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**Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Michael Scholar KCB**

Rt. Hon. Keith Vaz MP  
Chair, Home Affairs Committee  
House of Commons  
LONDON  
SW1A 0AA

11 July 2011

Dear Mr Vaz

**STATISTICS ON IMMIGRATION**

A number of reports from the Home Affairs Committee in recent years have included observations about the limitations of official UK migration statistics, and have criticised some of the ways in which the statistics have been used in public debate.

As a response to these observations, I enclose a report from the Statistics Authority which reviews the position on these statistics and the prospects for improvement.

Our main conclusion is that whilst Parliament, Government and the public all demand a comprehensive statistical picture of immigration and emigration, this is not, in practice, deliverable without the systematic recording of people entering and leaving the UK. Such systematic recording is not something that statistical offices can establish for themselves. It would require Parliament and Government to put the necessary framework of legislation and administration in place.

To the extent that such administrative recording is not put in place, there is no alternative statistical solution that will deliver comprehensive, integrated and reliable data. However, our report makes some suggestions to improve communication of what is produced.

I hope that the Committee will find our report helpful.

Yours sincerely



**Sir Michael Scholar KCB**

# Monitoring Brief

M&A Note 5/2011  
11 July 2011

## *Immigration Statistics*

In the course of 2010-11, the Home Affairs Committee of the House of Commons issued several reports on immigration-related topics. In these reports it commented on the limitations of UK migration statistics, and criticised some of the ways in which the statistics have been used in public debate.

This Brief considers, from the perspective of the UK Statistics Authority, the official statistics available and the comments made by the Committee, and suggests some areas for improvement in the presentation of the statistics.

Our main conclusion is that whilst Parliament, Government and the public all demand a comprehensive statistical picture of immigration and emigration, this is not, in practice, deliverable without the systematic recording of people entering and leaving the UK. Such systematic recording is not something that statistical offices can establish for themselves. It would require Parliament and Government to put the necessary framework of legislation and administration in place.

Until that time, government statisticians must continue to do their best with what is available whilst explaining the strengths and weaknesses of those statistics as clearly as possible. However, no matter how well the current data are presented, they will not present a comprehensive and coherent picture.

### **Statistics on international migration**

Faced with the fundamental problem that there is no comprehensive source of records on migrants in to or out of the UK<sup>1</sup>, the Office for National Statistics bases its main official estimates, 'Long-term International Migration' (LTIM), on the International Passenger Survey (IPS) and uses information from other sources to make adjustments, for example for people who change their intentions about their length of stay (**Annex A** sets out the various sources). These ONS estimates are the best available but their reliability in relation to migration is inevitably limited by the relatively small proportion of migrants in the travelling population (around 2% in 2008) interviewed at ports and the necessary reliance on what those interviewed say to the interviewer. The IPS was enhanced in 2009 to improve its coverage of migrants but the problems inherent in relying on sample survey data remain.

ONS publishes a suite of tables giving quarterly and annual estimates of international migration and data about the characteristics of migrants (including citizenship and the main reason for migration), all based mainly on the IPS. As well as these figures on the flows of migrants, ONS publishes statistics on the numbers in the population by country of birth and nationality based on other official statistics sources, principally the Annual Population Survey.

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<sup>1</sup> The Home Office is currently developing the e-Borders system which will record both the entry and exits of migrants, and other visitors, through linking document histories. It is planning to make data from the system available to ONS to support the production of migration statistics in the longer term but this is not expected for several years:  
<http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/imps/updates-reports/current-updates-reports/index.html>

ONS presents the main findings on both international and internal migration (movement of population within the UK) in a quarterly statistical bulletin, *Migration Statistics Quarterly*. ONS, the Home Office and Department for Work and Pensions jointly publish the bulletin and give headline figures about permission to enter and to work in the UK.

