

House of Commons
Public Administration Select Committee

Migration statistics

Written Evidence

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**Written evidence submitted by Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) Population
Geography Research Group (PopGRG) (5STATS 01)**

The responses to the PASC's questions on migration statistics in this submission from the RGS-IBG PopGRG are based upon comments from members of the PopGRG.

Summary of PopGRG response:

The data sources for understanding migration to, from and within the UK are limited. The ONS (and sister agencies) are doing a good job with poor data. The international migration data are not fit for purpose. What is required to answer questions of policy and academic interest is a longitudinal population register together with a reliable system for monitoring emigration. A revised system for migration statistics should focus on enabling local level estimation; and there is a need for internal and international migration to be considered holistically.

1. Do the published migration statistics – at the national, regional and local levels — meet the full range of their users' needs, namely: a. Are they easily discoverable and accessible to all users?

b. Are they easy to use and understand? c. Do they provide an appropriate level of detail?

d. Are they effectively summarised?

- It is possible to find the Internal and International Migration statistics quickly via a search of the ONS website or google.
- The LTIM estimates are difficult to locate on the ONS website and it is difficult to switch between the data, methodology and interpretation. It would be better if there was an interface along the lines of Neighbourhood Statistics, where the data can be accessed in a raw format and the metadata is located in the same place.
- The pathway to the statistics on the ONS website is not clear. It is necessary to search the ONS site using Google to find the data.
- Some experience is needed to use the statistics effectively. You need to know the limitations of how the data is collected (survey data), and why the data is collected (GP Patient Register).
- International Migration at Local Authority district level is not good quality. Ward level migration is only available every 10 years from the Census.
- The statistics are effectively summarised.

2. How well have producers of migration statistics engaged with users? How responsive have they been to feedback from users of the statistics?

- ONS engage through CLIP groups, workshops, consultations and updates at conferences such as BSPS. Response to feedback is difficult to assess – often what is requested by users is not available and / or achievable.

3. Do the migration statistics which are published enable members of the public to gain a better understanding of the issues? Are the right migration statistics being collected?

- The right migration statistics are not being collected, and this is not possible without a population register and compulsory re-registration when you move.
- The IPS is not a reliable source for detailed information on migrants, which is unfortunate considering the diversity of the migrant streams.
- The inadequacies of the data, and the specialised skills needed to properly use the estimates, do not help the public gain a better understanding of migration.

4. Is the degree of uncertainty surrounding estimates of migration properly reported and widely understood? Is the degree of uncertainty surrounding estimates of migration acceptable or should it be reduced? If so, how could it be reduced?

- The degree of uncertainty is not properly reported or widely understood. However, ONS are due to publish 95% Confidence intervals around LA Population Estimates – it is being tried out with pre-2011 Census estimates. Also ONS have tried publishing the extent of possible variation due to various components of population change.
- There is always going to be uncertainty – even with census results. Uncertainty could be reduced with more regular censuses or compulsory re-registration when moving which would improve GP Patient Migration (NHSCR/PRDS) and, hence, improve Internal migration estimates. Better International migration estimates at LA level is essential and has been the main weakness in ONS Population estimates for many years.
- Professor Philip Rees (School of Geography, University of Leeds) has produced a Memorandum submitted to the House of Lords Select Committee on Public Service and Demography, which will be published in their next volume of evidence. It makes an estimate of confidence intervals for age-sex groups in the projected UK population. The method might be usable for doing the same for net immigration estimates, but it would require several months of work.
- The following report may be of use: Bijak, J. (2012) Migration Assumptions in the UK National Population Projections: Methodology Review. Report for the Office for National Statistics. University of Southampton.

5. Are the migration statistics adequate for measuring the Government's progress against its net migration target?

- The Census demonstrates that existing methods underestimated net immigration through the 2000s. There is no sign of significant improvement in methodology (e.g. e-borders is not designed to track migration, passport details do not include current address, if you move after getting a passport, there is no obligation to inform the Home Office).
- Lack of data on emigration make net migration estimation difficult (see below).

6. What more could be done to improve the quality of migration statistics? Should data from other sources, such as e-Borders, be incorporated?

- ONS is doing the best they can with the (poor) data sources available to them.
- The UK could certainly benefit from better information on both migration flows and migrant stocks, especially if they plan to stop taking censuses.

- It should be made clear that international migration is distinct from internal migration (within-country). A holistic approach that considers data needs of internal and international migration together will best provide recommendations for a system that allows thorough understanding of population change.
- There is a serious shortfall of data on emigrants, about whom very little is known. Basic information is needed on how many people have left, their characteristics and where they are. The lack of information on emigrants makes local estimation of net migration almost impossible. Emigration is both poorly estimated and largely ignored in policy analysis. Emigration data could be gathered via a census question that asked information about family members living overseas; or a requirement of British nationals living overseas to register at embassies, which is a system adopted by the Dutch.
- An e-Border type system would provide the required data if it covered all persons from / to the country. A continuous population register (based on NHS or DWP systems) would help more.
- More could be made of current administrative data but all have the problem of not knowing when / why people leave the country.
- Several members of the Population Geography Research Group of the RGS-IBG advocate and would fully support the introduction of a longitudinal population register. This would enable measurement of migration (visitors, short-term, long-term) that is consistent across international migration and internal migration.
- If e-borders tracked everyone in and out, and recorded where each person was going, then international migration statistics could be improved. Census data should be compared with current methods and benchmarked accordingly.

January 2013

Written evidence submitted by the British Society for Population Studies (BSPS)

The British Society for Population Studies (BSPS) comprises persons with a scientific interest in the study of human populations. Its main objectives are to further the scientific study of biological, economic, historical, medical, social and other disciplines connected with human populations and to contribute to the public awareness of them.

Summary

- The statistics on migration to and from the UK and its constituent parts are inadequate not only for social scientific inquiry but also for monitoring the effectiveness of measures designed to implement government policy.
- This remains the case despite the significant improvements in data coverage and accuracy achieved by the UK's three national statistical agencies over the past decade following the revelations of the 2001 Census.
- The main reason for this unsatisfactory situation is that the primary source used in the monitoring of the UK's total migration flows between the decennial checks provided by the Census does not have this as its primary purpose.
- In the absence of an official system of registering the addresses of all persons usually resident in the UK and the changes in these, the best way of improving the quality of the UK's migration statistics is to implement e-Borders in such a way as to provide a full count of international arrivals and departures and, alongside this, to use the enhanced International Passenger Survey, Annual Population Survey and Population Census to estimate their personal characteristics and their UK destinations and origins respectively.
- The statistics on departures (emigrants) are now recognized to be of lower quality than those on arrivals (immigrants), yet are just as important in the calculation of the net migration figures that have featured recently in government policy statements and are just as important in their impact on the UK's population size and composition.
- Additional steps needed for the more accurate measurement of departures include: systematic collection of data from non-UK statistical agencies on the numbers of people arriving in their countries from the UK; fuller examination of the UK's three Longitudinal Studies to identify people that cannot be traced from one Census to the next and have not been registered as deaths; and better documentation of UK nationals living abroad.

Overview

1. The BSPS members who supplied evidence for this submission to PASC appreciate the substantial progress made in the UK's international migration statistics over the last

decade. The Migration Statistics Improvement Programme (MSIP) has led to refinements in the International Passenger Survey (IPS) and use of administrative data, greater availability of and accessibility to data, and more sensible publication dates, as well as providing valuable new information on plausibility ranges and migration timelines.

2. Nevertheless, there remain great concerns about the quality of the UK's international migration statistics and the extent to which they are fit for the purpose of helping to understand and forecast this key driver of UK population change and to measure its impacts, especially at the local-area scale. Therefore they still cannot be deemed to meet their users' needs adequately. This situation is unlikely to change without further investment in the IPS system or the adoption of e-Borders or an alternative system of better measuring the total numbers of people moving into and out of the UK.

Answers to PASC's specific questions

1. Do the published migration statistics – at the national, regional and local levels – meet the full range of their users' needs, namely:

a. Are they easily discoverable and accessible to all users?

3. The recently revamped ONS website is a distinct improvement on the previous version. Even so, it is not easy to negotiate for an experienced professional user, let alone for an interested layperson. Moreover, Google Search can sometimes get more directly to the data that one is searching for than using the ONS website's own search facility.

b. Are they easy to use and understand?

4. The international migration statistics published by ONS constitute a large suite of different data sets which are easy for the experienced statistician to use and understand but have the potential to wrongfoot the unwary.

5. Most straightforward are the total long-term international migration estimates which are published as part of the 'components of change' statistics released with the annual population estimates down to the local authority scale. Even so, it is not easy to switch between data, methodology and interpretation. It is recommended that an interface be developed along the lines of the Neighbourhood Statistics where data can be accessed in raw format and the metadata is placed alongside.

6. The less experienced user needs to be aware that those published migration statistics which are based on data derived solely from the IPS do not provide the full picture of this long-term migration. There is also the potential for confusion arising from the ONS's attempts – prompted in large part by the rise of labour migration from the EU's new Accession States from 2004 – to measure short-term international migration, defined as people moving into and out of the UK to live for between 3 and 12 months. However, wisely ONS has been careful to keep these separate from its main statistics on international

migration and out of the annual population estimates, giving central government the ability to allow for these separately in any relevant funding distributions.

c. Do they provide an appropriate level of detail?

7. Users vary considerably in their needs for detailed information about international migrants. Some are most concerned about the headline figure of the UK's total net migration in a particular year, which is readily available from the published data.

8. Most users are keen to distinguish immigrants and emigrants separately by nationality (especially British versus non-British citizens), area of origin and destination (not just broad world regions but also individual countries especially for the main suppliers and receivers), the main purpose of moving (especially work, study, and family reasons) and personal characteristics such as sex, age, labour market skills, race/ethnicity, wealth and health. ONS publishes the data which is provided by the IPS, but this covers only some of these details. Other sources such as the Annual Population Survey (APS) and the Population Census can be used to supplement this picture, but this task is left to users and can cover only immigrants, and not emigrants, because these surveys are of current residents.

9. In addition, a substantial body of users – notably in local administration and planning but also in social science research – requires these types of details for small areas rather than just for the UK as a whole. For these, despite the advances made in recent years through the MSIP, the published data are unsatisfactory in two respects. Firstly, the lowest level at which data derived from the IPS and APS is normally released is the local authority area, which can be as large as one million people (e.g. Birmingham) and includes a number of unitary counties covering very extensive areas (e.g. Northumberland). Secondly, the quality of the data is much lower for this more detailed geography than for national level.

10. The only data on international migration that is published by ONS for small areas (i.e. below local authority level) is that derived from the Population Census. The latter provides high-quality estimates of the number of local residents who had been living outside the UK one year previously and information on their personal and household characteristics. Moreover, through its question on country of birth, the Census also gives the total stock of immigrants in each area and – in the 2011 Census for the first time – allows this to be broken down by year of arrival in the UK. On the downside, the Census cannot directly measure emigration (though see para 24) and provides a snapshot only once every 10 years.

d. Are they effectively summarised?

11. ONS does a good job in collating its statistics on international migration and providing commentary on the main features that they reveal. Its annual report *International Migration* has traditionally contained a mine of information primarily drawn from the IPS. Particularly helpful currently is the Migration Statistics Quarterly Report which also contains summaries of the data obtained from the Home Office, as also is the Local Area

Migration Statistics data file which includes data on immigration derived from other sources such as the Workers Registration Scheme and National Insurance. The ONS website also contains relevant items, though these are usually brief: ONS should not abandon the practice of preparing longer articles along the lines of the annual reports that used to be published in *Population Trends*.

2. How well have producers of migration statistics engaged with users? How responsive have they been to feedback from users of statistics?

12. Over the years ONS has built up an impressive record of engagement with users of migration and related statistics. In particular, it involved relevant experts in the MSIP and in planning the 2011 Census, which provided much more intelligence on immigrants than any previous one. In addition, ONS regularly seeks the views of users through its formal consultations and its presentations at roadshows and conferences, including BSPS meetings.

13. ONS is also considered to be highly responsive to feedback, both in taking on board the suggestions received from users and in giving clear reasons in cases where they have not felt able to do so. The latter situation has tended to occur only when there have been significant technical and/or financial barriers to meeting user demands.

3. Do the migration statistics which are published enable members of the public to gain a better understanding of the issues? Are the right migration statistics being collected?

