

Gordon Lindhurst
Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP



08th November 2017

Dear Gordon,

Following comments made at the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work Committee during your enquiry into Scottish economic statistics, I wanted to clarify roles in their production and scrutiny.

Scottish Government statisticians are part of the Government Statistical Service. As such, all Scottish Government Official and National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics¹. The Government Statistical Service is headed by the National Statistician, John Pullinger, who provides professional leadership to all statisticians in the UK government and devolved administrations.

As Scotland's Chief Statistician and Data Officer, my aim is to produce high quality, trustworthy statistics about Scotland, that then allow organisations to systematically make decisions informed by high quality data: saving time, money and lives.

I am responsible for the format, content and timing of Scottish Government Official Statistics publications. These decisions are based upon conversations with have with users of statistics through our ScotStat network. This is a set of over 2,000 users of Official Statistics in Scotland. Statisticians regularly consult this network electronically and face to face. This helps decide how best to use our statistical resource to deliver high quality statistics on the issues that matter most. I am also responsible for the recruitment, training and development of excellent statisticians across a number of public bodies in Scotland. These statisticians are professionally accountable to me.

The role of Scottish Government Ministers is to approve resources to produce Official statistics about Scotland. This is predominantly for statisticians based in Scotland, but also funds access to data and conducting surveys. In particular in the context of economic statistics we boost the Scottish parts of a number of UK wide household and business surveys to ensure more robust statistics about Scotland.

The committee has asked questions about the practice of pre-release access to statistics. I am responsible for deciding who receives pre-release access and when this happens under the Pre-release to Official Statistics (Scotland) Order 2008. I am accountable to the National Statistician and responsible for implementation of professional standards across the 20

¹ https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/images-codeofpracticeforofficialstatisticsjanuary2009_tcm97-25306.pdf

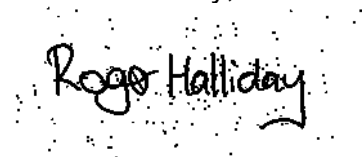
public sector bodies that produce official statistics in Scotland. In particular, I must report any breaches of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics to the National Statistician.

A number of economic statistics about Scotland are produced by the Office for National Statistics, for example in their regional accounts or regional labour market statistics. As head of statistics for ONS, John Pullinger is responsible for those statistics. Scottish Government is consulted about the content and format of these publications as a significant user of ONS statistics about Scotland. In addition, Scottish Government will help to assure the quality of these statistics by providing methodological advice or comparing to other known Scottish data.

The UK Statistics Authority and its regulatory arm, the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR), have a UK-wide remit and are completely independent of Government and all other public bodies in Scotland. OSR regularly assess Scottish Government statistics for compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. As the OSR Director General Ed Humpherson made it clear in a letter to the Scotsman on the 20th September, the Authority can and does comment publicly on the use of statistics in Scotland from an independent perspective².

I look forward to giving evidence to the committee on 14th November, accompanying the Cabinet Secretary for the Economy, Jobs and Fair Work and will be happy to discuss these matters further.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Roger Halliday". The signature is written in a cursive style and is surrounded by a light grey, textured background that looks like a scan of a document.

Roger Halliday

Chief Statistician and Data Officer

²<https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Letter-Ed-Humpherson-to-Frank-ODonnell.pdf>