



# **Annual Review of UK Statistics Authority Casework 2020/21**

**September 2021**

# Annual Review of UK Statistics Authority Casework 2020/21

## Contents

- Introduction..... 3
- Executive Summary ..... 5
- Background ..... 6
- Issues ..... 8
- Impact..... 11
- Management ..... 13
- Conclusion..... 14
- Annex A – Casework Summary: April 2020 to March 2021 ..... 15
- Annex B – Parliamentary discussion of casework..... 22

## Introduction

*Official statistics are an essential public asset. The UK Statistics Authority works to promote, monitor and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics. In accordance with the statutory requirements set by the Statistics and Regulation Service Act 2007, we strive to ensure that official statistics are accessible, reliable and that they serve the public good.*

*The Authority's casework function plays an important role in building public confidence in the production and use of official statistics. The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) is responsible for the Authority's casework function, undertaking monitoring to identify issues and investigating issues raised with the Authority. This report provides a summary of casework for the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 (2020/21).*

*This year, our report is split into three sections – Issues, Impact and Management. It provides a summary of the types of issues we have considered, the impact we have seen from our interventions, and some background on our processes and management approach. The report is supported by two annexes. Annex A provides a breakdown of the management information related to our casework, and Annex B provides examples of where our casework has been referenced in parliamentary debate.*

*To find out more about our casework process and how to submit a concern visit the Casework page on the OSR website: <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/casework/>*

## About the data

- Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole per cent.
- When calculating response times, cases that were closed on the same day they came in, have a 1 day response time, rather than 0.
- Internally generated cases are issues that have been noticed by internal staff. The OSR team monitor the use of statistics in public debate including social media.
- The categories provided in this report are provided to give an indication of the areas and issues covered by casework. There may be cases which could be classified as multiple categories, in these cases a decision has been made on which category is most relevant. In each case only one has been selected. As part of a range of process improvements OSR is looking to develop the categories and make improvements to the management information associated with Casework.
- Casework issues are broadly split into two categories – use/misuse of statistics, and compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics. Use/misuse is where there are concerns that statistics have been used inappropriately or incorrectly in public debate (whether deliberately or not). Code compliance assesses whether official statistics have been produced and presented in line with the Code of Practice for Statistics. OSR also considers whether official statistics meet the expectations of the code through its range of other [regulatory work](#).
- The time taken to complete casework can have a large level of skew and so, where possible, both the median and the arithmetic mean have been calculated. In order to offset the effects of this skewness the median is the headline measure used in discussion.

## Executive Summary



In the period 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021 the Authority considered **323 pieces of casework**. Nearly three times the number in the previous year (109 cases).



Health and Social Care made up **72% of all cases**, driven by the COVID-19 pandemic.



**Internally-generated casework** accounted for **16%**, a smaller proportion than in 2019/20.



**76% of cases** looked into this year were related to the pandemic in some form.



**48% of cases** related to **quality, reliability and trustworthiness of statistics**. The first time this had been the most common category.



The average (median) time taken from opening to closing a case was **10 days** (mean 15 days). Compared with 13 (median) and 20 days (mean) in 2019/20.

# Background

## What is casework?

One of the Authority's key roles is to use our voice to stand up for statistics and to represent the public, monitoring and reporting publicly where we have concerns and highlighting good practice. Casework is the tool that best allows us to be responsive and investigate issues quickly as they arise.

There are two main routes to an issue becoming casework:

- we identify the issue (self-generated casework)
- someone brings the issue to our attention

The Authority's [Interventions Policy](#), updated in May 2021, explains how cases are brought to our attention and the factors we consider in determining whether and how to intervene. The topics covered by casework can be varied, for example, around potential misuse of statistics, or questions may be posed about an aspect of the quality or presentation of a set of statistics.

The Authority's Interventions Policy was first published in 2017, and was designed to set out our practices for intervening when official statistics were misused in public debate or when the standards of the Code of Practice were not upheld. In December 2020, we published a series of [Frequently Asked Questions](#) to provide more information on when and why we intervene in statistical matters, and provide guidance and support for those raising issues with us. Following a period of consultation, a refreshed Interventions Policy was published in May 2021 which includes further detail on how we make decisions on whether to intervene on an issue.

## The role of the Office for Statistics Regulation

The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) was established in 2016 as the regulatory arm of the UK Statistics Authority. OSR sets the Code of Practice for Statistics and is responsible for the Authority's casework function, undertaking monitoring to identify issues and investigating issues raised with the Authority. OSR operates independently of statistical producers, including the Office for National Statistics (ONS). OSR's remit covers all official statistics across the UK whether produced in ONS, government departments or other specified bodies.

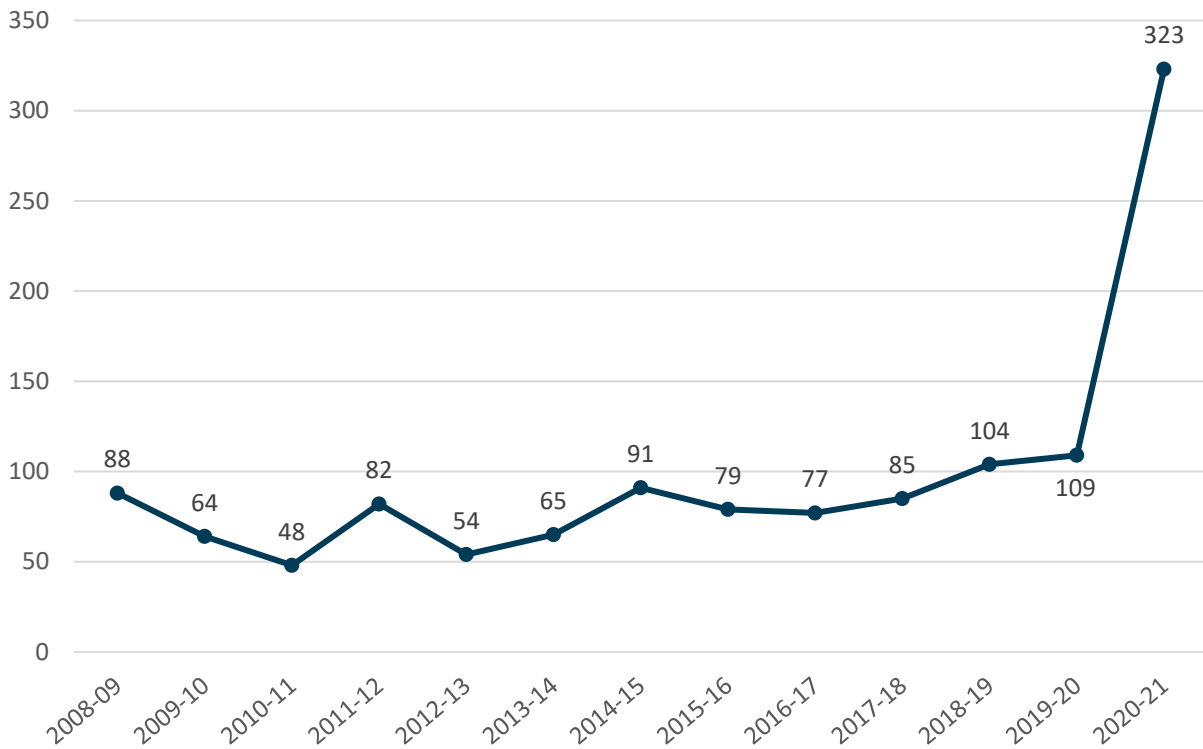
Once an issue has been identified, OSR will form a judgment on the issue and consider the most effective response, working with the Authority Chair where relevant. The decision on how to respond will be guided by the intervention policy and will focus on the best way to achieve the desired outcome. Interventions may be public or private, and might include telephone calls, letters, statements or related blogs. All issues we considered are published on our [issues log](#), whether they are handled publicly or privately.

