



Report into abuse of statistics by the Department for Work and Pensions and UK Government Ministers

Executive Summary

This report outlines 35 cases where Ministerial claims using statistics on the subject of Work and Benefits have fallen short of the standards expected of Government Ministers.

We believe that this demonstrates a consistent pattern of abuse of official statistics by Ministers of the present Government to paint a false picture of benefit claimants in the UK in support of policies which are aimed at cost cutting to the detriment of jobless, sick and disabled people.

Within this document, each case is presented, and fully referenced to source material throughout.

Prepared by the DPAC Research Team, June 2013

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Disabled People Against Cuts:

DPAC is a grass roots campaign body. It was formed by a group of disabled people after the first mass protest against the austerity cuts and their impact on disabled people held on the 3rd October in Birmingham 2010, England. It was led by disabled people under the name of The Disabled Peoples' Protest. DPAC has over 15,000 members and supporters and works with many anti-cuts groups, Universities, Disabled Peoples' Organizations, and Unions

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1 Abbreviations Used

BMA – British Medical Association

CPS – Centre for Policy Studies

DWP – Department for Work and Pensions - UK Government Department

ESA – Employment and Support Allowance

GP – General Practitioner (Medical Doctor)

HMRC – Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs

IB – Incapacity Benefit

JSA – Job Seekers Allowance

MP – Member of Parliament

ONS – Office of National Statistics

UKSA – United Kingdom Statistics Authority

WCA – Work Capability Assessment – test for claimants right to claim the ESA Benefit

2 Methodology

2.1 *Typographical Note*

Within this document, extracts of text that have been directly transcribed from a source are presented as such:

Quoted text

Wherever text has been transcribed into this document, a link is provided so that the original source may be viewed.

2.2 *Criteria for inclusion*

A search was carried out of the factchecking sources, listed in the following section under the following criteria, for items for inclusion in this report:

- Timeframe: May 2010 to the present, the span of the current government
- Topics: covered under the remit of the Department for Work and Pensions
- Who: Government Ministers within the specified timeframe (currently in post or previous post holders), the Prime Minister, Departmental Publications, Press Releases, Department for Work and Pensions web content.
- Independence: The fact check source must be an independent source, free of political or campaigning bias, with no preconceived position.
- Confidence: we excluded all cases where we did not have a high level of confidence in the correctness of the material.

In addition we included 2 cases that were previously known to us (detailed in sections in

sections 4.17 and 4.18) were the evidence was sufficiently conclusive to clearly stand on its own merits.

2.3 Fact Checking Sources

We searched the following fact checking sources in the preparation of this report

2.3.1 Fullfact.org

From the Fullfact.org [website](#):

Full Fact is an independent fact-checking organisation. We make it easier to see the facts and context behind the claims made by the key players in British political debate and press those who make misleading claims to correct the record.

.....

Full Fact is a not-for-profit company registered in England and Wales, [number 06975984](#). Our core funding comes from three independent charitable trusts: the [Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust](#), the [Nuffield Foundation](#) and the [Esmee Fairbairn Foundation](#), and from individual supporters' donations.

2.3.2 Channel 4 News Factcheck

From the Channel 4 News [website](#):

Channel 4 News is committed to challenging expectations with stories that reveal and inspire

Since its launch, the programme has been regularly awarded by the Royal Television Society, BAFTA, Broadcast, Amnesty International and One World Media for its home news stories, extensive foreign coverage and team of experienced presenters, editors, correspondents and reporters.....

[Cathy Newman's FactCheck](#) - seeks the truth behind claims made by those in public office. Her blog has been commended for its statistical integrity and is frequently cited in the House of Commons.

.....

2.3.3 UK Statistics Authority

From the UK Statistics Authority [website](#):

The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body operating at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament. It was established on 1 April 2008 by the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007.

The Authority's statutory objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. It is also required to promote and safeguard the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics, and ensure good practice in relation to official statistics.

The UK Statistics Authority has two main functions:

1. oversight of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) - its executive office
2. independent scrutiny (monitoring and assessment) of all official statistics produced in the UK.....

The UK Statistics Authority, together with the ONS, received a four year funding settlement as part of the 2010 Spending Review. More information about the settlement can be found [here](#).

3 Context

The purpose of the investigation laid out in this report is to ascertain whether statements made by Ministers of the UK government on the subject of Work, Benefits and Welfare have fallen short of the standards expected of Government Ministers in the UK, in respect of the use of statistics.

We have detailed those instances where we believe the claims made by ministers do not meet the standard required.

In order to define the “standard required” in this respect, we have referenced the UK Government's own Ministerial Code.

3.1 UK Government Ministerial Code

The rules governing the behaviour of Ministers of the UK government is the [Ministerial Code](#).

The purpose of the Ministerial code is:

The Ministerial Code sets out the standards of conduct expected of ministers and how they discharge their duties.

The sections of the Ministerial Code which govern use of official statistics by ministers are set out below:

8.15 Ministers need to be mindful of the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice which defines good practice in relation to official statistics, observance of which is a statutory requirement on all organisations that produce National Statistics in accordance with the provisions of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007.

8.16 Ministers also need to have regard to the Pre-Release Access to Official Statistics Order, which place strict conditions on access to official statistics in their final form, including limiting access ahead of publication and prohibits any statement or comment to the press ahead of release of the statistics.

3.2 UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice

The Ministerial Code makes reference to the [UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice which states:](#)

vi. It is also consistent with the Civil Service core values of integrity, honesty, objectivity and impartiality. In relation to statistical work, these are interpreted as follows.

- Integrity – putting the public interest above organisational, political or personal interests.
- Honesty – being truthful and open about the statistics and their interpretation.
- Objectivity – using scientific methods to collect statistics and basing statistical advice on rigorous analysis of the evidence.
- Impartiality – acting solely according to the merits of the statistical evidence, serving equally well all aspects of the public interest.

There are further provisions set out in the code of practice which can be read [here](#)

4 Analysis of claims made on welfare topics

4.1 Britain has the highest rate of jobless households in Europe

Claim: "Britain has the highest rate of jobless households in Europe."

Made by: Iain Duncan Smith

When: 11th October 2010

Where: House of Commons

Media report(s): [Telegraph](#)

Checked by: Fullfact: [Is the UK jobless households rate Europe's highest?](#)

Fact check
Result:

The Eurostat data has four EU member-states – Belgium, Ireland, Hungary and Lithuania – performing worse than Britain, along with several other non-EU countries in Europe. It was the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS) that brought [Eurostat's comparison of European jobless household rates](#) into the UK's political dialogue.

The CPS report '[More Producers Needed](#)' points to data suggesting that the UK has "one of the highest ratios of workless households in the EU", and "the highest incidence of adults in workless households of the six largest EU economies."

But nowhere do the CPS claim that Britain actually tops this ignominious league table, for the simple reason that we don't.

Conclusion Claim is false

4.2 Number of new jobs created but not advertised through Jobcentres

Claim: "Right now we have something like 450,000, just short of half a million jobs every week created within the Job Centres... beyond the Job Centres, in what I call the casual economy that isn't advertised in the Job Centres, it's roughly matching that I would have thought."

Made by: Iain Duncan Smith

When: 21st October 2010

Where: BBC Newsnight

Checked by: Fullfact: [Iain Duncan Smith's job vacancies calculations incorrect](#)

Fact check
Result:

"the ONS Vacancies Survey does give some indication of the number of jobs available both inside and out of the Job Centres, and it places the figure at 459,000, much more modest than the 900,000 implied by

Mr Duncan Smith.”

Conclusion Exaggeration, untrue

4.3 Cost of Family Breakdown

Claim: “The Centre for Social Justice estimates, the cost of family breakdown is £20-24 billion. And the Relationships Foundation puts the figure at nearer £40 billion.

“The fact remains that these are huge numbers – yet they represent just the direct costs. The costs to society as a whole through social breakdown, addiction, crime, lost productivity and tax revenues are very difficult to quantify – but research suggests they could be up to £100 billion.”

Made by: Iain Duncan Smith

When: 4th November 2010

Where: Speech to the charity, Relate

Media report(s): [Daily Mail](#)

Checked by: Fullfact: [£100 bn: the cost of family breakdown?](#)

Fact check
Result:

Without further enlightenment, we can see no reason to accept the claim now in circulation that “broken homes” cost Britain £100 billion.

And whether or not this was indeed what the Work and Pensions Secretary intended to say, his statement did appear to carry this implication. This in turn has given rise to headlines in the press which will receive far more public exposure than the original wording.

Given the complex nature of this issue, any projections are bound to include a large amount of assumption and speculation.

Indeed the very CSJ report from which the lower estimate is extracted warns against certainty in this area: “it is impossible to quantify with any accuracy the cost of family breakdown to the Exchequer”.

However, these cautions are academic to the claim at hand, since none of the available estimates, however rough, seem to support it.

Further reading [[Relationship Foundation Report](#)]

Conclusion Claim has no basis in fact

4.4 UK Jobs taken by people from overseas under the last Government

Claim: “in 13 years of Labour rule, 70 per cent of the four million jobs created were taken by people from overseas”

Made by: Iain Duncan Smith
When: 12 Nov 2010
Where: House of Commons
Media report(s): [The Sun](#) and the [Daily Mail](#)
Checked by: Fullfact: [Four million jobs created: 70% foreign workers?](#)

Fact check
Result:

“For the reasons explained above The Sun's claim is decidedly inaccurate. Yet taking a look at what Iain Duncan Smith actually said, his claim doesn't fare much better. The only way it could turn out to be accurate is if the 13 years he was referring to were, say, 1994-2007 not 1997-2010, but if this is the case, there is a potential problem with the comparability of the data.

Likewise both are mistaken in referring to the number of jobs created – though this may be a case of the figures being lost in the rhetoric, it is nevertheless worth keeping mind the there are no figures to back up any claim regarding the number of 'jobs created' that were taken by workers of any nationality.”

Conclusion Incorrect Claim

4.5 **Private Sector Rents**

Claim: In a parliamentary debate, the Work and Pensions Secretary claimed that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) found that private sector rents had fallen by 5 per cent last year. At the same time he claimed the amount local authorities paid to private landlords had risen by 3 per cent.

Made by: Iain Duncan Smith and Grant Shapps
When: 10th-18th November 2010
Where: Numerous occurrences including the House of Commons and [Today Programme](#)
Media report(s): [Inside Housing](#) and [The Independent](#)
Checked by: Fullfact: [Is the Government asking too much of rent statistics?](#)

Fact check
Result:

“Serious questions have been raised as to the nature of this claim, by the diligent work of [Inside Housing](#) magazine, that was subsequently picked up by [The Independent](#) this morning.

The reason for such doubts is the sourcing of the private sector rent figures from FindaProperty.com, as opposed to the Office for National Statistics as originally claimed in the House of Commons by Iain Duncan Smith.”

Conclusion Incorrect Claim

4.6 EU migrants abusing the UK Benefits system

Claim:

What the EU is now trying to do is get us to provide benefits for those who come to this country with no intention to work and no other means of supporting themselves, with the sole purpose of accessing a more generous benefit system.”

Made by: Iain Duncan Smith

When: 30 Sept 2011

Media report(s): Daily Telegraph

Checked by: Channel 4 News Factcheck: [‘Benefit tourism’ scare sent packing](#)

Fact check Result:

FactCheck asked the government for estimates of how big the problem of benefit tourism actually is, and whether it had got better or worse since the introduction of “right to reside” in 2004.

A DWP spokesman said the department had “no information available”.

We also asked where the headline figures of a potential annual cost to the taxpayer of up to £2.5bn came from and we were told: “The £2.5bn is taken from our internal estimates – showing the worst case scenario. Essentially we have looked at a range of scenarios with the possible fiscal impact ranging from £650m to £2.5bn per annum.”

It later transpired that the figures were based on estimated changes in the economically inactive population, with analysts looking at possible increases of five, ten and 20 per cent to get that worst-case scenario figure.

As far as FactCheck understands – and we weren’t allowed to look at the methodology in detail – this appears to mean that it would cost the country £2.5bn if the ranks of the economically inactive (9.38 million according to the latest Office of National Statistics figures) swelled by 20 per cent.

That would mean a sudden influx of 1.87 million benefit migrants – more than three times the entire Polish-born population of the UK – would have to take place for the Government’s direst predictions to come true.

Conclusion

Given this dubious evidence base, Mr Duncan Smith’s comments have no basis in fact.

4.7 Rise in working age welfare spending before the recession

Claim:

“Spending on working age welfare rocketed by 50 per cent before the recession”

Iain Duncan Smith, Speech to the Conservative Conference, 3

September 2011

“Spending on working age welfare rocketed by 50 per cent *in real terms* under Labour before the recession”,

[Transcript of Ian Duncan Smith's speech, Conservative Party Website](#)

Made by: Iain Duncan Smith
When: 3 September 2011
Where: Speech to the Conservative Party Conference
Checked by: [Fullfact: Did spending on working age welfare increase by 50 per cent under Labour?](#)

Fact check
Result:

Full Fact has been unable so far to track down a definitive source for Ian Duncan Smith's claims on working age welfare expenditure. Our best estimates indicate some support for the claim of a 50 per cent increase in nominal terms.

However, we can confirm that the claim should be understood in nominal terms, rather than the real terms rise first suggested in early versions of the speech. While this was not what the Conservative conference was told, it remains uncorrected on the party website and has already led to certain media outlets putting out the erroneous version. It is also well worth considering whether the use of nominal terms is itself the best measure of a growing welfare bill, given that a real terms comparison accounts for changes in the wider economy.

We hope that the DWP or Conservative party will soon provide us with a source for the claim, and we'll update as soon as we have more information.

[no such update has been posted on the Fullfact website]

Conclusion Unsourced and no firm evidence exists to support this claim

4.8 Child Homelessness

Claim:

“The public thinks that homelessness is about not having any reasonable accommodation to go to, that's not what the definition is. The definition inside government and places like Shelter is that children have to share rooms... Nobody, and I can guarantee this, nobody will be made homeless in the sense of the public's view of it – without a home to go to – as a result of this.”

Made by: Iain Duncan Smith
When: 23 January 2011

Where: [BBC Radio 4's Today programme](#),

Checked by: Channel 4 News Factcheck: [Why IDS can't make guarantees on homelessness](#)

Fact check Result:

Shelter's chief executive Campbell Robb said: "The Secretary of State said that, according to Shelter, families where children share a bedroom would be defined as homeless. This is simply not true. Shelter uses the same definition of homelessness as the government, as set out in the Housing Act 1996, passed by the last Conservative government."

Conclusion Untrue

4.9 Growth in DLA Claims and Lifetime Awards

Claim:

"We are creating a new benefit, because the last benefit [Disability Living Allowance] grew by something like 30 per cent in the past few years. It's been rising well ahead of any other gauge you might make about illness, sickness, disability or, for that matter, general trends in society."

"Something like 70 per cent [of DLA claimants] had lifetime awards, [which] meant that once they got it you never looked at them again."

Made by: Iain Duncan Smith

When: 13 May 2012

Where: [interview with the Sunday Telegraph](#)

Checked by: Fullfact: [Do Iain Duncan Smith's DLA claims ring true?](#)

Fact check Result:

Iain Duncan Smith can point to evidence to support both of the claims he makes about the current operation of the Disability Living Allowance, however the significance of each is hotly contested.

While there has been a 30 per cent growth in the raw number of claimants, this is significantly lower once demographic changes are accounted for, and the discrepancies in the relative growth rates of various conditions suggest the link to wider societal trends might be more complex than the Secretary of State acknowledges.

Similarly, while it is true that over 70 per cent of DLA claimants are on indefinite awards, it isn't necessarily true that these people are 'never looked at again'.

Conclusion Claim is highly questionable

4.10 Weekly number of new Jobs coming through at Jobcentres

Claim:

"On average, every week there are about half a million new jobs

coming through at the Jobcentre"

Made by: Iain Duncan Smith

When: 14 Jun 2012

Where: [LBC radio](#)

Checked by: Fullfact: [Are 500,000 jobs arriving in Jobcentres every week?](#)

Fact check
Result:

After contacting the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), they could not verify what Mr Duncan-Smith may have said this morning. However, they did confirm:

"On average Jobcentre Plus continues to add 10,000 jobs to its books every working day."

This would work out at approximately 200,000 per month, some way short of Mr Duncan Smith's claim.

This figure is actually somewhat lower than the current number of inflows into Job Centres, although as we pointed out above, only considering standard full-time roles brings us closer to DWP's estimate.

...

Regardless of which metric the DWP are using to measure the Job Centre's inflows, 10,000 jobs per working day (50,000 per week) is certainly not half a million per week.

So the Work and Pensions Secretary has inadvertently added 450,000 new vacancies to the actual statistics. Given that he has already done this before, he would be even more advised not to do so again.

Conclusion Untrue

4.11 Success of the Benefit Cap

Claim:

"These figures show the benefit cap is already a success and is actively encouraging people back to work."

Made by: Iain Duncan Smith

When: 16 July 2012

Checked by: Channel 4 News Factcheck: [IDS's work and benefits claims put to the test](#)

Fact check
Result:

In order to know how effective the policy had been, we would need to know the rate at which people on benefits worth more than £26,000 went into work before the letter announcing the changes was sent, and compare it to after the letter was received.

But those figures aren't available. The DWP doesn't collect them. The

Institute for Fiscal Studies, or the Work Foundation, both of which have researched employment, unemployment and benefits, didn't have them either.

"[These figures do] not reveal the effect of the policy," Robert Joyce, senior researcher at the Institute for Fiscal Studies told us.

Mr Joyce went on: "Indeed, this number is consistent with the policy having had no effect at all. Over any period, some fraction of an unemployed group will probably move into work, regardless of whether a benefits cap is about to be implemented.

"The number of people who moved into work as a result of the policy is 1,700 minus the number of people who would have moved into work anyway.

"We do not know the latter number, so we do not know the effect of the policy."

.....

With the information Mr Duncan Smith has put before us, his figures don't show the benefits cap is already successful at getting people back into work.

The figures he's pointed to show that people are getting back to work, but they don't show it's because of the cap.

