

Professor Sheila M. Bird
Surveys, Design and Statistics Subcommittee,
Home Office's Scientific Advisory Committee.
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Dear Sheila

Statistical critique of Home Office press releases from February to September 2008 and 2009

I am writing on behalf of the Home Office to thank you for your subcommittee's report.

We acknowledge that the presentation and referencing of statistical information within press notices is an area where further improvement may be possible. The purpose of a Departmental press release is to inform journalists of the facts of a particular matter, in a way that is accurate, informative and readily digestible. Many of our press releases are complemented by the statistical bulletins and detailed analysis or research reports published independently, which provide the supporting evidence, and are readily available. Departmental press notices should not duplicate existing statistical reports, but are there to provide sufficient information, presented clearly. We agree that it is essential that the facts included are accurate, supporting evidence is made available and that the use of evidence is transparent.

I appreciate the discussions you have had with our statisticians and press office to discuss the specific statistical gaps in press notices and this is an opportunity for Home Office to lead the way in developing practical implementation of the *Code of Practice for Official Statistics* (as it has done in other aspects such as independent media briefings). As a consequence we have already been developing further detailed advice for the presentation of statistics by press officers, researchers and policy officials. You will also be aware that further work is ongoing in the Government Statistical Service context to drive up standards, as part of the implementation of the Code.

We will also welcome discussing the report further to identify different possible solutions to improving the use of statistical information in press notices. Please be assured that the Home Office is committed to ensuring that information it releases is accurate and appropriately sourced.

Yours sincerely

Professor Paul Wiles

