
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Michael Scholar KCB

Damian Green MP
Minister of State for Immigration
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
LONDON
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11 October 2011

Dear Mr Green

COMMENTS ON MIGRATION STATISTICS

I am enclosing a copy of a letter from the Statistics Authority to Matt Cavanagh at the Institute for Public Policy Research. It relates to concerns raised by him in relation to a comment you made in a speech last month at the Centre for Policy Studies, which has been published online.

You will see that our own analysis suggests that whilst there was undoubtedly a marked increase in net migration between 1991 and 2004, the evidence is mixed as to any further increase since then. This is a different interpretation of the trend in net migration from that which you offered in your speech, although given the volatile nature of the series, as evident in the enclosed graph, there cannot be certainty on such a matter.

I am copying this to the Minister for the Cabinet Office.

Yours sincerely



Sir Michael Scholar KCB

Director General, Monitoring and Assessment, Richard Alldritt

Matt Cavanagh
Associate Director (UK Migration)
Institute for Public Policy Research
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11 October 2011

Dear Mr Cavanagh

MIGRATION STATISTICS

Thank you for your letter of 19 September to Sir Michael Scholar about comments made in a speech by the Minister of State for Immigration that '...after years of net migration increasing relentlessly, the figures stabilised in the last quarter of 2010'.

I should say first of all that the Statistics Authority recognises public debate for what it is. The liberal selection and interpretation of statistics in speeches and political statements is something we have to accept. However, we do comment if we consider that a particular use of official statistics is likely to be substantively misleading. In this particular case we have concluded that whilst we would describe the trend in net migration rather differently from the Minister, there is room for different interpretations.

We have looked at the annual international migration figures published by ONS in the *Migration Statistics Quarterly Report* in August 2011. We need to bear in mind here that net migration is the difference between inflow and outflow of migrants, both of which are difficult to measure, and as such the series is intrinsically volatile. It also appears that Figure 1.1 in the most recent Quarterly Report, which shows the migration trend since 2000, may not have appeared correctly in the online version but I understand this has now been fixed.

To set the figures in context, the Office for National Statistics has provided us with a graph of net migration since 1991, attached. Whilst one could describe it in different ways, I think most people would see a substantial rise between 1991 and 2004, followed by a period in which the figures have varied around 200,000 a year. The latest statistics do show similar numbers for net migration in the 'year ending' for the final two quarters of 2010. But given that we do not see evidence of an upward trend since 2004, we would not regard the end of 2010 as the point at which the figures levelled off. Of course, that interpretation could be modified by where the graph goes in the future.

On balance our view is that these annual net migration figures did increase substantially between 1991 and 2004 but have not shown any obvious upward trend since then. The volatility of the more recent figures makes any stronger statement problematic.

I will raise these observations with the Head of Profession for Statistics in the Home Office who will need to consider whether to issue further advice on the interpretation of these particular statistics.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Alldritt', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Richard Alldritt

Long-Term International Migration
Net migration, all citizenships, calendar years 1991-2010

