
Director General for Regulation

Mike Jones
Deputy Director & Head of Profession for Statistics
Department for Education
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20 Great Smith Street
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25 September 2017

Dear Mike

I am writing to you concerning two issues related to statistics produced by Department of Education (DfE).

Earlier in the year we received correspondence regarding information on the number and costs of academies which transfer between trusts. DfE has stated to users its intention to publish this information since early 2016. We have encouraged the publication of the data at numerous points over the summer and I am pleased to see that this data has now been published¹, and that similar data will be available for users on an annual basis. However the extended time frame between promising the release of data and its publication was excessive and left DfE open to criticism on its release practices. As Head of Profession for statistics you have the sole responsibility for deciding on statistical methods, standards and procedures, and on the content and timing of statistical releases. In line with this, I recommend that you publish development or work plans for new and existing statistics, especially those cited in Freedom of Information responses, indicating likely release dates where feasible.

More recently we also discussed the use of statistics within the DfE press release 'Back to school for thousands of pupils as new free schools open' issued on 6 September 2017. This press release reported an update of the provision of free schools, university technical college and studio schools. The press release quoted statistics on Ofsted inspection ratings for free schools and the number of free schools opened since 2011. These statistics were based on differing definitions of free schools and this was not made clear to readers. We shared our concerns with you on this and other specific issues within the release and are pleased that a revised release has now been published² which addresses these concerns.

More broadly, DfE produces data and statistics that seek to answer some important questions for the public and society more generally. These statistics have high public value. To maintain this value, we recommend that DfE should:

- Be transparent about DfE plans to develop and publish new statistics and ensure consistent messaging regarding these plans, providing as much detail to users as feasible including timescales for development

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/academy-trust-transfers-and-grant-funding>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/back-to-school-for-thousands-of-pupils-as-new-free-schools-open>

- Review and revise processes which ensure that you as Head of Profession for statistics have sole responsibility for the release of statistics
- Review the procedures for statisticians advising on the content of press releases and other statements or speeches which involve data and statistics. Ensure a more comprehensive final sign off by an analyst or statistician is incorporated into this process moving away from a simple factual accuracy check of individual numbers
- Seek to secure greater understanding of the importance of following the principles and practices set of in the Code of Practice with colleagues in communications and policy within DfE

I am happy to support you in undertaking these actions where appropriate, and I will be asking my team to monitor progress against these actions in the coming weeks and months.

Yours sincerely



Ed Humpherson

Director General for Regulation