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Ed Humpherson, Director General for Office for Statistics Regulation

Lord Moylan
House of Lords
(by email)

18 June 2025

Dear Lord Moylan

Thank you for your letter of 6 May regarding abortion statistics for England and Wales produced by the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC).

I appreciate your concern regarding the timeline for our compliance check. As the regulator for official statistics, our remit concerns published statistics. We do not regulate administrative systems from which data for some official statistics are collected. As such, any regulatory work that we conduct will be focused on the published statistics. Because of this, we have judged that the most appropriate time for us to undertake a compliance check is after the current development work on the data submission process has concluded but before the subsequent annual release – so in the first quarter of 2026/27. This will ensure that we are able to support the team in the lead up to the publication and provide advice on areas for improvement.

I have also considered the additional points made in your letter of 6 May. You are correct to point out that complications dealt with by a GP or through 111 are unlikely to be captured by abortion forms (though it is possible that they can be). This is one of the limitations of the data source and is explained by DHSC in its 2023 comparison analysis. However, as I set out in my previous correspondence, using abortion forms, rather than hospital data, as the data source for complications does have several strengths. These strengths include that the data cover both England and Wales, and, crucially, provide a denominator for calculating complication rates.

You also questioned the relevance of user demand for the statistics. Whilst the collection of the data is covered by the relevant legislation, the Code of Practice for Statistics requires producers to understand their users and address user views, where practicable, in relation to the publishing of statistics. We understand from DHSC that it has not received strong user demand for additional analysis of complications based on hospital data. Given this and the resource constraints facing DHSC, as I said in my previous letter, we understand DHSC's decision not to routinely publish this information.

I hope this letter addresses your concerns. I would be happy to meet with you for a discussion if it would be beneficial.

Yours sincerely

Ed Humpherson
Director General for OSR