
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

Chris Kelly MP
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1A 0AA

26 September 2014

Dear Mr Kelly

CRIME AND JUSTICE STATISTICS

Thank you for your letter dated 29 July 2014 regarding a speech by Rt. Hon Yvette Cooper MP and an associated document published by the Labour Party about crime and justice statistics.

The attached annex provides the Statistics Authority's detailed evaluation of each of the four points that you raised in your letter. To summarise briefly our findings:

- **Violent crime offences:** The statement you referred to could have been drawn from official statistics on crimes recorded by the police for the year ending March 2014. However, National Statistics drawn from the Crime Survey for England and Wales are considered to provide the more reliable indication of trends in crimes of violence against the person (rather than police recorded crime statistics), and these show that the number of violent crime incidents in that period has fallen by 20 per cent. We would recommend that all parties to public debate make clear which sources are being used. It is also important to note that, in January 2014, following a statutory re-assessment, the Statistics Authority removed the National Statistics designation from police recorded crime statistics due to accumulating evidence that suggested the underlying data on crimes recorded by the police might not be reliable¹.
- **Fraud:** The statement you referred to appears to have been taken from the quarterly crime statistics published by ONS in April 2014, covering the year ending December 2013. However, data on fraud offences recorded during that period are not directly comparable with data on fraud offences recorded in previous years because of the ongoing transfer to Action Fraud of responsibility for the central recording of fraud offences previously recorded by individual police forces. It is not possible to determine whether a recent rise in recorded fraud offences reflects improved recording practices, an increase in public reporting or a rise in actual criminality.

¹<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/correspondence/letter-from-sir-andrew-dilnot-to-bernard-jenkin-mp-150114.pdf>;
<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment/assessment-reports/assessment-report-268---statistics-on-crime-in-england-and-wales.pdf>

- **Violent crime prosecutions:** Both of the statements you referred to are consistent with published official statistics, although they draw on different data sources, cover different time periods, and show contrasting trends.
- **Domestic violence prosecutions:** Although the available statistics in this area, published by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), are not currently classed by the CPS as 'official statistics', the most recent figures published in July 2014 show that there was an increase in the number of completed prosecutions where domestic violence was identified as an aggravating factor to 78,071 in 2013/14, a rise of 7,369 since 2012/13. There was also an increase in the number of convictions, from 52,549 in 2012/13 to 58,276 in 2013/14. We will explore with the CPS whether it would be helpful to publish these statistics as official statistics in future in line with our published guidelines on the considerations that we will take into account when proposing that numerical information should, in future, be handled as official statistics.²

More generally, the Authority wishes to see all parties to public debate ensuring that statements drawing on official statistics are consistent with the published data and commentary, are clear about the sources and time frames being used, and take account of any limitations, caveats, or related advice of statistical professionals as to their appropriate use.

I am copying this letter to Rt. Hon. Yvette Cooper MP; and to John Pullinger, the National Statistician, Alison Saunders, Director of Public Prosecutions, David Blunt, the Head of Profession for Statistics at the Home Office, Steve Ellerd-Elliott at the Ministry of Justice, and Ed Humpherson the Authority's Head of Assessment.

Yours sincerely



Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

² http://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/docs/cps_vawg_report_2014.pdf

ANNEX

The Statistics Authority's detailed evaluation of the four points raised in your letter is set out below:

1. ***“Labour claim that: ‘violent crime rises’. However, the independent Crime Survey of England and Wales found there were 1,327,000 violent crimes in the year to March 2014. This was lower than the 1,666,000 in the year to March 2013. Labour base their claim on a rise in recorded crime in 2013. However, as the Office for National Statistics notes: ‘this is thought to reflect improvements in recording and possibly a rise in public reporting’.”***

The latest ONS quarterly crime statistics³ for the year ending March 2014, published in July 2014, describe a complex picture concerning the latest trends in violent crime, where the number of crimes recorded by the police showed a rise of six per cent compared with the previous year, while estimates of the number of violent incidents measured by the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) showed a reduction of twenty per cent compared with a year earlier, noting though that the extent of the decrease shown in the current estimate is likely to have been exaggerated due to sampling variability rather than an acceleration of the downward trend. While the CSEW showed an increase for the last quarter of 2013/14, the overall year on year decrease was driven by lower estimates presented in the previous two quarters; this demonstrates the importance of looking at short term comparisons in the context of longer term trends.

ONS told us that the increase in the number of ‘violence against the person’ offences recorded by the police is thought to have been driven by a combination of increased reporting by the public (particularly in relation to domestic abuse) and improvements in police recording practices. The CSEW is considered to provide a more reliable indication of trends in violence. ONS publishes guidance⁴ to assist users in interpreting and using crime statistics.

We consider that all parties to public debate should ensure that they make clear the sources of statistics used, and should use the sources of official statistics that are considered most reliable.

