
Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation

Dr Nicola Williams
Fair Play For Women
(by email)

12 May 2021

Dear Dr Williams,

Thank you for your email of 8 April 2021. My team and I have considered the various points you have raised, and I welcome your engagement with us on these matters.

Statistics producers use breach reports to notify the UK Statistics Authority of occasions when certain principles or practices of the Code of Practice for Statistics have not been fully met, like failing to publish statistics in line with the Code's requirement to publish at 09:30. They include details of the breach, the impact of the breach and any actions the producer has taken or plans to take as a result. The breach reports highlight for us, and for other users, issues that we might not otherwise be aware of or observe. For example, they often involve notification of internal breaches of Pre-Release Access arrangements. Breach reports are published on the Authority's website¹, but OSR may decide to escalate if necessary, such as launching a deeper investigation. We would normally be alerted to more serious failings to comply with the Code through broader user concerns expressed directly to us or be alerted directly by senior statisticians (rather than via the breach reporting template which can take longer). We consider each case on its merits for further investigation, including what we would publish about the matter or expect the producer to publish.

You raise some important points about the need for ONS to be transparent on development issues and quality concerns. We consider that these questions need the kind of deeper investigation that our assessments would undertake, in order to determine overall compliance with the Code. You may be aware that we already have an ongoing assessment of the censuses in the UK underway². This assessment looks across the wide range of census developments involved in providing high quality census data and statistics to the public. As part of this, the assessment team will be reviewing the actions taken by ONS with regard to the guidance for the sex question against the standards of the Code. In line with our normal practice, we will consider

¹ <https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publications-list/?type=breach-report>

² <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/our-regulatory-work/assessment/current-future-assessments/assessment-of-censuses-in-the-uk/>

the specific concerns you have highlighted as part of this process and we may come back to you to follow up the points you have raised.

If you would like to discuss any of these issues or the ongoing assessment process in greater depth, my office will happily arrange a meeting.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Humpherson', written in a cursive style.

Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation