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Sir Michael Scholar KBE
UK Statistics Authority
1 Drummond Gate
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20 January 2012

Dear Sir Michael

SETTLED MIGRANTS CLAIMING WORKING AGE BENEFITS

This morning, the Employment Minister, Chris Grayling and the Immigration Minister, Damian Green have presented figures in an article in the Daily Telegraph, with regard to the number of migrants who have become UK Citizens or have indefinite leave to remain that are claiming state benefits.

I believe that these figures have been used in a way that misrepresents the reality of the Department for Work and Pensions research, misleading the public, in order to score political points at the expense of the previous government and distracting from the policy failures of the current government.

As you will be aware, both Ministers have previously been found to use statistics in a misleading fashion; either to hide mistakes made at the UK border or by using crime statistics to scaremonger. And it seems that they continue to do so.

It is my belief that today's figures have been used in a similar fashion – presenting a picture that settled immigrants are disproportionately abusing the welfare system and implying that those settled here legally, are claiming benefits to which they are not entitled.

In this morning's Daily Telegraph, the ministers write that "millions of people came through open doors to the UK – sometimes in the back of lorries, sometimes as students who never went home when their studies finished, sometimes as failed asylum seekers who were never asked to leave." The article then goes on to claim that an "estimated" 370,000 migrants claim out-of-work benefits, in an apparent attempt to shift blame on to settled migrants, many of whom will be UK citizens (who are fully entitled to claim out-of-work benefits) for the government's failures to reduce net migration as well as the soaring cost of the welfare system.

This article fails to make reference to the realities which are laid out in the DWP report on the subject (Dept. Work & Pension, "*Nationality at point of National Insurance number registration of DWP benefit claimants*", January 2012) that 98% of the estimated 370,000 migrants claiming working age benefits have an immigration status that entitles them to do so. There is also a failure to place any sort of time frame around how long these migrant workers have lived and worked in the UK, some of whom may have been here since 1946 for example. Neither is there analysis into the numbers of UK citizens who are claiming state benefits in other countries in which they have settled – which would enable a far more robust enquiry into these statistics.

Further to this, Mssrs. Grayling and Green fail to reveal in their article that "16.6% of working age UK nationals were claiming a DWP working age benefit compared to 6.6% of working age non-UK nationals (at the time they registered for a National Insurance Number)" demonstrating that migrant workers in the UK are considerably more likely, to be working and supporting themselves than their UK-born counterparts.

For these reasons, I would like to request that you investigate, as a matter of urgency, how these statistics have been presented and whether this has been done in a way this is right and proper according to the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Furthermore, could you comment on whether this method of releasing statistics and the manner in which they are presented are recommended by you as the appropriate manner in which Ministers should release statistical information?

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris Bryant". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Chris Bryant MP

ENC. "Labour didn't care who landed in Britain", by Chris Grayling & Damian Green, The Daily Telegraph, 20/01/12

"Nationality at point of National Insurance number registration of DWP benefit claimants: February 2011 working age benefits", DWP, January 2012