OSR has been developing automated monitoring to complement monitoring and horizon scanning undertaken by individuals within OSR and issues raised with us. This is a project under continuous development, but has already supported OSR in identifying issues, for example through monitoring Twitter and highlighting relevant issues. Issues identified through this route sometimes become self-generated casework. It also allows OSR to monitor issues which can then be dealt with more effectively or quickly when subsequently brought to our attention by others.

## Context

This report focuses on casework raised (externally or internally) between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021 (2020/21). During this period, we considered 323 pieces of casework. This is nearly three times the volume of the previous year (109 cases), which was itself the highest number to date. There was a strong focus on the coronavirus pandemic, which led to unprecedented changes in society and the economy which have been reflected in our casework.

## Number of cases per year, 2008 to 2021



## Issues

### What issues did we investigate?

Issues we see raised with us via casework provide an insight into issues that mattered to the public, particularly those with an interest in data and statistics. Therefore it is no surprise that in the year from April 2020 to March 2021 the COVID-19 pandemic featured heavily in our casework.

Three quarters (76%) of the issues we considered in 2020/21 related to the COVID-19 pandemic in some form. The majority of these cases related to health and social care, including COVID-19 prevalence, testing, deaths, and vaccinations.

We also investigated a number of non-health related cases that were driven by the pandemic, reflecting the wide ranging effects that the pandemic has had on everyday life. The impact of COVID-19 on education was reflected in cases about COVID-19 prevalence in schools and school attendance. Casework also prompted [our review of the statistical models used to predict exam results](#) following the cancellation of exams in the summer of 2020, which we published in March 2021.

While COVID-19 dominated our casework programme last year, we continued to receive enquiries on other issues. Key themes included population and society, including the Census; crime and justice; and the labour market including cases on benefits and poverty. One of the most significant non-pandemic issues of this year was population estimates and housing projections; this led to OSR undertaking [a review of population estimates and projections](#), the findings of which were published in May 2021.

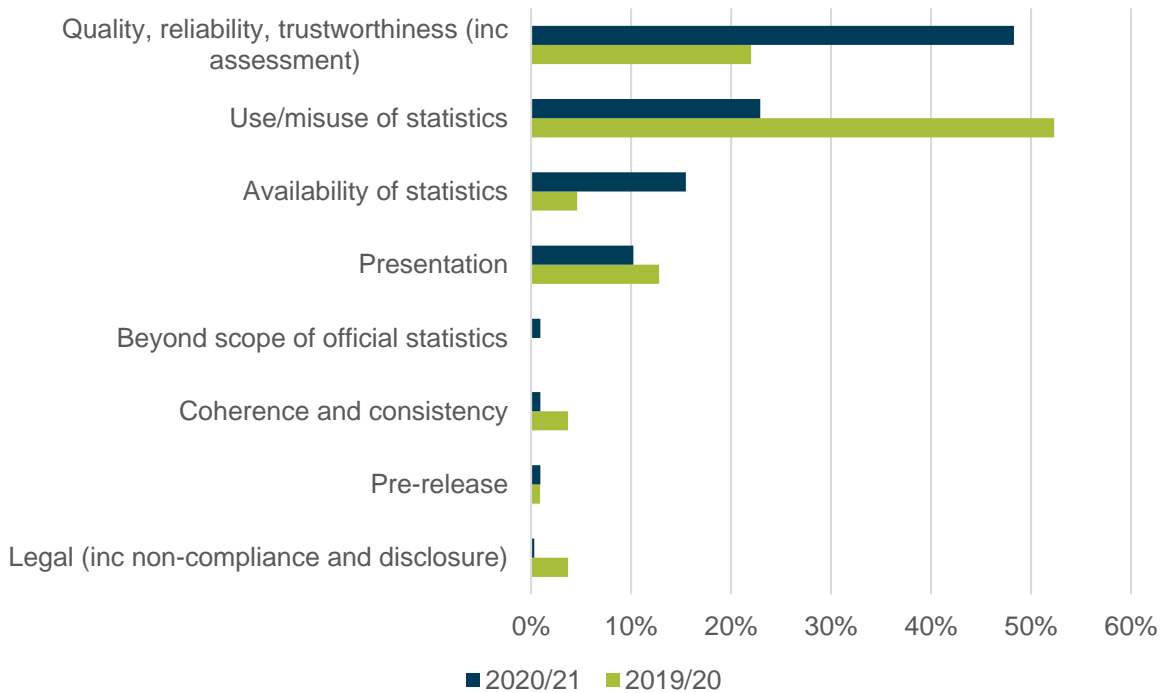
### What were the themes of our casework?

Casework complaints are broadly split into two categories – use/misuse of statistics, and compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics. This year, the most common issue for our casework was around the quality, reliability and trustworthiness of statistics. This is a fundamental aspect of the Code of Practice. Code compliance assesses whether official statistics have been produced and presented in line with the Code of Practice for Statistics. Use/misuse of statistics is another common issue – where there is a concern about statistics having been used inappropriately or incorrectly in public debate (whether deliberately or not).

This year (2020/21) was the first year where the use or misuse of statistics was not the most common issue. This year, the category with the highest number of cases related to the quality and trustworthiness of data (see Figure 2). Cases in this category often relate to the perceived accuracy of statistics; a common theme this year was that of the statistics being produced around COVID-19 testing and deaths, including the way these figures were being calculated. The increase in the quality theme this year reflects our observation that the pandemic caused an increase in public interest in the trustworthy production and publication of statistics, particularly as statistics were being used so frequently and publicly to justify decisions affecting peoples' everyday lives (for example whether or not to impose restrictions on people's lives because of the pandemic).



## Casework categories, 2019-20 vs 2020-21



Over the last year, we have been increasingly aware of concerns relating to transparency coming through in casework; for example, where statements have been made or published which cannot be backed up by data in the public domain, or issues which relate to publication delays or decisions not to publish official statistics as expected. Our role in promoting transparency was recently mentioned in [a report by the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee](#), who supported our work in this space and transparency in government more broadly. Over the last year (and into 2021/22) we have investigated a number of cases where transparency, or a perceived lack of transparency, has been an issue. We have set out our expectations around transparency in a number of recent outputs including our [State of the UK Statistical system report](#), a [statement on COVID-19 management information](#), and a standalone [statement on data transparency](#). Transparency will be a continued focus for OSR throughout 2021/22.

### **Case study: Transparency of COVID-19 data**

On 31 October 2020, at a Government briefing announcing introduction of coronavirus restrictions, the Government's Chief Medical Officer, Professor Chris Whitty, and Chief Scientific Officer, Sir Patrick Vallance, presented a series of data on the COVID-19 pandemic. The data underpinning the briefing were not in the public domain at the time of the briefing, and were not published until 3 November. This was not in line with our expectations about equality of access.

On 5 November, we published a [statement](#) setting out the steps that should be taken to support transparency, including the publication of data sources and supporting information on models. [An article](#) including a quote from the Authority Chair, Sir David Norgrove was also published on the UK Statistics Authority website.

The intervention highlighted the public interest in transparency, with widespread media coverage and visits to our website over the following 24 hours far exceeding our typical website traffic. It also led to senior officials restating their commitment to transparency, including [Sir Patrick Vallance writing publicly](#). Following the intervention, Welsh Government also announced plans to publish its briefing slides and data sources in a single place. In addition to specific changes, the intervention also provided a strong basis for further engagement emphasising that confidence in organisations producing statistics and data is supported by the publication of clear and accessible data.

## Impact

### What impact did Authority casework have in 2020/21?

The purpose of our casework function is to support our vision of statistics that serve the public good by protecting the role of statistics in public debate. While we intervene on specific issues, we aim to use our actions to support this broader ambition and drive sustained improvement in the production, publication and use of statistics. We measure our impact in a variety of ways:

- The publication of previously unverifiable data used in the public domain as a result of our intervention
- A change in the production practices, methods or behaviour as a result of our recommendations
- Improvement in the presentation or communication of the statistics
- An identified gap in available data and statistics filled
- A correction or clarification made to the public record

Our primary purpose is not to achieve media coverage, but we do monitor our media coverage as a way to understand the impact of our interventions.

