
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

Jonathan Portes
National Institute of Economic and Social Research
2 Dean Trench St
London
SW1P 3HE

15 May 2014

Dear Jonathan

STATISTICS ON MIGRATION AND BENEFITS

Thank you for your email of 14 April 2014 relating to the use of Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) statistics on migrant workers in receipt of housing benefit in a Sunday Telegraph article published on 12 April.

We have investigated the origin of the statistics and can confirm that they are located in the Impact Assessment and the DWP letter to the Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC), which are included as part of a suite of documents that sit alongside a SSAC open consultation on The Housing Benefit (Habitual Residence) Amendment Regulations 2014 dated 7 April. DWP has confirmed that the financial information contained within the impact assessment has been scored and approved by the Office for Budget Responsibility. These documents can be accessed from the SSAC website¹. DWP told us that in this case the sequence of events was that the DWP Press Office was contacted by a Telegraph journalist, who had sourced a story from the published information and was seeking comment from the Department.

In considering this issue in relation to the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, the UK Statistics Authority recognises that government bodies need to collect management information, carry out research, and make estimates of various kinds in order to run their business, and will often wish to make these numbers public in the interests of transparency. In practice it is not feasible to ensure that every release of information can be supported by a regular or ad hoc official statistics publication – clearly there is a judgement to be made about when a statistical release should be produced, and the Code is clear that this judgement is the sole responsibility of the statistical Head of Profession (HoP). We have encouraged DWP's HoP to remain alert to the publication of information by DWP that supports major policy decisions and/or is likely to attract public controversy – and, in such circumstances, to consider whether public debate would be better informed if the figures were supported by a statistical release produced in accordance with the Code. In the current context this would have helped you and others easily to identify and access the statistics (currently they are not readily available through the DWP part of the gov.uk website), and

¹ <http://ssac.independent.gov.uk/consultations/>

would have provided DWP an opportunity to publish information about the quality and reliability of the statistics (for example, we note that the Impact Assessment does not clearly set out how the £10million per year expenditure on housing benefit for migrant workers is calculated) that you would most likely have found useful.

I hope this reply is helpful. I would be delighted to meet with you to discuss these and other issues, with my colleague Ed Humpherson, the Statistics 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 'D'.

Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE