

11 November 2013

Dear Peter Gray,

I am writing, on behalf of the Royal Statistical Society, with reference to the National Audit Office's value for money examination of the privatisation of Royal Mail Plc.

The Postcode Address File (PAF) is an important part of our national data infrastructure. We are concerned that, following privatisation, its availability for use for in the public good in accordance with the government's policies on Open Data and National Statistics could be at risk.

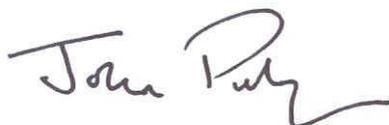
National datasets of addresses provide an essential element in statistical work done in the public sector, including the national population census, and in the private sector for customer insight, marketing and logistics. They support efficiency in government and profitability in business.

The PAF could play a significant role in moving towards a single, definitive national address dataset. PAF alone does not constitute such a dataset, but it forms an important element of the whole, with the frequent updates embedded in PAF adding value to addressing data overall. A number of bodies have called previously for a move to such a national address dataset, including several Parliamentary Select Committees, the Statistics Commission, The Advisory Panel on Public Sector Information, and this government, in the Open Data White Paper.

We are concerned that privatisation may jeopardise the public value of this crucial piece of national data infrastructure, which is an important element in realising the potential of the open data initiative. We urge you to consider the importance of PAF data in contributing to the UK's information infrastructure as part of your examination of the privatisation of Royal Mail.

Should you wish to discuss this issue further, we would be happy to brief you in greater detail.

Yours sincerely,



John Pullinger  
President  
Royal Statistical Society

