



House of Commons
Public Administration Select
Committee (PASC)

Migration Statistics

Seventh Report of Session 2013–14

Volume I: Report, together with formal minutes, oral evidence

Written evidence is contained in Volume II, available on the Committee website at www.parliament.uk/pasc

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 16 July 2013*

HC 523 [incorporating HC 1010-i, Session 2012–13]

Published on 28 July 2013

by authority of the House of Commons

London: The Stationery Office Limited

£12.00

The Public Administration Select Committee (PASC)

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Summary

Migration statistics produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the Home Office are blunt instruments for measuring, managing, and understanding migration to and from the UK. They are not accurate enough to measure the effect of migration on population, particularly in local areas, and they are not detailed enough to measure the social and economic impacts of migration, or the effects of immigration policy. Current sources of migration statistics were established at a time when levels of migration were much lower than they are today. These sources are not adequate for understanding the scale and complexity of modern migration flows, despite attempts to improve their accuracy and usefulness in recent years.

Annual estimates of immigration, emigration and net migration are primarily based on a sample of around 5,000 migrants identified through the International Passenger Survey, which is a survey of people travelling through UK air and sea ports. The Government must plan to end reliance on the International Passenger Survey as the primary method of estimating migration: it is not fit for the purposes to which it is put. The ONS and Home Office should move as quickly as possible to measuring immigration, emigration and net migration using e-Borders data. The International Passenger Survey was not primarily designed for the purpose of estimating international migration, but to provide economic data on travel and tourism.

In the year to June 2012, immigration was estimated at 515,000. Around 15% of immigration was by British nationals, around 30% was by nationals of other EU countries, and around 55% was by non-EU nationals. Emigration was estimated at 352,000. Around 44% of emigration was by British nationals, around 24% was by nationals of other EU countries, and around 32% was by non-EU nationals. Net migration, the difference between immigration and emigration, was estimated at 163,000.

Because the migration estimates are based on a survey sample they are surrounded by a margin of error. The 95% confidence interval surrounding the estimate of net migration is around plus or minus 35,000. This means there is a 95% chance that the true value of net migration in any twelve month period falls within a range of around 70,000, and a 5% chance that it falls outside this range. This confidence interval represents the potential statistical error in the estimate that arises from the sample size. Other possible sources of error mean the uncertainty surrounding the estimate is even greater. Respondents may be lying and there can be systemic biases in the willingness of particular groups to participate in the survey.

The Government aims “to reduce net migration from the hundreds of thousands back down to the tens of thousands” by the end of the current Parliament.¹ In the period 2006 to 2010, estimates of net inward migration averaged 209,000 a year. So while the Government’s target suggests a ten-fold reduction in net inward migration, in practice it

¹ Home Secretary, HC Deb, 23 November 2010, col 169

only needs to be roughly halved in order for the Government to achieve its aim.

Migration estimates based on the International Passenger Survey are too uncertain for accurate measurement of progress against the Government's net migration target. We are struck by the advice of the Migration Advisory Committee to the Government that it should aim for net migration of only 50,000 as the only means of being certain that net migration is in fact below 100,000. In the longer term the Government should not base its target level of net migration on such an uncertain statistic: doing so could lead to inappropriate immigration policy.

The statistical uncertainty associated with migration estimates increases when the migrant sample is broken down to identify particular sub-groups of migrants, such as those of a particular nationality, or those moving to or from a particular part of the UK. This limits the extent to which the sample can be used to describe the characteristics of migrants. Furthermore, some migrant characteristics are not recorded at all, such as ethnicity. Migration estimates based on the International Passenger Survey do not provide sufficient detail on the characteristics of people migrating to and from the UK to judge properly the social and economic consequences of migration and the effects of immigration policy. They do not provide accurate estimates of international migration to and from local areas.

ONS and Home Office data are incompatible in several respects. ONS migration estimates contain no information on the immigration status of migrants. It is not possible to tell how many immigrants identified by the ONS entered the UK in particular visa categories. Home Office statistics do not indicate the number of visa holders with valid leave to remain in the UK, or the number who overstay their leave to remain. Some aspects of official migration statistics could be considerably improved if the Home Office and ONS properly recorded and linked the data they already gather. But a full and accurate statistical account of migration to and from the UK also requires the ONS to develop new sources of migration statistics.

