
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Michael Scholar KCB

Sir Andrew Green KCMG
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Dear Sir Andrew

STATISTICS ON THE POINTS BASED SYSTEM

Thank you for your letters of 5 and 19 April. I am sorry that it has taken me a while to reply, but your letters raised complex issues, on which I wanted to be sure of the facts before replying to you.

My enquiries have elicited information from the Home Office and UK Border Agency, who are the producers of the relevant statistics, on the source of the statistics quoted in the Prime Minister's speech of 31 March, to which you refer in your letter. I understand that the latter are in part derived from material that has already been published and in part from estimates prepared by the UK Border Agency. I will write to you separately about the status and source of those figures when we have completed our inquiries.

However, I wanted to reply without further delay on the question of principle that you raise.

In July 2009, the Authority published a statement on the circumstances in which data held by government departments for management purposes should, in our view, be treated as official statistics.¹ In that statement we said that we recognise that there are large amounts of detailed government data that are not routinely published as official statistics, but that the Authority will advise that in certain circumstances such figures should, in future, be handled in accordance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics and thus be treated as official statistics. We identify in our statement two criteria to which we will have particular regard:

- the data are used publicly in support of major decisions on policy, resource allocation or other topics of public interest, or
- the data attract public controversy when published and the Authority takes the view that public debate would be better informed if the figures were in future handled as official statistics.

In the case to which you refer, my view is that both of these criteria have been satisfied and that it would, in future, be appropriate for the Home Office or UK Border Agency to prepare and publish the main statistics from the Points Based System in accordance with the rules for official statistics (to the extent that they are not already). I should stress that this is not a retrospective view, and should not be construed as a criticism of what was said on 31 March.

¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/statement---management-information--research-data--and-the-use-of-statistics-in-policy-documents--22-july-2009.pdf>

I will be writing to the Permanent Secretary at the Home Office to draw the Authority's advice to his attention. The final decision on such matters is, under the legislation under which we operate, for the body producing the statistics.

Yours sincerely

Michael Scholar

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