The Home Office publishes separately a range of statistics from its border control systems including visa information from the Points Based System. It also publishes statistics from the Worker Registration Scheme for nationals from the eight Accession countries in central and eastern Europe that joined the EU on 1 May 2004. DWP publishes statistics on the number of registrations for National Insurance Numbers to overseas nationals – an important source of information about foreign nationals joining the labour market.

In response to demand for estimates of the number of visitors to the UK for periods of less than a year<sup>2</sup>, ONS has developed short-term migration estimates<sup>3</sup> of the number of people arriving in the UK to stay between one month and a year. These estimates are not included in the mid-year population estimates.

### **Home Affairs Committee comments**

In its October 2010 report *Immigration Cap*, the Committee concluded:

“There is no single source of migration data in the UK. Until exit checks are implemented in the form of e-Borders, it is not possible to count individuals out of the country, and so figures on the inflow and outflow of migrants cannot be matched. Migration is currently measured in several different ways, which are not directly comparable one to another. This can obscure and complicate the public policy debate on immigration, a difficulty which was highlighted by the use of varying sets of figures by different witnesses, and exemplified by the fact that the Government itself is using one set of data for its immigration target (net long-term immigration) but is acting on another set (entry clearance visas issued) to implement a cap. We urge the Government to implement exit checks as soon as possible to ensure that immigrants leaving the country can be matched with those entering it.”<sup>4</sup>

The Committee undertook a review of the work of UK Border Agency in December 2010. In its report, the Committee commented:

“Finally, our recent inquiries into the proposed immigration cap and the evidence sessions ... have pointed up the multitude of statistics relating to migration, the different bases on which they are compiled, and the lack of comparability between sets of statistics and over time. This makes any discussion of the area very difficult as there is no agreed starting point and opponents choose whichever set of figures supports their argument best. We acknowledge that the conflicting sets of figures are compiled for different purposes and by a variety of bodies, but we consider that it would help both those engaged in the formation of immigration policy and the general public seeking to understand it if the Government—and indeed others—were to adopt a clear set of criteria for the measurement of inflows to and outflows from the UK (whether, for example, they include UK citizens, whether they relate to those settling in the UK and, if so, for how long, and so on) and to use only figures that meet these criteria when discussing migration, asylum and related policies.

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<sup>2</sup> A long-term migrant is defined as one who states that he or she expects to stay for at least a year

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=15363>

<sup>4</sup> Home Affairs Committee, *Immigration Cap*, First Report of 2010-11, 25 October 2010, p. 10  
<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/home-affairs-committee/inquiries/immigration-cap/>

We also note that unless and until the UK has records of all those entering the country and leaving the country, many of the uncertainties highlighted in this Report will continue into the future.”<sup>5</sup>

The Committee also examined these issues in its report in March 2011, *Student Visas*, on the Government’s proposals on Tier 4 of the Points Based System. It concluded:

“Any policy which is based on flawed data has the potential to create significant unintended consequences. We are broadly supportive of the Government’s policy of reducing immigration, but we believe that policy decisions ought to be based on the best possible information. We therefore urge the Government, as a matter of priority, to investigate whether a more reliable system of data collection than the International Passenger Survey can be used upon which to base immigration policy.”<sup>6</sup>

### **Accessibility of the statistical messages**

The Statistics Authority’s 2009 Report on migration statistics<sup>7</sup> looked at the state of development of statistics on the subject and the prospects for progress. **Annex B** below sets out briefly the report’s recommendations and related action currently in hand.

ONS, Home Office and DWP have responded to the difficulties in accessing and understanding the range of statistics by publishing their quarterly statistics on the same day supported by the overarching release, *Migration Statistics Quarterly*. The departments also jointly developed an annual report for migration statistics, to provide a more detailed analysis of the characteristics of migrants (although they have so far only published this report once, for migration in 2008). ONS has also published detailed guidance material about the LTIM statistics, including their reliability and comparability with the other sources<sup>8</sup>.