Our interventions policy and casework frequently asked questions set out the considerations we make in making our interventions public. Where we feel an issue is substantial, has a high likelihood to mislead, or is heavily in the public interest, we are more likely to share our views publicly, for example through a public letter or blog. To increase impact, on the most significant issues we may combine a public letter with a written statement, or a social media campaign. We will also vary the scale and approach we take depending on whether it is our first intervention on an issue, or part of a repeated issue or longer-term campaign. As such, each intervention is tailored to the issue being investigated, but is always guided by our overarching principles. For transparency we will always list all issues we consider on our published issues log, whether or not having looked into the issue we consider there to be a concern which requires further action.

One way we can understand the impact of our interventions is by monitoring our mentions in the parliaments of the UK. Where issues are discussed at this level, it raises their profile and can contribute to positive change. An example of this during 2020/21 was Sir David Norgrove's letters to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care in May and June 2020 on COVID-19 testing data. These letters were mentioned in four separate debates in the House of Commons and House of Lords between 2–10 June. Annex B to this report includes full details of casework mentions in parliament.

In November 2019, we launched our own Twitter account (@StatsRegulation) and in July 2020 we launched a separate website for the Office for Statistics Regulation. Prior to this, we shared a digital footprint with the UK Statistics Authority. This has helped reinforce our identity as an independent regulator.

Throughout 2021/22, we will be exploring the impact of our work and casework outcomes in more detail, including a new programme of work on evaluation.

## **Examples of our impact**

This box sets out examples of casework investigated in 2020/21 for each of our identified areas of impact.

*The publication of previously unverifiable data used in the public domain as a result of our intervention:*

In September 2020, we looked into statistics on the distance that people were traveling to obtain coronavirus tests. The data to verify claims being made were not, at the time, published. We engaged with officials in the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) who committed to publishing the data as [an ad-hoc publication](#) to ensure equality of access. We followed up with [a public letter](#) welcoming publication and setting out our expectations. The data were later incorporated into the main [Test and Trace statistics](#).

*A change in the production practices, methods or behaviour as a result of our recommendations:*

In late 2020/early 2021, we handled multiple items of casework regarding population estimates and projections in areas of England including Coventry and the Wirral. This casework led to a [formal review of these statistics](#), and the producer department (ONS) [agreed to review](#) aspects of its methods and user engagement practices for the statistics.

*An improvement in the presentation or communication of the statistics:*

Throughout the pandemic, we have engaged with health bodies across the UK to recommend improvements to data and statistics. An example of this is our concerted campaign to push for improvements in Test and Trace statistics. As well as individual interventions such as [letters to health officials](#), we also conducted a [rapid review of the statistics](#) and an [associated statement](#). Over time we have seen great improvements in the way these statistics are produced and presented, and continue to push for the best statistics possible to help monitor and understand the pandemic.

*An identified gap in available data and statistics filled:*

In June 2020, we responded to [a letter from Stephen Timms MP](#) about the availability of statistics on the number of people who were given leave to remain in the UK in 2019 subject to the no recourse to public funds condition. We engaged with the Head of Profession for Statistics at the Home Office who [committed](#) to investigate how available administrative data held by the Home Office could provide meaningful information to best support public debate on hardship faced by migrants in the UK. Statistics on [No Recourse to Public Funds](#), specifically applications to change conditions of leave, were first published in July 2020. We continue to engage with the Home Office on these statistics.

*A correction or clarification made to the public record:*

In January 2021, we investigated claims about the impact of a trade deal on UK fisheries which were found to be inaccurate. We discussed these with the relevant department, and a revision was made to the [Government website](#) in February.

## **Example of media coverage of our casework**

In July 2021, we wrote to the Scottish Government about a press release that used unverifiable figures on antibody testing, urging publication of the data to ensure equality of access. This letter was picked up by several media outlets including [The Times](#).

# Management

## How did OSR respond to casework issues?

In 2020/21, we built on the developments of the previous year to continue to evolve our approach to casework. For example, given the numbers of issues raised with us relating to COVID-19 we more often looked to draw together our action around similar cases. While we continued to respond to concerns in the usual ways, we also more often used written statements and blogs. This enabled us to share our position and views on issues with a wider audience. This also helped by providing a reference document to point to when similar concerns were raised with us, and may have reduced the number of individual enquiries and complaints on issues where our position was already in the public domain.

We also increased our informal engagement with statistical producers to influence positive change at the working level. Particularly in relation to the new statistics and outputs linked to the pandemic, we understood that these were being produced under extraordinary circumstances and at great speed, and our traditional approaches to casework may not always be the best way to influence change and support those working in this difficult environment. While we still wrote formally where this was warranted, we significantly increased our informal engagement with producer teams to support output development, discussing issues and expectations, and making recommendations for improvement. We also applied this approach to our other regulatory work, carrying out rapid reviews of new outputs to assess their compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics. The overwhelming response from producers was welcoming and they felt it led to better outcomes.

During the pandemic, we used our resource flexibly to manage the sharp increase in casework. We streamlined our processes and temporarily restructured some of our teams. This enabled us to share the casework burden across a wider range of staff.

We have also taken steps to better manage our casework data internally, and increased the information we provide externally throughout the year. We update our issues log weekly, which provides a snapshot of the cases we are investigating, and also publish quarterly management information on how many cases we have handled in each quarter and the average closure times (median and mean). Internally, we have also been focusing more on the impact of our casework, including where we have made significant impacts on statistical production. This helps us learn from our experiences and adapt our approach going forward to deliver the best outcomes from our casework. In 2021, we conducted an internal review of lessons learned from our work during the pandemic so we can continue to improve our key workstreams, such as casework, going forward.

Improvements to our processes have contributed to quicker closure times in 2020/21 than in the previous year (10 days, down from 13 in 2019/20) despite the significant increase in volume of casework handled.

We expect to see a reduction in the number of cases handled in 2021/22 compared with 2020/21, but still higher than the 109 cases handled in 2019/20. In Quarter 1 of 2021/22, we opened 39 cases. We also expect to see an increase in the average response and closure times due to the wider variety of cases we are seeing raised with us, which require more bespoke analysis. Our Issues Log and quarterly management information are both available via the Casework pages on the website.

### Median days to reply or close a case by year:

Year	Median time to reply	Median time to close case
2016-17	23	[data not available]
2017-18	21	[data not available]
2018-19	25	20
2019-20	13	13
2020-21	11	10

## Conclusion

During 2020/21 the pandemic has led to our highest volume of casework to date. We have met this challenge with improved response times and some of our most high profile public interventions. Most importantly though, our casework has given us valuable insight into the issues which concern the public and expert users of government data and statistics. This has allowed us to use a variety of approaches to make the case for improvements and support the role of data in public debate. We will build on the lessons from this period to continue to drive improvements to data and statistics produced and used by government in future.

### List of Annexes

**Annex A Casework Summary: April 2020 to March 2021**

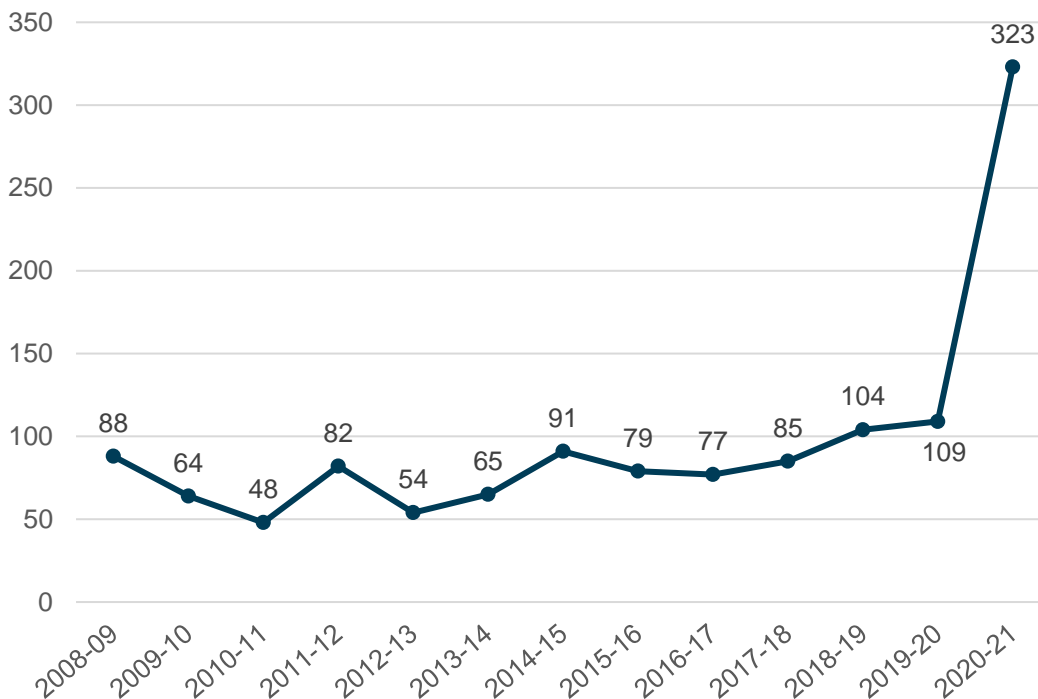
**Annex B Parliamentary discussion of Authority casework**

## Annex A – Casework Summary: April 2020 to March 2021

### How many cases did we receive?

A total of 1,269 cases have been considered by the Authority between 1 April 2008 and 31 March 2021 (see Figure 1). Between 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021 (2020/21) the Authority considered 323 pieces of casework.

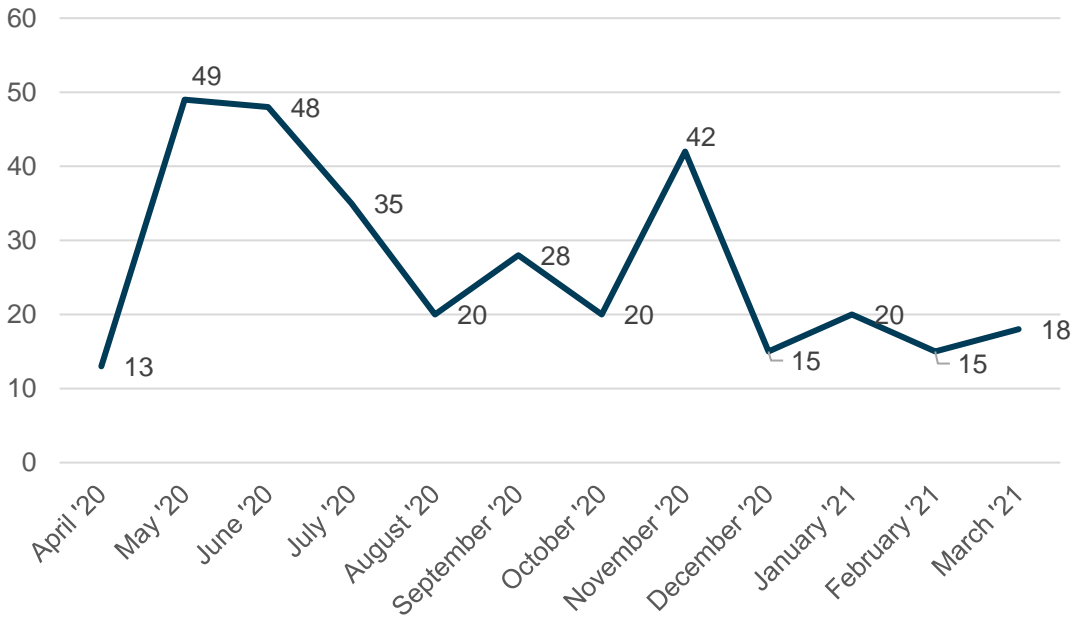
**Figure 1: Cases considered 2008/09 to 2020/21**



The month with the most cases in 2020/21 was May 2020 (49 cases). This was driven largely by issues relating to the COVID-19 pandemic, including statistics relating to deaths and COVID-19 testing.

The first half of 2020/21 was the busiest period for casework, at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Between April and September, the Authority handled 193 cases, with the remaining 130 between October and March.

**Figure 2: Cases logged per month April 2020 – March 2021**

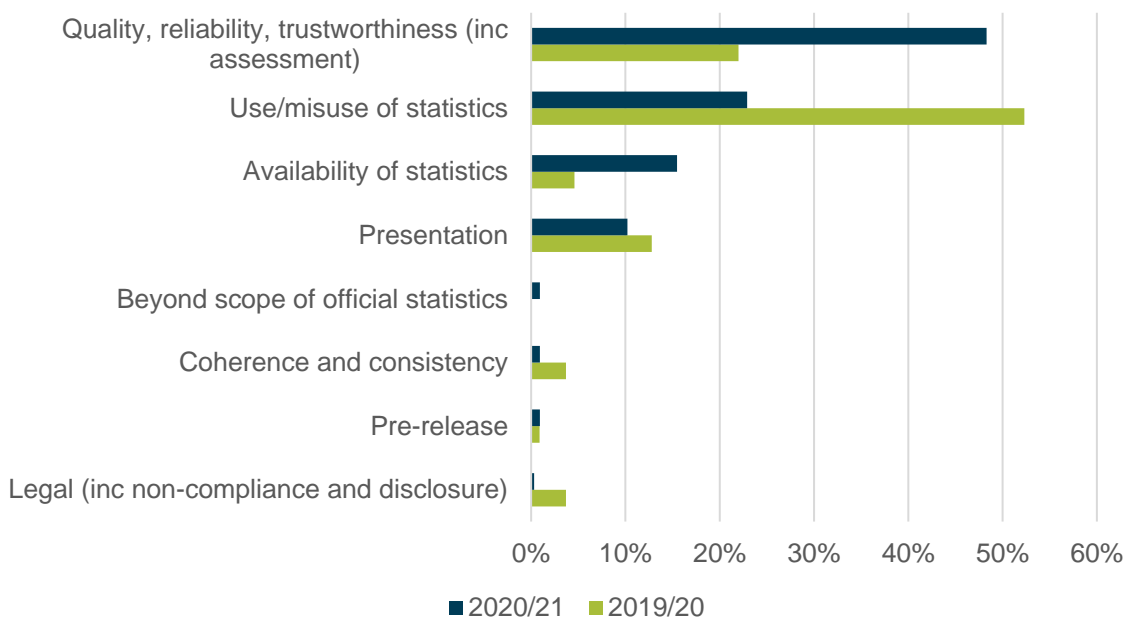


**What was the nature of the issues?**

This section summarises the types of issues raised through casework, comparing 2020/21 to the previous year. The types of issues considered remained broadly similar to the previous year, however quality, reliability and trustworthiness overtook use/misuse of statistics as the most common category of concern.

This year, the category with the highest number of issues raised was the quality, reliability and trustworthiness of statistics. This represents 156 cases (48%). These cases related to concerns about how well a set of statistics adhered to the expectations of the Code of Practice, which has three main pillars (Trustworthiness, Quality and Value). We expect all official statistics to adhere to these standards.

