



Tom Watson MP
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Sir Michael Scholar KCB
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority,
Statistics House Islington,
London EC1R 1UW
TW/KM
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Dear Sir Michael,

Misuse of Official Statistics

This morning on BBC Radio 4's Today Programme, Jen Draper quoted a Department of Health spokesperson saying that according to a recent census of the NHS workforce the number of nurses had increased by '2600 in 15 months'. The source for this figure is:
http://www.ic.nhs.uk/webfiles/publications/010_Workforce/provisionalmonthlyhchs_workforce/Dec10/FINAL_Table_National.xls

Checking these table I see that they are 'provisional' and 'experimental' statistics. In the Code of Practice for Official Statistics it states:

'Experimental statistics are new official statistics undergoing evaluation. They are published in order to involve users and stakeholders in their development and as a means to build in quality at an early stage.'

By my reading, they should not be used as definitive statements by civil servants or ministers. For a departmental spokesperson to use these experimental statistics to rebut a claim from the Royal College of Nursing is, to my mind, a breach of Code of Practice and its commitment to integrity.

I would value your observations on this matter. In the light of the current controversy about the National Health Service, I would welcome an urgent reply to my enquiry.

I am copying this letter to Sir Gus O'Donnell.

Yours sincerely,

Tom Watson
Member of Parliament - West Bromwich East