
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

Charlie Elphicke MP
House of Commons
LONDON
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23 May 2014

Dear Mr Elphicke

STATISTICS ON ZERO-HOURS CONTRACTS

Thank you for your letter of 6 May 2014 regarding reporting in the media and in public debate of new ONS statistics, published on 30 April 2014¹, about employment contracts that do not guarantee a minimum number of hours, or so-called 'zero-hours contracts'.

Last year ONS announced that it would begin to collect information about zero-hours contracts directly from employers via a business survey². The provisional estimate published by ONS in the April 2014 statistical release was the first in this new series, and found that in the period January to February 2014 there were around 1.4 million zero-hours employee *contracts*. The April 2014 ONS release also contained the most recent estimate from the ONS Labour Force Survey (LFS), previously published on 19 February 2014, of the number of *people* reporting that they were employed on zero-hours contracts, which was 583,000 for the period October to December 2013.

The ONS statistical release stated that it was not possible to say from the business survey statistics whether the number of zero-hours contracts had increased or decreased over time. The estimates from employers were likely to be higher than those from individuals for a number of reasons: employers may be more aware of the formal contractual arrangements of their employees; working patterns may mean individuals do not consider themselves to be covered by such contracts; and there may be people working on such a contract in addition to their primary employment. The business survey figures relate to the number of contracts that employers are using, not the number of people employed on these contracts.

ONS plans to conduct a further business survey during summer 2014, reporting by the end of 2014, which will allow comparisons to be made between the two time periods. ONS has told me that subject to the availability of funding for the continuation of this exercise, a time series for the prevalence of zero-hours contracts from 2014 onwards could become available.

ONS held a press briefing for journalists to help ensure that the statistics were properly understood. It is regrettable that the statistics were subsequently misreported. Various media outlets have now issued corrections to their coverage after ONS and Full Fact drew attention

¹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/lmac/contracts-with-no-guaranteed-hours/zero-hours-contracts/art-zero-hours.html>

² <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/mro/news-release/ons-announces-additional-estimate-of-zero-hours-contracts/zhc0813.html>

to inaccuracies. Such initial misreporting demonstrates the need for clear communication of statistics.

I have today written to the Shadow Business Secretary Chuka Umunna MP regarding statements made in a Labour Party press release³ and on social media on the day that the ONS figures were released. I append a copy of my letter for your information.

I am copying this to Jil Matheson, the National Statistician.

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 'D'.

Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

³ <http://press.labour.org.uk/post/84311157649/shocking-figures-show-huge-increase-in-zero-hours>