1 Introduction

1. ONS migration statistics provide information on how the population is changing as a result of people coming to live in the UK and moving to live abroad. They are a key component of the population estimates for the UK, which are used to allocate central government funding to the UK's devolved administrations and to local public services. Population estimates are also used to calculate a wide range of social and economic indicators, which inform political decisions and help measure policy outcomes. Home Office immigration statistics provide information on controlled migration and on compliance with the Immigration Rules. Accurate, detailed and timely migration statistics are needed to measure the social and economic effects of migration and the impact of immigration policy.

2. During the last 15 years there has been considerable growth in immigration and emigration to and from the UK. Immigration has grown faster than emigration, leading to historically high levels of net migration. The Government aims “to reduce net migration from the hundreds of thousands back down to the tens of thousands” by the end of the current Parliament, and has introduced changes to the Immigration Rules to achieve this objective.

3. Opinion polls show that immigration is one of the most important issues for the public.² It is therefore vital that members of the public are able to find and understand reliable and comprehensive official migration statistics and that policy-makers understand what specifically concerns the public about migration.

4. This study on migration statistics is part of a wider programme of work we are carrying out on statistics and their use in Government. A full description of the studies is set out on our website at www.parliament.uk/pasc. The purpose of this inquiry was to assess the quality of migration statistics produced by the Office for National Statistics and the Home Office, and to establish how well-informed the debate about migration is as a consequence. We called for written evidence, and took oral evidence from the ONS, the Home Office, Westminster City Council, the Migration Research Unit at University College London, and the Oxford Migration Observatory.

² IpsosMORI, *Issues Index: 2007 onwards – The Most Important Issues Facing Britain Today*, www.ipsos-mori.com; YouGov, “Immigration Concern hits three-year high”, 8 May 2013, www.yougov.co.uk/news/

2 International migration estimates

Background

5. International migration estimates produced by the ONS attempt to reflect how much the UK population has changed as a result of migration. They estimate how many migrants have been arriving and leaving, where they are migrating to and from, and for what reasons. They aim to measure all long-term international migration to and from the UK, which is migration by people who change their country of usual residence for a period of at least a year. ONS migration estimates are the only statistics that attempt to routinely measure all migration to and from the UK within a given period using a consistent definition. As migration is a component of population change, ONS migration estimates are used in estimating population change in years between the decennial Censuses.

6. ONS migration estimates are based principally on the International Passenger Survey (IPS), which is a survey of passengers arriving at and departing from UK air and sea ports. The IPS was not primarily designed for the purpose of estimating international migration, but to provide economic data on travel and tourism. As most people travelling to and from the UK are not long-term international migrants, the IPS must approach around 800,000 passengers each year in order to achieve a sample of around 5,000 migrants.³

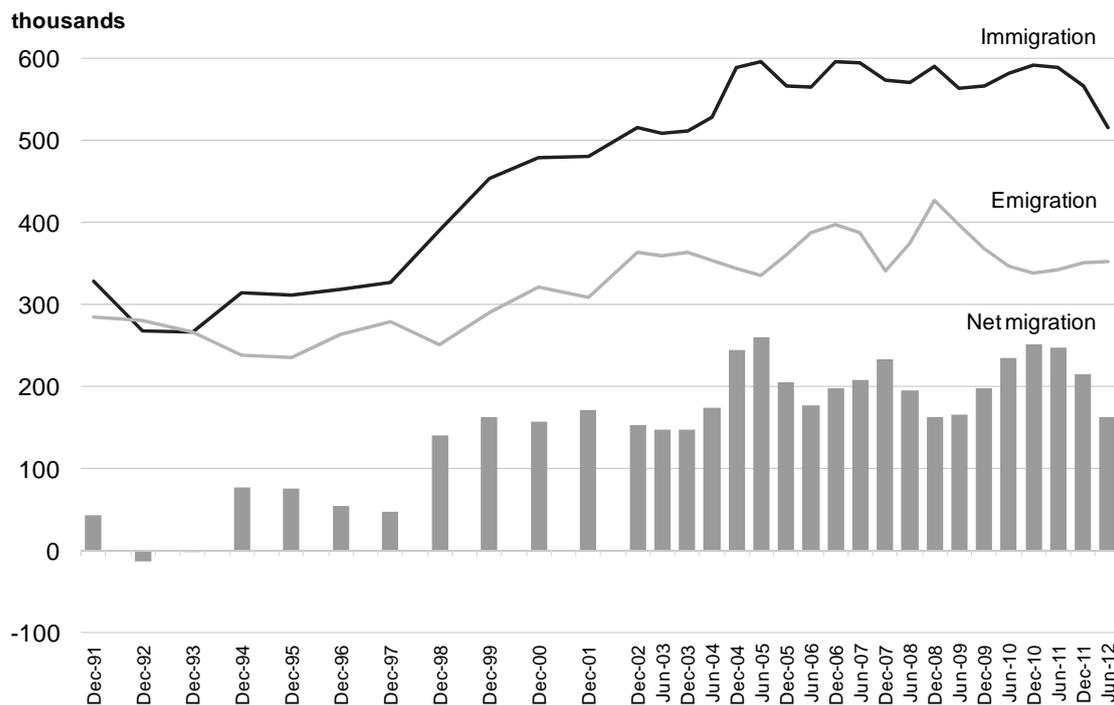
7. The ONS first produces estimates of international migration using just the IPS sample. These survey-based estimates are then adjusted to reflect types of long-term migration that are not properly captured by the survey, such as asylum seekers, migration through Northern Ireland, and “switchers”—people who change their country of usual residence for a period longer or shorter than they originally anticipate, thereby falling into and out of the definition of a long-term migrant. The adjusted estimates are the long-term international migration (LTIM) estimates, which provide the headline estimates of immigration, emigration and net migration in the UK.⁴

