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Dear Andrew,

I write in reference to the speech today to the Institute for Economic Affairs by the Minister for Employment, Chris Grayling, about the Work Programme.

As you know, the Department for Work and Pensions has refused to publish data on the Work Programme, which started in June 2011, until autumn 2012. Data was published on the similar Flexible New Deal scheme after only a year.

Yet today Mr Grayling will use data compiled by a third party – ERSA, the industry's trade association – to claim that the Work Programme's performance is better than the National Audit Office's estimate. Use of third-party statistics for political purposes, whilst refusing to publish his Department's own data, is surely inappropriate.

The National Audit Office estimated that 26% of adult Jobseekers' Allowance claimants will move into six-month sustained work. This is not comparable with ERSA's figure, that, on average, 22% of claimants on the scheme start on a job (with no indication of sustainment). Mr Grayling has attempted to justify this difference by claiming that the ERSA total includes harder-to-help groups – yet these constituted only 5% of starts on the scheme between June and September 2011.

I understand that Mr Grayling has also claimed that the Work Programme's performance is currently exceeding that of the Flexible New Deal. Yet in a written parliamentary answer to me dated the 20th January 2012 he stated that an average of 19% of people on the Flexible New Deal achieved 13 weeks sustained employment within 9 months on the programme, compared with 22% only *starting* a job on the Work Programme within the same timeframe, according to the ERSA data he quotes.

I hope you will agree that refusing to publish clear and accurate data as soon as possible, whilst relying on limited third-party data to prove political points, misleads the public on the effectiveness of the Work Programme.

With all best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

STEPHEN TIMMS MP