To be fair, we can't really say the policy's been a failure at getting people back to work either – because we just don't know.

A spokesman for the Department for Work and Pensions said: "The Secretary of State believes that the benefits cap is having an effect."

Conclusion Unsupported claim

4.12 Claimants finding full time work

Claim:

"Of those who are looking for full-time jobs, 4/5 of them are finding them, so about 1/5 of those looking for full-time work are not finding full-time work and settling for part time work."

Made by: Iain Duncan Smith

When: 16 Aug 2012

Where: [LBC Radio](#)

Media report(s): [ITV News](#)

Checked by: Fullfact: [Are 4 in 5 people seeking full time work finding jobs?](#)

Fact check
Result:

...there does not appear to be any data by which the Work and Pensions Secretary can substantiate his claim. There is simply no measure for the number of people seeking full-time work, and hence no

measure for the proportion of whom are successful.

Conclusion Unsupported claim

4.13 Large Families on Welfare

Claim:

“Where you see the clustering of the large families is really down at the very lowest incomes, with those on significant numbers of welfare...and those at the very top level of incomes.”

“We have paid rents on houses in London in some cases of over £100,000 to families are too large to house anywhere else.”

Made by: Iain Duncan Smith

When: 25 Oct 2012

Checked by: Channel 4 News Factcheck: [The truth about the child benefits cap](#) _

Fact check
Result:

Not that many families were ever getting £100,000 a year. [DWP figures](#) show that some 160 claimants out of more than 3 million were getting the equivalent of £50,000 a year or more in 2010. That’s 0.0004 per cent of cases.

....

Our best guess on how many of these claim topped £100,000 is a handful. The [Daily Telegraph](#) researched this in 2010 and found only three, all in the London borough of Westminster.

Conclusion Misrepresentation. Although true, it concerns a tiny number of people

4.14 Rise in tax Credit Payments

Claim:

“Tax credit payments rose by some 58 per cent ahead of the 2005 general election, and in the two years prior to the 2010 election, spending increased by about 20 per cent.”

Made by: Iain Duncan Smith

When: 31 Dec 2012

Media report(s): [Daily Telegraph](#)

Checked by: Channel 4 News Factcheck: [is Britain a tax credit haven?](#)

Fact check
Result:

We asked the Revenue and Customs (HMRC), which administers work and child tax credits, how much has been paid out since the current system started under Labour in 2003 (before that it was the Working Families Tax Credit).

It said that in 2003-04, £16.4bn was paid, and the following year – the one that included the general election to which Mr Duncan Smith refers – £17.7bn.

That's an increase of 8 per cent, not 58.

And in 2008-9, HMRC said, some £25.1bn was paid in tax credits. In the following year, it was £27.3bn. Which means that in the two years prior to the 2010 general election, spending on tax credits increased by 8.8 per cent, not 20.

Conclusion Untrue

4.15 Labour Spending on Tax Credits

Claim:

“Between 2003 and 2010, Labour spent a staggering £171 billion on tax credits, contributing to a 60 per cent rise in the welfare bill. Far too much of that money was wasted, with fraud and error under Labour costing over £10 billion.”

Made by: Iain Duncan Smith

When: 31 Dec 2012

Media report(s): [Daily Telegraph](#)

Checked by: Channel 4 News Factcheck: [is Britain a tax credit haven?](#)

Fact check Result:

That meant that under Labour, from when the scheme started to their last year in government, £147bn was spent, not £171bn.

We also asked HMRC how much had been lost through fraud and error in the tax credits system under Labour. It was actually £11.16bn, not £10bn, so Mr Duncan Smith's only £1.16bn out there – which is better than his previous effort.

It's also worth pointing out that of the £11.16bn lost to fraud and error under Labour, just £1.27bn of that was actually down to fraud. Or 0.7 per cent of the total amount spent on tax credits.

Conclusion Exaggeration

4.16 Fraudsters around the world targeting UK Tax Credits

Claim:

“It will come as no surprise therefore that fraudsters from around the world targeted this [tax credit] benefit for personal gain. “

Made by: Iain Duncan Smith

When: 31 Dec 2012

Media report(s): [Daily Telegraph](#)

Checked by: Channel 4 News Factcheck: [is Britain a tax credit haven?](#)

Fact check Result:

Actually this did come as a surprise. Fraudsters from around the world coming to the UK exploit the tax credit system? Sounds serious. But when we asked HMRC how many non-UK nationals were responsible for tax credit fraud, it said: "The tax credit system doesn't record nationalities of claimants, so we don't have those figures."

Conclusion No basis in fact.

4.17 *Inter-generational worklessness*

Claim:

A radical welfare reform programme designed to tackle entrenched poverty and end the curse of intergenerational worklessness is set out today by new Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Iain Duncan Smith.

Made by: Iain Duncan Smith

When: 27 May 2010

Where: [DWP Press Release: Reforms will tackle poverty and get Britain working again](#) and [Department for Work and Pensions - European Social Fund in England](#)

Media report(s): [Daily Express](#)

Checked by: [Joseph Rowntree Foundation: Are 'cultures of worklessness' passed down the generations?](#)

Further Reading: [The welfare scrounger is exposed as myth by new report](#) and [Exposed: the myth of a 'culture of worklessness'](#)

Fact check Result:

From the [Joseph Rowntree Foundation report summary: Are 'cultures of worklessness' passed down the generations?](#)

"Researchers in deprived neighbourhoods in Glasgow and Middlesbrough found that worklessness was not the result of a culture of worklessness, held in families and passed down the generations.

It found that:

Even two generations of complete worklessness in the same family was very rare.

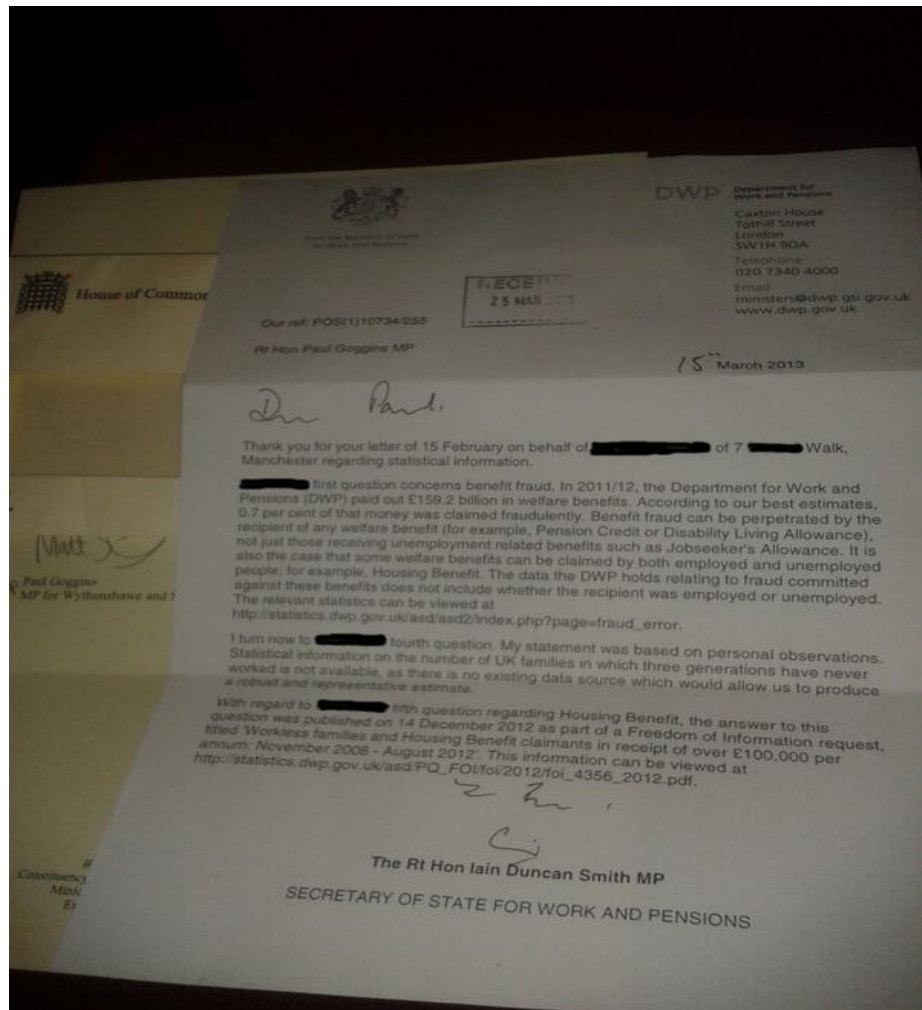
There was no evidence of 'a culture of worklessness' – values, attitudes and behaviours discouraging employment and encouraging welfare dependency – in the families taking part in the research.

Working-age offspring remained strongly committed to conventional values about work and were keen to avoid the poverty and

worklessness experienced by their parents. “

In addition the letter reproduced below (reference POS(1)10734/255), dated 15th March 2013, from Iain Duncan Smith to Paul Goggins MP states:

“My statement was based on personal observations, Statistical information on the number of UK families in which three generations have never worked is not available, as there is no existing data source which would allow us to produce a robust and representative estimate.”