14. If the term 'issues' refers to the size of the UK's overall net migration balance (as in question 5), then the right type of migration statistics is being collected and published for the purposes of allowing the public to see how this number is changing over time. Migration statistics alone, however, are not sufficient to enable a better understanding of whether a higher or lower number, or some other change in the patterning of this migration, would be beneficial to the UK as a whole or to the individual person or the section of the population to which they belong. Such an understanding can come only from the results of research on the causes and consequences of all the various population movements that are included under the headings of immigration and emigration, these including skilled and unskilled labour migration, student migration, retirement migration, refugees and asylum seekers, and family reunification. The responsibility for providing this sort of intelligence to the public lies beyond the remit of the statistical agencies. The main question for the latter is whether the published statistics are correct, i.e. provide an accurate record of what is actually happening (see below).

4. Is the degree of uncertainty surrounding estimates of migration properly reported and widely understood? Is the degree of uncertainty surrounding estimates of migration acceptable or should it be reduced? If so, how could it be reduced?

15. While the ONS website provides clear guidance on the degree of uncertainty that is attached to its estimates of international migration, this is not nearly so evident in the summary publications that are most accessible to the media and the public at large. If it were, then surely there would have been greater pressure placed by the electorate on government to improve the quality of the statistics on international migration. This is because the average person would find the scale of uncertainty difficult to comprehend.

16. As an illustration, the latest edition of ONS's Migration Statistics Quarterly Report (November 2012) contains one paragraph on uncertainty, specifically to say that confidence limits have been introduced to accompany the migration estimates based on the IPS. Using the web link given there and then being directed through several further web pages, it is found that the central estimate of net international migration for 2011 is put at 199,600. The 95% confidence limit, given as 35,400, indicates that it is very likely that the true figure lies between 164,200 and 235,000, with a 1 in 20 chance that it lies outside this range. This degree of uncertainty is mainly because the central estimates of arrivals and departures – 531,300 and 331,600 in 2011 – are based on very small sample sizes: interviews with just 2,620 and 1,824 people respectively in 2011.

17. Ultimately, whether or not this degree of uncertainty is acceptable has to be a political decision, informed by an appreciation of the importance of any government target for managing international migration weighed against the costs of introducing measures to reduce the uncertainty. It is, however, worth saying that there would be much cause for concern if the statistics on the other two basic determinants of the UK's changing population size – births and deaths – were subject to a similar level of uncertainty.

18. How it could be reduced is dependent on improving the quality of migration statistics (see question 6).

5. Are the migration statistics adequate for measuring the Government's progress against its net migration target?

19. No, as exemplified in the answer to question 4. But then the Government's net migration target is poorly conceived: indeed, it provides a very good illustration of the prevailing lack of understanding of migration. There seems to be a general failure to recognise that the net figure is the balance between the two much larger figures of immigration and emigration. While most public concern seems to be focused on the number of immigrants, the Government's net target could in theory be achieved without any change in the number of people moving to live in the UK but instead by a 30 per cent increase in the number of people moving abroad.

6. What more could be done to improve the quality of migration statistics? Should data from other sources, such as e-Borders, be incorporated?

20. In the last few years changes have been made in the methods of measuring the numbers of people entering and leaving the UK for intended stays of at least one year and also in the

methods of allocating immigrants (but not emigrants) across the UK, down to the level of individual local authority areas. Therefore, the first step should be to assess how far these changes have improved the quality of these statistics. The best way of doing this is to compare – for the UK as a whole and for each local authority area – the results of the 2011 Census with the population estimates rolled forward from the 2001 Census. This should use both the original population estimates series and the one produced with the recent methodological improvements in order to see how much each of these deviates from the best estimate provided by the latest Census. The discrepancies, broken down by sex, age, country of birth and other personal characteristics, will provide pointers as to the source of any remaining problems and the actions needed to address them.

21. Even before the results of these checks are known, it can confidently be stated that the key problem with the quality of these migration statistics is the reliance on the IPS for the main element of the total numbers of immigrants and emigrants. Therefore the most obvious way of improving their quality is by reducing the degree of uncertainty surrounding the IPS-based estimates, which requires greatly increasing the number of migrants interviewed from its current level of around 12 a day.

22. The idea of using e-Borders is potentially a very attractive one, if it provides a full count of people entering and leaving the UK and also allows the matching of records over time in order to identify the actual length of time that individual people have stayed in or out of the UK. While this system would not provide the richness of information obtained via the IPS, it could be used in conjunction with the IPS to produce improved counts for the IPS-derived information to be grossed up to.

23. The other options relate to intensification of efforts to use other statistical sources to check and, where appropriate, amend the current methodology for estimating migration. This is particularly relevant for immigration counts because the people involved can be covered by surveys and administrative data sets. Besides using the decennial Census (see above), sample surveys like the APS provide information on country of birth and year of arrival in the UK on a more frequent basis. Similarly, administrative data sources such as those maintained by the NHS and central government departments can be used for this purpose. The experience of matching data sets being gained by the Beyond 2011 programme should be drawn upon here.

24. By contrast, emigration poses a stiffer challenge as its better estimation requires identifying people who are no longer living in the UK. Commonly, there is no incentive to deregister from administrative lists (e.g. NHS, NI) on departure, nor by definition will these people be included in surveys. Nevertheless, there are a number of indirect methods, including:

- surveys which ask about any of their household or family members that are living abroad (but this approach provides only a partial picture as it will miss cases where all members have moved);

- collection of data from non-UK statistical agencies on the numbers of people arriving in their countries from the UK (valuable in that, just as for the UK, most countries possess more accurate records on their immigrants than on their emigrants);
- examination of the UK's three Longitudinal Studies to identify people that cannot be traced from one Census to the next and have not been registered as deaths (or possibly a separate customised analysis using higher sampling fractions); and
- exploration of ways of better documenting UK nationals living abroad through pensions and other administrative data (possibly as part of or a follow-on from Beyond 2011).

January 2013

Written evidence submitted by Professor Edward Acton, Vice-Chancellor of the University of East Anglia and Chair, Universities UK working group on student visa issues (5STATS 03)

Summary

- **Because the estimates of migration have been made a cornerstone of Home Office immigration policy, the high degree of uncertainty surrounding them is not acceptable.**
- **They are inadequate for measuring the Government's progress against its net migration target. Policy is based on the difference between two very imprecise estimates taken from the International Passenger Survey (IPS). This makes the scope for statistical error huge.**
- **The statistics could be quickly improved if the Home Office implemented the proposal made for the last 18 months by UUK, i.e. to pilot use of eBorders by combining it with the meticulous data on each individual university student collected by the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) in order to test the credibility of the IPS count of non-EU former students exiting the UK. The overwhelming likelihood is confirmation of a very high level of visa compliance and the unanswerable imperative to lift university students out of the net migration target.**
- **The stakes are high for the future of British Higher Education, economy and place in the world. No fewer than five select committees of both Houses have already recommended that university-sponsored students be lifted out of the net migration target¹. Including them, as now, flouts directly government commitment to increase the number of overseas university students coming to Britain. Yet the Home Office is ploughing ahead regardless of the damage to our balance of payments, economy, job creation, international reputation, scientific strength and cultural advantage. The UK's steady growth in non-EU student recruitment halted abruptly in 2011. Our market share suddenly declined and in key markets, notably India, we suffered steep falls. All the indications are of graver decline for September 2012 entry.**

Note: This evidence addresses the Committee's questions 4, 5 and 6. It sets out the main points of debate surrounding the treatment of university students in migration statistics. A much more detailed analysis of the flaws in these statistics is appended in

¹ House of Lords Science and Technology Committee, 17 July 2012, Home Affairs Committee, 23 July 2012, Public Accounts Committee, 4 September 2012, Business, Innovation and Skills Committee, 6 September 2012, House of Lords European Union Committee, 11 December 2012

my Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) occasional paper, *The UKBA's Proposed Restrictions on Tier 4 visas: the threat to University recruitment of overseas students* (February 2011).

4. Is the degree of uncertainty surrounding estimates of migration acceptable or should it be reduced? If so, how could it be reduced?

1. It should be reduced. The Home Office's goal of reducing net migration to the tens of thousands is defined by the estimates drawn from the International Passenger Survey (IPS). The IPS relies on a very small sample (1 in 500). The vast majority of those interviewed are short-term travellers: only a tiny fraction are migrants. Moreover, since the survey is voluntary, systemic error is all too easy. Young people, especially men, in particular seem disinclined to volunteer for the survey. Failure adequately to count young people exiting the UK was the biggest single source of error in population estimates before the 2001 census.
2. The Home Office's own Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) was asked in 2010 to advise on visa limits and ordered to rely on the IPS. It has studied the matter closely. It found the data on exit by non-EU citizens who had come to the UK to study was too sparse to be credible. It therefore carried out a detailed but little-read analysis, using IPS figures for 2008². Its conclusion indicated that the IPS had undercounted the exit figure by 50,000.
3. So uncertain are the statistics, that in advising the Home Office how to achieve the goal of bringing net migration as measured by the IPS under 100,000, the MAC recommended a total net migration target of 50,000. Had the Home Office accepted MAC's estimate of the undercounting of former student exit, the logic would have been to double that figure. The result would have been to ease sharply the pressure to go beyond cutting abuse. There would have been no need to proceed, as the Home Office has done and is doing, to alienate thoroughly legitimate prospective university applicants from coming to the UK.
4. Used as they are currently used, these statistics are doing profound damage to British interests by placing university-sponsored students in direct line of Home Office fire, and savagely reducing the appeal of British universities in key Commonwealth and other non-EU markets.

5. Are the migration statistics adequate for measuring the Government's progress against its net migration target?

² *Limits on Migration*, Migration Advisory Committee, November 2010, especially Appendix B.

5. No they are not. This is because they are based on the IPS whose inadequacies have time and again been condemned by Parliamentary Committees as not fit for (migration statistic) purpose.
6. The net migration calculation is based on the difference between two very imprecise estimates taken from the IPS, total inflow of migrants and total exit of migrants. This makes the scope for statistical error huge.
7. In this situation, it is entirely possible that the Government will tighten visa limits when net migration is in fact much lower than the IPS suggests, and loosen them when it is much higher than the IPS suggests. They are not a sound basis on which to achieve a critical aim in a democracy: trust that the state is in effective control of the borders.
8. The IPS's gravest weakness is in grossly understating non-EU student exit, and thus grossly overstating the net migration arising on the study route.

6. What more could be done to improve the quality of migration statistics? Should data from other sources, such as eBorders, be incorporated?

9. The statistics could be quickly improved if the Home Office implemented the proposal made for almost two years by UUK. The meticulous data on each individual university student collected by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), if combined with eBorders, would test the credibility of the non-EU student exit number. The exercise would pilot the use of eBorders to give Britain sounder migration statistics. It would help in implementing the Government's stated commitment (a) to disaggregate student numbers from the rest, and (b) to improve the student exit count.
10. It would also compel a reappraisal in the Home Office's attitude to university-sponsored students, which is currently hostile to the national interest. It would do so because it would expose the contradiction on which current Home Office policy rests:
 - a) The Home Office treats the IPS estimate of net migration as sacrosanct.
 - b) Yet the Home Office's own MAC regards the IPS data on former student exits flows, a vital element in the IPS overall estimate, as not credible.
 - c) The only situation in which that data could be valid is if university-sponsored students have been illegally overstaying in the UK on a massive scale.
 - d) Yet the Home Office has itself published detailed analysis indicating that compliance by university-sponsored students is at least 98% and quite possibly higher, and has repeatedly confirmed the generally excellent level of visa compliance by university-sponsored students.

- e) When UUK urged an eBorders exercise to test the credibility of the IPS, and even offered to fund it, the Home Office declined. The reason given was that, since UUK proposed to restrict the exercise to university-sponsored students, there was no point: their visa compliance was not in doubt.

11. Conclusion

Were the inadequacies of the current statistics to be addressed in the way that I have discussed, above, the Home Office would have every justification for the lifting of university-sponsored students out of net migration targets: a change which would be both methodologically and politically advantageous for the public understanding of the position of universities in this most sensitive of debates.

To do otherwise, and to persist with a system that is fundamentally flawed is of serious and lasting disadvantage to this generation of university students and is liable to do permanent damage to our heritage. The damage already done to Britain's reputation in sensitive markets such as India is dire. Time is now of the essence.

January 2013

Written evidence submitted by Migration Watch UK (5STATS 04)

1. The Home Office data on immigration control has undergone a substantial improvement in the last two years. The data is easy to access and examine with excellent summaries of each area.
2. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) contains a large amount of data on long-term international immigration. To a new user is not clear exactly what data is available as the ONS website can be difficult to navigate. The website search function is not selective enough in the material it returns and so hinders targeted searches for material.
3. The producers of migration statistics have engaged very well with their users. They have held the Migration Statistics User Forums which have been a great success in bringing together producers and users of the statistics. The Home Office have also held their own consultation which asked for user feedback on the statistics.
4. The briefing notes that go alongside the published statistics are written in an accessible way with good summaries and with definitions clearly explained. A member of the public should be able to use them to get a better understanding of the issues.
5. A useful addition to the range of data published would be more longitudinal data on the progress of migrants through the immigration system. For example there has been recent debate about the effect of closing the Tier 1 Post-Study Work visa. This debate would have been helped if data on the number of migrants extending their stay in the UK beyond their time on this route had been known. Similarly, now that this route is closed, it is unclear whether the Home Office will be able to publish the number of migrants switching from study to work in the UK. The “Migrant Journey” analysis undertaken by the Home Office does provide a longitudinal view of migrants in the immigration system and is a very useful addition to the information available. However, as it relates to immigration flows of several years previously its use in the current debate is somewhat limited. It is understood that such a request would involve some improvement to the relevant Home Office IT systems.
6. A medium term goal for the Home Office could be to develop their systems in conjunction with e-borders so that they can report how many migrants are in the country, their nationality, the immigration category through which they entered the country and their current immigration status. This will help in understanding who the net migrants are and allow for a more evidence based immigration control policy.
7. The ONS have recently started publishing the confidence interval for the main net migration figure. However, it is the central estimate that is widely reported and we suspect there is less awareness of the uncertainty in the figure.

8. It appears that expanding the International Passenger Survey (IPS) is not a practical option due to the large number of passengers already approached to get the current sample size of international migrants. This means that e-borders is the only realistic option for reducing the uncertainty in the net migration figure.

9. The uncertainty around the net migration figure should be reduced. The net migration figure is central to the government's policy in immigration and their success in this area will be largely judged on this figure. It is therefore far from ideal that the *true* net migration figure could deviate so substantially from the calculated estimate.

January 2013

Written evidence submitted by Migration Advisory Committee (5STATS 05)

1. The Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) is a non-departmental public body comprised of economists and labour market experts, set up to advise the Government on migration-related issues. We welcome this opportunity to provide feedback on migration statistics.
2. **Summary:**
 - We are regular users of migration statistics, including the International Passenger Survey and Home Office Immigration Statistics (and National Insurance Number administrative data). These data are used to inform our analyses when making recommendations to the Government.
 - In general, we are satisfied with the migration statistics produced and have had good engagement with those responsible for their production.
 - It is important that the migration debate is based on evidence. However, as with all statistics, there is uncertainty involved. It should be the responsibility of users, as well as producers, of migration statistics to recognise these uncertainties when making inferences.
 - A number of suggestions are made below that could help improve the quality of the data related to migration.

Do the published migration statistics – at the national, regional and local levels – meet the full range of their users’ needs, namely:

Are they easily discoverable?

Are they easy to understand?

Do they provide an appropriate level of detail?

Are they effectively summarised?

3. We use migration data at national, regional and local levels. We have not experienced any issues in locating the data we have required. One issue we have encountered has been in creating a time-series of some of the data where releases only include recent periods. We would urge producers of time series migration data to make these more readily available and extending over longer periods of time where this data exists in previous releases..
4. The data are understandable and the available guidance is sufficient for explaining any revisions to the data.
5. A data explorer tool would be useful for users to conduct their own 3-way cross-tabulation of the available data.

6. Summaries that accompany the migration statistics are usually effective and informative and have improved recently.

How well have producers of migration statistics engaged with users? How responsive have they been to feedback from users of statistics?

7. We responded to an Office for National Statistics consultation on migration statistics in July 2012. Some of the recommendations made in our response have been implemented in subsequent releases.
8. When we have made contact with the Office for National Statistics for information on the migration Statistics they produce, they have been willing to engage.
9. Producers of Home Office Immigration Statistics have engaged when contacted in relation to the statistics that they produce.
10. The Migration Statistics User Forum has proved very helpful and we understand the Migration Statistics Improvement Programme to be in the process of making a number of improvements to collection and dissemination of future migration data.

Do the migration statistics which are published enable members of the public to gain a better understanding of the issues?

Are the right migration statistics being collected?

11. Careful and transparent use of the migration statistics which are produced can enable the public to gain a better understanding of the issues.
12. We are aware of the recent debate regarding the inclusion of flows of international students in the net migration statistics. The figures currently available from the International Passenger Survey do not allow a mapping of outflows from the UK by reason for migration with the corresponding reason for initial entry to the UK. As a result it would be difficult to reliably estimate the net migration figure excluding flows of international students.
13. The Office for National Statistics, however, has included a new question in the International Passenger Survey to determine the main reason for initial entry to the UK. It may be possible in future for a reliable estimate of net migration flows excluding international students to be determined.

Is the degree of uncertainty surrounding estimates of migration properly reported and widely understood?

Is the degree of uncertainty surrounding estimates of migration acceptable or should it be reduced? If so, how could it be reduced?

14. Migration statistics are properly reported; however they are often not easily understood. The recent inclusion of standard errors in the International Passenger Survey has been a welcome development.
15. The uncertainty regarding the estimates of migration statistics is made clear by the producer of the statistics and when we use these data in our analyses, we are also transparent about these uncertainties.
16. The sample size of the International Passenger Survey is quite small, resulting in a greater degree of uncertainty. To reduce this uncertainty, the sample size would need to increase and this would result in a greater expense for the collectors of the data.
17. It would be useful for there to be greater clarity of the revisions made to historic data in the Home Office Immigration Statistics.

Are the migration statistics adequate for measuring the Government's progress against its net migration target?

18. The Government has set a target for net migration in terms of net flows as measured by the International Passenger Survey (IPS). The role of our Committee is to provide advice to the Government in relation to specific questions set by the Government - it is not the role of our Committee to set Government policy. As such, the migration statistics produced as part of these releases are adequate for measuring the progress towards this target. However, although the target is set with reference to the IPS estimates, the policy-lever for the Government to achieve the target is through non-European Economic Area visas which, for a variety of reasons do not match the IPS data.
19. As discussed in paragraphs 11 and 12, we are aware of the current debate relating to international students and await the results of the new question from the International Passenger Survey.

What more could be done to improve the quality of migration statistics?

Should data from other sources, such as e-borders, be incorporated?

20. We have already made reference in earlier responses to the potential new question in the International Passenger Survey as one action which may improve the quality of evidence on migration.
21. Additional actions which would be useful to improve the quality of migration statistics and migration-related data more generally include:
 - increased coverage of individuals living in non-residential accommodation in the Annual Population Surveys and Labour Force Surveys, for example caravans, communal establishments and farm out-buildings;

- increased cross-referencing with the wealth of existing information in complementary migration-related data sources such as the Labour Force Survey;
 - occupational breakdown of immigration statistics to the 4-digit level of the Standard Occupational Classification; and
 - a three-way cross tabulation tool for the International Passenger Survey allowing users to make their own 'cut' of the data.
22. Ideally, the richness of available data on the migrant population could be improved, possibly through the use of booster surveys of migrants and greater coverage of migrant employees and the earnings of self-employed migrants.
 23. An improvement in the timeliness of migration-related data could help improve the quality of the debate.
 24. We are content for this response to be made publicly available.

January 2013

**Written evidence submitted by Migration Observatory at University of Oxford
(5STATS 06)**

Summary:

- It is often difficult for the “causal” user (e.g. NGO, journalist, council employee, academic, etc.) to find the information on the websites of the Office for National Statistics and the Home Office.
- Local area migration statistics are not currently at the level required to satisfy user needs. However, the ONS seems to be moving in the correct direction.
- Consultations with data users tend to emphasise “frequent” user needs and “causal” users are still having problems accessing and understanding migration statistics. These “causal” users put together represent a significant group, but more difficult to reach and with a less coherent sense of what they need.
- There is at least one key area where the public wants more information that is not currently available: the immigration status of migrants in the UK.
- The available migration estimates are problematic as a means to define and precisely measure progress toward a numerical limit on migration.
- The e-Borders system might lead to significant improvements. It will not provide the level of detailed information about migrants that the IPS provides, but it may be very useful to help refine the basic task of counting entries and exits.

1. Do the published migration statistics – at national, regional, and local levels – meet the full range of their users’ needs, namely:

a. Are they easily discoverable and accessible to all users?

1.1 At the Migration Observatory we get calls and emails regularly from migration statistics users who are looking for specific migration statistics on the websites of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) or the Home Office (HO) and are unable to find what they are looking for. Often these data are simply not available, but on many occasions the data are available on the ONS or HO websites, but it is difficult for the “causal” user (e.g. NGO, journalist, council employee, academic, etc.) to find the information. In particular, it is easy to reach the migration statistics page. However, once there the user is presented with hundreds of Excel files with limited explanation of which data they contain and it is challenging for non-experts to make sense of all the information available and find a specific series.

b. Are they easy to use and understand?

1.2 The statistics are very use to use and are accessible as Excel files. However, there is still a lot of confusion among users of these statistics. It is common for users to mix migrant flows with migrant stocks, or to confuse visa data with immigration flows data.

c. Do they provide the appropriate level of detail?

1.3 Many of the inquiries that we get are from people looking for local area statistics. The size and composition of the local population can change rapidly due to changes in both internal and international migration in- and out-flows. The Census is the best source of demographic data for small geographical units but it happens only every ten years and thus becomes quickly out of date, especially during times of large migration flows. In the intercensal period, estimates from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Annual Population Survey (APS) provide the best measurement of the migrant population at the local level (e.g. the number of foreign born and foreign nationals). However, the LFS and APS are national surveys that are not designed to yield precise estimates of the size and characteristics of the migrant population at the local level.

1.4 Other sources of information for the local level are incomplete as well. These include National Insurance Number registrations, registrations with a GP of individuals previously living overseas (Flag 4 records), registrations in the Workers' Registration Scheme (WRS), and the International Passenger Survey (IPS). Importantly, while giving some information about the new inflow of migrants into particular areas of the UK, these data are not designed to measure the stock of migrants at a particular point in time as they do not capture migrants who leave the area for another place in the UK or to move abroad. The significant uncertainty about the number of migrants in local areas creates significant difficulties for the planning and efficient delivery of public services and a whole range of other public policies.

1.5 The ONS has improved the local area statistics on migration during the last several years and the 2011 Census should also help in this effort. While the local area migration statistics are not currently at the level required to satisfy user needs, the ONS seems to be moving in that direction.

d. Are they effectively summarised?

1.6 Migration statistics are generally well summarised in the HO and ONS reports accompanying the statistics release.

2. How well have producers of migration statistics engaged with users? How responsive have they been to feedback from users of the statistics?

2.1 Both HO and ONS hold regular consultations with frequent migration statistics users to improve access and usefulness of data. One problem is that these consultations tend to emphasise “frequent” user needs and “causal” users are still having problems accessing and understanding migration statistics. These “causal” users put together represent a significant group, but more difficult to reach and with a less coherent sense of what they need.

3. Do the migration statistics which are published enable members of the public to gain a better understanding of the issues?

Are the right migration statistics being collected?

3.1 In general, the migration statistics are very useful for researchers and for public understandings. However, there is at least one key area where the public wants more information that is not currently available: the immigration status of migrants in the UK.

3.2 There is no data source with information about the immigration status of migrants in the UK. The most comprehensive source of data on the number and characteristics of migrants is the LFS. The LFS includes questions about citizenship, place of birth and time spent in the UK. It does not, however, contain information about whether a migrant has temporary or permanent residence status (“leave to remain”) in the UK. A new question in the LFS records the main reason for coming to the UK (e.g. working, studying, family, asylum, etc.), but there is no information on the actual status of the migrant and how his/her status has changed over time.

