

Statement

16 March 2009

ONS news release *UK born and non-UK born employment*

Following press criticism of a News Release issued by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on 11 February 2009, Sir Michael Scholar, Chair of the Statistics Authority, wrote to the Times newspaper¹ about the comments made, indicating the Authority's support for the National Statistician's decision to publish these statistics, and noting that the Authority would assess the News Release against the Code of Practice for official statistics and publish its findings.

A summary of the findings is available on the Authority's website at this link.² The Authority is clear that the decision to bring forward the News Release from the planned publication date of 24 February to 11 February was taken for legitimate reasons and that this action was consistent with the Code of Practice. There are, however, aspects of the way this was done, particularly the amount of explanation given, that we believe did not fully meet the expectations of the Code of Practice.

The Authority wishes to stress that the Code of Practice, which was introduced in January 2009, is designed to set high standards across the statistical service. This is the first statistical release to have been assessed against the Code: it is likely that there will be many that will require some development to achieve full compliance with the Code.

Speaking today, Sir Michael Scholar said:

"I have already rejected any suggestion of political motivation in the steps ONS took. The National Statistician exercised her professional judgement in deciding to bring forward the release of the regular analysis of these statistics of the country of birth and nationality of workers, both because there has been misinterpretation of these figures in the past and because she judged that it was in the public interest to publish neutral and objective statistics on this subject as soon as possible, given that the underlying data-set was widely available.

"The Statistics Authority will ask ONS to ensure that the lessons from the assessment we have published today are agreed and accepted. We will continue to support and defend the freedom of professional judgement of the National Statistician".

¹ <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/correspondence/index.html>

² Monitoring and Assessment Note 3/2009, March 2009 is available at:

<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring-and-assessment-notes/published-notes.html>