**Figure 3: Percentage of cases considered by category of concern**





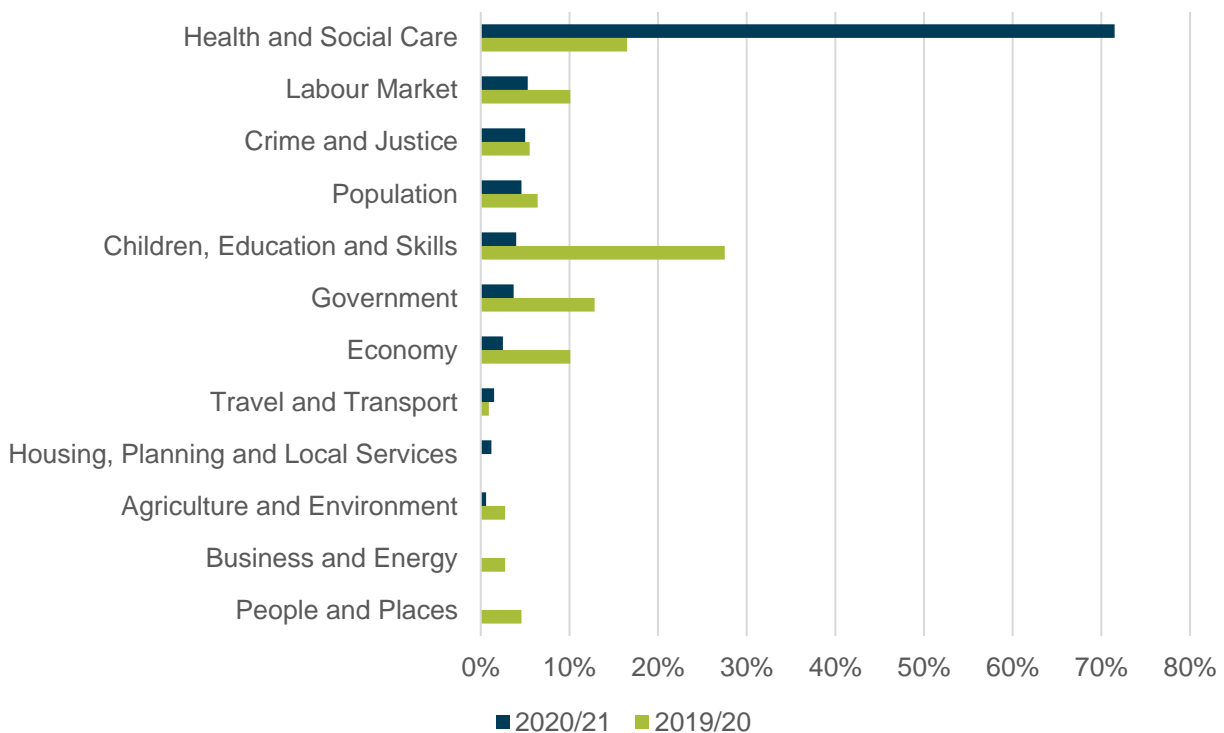
The next most common category, and the most common in the previous year, was about the use/misuse of statistics – 74 cases, 23%. This compares to 52% (57 cases) in 2019/20. These are often instances where statistics have been used in a way which someone considers potentially misleading, most commonly the use is by a public figure or in a press release from a public body. These types of issues can be picked up through individuals writing to the Authority, or through OSR’s media and social media monitoring. In 2020/21, of the 74 cases in this category the highest proportion came from members of the public (62%).

**What were cases about?**

Figure 5 shows the general themes of casework from 2020/21. These themes broadly correlate to the [OSR domains](#).

Health and Social Care was the theme with the highest number of cases this year – 231 cases, 72% of total casework. The next most common themes represented 5% of cases each – Labour Market, Crime and Justice, and Population – these represent less than 20 cases each. In the previous reporting period (2019/20) the most common theme was Children, Education and Skills (30 cases, 28%) and Health and Social Care the second most common (18 cases, 17%).

**Figure 4: Casework by theme**



**How long did it take to close cases?**

This section of the report provides information on the time taken to close a case. This is the time taken between opening a case to closing a case. Over recent years, OSR has worked to improve processes so that more cases are turned around more quickly. However, it is important to note that this is never at the expense of making an informed judgment. Therefore, while closure times and response times are important, it is not the primary metric driving casework.

The report sets out the average time to close a case, giving the median and mean. The median is considered the headline measure as it best reflects the typical experience. In 2020/21 the median time taken to close a case was 10 days, compared with 13 days in 2019/20. The mean time taken to close a case in 2020/21 was 15 days. This number is higher than the median as it is more strongly influenced by a relatively small number of longer cases. The mean time taken to close a case in 2019/20 was 20 days.

The time taken to close a case covers internally and externally generated casework. The date of opening a case could be the date a concern is received from an external source or the date an issue is identified. The date a case is closed is the point at which the issue has been considered and any necessary action taken. For externally generated casework this will usually include a response to the person or organisation that raised the concern. Some longer-term follow up actions, as well as the impact of the casework, will be tracked separately.

OSR seeks to respond to all those who email or write whether or not it agrees with the concern raised. Casework can also result in correspondence with the individual or organisation a concern relates to. Some of the correspondence will be published on [our website](#) (or the [UK Statistics Authority website](#) where a letter was sent by the Chair) and some will be private.

Internally generated cases may not lead to any formal correspondence. For example, once a case has been considered no further action may be deemed necessary, or it could be resolved through informal engagement with stakeholders and departments.

These averages mask a lot of variation in response times. Table 1 shows that in 2020/21:

- 50% of cases were closed in ten days or fewer (45% in 2019/20)
- 88% of cases were closed within 30 days (79% in 2019/20).
- there were 11 cases that were closed more than 50 days after they were opened. Cases that take this long tend to be complex cases, or require lots of engagement with external departments or stakeholders.

**Table 1: Days from opening to closing a case 2020/21**

Casework Closure Time (Days)	Totals	Cumulative Totals	Percentages	Cumulative Percentages
<b>0-10</b>	162	162	50%	50%
<b>11-20</b>	80	242	25%	75%
<b>21-30</b>	41	283	13%	88%
<b>31-40</b>	18	301	6%	93%
<b>41-50</b>	11	312	3%	97%
<b>51-100</b>	11	323	3%	100%

There are a range of factors which will influence the time taken to respond, for example the profile of the issue, the number of organisations which need to be engaged and the type of issue being considered. Table 2 shows the average days taken to close a case by type of issue (median and mean).

**Table 2: Average days to close a case by issue type**

Issue type	Count of cases	Median days to close a case	Mean days to close a case
Availability of statistics	50	6	11
Beyond scope of official statistics	3	10	8
Coherence and consistency	3	7	7
Legal (inc. non-compliance and disclosure)	1	47	47
Pre-release	3	9	8
Presentation	33	8	14
Quality, reliability, trustworthiness (inc. assessment)	156	12	17
Use/misuse of statistics	74	12	13

OSR aims to send an acknowledgment of any correspondence within one working day, for longer running cases updates will be provided as the work progresses.

Unfortunately, due to the process used to archive older casework data the time to reply is not available and so median values for years prior to 2016 are not available. Additionally, prior to 2018 no date for closing a case was recorded in cases where a reply was not sent out. These combined issues mean that limited data are available for examining changes across time.

It should be noted that the time to reply and time to close (Table 3) are not directly comparable as not all cases receive a direct reply; as above, some internally-generated cases are closed with no further action or closed with informal action, such as discussion with a producer department. ‘Median time to reply’ represents the subset of cases to which a written reply was sent whereas ‘Median time to close case’ is the average closure time for all cases opened by OSR.