2. ***“Yvette Cooper claimed the Government is: ‘failing to deal with growing modern crimes. There’s been a 25 per cent upsurge in reported online fraud.’ However, the Office for National Statistics warned that: ‘trends in fraud should be interpreted with caution. It is unclear to what extent there has been a genuine increase in such crimes or whether the move to the centralised recording of such offences has led to improved counting of fraud offences’.”***

In January 2014, following a statutory re-assessment, the UK Statistics Authority removed the National Statistics designation from police recorded crime statistics due to accumulating

³<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/period-ending-march-2014/stb-crime-stats.html#tab-Violent-Crime>

⁴<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/specific/crime-statistics-methodology/user-guides/index.html>

evidence that suggested the underlying data on crimes recorded by the police might not be reliable.⁵

The increase of 25 per cent cited by Ms Cooper in her speech comes from statistics for the year ending December 2013, published in April 2014 in the ONS quarterly crime statistics bulletin^{6,7}. Action Fraud has recently taken over responsibility from local police forces for recording fraud. As a result, ONS has stated that “it is not valid to make like for like comparisons between fraud offences recorded during the year ending December 2013 with previous years”. It is difficult to judge to what extent the recent rises in recorded fraud reflect improved recording practices, an increase in public reports or a rise in actual criminality.

Figures for the year ending March 2014, published in July 2014, now present all police recorded fraud under Action Fraud. The effects of the transition to Action Fraud will no longer be a factor when considering the year on year changes in recorded fraud when ONS releases data for the year ending March 2015 (due to be published in July 2015).

3. “Labour claim that: ‘the number of cautions, proceedings and convictions’ for violence against the person are falling. Again, this claim is based on a comparison between 2012 and 2013. The statistics published by the Home Office for 2013/14 show an increase in crimes of violence against the person resulting in a charge or summons.”

The document published by the Labour Party presents statistics published by the Ministry of Justice in *Criminal Justice Statistics 2013*⁸. The statistics that you cite are published in the Home Office’s *Crime Outcomes in England and Wales 2013/14*⁹. While both citations of statistics are consistent with the official statistics from which they are drawn, they use different data sources, cover slightly different time periods¹⁰, and show contrasting trends.

Crime and justice statistics are complex and involve several government departments which publish a range of National and other official statistics, in addition to management information. While ONS, the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice do provide some guidance to the users of crime statistics, explaining the breadth of statistics available and their uses, the guidance could be clearer on which data source to use and when. We will ask these departments to review the guidance for users of criminal justice statistics with a view to making more transparent which is the most appropriate source to use in different situations.

4. “Labour use figures on domestic violence to suggest that prosecutions and convictions for domestic violence are falling. However, these do not include figures for 2013/14. These show that the volume of domestic violence referrals

⁵ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/assessment-report-268---statistics-on-crime-in-england-and-wales.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/crime-stats/crime-statistics/period-ending-december-2013/stb-crime-stats-dec-2013.html#tab-Key-Points>

⁷ Note that ONS’s most recent estimate for the year ending March 2014, show an estimated increase of 17 per cent in the volume of fraud recorded between 2012-13 and 2013-14

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/criminal-justice-statistics-quarterly-december-2013>

⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/crime-outcomes-in-england-and-wales-2013-to-2014>

¹⁰ Home Office figures for charges or summons reflect the decision made by the police at the point of resolving the crime. Ministry of Justice figures reflect the final court outcome and so will be issued at a later point (potentially in the following years) – any change in the trends for the police resolution of crime could take time to filter through to statistics for the outcome of a court case.

from the police rose to 103,569 in 2013-14, the highest level ever. 2013/14 also saw the lowest ever level of discontinued cases for domestic violence cases.”

A large volume of official statistics is published about the criminal justice system. The figures quoted are published by the Crown Prosecution Service¹¹ and are reliant on a case being flagged as involving domestic violence. The most recent figures published in July 2014 show that there was an increase in the number of completed prosecutions where domestic violence was identified as an aggravating factor to 78,071 in 2013/14, a rise of 7,369 since 2012/13. There was also an increase in the number of convictions, from 52,549 in 2012/13 to 58,276 in 2013/14.

We note that the Crown Prosecution Service does not classify its report on Violence Against Women and Girls as official statistics. However, we consider that this report represents an important source of information on the number of prosecutions in which domestic violence is identified as an aggravating factor, and, in our view, the CPS report addresses an issue of significant public interest. We will therefore discuss with CPS whether this report should be classified as official statistics, and therefore comply with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics in all material respects. We will be following up on this question with CPS directly. We will also be exploring with the Crown Prosecution Service the extent to which their figures include domestic violence where the victim is male.

¹¹ http://www.cps.gov.uk/publications/docs/cps_vawg_report_2014.pdf