8. The ONS has produced long-term international migration estimates for each calendar year since 1991, for years to June since 2003, and for years to March and September since 2010. Figure 1 shows LTIM estimates of immigration, emigration and net migration in years to December and June since 1991, for those years where data are available.

³ Q 59

⁴ ONS, *Long-Term International Migration Estimates - Methodology Document - 1991 onwards*, May 2013

Figure 1: Long-term international migration, Years to Dec & Jun, 1991–2012



Note: Years to June only available since the year ending June 2003.

Source: ONS, Migration Statistics Quarterly Report, May 2013

9. Net migration is the difference between immigration and emigration: the number of people moving to live in a particular country minus the number of people moving out of that country to live elsewhere. It is important to recognise that net migration does not indicate the full extent of population change. If immigration and emigration are roughly equal, net migration will be low irrespective of how many people are migrating in and out of the country. Low net migration can be consistent with high levels of immigration and emigration, and net migration may change as a result of changes in either immigration or emigration.

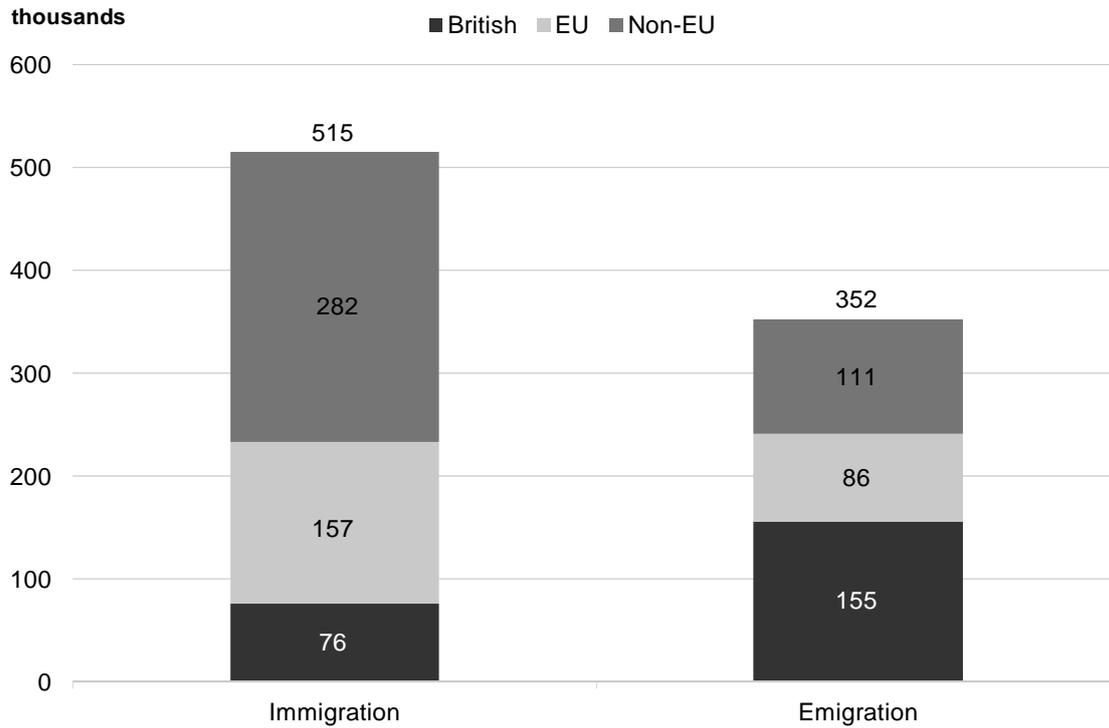
10. Net inward migration to the UK increased from an annual average of around 37,000 in the period 1991 to 1995 to an annual average of around 209,000 in the period 2006 to 2010. So while the Government's net migration target—to reduce net migration from the hundreds of thousands to the tens of thousands—suggests a ten-fold reduction in net inward migration, in practice net inward migration only needs to be roughly halved in order for the Government to achieve its aim.

11. Because the international migration estimates are based on a survey sample, rather than a count, they are subject to a margin of error. In practice this error can be quite large. For net migration (as measured by the unadjusted IPS estimate), the range is currently around plus or minus 35,000, which means there is a 95% chance that the true level of net migration falls within a range of around 70,000. This is called “the confidence interval” and is calculated by ONS statisticians. Confidence intervals cannot be calculated for the final adjusted LTIM estimates because the uncertainty associated with some of the adjustments

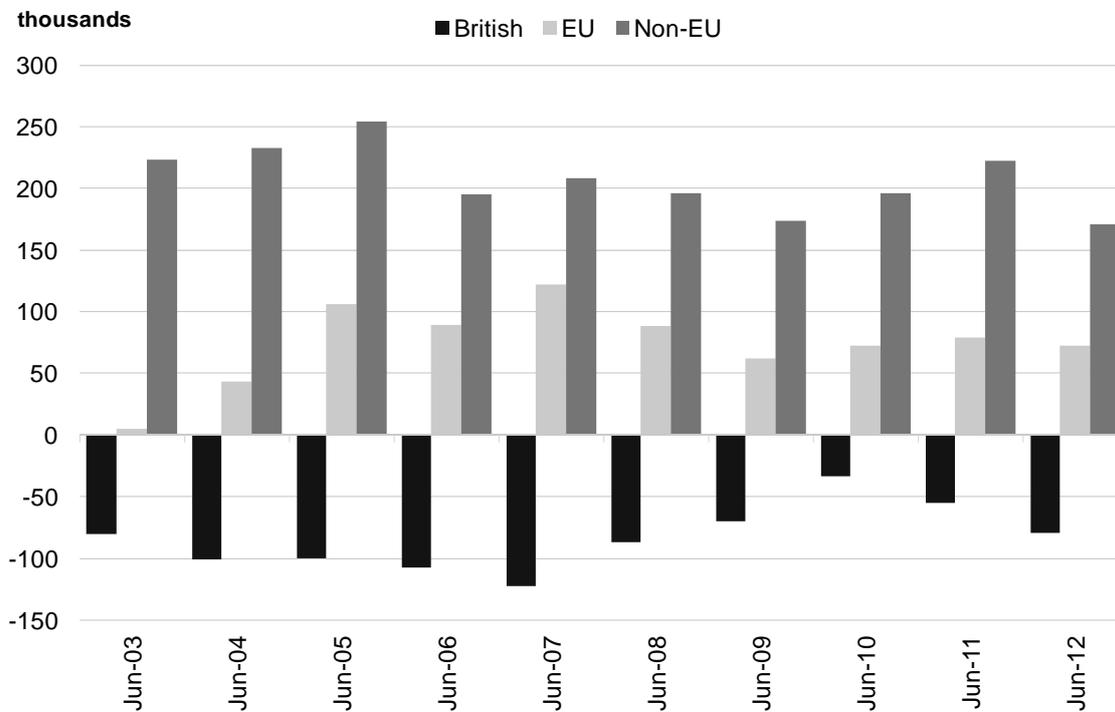
cannot be easily quantified, but the confidence intervals surrounding the IPS estimates give some indication of the statistical uncertainty in ONS migration statistics. This means that if the estimate of net migration is, for example, 200,000, the confidence interval suggests there is a 95% chance the true value falls between 165,000 and 235,000, with a 5% chance the true value falls outside this range. In practice, the uncertainty is even greater than this, as the confidence interval only represents the potential sampling error, and takes no account of other possible sources of error, such as the possibility of respondents lying or systematic biases in the willingness of particular groups to participate in the survey.

12. Figure 2 shows immigration and emigration in the year to June 2012 broken down by nationality. Just over half of immigration to the UK is by non-EU nationals (55%), around a third is by nationals of EU countries other than the UK (30%), and less than a sixth is by British nationals (15%). This means that just over half of the immigration flow comprises people who need a visa to come to the UK. Conversely, most emigration from the UK is by British nationals (44%), around a third is by non-EU nationals (32%), and around a quarter is by nationals of other EU countries (24%).

13. Figure 3 shows net migration by nationality in years to June from 2003 to 2012. Net immigration is highest among non-EU nationals, while there has been net emigration of British nationals in every year since LTIM estimates have been produced. Because more British nationals are leaving the UK than entering it, the overall level of net migration is lower than would otherwise be the case. An increase in net emigration of British nationals since 2010 has contributed to the fall in net migration during this period.

Figure 2: Immigration and emigration by nationality, Year to June 2012

Source: ONS, Migration Statistics Quarterly Report, May 2013

Figure 3: Net migration by nationality, Years to June, 2003–2012

Source: ONS, Migration Statistics Quarterly Report, May 2013

Quality of international migration estimates

14. In 2009 the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA) carried out an assessment of ONS migration statistics. It said that “Both users and ONS’ statisticians generally agree that migration statistics are not fit for all of the purposes for which they are currently used and require further improvement”.⁵

15. Between April 2008 and March 2012 the ONS carried out a comprehensive programme for improving the quality of its migration statistics. The Migration Statistics Improvement Programme (MSIP) led to some improvements in the way migration statistics are produced and reported.⁶ The ONS told us the migration statistics were “fit for purpose”.⁷

16. In written evidence, users of ONS migration statistics welcomed these improvements, but many remained critical of the overall quality of the international migration estimates. The Royal Statistical Society told us:

Despite these recent improvements migration statistics are still not fully adequate for the task of producing robust population estimates or understanding patterns of migration.⁸

The British Society of Population Studies wrote:

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.⁹

The Royal Geographical Society said “the international migration data are not fit for purpose”, but concluded that “the ONS (and its sister agencies) are doing a good job with poor data”.¹⁰

17. The most common criticisms of the migration estimates were the degree of uncertainty surrounding the statistics and the lack of detailed information available on the characteristics and behaviour of migrants entering and leaving the UK.¹¹ Both of these problems were attributed to the IPS and its small migrant sample. The British Society of Population Studies told us:

[I]t 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,

⁵ UK Statistics Authority, *Assessment Report: Migration Statistics*, July 2009, p 7

⁶ ONS, *Migration Statistics Improvement Programme Final Report*, March 2012

⁷ Q 59

⁸ Ev w18

⁹ Ev w2

¹⁰ Ev w1

¹¹ Ev w2, Ev w6, Ev w8, Ev w13, Ev w18, Ev w27

which requires greatly increasing the number of migrants interviewed from its current level of around 12 a day.¹²

18. Many of those who submitted written evidence hoped that data from the Government's e-Borders programme—which records basic travel document information on the identity of passengers travelling through UK ports—could eventually be used to improve the quality of migration estimates.¹³

19. The ONS explored the potential use of e-Borders data as part of the Migration Statistics Improvement Programme. The biggest contribution they expect e-Borders data to make is in improving the accuracy of the headline measures of immigration, emigration and net migration at the national level. This improvement is expected around 2018, three full years after the e-Borders scheme achieves 95% coverage of passenger movements in and out of the UK.¹⁴ This is because e-Borders data must be collected for a full year before and after the year for which migration statistics are produced in order to determine whether a person entering or leaving the UK meets the definition of a long-term international migrant.

20. However, while e-Borders data may lead to more accurate headline estimates of immigration, emigration and net migration, it cannot replace the IPS in providing information on the characteristics of migrants, as it does not record all of the characteristics of migrants that the IPS currently records, such as their usual occupation before migration or their main reason for migrating. It can also play only a limited role in helping to improve local area migration estimates as it does not record the origin or intended destination of people migrating to and from the UK. We look at this issue further in Chapter 3 below.

