

Simon Hoare MP
Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

(By email)

21 August 2025

Dear Simon,

Following the recent appearances before your Committee on 1 and 8 July, we subsequently received requests for further information. To that end, I hope this letter is helpful.

Deputy Chair Post

When did the Board agree to recommend Penny Young for appointment as Deputy Chair? Has it (and if so when) made a submission to Cabinet Office Ministers on the appointment?

In June 2024, the UK Statistics Authority notified the Cabinet Office sponsor team of its intention to recommend me as Deputy Chair of the Board following Sian Jones' departure at the end of her term. As this was during the pre-election period, colleagues were notified that this could not receive formal Ministerial approval (as required under the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007) until after the 2024 general election. As noted in the June 2024 Board minutes¹, Board members agreed to appoint me the 'acting' Deputy Chair, pending Ministerial approval.

The Cabinet Office sponsor team had advised that they should prepare submissions for Ministers relating to the work of the Authority. The Authority was not privy to the content of these submissions, nor of their timing. Authority colleagues reminded the sponsor team of the pending Ministerial approval in regular working level meetings. We received formal confirmation of Ministerial approval for the Deputy Chair appointment in July 2025.

¹ <https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/UK-Statistics-Authority-Board-Minutes-27-June-2024.pdf>

It has recently been agreed that the Authority will be able to write submissions to Ministers, in communication with the sponsor team.

Has UKSA raised concerns about delays in appointment with Cabinet Office, at any point?

The Authority had an open recruitment campaign for three non-executive directors (NEDs) to replace outgoing NEDs that was paused during the general election. Restarting the campaign after the election was a priority for the Board to remain quorate and it was discussed during regular working level meetings with the Cabinet Office sponsor team, alongside the matter of formally appointing the Deputy Chair. I understand that Sir Robert also raised the NED recruitment campaign with Minister Gould at his introductory meeting with her in October 2024. We received permission to restart the campaign shortly after and appointments were made in January 2025.

Board effectiveness

Sir Robert mentioned a review will shortly take place on Board effectiveness; could you please share a copy of results with us?

We would be happy to share a copy of the results following the completion of the Board effectiveness review later this year.

Sir Charles Bean recommended that UKSA establish a high-level group comprising representatives of HM Treasury, the Bank of England and other key stakeholders (of econ stats) to facilitate frank and open discussion with the UKSA Board; did this take place, and is the group still in place?

In response to the recommendation from the Bean Review, the Economic Experts Advisory Group (EEAG) was convened in August 2016 comprising of key users of Office for National Statistics (ONS) economic statistics. The role of the group was to act as a sounding board and source of advice.

At the October 2016 Authority Board meeting, the then Chair, Sir Andrew Dilnot, reported on the first meeting of the EEAG². The second meeting of the EEAG took place on 2 March 2017 and was a joint meeting with the Authority Board. Sir Andrew Dilnot provided a summary of the meeting³.

Sir David Norgrove chaired further meetings of the EEAG on 1 November 2017, 15 November 2018, 18 July 2019, 5 December 2019, and 13 October 2021.

The group did not meet in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic and it was not reconvened following the October 2021 meeting. There are a number of advisory committees and panels convened by the National Statistician to provide external

² <https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Papers-from-UK-Statistics-Authority-meeting-on-28-October-2016.pdf>

³ <https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Minutes-and-Papers-Authority-Board-2-March-2017.pdf>

independent advice on specific topic areas, such as on Consumer Price statistics, labour market statistics and data ethics⁴. The Economic Experts Working Group also meets four times a year. Its membership comprises external experts who help to provide user feedback on some of the key work programmes carried out on economic statistics as part of improving ONS economic capability.

The Authority's relationship with Parliament

How are requests for statistical information from the ONS within PQs generally handled?

Have you raised concerns with CO colleagues about the handling of recent PQs? Can you please provide a summary?

