
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

Rt. Hon. David Blunkett MP
House of Commons
LONDON
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15 May 2014

Dear David

MIGRATION STATISTICS

Thank you for your email of 11 April 2014. I'm sorry it has taken some time to reply; I needed to explore the issues you raised with experts in ONS.

Addressing in turn the questions you asked:

1. Whether the statistics take into account the fact that '40% of those adjudged to be 'new' migrants from May 2004 were already in the country.'
 - I understand that this is a reference to data on work permit applications which showed that of the 133,000 work permit applicants in May-December 2004 from new EU member countries, nearly 40% were already in the UK prior to 1 May 2004¹.
 - ONS' revised estimates of net migration between 2001 and 2011 take account of work permit applications, but also – importantly - data from a range of other sources. These include the Annual Population Survey (APS), Flag 4 GP registrations, Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) Lifetime Labour Market Database (L2), National Insurance Number allocations to overseas nationals (DWP) and work and study visas issued by the Home Office. Taken together these support the picture that inflows of EU8 nationals were consistently higher from 2004 – 2007 than previously estimated.
 - It is worth bearing in mind that the ONS revisions to the net migration series were made across the whole decade from 2001 - 2011, not just the period after EU accession in 2004.

2. The validity of assumptions made about migrants (as opposed to visitors) from Eastern Europe coming in to airports outside London and Manchester.
 - ONS' analysis of data from the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) from 2001 to 2011 showed large increases in the number of passenger routes and passenger journeys connecting airports in EU8 countries with airports in the UK between 2004 and 2008. The annexed graphs show the considerable increase in, for example,

¹ <http://www.oecd.org/general/migrationflowstomajoroecdcountriesseemtobestabilizingdatashow.htm>

- numbers of passenger journeys between EU8 countries and airports such as Luton and Stansted between 2004 and 2008.
- ONS' experts concluded that a plausible explanation of the underestimation of net migration of EU8 nationals between 2004 and 2008 was likely to be arrivals of migrants at airports which were not covered (or not fully covered) for migration purposes prior to improvements made to the International Passenger Survey (IPS) sample design between 2007 and 2009.
3. Whether this is an issue of net or gross flows – specifically, whether any of the 'new' migrants were actually returning from visits to home.
- The IPS covers people who both enter and leave the country. It distinguishes between visitors and 'migrants' – of different durations – on the basis of questions about the intended length of stay (for immigrants) and the year of arrival in the UK, excluding any short visits overseas (for emigrants).
 - The revised figures published by ONS are for net migration to the UK for 2001-2011 and, as mentioned above, have been compiled from analysis of several different data sources.

I trust that you will find this information reassuring. I would like to add one further reflection on my part: I believe there are lessons for all statistical producers from the ONS work on international migration. The ONS work was based on systematic analysis of different sources of data. This analysis shed light on the quality of past estimates. It shows the benefit of continuous review, and regular triangulation of official estimates with other data sources. I will encourage the ONS and others to continue to do analysis of this type, and to do so promptly.

If you would find it useful to discuss further details with the experts in ONS then my officials will be happy to arrange a meeting.

I am copying this letter to Yvette Cooper MP, David Hanson MP, Jil Matheson (the National Statistician) and Glen Watson (Director General of ONS).

Yours sincerely

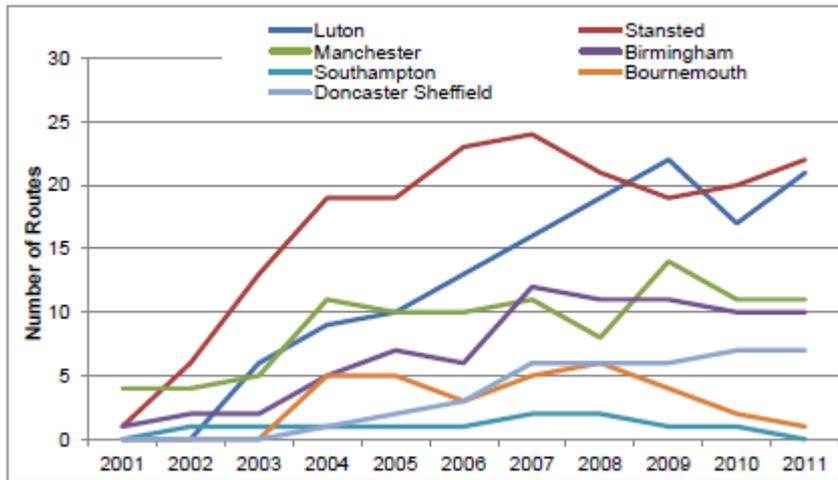


Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE

Annex

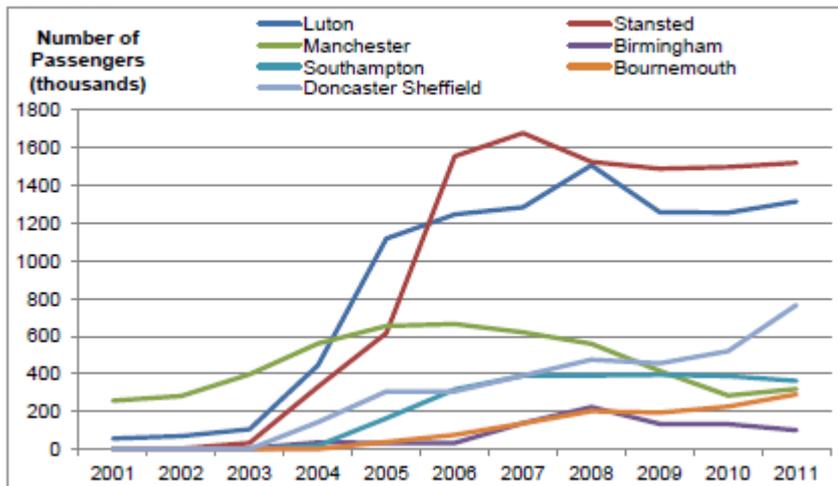
Selected charts from ONS's report: Quality of Long-Term International Migration estimates from 2001 to 2011² (p30)

Figure 3.1 Number of passenger routes between selected UK airports and EU8 countries, 2001- 2011



Source: Civil Aviation Authority (CAA)

Figure 3.2 Number of passenger journeys between selected UK airports and EU8 countries, 2001- 2011



Source: Civil Aviation Authority (CAA)

²

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/migration1/long-term-international-migration/quality-of-long-term-international-migration-estimates-from-2001-to-2011/sty-quality-of-ltim.html>