3.3 The absence of comprehensive information about migrants’ immigration status gives rise to at least three problems in public and policy debates. First and most fundamentally, we do not know the numbers and characteristics of migrants with different types of immigration status. Among the total stock of migrants in the UK, how many are currently on Tier 1 and 2 visas? How many have student visas and what share of migrants on student visas have taken up employment in the UK? How, if at all, do the personal characteristics, skills and labour market participation rates vary across migrants with different types of immigration status? We currently do not have the data to provide robust answers to these questions.

3.4 A consequent second problem is that we do not know how different types of immigration status affect the economic and social outcomes of migrants in the UK. Each immigration status is associated with different rights and restrictions with regard to access to employment and the welfare state. For example, current Tier 1 migrants have the right to free choice of employment in the UK, while Tier 2 migrants are only allowed to work for the employer specified on the certificate

of sponsorship (they can change employers but only after a new application). How does this employment restriction impact on Tier 2 migrants' wages and behaviour in the labour market? Some migrants do not have full access to selected welfare benefits such as health care and education. How do these restrictions impact on migrants' health and other outcomes? How do the wages and jobs of recognised refugees change over time? The lack of data prevents systematic analysis of these issues.

3.5 The third problem is that we currently cannot systematically assess the impact of migrants with different types of immigration status on the UK labour market, economy and society. This issue becomes particularly problematic when Government is adjusting its immigration policies by fine tuning the admission and selection criteria for particular types of migrants (e.g. workers and students from outside the EU). In the absence of data about migrants' immigration status, any impact analysis of changing policies that target specific migrant groups must necessarily remain limited.

4. Is the degree of uncertainty surrounding the estimates properly reported and widely understood?

Is the degree of uncertainty surrounding the estimates of migration acceptable or should it be reduced? If so, how could it be reduced?

4.1 The degree of uncertainty may not be widely understood and appreciated, although the recent move by ONS to publish confidence intervals around net migration estimates is a welcome development. It could also be further highlighted that all surveys – not only surveys of migrants – involve a degree of uncertainty about their central estimates.

5. Are the migration statistics adequate for measuring the Government's progress against its net migration target?

5.1 The available migration estimates are problematic as a means to define and precisely measure progress toward a numerical limit on migration. The government has a policy goal of reducing net migration to the "tens of thousands" (i.e. less than 100,000) by 2015. For the government to be judged on its achievement in delivering this target, accurate measurement is important. But to know whether this target has been reached requires clear data – of the sort that the IPS does not currently produce because of the uncertainty surrounding the estimates.

5.2 As a consequence, the government could miss the "tens of thousands" target by many tens of thousands and still appear to have hit it – conversely the government could hit, or even exceed its target and still appear to have missed it by tens of thousands.

6. What more could be done to improve the quality of migration statistics?

Should data from other sources, such as e-Borders, be incorporated?

- 6.1 The e-Borders system might lead to significant improvements. It will not provide the level of detailed information about migrants that the IPS provides, but it may be very useful to help refine the basic task of counting entries and exits.
- 6.2 Some countries – such as Germany and the Netherlands – base their estimates of migration stock and flows on a population register rather than a survey or data on border exits or entries. Anyone taking up residence in Germany, for example, has to register with local authorities in order to get the necessary ID to allow them to work, claim benefits or do other day-to-day tasks. Registration systems can have their own problems because, for example, it is often much harder to register people leaving than arriving. There have been calls by some demographers to introduce a registration scheme in the UK, but cost, and a politically challenging public backlash against the introduction of ID cards in recent years, may well make it unlikely.

Related material

- For further information about problems with the UK's collection of data on migration, read our "Top Ten Problems in the Evidence Base for Public Debate and Policy-Making on Immigration in the UK" report from 2011 at <http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/reports/top-ten-problems-evidence-base-public-debate-and-policy-making-immigration-uk>

January 2013

Written evidence submitted by Analytics Cambridge (5STATS 07)

Please accept this as a response to the Public Administration Select Committee's call for views on Migration Statistics.

These views are from the company and myself as an individual with an interest in demography to understand the characteristics and needs of areas, for example in providing "public" services such as schools, health, or community development and care.

The comments are in response to Question 6. **"What more could be done to improve the quality of migration statistics?"**

We would suggest that more attention needs to be given to improving migration data at the level of local authority (more specifically District or Unitary level). This is particularly international migration data which is more difficult to measure / estimate compared to within UK migration by people who may be on administrative systems held by / on behalf of the UK Government.

In some Local Authorities more than others, international migrants can make a significant component of population change. Although information from Censuses of Population provides a solid foundation for understanding local populations every 10 years better information on the changes in these between Censuses would help allocate resources better according to need.

In order to come to a more considered view on the value of this you might consider examining:

- a. the impact of international migration data quality on the accuracy of estimates of population of Local Authority District / Unitary between Censuses
- b. a cost benefit analysis comparing costs for improving the quality of international migration estimates at LA level against the benefits of more accurate information

January 2013

Written evidence submitted by Division of Social Statistics and Demography, University of Southampton, British Society for Population Studies (BSPS) (5STATS 08)

Executive Summary

- This document discusses main sources of migration and asylum statistics in the United Kingdom in the international context, and makes recommendations considering the needs of data users.
- In order to estimate detailed breakdowns of immigration flows, administrative data sources and statistical modelling should be used to augment the International Passenger Survey estimates.
- To provide better estimates of emigration and immigration in the longer term, alternative sources of data, such as the e-Borders scheme, should be additionally included in the estimation.
- Recording the timing of events during the asylum process would enable detailed policy evaluation and allow asylum seekers to be correctly incorporated into international migration estimates.
- Meeting the requirements of the European law can be improved by combining migration data from other countries, alternative data sources and expert opinion, within a statistical framework.
- Measures of uncertainty in migration statistics should be reported to the users of data, possibly in conjunction with a bespoke decision advice.

Acknowledgements

The views, interpretations and recommendation presented in this document are the ones of the authors and do not necessarily represent the position of the University of Southampton, the British Society for Population Studies, or any other institution, with which the authors are affiliated.

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I. Introduction

1. Next to the statutory requirements concerning the delivery of high-quality migration statistics for various users in the United Kingdom (UK), the Office for National Statistics (ONS) is now formally required to provide the Eurostat – the statistical office of the European Union (EU) – with reliable data on international migration flows. These data need to comply with the standard definition of long-term international migration, as recommended by the

United Nations (UN 1998), whereby a migrant is someone who changes their usual place of residence for at least one year.

2. The requirement concerning Eurostat stems from Article 3 of the Regulation (EC) No. 862/2007 of the European Parliament and the Council on *Community Statistics on Migration and International Protection*¹. The Regulation introduces a set of definitions and common requirements for statistics on migration flows, stocks, the citizenship and country of birth of persons, as well as administrative procedures concerning immigration, residence permits, asylum and prevention of illegal immigration. To fulfil the requirements, reliable data are required on both immigration and emigration, with further detail on the citizenship and countries of origin and destination of migrants.

3. In this context, the current *Response to the Call for Evidence* discusses several aspects of the UK international migration statistics. Firstly, in Section II sources of data on the main categories of migrants are examined, followed by an evaluation of the Home Office data on asylum seekers in Section III, and a presentation of the UK migration data in a wider European setting in Section IV. The *Response* concludes by briefly discussing the issue of uncertainty inherent in migration statistics in Section V, and providing some recommendations for the future in Section VI.

II. Sources of International Migration Statistics in the United Kingdom

4. The main source of official data used to estimate overall levels of immigration to the UK, and the only source of information on total emigration, is the International Passenger Survey (IPS), further adjusted to take into account asylum seekers (see Section III), people who change their migration intentions (“switchers”), and migrants to and from the Republic of Ireland (ONS 2012a). The IPS was originally intended to provide data on travel and tourism; questions about international migration are a later addition.

5. As with all surveys, the IPS is subject to sampling error. International migration, however, is still a rare event in comparison to other international travel such as holidays and work-related journeys. Consequently, when data on international migration are required in a breakdown by age or citizenship, the estimates provided by the IPS are likely to be unreliable.

6. It is worth bearing in mind, though, that the IPS is the only UK source of migration data that uses the UN (1998) definition of an international migrant, and does relatively well estimate large flows of migration based on sufficient numbers of respondents. Empirically, large flows do not exhibit such high degree of random variability as smaller ones. In the short term, these two strengths of the IPS should be utilised fully, with other sources of information benchmarked to these reliable elements.

¹ Official Journal OJ L 199, 31.07.2007, pp 23–29; <http://eur-lex.europa.eu>.

7. To obtain reliable international migration flow statistics further data are required to augment or replace the IPS. There are several options available. Firstly, more data can be collected, ideally not from a sample survey. One possible source of such information in the future can be the e-Borders project (ONS n.d.). Secondly, following Willekens (1994), various existing sources of administrative data can be used to enhance the IPS, as is already done by the ONS for distributing the total flows into UK regions (Bijak 2010b). Such alternative sources are documented in the ONS Conceptual Framework of Population and Migration Statistics (Raymer et al. 2012b; cf. Boden and Rees 2010). Thirdly, statistical modelling can be used to bring different sources together – examples in a multi-national context are discussed in Section IV, but the same principle can be applied to include information from different UK sources in a single statistical model, as set forth below.

8. For immigration to the UK, there are two examples of administrative data sources that provide information on the citizenship of migrants. The first is data of non-UK domiciled students from the Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA). The second is data on the number of new National Insurance Number (NINo) registrations of foreign nationals, from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Neither source of data includes information on British nationals returning to the UK. They are also not specifically designed to measure immigration, and thus do not conform to the UN definition of a long term migrant used in the IPS. Being administrative records, the HESA and DWP data are not subject to the sampling error, yet still can be biased due to differences in the underlying concepts and definitions, as well as in their coverage (see Section IV).

9. Thus, as mentioned above, one possible method to improve the international migration estimates by citizenship, if the data are available at an aggregate level rather than at an individual level, is to use a statistical model to combine the auxiliary datasets with the IPS. This could take the form of benchmarking the auxiliary data to the reliable parts of the IPS, and modelling various structures – by age, country etc. – from this partial information by using indirect methods (e.g. Rogers et al. 2011). Here the main strength of the IPS – its match to the UN definition of international migration – would be used as a benchmark to adjust the reliable patterns of the auxiliary data. This could provide more reliable and accurate estimates of the immigration in different breakdowns.

10. So far, there are no auxiliary sources of data on emigration, however. To improve detailed estimates of emigration a new source of data is required. With emigration forming one half of international migration, it is vitally important for the UK to collect better data here. It can be expected that in that respect the data situation will improve once the e-Borders scheme is fully operational, however not earlier than before the end of 2017 (ONS n.d.).

11. The statistics on immigration and emigration can be further supplemented by estimates of *net migration*, based on the census population counts and statistics on vital events (births and

deaths), combined through the population accounting equation. However, net migration is being criticised for being an artificial category that conflates two entirely different processes: inflows and outflows (Rogers 1990). In this context, we suggest that the UK Government migration target is revisited. Since the authorities can only extend very limited control over emigration, and some immigration flows (UK and EU nationals), meeting the net migration target may be often a matter of chance, rather than of policy.

III. Home Office Asylum Statistics

12. The total number of asylum seekers is inherently easy to measure given the legal requirement that an application for 'leave to remain' must be lodged with the authorities. It is the transitions and timing between status changes which are more complex – but also more useful – to measure. The amount of data published by the Home Office on asylum applicants has increased in recent years (Home Office 2012). There is more information available on key characteristics of asylum seekers (e.g. age, sex, nationality) as well as a greater temporal breakdown, with many statistics now produced by quarter or month. These developments are clearly to be welcomed as they enable the analysis of trends and more in depth policy evaluation; however, the limited retrospective statistics available continue to hinder the study of past trends and limit comparisons over time.

13. Clarity around the timing of when events occur and are recorded is crucial in the provision of accurate, informative and comparable statistics. Varying lengths of time between each stage in the asylum process, particularly with the backlog of cases awaiting a final decision, mean that clearly identifying stocks and flows over time is problematic. Access to the data on decision status, cross-tabulated with other information, such as geographic area and the level of support received, would increase the analytical potential considerably.

14. As mentioned in Section II, the total number of asylum applicants in a given year (excluding those *known* to have left the country within a year of their application, and correcting for an overlap with the IPS) is added to the IPS-based estimates, in order to produce international migration statistics for that year (ONS 2012c). However, some of the asylum seekers may already have been in the country for a considerable length of time, and many will leave after a few months. It is not possible to establish how many asylum seekers should be counted as international migrants under the UN definition unless individual-level data on length of time between each stage are used, as it may be the case under the e-Borders scheme.

