
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

STATISTICS ON EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE: WORK CAPABILITY ASSESSMENT OUTCOMES

Thank you for your letter of 20 December 2013 regarding the presentation of statistics about applications for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), in particular work capability assessment outcomes, and related appeals and requests for reconsideration. I apologise for the delay in responding but I wanted to check the position carefully before doing so and this has taken a little longer than expected.

Statistics Authority officials have discussed the issues raised in your letter with statisticians at the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). We have concluded that the title of Table 1a in the quarterly statistical release *Employment and Support Allowance: outcomes of Work Capability Assessments, Great Britain* is potentially misleading, as you suggest, and we will be asking DWP statisticians to consider an alternative labelling so as to correct this and to alert users to this issue. The Authority will review compliance with this request as part of following up on our recent statutory assessment of these statistics, and this will therefore inform in part our consequent decision as to whether to confirm the designation of this set of statistics as 'National Statistics'.

We have been told by DWP statisticians that they will consider your request for more detailed presentations of the statistics as part of a wider departmental review of the whole production process underpinning this statistical series, to ensure consistency with other related statistical products. We understand that, at present, the administrative systems within DWP are not currently configured to enable this to be done immediately, but that the Department will consider new user requirements for additional statistical tabulations as part of this review work. We have been told that the review is expected to start in the next couple of months.

The Department has told us that it made a significant change to the ESA claims procedure in October 2013 to introduce a 'reconsideration procedure' before applicants are able to appeal formally. However, since the publication of the statistics is up to 10 months behind the application reference point, we expect it to take some time for the effects of such procedural changes to flow through into the published statistics. While the Department was not able to confirm an indicative timescale for the introduction of new statistical tabulations in the relevant statistical release, we have asked DWP statisticians to ensure that this happens at the earliest possible opportunity.

More generally, the Authority wishes to see all producers of official statistics ensuring that users are kept informed of departmental plans to enhance existing sets of statistics, partly so that users are aware of forthcoming changes, but also so that users have an opportunity to influence the resulting

statistical product. I would therefore encourage the Department to publish information on its website about the work being undertaken within DWP about these particular statistics, and to provide a contact point or other opportunity for users to feed in their views.

I would like to invite you to meet with the Authority's Head of Assessment to discuss further your interest in these statistics. My office will be in touch with yours to find a mutually convenient date.

I am copying this to Robert Devereux, the Permanent Secretary at DWP, to Jil Matheson, the National Statistician, and to Ed Humpherson, the 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