

Iain Bell

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Ed,

I am responding on behalf of DfE to your letter of 11th November to the Permanent Secretary on a tweet released by the Department for Education relating to progression to University from selective and non-selective schools. Within DfE I am accountable for ensuring the Department has the skills, capabilities and processes to ensure data are used accurately when released publicly.

I thought it worth setting out what happened in this instance and the steps we are taking to ensure that DfE uses statistics and evidence fully in its published materials.

As you are aware, there is an ongoing consultation on selective education. The Department's Communication team has been working to inform the public debate and encourage participation in the consultation. They considered the statistics in the PQ referenced were information that merited sharing further in order to inform debate.

DfE have processes in place to check tweets which have statistical material. However, in this instance the analysts were not involved in checking the tweet. This would have picked up the two main issues I saw with this as Head of Profession:

- 1) The PQ had full information on numbers of pupils in selective and non-selective education as well as percentages, a set of caveats and links to the underlying published statistics which allowed users to fully judge the way the information was collected and the limitations of the data.
- 2) The phrasing of the tweet implied causality between being a selective school and the differences in outcomes when there are a number of other factors that could have explained the difference.

It is unfortunate, therefore, that our usual processes were not followed in this instance. As you pointed out, we reacted quickly once the issue was identified

and removed the tweet.

The Department has invested significantly in training our civil servants in the accurate use of data and will continue to do so.

As a result of this, we have arranged refresher training for Communications Group and social media staff and are putting in place an ongoing programme to ensure that new members of staff are fully inducted in the processes to ensure the Department maintains the highest standards in use of data as required by the UK Statistics Authority.

I am, as ever, happy to discuss ways in which DfE can continue to improve its processes.

I am copying this letter to the National Statistician, John Pullinger.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Iain Bell".

Iain Bell

Head of Profession for Statistics