positive, despite regular requests for this information from opposition politicians.

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- Scrutiny of Scottish Government commitments is hampered by a lack of, or incorrect, statistics. More than three weeks after the Scottish Government commitment to regular testing for care homes, statistics on progress were first published on 10 June. However, within hours this had to be reissued due to errors. Information on nosocomial infections has been drip-fed from the Scottish Government who have then claimed that the data released cannot be used for scrutiny because it has not been validated. Finally, the Scottish Government have claimed that there is daily capacity in Scotland for 15,500 tests yet figures on capacity and the proportion used are not made public.
- On 10 June, data on the Test and Protect system was published for the first time but was insufficient to assess the efficacy of the system. There is no information on the average number of contacts identified per each positive case, no detail on how many contacts have gone on to test positive, and no geographical breakdown. There is also no explanation as to why the number of cases is significantly higher than the corresponding positive test results reported during the same timeframe. Finally, there is no information on how long the contact tracing process takes per case.

Resolving the issues with the UK testing statistics may help address a small number of these issues. Nevertheless, I do consider there to be significant improvements that could be made to data also provided solely by the Scottish Government. I therefore ask that the UK Statistical Authority review these matters and suggest any changes that should be made.

Everyone involved in data collection and publication is working under extraordinary pressure and their efforts are appreciated. The good governance that the public expects relies on the publication of clear, accurate and timely data and robust scrutiny of that data. Public confidence in the Scottish Government's Test and Protect system will only be achieved through clear and transparent reporting of data.

As you said in your previous letter, good evidence, trusted by the public, is essential to success in containing the virus and I would be grateful for your assessment of what improvements can be made by the Scottish Government and public bodies in Scotland to ensure that information on Covid-19 is transparent and trustworthy.

Yours sincerely,

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