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Dear Jonathan

Spring Budget 2020 and the 2019Q4 labour market dataset

As you are aware, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) has never sought regular pre-release access to statistics. We have periodically sought and received exceptional pre-release access to specific releases to facilitate production of our forecasts ahead of Budgets and other fiscal statements. In these cases, the forecasts that have benefitted from the pre-release access are not published until well after the data in question. We do not use pre-release access to comment on data at the point of publication.

We provide the Chancellor with successive draft forecasts (termed 'rounds') ahead of each fiscal statement. The Spring 2020 Budget forecast timetable requires us to deliver the third round of our economic forecast to the Treasury on the morning of 18 February. This coincides with the publication of the February 2020 labour market statistics. This release contains information that is integral to the production of our economic forecasts. The third round of our economic forecast is the 'pre-policy measures' forecast that we submit to the Treasury, and the final opportunity for us to include new data before the forecast is published on 11 March. The OBR is therefore requesting 48 hours exceptional pre-release access to the Q4 Labour Market Statistics (18 February 2020).

This would provide relevant analysts and decision-makers in the OBR with these datasets on the morning of 16 February. We would limit the number of recipients to the minimum necessary. This would consist of the three members of the Budget Responsibility Committee, the OBR's Chief of Staff, and nine OBR officials. In broad terms, the pre-release access will allow one day for processing and analysis by staff, half a day for discussion with the Budget Responsibility Committee and half a day for those judgements to be implemented in the economic forecast.

Best regards,
Robert

Robert Chote
Chairman