

Email from Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation to Emily Craig (BBC)

From: Ed Humpherson

Sent: 29 April 2015

To: Emily Craig

HEALTH SPENDING

Dear Emily

You recently raised with me a concern that you had been unable to locate in the public domain the source of statements made by the Secretary of State for Health about the spending on independent providers as a proportion of total NHS expenditure, and how this has changed over recent years. We note that the information has already been released through a response to a Parliamentary Question (PQ). In examining the statement made by the Secretary of State and the Parliamentary response, we have considered two questions: first, whether there is any significance in the difference between the proportion quoted by the Secretary of State (5.9%) and that used in the Parliamentary response (6.1%); and second, whether the information is supported by clear explanation of the sources, definitions and interpretations of the information.

The Authority has discussed these questions with the Department of Health. On the first point, the Department informed us that the difference between the figures used is because the figure of 5.9% was a provisional figure, and the revised and final figure is 6.1% (although we note that Secretary of State's statement was the most recent one, using the 5.9% figure).

On the second point, the Department informed us that it had concluded that the main data subject to public debate – the spend on independent providers as a percentage of total NHS expenditure, and how this has changed over recent years – is in the public domain via the PQ response and by information shared with Full Fact and other media outlets. The Department also indicated that it would look to publish the information on a proactive basis in future, as part of its annual financial statements and report. While we welcome the commitment to fuller public reporting in the future, we regard the current position as unsatisfactory because of the significance that we attach to the principle of equal access to statistics and underlying analysis.

The data in question do not come from an official statistics publication, and therefore do not fall under the remit of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. As we have said in a recent case involving HM Treasury analysis (<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/correspondence/index.html>) the Code of Practice sets high standards, especially in relation to equality of access to data and analysis, and the importance of providing information about quality and reliability. Voluntary adherence to the spirit and the high standards of the Code of Practice when publishing numerical analysis not currently designated as official statistics can be beneficial in these and other areas.

Kind regards

Ed

Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation
UK Statistics Authority
1 Drummond Gate
London SW1V 2QQ