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**Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation**

Jonathan Slater  
Permanent Secretary  
Department for Education  
7<sup>th</sup> Floor Sanctuary Buildings  
20 Great Smith Street  
London  
SW1P 3BT

11 November 2016

Dear Jonathan,

The UK Statistics Authority has received concerns following a Tweet published by the Department for Education (DfE) on 10 November<sup>1</sup>. The Tweet read “70% of white working class boys from grammars go to uni vs 54% from comprehensives. What do you think about grammars”.

The UK Statistics Authority has reviewed the Tweet in question and identified possible issues with its content.

- The reference to ‘*working class boys*’ seems wrong. As was made clear in the answer to a Written Parliamentary Question from Royston Smith MP that was published on November 2<sup>2</sup>, DfE does not collect ‘*information on pupils’ socio-economic status or whether they would be identified as working class*’<sup>3</sup>. Instead, the statistics quoted were about white male students who were eligible for free school meals in year 11.
- It is also in the nature of grammar schools that they are selective, unlike most comprehensive schools, and the tweet is therefore not making a like for like comparison between the two types of school.

The Authority has concluded that the tweet was not a fair representation of the underlying statistics<sup>4</sup> and we are disappointed that the Department published it in this form. I was pleased therefore to see that your press office has now withdrawn this tweet, and did so quickly once the issue was identified.

I know that the Department’s statistical Head of Profession, Iain Bell, has been working closely with your press office to seek to ensure that all statistical content is checked with his

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<sup>1</sup> This Tweet has now been withdrawn.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2016-10-19/49388/>

<sup>3</sup> See footnote 2.

<sup>4</sup> See footnote 2.

team before publishing. This approach to sign-off is encouraged by the Code of Practice for Official Statistics<sup>5</sup>.

I understand that in this case the statistical team was not consulted before the message was tweeted, which was unfortunate. I would therefore like to ask for an update from you on how you will avoid the recurrence of such misleading communications.

I am copying this letter to John Pullinger, National Statistician, and Iain Bell, Head of Profession for Statistics at the Department.

Yours sincerely,

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

**Ed Humpherson**

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/monitoring-and-assessment/code-of-practice/>