
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Andrew Dilnot CBE

Janet Allbeson
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13 March 2013

Dear Ms Allbeson

CHILD SUPPORT AGENCY QUARTERLY SUMMARY OF STATISTICS

Thank you for your email of 18 February 2013 raising concerns about an article published in the Sun on Sunday newspaper on 17 February 2013, which you suggested could have been informed by prior knowledge of statistics about child support that were subsequently published by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on 20 February 2013.

The National Statistician's office has reviewed the source of the figures in the article and has confirmed that the official statistics mentioned had already been set out in published statistics. I understand that during the week leading up to the publication of the article, the DWP Press Office briefed journalists from the Sun on Sunday, but that the DWP Press Office did not have access to unpublished statistics at the time of this briefing. We are therefore content that there was no breach of the rules governing pre-release access to official statistics.

However, it has become clear that in this instance, contrary to standard practice, the briefing given to journalists was not reviewed by DWP statisticians prior to release, and was therefore not subject to the scrutiny of professional statisticians who would have provided an explicit wording for the delivery of the statistical messages to the media.

I have been assured that the DWP Permanent Secretary and the department's Head of Profession for statistics have reiterated to their staff the seriousness of their obligations under the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. The Head of Profession has confirmed that he will be reviewing departmental procedures.

In respect of your further point about the definition of 'non-resident parents paying child maintenance' in DWP's quarterly statistical summary of child support agency statistics, the department might wish to consider the merits of including a statistical disaggregation of maintenance payments so that users can identify the proportion of 'maintenance direct arrangements' and other payments received. It may also wish to consider improving the communication of figures for the percentage of cases in which maintenance was received. I have asked the Authority's Head of Assessment to explore this matter with the department in respect of the Authority's ongoing Assessment of these statistics.

I am copying this letter to Jil Matheson, the National Statistician, Robert Devereux, the Permanent Secretary at the Department for Work and Pensions, to David Frazer, Head of Profession for Statistics at DWP, and to Richard Alldritt, the Authority's Head of Assessment.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Dilnot". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and a distinct 'D'.

Andrew Dilnot CBE