

Sent by email

3 August 2026

Dear First Secretary of State,

I am writing to congratulate you on your appointment as First Secretary of State and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and to introduce you to the Royal Statistical Society (RSS).

The RSS is a membership society and chartered body for statisticians and data scientists. We have over 7,000 members based in the UK and working across academia, industry and the Government Statistical Service. We are a charity with strategic objectives to improve the use of statistics and data in decision making and improve public understanding of statistics.

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 a Society we have a close working relationship with the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA) as well as both the Office for National Statistics and the Office for Statistics Regulation. As you will be aware, the statistical system is currently in the process of recovering from a challenging period in which it has experienced leadership changes and high levels of uncertainty in its core statistics. The interim chair of the UKSA has done an excellent job in setting the system on a more positive trajectory – but we are nevertheless very concerned by the amount of time that the statistical system has been without a National Statistician to provide system-wide leadership. I would ask that you please do what you can to progress the appointment as a matter of urgency – as well as seeking a permanent chair for UKSA.

There are a couple of our other policy priorities which fall under your remit that I would like to bring to your attention. First, improving data sharing between government departments. This was highlighted as an issue in Denise Lievesley's 2024 review of the UKSA. She highlighted 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. If the potential for data to help improve services is to be fulfilled, government must ensure that the UK's data infrastructure is fit for purpose. The cultural barriers to sharing need a clear direction from senior ministers to be overcome and, given your position, this is a tone that you would be able to set across government.

We have also 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 for two reasons. 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. The Office for National Statistics does not allow pre-release access to statistics, and we note that historically there has been a [high level of public confidence in that organisation](#).



The [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) states that “Access to statistics before their public release should be limited to those involved in the production of the statistics and the preparation of the release, and for quality assurance and operational purposes”. The Ministerial Code currently states that Ministers should “be mindful” of the statistical Code of Practice – which, on our reading, would suggest that ministers should stop pre-release access in their departments.

We brought this to the attention of your predecessors and were informed that there would be an internal review of the practice or pre-release access by the government. However, we are not aware whether this progressed or what the outcome was. I would be grateful if you could confirm the government’s position on this.

In summary there are two things that can be done, early in your tenure, to improve the way data is used and build trust with the public:

1. Instill a culture that encourages the sharing of data between government departments.
2. End the practice of pre-release access to statistics within your department – and use your role as first secretary of state to encourage this move across departments.

Please let us know if it would be helpful to have any more information on any of these points.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Sarah Cumbers
Chief Executive

