
Director General for Regulation

John Pullinger
National Statistician
(by email)

27 July 2017

Dear John,

The Office for Statistics Regulation has been undertaking a review of the continuing compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics of ONS's long-term student migration statistics. This report has been published today on our website.

A range of concerns about the robustness of the estimate of former-student emigration have been raised publicly and directly with us. On this basis, I decided that the Office should look into the quality of the student migration estimates.

In general, I am satisfied with the overall commitment ONS shows to high quality data and high value statistical outputs. ONS is making a range of improvements to its migration statistics to help ensure that they serve the needs of users. Its development programme is well under way, and we expect ONS to continue making progress with their planned changes.

However, I am concerned that the former-student emigration estimate does not bear the weight that is put on it in public debate. This estimate should add clarity on the pattern of student migration in the UK, but instead, it creates doubts by not providing a complete and coherent picture of former-student emigration, since these figures alone do not provide information on all the different outcomes for international students. This judgment applies only to the student migration component of ONS's migration statistics; it is not a judgement about the quality of the overall estimates of immigration and emigration derived from the IPS.

It is standard practice for new figures to be labelled as experimental while they bed in, but in this case, this did not happen. We therefore have asked ONS to make clearer in the MSQR that this estimate should be treated with caution and that it be labelled as an experimental component of the overall National Statistics on migration, while the ONS work programme continues. This is standard practice and it is unfortunate that this was not followed in this case when the new breakdown of emigration figures by previous reason for immigration was first introduced. ONS's work programme is expected to lead to greater clarity about the uncertainty and the issues with the former-student emigration estimate. ONS should work to complete these new developments as quickly as possible and share the findings with the users of the statistics.

I am copying this letter to Iain Bell, Deputy National Statistician; David Blunt, Chief Statistician at the Home Office; and Jon Simmons, Head of Migration and Border Analysis at the Home Office.

Yours sincerely



Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation