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**Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation**Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP  
Chair, Procedure Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

23 August 2022

Dear Ms Bradley,

I write in response to the Committee's call for evidence for its inquiry *Correcting the record*.

The UK Statistics Authority and the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR), as its regulatory arm, have a responsibility to ensure that official statistics meet the public good. We provide independent regulation of all official statistics produced in the UK, and aim to enhance public confidence in the trustworthiness, quality and value of statistics produced by government. We do this by setting the standards official statistics must meet in the Code of Practice for Statistics. We ensure that producers of official statistics uphold these standards by conducting assessments against the Code. Those which meet the standards are given National Statistics status, indicating that they meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and value.

We also report publicly on systemwide issues and on the way that statistics are being used, celebrating when the standards are upheld and challenging publicly when they are not, intervening when statistics are either misused publicly, or quoted without sources being made clear. Our interventions policy<sup>1</sup> explains how we make these judgements in a considered and proportionate way.

Key to our interventions is the ask that people practise intelligent transparency<sup>2</sup>. Transparency and clarity support public confidence and trust in statistics and the organisations that produce them and minimises the risk of misinterpretation of statistics and data. Transparency allows individuals to reach informed decisions, answer important questions and provide a mechanism for holding governments to account. Statistics and data also underpin successful implementation of government policies, and individuals' views on the effectiveness of policy decisions.

Intelligent transparency is informed by three principles:

- **Equality of access:** Data quoted publicly, for example in parliament or the media, should be made available to all in a transparent way. This includes providing sources and appropriate explanation of context, including strengths and limitations.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/policies/our-interventions-policy/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/transparency/>

- **Understanding:** Analytical professions need to work together to provide data which enhances understanding of societal and economic matters, including the impacts of policy. Governments should consider data needs when developing policy and be transparent in sharing analytical and research plans and outputs with the public.
- **Leadership:** Organisations need strong analytical leadership, within and beyond analytical professions. Decisions about the publication of statistics and data, such as content and timing, should be independent of political and policy processes. These decisions should be made by analytical leaders, who should also be given freedom to collaborate across organisational boundaries to support statistics that serve the public good. Their expertise and decision-making authority should be endorsed by Permanent Secretaries.

As tools for understanding public policy, statistics and data rightly belong at the heart of Parliamentary debate. They can be a powerful support to an argument. In the pressured environment of an oral debate, it is only natural that some of these references to statistics, though made in good faith, will be misremembered, unclear, or misattributed. In these circumstances, it is always welcome when MPs make the effort to furnish the record with clarifications or additional information about their sources. This not only ensures that the House is fully informed, but also meaningfully improves the quality of media reporting and subsequent public debate.

At other times an MP may quote statistics correctly but confuse data from a private source with that already in the public domain. In particular, Ministers (who under the Ministerial Code are required to be mindful of the Code of Practice for Statistics) have access to a wide range of published and unpublished information from their departments and should take care to rely on the former when making their statements. However, as set out in our guidance for the transparent release and use of statistics and data<sup>3</sup>, when unpublished information is used unexpectedly, statistical officials in Government departments can play their role in setting the record straight by publishing the information as soon as possible in an accessible form, ideally on the same day. This can be done via an ad-hoc release, which need not be long, or technical. For example, the Department for Work and Pensions has a page dedicated to ad hoc statistical analyses<sup>4</sup>.

Our aim, one that we would hope the Committee agrees with, would be to see intelligent transparency being the default for all statistics and data, including those used by Ministers and parliamentarians.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely



Ed Humpherson  
Director General for Regulation

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<sup>3</sup> <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/regulatory-guidance-for-the-transparent-release-and-use-of-statistics-and-data/#pid-when-data-are-quoted-publicly-they-should-be-published-in-an-accessible-form>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/ad-hoc-statistical-publications-list>