The Authority recognises however that there remains scope for confusion due to the number of sources and their less-than-ideal nature. Most of the sources are designed for purposes other than the production of statistics, and are not necessarily what would be most useful for that purpose. Moreover, some users<sup>9</sup> question the reliability of the sample survey estimates derived from the IPS (because it is an interview survey and identifies relatively small numbers of migrants), prompting them to prefer the Home Office statistics based on administrative data, regardless of the well-documented limitations of the current administrative records<sup>10</sup>.

The comments made by the Home Affairs Committee in its *Student Visa* report related in part to evidence provided by the University of East Anglia. UEA cited the Migration Advisory Committee<sup>11</sup> (MAC) report, *Limits of Migration*<sup>12</sup> that highlighted the relatively small sample size of the IPS, and the results<sup>13</sup> of the 2001 Census that indicated an under-estimation of out-migration during the

<sup>5</sup> Home Affairs Committee, *The work of the UK Border Agency*, Fourth Report of 2010-11, 21 December 2010, p. 7 <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmhaff/587/58702.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Home Affairs Committee, *Student Visas*, Seventh Report of 2010-11, 15 March 2011, p. 37 <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmhaff/773/77302.htm>

<sup>7</sup> UK Statistics Authority, *Migration Statistics – the Way Ahead?* July 2009 <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-reports/index.html>

<sup>8</sup> See *Frequently Asked Questions*: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=507>

<sup>9</sup> Sarah Mulley and Alice Sachrajda, IPPR, <http://www.ippr.org/publicationsandreports/publication.asp?id=802>

<sup>10</sup> Office for National Statistics, *Comparison of combined IPS (long and short-term migration) estimates with administrative sources*, May 2008, [http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/downloads/Reconciliation\\_Exercise.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/downloads/Reconciliation_Exercise.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/aboutus/workingwithus/indbodies/mac/aboutthetmac/>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/policyandlaw/consultations/closed/>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/implications.asp>

1990s, as evidence of the inherent unreliability of the survey. MAC noted the more recent improvements<sup>14</sup> to the survey but gave no view as to the expected benefit of the changes. MAC also highlighted the under-estimation of student outflow from the UK by the IPS. Those leaving are more likely to give other explanations than studying as their main reason for travel and consequently give the appearance that students stay in the UK after completing their studies. ONS has told us that it has investigated this issue and is testing two questions in May/June 2011 to better identify students leaving the UK. It expects to introduce the new questions on the IPS in January 2012.

The Select Committee's comments highlight also a concern that the statistics are sometimes used in a selective way, not least by government departments. Commentators<sup>15 16</sup> have criticised the UKBA consultation document *The Student Immigration System*<sup>17</sup> for its use of migration statistics. It sets out the context for the policy proposals by quoting statistics on student migration using arrivals data based on landing cards. However, these are limited to non-European Economic Area visa holders and may include multiple visits for the visa holders during the period. Also, the figures include some dependants of the visa holders, and also student visitors who can only remain in the UK for up to six months. This use of the student visitor statistics seems to run counter to the Home Office's own advice:

"Data from the Office for National Statistics on long-term international migration of students provide a better indication of long-term trends than visas issued and passenger arrivals data, due to changes in immigration rules, in particular the introduction of the 'student visitor' category on 1 September 2007."<sup>18</sup>

MigrationWatch similarly used the student visitor numbers to demonstrate a rise in student migration in its report<sup>19</sup> on the impact of the Points Based System and in evidence to Home Affairs Committee<sup>20</sup>.

### **Improving the statistics**

The extracts from the reports of the Home Affairs Committee, quoted above, indicate that the currently available statistics on immigration and emigration fall some distance short of painting the comprehensive statistical picture that Parliament would want to be available to inform the public policy debate. This is true at the national level but even more pronounced at the local level where there is often little relevant data. As the other material in this Brief makes clear, there is no statistical solution to this without the systematic recording, and matching, and keeping of full records, of people entering and leaving the UK. Such systematic recording is not something that statistical offices can establish. It would require Government and Parliament to put the necessary framework of legislation and administration in place. In the absence of that, government statisticians must do their best with what is available, and what will come available.

The Home Affairs Committee has rightly emphasised the importance of the e-Borders project in providing a robust source of exit data – it will be the first administrative source of data on passengers/migrants leaving the UK. However, it will not offer a complete solution in itself. The Committee has asked the Government to enable the linkage of entry and exit information, and the

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<sup>14</sup> See Annex A

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.ippr.org/publicationsandreports/publication.asp?id=802>, footnote 9

<sup>16</sup> <http://mag.digitalpc.co.uk/olive/ode/elgazette/LandingPage/LandingPage.aspx?href=RUXHQVBENC8yMDExLzAyLzAx&pageno=NA..&entity=QXlwMDQwMA..&view=ZW50aXR5>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/sitecontent/documents/policyandlaw/consultations/students/>, p. 12

<sup>18</sup> <http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration-asylum-stats.html>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.migrationwatchuk.org/briefingPaper/3.13>

<sup>20</sup> Home Affairs Committee, *Student Visas*, Written evidence, MigrationWatch, SV3,

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/home-affairs-committee/publications/>

Government has responded<sup>21</sup> saying that it supports the development of e-Borders. Information<sup>22</sup> from the Migration Statistics Improvement Programme has highlighted that whilst some statistical benefits are likely to be delivered from the e-Borders system in the long term, it will not be possible to produce direct migration counts from it. This is because the administrative records that will be collected from the carriers will not routinely include the country of residence of the traveller. Where e-Borders will deliver benefits is in relation to information on linked journeys, which will be useful at an aggregate level to improve the measurement of net migration and to improve estimates from the IPS.

In line with the recommendation in the Authority's report on migration statistics<sup>23</sup> and with the Select Committee's call for the use of a consistent definition of migration<sup>24</sup>, it would be helpful if ONS, Home Office and DWP were to adopt a conceptual framework<sup>25</sup> for migration statistics and encourage its use across government and by the broader user community. The framework would indicate how the different existing statistics relate to each other and to the process of migration more generally. It should also make clear the strengths and limitations of each set of statistics and guide users on the preferred statistic for different uses.

The Home Office may need to take further steps to ensure that its use of migration statistics in policy and related documents is consistent, particularly between the statistics presented in policy reports and those in statistical outputs, to help ensure their appropriate use and interpretation. The Cabinet Secretary issued guidance to government departments on such matters in 2009<sup>26</sup>.

ONS could improve the available material by presenting migration statistics on a consistent basis wherever possible, for example, presenting LTIM and IPS estimates together for non-EEA migrants. It would also be helpful if ONS consulted users on what use they make of the data in *Migration Statistics Quarterly*, and then use that information to develop its presentation and accessibility.

While ONS has made improvements to the IPS, these changes are modest in comparison with the challenge of accurately measuring international migration. The longer term goal – of an integrated statistical system that draws on both administrative and survey/census data – will take some considerable time to realise, perhaps decades.

Progress will be dependent on how far and how fast the UK moves to establish the administrative recording and matching of the passport details of people entering and leaving the country. To the extent that this is not put in place, there is no alternative statistical solution that will deliver comprehensive, integrated and reliable data.

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<sup>21</sup> Home Affairs Committee, *Immigration Cap*, Government's Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2010-11, Fifth Special Report of Session 2010-11

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmselect/cmhaff/717/717.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/imps/updates-reports/current-updates-reports/index.html>

<sup>23</sup> *Migration Statistics – the Way Ahead?* (footnote 7)

<sup>24</sup> Para 18 Review of the Work of the UKBA (footnote 5)

<sup>25</sup> We understand that Eurostat has adopted a conceptual framework for migration statistics and ONS announced in May that it has begun work on a conceptual framework with the University of Southampton:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/imps/updates-reports/current-updates-reports/index.html>

<sup>26</sup> [http://www.parliament.uk/documents/upload/letter\\_brennan\\_090227.pdf](http://www.parliament.uk/documents/upload/letter_brennan_090227.pdf)

## **Annex A: Sources of International Migration Statistics produced by ONS and the Home Office**

### **The International Passenger Survey (IPS) and Long-Term International Migration (LTIM)<sup>27</sup>**

The IPS is a sample survey of passengers arriving at and departing from UK air and sea ports, and the Channel Tunnel. Its primary use is to capture data on international tourism and to compile the travel account of the balance of payments. Passengers are sampled on all major routes in to and out of the UK; travellers on these routes make up around 90 per cent of all travellers entering and leaving the UK. The IPS sample is structured to ensure that it is representative by mode of travel, route and time of day. Interviews are conducted throughout the year.

The main IPS sample is over 230,000 interviews and in 2008 had an overall response rate of 83 per cent. In 2008, about 2.2 per cent of those sampled were migrant interviews, which amounted to 5,117 cases. The information collected by the survey is then weighted to produce national estimates of migration. A range of characteristics are collected by the IPS including citizenship, reason for migration and country of birth.

LTIM provides a more comprehensive estimate of flows of international migration as it combines information from other sources to compensate for the types of migrants missed by the IPS. These include the majority of asylum seekers and some of their dependents, and people who migrate over the land border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Until 2007 LTIM estimates were produced by combining IPS migrant information with data on flows to and from the Irish Republic provided by the Irish Central Statistics Office. From 2008 onwards, data on migration from the Irish Republic is covered by the IPS, with information on international migrants going to and from Northern Ireland being supplied by the Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency (NISRA). Adjustments are also made for asylum seekers using data provided by the Home Office.

Information collected by the IPS is based on respondents' intentions which may or may not reflect their final actions. LTIM estimates include adjustments for people who change their intentions with respect to their length of stay and therefore whether they are considered a long-term migrant under the UN definition. Due to its construction LTIM cannot be used to perform cross-tabulations in the same way as the IPS but it is the preferred source for analysis where possible.

### **Improvements made to IPS**

The Port Survey Review<sup>28</sup> summarised the main changes to the IPS:

- new migration shifts at major ports (in particular at Stansted, Luton and Manchester airports)
- established migration filter shifts<sup>29</sup> for emigration for the first time in 2007
- increased the sample of migrants at the key ports
- increased the coverage of short-term migrants
- a new survey design with a larger, main migration sample and a sub-sample for interviews collecting data for balance of payments and tourism statistics,

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<sup>27</sup> See *Exploring the differences in sources of international migration data*:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=507>

<sup>28</sup> See Quarter 2 2009: <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/imps/updates-reports/historical-updates-reports/updates-reports-09/index.html>

<sup>29</sup> Migration filter shifts boosted the number of migrant contacts. Most contacts were only asked questions which enabled identification of whether they intended to migrate or not. A full interview was conducted only with those who were intending to migrate.

The new sample design, introduced in January 2009, re-focused the sample on the measurement of migration. ONS also extensively re-designed the IT platform for the survey, to enable future flexibility in the survey design.

ONS has commented further: 'The IPS was not originally designed for the purposes of measuring migration, focusing primarily on the requirements for tourism and balance of payment statistics, hence the changes brought about by the Port Survey Review. The latter changes have been significant, but within the constraint that we have to use a voluntary, self-reporting survey for this purpose - for example, in making the sample more optimal in relation to migration statistics, in increasing the sample sizes of emigrants, and in ensuring we cover the emerging routes for new migrants from Central and Eastern Europe.'

### **Impact of the changes**

The dynamic nature of migration means that it is impossible to measure exactly how much these changes have improved IPS migration estimates. There has been no increase in the actual numbers of migrants interviewed, but there is reduced standard error and the sample is much more balanced, that is, less skewed towards migrants arriving and leaving through Heathrow and more balanced on migration through other routes. This will have delivered improvements to the quality of regional and local authority estimates, especially outside of London and the South East.

### **2011 Census and Beyond**

The Census has always measured long-term in-migrants but not previously measured short-term migrants. Users such as the Bank of England and Treasury are interested in the impact that all in-migrants, including those that are short-term, have on the labour market and the economy more widely. The recent influx of EU accession migrants raised resource planning and funding issues for both local and central government.

The 2011 Census<sup>30</sup> will be the first to count the number of short-term migrants<sup>31</sup> (although they will be excluded from the count of the usual resident population). Questions on migration have been extended in the 2011 Census, to cover citizenship, and the month and year of arrival. These data will enable better comparisons with administrative data.

ONS has established the Beyond 2011 programme to investigate the feasibility of producing census type statistics in a variety of different ways and will look at alternatives to a traditional census.

### **Home Office Border Control Statistics<sup>32</sup>**

The UKBA International Group manages visa-issuing sections around the world. There are currently over 100 nationalities that require a visa to come to the UK, covering three-quarters of the world population. Non-visa nationals, apart from EEA and Swiss nationals, who want to come to the UK for over 6 months, or to work, also require a visa.

**Entry clearance visas** can be classified into three categories:

- Temporary: the applicant has met the requirements for admission to the UK as a visitor, student, student visitor or temporary worker and must renew the visa before it expires;
- Leading to settlement: at the end of a certain length of time, usually between two and five years, the applicant can make an application for 'indefinite leave to remain'; and

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<sup>30</sup> In England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The General Register Office for Scotland did not include the intention to stay question in Scotland's 2011 Census

<sup>31</sup> A migrant born outside the UK who has stayed or intends to stay in the UK for between 3 and 12 months

<sup>32</sup> See: Control of Immigration annual and quarterly reports: <http://homeoffice.gov.uk/science-research/research-statistics/immigration/>

- Settlement: a visa permitting a person to remain indefinitely in the UK.

The figures of entry clearance visas issued show intentions to visit rather than actual arrivals.

The Points Based System (PBS) consists of five “Tiers”. Three of these (Tiers 1, 2 and 5) relate to permission to work. Tier 4 provides a route for students to study with an approved education provider. An additional tier (Tier 3) relates to unskilled workers and is currently suspended.

Dependants are allocated an entry clearance category according to the circumstances of their application. A child or partner will be recorded as a dependant under the tier of the main applicant, unless he / she has applied for and been issued with a PBS visa in their own right, when they will be included as a main applicant.

### **Passenger arrivals**

The number of journeys across the border by non-EEA nationals is derived from **landing cards** presented to Immigration Officers at the border crossing point either in the UK or at a juxtaposed control. This excludes: EEA and Swiss nationals; passengers who enter as members of HM or NATO forces; officers or members of the crew of ships, aircraft or Channel Tunnel trains; those who land briefly in the UK in transit without passing through immigration control; and any passengers who enter the UK from other parts of the Common Travel Area<sup>33</sup>. The passenger arrivals data are of the number of journeys made; a person who makes more than one journey is counted on each occasion, either in a specific category, if given fresh leave to enter, or in ‘passengers returning’.

### **Comparisons**

UK Border Agency data on visas issued and passenger arrivals include those coming to the UK to study. However, these data cannot be directly compared as they use different counts of the same group of people. In addition the data released relate to different time periods.

There are a range of other reasons for the differences between these figures, which include:

- visas can be issued in one period and the individual arrives in a later period;
- the individual may not arrive;
- the individual may make more than one journey into the UK in the period the visa is valid;
- not all individuals arriving require a visa for entry; and,
- arrivals are based on estimates of landing cards, while estimates of visas issued are sourced from the database used to process the visas.

Data from the Office for National Statistics on long-term international migration of students provide a better indication of long-term trends than visas issued and passenger arrivals data, due to changes in immigration rules, in particular the introduction of the ‘student visitor’ category on 1 September 2007.

The ‘student visitor’ category, which provides for those persons who wish to come to the UK as a visitor and undertake a short period of study (maximum 6 months) and those studying on courses of six months duration or less who do not intend to take part-time employment or undertake a paid or unpaid work placement as part of their course, may previously have been classified as ‘visitors’ or ‘short-term students’ respectively.

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<sup>33</sup> The Common Travel Area consists of the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and the Republic of Ireland.

## **Annex B: Recommendations in the UK Statistics Authority Monitoring Report, *Migration Statistics: the Way Ahead?* (July 2009)<sup>34</sup>, and steps taken subsequently**

1. We recommend that ONS's quality assurance methodology is made clear to users and that a phase of quality assurance involving local government experts occurs before the final version of the estimates is released.

*ONS published a quality assurance strategy<sup>35</sup> explaining the approach it was taking to check the quality of the estimates and also highlighted how users could be involved in the checking.*

*ONS conducted a user engagement exercise to seek users' views of the impact on the planned improvements. It published a summary response on the feedback, followed by a detailed report. Users were largely in favour of the improvements.*

*ONS established reference groups consisting of a variety of experts to comment on methodology and sense check results. The members are mainly local authority experts who provide a detailed local perspective.*

*There are two types of reference group: Technical Reference Groups and Local Insight Reference Panels. Technical groups assist in the development of new methodology and provide knowledge of local trends and effects, while Local Insight groups focus on local emerging impacts of the improvements made.*

2. We recommend that ONS flag those local authority population estimates where there are higher levels of uncertainty, indicating the reason for the uncertainty.

*ONS is developing a means of flagging local authority population estimates. It published a paper on its work to date in May 2010, which set out its approach and outlines the main sources of uncertainty in population estimates. It provides examples of the types of local authorities that are subject to uncertainty in their estimates. In the longer term, ONS is looking to produce an approximate indicator of quality for each local authority population estimate.*

3. We recommend, as soon as practicable, the release of information to clarify how e-Borders data might be used in the estimation of migration statistics.

*Phase 2 of the Programme has commenced and includes a work stream to determine the statistics benefits of e-Borders. The February 2011 update from the Programme says:*

*'It is expected that some statistical benefits could still be delivered in the long-term. This would include the use of aggregate flow data to produce improved measurement of 'net' migration flows and use of e-Borders data to improve the method of weighting-up of the International Passenger Survey. However, the timing of these benefits depends on achieving sufficient data quality, particularly in terms of coverage. It is expected that tangible benefits for ONS statistics are still several years away.'*

4. We recommend the online release of project papers which, together with details of investigations currently underway and their progress, would give users a better understanding of progress.

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/monitoring/monitoring-reports/index.html>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/imps/mig-stats-improve-prog/comm-stakeholders/index.html>

*ONS has published quarterly summaries about progress on the MSIP, as well as a number of research papers on the main areas of development. It also published minutes of the Programme Board meetings, together with some working group papers.*

5. We recommend that each department involved in the Programme provides the programme board with details of the work being undertaken, together with the associated expenditure, and update this every six months.

*ONS developed a template for departments to report on their progress to the MSIP Board. The departments' reports to the Board are summarised in the Programme Board minutes and published on the ONS website.*

6. We recommend that ONS, Home Office and the Department for Work and Pensions adopt a 'conceptual framework' in their releases of migration statistics, to enable users to understand how the different sets of figures relate to each other and to the process of migration more generally.

*The first (and only) joint Migration Statistics annual report (2008) produced by ONS, Home Office and DWP contained a diagram that went some way to illustrate the international movements and related data sources. The report included a detailed explanation of the sources of international migration data highlighted in the diagram in an annex to the report. The diagram didn't refer to internal migration and associated data sources. ONS only presented the diagram in the annual report. The joint report for 2009 was cancelled. ONS hasn't included the diagram as a framework in Migration Statistics Quarterly or referred to it subsequently.*