15. Data on the dispersal of asylum seekers in need of housing support and on the receipt of subsistence-only support are published quarterly, in a breakdown either by Local Authority or by nationality. Access to these data by Local Authority *and* by nationality would again increase the potential for analysis, although there may be confidentiality considerations which need to be overcome in order to achieve this. Understanding geographic variation is essential

to allocate resources and effectively implement policy in an efficient, fair and transparent way. Releasing data from housing providers at a regional or local level could contribute to this.

16. The only data available on asylum seekers after they have received a final decision is a record of the numbers deported or those who have left the country through notified/assisted voluntary return. Clearly, there are no data on how many people remain in the country or leave without informing the authorities. There is also a notable absence of data on the refugee population in the UK, although some effort has been made to improve knowledge about this group through the Survey of New Refugees (Home Office 2010). A lack of data on asylum seekers after they have received their final decision means that it is extremely difficult to support the integration process of individuals who have been granted leave to remain, and to follow up the unsuccessful cases.

IV. UK Migration Statistics in the International Context

17. In general, the availability and quality of migration data in Europe is problematic (Poulain et al. 2006). The data collected by statistical institutes are not reliable and often do not comply with the standard definitions. The main reasons include migration undercount and imperfect data coverage. The undercount concerns sources based on self-declarations. The problem is deemed more severe for emigrants, who usually have fewer incentives to deregister from the system than immigrants, who, after registration, may gain access to certain benefits. The insufficient coverage primarily concerns three population groups: undocumented migrants, asylum seekers and foreign students.

18. The poor reliability of migration data leads to a lack of their international comparability. Besides, there are differences between countries in the adopted definitions of migration and in the data collection mechanisms (Poulain et al. 2006). These differences encompass the temporal dimension of migration, i.e. the minimum duration of stay applied to define a migrant, as well the populations included in the definition. Different rules often pertain to nationals, foreigners from the other EU countries, as well as third-country (non-EU) nationals.

19. Regulation 862/2007 aims at harmonising the statistics on migration in the EU according to the UN (1998) definition. Harmonisation here refers to the process of reconciling the differences between different measurements of migration data. So far, the implementation of the Regulation has brought about some improvement to the migration statistics (European Commission 2012). The data provided to the Eurostat by the EU Member States are now more complete and are based on a common definition. However, some weaknesses remain and, apart from the Nordic countries, the information on migrants is usually not shared between the statistical offices of the EU countries.

20. According to Regulation 862/2007, Article 9, scientifically based and well documented statistical estimation methods may be used to produce migration statistics. An approach encouraging an integrated use of migration flow data from all EU and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries has recently been proposed within the project 'IMEM: Integrated Modelling of European Migration' (Raymer et al. 2012a; Wiśniowski et al. 2012). The approach advocates explicitly accounting for the main aspects of the differences in measurement: intended duration of stay in the UK, undercount, coverage and accuracy of the data collection mechanisms, based on migration flow data from different countries and the covariate information. Additionally, expert knowledge is elicited to learn about the characteristics that cannot be explained by the data, such as the immigration undercount.

21. Another path of improving migration statistics is the Migration Statistics Mainstreaming programme, adopted by Eurostat (Knauth 2011). Here, it is advocated that the migration perspective should be added to all statistics produced by using the available administrative data sources and surveys. Thus, a dimension of migration status should be introduced to all official statistics on income, education, employment or living conditions.

22. In parallel, as part of the mainstreaming, the sampling frames of surveys should be improved in order to capture sufficient number of migrants. For large-scale surveys, such as the LFS and the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC), sample limitations can be overcome by reviewing the methodologies and the field work approach. First steps into using the large survey data for measuring migration have been undertaken by Rendall et al. (2003), Ródenas and Martí (2007), and Wiśniowski (2012).

V. Uncertainty in Migration Statistics

23. The presence of uncertainty in migration and population estimates is well acknowledged (e.g. ONS 2012b). This uncertainty should ideally be reflected in the statistics in a measurable way, such as through probability distributions, which however may pose challenges to the users of migration data. On the other hand, Lawrence et al. (2006) cited several studies which found that users prefer estimates with some uncertainty measures, such as confidence intervals, as clearly providing more information than point estimates alone. Of course, too wide intervals are hardly informative, while too narrow ones are more likely to miss the reality, and can give the users a false *illusion of control*. The challenge of prudent decision making is thus in retaining the balance between these opposites.

24. A solution to this challenge might be provided by the statistical decision analysis, whereby the costs of different decisions in the light of under- and over-estimation of migration are taken into account. As noted by Alho and Spencer (2005) and Bijak (2010a), this procedure is specific to the particular decision context – there are no ready answers – and requires communication between the producers and users of the estimates. Should the users share the

details of their decision context, the producers of the statistics would be able to offer a bespoke decision advice on that basis.

VI. Conclusions and Recommendations

25. In conclusion, we strongly recommend the use of alternative sources of data to aid the estimates of international migration. We suggest that, in the short term, alternative sources of data and statistical modelling should be utilised to help improve the UK international migration estimates. Administrative data sources have been used by the ONS in their estimates of the local geographical distribution of international migrants (see Bijak 2010b), and this could be extended to estimating the citizenship-detail of immigration flows to the UK.

26. In the long term, we recommend the fullest possible use of information available from the e-Borders scheme. Still, we do not consider it to be a panacea for all challenges of migration statistics, and suggest that it complements, rather than replaces the existing sources of data. In particular, e-Borders data can be very useful for benchmarking the other information to the UN (1998) definition, since it will enable relating migration intentions to the actual length of stay in the country.

27. When statistical modelling is used, we recommend that the results are reported together with a range of the associated uncertainty measures. An interactive engagement of the producers of the statistics with the users is suggested in order to help utilise this information fully, taking into account the decision context. We believe that an honest reporting of the imperfections of knowledge on migration will provide a prudent approach to the migration challenges facing the United Kingdom.

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Written evidence submitted by Royal Statistical Society and Statistics User Forum (5STATS 09)

Summary

This response is jointly submitted by the Royal Statistical Society and its Statistics User Forum (SUF).

The Royal Statistical Society (RSS) is the UK's only professional and learned society devoted to the interests of statistics and statisticians. Founded in 1834, it is one of the world's most influential and prestigious statistical societies. It aims to promote public understanding of statistics and provide professional support to users of statistics and to statisticians.

The Statistics User Forum (SUF) was established by the Royal Statistical Society in 2004 as an umbrella organisation for groups and networks of users of official statistics to represent the shared views of this very diverse community. The Forum is the successor to long-established Statistics User Council.

The RSS and SUF recognise the importance of Migration Statistics to inform the policy issues surrounding migration, understand the complexity of trying to measure migration into and within the United Kingdom, and appreciate the efforts made in recent years to improve such statistics. In the context of this, we suggest the following:

- There is a good story to tell in the development of migration statistics - enormous improvements have been made in the quality and quantity of the statistics over recent years. We are also pleased with the degree of user engagement, and many of the recent improvements have been implemented in response to user demand.
- Despite these recent improvements migration statistics are still not fully adequate for the task of producing robust population estimates or understanding patterns of migration.
- We are concerned about the capacity to improve migration statistics in an environment where government funding of statistics is being reduced. The potential for further improvements is also limited whilst we rely upon a relatively small sample of migrants from the International Passenger Survey.
- There is an issue with the quality and quantity of migration data at a local level, which has a significant impact upon population estimates in areas with high population turnover. It also inhibits the public understanding of migration.
- We still rely upon the Census for detailed statistics about migration and migrant characteristics, and to evaluate other estimates of migration. During a period of large migration, such as between the last two Censuses (2001 and 2011), waiting ten years for reliable estimates is not sufficient.
- The level of uncertainty in migration estimates is not fully appreciated or reported, and more needs to be done in this regard.

- Estimates of emigration from the UK are known to be hardest to produce. The potential for use of other countries' immigration data should be considered to validate the UK estimates. Furthermore, the Office for National Statistics could proactively encourage cooperation between member states of international organisations such as the European Union, OECD and UN to work together on this issue.
- Data from e-Borders should be used to supplement the International Passenger Survey, but will not be able to provide the same level of detail. A step change in migration statistics would require the development of a population register. This should be considered seriously, particularly if alternatives to a Census are being considered for the future.

Responses to specific questions

1. Do the published migration statistics – at the national, regional and local levels – meet the full range of their users' needs, namely:

a. Are they easily discoverable and accessible to all users?

- 1.1 There have been improvements in making migration data more accessible, including the cross-department Migration Statistics Quarterly Report and the Local Area Migration Statistics report, a compendium of migration indicators at local authority level.
- 1.2 Whilst regular users of migration statistics generally know where to find them, there is concern that occasional or new users of the statistics may have more difficulty in finding and using them. In particular we are concerned about the poor quality of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) website – see our comments in submission to the Committee's inquiry into the communication and publication of statistics. Browsing to the page for international migration presents users with a list of myriad publications – bewildering to the non-expert. A user-friendly site would present the reader with the key facts on the topic and guide them on to the most appropriate detailed sources.

b. Are they easy to use and understand?

- 1.3 The total long-term international migration estimates produced by the ONS are easily understood headline statistics, particularly when the net migration estimate is presented alongside the immigration and emigration components (see the migration timeline product referenced in 1.6).
- 1.4 Broadly speaking however migration statistics are inherently difficult to use and understand; the sheer complexity of migration does not lend itself to easy capture in a simple set of statistics. This is exacerbated by the fact that we have to rely upon multiple sources to infer the whole picture, and these sources sometimes tell apparently contradictory stories. This is particularly the case when understanding the impact of migration at a local level.
- 1.5 In order to use migration statistics effectively, users need to understand the concepts behind migration and the limitations of the data we are required to use. This is part of the rationale

for bringing together all the migration statistics available as cross-government publications, which we welcome. The ONS have produced a brief guide, 'Interpreting Labour Market Statistics', which introduces new users to the statistical issues in that area – we would welcome a migration statistics version.

- 1.6 More efforts have been made to make the statistics easier to understand – an excellent example is the ONS interactive migration timeline, which presents migration statistics alongside an appreciation of the political, societal and international causes for the changing patterns. However the timeline is difficult to find unless you know to look for it – this is the sort of headline story which first-time users of migration statistics should be presented with on an international migration web page.

c. Do they provide an appropriate level of detail?

- 1.7 Over the last five years there has been an enormous improvement in the quantity and quality of international migration statistics available. The Migration Statistics Improvement Programme has brought access to immigration control data, refinements to the International Passenger Survey (IPS), use of HMRC and higher education data to understand the within-UK destination of immigrants and more timely publication dates.
- 1.8 However there are still gaps in the available data. This has been put into relief by the recent release of 2011 Census results which have given us the most definitive picture of the effect of a decade of high international migration. The Census has provided details on total migrant stock, country of birth and date of arrival, and future releases will tell us more about economic activity, household formation and more. Many of these statistics are unavailable from other sources. It is of concern that the Census – which provides us with the best quality statistics with which to evaluate previous estimates – has an uncertain future.
- 1.9 Flow statistics continue to be based on the IPS. The sample of migrants is small (around 5,000 per annum), and is based on intentions, and although the methodology has been improved over recent years we are about at the limits of what it can produce by way of detail.
- 1.10 The coverage of emigration is still poor, and furthermore there are no administrative statistics to supplement the IPS. A step forward has been made by matching the reason for leaving with the reason for entering. However, not enough use is made of data collected by other countries – this could be used to improve our understanding of the flow of emigrants from the UK.
- 1.11 There is anecdotal evidence of a large number of undocumented migrants in the UK. Whilst difficult to estimate, the existence of an uncounted population is a significant challenge to the credibility of migration estimates – a problem also encountered by the 2011 Census.
- 1.12 Changing patterns of international migration over recent years – and probably into the future – means that there is an increasingly wide matrix of countries of interest, for example the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China). Yet the ONS continues with the same breakdown as in recent decades (Old and New Commonwealth, Other Foreign, EU etc.). New groupings need to be made available.