**Table 3: Median days to reply or close a case by year**

Year	Median time to reply	Median time to close case
<b>2016-17</b>	23	<i>[data not available]</i>
<b>2017-18</b>	21	<i>[data not available]</i>
<b>2018-19</b>	25	20
<b>2019-20</b>	13	13
<b>2020-21</b>	11	10

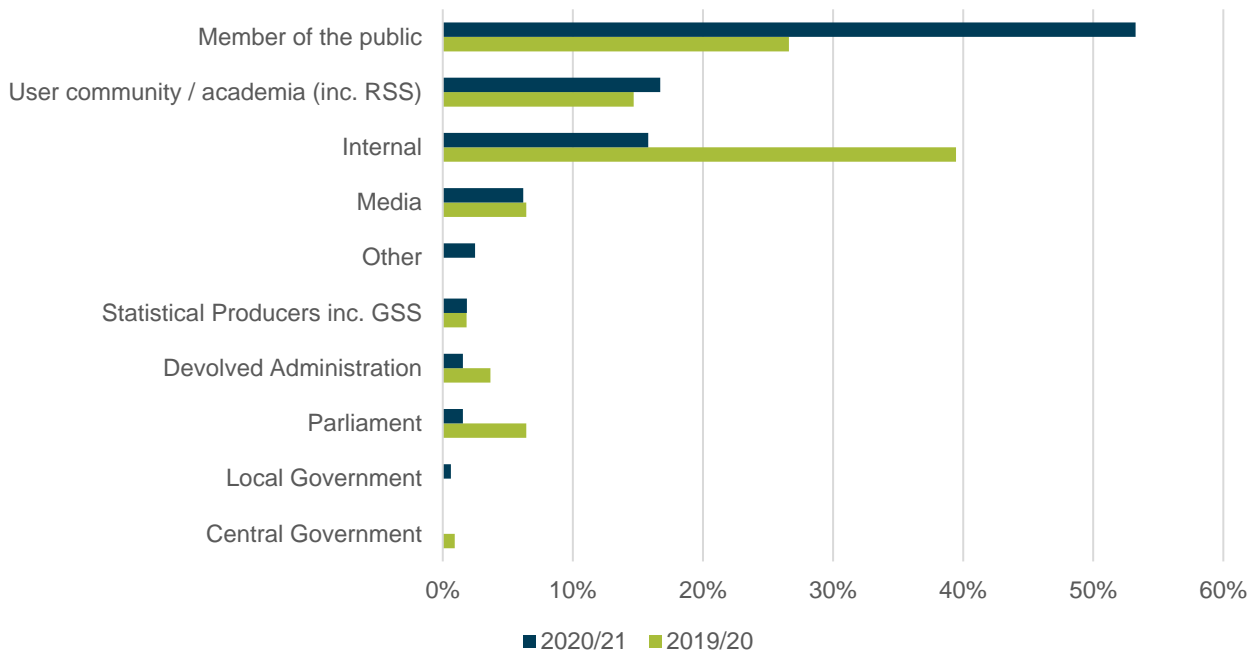
### **Who raised the issues?**

This section summarises how casework was initiated including which groups raised casework.

We categorise these as either internal (i.e. through OSR’s own monitoring) or external, and then external cases are broken down further by a series of categories e.g. members of the public.

Of the 323 cases considered in 2020/21, the highest proportion of cases came from members of the public (172 cases, 53%). This is a substantial increase on 2019/20 where casework from the public represented 27% of all cases. Internally generated casework made up 16% of all cases (51 cases), a smaller proportion but higher number than in 2019/20 (39%, 43 cases).

**Figure 5: Casework by source**



### Health and Social Care Casework

This year, of the 323 total cases, 231 (72%) of these related to Health and Social Care, with 97% of those (225 cases) related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The majority of cases in the Health and Social Care theme were received from members of the public (56%).

The median closure time of health and social care related casework was eight days (mean 13 days). Within this, 56% of cases were closed in 10 days or fewer, and 90% were closed in 30 days or fewer.

### Internally generated casework

Of the 51 internally generated cases, 13 cases led to some form of correspondence, 28 leading to informal action such as a discussion with a department. One case was transferred to another department, and the remaining nine cases led to no further action.

82% of internally-generated casework was in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Government and Parliaments

The Authority received nine cases from members of Parliaments in the UK and Devolved administrations, and one case from a parliamentarian's office. This includes cases raised by current members of Westminster and Scottish Parliaments; there were no cases raised by members of the Welsh or Northern Irish Parliaments in 2020/21. This year, there was an even split between Westminster and Scottish Parliaments with five cases each. There

were also two cases from local government. In ten of the 12 total cases (83%) the Authority's response was published.

The most common theme of the casework raised by these groups was health and social care – 7 cases, 58% - all of which were related to data and statistics on COVID-19.

In 2020/21, Sir David Norgrove wrote publicly to parliamentarians on 12 occasions relating to nine separate interventions. These were sent to five Members of Parliament (MPs), four Members of the Scottish Parliament (MSPs), and one Member of the Senedd (MS) – however the latter was related to an intervention in the previous reporting period (2019/20).

### **Casework discussed in parliament**

During the period from 1 April 2020 and 31 March 2021 Authority interventions have been mentioned in the House of Commons and House of Lords 14 times. There was one mention of an intervention during this period in the Scottish Parliament. There were no mentions of the Authority, OSR or our interventions in the Welsh Parliament.

Annex B provides further details of references to Authority interventions in Parliaments within the UK, including excerpts from Hansard<sup>1</sup> and the Official Report<sup>2</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://hansard.parliament.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://archive2021.parliament.scot/parliamentarybusiness/ormain.aspx>

## Annex B – Parliamentary discussion of casework

OSR Intervention	Date of mention	Where mentioned	Details
Test and Trace	2 June 2020	House of Commons	<p>During a <a href="#">debate on the Government's COVID-19 response</a> on 2 June 2020, Sir David Norgrove's letter to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care was referenced in two exchanges.</p> <p>(1) “On managing the virus, one of the tests is on whether we can manage the virus, but, as the Secretary of State has said, that depends on testing and tracing. There is now capacity for more than 200,000 tests, but there is still a lack of clarity about how that figure is arrived at. The UK Statistics Authority has written to him today, saying that his figures are still “far from complete and comprehensible”, that the testing statistics still fall well short of standards in the Code, and that it is not surprising that testing data is mistrusted...” – <b>Jonathan Ashworth MP</b></p> <p>“The hon. Gentleman asks, rightly, about the NHS test and trace capability. That is up and running, and working well. He asks how I can say it is working well. It is working well because thousands of people have been contacted and their contacts are being traced. So the system is working. We absolutely will publish data on that, but, as the letter from the UK Statistics Authority this morning shows, it is very important that we get that data publication right. We will work with the UKSA to make sure it is happy with how we are publishing that data, to make sure we get the data published in a reasonable and sensible way, one that also supports the operation of NHS test and trace, which we agree is a critical part of the next stage. I commit to publishing that data and to working with the UKSA on how it is put together.” – <b>Matt Hancock MP</b></p> <p>...</p>

			<p>(2) "...Does the Secretary of State agree that public confidence is critical in this next phase of dealing with the virus? There is no doubt that confidence has plummeted over the last few weeks. Does he agree that to restore that confidence we need a great deal more transparency about the test, track and trace system—numbers, who has been contacted, and so on—so people feel that if they are contacted action will follow?" – <b>Lucy Powell MP</b></p> <p>"The hon. Lady raises a very important point about test and trace. Subject to patient confidentiality, which I take very seriously, of course we will publish data on the test and trace system and will work with the UK Statistics Authority on the best way to do that. I spoke to David Norgrove earlier today about that and how our teams should work together to make sure we can publish it in the right and appropriate way." – <b>Matt Hancock MP</b></p>
<b>Test and Trace</b>	3 June 2020	House of Commons	<p>During <a href="#">Prime Minister's Questions on 3 June 2020</a>, Sir Keir Starmer MP, Leader of the Opposition, referenced Sir David Norgrove's letter of 2 June to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.</p> <p>"...But the problem when the Prime Minister uses statistics is that the UK Statistics Authority has had concerns on more than one occasion. In a strongly worded letter to the Health Secretary yesterday, the chair of the UK Statistics Authority said that the statistics "still fall well short of...expectations. It is not surprising that given their inadequacy data on testing are so widely criticised and often mistrusted." Can the Prime Minister see how damaging this is to public trust and confidence in his Government? – <b>Sir Keir Starmer MP</b></p>
<b>Test and Trace</b>	3 June 2020	House of Lords	<p>During a Lord's debate on the <a href="#">Covid-19 response on 3 June 2020</a>, Sir David Norgrove's letter to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care was mentioned during two exchanges.</p> <p>(1) "It is very concerning that the Government are refusing to publish information about the reproduction rate per region, the viability of home test kits, the number of people tested daily, and the number of people</p>

contacted under the new contact tracing system, to list a few examples. Furthermore, the data that the Government have published has been decried as highly misleading by the head of the UK Statistics Authority. Will the Minister commit to urgently publishing these figures to ensure openness, transparency and public confidence in the Government's approach?

