
Mary Gregory, Deputy Director for Regulation

Neil McIvor
Chief Data Officer and Chief Statistician
Department for Education

8 March 2021

Dear Neil,

Use of unpublished data during Parliamentary Questions

I am writing to you regarding the use of unpublished data during Parliamentary Questions on 29 January around the DfE's Skills Toolkit. Thank you for the help your team has provided as we have been looking into this.

We welcome the inclusion of statistics on the Skills Toolkit as part of the Apprenticeships and Traineeships official statistics publication. This recognised the need for the orderly release of these data following the use of unpublished management information during a press release. It is positive that you sought to provide analytical support to the policy team that own the data.

However, there have been two separate instances of use of unpublished data on the DfE Skills Toolkit in response to Parliamentary Questions. The first was data on registrations quoted during a [Parliamentary Question in October 2020](#). We raised this with you and shared our view that the response should have drawn on the latest published data. You raised this with the policy team and the figures used have since been revised and updated.

The second related to a [Parliamentary Question in January 2021](#), where unpublished data on course completions were used. The data have since been published within the latest [Apprenticeship and Traineeship](#) official statistics publication.

Your team told us that it is working with officials in your department to ensure that in future where data are used in the public domain, you will follow the principles of the Code of Practice, in particular ensuring that sufficient methodological detail is available for readers to fully understand the figures.

As part of looking into these queries, we have looked at the Skills Toolkit data within the Apprenticeships and Traineeships publication. There are a number of limitations with the data, made clear in the publication, but we also identified some improvements we would like to see. For example:

- The data are published under the Additional Analysis section. This may not be clear to users looking for these data in the release.

- The notes provided under the Additional Analysis section provide users with some of the limitations of the Skills Toolkit data. However, not all limitations of the data are included for example they do not currently inform users of what the geographical coverage is. It is important to clearly explain the relevant limitations of the data and statistics to aid user understanding and these should be regularly reviewed as the statistics are developed.

My team would be happy to discuss the content of this letter with you or your team. I look forward to hearing about your plans for these statistics going forward.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Gregory". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped 'M' and a trailing flourish.

Mary Gregory
Deputy Director for Regulation