

Sent by email

7 October 2024

Dear Simon Hoare,

Congratulations on your election as chair of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Select Committee (PACAC).

We are writing to introduce you to the Royal Statistical Society and to set out some of our priorities for how statistics and data can most effectively inform government's evidence-based decision-making. PACAC, with its oversight role of the UK Statistics Authority, has an important role to play in the UK's statistical ecosystem and we hope that we will be able to work closely with you and your committee to support you in this work.

The Royal Statistical Society (RSS) is a membership society and charity that brings together all who have an interest in, and appreciate the value of, data and statistics. We are a professional body and learned society that advocates for the importance of data and statistics. The vision of the RSS is to have a world where data is at the heart of understanding and decision-making.

One of the key roles of the RSS, established in our Royal Charter, is to advocate for the role of statistics and data in decision-making. We believe that there is a crucial role for statistics and data both to improve decisions and inform the public – the importance of this was highlighted during the pandemic. A well-functioning statistical system means investment in infrastructure, transparency around the data used to inform decisions and decision-makers who are well-equipped to interpret statistical evidence.

As we are sure you are aware, Professor Denise Lievesley has recently conducted a review of the UK Statistics Authority. The [RSS has welcomed the findings of her review](#). This review also informed PACAC's recent report [Transforming the UK's Evidence Base](#), which we also warmly welcome. We would like to see PACAC continue to push for these recommendations over the next parliament and would offer our support to you in doing so.

We are working closely with the UK Statistics Authority to help implement some of the recommendations of the Lievesley Review – especially around the proposal for a new Triennial Statistical Assembly to identify users' needs. We are organising the first Assembly in partnership with UKSA for January 2025.


From the RSS's perspective there are two especially important issues: data sharing between government departments and pre-release access to statistics. There are several systemic and cultural barriers to data sharing between government departments that hamper the government's ability to develop a full picture of the state of the nation. Removing these barriers will increase the productivity of public service delivery. We are interested in the new government's proposals for a National Data Library, which could be an important addition to the UK's data infrastructure. We hope that this will incentivise the government to address issues around data sharing – we would be happy to support you in your scrutiny of this policy as it develops.



The RSS has long campaigned for an end to the practice of pre-release access to statistics. We believe that this practice – by which ministers and civil servants can access statistics before the wider public – has a harmful impact on our political system. First, it means that when the public see a department’s statistical release it comes with a pre-prepared press line. The public is sensitive to the potential spinning of information and that risks mistrust in the statistics themselves. Second, it perpetuates the impression that ministers control data and its release. Our view is that abandoning the practice could improve public confidence in official statistics. The Office for National Statistics does not allow pre-release access to statistics, and we note that there is a high level of public confidence in that organisation. The previous Parliament’s PACAC encouraged Professor Lievesley to consider this matter in her review – we hope that this interest will continue and would be happy to discuss how we might support you in pressing ministers to stop this practice.

In case they are of interest, we are also sharing with you some more detailed [briefings on how better data can lead to more informed and transparent decisions making](#). We hope you find the briefings helpful. We would be pleased to meet with you or a member of your committee’s team to discuss further and provide further information that may be of interest.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Sarah Cumbers
Chief Executive Officer



Dr. Andrew Garrett
President