Does the Minister share the concerns of scientists, including members of SAGE, and public health leaders that the Government's NHS Test and Trace system was not yet robust enough to quash any resurgence of the virus and should have been "fully working" before lockdown measures were eased? A final comment on "test, track and trace" is that the Cummings saga was bad enough, but we now have the chairman of the UK Statistics Authority making very robust suggestions that government presentation may not be what it seems. Sir David Norgrove has pulled no punches and makes it abundantly clear that he thinks the presentation of testing numbers in England is unacceptable." – **Baroness Thornton**

...

(2) "...Yesterday, the Office for National Statistics (*sic*) wrote its second letter in four weeks to the Secretary of State, challenging him in the bluntest terms and accusing him of obfuscation and confusion on the number of daily tests carried out. Can the Minister give the House a date when we will be able to see real and consistent data on testing, approved by the ONS, back-dated and adjusted, so that there is no room for any misunderstanding?" – **Baroness Brinton**

"...I utterly agree with both noble Baronesses that people need to be able to understand the data—it is a really important project—but perhaps I may share a genuine and honest dilemma. We have sought to publish data as promptly and in as much quantity as we humanly can. The result of that, though, is that it is not all audited and checked and therefore it is often revised. That creates the kind of problems which David Norgrove has quite



			<p>rightly identified. We are working extremely closely with David to try to close the gap. We are working closely with the Office for National Statistics to ensure that all future data is fully audited, but it is usual in peacetime to take months to iron out these processes before the publication of official data, and data is not published on a daily basis for exactly the reasons identified by both noble Baronesses. We have real and consistent data published by the ONS which is properly audited. That is completely robust data and we try our hardest to make right the data that goes into the daily updates. However, there is a tension between being prompt and being procedural, and we have sought hard to try to hit the right combination of the two.” – <b>Lord Bethell</b></p>
<b>Test and Trace</b>	10 June 2020	House of Commons	<p>During a debate on <a href="#">10 June 2020 on Health Protection Regulations</a>, our interventions on Test and Trace statistics were mentioned.</p> <p>“We take no pleasure from the fact that the system is in chaos and that the UK Statistics Authority has been forced to intervene over concerns about testing data, or that the Association of Directors of Public Health has called on the Government to delay easing lockdown until the tracing system has been proved to be more robust and there can be confidence about what the impact will be on continuing trends in infection rates...” – <b>Justin Madders MP</b></p> <p>“...I absolutely appreciate the hon. Gentleman’s desire for data on the testing programme—both the numbers and what they tell us. However, as he said, it is really important that we share accurate data that is supported by the UK Statistics Authority, and we are working with it to make sure that we share reliable, robust, informative data on the testing programme.” – <b>Helen Whately MP</b></p>
<b>No Recourse to Public Funds</b>	18 June 2020	House of Commons	<p>During a debate on <a href="#">the impact of COVID-19 on Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Communities on 18 June 2020</a>, Stephen Timms MP referenced his letter to the Authority on those with no recourse to public funds, which was treated as casework.</p>

			<p>“...Last month, I asked the Home Office a written parliamentary question: how many people were given leave to remain with no recourse to public funds in 2019? I received the reply on 20 May: “The information you have requested is not assured to the standard required by ONS for publication and as it would be too costly to do so, we are unable to provide it” – in other words, “We’re not going to bother answering the question.” I have asked the UK Statistics Authority what it makes of that answer and the attempt to hide behind the Office for National Statistics. I am looking forward to receiving the chair’s reply, which will arrive, I believe, quite shortly...” – <b>Stephen Timms MP</b></p>
<b>COVID-19 prevalence in Scotland</b>	30 July 2020	Scottish Parliament	<p>During a meeting of the <a href="#">Scottish Parliament on 30 July 2020</a>, our intervention on COVID-19 prevalence in Scotland was referred to in debate by Jackson Carlaw MSP.</p> <p>“The First Minister concluded her statement by reminding everybody of the importance of facts. However, when Parliament met on 9 July, the First Minister said repeatedly, in response to questions from me, that the prevalence rate of the coronavirus was five times lower in Scotland than elsewhere in the UK. Subsequently, that figure was widely reported and repeated in the media. This morning, the director general for regulation at the UK Statistics Authority wrote to us and—I know—to the Scottish Government as well, giving his verdict on whether that statistic was true, and his verdict is damning. When challenged at the time, the Scottish Government said that it compared its Scottish Government Covid-19 modelling to a survey statistic for England, but when the UK Statistics Authority investigated and asked for the source of the statistic, the Scottish Government changed its story and said that it was something else entirely—it was now a figure from a London university, and it was for the whole UK. Why did the Scottish Government mislead the public about the source of that claim?” – <b>Jackson Carlaw MSP</b></p> <p>“I do not think that that is the case. I stand by the view, which I think is backed up by the evidence, that the prevalence of the virus is significantly lower in Scotland right now than it is in England, although it is not something that I have a shred of complacency about. The issue with the statistic that I cited before is that the English part of that UK statistic has not been published. That is not down to me;</p>

			<p>the UK Government has not published it. Perhaps Jackson Carlaw will join me in encouraging the UK Government to do so...” – <b>Nicola Sturgeon MSP, First Minister</b></p> <p>“Well, I am afraid that that is not what the UK Statistics Authority had to say. Here is what it said: “the sources you were provided with do not allow for a meaningful comparison to be made.” However, that is exactly what the First Minister did ... Here is what the UK Statistics Authority says: “We do not think that the sources above allow for a quantified and uncaveated comparison of the kind that was made.” Will the First Minister give us a straight admission that she made a comparison that she may have chosen to believe but that was not true?” – <b>Jackson Carlaw MSP</b></p> <p>“The figures were not published—I accept the views of the statistics regulator on that—but I have a few points to make ... I may have used a statistic that was not published—the statistics regulator has, rightly and properly, made his views known on that, and I respect them—but, for goodness’ sake, there are plenty of other published measures that lead to the same conclusion...” – <b>Nicola Sturgeon MSP, First Minister</b></p> <p>“...The First Minister is well prepared, and she is the first to bring a statistic to any debate. She made that claim about the prevalence rate seven times, and again as recently as last week. It was not a slip of the tongue. Neither is it for the First Minister to say that she thinks that it is all fine—that it is all very complicated and that she has to try to imagine what the numbers were—or to suggest that the UK Statistics Authority has been anything other than damning. The First Minister knows that the prevalence statistic was wrong, and she knows why it was wrong.” – <b>Jackson Carlaw MSP</b></p>
<p><b>No Recourse to Public Funds</b></p>	<p>14 Sept 2020</p>	<p>House of Lords</p>	<p>During a debate on the <a href="#">Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill on 14 September 2020</a>, our intervention on no recourse to public funds was mentioned in two exchanges.</p>

			<p>(1) “Another concern, as we have heard, is the lack of official data. There has been an exchange between the chair of the Work and Pensions Committee, the UK Statistics Authority and the Home Office on the issue...” – <b>Baroness Lister of Burtersett</b></p> <p>...</p> <p>(2) “The noble Baroness also talked about the provision of data. In his letter to the UK Statistics Authority, the Home Office chief statistician committed “to further investigate the administrative data we hold to assess whether it can provide any meaningful information on the issue of hardship specifically”. However, given the fluid nature of migration, it is quite difficult to provide an accurate figure of how many people are subject to NRPF, but we will do our best to get some meaningful figures.” – <b>Baroness Williams of Trafford</b></p>
<b>2020 GCSE and A-Level exams</b>	23 Sept 2020	House of Lords	<p>During a Lords debate on <a href="#">A-Level results on 23 September 2020</a>, our review of the use of statistical models to predict exam results, which was prompted by an item of casework, was referenced.</p> <p>“My Lords, all four nations of the United Kingdom attempted to use this method. At the moment, the Office for Statistics Regulation, which is part of the UK Statistics Authority, is looking at the algorithms used for all four nations. However, it is intended that exams will go ahead this summer.” – <b>Baroness Berridge</b></p>
<b>No Recourse to Public Funds</b>	6 Oct 2020	House of Lords	<p>During a Lords debate on the <a href="#">Immigration and Social Security Co-ordination (EU Withdrawal) Bill on 6 October 2020</a>, Lord Parkinson of Whiteley Bay referenced our intervention on no recourse to public funds.</p> <p>“The noble Lord, Lord Rosser, and the noble Baroness, Lady Hamwee, asked about the statistics that would be produced – not “reduced” – on this. The Home Office chief statistician recently replied to a letter from the UK Statistics Authority on the subject.” – <b>Lord Parkinson of Whiteley Bay</b></p>