- 1.13 The lack of data on migration by ethnic group makes it difficult to estimate the impact of international migration on the ethnic composition of the population, needed for planning of various services such as education and health.
- 1.14 There is a continued problem with the quality and quantity of migration data available at a local level. Improvements have been made through the Migration Statistics Improvement Programme by allocating international migrants to local authority areas using administrative data, but the local-level estimates of migration are not robust, particularly for areas with high population turnover. For some local authority areas the Census has shown that the ONS population estimates have misrepresented the level of population growth, a problem caused by inaccurate internal and international migration estimates. Whilst the method of distributing international immigrants to local authorities has been improved, the method of distributing emigrants has not – and this may be a source of the problem. This issue should be examined further by the ONS and results published, if possible with some sensitivity analysis based on different assumptions.
- 1.15 The range of data available at local level is also an issue, though recent improvements, such as the provision of National Insurance number data, have been helpful. More information is required on age of migrants, reason for migration, short-term migrants and country of origin. At a sub-local authority level (e.g. wards) the only available migration data is from the Census every ten years, which means that the impact of high rates of international migration in particular neighbourhoods has been poorly understood. Until the Census results are published we have largely had to rely on anecdote.

d. Are they effectively summarised?

- 1.16 One of the ways in which migration statistics are summarised is through the Migration Statistics Quarterly Report. Whilst this is an extremely useful report for accessing the data, the report leaves much for the reader to infer about the overall story. We feel that communication of migration statistics would be better served by the authors going the extra mile in describing the story which is being told by the statistics. See also our comments in 1.2 about guiding the non-expert user to the most appropriate source.

2. How well have producers of migration statistics engaged with users? How responsive have they been to feedback from users of statistics?

- 2.1 We find the ONS extremely open to user engagement – they engage with users through reference panels, workshops, consultations, RSS events, conferences and CLIP (Central Local Information Partnership) groups. They have also been proactive in approaching local authorities where migration patterns are more difficult to estimate. The Home Office also engages through some of these events and has hosted user group meetings to discuss migration statistics.
- 2.2 The above methods of engagement tend to attract regular, expert users of migration statistics. There is some concern that less frequent users who need an understanding of data quality – such as managers and policy makers – are not engaged so well.

2.3 Response to the feedback provided by users is more difficult to assess. Many of the improvements noted in our submission have been implemented in response to user demand, but many issues remain outstanding (see above). We understand that there are significant technical and financial barriers to meeting all of these demands. In addition, the demands of some users sometimes compete with the demands of others, leaving some unsatisfied.

3. Do the migration statistics which are published enable members of the public to gain a better understanding of the issues? Are the right migration statistics being collected?

3.1 The UK total long-term international migration figures, such as those presented in the ONS migration timeline, are excellent contributions to the understanding of migration. Many users see these statistics through the press, broadcasters, social media, and other secondary sources. The ONS could do more to help these mediators to disseminate statistics, through presenting them in simple formats with informative explanations to which links can be made. This would both widen the use of migration statistics and improve the accuracy with which they are reported.

3.2 Public understanding of the issues is undermined by the paucity of local level migration data. Whilst media comment – driven by the available statistics – tends to concentrate on the national picture, many members of the public also want to know about the impact of migration in their local area – how many people are arriving in the area, where they have come from, how long they will stay and what they are doing whilst they are living locally. This kind of detail is really only available from the Census, so in a decade where international immigration has been high the local level statistics have been found wanting. However, we do recognise the practical difficulties of producing robust statistics at the local level.

4. Is the degree of uncertainty surrounding estimates of migration properly reported and widely understood? Is the degree of uncertainty surrounding estimates of migration acceptable or should it be reduced? If so, how could it be reduced?

4.1 We believe that the understanding of uncertainty is not properly reported nor widely understood. Debate using migration statistics rarely takes place with an appreciation that migration is difficult to measure and that there is uncertainty around any given figure. This is an issue across the full range of official statistics.

4.2 In the latest (November 2012) Migration Statistics Quarterly Report, the existence of uncertainty and confidence intervals is acknowledged on the second page. However in the headline statistics no indication is given of the relative size of the confidence intervals compared to the estimates – it is left to the user to find the confidence intervals in the relevant table and make their own judgements. It would be helpful if confidence intervals were reported alongside the headline statistic; this would help to educate non-expert users about the existence of uncertainty.

- 4.3 Confidence intervals are relatively easy to convey because they are easily quantified, but non-sampling errors such as non-response bias in the IPS also need to be fully appreciated and communicated.
- 4.4 As already noted, the international migration estimates are based upon a small sample from the IPS, so levels of uncertainty are quite high. When these estimates are disaggregated to local level within the UK the uncertainty rises considerably, particularly around emigration. We address some ideas for reducing uncertainty in the response to question six.
- 4.5 The considerable uncertainty around migration estimates at a local level has previously gone undocumented and unrecognised. The ONS have done a significant amount of work to address this, and have recently published indicators and statistical measures of uncertainty at a local level – very welcome developments.

5. Are the migration statistics adequate for measuring the Government's progress against its net migration target?

- 5.1 We have limited opinion on this question, as clearly the Home Office itself is the primary user in this regard. However, the net migration target does not allow for the existence of uncertainty in the measurement of migration – perhaps it should. Also, net migration is influenced by movements in in- or out-migration and the components of each of these flows. The target should appreciate the variation in each of these components as well as measuring the net effect.

6. What more could be done to improve the quality of migration statistics? Should data from other sources, such as e-Borders, be incorporated?

- 6.1 Much has already been done to improve the quality of migration statistics. As a broad comment, we are concerned about the ability to further improve quality when the government is cutting back its spending on statistics.
- 6.2 Despite the recent improvements in the IPS, it remains a small sample survey of 5,000 migration contacts in an 800,000 contact survey. Further improvements to the survey are probably only to be gained by considerably increasing the sample size.
- 6.3 In the immediate future, we expect that the Home Office and ONS will be evaluating their migration estimates in the light of the 2011 Census data, and that further improvements will result.
- 6.4 E-borders data will be of marginal help and there are still lots of technical problems to be resolved. They will not fill the gaps in duration of stay; reason for migrating; nationality; long- and short-term travel; and we currently have no indication what kind of data outputs might result.
- 6.5 The measurement of emigration is a particular issue, and we have already noted above that more use should be made of other countries' data to understand the number and characteristics of UK emigrants. For example, the Australian, Canadian and USA statistical

websites give annual estimates of immigrants from the United Kingdom. Through its membership of relevant international committees and working parties, the ONS could proactively encourage cooperation between member states of organisations such as the European Union, OECD and UN to work together on this issue. Many countries have an interest in migration statistics which help to improve their understanding of their labour markets, economies and social issues, and to plan appropriate services.

- 6.6 At a local level, the estimates of international emigration need to be linked more closely to the estimates of international immigration, to reduce any potential bias in the net migration estimates.
- 6.7 A step change in the quality of migration statistics would require the development of a population register as in many other European countries. This would not be a panacea, and would have many difficulties associated with it – but is worthy of a feasibility study. This is even more important in the context of the ONS considering alternatives to a future Census. In the meantime more people could be encouraged to register with a NHS GP – as this is the *de facto* population register used in population estimates.

January 2013

Written evidence submitted by Westminster City Council (5STATS 10)

The City Council would also like to offer speakers to give oral evidence to the committee.

Westminster City Council is pleased to respond to the request from the Public Administration Select Committee to set out our thoughts in relation to the measurement of migration.

International migration levels to Westminster have been traditionally significant, and published ONS figures, covering the years 2001-2011 show Westminster as having the highest volume of international migration per 1,000 population in England & Wales¹. Westminster is uniquely affected therefore by the accuracy and volatility in the measurement of migration.

Westminster remains concerned that migration estimates based on survey data and modelling of incomplete administrative data may not reflect complex urban environments well enough and have corollary detrimental effects on funding and service planning. It should be noted that although there are direct impacts of migration to local authority areas such as the pressures to the private rented sector, overcrowded accommodation, public health, community safety, rough sleeping, increased cleansing and refuse collection, the indirect impacts are greater still. Indirect impacts are those caused by the lack of accurate government management data. In the case of population estimates this is extremely urgent and will cause severe detrimental impacts in the future grant settlements and needs based assessment of funding.

The ONS in its attempts to improve migration estimates has brought forward numerous changes to methodology resulting in uncertainty and volatility that has undermined confidence in official estimates at LA level – Westminster's population estimates have varied considerably due to the numerous methodology changes in measuring migration over the last 10 years. In 2012 for example 5% of Westminster's estimated population was simply removed by a change of methodology.

This volatility creates impossible service planning conundrums. Helping Government meet priorities around worklessness, community safety, public health and most critically from a financial perspective the care of the vulnerable adults are challenging enough, without the absence of a secure population baseline. Population uncertainty makes a mockery of evidenced based planning. For example - In the 2011 census estimates there to be only 3,100 over 85s in Westminster when some 6,800 claim a pension here.

We hope this inquiry will help in the process of improvement of migration statistics.

¹ At the time of this response ONS had not yet published revised migration flows from 2001 to 2006 post 2011 census results.

Summary

- a) The ONS Report of the Interdepartmental Task Force on Migration Statistics² identified barriers to the accurate measurement of migration and set a clear vision for the future:

The aspiration is to move to a situation where we have timely, accurate estimates of the number of people coming into, going out of and present in the country for different durations and reasons (short and long term residence, seeking refuge, study, etc). Sufficient detail (e.g. geographic breakdowns) would be available to meet key requirements for population and migration statistics. This would be accompanied by the capacity to interpret trends and anticipate how changes and new uses will impact on the requirement for statistics.

- b) We recognise that a significant work programme (IMPS) was put in place following concerns raised in 2004 but despite this work which ended in July this year we still have significant concerns about the validity of migration estimates both at national cohort level and local authority level.
- c) The use of survey data was cited by the Statistics Commission in 2004³ as unlikely to provide the answer to the measurement of migration yet a methodology based mainly on surveys for the national cohort is still being used. Also the use of modelling migration using administrative data to distribute this national cohort has not improved estimates in complex hyper-diverse urban areas such as Westminster.
- d) We believe the International Passenger Survey (IPS) remains a questionable methodology of estimating TIM and should be strengthened by the full use of e-borders scheme or replaced altogether.
- e) The new ONS methodology using a small sample of DWP administrative data and social surveys for the distribution of migration from national cohort to LA level has not improved the measurement of migration for places like Westminster.

The continued use of GP Register Flag Four data to estimate internal migration within E&W was highlighted as a weakness in previous methodology but remains a core determinant of migration movement.

² 15th December 2006

³ Our 2003 report *The 2001 Census in Westminster* contained a recommendation that "the quality of migration data should be addressed with urgency" and noted that the solution "might involve major changes in administrative practice" and that "statistical surveys are unlikely to be adequate". This position was repeated in subsequent reports.

<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld200708/ldselect/ldconaf/82/82we34.htm>

Although the 2011 census may have worked well for most of the country in areas like Westminster there remains significant doubt about the outputs in Westminster and a small number of other authorities. Basing future migration estimates on the 2011 Census therefore could lock significant flaws into estimates for places such as Westminster for the next 10 years.

- f) The level of undocumented migrants, short-term migrants and illegal migrants remain essentially unknown. For other areas of the country this would not be a problem but for Westminster where an estimated 24,000 people remain uncounted it makes up a substantial 'hidden' population.
- g) Despite the Treasury Select Committee of 2007/8 considering the measurement of short term migration (staying in the England and Wales for between 3-12 months) as urgent there are still no official estimates for STMs which we believe is an unacceptable timeframe for measuring an estimated 195,000 STMs⁴ nationally equating to a town the size of York.
- h) Migration estimates should not be used without an understanding of their 'uncertainty' at a local as well as national level. We recommend that estimates should carry a flag of uncertainty where appropriate and published alongside them with both percentages confidence intervals and population ranges.
- i) ONS has significantly improved its contact with users of statistics and we welcome the time the organisation has spent holding seminars and with us individually. However, ONS consultation with users is mainly focussed on explaining the methodology it has already developed rather than meaningful engagement in the creation or challenge of it. We believe that it more flexibility in the current one-size-fits-all approach to measuring migration should be adopted and that ONS needs to be open to challenge that an approach that suits some areas will not work well in others.
- j) Furthermore Government Agencies need to work much more collaboratively to support ONS. Measuring migration is fundamental requirement, yet for example the DWP samples that are provided through the L2 database covers is just 1%. Why introduce uncertainty into local estimates though restrictions on data that ONS require?
- k) Current 'consultative' bodies such as the CLIP and SWG should be strengthened with representatives from LA groupings such as Central London Forward or National Association of Local Councils to make sure the different challenges of counting population in different areas are recognised fully.

