

Rt Hon Nicola Sturgeon MSP
First Minister
St. Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh EH1 3DG

Sent by email to firstminister@gov.scot

15 September 2020

Dear First Minister,

Pre-release Access to Official Statistics (Scotland) Bill

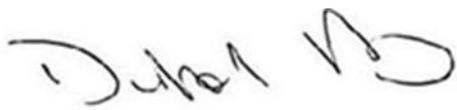
I am writing in support of the objectives set out in the Pre-release Access to Official Statistics (Scotland) Bill, which was recently introduced to the Scottish Parliament by its Economy, Energy and Fair Work Committee.

The Royal Statistical Society has long been campaigning for an end to the practice of pre-release access which, we believe, can corrode public confidence in official statistics. Indeed, we have previously given both oral and written evidence to the EEFW Committee, calling for reform.

We were very pleased when, three years ago, the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA) ended the practice of pre-release access to official statistics produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). As the UK's National Statistician at the time, John Pullinger, [argued](#): "the public benefit likely to result from pre-release access to ONS statistics is outweighed by the detriment to public trust in those statistics likely to result from such access." Quite simply, allowing a government privileged access to official statistics risks undermining public trust in those statistics as, for example, it creates opportunities for figures to be 'spun' to the media or 'buried' beneath other announcements. There is also persuasive evidence that, before the implementation of 2017's reforms, some market-sensitive statistics were affecting financial markets before they were published.

For these reasons, the RSS believes there is a compelling case for reform in the case of statistics produced by the Scottish Government – especially as they can currently involve a full five days of pre-release access. Accordingly, we would strongly encourage the Scottish Government to either support the Bill put forward by the Committee or, alternatively, develop its own proposals to achieve the fundamental objectives on which the Committee and the RSS are agreed.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Deborah Ashby OBE FMedSci
President, Royal Statistical Society