Conclusion This claim has no basis in fact.

4.18 People are better off in work

Claim:

"This principle is in keeping with the body of evidence that people are better off in work - not only financially, but in terms of their health and well-being, their self-esteem and the future prospects for themselves and their family. For instance, people who are long-term unemployed or who have never worked are up to three

times more likely to have poor health than those in work."

Made by: Department for Work and Pensions (Website)
Where: DWP Website: [DWP Health and Work: Employment and Support Allowance](#)
Checked by: Freedom of Information request:
https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/work_and_health
Fact check Result: The DWP response to the Freedom of Information Request contains the source of this claim:

"Gordon Waddell & Kim Burton were commissioned by the DWP to conduct an independent review of the scientific evidence - Is work good for your health and well-being? 2006. The Stationery Office, London. This review contains findings on work for sick and disabled people, (pp20-21), mental health, including severe mental illness, common mental health problems and stress (pp21-24) and cardio-respiratory conditions (pp27-28). It can be found at the following link: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/hwwb-is-work-...> [pdf]"

However, the report itself contains a number of important caveats, especially with regard to people with Mental Health conditions and certain physical conditions.

From annotations made by the author of the FOI Request:

1. The statement "work makes you better" is so general as to suggest that work is beneficial to health in all circumstances when in fact this is not the case, the claim is therefore misleading.

The only evidence to support this claim is a single review which "focused on adults of working age and the common health problems that account for two-thirds of sickness absence and long-term incapacity" [page viii of Is Work Good for your Health and Wellbeing] clearly this means that the remaining third of the relevant population were not considered in any detail.

2. The report itself acknowledges (on page ix) that "a minority of people may experience contrary health effects from work(lessness);" and that "Beneficial health effects depend on the nature and quality of work". The statement "work makes you better" does not include any of the provisos contained in the report itself.

3. It is wrong to suggest there is a large body of evidence when the only supporting evidence the DWP has so far been able to provide is a single report from 2006 which only claims to have focussed on two thirds of the relevant population (see also point 1 above) and when there is no long term researched evidence of the claim.

4. On pg 22 it states the following

"There is limited evidence about the impact of (return to) work on (people with) mild/moderate mental health problems, despite their epidemiological and social importance. However, there is much more evidence on 'stress', which may be the best modern exemplar of common mental health problems."

5. On pg 23 of the same report it states the following

"This review did not retrieve any direct evidence on the relative balance of beneficial vs. harmful effects of work (of whatever psychosocial characteristics) on mental health and psychological well-being."

6. On pg 28 of the same report it states the following

*"CR4 * There is limited evidence that rehabilitation and return to work for workers with cardio-respiratory conditions can be beneficial for general health and well-being and quality of life."*

7. On pg 30 of the same report it states the following

"Moving off benefits can have either positive or negative effects on health and well-being, depending mainly on how claimants leave benefits and whether or not they (re)-enter work. Of those claimants who leave benefits voluntarily, the majority (re)-enter work and have increased income, and many report that their health is completely recovered or much better"

This claim is based on extremely thin evidence, and made in such a generalised form, it does not take into account important parts of the report which state that for some sick and disabled people, work can be harmful

Conclusion Misleading Claim

4.19 Local Housing Allowance Reforms

Claim:

"It is also important we end the sensationalist myths about the local housing allowance reforms in 2011...In London around 750,000 private rental homes will still be affordable."

Made by: Lord Freud

When: January 11, 2011.

Checked by: Channel 4 News Factcheck: [Housing benefits row can't afford slip ups](#)

Fact check
Result:

Lord Freud got his numbers in a muddle – confusing available

properties with affordable properties.

And this isn't the first time that the Work and Pensions Secretary's efforts to calm fears over benefits cuts have been undermined by some "[serious deficiencies](#)" in his department's use of statistics.

The last time, the DWP was caught out dressing up statistics from Find a Property as official figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

If the government wants to deal with what Iain Duncan Smith calls "hysterical scaremongering" about the benefit cut, it needs to be a bit more careful.

Conclusion Figures muddled

4.20 Housing Benefit Claims

Claim:

"Sadly this is the system we have inherited. A system that allowed some families who were living in areas with incredibly high rents, to claim over £100,000 a year in housing costs."

Made by: Lord Freud

When: 5 Nov 2012

Checked by: FullFact: [How many families are claiming £100,000 per year in housing benefit?](#)

Fact check
Result:

These figures show that over four out of every five Housing Benefit claims are below £100 per week (the equivalent of £5,200 per year) according to the September 2010 figures, while only 70 out of over 4.5 million recipients claimed over £1000 per week, around 0.001% of the total.

Even this is likely to overstate the number claiming £100,000 per year however, as a family would need to claim over £1,900 per week to hit this total. Previous FoI responses from the Department have suggested around [five families benefited by this amount](#).

While Ministers may well feel that those families which do fall into that bracket should be tackled nonetheless, it is not necessarily helpful to the public understanding of the issue to repeatedly highlight what is such a small number of the total, without putting this into a wider context.

While the evidence suggests that there are a small number of Housing Benefit claims of more than £100,000 per year - perhaps around five - these cases are very much the exception rather than the rule.

Focusing exclusively on these outliers without first putting them into context, where over 80% of claims are below £100 per week, could distort the debate around this important topic.

Other information drawn out in our FoI request found that larger claims tended to come from larger families, and the average household size for people claiming over £40,000 was six. For more details, do check

out the numbers in the request itself, which is [available here](#).

Conclusion Highlighted the issue of housing benefit costs by using exceptional cases as if they were the rule.

4.21 Support to gain employment

Claim: "The evidence clearly shows that there are people out there who, with the right support, will be able to gain employment and say goodbye to a life on benefits."

Made by: Chris Grayling

When: 4 Apr 2011

Checked by: Channel 4 News Factcheck: [Is the Government's new benefits policy fit to work or shirking its duties?](#)

Fact check Result: Extrapolation from 2 pilots using a stricter WCA test which found 32% Fit For Work and 38% able to work with the right support. Does not take into account number of appeals, and number of decisions overturned.

As for employment prospects, all work programme contractors missed their targets

Conclusion Unsupported Claim

4.22 Moving off benefits following Work Experience

Claim: "Nearly twenty thousand young people have already moved off benefits after doing work experience organised by Job Centre Plus."

Made by: Chris Grayling

When: 19 Feb 2012

Media report(s): Telegraph

Checked by: Fullfact: [Have 20,000 young people moved off benefits after Government-backed work experience placements?](#)

Fact check Result: Full Fact has contacted the DWP to confirm the source of Mr Grayling's claim. If his reasoning tallies with the calculations taken here, we can at best identify around 17,500 of his 'nearly 20,000 young people'. Being more age-specific in measure 'young people' could send the figure down to around 16,000.

However we should be cautious about drawing too many conclusions from this data, given that it extrapolates the findings of a relatively small-sample survey to what is now a much wider cohort. While the

figures might be the best available to us, they are not necessarily strong enough to support the assertion made by the Employment Minister.

UPDATE (21/02/2012)

As we await a response from the DWP, one of our Twitter followers, @atm0spheric has pointed out an additional caveat to using the three-month period from January to March as a basis for extrapolating the findings. Since the rate at which young people enter the job market during a year is not constant, the figures need to be seasonally-adjusted if useful data is to be acquired from 2011 alone.

[There is no record of a DWP response]

Conclusion Too small sample to draw conclusion to support the claim made

4.23 Mandatory Work Experience for Companies

Claim:

There is no circumstance in which we would mandate any individual to take part in work activity for a big company. That doesn't happen."

Made by: Chris Grayling

When: 24 Feb 2012

Media report(s): [The Spectator](#)

Checked by: Channel 4 News Factcheck: [Work experience or slave labour?](#)

Fact check Result:

We found [this answer](#) to a Freedom of Information request from December which strongly suggests Mr Grayling may be wrong on this one.

DWP use the magic word "mandatory" in the document and they name a number of high street giants including Poundland, Wilkinson's, ASDA and Pizza Hut as "current delivery placements".

A spokesman said: "Essentially the Minister was being asked and was talking about the work experience schemes run by JCP – for which his comment is accurate.

"We don't mandate people to work experience through the Work Programme – we mandate people to take part in the Work Programme. It's black box so providers have the freedom to suggest work experience if they think it is useful for the person claiming."

You can read a transcript of Mr Grayling's interview [here](#) and decide for yourself what the minister "was being asked and was talking about", and whether we're right to award him a Fiction rating for that last claim.

Conclusion Economical with the truth

4.24 Work Experience Scheme Voluntary not Mandatory

Claim:

The [Employment Minister said](#) the government's Work Experience scheme, aimed at young people, was voluntary not mandatory. Another scheme run by the government's Jobcentre Plus network called Mandatory Work Activity was compulsory, as the name suggests, but no "big company" would benefit from it by getting cheap labour, he insisted.

Made by: Chris Grayling

When: 29 Feb 2012

Media report(s): [The Spectator](#)

Checked by: Channel 4 Factcheck: [Work experience or slave labour?](#) and [FactCheck update: DWP fail to explain disappearing "workfare" document](#)

Fact check Result:

We found [this response](#) to a Freedom of Information request that strongly suggested he was wrong about that.

