
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

Frances O'Grady
General Secretary
Trades Union Congress
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Dear Ms. O'Grady

WOMEN IN EMPLOYMENT STATISTICS

Thank you for your letter of 27 October about the statistical basis of HM Treasury's presentation of information about women's employment. I apologise for the delay in replying. I attach a note prepared by Ed Humpherson, the Authority's Director General for Regulation, drawing on discussions with statisticians at HM Treasury and the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

I am copying this to Sir Nicholas Macpherson, Permanent Secretary to the Treasury, and to John Pullinger, the National Statistician.

Yours sincerely



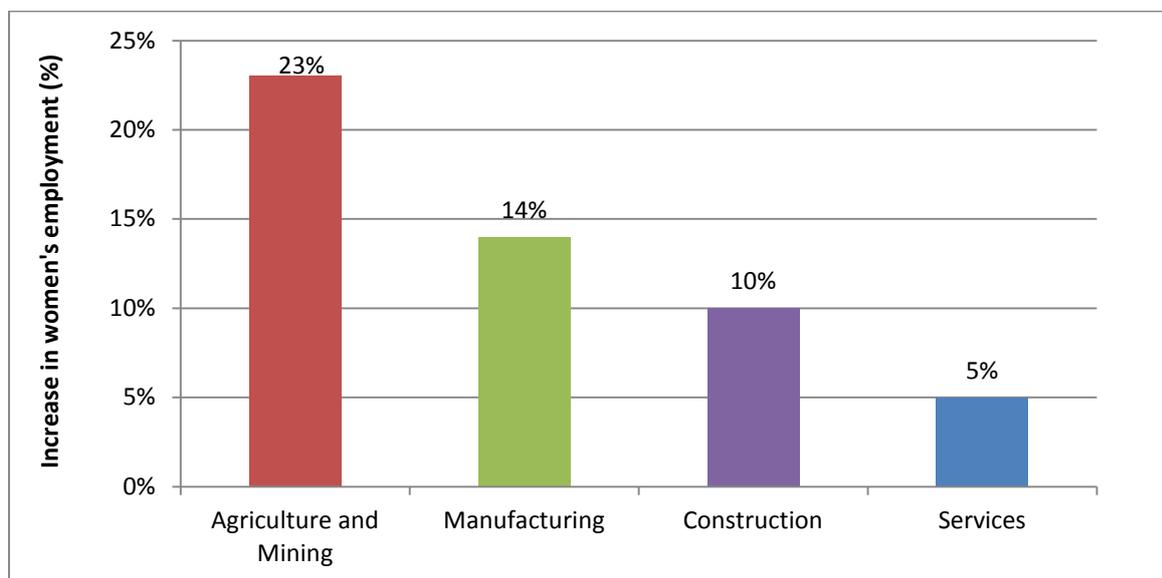
Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

ANNEX

Most of the issues raised in Ms. O’Grady’s letter appear to have been addressed in an analytical note¹ published by HM Treasury on 6 November. This analytical note is consistent with the note attached to Ms. O’Grady’s letter but, usefully, adds more information about data sources and two further statistical tables. HM Treasury’s note clarifies that the Labour Force Survey (LFS) statistics presented are non-seasonally adjusted estimates for April-June quarters, for 2010 to 2014, and relate to the United Kingdom. Table C also indicates the occupational groups defined as High Skilled, Medium Skilled, and Low Skilled. HM Treasury has told the Statistics Authority that the LFS was used because it is regarded as the best source of information about employment by occupation, and that HM Treasury’s analysts used the LFS as the source of information about employment by industry to ensure consistency. ONS publishes a wide range of statistics about women’s employment from the LFS on its website²; this helps users to explore headline figures in further detail, and to present their own analyses.

Ms. O’Grady also raised an important question about presentation – that showing percentage increases in high level sectors of the economy without indicating the relative sizes of the sectors can be misleading. The HM Treasury analytical note includes this graph:

Figure 1: Percentage change in female employment (April-June 2010 to April-June 2014)

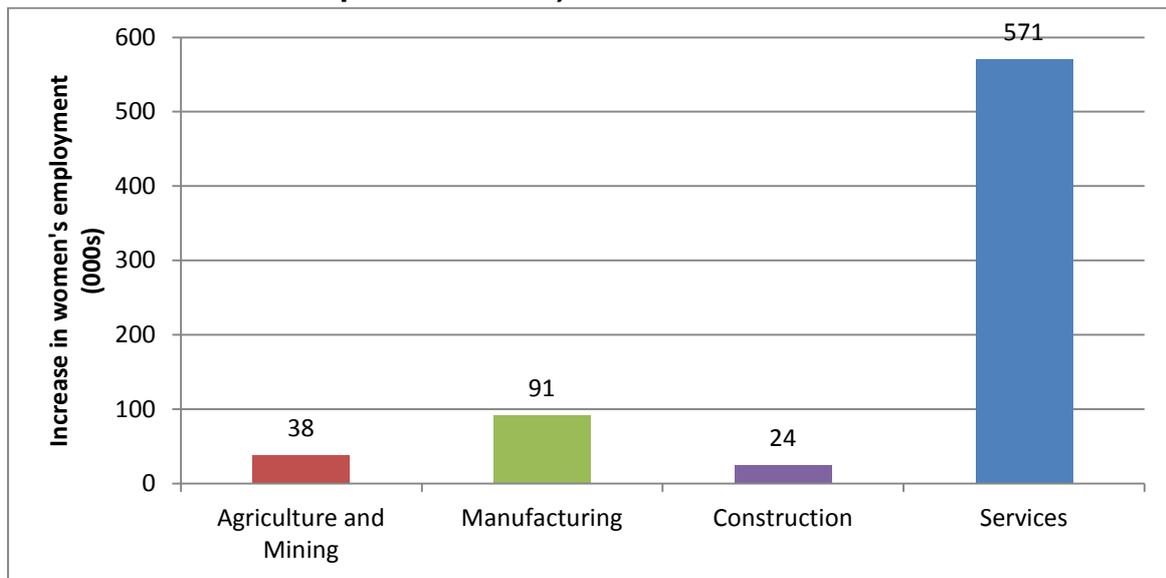


This shows a substantial percentage increase in female employment in the Agriculture and Mining sector which, although numerically correct, might mislead the non-expert reader. The chart below shows the change in absolute terms.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hm-treasury-analysis-women-in-the-workplace>

² <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=Labour+Market>

Figure 2: Increases in female employment in absolute terms (April-June 2010 to April-June 2014)



However, neither chart by itself is fully satisfactory because the industry sectors presented are very different in terms of the number of women working in them. Agriculture and Mining is the high-level industry sector with the lowest number of female workers (203 thousand in April-June 2014), and of course is dwarfed by the Services sector, in which 12.84 million women worked in the same period.

The graph overleaf (Figure 3), prepared by Statistics Authority officials, using the data provided in Table B of HM Treasury's analytical note, presents an alternative illustration of women's employment by sector.

Whilst it is helpful that HM Treasury published its analytical note, we are concerned that it did not do so until a fortnight after the version that Ms. O'Grady attached to her letter. The Authority's view is that Government announcements drawing upon official statistics, or making significant reference to them, should be accompanied by analytical articles setting out the details of sources, definitions and any assumptions made.

Figure 3: Increases in female employment in and percentage change in female employment (April-June 2010 to April-June 2014)

