Sir Andrew Dilnot
Chair, UK Statistics Authority
BY EMAIL

5 November 2014

Dear Andrew

This week sees the first annual tax summaries posted to 24 million people, breaking down their income tax and national insurance contributions by each area of government spending.

It is unclear how each area of spending has been defined and, in particular, how welfare has been categorised given that the Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses data used to produce the summary does not use that label.

Given the centrality of welfare (i.e. benefits) reform to political debate and to this and previous governments' legislative agendas, it's surprising and perhaps unhelpful to see a much more expansive definition of welfare used in this context.

The welcome level of public interest in the figures also raises the question of whether it might be helpful routinely to provide more explanation with the Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses.

Statistics must be presented in a way which "enhances clarity [and] interpretability", according to the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. A letter presenting official figures to 24 million people which fails to meet these criteria is something we are concerned about. I would be grateful if you would look into this and let us know your view.

We would also be grateful if the Authority would consider what other context might be important in a letter such as this, for example the fact that people pay significantly more than just income tax to fund government spending, and the fact that significant numbers of people get more back from the government in cash or in kind than they pay in tax.

Best wishes

Will Moy
Director
Full Fact