

# Statistics Commission

Artillery House, 11-19 Artillery Row  
London SW1P 1RT

*From the Chairman, Professor David Rhind, CBE FRS FBA*

14 September 2007

Maxine Ayton  
Chief Executive  
Commission for Racial Equality  
St Dunstan's House  
201-211 Borough High Street  
London SE1 16Z

Dear Ms Ayton

## REFERENCES TO OFFICIAL STATISTICS

I write in regard to issues raised with us by Professors Daniel Dorling and Ludi Simpson. They have previously raised a number of concerns with CRE and we have been provided with a copy of your letter of 4 July to them.

The major role of the Statistics Commission is to advise Parliament and government on the quality and integrity of official statistics but we also have a role to play in fostering public trust in such statistics. Thus any concerns about use of official statistics which might impact on public trust are matters on which we may choose to comment.

There are a number of elements in the complaints made by Professors Dorling and Simpson. Several of these are beyond our remit and we have no view on the personalisation of the complaints. Our interest is in whether official statistics support or do not support statements attributed to CRE. We accept of course that any organisation or individual is able to offer opinions, or give more weight to one source than another. But we take the view that statements which quote or seem to impute support from official statistics should be accurate and include an adequate citation so that others can examine the statistical evidence.

As we understand the material given to us, CRE officials have been quoted as making various predictions of non-white majorities in some British cities by 2016 and stating that schools are increasingly more segregated than the communities they serve. These views have been given press coverage, for example in the Sunday Times on 19 March 2006 which added that "The warning comes as government statistics show that white and ethnic minority communities are becoming increasingly segregated...". Professors Dorling and Simpson contend that the available statistics do not support these statements. We think it would be helpful if the CRE could make clear whether the statements are based on statistical evidence or are more matters of opinion.

We have also had our attention drawn to the entry for Leicester on your website ([www.cre.gov.uk/diversity/map/eastmidlands/leicester.html](http://www.cre.gov.uk/diversity/map/eastmidlands/leicester.html)). We understand that the observation that "nowhere else in Britain has proportionately fewer White British residents" may be incorrect (Slough seems to have fewer according to other information on the website); and that the claim that "Leicester is widely predicted,

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It operates openly and transparently.*

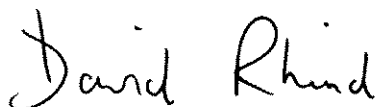
within the next five years, to become the first city in Europe with a majority non-white population” is made without reference to supporting evidence – again leaving it unclear as to whether this is a matter of opinion or statistical evidence.

More generally, we think some of the statements on the website may need to be checked – it states, for example, that Slough has the highest proportion of Asians within its population of any place in Britain, whereas Leicester appears to have a higher proportion.

We do recognise that the CRE may wish to express and gather together opinions and predictions. We think though that any statements that suggest a basis in official statistics should be confirmed with the Office for National Statistics to avoid public controversy that might impact on confidence in existing official statistics.

I am copying this letter to the Karen Dunnell, the National Statistician.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Rhind". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D'.