⁴ http://www.google.co.uk/#hl=en&tbo=d&scient=psy-ab&q=195%2C074+short+term+migrants&oq=195%2C074+short+term+migrants&gs_l=hp.3...847.6301.0.6514.21.21.0.0.0.116.1585.17j4.21.0.les%3B..0.0...1c.2j1.ZExXCK5ebYg&pbx=1&bav=on.2,or_r_gc.r_pw.r_cp.r_qf.&fp=417da4c150e265d0&bpcl=39468505&biw=1394&bih=642

- l) There remains no official challenge process to migration or population estimates. Despite attempts by LAs to set up a resolution process before the publication of the 2011 census this did not happen. We recommend that a body such as the UKSA should set up an independent review where concern exists between the ONS and users of population statistics.
- m) The general public remain under the illusion that migrants are physically counted in and out of the country at border checks. This is simply not the case with national estimates of migrant sub groups being scaled up from very small IPS sample sizes. The public and policy makers should be aware of the uncertainty and limitations of assessing migration using surveys and modelling administrative data.

Questions

1. Do the published migration statistics – at the national, regional and local levels – meet the full range of their users’ needs namely:
 - a. Are they easily discoverable and accessible to all users?
 - b. Are they easy to use and understand?
 - c. Do they provide an appropriate level of detail?
 - d. Are they effectively summarised?
- 1.1 At a national level we support the quarterly reports (MSQR) on migration introduced in 2011 bringing together approximately 40 different reports on migration and administrative data to give a more rounded picture and context.
- 1.2 However, care should be taken that the migration statistics are not published without an explanation of uncertainty of the estimates and that the wrong inferences are not drawn from the reports by emphasising certain aspects over the whole picture. Although the MSQR does publish an explanatory guide to the use and reliability of the data published this should be made much more obvious in the summary and press releases issued with the reports.
- 1.3 Standard error percentages and confidence intervals should be published together and in the headline summary as that is likely to be the most widely read part of the report. The reports should make absolutely clear what should be reported as statistically significant and what should be treated with caution.
- 1.4 The reports seem to be written with headlines in mind and for a media audience rather than from the users of statistics perspective. Perhaps publishing a standardised table of gross immigration/emigration and net immigration/emigration with confidence intervals alongside comparative administrative data such as NiNo would help objectify commentary.

- 1.5 Emigration should be treated with care as IPS sample sizes are very low in scaling this aspect of migration.
 - 1.6 The publishing of National Insurance Numbers (NiNo) should be used to give context to the migration figures. However, there is no comparison between administrative data and estimates of net immigration. For example there is no explanation why 601,000 NiNos were allocated to non-UK nationals in the year to March 2012 but inward migration stood at 536,000.
 - 1.7 At a local or regional level we don't believe the publication of migration estimates is anywhere near adequate for the planning of services or the distribution of funding. As a local authority we would welcome more granular level information published for each council quarterly. This should take the form of a standardised table with LA's net/gross immigration/ emigration published alongside confidence intervals. A breakdown of ethnicity or nationality should be provided on a quarterly basis alongside the national report to enable each council to understand the flow of migration and for the public to gain a better understanding of what is taking place within its area.
 - 1.8 A Migration Observatory report ⁵ seems to underpin the view of the former Statistics Commission that survey data such as the Labour Force Survey and the Annual Population Survey carry significant uncertainty but this is especially so in complex areas like Westminster. These surveys have specific weaknesses when conducted in complex and diverse urban areas.
2. How well have producers of migration statistics engaged with users? How responsive have they been to feedback from users of the statistics?
 - 2.1 As a local authority we welcome the improvement in ONS the provision of information concerning changes to migration estimates holding regular seminars, working groups and presentations. We also welcome the time that ONS has spent with the Council at technical meetings concerning migration estimates and the 2011 census.
 - 2.2 However, this much improved contact is used mainly to explain decisions already taken over the creation of methodology rather than to solicit thoughts on the co-creation of methodology through meaningful consultation.
 - 2.3 We understand the need for a nationally consistent set of population data but the ONS seems wedded to a one-size-fits-all approach to migration measurement that does not take into consideration significant local differences such as using Flag 4 GP registration data tracking patient registration when in

⁵ <http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/top-ten/5-local-area-statistics>

central London a significant amount of the local migrants population will use walk in centres or A&E services and not register with GPs.

3. Do the migration statistics which are published enable members of the public to gain a better understanding of the issues?
 - a. Are the right migration statistics being collected?
- 3.1 We don't believe that the publication of the current reports benefit the public's understanding of migration. At the moment the public is informed by the media reporting of the national picture taken directly from the summary of the quarterly and annual reports. The headlines generated by this coverage will in some cases not reflect the experience or perceptions of the public in their local communities.
- 3.2 Without more geographic specific information being published by the ONS on a quarterly basis the public are not being served well by these reports.
- 3.3 We believe it will be extremely difficult for the ONS to produce quarterly LA estimates of migration at any reliable level as sample sizes from the IPS and Flag 4 data used from GP Registration are so small as to make the estimates unreliable. We can only determine that the measurement of migration from the perspective of a LA user and as reliable information of our residents is failing.
4. Is the degree of uncertainty surrounding estimates of migration properly reported and widely understood?
 - a. Is the degree of uncertainty surrounding estimates of migration acceptable or should it be reduced? If so how could it be reduced?
- 4.1 As above we think that the uncertainty surrounding migration measurement is not well reported and care should be taken to explain this in summary reports and press releases accompanying them.
5. Are the migration statistics adequate for measuring the Government's progress against its net migration target?
- 5.1 Care should be taken the reporting of the progress towards reducing migration to the government's target of 10s of thousands within this term of Parliament. As outlined by the Migration Observatory in August 2012 the margins of error on migration statistics makes a definitive statement on progress difficult. We would also suggest that methodological weaknesses in the measurement of migration should be taken into consideration.
6. What could be done to improve the quality of migration statistics?
 - a. Should data from other sources, such as e-Borders, be incorporated?

6.1 Although we recognise that the improvements made by the ONS in its IMPS programme we do not think the results have overcome the problems of providing accurate and reliable LA level data on international and internal migration.

6.2 Our concerns rest in two distinct areas:

- 1) the **national cohort** of migration measured by the International Passenger Survey (IPS)
- 2) the **distribution of international in-migrants** within the UK using ONS modelling

National cohort

6.3 International migration estimates, which include only people who move to a country other than that of their usual place of residence for a period of at least a year, are currently based on estimates of Total International Migration (TIM) allocated on the basis of the International Passenger Survey (IPS).

6.4 The IPS is the bedrock of migration measurement and by far the largest component of TIM. The IPS has been the subject of much criticism⁶ over the years and we recognise the work undertaken by the ONS to improve the survey. However, we remain concerned that the survey is still inadequate as a means to determine migration levels.

6.5 Primarily our concerns with the IPS are:

- Although the much-used public line is that the IPS is a survey of over 319,000 people this is misleading. This may be the number of people asked to take part but the actual sample of those who say they are migrants coming to the UK for more than one year in 2010 was only 2,990. From this small sample the national migration cohort is modelled.
- This small sample size doesn't seem to have grown substantially since 2004 when only 2,810 identified LTMs took part.
- Are people telling interviewers that they are not migrating to the UK when in fact they are? From a total of 1,342 Pakistani's interviewed only 260 identified themselves as LTMs. Of 1,981 Chinese interviewed 164 identified as LTMs. 8,294 Polish interviewed with only 103 identified as migrants.
- 'Each of the passengers contacted through application of the first-stage sampling rate is screened to assess whether or not he or she is migrating (if the

⁶ In its report, the Treasury Select Committee (2008) noted that:

Society is becoming more mobile and the information held electronically about events, persons and services by government agencies and other bodies has substantially increased.

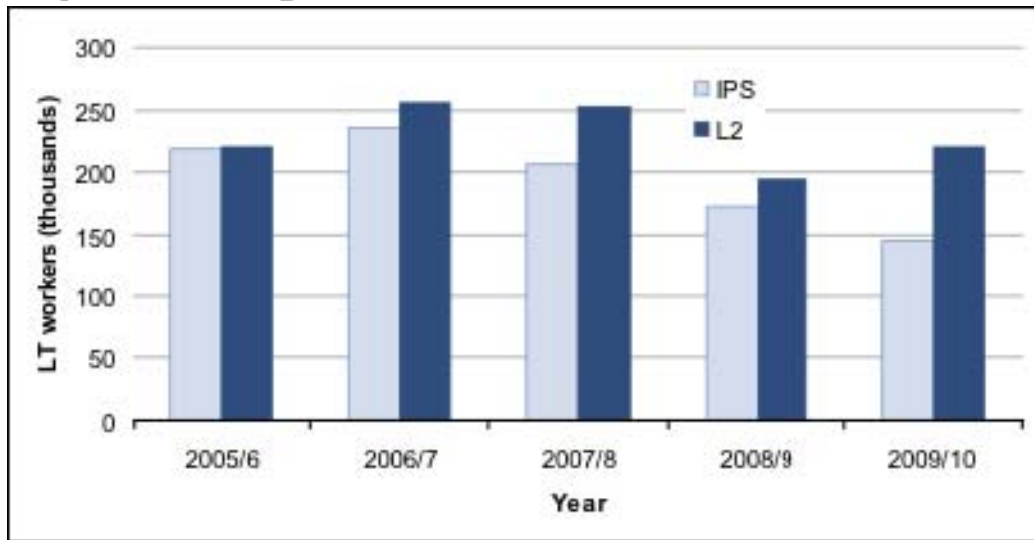
The International Passenger Survey was designed to provide data primarily for tourism and business travel purposes. It is now called upon to play a central role in estimating international migration. It is clear from the evidence.... that the Survey is not fit for this new purpose

contact is migrating, he/she will then be asked migration-specific questions, but if not migrating no further questions will be asked).’ ONS IPS methodology⁷. Are migrants more likely to give a false answer to this question if they are approached by officialdom in this way?

- Those travelling at night are not sampled in the survey and the overall response rate for the 2010 survey was 81 per cent.
- Despite holding the survey at more ports of entry following the ONS review it still seems that this is essentially a Heathrow centric survey. For example the difference between sample sizes at major airports feeding London in 2010 is marked. Heathrow (2,267); Gatwick (39); Stansted (115); Luton (118). There seems to be an assumption that inward migration patterns will be the same at each airport.
- Also is the way the survey is conducted robust enough? This is a section of the IPS handbook for ONS staff: “There may be times when, owing to a particular flood of passengers, you just cannot keep an accurate count. Do not panic if this happens but keep counting as best you can.” <http://www.theyworkforyou.com/wrans/?id=2012-10-22b.123460.h>
- Modelling of total inward migration from different countries is based on very small numbers of surveyed migrants. The number of Iraqis interviewed in 2010 was 2; Jamaicans 3; Portugal 16; Romanians 36; Lebanese 2; Libya 5; Poland 103; UAE 3.
- As below there is a discrepancy between the IPS and records collected by the DWP L2 data base which records all migrant economic activity i.e. NiNo, self employed and benefits. In 2009/10 the difference is quite wide between the total number of long term migrants entering the country according to the IPS and those that are economically active in that year according to the DWP. One or both of the data sets must be wrong.

⁷ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/specific/travel-and-transport-methodology/international-passenger-survey/index.html>

Figure 3.2
Comparison of LT migrant workers in the L2 and IPS, ESW, 2005/6 to 2009/10



Distribution of international migration

6.6 Whilst the Census 2011 estimate of 219,400 represents an increase in population since the 2001 census (181,300) in Westminster, it also represents a large reduction of 21,800 (9%) from the previous Revised 2010 Mid Year Estimate⁸ of 241,100 and a 43,500 less than the 267,000 (2008 MYE projections) used in the last government funding formula. If population estimates are to be rolled forward from a questionable base such as the 2011 census in Westminster we may never be able to accurately estimate the level of migration.

6.7 In an attempt to improve migration estimates at a LA level the ONS published revised methodology in November 2011. The new methodology altered how the national cohort was distributed around the country with some regions losing out and others gaining large amounts of migrants. The IPS is still used to determine the national cohort of migration but administrative data such as the L2 data (a sample from the DWP database) which holds NI numbers/PAYE and HESA student data is then used to distribute migration within the UK.

