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Convener
Scottish Parliament
Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee
Scottish Parliament Building
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21 November 2018

Dear Gordon

INQUIRY INTO SCOTTISH ECONOMIC STATISTICS

Thank you for your letter of 31 October.

My thoughts on Pre-release Access (PRA) have not changed since I set them out in my letter of 19 October so I will not restate them here.

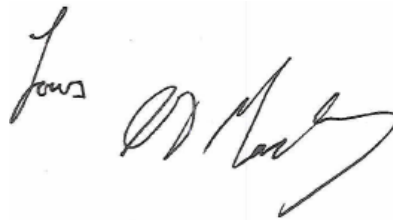
The UK Statistics Authority has a long-standing policy position on PRA. However Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation, is clear that in Scotland it is for the Chief Statistician to determine the appropriate arrangements for PRA to official statistics. PRA is consistent with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics which states that it should be in line with the rules and principles set out in legislation.

Since the ONS ended PRA to its statistics over a year ago, only the Bank of England has followed suit. Whitehall Departments still operate with 24 hours as per the English PRA Order. PRA continues to be provided to the vast majority of statistics releases in the UK. Therefore I don't agree that ending PRA is the prevailing view of the wider statistical community.

As you noted, at the Committee meeting on 2 October I stated that I remained open-minded on PRA. I am therefore happy to accept your invitation to have an informal meeting with yourself and the Deputy Convener to probe further.

The needs of the Scottish Fiscal Commission have been prioritised as set out in the Scottish Economic Statistics Plan 2018-19 which was published in August. The Scottish Government regularly meets with SFC colleagues to discuss progress in developing the range and quality of economic statistics for Scotland, and has responded to the first annual Statement of Data Needs with a progress report.

The Scottish Economic Statistics Consultation Group is chaired by the head of National Accounts in the Scottish Government and its membership includes key users across government, economic commentators, forecasters and the business community. The group meets annually to provide peer review and shape the development of Scotland's economic statistics, and its feedback informs the Scottish Government's Economic Statistics Plan for the year ahead. Future meetings of the group will review and provide peer challenge of the Scottish Government's future plans for economic statistics and how we respond to both the recommendations of the Committee and the Scottish Fiscal Commission's data needs.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Derek Mackay', is centered on the page. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

DEREK MACKAY