Avanta, one of the companies contracted by the government to deliver the Work Programme, made it pretty clear in this document that they were setting up "mandatory work placements" for unemployed people with the likes of Poundland, Asda and Pizza Hut.

Now you can see the FoI response by clicking on that link, but if you search for the document on the Department of Work and Pensions website, all you get is: "Sorry, that page cannot be found."

At the time, we thought we'd give DWP the benefit of the doubt on that missing link. After all, things do go wrong with the internet from time to time.

But since then, our attention has been drawn to another case of strange goings-on with the online information published by the department.

We're grateful to a reader, Anton, for pointing out something strange that's since been seized on by [several bloggers](#).

Anton spotted that the guidance DWP publishes for providers of the Work Programme changed suddenly on Friday.

The Work Programme is completely separate to Work Experience and Mandatory Work Activity. It's not run directly by the government and it wasn't what Mr Grayling was talking about last week.

Under the Work Programme, private companies are contracted to try to help the long-term unemployed get off benefits, and are given quite a lot of freedom to operate as they see fit. One of the options is to organise unpaid work experience.

But DWP does publish "guidance" for those companies setting out rules on how they are supposed to deal with job seekers, and that's what has suddenly changed.

Luckily, Anton saved a [cached copy](#) of the document, which used to tell prime contractors this:

▪

At some point on Friday, hours after Mr Grayling appeared on BBC radio to make those contentious claims about government-run Work Experience, paragraph 14 [mysteriously disappeared](#) and the remaining sections were renumbered.

The change was made quietly, and without explanation. Note that the [updated version](#) is still tagged as “V2.00”, with no reference to the update.

While the debate on whether the Work Experience programme being run directly by DWP is really “entirely voluntary” continues to rage, we didn’t think there was any doubt that work experience under the auspices of the Work Programme WAS mandatory.

Conclusion Economical with the truth

4.25 Comparison of DLA Entitlement of Drug/Alcohol Users vs Blind People

Claim:

"Well it can't be right that we have a benefits system where, under DLA, more people who are either alcoholics or drug addicts are in receipt of the higher rate of disability allowance than people who are blind"

Made by: Maria Miller

When: 11 May 2011

Where: BBC News

Checked by: Fullfact: [Disability Living Allowance: are alcoholics and drug addicts better off than the blind?](#)

Fact check
Result:

The comparison between the number of people who are blind and those with alcohol and drug abuse in receipt of DLA, Maria Miller looks to be on somewhat problematic.

While adding together the higher rate care and mobility numbers does support what she says – this figure does not directly correspond to the total number of people in receipt of higher rate DLA for blindness and for alcohol and drug abuse.

Looking at the care and mobility components separately, it is only for the higher rate mobility component that fewer people who are blind receive the benefit – which is explained by the fact that the DLA criteria has historically excluded blind people, something that has now

changed.

Looking more broadly at overall numbers in support of DLA show that 69,000 people with blindness are in receipt of DLA against 22,800 who have alcohol and drug abuse as a primary medical condition.

Conclusion Dubious comparison

4.26 Private Sector Jobs

Claim:

“Since the election there are actually 500 000 more jobs in the private sector, and employment... there are more people – 300 000 more people – in work than there were a year ago”

Made by: David Cameron

When: 14 September 2011

Where: Prime Minister's Questions

Checked by: Fullfact.org: [Is David Cameron right about the latest employment statistics?](#)

Fact check
Result:

Both Ed Miliband's claim about public vs private sector employment David Cameron's claim about private sector employment can be supported if we accept the time period that they stipulate. However, David Cameron's statement of a rise in total employment over the last year of 300,000 is a vast exaggeration of the actual figure.

Update: We have now heard back from Number 10, clarifying what the PM was getting at when he claimed employment levels had gone up 300,000 in the past year.

Clearly time flies when you are in power. It turns out he meant to say that employment had increased 300,000 *since the election* rather than in the past year. The most recent year on year comparison would be between July 2010, and July 2011. Measured since the election claim is much stronger.

The figure is arrived at by taking the employment level for the three months up to [April 2010](#) which was 28,862,000 (ie the last full quarter before the election) and the current level of 29,169,000.

Between these two periods it can be seen that employment levels are 307,000 higher in the latest statistics than they were then.

So it seems it was the PM's timeline, rather than his number that was inaccurate. Nevertheless, the Parliamentary record needs to be corrected, and we will be looking out to see that this happens.

Conclusion David Cameron's statement of a rise in total employment over the last

year of 300,000 is a vast exaggeration of the actual figure.

4.27 Benefits for Disabled Children

Claim:	“We are not cutting benefits for disabled children.”
Made by:	David Cameron
When:	14 Dec 2011
Checked by:	Channel 4 News Factcheck: Is Cameron cutting disabled benefits?
Fact check Result:	<p>It's true that the most severely disabled children are exempt from the cut, and that existing claimants will get some protection, although it's not the cast-iron promise that campaigners were hoping for.</p> <p>But the benefit on offer for new claimants is being cut, to the tune of more than £1,400 a year.</p>
Conclusion	Mr Cameron was only telling half the story when he said: “We are not cutting benefits for disabled children.”

4.28 Workless Households

Claim:	"The real shame is there are so many millions of children who live in households where nobody works and indeed that number doubled under the last government."
Made by:	David Cameron
When:	25 Jan 2012
Where:	Prime Minister's Questions
Media report(s):	Hansard
Checked by:	Fullfact: 'Double' trouble? Has David Cameron confused his workless household statistics?
Fact check Result:	<p>David Cameron's claims on workless households do not seem to accurately reflect the data he apparently intended to reference. While there is data that shows a doubling of households where nobody has ever worked under the previous Government, this wasn't clearly referenced in his claim, and his meaning could easily have been misinterpreted by MPs.</p> <p>The use of this statistic also meant that the 'millions of children' statement should perhaps have read 'hundreds of thousands of children.'</p>
Conclusion	Exaggeration

4.29 Comparison of the Work Programme and Future Jobs Fund

Claim:

"It [the Work Experience programme] is not a compulsory scheme; it is a scheme that young people are asked to go on and the findings are that around half of them are actually getting work at the end of these schemes. That is a far better outcome than the Future Jobs Fund."

Made by: David Cameron

When: 22 Feb 2012

Where: [Prime Minister's Questions](#)

Checked by: Fullfact.org: [Was David Cameron right on the success of Work Experience schemes at PMQs?](#)

Fact check Result:

However, after speaking to the DWP, it is clear that the data to which the Prime Minister was referring did not measure how many of the participants had got work. Other research has illustrated that not all claimants necessarily enter employment after leaving benefits.

Furthermore, it is not possible to conclude the 'success' or 'failure' of the scheme from the data because no control groups of people not on the scheme were used. Again, other research suggests there may not be much of a difference at the early stages, based on the limited sample available.

So until the DWP extend and develop their research into the Work Experience scheme outcomes, the Prime Minister does not seem to have an adequate basis to make the claims he did.

Conclusion Unsupported Claim

5 Complaints to the UK Statistics Authority regarding Statistics on welfare topics

5.1 Complaint from Fullfact to UKSA on DWP press releases

Complaint [Statistics from the Department of Work and Pensions](#) [\[tcm97-35159\]](#)

Letter:

Made by: Patrick Casey, Fullfact

When: 1 October 2010

Complaint:

Dear Sir Michael

I am writing to request your opinion on whether there has been a breach of guidance on official statistics by the Department for Work and Pensions in recent press releases.

.....

On Monday 27 September [2010] several media outlets, including the Sun and the Daily Mail, reported figures from the Department suggesting that one in face claimants of three types of benefithad received support for over five years.

However there was no mention of these figures on the Departmental website, nor was the press release published.

Though we have since obtained a copy of the press release..... the statistics specific to the story were not publically available when released to the press.

This is not the only time that such an approach has been taken to releasing statistics. On 13th September [2010], a press release was circulated highlighting figures suggesting that 1.4 million people of working age had never worked.

Again, neither the press release nor the figures were reproduced on the DWP website, and when my organisation requested the figures, we were simply sent the original press release because the figures were not publically available.

The press release actually included a link to the bulletin of official worklessness statistics, but the bulletin did not include the type of figures quoted in the release.

Given that the 2009 guidance issued to Government departments by Sir Gus O'Donnell included a reminder that officials "must not selectively quote favourable data from any unpublished dataset", I wish to know if the press releases could be deemed contradictory to such guidance.

UKSA
Response:

Dear Mr Casey

DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS STATISTICS

Thank you for your letter of 1 October about publication of recent statistics by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). I am sorry not to have replied sooner.

I raised the points you made in relation to the two recent DWP Press Releases on benefits duration and worklessness statistics with the National Statistician, who has discussed with DWP. The Department has confirmed that these statistics are National Statistics. In both instances, I understand that they were derived from analyses produced in response to Ministerial requests for such information, and were provided with supporting advice to the Minister on appropriate use of the statistics.

I see no objection to selective quotation from datasets of this kind, provided that they are presented fairly and accurately, and provided that the public

has equal access to the database concerned, so that alternative selections may be made. I am informed that DWP is taking steps to ensure public access to such ad hoc statistical analyses that are not part of their usual suite of regular publications. I understand that, in the instance of the analysis of benefit durations based on the Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study, a similar analysis can be produced by members of the public using the DWP's online tabulation tool accessible via the Department's website.

Nevertheless, in the instance of the analysis of the number of people of working age who have never worked, neither this particular analysis nor the Press Release containing these statistics was made publicly available; and the source of the analysis (the Office for National Statistics' Labour Force Survey) was not given. These were, in my view, serious deficiencies in DWP's arrangements, and I have drawn their attention to this.

The Code of Practice for Official Statistics requires official statistics to be made equally available to all, subject to statutory provisions for pre-release access. The National Statistician has asked DWP that, when producing new analyses that are used in public statements, they ensure that the statistics are also published by their statisticians, or are accessible to non-government analysts, in a transparent way. The Statistics Authority regards compliance with this principle as central to retaining trust in official figures.

UKSA [Department for Work and Pensions Statistics \[pdf\] \[tcm97-35157\] 26th November 2010](#)
Reponse
Letter:

5.2 Work and Pensions Select Committee concerns over reporting of DWP statistics

Complaint Letter: [Letter to Chris Grayling Regarding Benefit Payment Statistics](#)

Made by: from Dame Anne Begg chair of the Work and Pensions Select Committee, [following release of the Work and Pensions Select Committee Report: The role of incapacity benefit reassessment in helping claimants into work](#)

When: Report published 13th July 2011, letter dated 27th July 2011

Complaint:

Dear Minister,

As you know, the committee published its report on "The role of incapacity benefit reassessment in helping claimants into work" yesterday.

You will have seen that in our report, we highlighted the concern amongst incapacity benefit claimants about the negative public perception of them. We deprecated the coverage of the reassessment in some sections of the media and in particular the use of terms such as "scrounger" and "work shy". We drew particular attention to the way in which releases of official statistics about the reassessment process were covered in the media and said that:

"We believe that more care is needed in the way the Government engages with the media and in particular the way in which it releases and provides its commentary on official statistics on the IB reassessment. In the end, the media will choose its own angle, but the Government should take great care with the language it itself uses and take all possible steps to ensure that context is provided when information about IB claimants found fit for work is released, so that unhelpful and inaccurate stories can be shown to have no basis."

UKSA
Response:

Dear Dame Anne

STATISTICS ON EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE

I am writing to you in relation to the concerns expressed by the Work and Pensions Committee about the reporting of statistics on Employment and Support Allowance

In your report, you express concern at the way in which releases of official statistics on the subject were covered in the news media. Your report says that '...more care is needed in the way...in which [Government] releases and provides its commentary on official statistics on the IB [Incapacity Benefit] reassessment.' And 'the Government should take ...all possible steps to ensure that context is provided when information about IB claimants found fit for work is released, so that unhelpful and inaccurate stories can be shown to have no basis'. You also stressed these points in your letter of 27 July to the Minister of State for Work and Pensions.

In the light of these concerns, the Statistics Authority has reviewed the statistical release in question, Employment and Support Allowance: Work Capability Assessment by Health Condition and Functional Impairment and concluded that it could be improved in a number of respects.

As it stands, the statistical release is not as clear as it could be. We note for example that it may not be obvious to the non-expert that figures for the category 'Work Related Activity Group' have to be added to those for 'Support Group' to get the proportion initially judged entitled to benefits; or that because the proportion initially judged 'Fit to Work' is reduced following appeals, the proportion eventually judged to be eligible for benefits is higher than it first appears. We would also like to see more distinction between the assessment of new claims and the re-assessment of existing claims; and some information on trends in the statistics over time. Some improvements on these lines would help all users of the statistical release, especially journalists, to better understand the figures.

We share the view expressed in your report that good statistical commentary not only helps people to understand and use the statistics, it allows inaccurate stories to be shown to have no basis. The Authority considers that this is a very important message for all government departments and agencies. The public can much more easily challenge inaccurate reporting, and inaccurate statements made in the political fray, if the official statistics concerned are accompanied by objective and helpful commentary. It is, regrettably, sometimes argued that if the statistics are controversial, it is best for statisticians to avoid risk and to maintain a low profile, by offering

minimal comment and commentary. We wholly disagree with this view and we are supporting the National Statistician's project to improve official statistical commentary across the board.

UKSA
Reponse
Letter:

[Letter to Dame Anne Begg - Statistics on Employment and Support Allowance \[pdf\] \[tcm97-40942\] 11 August 2011](#)

Letter to
Iain
Duncan
Smith
from
UKSA

Dear Secretary of State

STATISTICS AND REGISTRATION SERVICE ACT 2007: NOTIFICATION IN
RELATION TO STATISTICS ON EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT
ALLOWANCE: WORK CAPABILITY ASSESSMENT

I am writing further to my recent letter to Dame Anne Begg, Chair of the House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee, a copy of which is attached. This letter is notification under section 16 of the above Act, which states that:

(1) Where in the case of any official statistics other than statistics produced by the Board:

(a) the appropriate authority has not under section 12(1) requested the Board to assess and

determine whether the Code of Practice for Statistics has been complied with, and

(b) the Board is of the view that it would be appropriate for it to do so, the Board must notify the appropriate authority accordingly.

(2) Where the appropriate authority is a Minister of the Crown, the Board must lay a copy of its notification under subsection (1) before Parliament.

I understand that you are the appropriate authority for the above statistics. These statistics are not currently designated as National Statistics and are not therefore subject to formal assessment against the Code of Practice. Following the Authority's review of the above statistics to inform our letter to the Work and Pensions Committee, I am writing to let you know that we are of the view that the above statistics should be assessed against the Code with a view to designation.

In accordance with subsections (3) to (5) of section 16 of the Act, I would be grateful if you could now provide me with one of the following:

☺ a statement that you intend to make a request for assessment under section 12(1), including a timetable for making the request; or

☺ a statement that you do not intend making such a request, giving your reasons.

Letter
reference:

[Section 16 - Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 - Statistics on Employment and Support Allowance \[pdf\] \[tcm97-41030\] \[15th August 2011\]](#)

DWP
Response

[Section 16 - Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 - Statistics on Employment and Support Allowance \[pdf\] \[tcm97-41240\] 18th October 2012](#)

5.3 Statistics on Nationality of Benefit Claimants

Complaint Letter: [Settled migrants claiming working age benefits \[pdf\] \[tcm97-41452 \]](#)

Made by: Chris Bryant MP

When: 20th January 2012

Complaint:

Dear Sir Michael

Settled Migrants Claiming Working Age Benefits

This morning, the Employment Minister, Chris Grayling and the Immigration Minister, Damien Green have presented figures in an article in the Daily Telegraph, with regard to the number of migrants who have become UK Citizens or have indefinite leave to remain that are claiming state benefits.

I believe that these figures have been used in such a way that misrepresents the reality of the Department for Work and Pensions research, misleading the public, in order to score political points at the expense of the previous government and distracting from the policy failures of the current government.

As you will be aware, both Ministers have previously been found to use statistics in a misleading fashion;And it seems they continue to do so.

It is my belief that today's figures have been used in a similar fashion – presenting a picture that settled immigrants are disproportionately abusing the welfare system and implying that those settled here legally, are claiming benefits to which they are not entitled.

.....

For these reasons, I would like to request that you investigate, as a matter of urgency, how these statistics have been presented and whether this has been done in a way that is right and proper according to the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Furthermore, could you comment on whether this method of releasing statistics and the manner in which they are presented are recommended by you as the appropriate manner in which ministers should release statistical information.

UKSA Response:

Dear Mr Bryant

STATISTICS ON NATIONALITY OF BENEFIT CLAIMANTS

Thank you for your letter dated 20 January.

The Statistics Authority recognises that Ministers often want to present published statistical information in the way that best serves their political objectives, and that this is part of the cut and thrust of political debate. However, we expect the statistics themselves to be publicly available in a professional and impartial format, and produced and released in ways consistent with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. The DWP

are claiming that these figures (which they describe as 'statistics' on their website) are not in fact statistics subject to the Code of Practice. We disagree. But whatever view is taken on this question, it is clearly contrary to good practice if, as in the present case, the political comment on the figures is in the news media before the public have access to the statistical report.

Please find attached a copy of my letter to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions regarding this matter. More generally, in cases where departments are unclear whether a new release of statistics and analysis should be released as official statistics, we encourage them to seek the early advice of the Authority, given our statutory responsibilities in respect of official statistics.

The statistical report published by DWP on this occasion was, as far as we can ascertain, professional and impartial. We would therefore suggest that all parties to the public debate should pay close attention to the findings, explanations and cautionary comments that the DWP report contains.

UKSA
Reponse
Letter:

Letter to
Iain Duncan
Smith from
UKSA

[Statistics on nationality of benefit claimants\[pdf\] \[tcm97-41450 \] 25th January 2012](#)

Dear Secretary of State

STATISTICS ON NATIONALITY OF BENEFIT CLAIMANTS

The statistics in the report 'Nationality at point of National Insurance number registration of DWP benefit claimants' published by your Department on Friday 20 January have attracted wide media coverage and comment. They were also the basis for the article in the Daily Telegraph, published online on 19 January, by the Minister of State for Employment and the Minister of State for Immigration.

The Statistics Authority has received representations about the interpretation and manner of release of these statistics. We note that DWP issued these as a research report, not as official statistics; and that, as such, they are not in your view covered by the rules in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

The Statistics Authority has reviewed the report and has concluded that it would be preferable for statistics of this kind to be published as official statistics, and in accordance with the Code of Practice. In reaching this view we took account of these points in particular:

⊘ The DWP website refers to the research as 'publication of ad-hoc statistics', which indicates that DWP itself considers them to be official statistics. Many users have treated them as official statistics, and have assumed that they should have been published in accordance with the Code of Practice, which would, amongst other things, have prevented Government Ministers from issuing a political commentary on the statistics ahead of their publication. The Statistics Authority shares that view.

⊘ In view of the political and media interest in the results, we expect that there will be demand for these statistics to be published in future as a series.

⊘ As is explained in the DWP report, the number of people claiming working age benefits is a regular National Statistics release; and so too are the numbers of National

Insurance Numbers registered to non-UK nationals entering the UK. The cross-analysis of these sets of data, which gave rise to the statistics in the current report, is a new statistical analysis, and should be seen as augmenting the existing statistical releases. We suspect that is how most commentators will see them.

⊛ Again, as recognised in the DWP report, these statistics are both highly relevant to public policy and highly vulnerable to misinterpretation. There are some important caveats and weaknesses that need to be explained carefully and objectively to Parliament and the news media at the time of publication. This is, in our view, best done by official statisticians producing a statistical release in accordance with the Code of Practice.

Statistics Authority officials responsible for the statutory assessment of official statistics stand ready to provide any necessary further advice in this respect to the DWP statisticians.

With these considerations in mind, I seek your agreement that any further publication of these, or of any such statistics, be handled as an official statistics release. If you agree to that, we will further propose, under the provisions of the Statistics and Registration Service Act, that the Authority should be invited to assess these statistics, to ascertain whether they are worthy of designation as National Statistics.

In addition, we hope that the anonymised matched records from which the results have been drawn will be published in accordance with the Government's Open Data initiative to allow others to make their own analyses.

Letter reference: [Statistics on nationality of benefit claimants \[pdf\] tcm97-41446\]](#) 25 January 2012

Response from Ian Duncan Smith [Statistics on nationality of benefit claimants\[pdf\] \[tcm97-41448\]](#) 25 January 2012

5.4 Work Programme Statistics

Letter ref: [Work Programme statistics \[pdf\]\[tcm97-42903 \]](#)

By: Andrew Dilnot

When: 3 May 2013

Letter:

Dear Secretary of State

STATISTICS AUTHORITY REPORT ON STATISTICS RELATING TO DWP WORK PROGRAMME AND PRE-WORK PROGRAMME

I wrote to you on 1 November 2012 about the Statistics Authority's interim report on the development of official statistics relating to the Work Programme.

I said in that letter that both the development of the statistics themselves, and the views of the Authority on their adequacy and coherence, should be

seen as work in progress and that they may be overtaken by the release of further statistical outputs. We have now had the opportunity to review the first statistical release on outcomes from the Work Programme issued on 27 November 2012 and have updated the earlier report to take account of this. You will note from the main findings section of the report that we see considerable scope for further development of the official statistics, in terms of the range of the statistics published, their public presentation, their coherence and their compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

In preparing this report we have had regard to the observations in the report by the Public Accounts Committee published on 13 February on Work Programme Outcome Statistics and in the related report by the National Audit Office published in December 2012. The PAC report comments that “the information published by the Department was unclear, and Parliament, the public, and the media were left confused as to the relevance and meaning of the information that did enter the public domain” and “in publishing its data the department did not make clear what level of performance it had expected.”

Whilst both the PAC report and the related National Audit Office report focus on the fact that 3.6% of people referred to the Work Programme between June 2011 and July 2012 achieved sustained employment (normally of six months) by July 2012, the Statistics Authority does not regard that as the most relevant measure to use - since many of the individuals would not have been in the scheme long enough to achieve six months sustained employment by July 2012.

Our conclusion is that the more relevant figure is that based on the June 2011 cohort on its own – namely that 8.6% of those referred to the Work Programme in June 2011 were in sustained employment of at least six months (or three months if hard to place) at some point during the 12 months following referral. That figure can of course now be updated for each month from June 2011 to give a monthly series. The existence of such different measures was the root of some concern at the hearing of the Public Accounts Committee on 17 December 2012 but there are good arithmetic reasons why one is a lot higher than the other and it is up to the authors of the Department’s statistical releases to explain these points clearly and fully.

Whilst this is not directly a matter for the Statistics Authority, it might be helpful for users of the statistics if DWP provided contextual information to support the interpretation of this percentage of each cohort achieving sustained employment. This contextual information could take the form of, for example, DWP’s prior expectations of the percentage achieving sustained employment, or information about target levels for providers, or about the performance other similar programmes.

Annex 3 to the Authority’s report notes that many of the leading news media stated the relevant figure as either 3.5% or 2.3%. There can be no

sharper illustration of the need to explain more fully and clearly the key figures.

We do recognise that the statistics on the Work Programme are relatively complex and unfamiliar to commentators, particularly at this early stage in their development. I hope that the Statistics Authority will be able to offer some further assistance. I have asked my colleagues to explore with DWP statisticians what further advice and support would be helpful.

5.5 Benefit Cap Statistics

Complaint [Benefit cap statistics \[pdf\] \[tcm97-42917\]](#)

Letter:

Made by: Nicola Smith, Head of Economic and Social Affairs, TUC

When: 15 April 2013

Complaint:

Dear Andrew Dilnot

Re: DWP's misrepresentation of data analysis about the benefits cap

Further to my email of last Friday, I am writing to you to complain about DWP's misrepresentation of recent statistical analyses in a press statement the Department provided to the Press Association (PA) about the benefits cap.

Headed 'benefits cap an incentive to work' the PA story (which I have enclosed) sets out that the number of households expected to be affected by the cap has fallen by a quarter. The story states that 'officials suggested 8,000 people have found jobs while others have moved to cheaper properties' and quotes the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions saying that '.... even before the cap comes in we are seeing thousands of people seeking help and moving off benefits.'

The statements from officials and the Secretary of State with respect to changes in the total number of claimants estimated to be affected by the cap are derived from an ad hoc analysis on 'households identified as potentially impacted by the benefits cap', which can be downloaded here:

http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/adhoc_analysis/2013/Ben_Cap_Updated_estimate.pdf .

.....

It seems to the TUC that the content of the analysis and recent statements made by officials and the Secretary of State are at odds. While the analysis explicitly states that the reduction in the number of households who are estimated to be subject to the benefit cap is not the result of claimants changing their behaviour, the DWP's response to the figures continues to imply that it is.

I would therefore appreciate it if you could investigate whether the DWP has accurately represented these statistics, or whether you share our view that in this instance the Department's public statements and briefing contradict the findings of their published analysis.

UKSA
Response:

Dear Ms Smith

STATISTICS ABOUT THE BENEFIT CAP

Thank you for your letter dated 15 April 2013 regarding the publication of official statistics about the benefit cap and related statements made by Ministers and Department for Work and Pensions officials. We have reviewed two DWP releases of statistics published on 12 April – Ad-hoc statistics on households identified as potentially impacted by the benefit cap and Ad-hoc statistics on JobCentre Plus activity regarding claimants who have been identified as potentially impacted by the benefit cap. We have also reviewed various ministerial statements and media coverage before and after the publication of these statistics.

We have concluded that the statement attributed to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions that ‘Already we’ve seen 8,000 people who would have been affected by the cap move into jobs. This clearly demonstrates that the cap is having the desired impact’, is unsupported by the official statistics published by the Department on 15 April. The release ad-hoc statistics on JobCentre Plus activity, from which the 8,000 figure appears to be drawn, explicitly states that the figures are ‘not intended to show the additional numbers entering work as a direct result of the contact’. The release Ad-hoc statistics on households identified points out a number of policy changes that occurred between the publication of the 56,000 and 40,000 numbers, as well as caseload changes ‘due to normal caseload churn, reducing those potentially in scope for the cap’. It further notes:

“Once policy changes and methodological improvements have been accounted for, this figure [the revised estimate of the number of households that will be impacted - 40,000] has been no behavioural change.”

We have also reviewed the extent to which the two DWP statistical releases comply with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. I have written separately to the Secretary of State about these matters, and a copy of my letter is enclosed.

UKSA
Reponse
Letter:

[Benefit cap statistics \[pdf\]\[tcm97-42915\]](#) 9 May 2013

Letter to
Iain
Duncan
Smith
from
UKSA

Dear Secretary of State

DEPARTMENT FOR WORK AND PENSIONS STATISTICS

I have today replied to a letter from Nicola Smith at the Trades Union Congress regarding the recent publication of statistics about the benefit cap, and a copy of my reply is attached.

