
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

Rt. Hon. Alistair Darling MP
Better Together
5 Blythswood Square
GLASGOW
G2 4AD.

28 October 2013

Dear Mr Darling

OFFICIAL STATISTICS AND THE SCOTTISH REFERENDUM

Thank you for your letter of 3 October. As you say in your letter, trustworthy statistical information, presented in a balanced way, is essential if voters are to be properly informed. However, as you will recognise, it is in the nature of political debate to select and liberally interpret statistics in support of a policy position. That is why there is a clear distinction between the statistical products of government - which are required to comply with a code of practice enforced by the Statistics Authority - and policy documents, which are not.

We do nonetheless expect policy documents published by Ministers to meet basic professional standards in terms of their use of official statistics. The paper published by the Scottish Government on 23 September "Pensions in an independent Scotland" is essentially a policy document and in most respects it does meet those standards.

It is evident from the paper that, in the event of independence, the 'affordability' of future state pensions will rest on a number of important assumptions. Among these are explicit assumptions about Scotland's future income from North Sea oil, and more implicit assumptions about the relationship between future tax revenues, GDP, and competing demands on Scotland's budget.

The paper selects statistical evidence that supports its central arguments, and in that respect is no different from many policy documents. However, we note the omission from the paper of analysis of published official projections showing that the dependency ratio for people of pension age is projected to be higher in Scotland than the UK average in the period to 2035 (see enclosed chart). This is readily available information and would seem to be relevant to the debate. Instead the paper presented analysis showing the dependency ratio for children *and* people of pension age combined.

On 2 October, the Statistics Authority published a report “Official Statistics in the Context of the Referendum on Scottish Independence” which contains statistical advice aimed at everyone involved in the debate ahead of the referendum. That report does include the dependency ratio for people of pension age mentioned above.¹

I am copying this letter to Nicola Sturgeon MSP, Deputy First Minister in the Scottish Government.

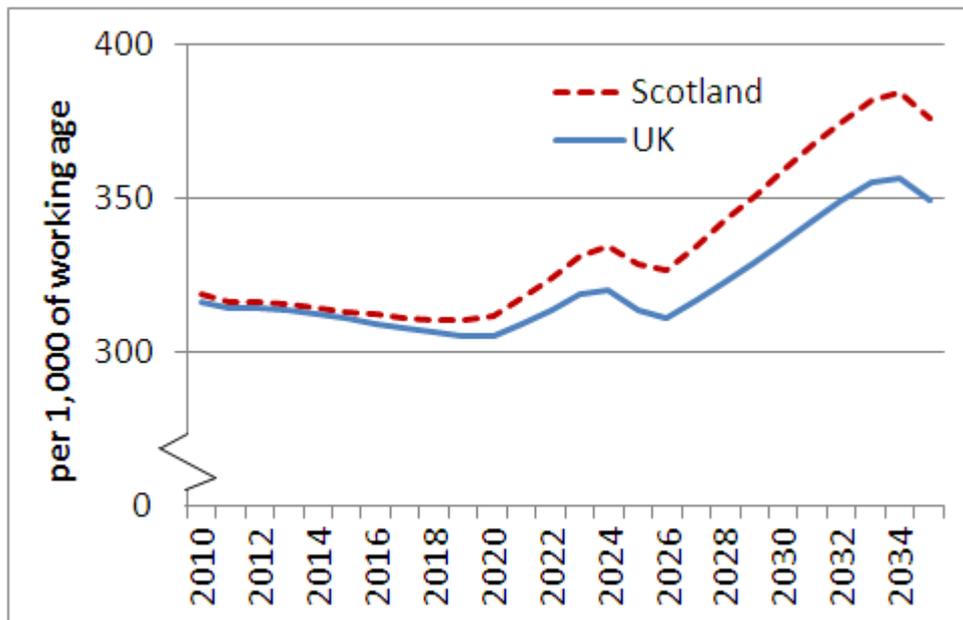
Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Dilnot". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A'.

Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-reports/monitoring-report-6-2013---official-statistics-in-the-context-of-the-referendum-on-scottish-independence.pdf>

Dependency Ratios, Pension Age, 2010 to 2035



Source: ONS, 2010-based Population Projections