



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Sir Michael Scholar KCB
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority
Statistics House
Islington
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Wednesday 15th December 2010

I am writing in relation to the use of statistics on participation in school sport by the Leader of the Opposition, Ed Miliband and Shadow Education Secretary, Andy Burnham.

The UK Statistics Authority's annual report states that one of its roles is: 'intervention in relation to the use of official statistics in public debate where we judge that an intervention is necessary in order to preserve the integrity or trustworthiness of official statistics' (UK Statistics Authority, *Annual Report 2009/10*).

In light of this guidance, I would like to draw to your attention recent claims made by the two Members of Parliament:

- **Ed Miliband, at Prime Minister's Questions:** 'since 2002, we have seen an increase from 25% to 90% in the number of kids doing more than two hours of sport a week' (*Hansard*, 24 November 2010, Col. 258).
- **Andy Burnham, in an Opposition motion:** 'I beg to move, That this House... notes that the number of young people doing two hours of sport a week has risen from 25 per cent in 2002 to at least 90 per cent last year' (*Hansard*, 30 November 2010, Col. 693).
- **Andy Burnham, in the House of Commons:** 'It is estimated that in 2002 only 25% of young people engaged in two or more hours of competitive sport each week, whereas more than 90% do so now' (*Hansard*, 30 November 2010, Col. 670).

On each of these occasions, both Ed Miliband and Andy Burnham claimed that the proportion of young people completing at least two hours of PE and sport each week rose from 25 per cent in 2002 to 90 per cent. This claim rests on two separate and distinct statistics that raise questions about its validity:

- **25 per cent figure an 'estimate':** The 25 per cent figure for 2002 was an 'estimate'. It was given by Tessa Jowell, Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, in November 2002: 'we estimate that about 25 per cent of five to 16-year-olds are taking part in PE and sport for at least two hours a week' (*Hansard*, 18 November 2002, Col. 356).

- **90 per cent figure is taken from an official survey:** The Government subsequently started an official survey of school sport participation, the *PE and Sport Survey*, which was first completed in 2003/04. The 90 per cent figure is taken from this survey: ‘by 2007/08, 90% of pupils across Years 1 - 11 in partnership schools achieved this level of participation [at least two hours of PE and sport a week]’ (Department for Education, *PE and Sport Survey 2009/10*, September 2010).

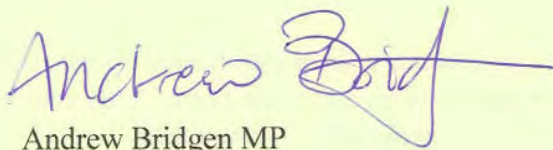
I believe this clearly demonstrates that both Ed Miliband and Andy Burnham have potentially misled the public by making inaccurate comparisons for political purposes. The effect of this has been to vastly exaggerate the pace of change in school sports participation.

The first official *PE and Sport Survey*, conducted in 2003/04, showed that 62 per cent of young people took part in at least two hours of PE or sport each week (Department for Education and Skills, *PE and Sport Survey 2003/04*, April 2004). This first *PE and Sport Survey* did not mention the far lower estimate of 25 per cent for 2002, in recognition that the two numbers could not be compared.

The contrast between the first official figure in 2003/04 (62 per cent) with the 2002 estimate (25 per cent) shows that the use of the latter statistic must be treated with caution, and at the very least, given context when used. The Shadow Education Secretary has himself previously criticised misleading comparisons as ‘an incredible abuse of statistics’ (*Hansard*, 30 Nov 2010, Col. 699).

Given the public interest in retaining public confidence in the use of statistics, I would be grateful if you could investigate this matter further.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Andrew Bridgen". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Andrew Bridgen MP