6.8 The use of administrative data for the modelling of migration to local authority levels should be treated with great caution. There is much to commend the ONS and government departments in their attempts to share data and link records across government databases. However, the modelling methodology using this data should be reviewed in detail as we believe administrative data can have just as significant weaknesses as the social survey data they replace.

⁸ The MYE 2010 figures were revised by ONS and reduced the Westminster population from 253k to 241k through a change to migration methodology

6.9 For example, data cut from the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) is a 1% sample of all records over a 30 year period. The proportion of migrants per local authority who are long term are taken from this sample which is determined by the length of economic activity i.e. if a NiNo is used for more than 12 months. There will be many flaws in data extracted in this way – for example sample sizes of the data by LA could be very low and suffer from weighting the data which will be constrained to national figures.

6.10 Also LAs ethnographic research suggests that some migrant communities clone or share NiNos which illustrates how a statistical analysis of available data alone may not fully appreciate the social behaviours or movement they seek to explain.

6.11 The statistical solution to counting migration that has been pursued by the ONS is limited to the use the available data or social surveys. However, we believe that in complex urban environments data extracted in this way will not provide accurate assessment of migration. Estimates of migration compiled by statisticians working alone with data should be treated with some scepticism as they do not understand the complex social interaction between migrants and officialdom.

6.12 Tony Travers' comment on the 2011 census captures this well: "This [the census] is a good example of the 'official' world coming into contact with worlds of which it knows nothing. Behind the doors of households, what goes on is a complicated thing... imagine 15 or 20 people living behind a 'front door', constituting neither a household nor a series of households because no one has responsibility for all of the others. The front door, should be understood as a gateway from an ordered world to a disordered world, and we are therefore the worst people to be trying to understand it."⁹

January 2013

⁹ Tony Travers, Visiting Professor LSE London Department of Government, Census Coverage Survey and Imputation: Deliberative Event. 07/10/10

Written evidence submitted by Universities UK (5STATS 11)

Summary

- The government's target to reduce net migration to the 'tens of thousands' by the end of this Parliament has focussed attention on the measurement of this data. Student visas are the single largest category of visa, and it is unlikely that the target could be reached without significant reductions in the number of international students studying in UK universities. It is therefore vital that immigration statistics, including those relating to international students, are fit for purpose.
- We welcome the government's recent commitment (in September 2012) to publish disaggregated figures on student visas. However, there are several ways in which published migration statistics could be improved to better inform debate around immigration policy, including student migration. These include:
 - Improving the timeliness of the publication of ONS data, by publishing it within three months of the time period to which the data relates, as is the current practice for Home Office immigration data.
 - Providing greater detail in Home Office data on visas issued for the purpose of studying in the UK, for example by disaggregating by type of education institution, and publishing this data more frequently than once per year.
 - Collecting and publishing information about emigration and exit, so that the impact on net migration of different types of migrant could be better measured. The use of e-Borders to record the categories of visas of those exiting the country could contribute to this. Universities UK is currently establishing a Commission on Exit to examine ways in which universities could assist government in improving the quality of data in this area.
 - Further disaggregation of net migration statistics, such as separating permanent from temporary immigration, to improve public understanding of the nature of UK migration. We also think the temporary nature of most

student immigration means that it should be excluded from the government's net migration target.

Do the published migration statistics – at the national, regional and local levels – meet the full range of their users' needs, namely:

- a* ***Are they easily discoverable and accessible to all users?***
- b* ***Are they easy to use and understand?***
- c* ***Do they provide an appropriate level of detail?***
- d* ***Are they effectively summarised?***

1. ONS data on net migration is easy to use, although historically the data on emigration has been misleading due to the questions asked of emigrants. Until January 2012 the International Passenger Survey (IPS) asked emigrants their reason for leaving the UK. It did not ask what their original reason for migrating to the UK was. Therefore, if someone arrived in the UK for study purposes, but left for work, the data might suggest that the student never left the country. This is represented in the 'Long Term International Migration' (LTIM) release within ONS publications on net migration, and has led to an exaggeration of the contribution that students make to overall net migration. Whilst this particular figure is not usually referenced, taking the data at face value can be problematic, especially to new users.
2. The IPS has been amended to include questions designed to identify emigrants' original reasons for coming to the UK. This will allow for the IPS to more accurately record student departures. The first release of a 12 month data-set reflecting these amended questions is due in August 2013. Until then, this remains a significant flaw in the data.
3. In comparing releases from the ONS with the Home Office, the disparity in reporting periods affects the value of the data. The Home Office data publications on visas are produced within three months of the period they refer to, which is timely. In comparison, the ONS net migration statistics are released with around an eight-month time lag. Seeing as there is some overlap between what is being

reported by both parties, it would be of greater value to users of the statistics if publications were coordinated, ideally by bringing ONS data forward.

4. There could be a greater level of detail in Home Office data on entry into the UK. Data is available annually on the number of people admitted into the UK for the purpose of study. However, this data should be available at a more disaggregated level to show the number entering for the purpose of study at higher education institutions. This could be done by using Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) information associated with the visas used by students to enter the UK. Such data ought to be held by the UK Border Agency (UKBA) Sponsor Management Team. Due to the increasing focus on student immigration, data on entry to the UK should also be published more frequently than once a year.
5. It would also be useful for the Home Office to publish data on the numbers of visa nationals (and other non-EEA citizens) exiting the UK. At present, the Home Office compares its own data on admissions with ONS estimates of immigration, but it is impossible to determine the accuracy of ONS emigration data without any supporting evidence on how many people are leaving the UK and for what purpose they arrived originally.
6. In its most recent release, the Home Office has published data on visa applications by education sector using CAS issuances. This is of great use to Universities UK, as we represent higher education institutions only, which have been impacted by immigration reform differently to other education providers such as private and further education colleges. Until this release in November 2012, we did not know the extent to which different institutions were experiencing different changes in demand.
7. Data on visa applications broken down by higher education institution would be of even greater use. This data is held by the UKBA, and would offer a very timely picture of how demand for higher education is changing within the sector, for instance, London compared to the rest of England or Scotland compared to Wales.
8. The summaries accompanying both the Migration Statistics Quarterly Report (ONS) and the Immigration Statistics (Home Office) are useful in measuring the

number of people migrating into the UK. However, the value of these summaries would increase significantly if data on emigration and exit were collected by the Home Office, and collected in a more robust manner by the ONS. It is difficult to ascertain the impact of migration without really understanding which types of migrants, such as students, are more likely to remain in the country and for how long.

9. For example, a key source of evidence relating to emigration patterns comes from the Home Office study, *'The Migrant Journey'*, which estimated that 21% of non-EEA students that arrived in the UK in 2004 were still in the country in 2009. The remainder are believed to have left the immigration system. However, without accurate data being collected on the emigration of students, it is not possible to understand the true impact of student migration on population change in the UK.
10. Four years after the period to which this study relates, and following significant changes to the student visa system including the removal of many post-study work opportunities for non-EU students, there is no available data to show how the numbers of non-EEA students leaving the immigration system might have altered. This is an obvious gap.
11. Many of the UKBA's systems which produce migration data do not 'talk' to each other, hence the need for independent studies like *The Migrant Journey* to be undertaken. This is costly and inefficient. The planned upgrades to the UKBA's IT systems may improve the amount of data we have available to show an individual's journey through the migration system. However, in implementing upgrades of this nature, the UKBA should routinely consider what positive impact they could have on better statistics and data on migration.

How well have producers of migration statistics engaged with users? How responsive have they been to feedback from users of the statistics?

12. Given the increased focus on net migration as a measure to drive policy, Universities UK raised concerns in the student visa consultation of January 2011 about flaws in the International Passenger Survey. These representations to the Home Office included pointing out that the IPS did not accurately account for

students departing the UK on completion of their studies. We subsequently raised these points with ONS officials including the National Statistician later in 2011. We are pleased that our concerns, and those of other stakeholders, have resulted in a change to the IPS questions, introduced in January 2012.

13. In 2012, Universities UK attended workshops and seminars with a focus on migration statistics. This included a very useful workshop on the uses of the International Passenger Survey in which the ONS participated, and an event focussing on whether official migration statistics meet users' needs, at which the ONS and the Home Office presented very interesting findings. Such events are most welcome.

Do the migration statistics which are published enable members of the public to gain a better understanding of the issues? Are the right migration statistics being collected?

14. Those who do not have a detailed knowledge of how immigration statistics are measured may infer that the net migration statistics relate to a permanent increase in the population. In fact, many people included are coming for a time limited period. It would be useful if the figures could be presented with further disaggregation, for example to show those who are migrating for work for a temporary period of leave of more than one year, students entering for a temporary period of leave of more than one year etc., and then separately present statistics relating to settlement.
15. Without accurate data on emigration, it is impossible for a member of the public to determine the contribution of specific migrant types to net migration. This can lead to some misinterpretation, and more accurate data on emigration is required both for ONS statistical reports and for the Home Office in terms of visa holders exiting the country.
16. The Home Office publishes information on the number of in-country and out-of-country visa issuances, but there is a need for detailed information on visa switchers. Under the old Tier 1 Post Study Work visa, many non-EU students were entitled to remain in the country for a further two years in employment. The

way this data was presented in Home Office statistics made it quite clear how many graduates decided to remain in the country to work after their studies. This route was closed in April 2012, which may have had the impact of encouraging overseas students already in the UK to return to their home country, or may have deterred some prospective students from coming to the UK at all. More limited post-study work opportunities are still available to graduates through the Tier 2 (General) route. However, there needs to be more disaggregation within the published data showing how many people granted Tier 2 (General) visas have switched from a Tier 4 student visa. Otherwise it is not clear how the uptake of post-study work has changed since Tier 1 Post Study Work was closed. There is also no clear evidence to demonstrate the impact of the Government's change in policy. This does not help the debate around types of migrants and their impact upon UK society.

Including students within the net migration figures, which the Government aims to reduce to the “tens of thousands”, is at odds with other Government policy. Realistically, the target cannot be met without further decreases in the number of non-EU students coming to the UK. In our view, this is at odds with the Government's recent statements, in response to reports by the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee and the Lords' Science and Technology Committee, that it is “committed to the sustainable growth of a sector in which the UK excels”.¹

17. We believe that the number of legitimate international students is being affected by their inclusion in the drive to reduce immigration. In academic year 2011/12, the number of first year non-EU students arriving to study at UK higher education institutions fell for the first time in recent years, with the number of students from India falling by almost one-third.

Is the degree of uncertainty surrounding estimates of migration properly reported and widely understood? Is the degree of uncertainty surrounding estimates of migration acceptable or should it be reduced? If so, how could it be reduced?

¹ Government Response to the Home Affairs Committee's Fifth Report of Session 2012-13, available here: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmselect/cmhaff/825/82504.htm>

18. The ONS data of most use to Universities UK is that of non-EU immigration for the purpose of study. However, a breakdown of this level is only available from the IPS, as opposed to the 'Long-Term International Immigration' (LTIM) statistics, which form the basis of the net migration 'official' results. When non-EU student immigration is discussed, we therefore have no published figure within the LTIM to understand how this migration route compares to the total levels of immigration in the reported results.
19. As an example, the most recent release on net migration (for the year to March 2012), suggests that total immigration for reason of study, (including British, EU and non-EU citizens), was 213,000, whilst in the IPS itself the total was 208,000. The IPS also showed that non-EU student immigration was 163,000, but there is no corresponding figure in the 'official' net migration results.
20. Statistics within the reported net migration results are of varying reliability, after taking into account confidence intervals. This could be worrying as the Government continues to drive net migration down, as the ONS data may suggest that the target has been met when it hasn't, or vice-versa.
21. One means of improving the accuracy of student immigration data might be for the ONS to use official student record data published by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). This would mean backdating data, but it could greatly assist in identifying overall trends within the student component of immigration.

Are the migration statistics adequate for measuring the Government's progress against its net migration target?

22. The level of uncertainty surrounding some migration estimates can be so high that, on face value, it may appear that levels of migration have changed significantly, but these levels may not be deemed statistically significant by the ONS.
23. The Government's aim is for its net migration target to be achieved by the end of this Parliament, in 2015. However, due to the time lag associated with ONS net migration data being published, the latest data to be published on net migration