The MoU between the Authority and the Cabinet Office sets out the agreed working arrangement relating to PQs⁵. Cabinet Office Ministers account for business on behalf of the Authority where this can only be conducted by a Minister. The MoU says: *"Where appropriate Cabinet Office will refer Parliamentary Questions to the Authority to respond directly to the Member of Parliament. This will generally be appropriate where the Questions relate wholly to the Authority's own activities. The answer will be facilitated by the Cabinet Office Parliamentary Branch."*

Accordingly, the Authority's Parliamentary Unit receive all PQs via the Cabinet Office Parliamentary Branch. Roughly half of the PQs the Authority answer are originally tabled to the Cabinet Office (usually where the question directly mentions the ONS), and the other half are originally tabled to other Government Departments (for example, on crime or business statistics that the ONS holds) and are transferred.

The PQ answer is drafted and quality assured within the relevant statistical team. It is always signed off by the relevant Deputy National Statistician on the National Statistician's behalf, although the National Statistician may also review a PQ depending on the topic. The answers are prepared as a direct letter to the Parliamentarian, and this is sent as a PDF to Cabinet Office Parliamentary branch to facilitate publishing. The Minister responding (whether Commons or Lords) says (a variation on the following): *The information requested falls under the remit of the UK Statistics Authority. A response to the Hon gentleman/lady's Parliamentary Question of XX is attached.* Ministers may, if they wish, add further remarks in their covering response (separate to the letter), for example to add political commentary.

Ahead of publication, we understand that our PQ responses may be reviewed by Cabinet Office Special Advisers before the Minister is sighted. There is a longstanding convention that the Cabinet Office would not request amendments to

⁴ <https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/the-authority-board/committees/national-statisticians-advisory-committees-and-panels/>

⁵ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5eaa997dd3bf7f6523c81c1a/MoU_-_Cabinet_Office_UK_Statistics_Authority.pdf

the content of our PQ response, unless it is incorrect or, there is concern that it could be misinterpreted and required additional context.

Mindful of this convention and the MoU between the Authority and Cabinet Office, I understand that the Authority has in the past year sought clarification at a working level regarding two PQs requesting statistical information where the National Statistician had been asked to answer but the letter provided did not end up being used, with the Minister answering instead. If this occurs in future I have asked for the Chair to be alerted so that it can be raised with the Cabinet Office Minister, recognising the importance of the professional independence for official statistics.

The Authority also regularly engages with Parliamentarians directly with regards to matters relating to both the regulation and production of official statistics, such as through casework and official correspondence.

How does the UKSA's accountability to the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Parliament, and the Northern Ireland Assembly work in practice?

Unlike the current arrangements in the UK Parliament where PACAC holds the Authority to account, there is not the same formalised arrangement with a particular Select Committee in any of the devolved parliaments.

The Authority engages with Committees across the devolved parliaments either when requested, or following proactive engagement with relevant inquiries, and as with all our formal parliamentary engagement, a record of our written and oral evidence is published on the Authority website⁶. We have previously written to Committees in the devolved parliaments to ascertain if they might wish to fulfil a similar role to PACAC.

We lay our Annual Report and Accounts in the devolved Parliaments. We also undertake proactive engagement directly with members, for example holding events on the Census for England and Wales in the Senedd.

The Board meets in either Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland periodically (often for the September meeting) and next month will meet in Belfast. The Authority has also committed to explore opportunities to combine Board meetings with engagement with devolved Parliamentarians.

More broadly, the Authority's engagement with the devolved governments is guided by the Concordat on Statistics, an agreed framework for co-operation on professional matters such as coherency, international operations, data sharing, consultations, and staffing⁷. The Concordat on Statistics is overseen by the Authority's Inter-Administration Committee (IAC), which meets quarterly and is chaired by the National Statistician with membership including the Chief Statisticians of the devolved governments and the Registrar General for Scotland. Through the

⁶ <https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/parliamentary-committee-submissions/>

⁷ <https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/concordat-on-statistics/>

IAC we have developed programmes of work to promote coherent statistics on priority topics, better understand user needs for comparable data, and cooperate on efficient ways of working⁸.

Transformed Labour Force Survey

During the hearing on 8 July, Sir Robert and Yuan Yang MP discussed the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS). The original intent to transform the LFS was to have a shorter online survey. Stakeholder feedback during the creation of the TLFS meant that options to reduce the length of the survey, at that time, were minimal. Further detail regarding the development of the TLFS has been provided in a separate letter from the Acting National Statistician to the Committee today.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Penny Young', with a stylized, cursive script.

Penny Young
Deputy Chair

⁸ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/statisticsacrosstheuk/ukwidestatistics>