

## Letter to the Daily Mail, 22 May 2016

To the Editor:

In reply to your article 'New plot to share your private data across Whitehall', published 21 May 2016: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3601892/New-plot-share-private-data-Whitehall-Fresh-powers-buried-Queen-s-Speech-criticised-privacy-campaigner.html>

Improved use and sharing of government data for statistical and research purposes has clear benefits for democratic accountability by improving the numbers the country needs. These important data inform decisions that affect the health, well-being and security of the UK population and public debate about them.

Current legislation is patchy, cumbersome and inefficient, and new legislative proposals for these purposes are essential to enable better understanding of issues such as housing, pathways out of poverty, and immigration, where the current evidence base is unsatisfactory or incomplete.

The privacy safeguards proposed for the research and statistics elements of the legislative proposals are robust, and the data will be analysed by experienced and approved researchers and statisticians in secure locations and reported without identifying any individuals. As a further safeguard, and to ensure that the research and statistics projects meet ethical standards and have genuine public benefit, it is proposed that there should be scrutiny and oversight by the independent UK Statistics Authority, which reports to parliament.

Mike Hughes, Chair, National Statistics Advisory Group, Royal Statistical Society

Vanessa Cuthill, Deputy Director, Economic and Social Research Council

Professor Alison Park, CLOSER, UCL Institute of Education

