
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

Sheila Gilmore MP
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1A 0AA

21 February 2014

Dear Ms Gilmore

MANAGEMENT INFORMATION ON THE WORK PROGRAMME

Thank you for your letter of 21 January 2014 regarding statements made by the Director of Work Services, Neil Couling, to the Work and Pensions Select Committee on 20 November 2013, about the number of people that have completed the Work Programme since June 2013 and the respective outcomes for those people.

Statistics Authority officials have reviewed the statements made to the Work and Pensions Select Committee and the numerical information that was in the public domain at the time. We have also made enquiries with officials in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

We have confirmed that the statements made to the Select Committee were based on unpublished Management Information, which was subsequently published by DWP as part of the Work Programme Statistical Summary on 19 December 2013.¹

The National Statistician has issued guidance on the use of Management Information.² This states that, where available, published official statistics should be the referred to in public statements. In exceptional circumstances, the departmental Head of Profession for Statistics may agree to the use in public statements of alternative information to official statistics, for example unpublished Management Information. The Head of Profession should be satisfied that such use is justified and clearly explained, and any prior release of the source data should not undermine the planned official statistics release or broader public trust in official statistics.

DWP told us that its normal practice is for the relevant analyst to check and sign off the accuracy of the statistical and internal management information to be used in briefings for select committee hearings. In addition, their usual practice is for the Head of Profession for statistics, or his Deputy, to advise on the appropriate use of Management Information. On this occasion, no DWP analyst was involved in compiling or checking the information in respect of the number people completing two years on the Work Programme. DWP also confirmed that the advice of the Head of Profession for statistics was not sought or given on the Management Information contained in the answer given to the Work and Pensions Select Committee. It is a matter of regret that DWP's usual practice, which would have ensured compliance with the National Statistician's guidance, was not followed.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/work-programme-statistical-summary-december-2013>

² <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/national-statistician/ns-reports--reviews-and-guidance/national-statistician-s-guidance/use-of-administrative-or-management-information.pdf>

The Statistics Authority has suggested to DWP that publishing the official statistics on a more frequent basis, e.g. monthly, could help avoid the situation of officials quoting unpublished data. DWP told us that the quarterly release is aligned with the validation regime to allow the publication of validated Job Outcomes at the earliest possible time, and so moving to more frequent publication would entail considerable changes to the current validation regime.

I am copying this to Dame Anne Begg MP, Chair of the Work and Pensions Select Committee; Robert Devereux, Permanent Secretary for DWP; David Frazer, Head of Profession for Statistics at DWP, Jil Matheson; the National Statistician; and Ed Humpherson, the Authority's Head of Assessment.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Dilnot". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE