
Director General for Regulation

Mr Mark Sedwill
Permanent Secretary
Home Office
2 Marsham Street
London
SW1P 4DF

7 October 2014

Dear Mr Sedwill

I am writing to you about the data on the monthly volume of passport applications received by the HM Passport Office. On 10 June, James Brokenshire MP, the Minister for Security and Immigration, speaking in an Adjournment Debate, described the number of applications received in the first five months of this year as being the highest for 12 years.

On high profile issues, where Ministers make statements based on management information, the UK Statistics Authority expects Government Departments to place the supporting information in the public domain, in the form of an ad hoc statistical release, to support the Ministerial comment. Although HM Passport Office has provided monthly information to the Home Affairs Select Committee going back to 2010, no supporting information covering the entire 12-year period has been made available publicly.

In our view, this is an opportunity to consider the whole issue of official statistics on the topic of passports - the availability, coverage, reliability and frequency of statistical information about passport applications - to ensure that the public interest in the provision of passports is met. Over the summer, I have had constructive discussions with the Home Office's Head of Profession for statistics, who has been very helpful in explaining some of the background to the management information relied on by the Minister. From these discussions, I understand that the Home Office is already considering carefully how best to release information on passport applications into the public domain in the future. I also note the recent announcement that the HM Passport Office has ceased to be an Executive Agency from 1 October 2014 (although this should not affect the availability of historic information).

However, I want to emphasise that the Authority's core principle is to encourage equality of access - so that all those interested in an issue of public debate can draw on the same data compiled on the same basis at the same time. In this case, the Home Office has not met this expectation.

I would therefore welcome an update from you on your progress towards releasing the underlying data together with appropriate statistical commentary.

I am copying this letter to Sir Andrew Dilnot, Chair of the UK Statistics Authority; John Pullinger, the National Statistician; and David Blunt, the Head of Profession at the Home Office.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Humpherson', written in a cursive style.

Ed Humpherson