
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Michael Scholar KCB

Rt. Hon. Stephen Timms MP
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1A 0AA

22 March 2012

Dear Mr Timms

STATISTICS ON MANDATORY WORK ACTIVITY

Thank you for your letter of 22 February. I am sorry about the delay in replying.

After reading the various newspaper articles to which you drew my attention, I can well understand why you suspect that they were based on briefing by someone in the Department. But, as far as we in the Authority have been able to establish, none of the figures quoted in the articles came from any official source and are neither unpublished official statistics nor from official management information sources.

In the absence of any published source for the figures, all we can do is advise the greatest caution in placing any credence on them. The Statistics Authority would always want to see public debate informed by published, and properly analysed, official statistics. The Department for Work and Pensions has recently started to publish official statistics on the Work Programme - the first sets of statistics were published on 21 February - but they do not as yet contain information on outcomes that would, in our view, allow the claims in the earlier newspaper articles to be either validated or contradicted.

I understand that official statistics on mandatory work activity up to and including November 2011 were published by the Department for Work and Pensions on 15 February 2012. We also note that on 5 March, in answer to your Written Parliamentary Question, the Minister of State for Employment noted that he has asked statisticians in the Department for Work and Pensions to look at publishing further data for both the work experience scheme and the mandatory work activity scheme, in respect of those who stop receiving benefits. (Hansard, 5 March 2012, c571w)

The Statistics Authority will pay close attention to the statistics on the Work Programme as they develop and if we judge that they could be made more readily understood or otherwise improved, we will take that up directly with the Department.

Yours sincerely



Sir Michael Scholar KCB