We have also considered the two short statistical reports published on 12 April against the criteria that the Statistics Authority has published for identifying material that should be regarded as official statistics and published in accordance with the Code of Practice for

Official Statistics. These criteria are in essence that the statistics are used publicly in support of policy, or otherwise are seen to be of public significance. Clearly, the statistics in question qualify on both grounds.

In the manner and form published, the statistics do not comply fully with the principles of the Code of Practice, particularly in respect of accessibility to the sources of the data, information about the methodology and quality of the statistics, and the suggestion that the statistics were shared with the media in advance of their publication.

In March, when considering a complaint about the handling of statistics on child support, I was told that senior DWP officials had reiterated to their staff the seriousness of their obligations under the Code of Practice and that departmental procedures would be reviewed. The Board of the Statistics Authority would welcome further assurance that the working arrangements within the department give sufficient weight to the professional role and public responsibilities of statisticians

5.6 *ESA Statistics*

Complaint Letter: [Employment and Support Allowance statistics \[pdf\] \[tcm97-42958 \]](#)

Made by: Sheila Gilmore MP

When: 9 April 2013

Complaint:

Dear Mr Dilnot

I am writing to you in your capacity as the leading authority on the use of Government statistics. On 30 March 2013 an article by Patrick Hennessy entitled '900,000 choose to come off sickness benefit ahead of tests' was published in the Sunday Telegraph. Please find a copy enclosed. [article was attached to the original letter, it can be read here]. I believe that the headline and the subsequent story are fundamentally misleading because they conflate two related but separate sets of statistics. I would be grateful if you could confirm that my interpretation of what has happened is correct.

The sickness benefit in question is Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). People have been able to make new claims for ESA since October 2008, but those in receipt of the benefits it replaced – Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance, and Income Support on the grounds of disability – only started migrating across in April 2011.

The article implied that many of this latter group were dropping their claim rather than having to go through a face-to-face assessment, with the implication that there were never really ill in the first place and had been 'playing the system'.

However I have checked the figures published by the Department for Work and Pensions and it would appear that the figure of 900,000 actually refers to all those who have made new claims for ESA since its introduction over four years ago, but who have since withdrawn their application before undergoing a face-to-face assessment. These people were not claiming the benefit before and generally drop out of the system for perfectly innocent reasons – often people become ill, apply as a precaution, but withdraw when they get better.

Of the 600,000 people who have been migrated from Incapacity Benefit over the past two years, only 19,700 have dropped their claim. This is the figure that should have featured in the headline, but the 900,000 figure was used instead.

UKSA
Response:

Dear Ms Gilmore

EMPLOYMENT AND SUPPORT ALLOWANCE STATISTICS

Thank you for your letter dated 9 April 2013, regarding the reporting of official statistics relating to the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). I apologise for the delay in my response but I wanted to check this matter carefully before responding.

As you noted in your letter, an article published in the Sunday Telegraph on 30 March 2013 reported that according to government figures, "nearly 900,000 people who were on incapacity benefit dropped their claim to the payments, rather than undergo a tough medical test." The article quoted Rt. Hon. Grant Shapps MP, in his capacity as Conservative Party Chairman, as saying "This is a new figure, nearly a million people have come off incapacitybenefit...before going for the test. They take themselves off."

The National Statistician's Office has passed on to me the text of a press release apparently issued by the Conservative Party at around the time the article was prepared (Annex 1). We note that the press release appears no longer to be easily available in a published format.

Having reviewed the article and the relevant figures, we have concluded that these statements appear to conflate official statistics relating to new claimants of the ESA with official statistics on recipients of the incapacity benefit (IB) who are being migrated across to the ESA.

According to official statistics published by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in January 2013, a total of 603,600 recipients of IB were referred for reassessment as part of the migration across to ESA between March 2011 and May 2012. Of these, 19,700 claims were closed prior to a work capability assessment in the period to May 2012.

The figure of "nearly 900,000" referenced in the article appears to refer to the cumulative total of 878,300 new claims for the ESA (i.e. not pre-existing IB recipients) which were closed before undergoing assessment in the period from October 2008 to May 2012. Annex 2 presents' data published by DWP on new ESA claims and IB reassessments.

In your letter, you also expressed concern about the apparent implication in the Sunday Telegraph article that claims for ESA had been dropped because the individuals were never really ill in the first place. The statistical release does not address the issue of why cases were closed in great depth, but it does point to research undertaken by DWP which suggests that "an important reason why ESA claims in this sample were withdrawn or closed before they were fully assessed was because the person recovered and either returned to work, or claimed a benefit more appropriate to their situation".

Annex 1

Annex 1: Conservative Party Press Release

Nearly 1 million people drop incapacity benefit claim before medical test

878,300 people claiming incapacity benefit - more than a third of the total - have chosen to drop their benefit claim entirely rather than face a medical assessment, new figures have revealed.

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/esa_wca/esa_wca_jan2013_tables.xls

Figures for the two years to November 2010, show that in Glasgow City, an enormous 50 per cent of incapacity benefit claimants chose to lose their benefit rather than undergo a medical test (Hansard, DEP2011-1633, 18 October 2011, link <http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2011-1633/DEP2011-1633.xls>)

To date, a total of 1.44 million Incapacity Benefit reassessments were carried out by doctors.

Of those, the majority, 837,000 (55 per cent), were found fit to work immediately, with a further 367,300 (23.9 per cent) able to do some level of work. Only 232,800 people (15.1 per cent) were classified by doctors to be too ill to do any work at all (DWP, Outcomes of Work Capability Assessments, 22 January 2013, link http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/index.php?page=esa_wca).

Whilst the figures show that not a single person with a terminal illness has been classified as able to work, injuries such as 'sprains and strains', 'repetitive strain injury', 'allergic reactions', 'blisters' and 'acne' have seen big reductions in the numbers of people claiming benefit (DWP, Analysis of WCA outcomes, 12 September 2012, link

<http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/adhoc_analysis/2012/ESA_WCA_Detailed_medical_condition_breakdown_after_appeals.xls >).

Conservative Party Chairman Grant Shapps said:

"Welfare makes up a third of this country's spending - so it's our job to make sure it's getting to the people who really need it.

"Our reforms are about freeing people from a system of dependency that's trapped them and their families for decades - and people are getting back into work as a result.

"These figures demonstrate how the welfare system was broken under labour and why our reforms are so important."

ENDS

Notes to editors

Blisters

·100 per cent of all incapacity benefit claimants suffering from blisters have either withdrawn their claim or been found fit to work.

Repetitive Strain Injury

·87 per cent of all incapacity benefit claimants suffering from RSI have had their benefit stopped. 37 per cent withdrew their claim voluntarily. Of those who attended a medical assessment, 79 per cent were found fit to work immediately.

Sprains/Strains

·Less than 0.5 per cent of claimants with 'sprains/strains' have been found too ill to do any work. 69 per cent of claimants chose to give up their benefit rather than face a medical assessment.

Acne

·None of the 60 people who have been claiming incapacity benefit for 'acne' have been found to be so ill that they cannot do any work. 83 per cent have been found to be either fit for work immediately, or voluntarily withdrew their claim.

Alcohol

·Of the 46,120 people who claim incapacity benefit because of 'behavioural disorders due to use of alcohol', more than 13,000 chose to end their benefit altogether rather than be medically tested. 66 per cent of all claimants have been found to be fit for work immediately, or withdrew their claim.

Drugs

·Of the 29,130 people who claim incapacity benefit because of 'behavioural disorders due to multiple drug use', 69 per cent have been found to be fit for work immediately, or voluntarily withdrew their claim.

UKSA
Reponse
Letter:

[Employment and Support Allowance statistics \[pdf\] \[tcm97-42960 \]](#) 29 May 2013

6 Further reading

- [Work and Pensions Select Committee Report: The role of incapacity benefit reassessment in helping claimants into work \(13th July 2011\)](#)
- [Lies, damned lies and Iain Duncan Smith](#)
- [Full Fact asks watchdog to intervene over inaccurate incapacity benefit reporting](#)

- [Conservative chairman Grant Shapps rebuked over benefit error](#)
- [After Shapps' bad data, the DWP is back in the spotlight](#)
- [IDS accepts need to tone down benefit fraud rhetoric](#)
- [David Cameron accused of "scaremongering" over health tourism](#)
- [How many parents are really paying child maintenance?](#)
- [Government statistics: Fixing the figures](#)
- [Disabled challenge minister over job support boast](#)
- [MPs set to quiz minister over 'misleading' benefit stats](#)
- [DWP lies to cover its tracks on mobility cuts](#)
- [Skivers v strivers: the argument that pollutes people's minds](#)
- [Minister rebuked over immigration statistics](#)
- [Mythbuster: Tall tales about welfare reform](#)
- [Facts and fiction on welfare](#)
- [Scrounger stigma puts poor people off applying for essential benefits](#)
- [The welfare scrounger is exposed as myth by new report](#)
- [Is £600m really being paid in disability living allowance to people who don't qualify?](#)
- [Exposed: the myth of a 'culture of worklessness'](#)
- [Are 'cultures of worklessness' passed down the generations?](#)
- [Mind the gap](#)
- [Benefit policy based on figures culled from web](#)
- [The coalition's statistics: Stats, spats and spads](#)