<p><b>No Recourse to Public Funds</b></p>	<p>8 Oct 2020</p>	<p>House of Commons</p>	<p>During a debate on <a href="#">No Recourse to Public Funds on 8 October 2020</a>, our intervention was mentioned during two exchanges.</p> <p>(1) "...On 20 May, I asked: "how many people were given leave to remain in the UK subject to the no recourse to public funds condition in 2019." I asked for a number. On 2 June, the Minister's colleague replied: "The information you have requested is not assured to the standard required by ONS for publication and as it would be too costly to do so, we are unable to provide it." In other words, "We're not interested in answering your question." I complained about that answer to the UK Statistics Authority, and it upheld my complaint. The correspondence is on its website. The Home Office head of statistics responded on 3 July..." – <b>Stephen Timms MP</b></p> <p>...</p> <p>(2) "The letter from the Home Office chief statistician dated 3 July, which is on the UK Statistics Authority website, states: "Home Office administrative data only captures information on whether visas are subject to NRPF conditions for in-country extensions." I have asked how many there are, but received no answer." – <b>Stephen Timms MP</b></p>
<p><b>COVID-19 data transparency</b></p>	<p>9 Nov 2020</p>	<p>House of Lords</p>	<p>On 9 November, a Lords debate took place on the <a href="#">transparency and accuracy of COVID-19 statistics</a> prompted by our statement published on 5 November.</p> <p>(1) "To ask Her Majesty's Government, further to the statement by the Office for Statistics Regulation on the transparency of data related to COVID-19, published on 5 November, and reports that charts on projected daily deaths from COVID-19 have been reissued, what assessment they have made of such reports; and what steps they are taking to review (1) the transparency and accuracy of statistics relating to COVID-19, and (2) the decisions that are based on such statistics." – <b>Lord Lilley</b></p>

“My Lords, the Office for Statistics Regulation is 100% right: the best use of data and statistics is critical in this unprecedented time. All slides and data from press conferences are published on GOV.UK, normally at the time of the press conference. The Government are committed to transparency to build public trust throughout the pandemic; that is why we publish data, the modelling used and any revisions as part of this process.” – **Lord Bethell**

“I thank my noble friend. Does he realise that this rebuke from the statistics regulator is unprecedented, as is the unparalleled series of errors, dubious charts, outdated data and failed projections? ...” – **Lord Lilley**

“My Lords, we are grateful to the Office for Statistics Regulation for its challenge; its points were perfectly reasonable and we take them on board completely...” – **Lord Bethell**

...

- (2) My Lords, would the Minister agree that it is an extremely serious matter when the statistics authority criticises government advisers’ use of statistics? If the public are to accept lockdown and all the restrictions involved, they need to have confidence in the statistics and that they are not speculative. Would the Minister agree that the graph with four scenarios for daily deaths from Covid, rising to 4,000 a day – a rate that exceeds that of Brazil, which has three times our population – should never have been shown at the Prime Minister’s press conference? If he does not agree with that, why was it subsequently modified? –**Lord Lamont of Lerwick**

“My Lords, my noble friend is entirely right: statistics are critical and very important to public trust. No one takes them more seriously than this Government. However, I remind him that it was not the statistics that the Office for Statistics Regulation expressed concern about; it was about material being used in press conferences that has not been published at the press conferences as they happened. That was a function of the speed

			<p>at which that press conference was turned around, but he is entirely right that that chart had a presentational error in it, which was corrected. It was published as a result of the publication of the data behind it. I reassure him that the data upon which decisions were made and the data that went into the central case of that chart was correct, and the fact that we have changed it demonstrates that we are committed to transparency in all these matters.” – <b>Lord Bethell</b></p>
<b>No Recourse to Public Funds</b>	26 Nov 2020	House of Commons	<p>During a debate on <a href="#">DWP’s response to the coronavirus outbreak on 26 November 2020</a>, Claudia Webbe MP referred to our intervention on no recourse to public funds.</p> <p>“...It is appalling that the Home Office does not even record the number of UK residents with no recourse to public funds, despite a recent intervention from the Office for Statistics Regulation, which expressed alarm at the Home Office’s repeated refusal to do so. It is contrary to reason to develop policy without knowing how many people the condition affects. The Government must adopt this most basic of tasks.” – <b>Claudia Webbe MP</b></p>
<b>COVID-19 data transparency</b>	1 Dec 2020	House of Lords	<p>During a Lords debate on <a href="#">coronavirus regulations on 1 December 2020</a>, Baroness Noakes referred to our intervention on COVID-19 data transparency.</p> <p>“The Government continue to take Parliament and the country for fools. Before the last lockdown, they used some graphs to scare us into submission. The basis of those graphs disintegrated once the underlying models and assumptions were forced into the public domain. It was so bad that the Office for Statistics Regulation issued a strongly worded rebuke. This time we have again been told that, unless the new tiered version of lockdown hell is voted through, NHS hospitals will be overwhelmed. This is clearly not a fact, as our hospitals are not currently overwhelmed. They are operating much as usual for this time of year, and the Nightingale capacity remains unused.” – <b>Baroness Noakes</b></p>



<p><b>Road haulage</b></p>	<p>18 March 2021</p>	<p>House of Lords</p>	<p>During a Lords debate on <a href="#">Drivers' Hours and Tachographs (Temporary Exceptions) Regulations 2021 on 18 March 2021</a>, our intervention on the transparency of road haulage statistics was mentioned.</p> <p>“...The Government published a press story on, I think, 7 February disputing the figures published by the Road Haulage Association. The Road Haulage Association looks after its members’ interests, and it suggested that the loads to the EU – I quote from its press release – had “reduced by as much as 68 percent” since January this year. It wrote to the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster explaining this, and the Government are basically saying it is not true. Somebody must be able to count; it is surely pathetic. I tend to believe the RHA because it has an interest in looking after its members’ interests – they do not want to see delays – whereas the Government are trying to say that everything is all right. This has gone on, with an argument in a letter between the Office for Statistics Regulation and Richard Laux, the chief statistician of the Cabinet Office, talking about whether the data is published or not. The Cabinet Office then published a note to accompany the original press story. In other words, this is damage limitation. The key, to me, is a quote from the Port of Dover on 8 February that said: “Traffic continues to flow smoothly through the Port of Dover post-Brexit transition.” Does that not tell us that there is no problem that needs to be cured?”</p> <p>– <b>Lord Berkeley</b></p>
<p><b>Sex and gender in criminal justice statistics</b></p>	<p>17 March 2021</p>	<p>House of Lords</p>	<p>During a Lords debate on the <a href="#">Domestic Abuse Bill on 17 March 2021</a>, Baroness Fox of Buckley referred to our statement on sex and gender statistics.</p> <p>“Gender is not defined in UK law and is a cultural identity—malleable, subjective and one of choice. Sex is, however, a material objective reality. The Office for Statistics Regulation recently emphasised the need for clarity about definitions and stressed that sex and gender should not be used interchangeably in official statistics, and gave the example of criminal justice statistics.”</p> <p>– <b>Baroness Fox of Buckley</b></p>