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Date: 26th March 2014

Dear Sir/Madam,

I apologise for the delay in responding to your invitation for further comments in relation to the Geography of Economic Statistics – Interim Report, but hope that this letter is of use.

The GLA welcomes the report's call for the ONS to engage with the GLA on the gaps in data provision and an appropriate resourcing plan for addressing them. Given the size of London's economy with output in (2012) at £309 billion, accounting for over 20 per cent of the UK's total output, the GLA feels that the timeliness and quality of economic statistics in London is of critical importance to the UK as well as to us.

I would further like to reiterate the observation made in our original submission that given the dynamic nature of the London economy it is essential we have timely information on London's economic performance. Thus the current situation where the latest available data for London's gross value added is for 2012, compared to Q4 2013 for UK wide data (in nominal not real terms and not quarterly), leads to an unsatisfactory situation for both the Mayor and UK policy makers to be judging London's economic performance on.

Moreover, improving the provision of data on London (and the other areas of the UK) may well improve the overall quality of ONS statistics. As noted previously, the service sector is particularly important for London (and the UK) and is arguably less well covered by ONS data than other sectors. Thus improving timely statistics for London would more than likely lead to improvements in the understanding of the service sector for the UK as a whole.

We also welcome the recommendations for further discussion on "the availability of existing administrative sources to meet the gaps, and whether GLA can obtain access to them". Our current lack of access to certain data sources is an area of concern for the GLA. In particular, the GLA currently does not have access to the IDBR on the same basis as local authorities and government departments. This situation seems to be more a relic of past legislation (ie the GLA being a relatively new body) than any considered reasoning for the GLA to have less access to this data than other bodies. We would urge ONS and central government to review, and in our eyes rectify, the GLA's status as regards IDBR access as a matter of some urgency. In addition, the GLA's access to micro data under special licence in other areas is also often more restrictive than the access provided to government departments. For example, the recent release of wellbeing data to central government departments had 'region of work' available as a variable – but this variable (very useful for our type of analysis – at the regional level) was not available in the special license version – requiring us to contact ONS to ask that the variables be added to the dataset – adding delay and, in our view unnecessary, complication to our work. These examples indicate how current data access limitations hinder GLA work and the GLAs ability to effectively support the implementation of the Mayor's priorities.

The GLA also welcomes discussions with ONS staff on the scale and cost of additional survey work, although notes that the ability of the GLA to meet these costs is likely to be limited. However, in relation to whether seconded staff are likely to be able to address these gaps it should be noted that compared to Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland the GLA's resources in this area are greatly limited.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate that the provision of better quality, more timely economic data for London would significantly improve both the Mayor's and national government's ability to understand the London economy and to prepare and deliver policies and programmes for Londoners on a more timely and effective basis. To that end we are very willing to engage in the recommendations of this report to meet with ONS officials to discuss how best this demand for economic statistics can be met.

Yours faithfully,

Matthew Waite
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