21. Users and producers of migration statistics both said that data on emigration was even weaker than data on immigration. Several respondents to our call for evidence suggested that emigration statistics could be improved by using data on immigration in other countries.¹⁵ The Royal Statistical Society said:

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.¹⁶

¹² Ev w2

¹³ Ev w1, Ev w2, Ev w8, Ev w10, Ev w13, Ev w18

¹⁴ ONS, *Delivering statistical benefits from e-Borders*, p 7

¹⁵ Ev w2, Ev w18, Ev w31

¹⁶ Ev w18

22. In a recent review of the robustness of the International Passenger Survey, UKSA also recommended using data on international migration collected in other countries to help understand migration to and from the UK.¹⁷

23. **We welcome work the ONS has done to improve the quality of migration statistics. The ONS has done its best to produce informative migration statistics using the International Passenger Survey. However, the International Passenger Survey is inadequate for measuring, managing and understanding the levels of migration that are now typical in the UK. *The Government must plan to end reliance on the International Passenger Survey as the primary method of estimating migration: it is not fit for the purposes to which it is put.***

24. **e-Borders data has the potential to provide better headline estimates of immigration, emigration and net migration from 2018. *The ONS and Home Office should move as quickly as possible to measuring immigration, emigration and net migration using e-Borders data.***

25. **Migration is an international phenomenon. Data held by other countries on migration to and from the UK could help improve the depth and quality of UK migration statistics. *The ONS should co-operate further with foreign national and international statistics agencies to improve the quality of UK migration statistics.***

Measuring progress against the net migration target

26. In written evidence, many users of migration statistics expressed concern that the degree of uncertainty in the migration estimates made them unsuitable for measuring progress against the Government's net migration target. Migration Watch told us:

The uncertainty around the net migration figure should be reduced. The net migration figure is central to the Government's policy on 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.¹⁸

The Oxford Migration Observatory wrote:

The available migration estimates are problematic as a means to define and precisely measure progress toward a numerical limit on migration [...] 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. As a consequence, the Government could miss the “tens of thousands” target by many tens of thousands and still appear to have hit it—

¹⁷ UKSA, *Monitoring Brief reviewing the robustness of the International Passenger Survey*, June 2013, p 3

¹⁸ Ev w8

conversely the Government could hit, or even exceed its target and still appear to have missed it by tens of thousands.¹⁹

Submitting evidence in his capacity as Chair of the Universities UK working group on student visa issues, Professor Edward Acton said that such uncertainty could lead to immigration policy that was either too tight or too loose.²⁰

27. The only respondent to the Committee's call for evidence that felt the current migration estimates were adequate for this purpose was the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC), which advises the Home Office on migration policy.²¹ However, it is worth noting that the MAC's recommendations to the Home Office have been influenced by the potential inaccuracy of the migration estimates. When the MAC was asked to suggest visa limits to help achieve the net migration target in 2010, it aimed at reducing net migration to 50,000 rather than 100,000 specifically in order to overcome uncertainty in the net migration estimate.²²

28. We wrote to Sir Andrew Dilnot, Chair of UKSA, to ask whether UKSA considered the LTIM estimate of net migration to be suitable for measuring progress against the Government's net migration target. In his response, Sir Andrew wrote:

With careful analysis of all the available data we can be fairly sure of the broad level of net inward migration over a period. It may, however, be necessary to wait quite a long time to get a clear picture.²³

As illustrated in Figure 1 above, the estimated level of net migration can change by tens of thousands in either direction from one calendar year to the next, so medium and long-term trends in net migration only become apparent after several years. The true level of net migration at a given point in time is highly uncertain.

29. In the longer term, migration estimates based on the International Passenger Survey are too uncertain for accurate measurement of progress against the Government's net migration target. We are struck by the advice of the Migration Advisory Committee to the Government that it should aim for net migration of only 50,000 as the only means of being certain that net migration is in fact below 100,000. The Government should not base its target level of net migration on such an uncertain statistic: doing so could lead to inappropriate immigration policy.

Understanding who is migrating to and from the UK

30. The statistical uncertainty associated with migration estimates increases (relative to the size of the flows) when the IPS sample is broken down to identify particular sub-groups of

¹⁹ Ev w10

²⁰ Ev w6

²¹ Ev w8

²² Migration Advisory Committee, *Limits for Tier 1 and Tier 2 for 2011/12 and supporting policies*, November 2010, paragraphs 45-48, p 12

²³ Ev w36

migrants, such as those of a particular nationality, or those with a particular reason for migration. So, for example, when the estimate of net inward migration by nationals of the A8 Eastern European countries that joined the EU in May 2004 is 28,000, the 95% confidence interval surrounding the estimate is around plus or minus 14,000.²⁴ This means there is a 95% chance that the true number of migrants from those countries falls between 14,000 and 42,000.

31. This statistical uncertainty limits the extent to which the IPS sample can be broken down into different sub-groups. Therefore, breakdowns of immigration and emigration by nationality, country of birth, and country of last or next residence are only available for groups of countries (such as the EU15, the A8, and the Old and New Commonwealth) rather than for individual countries. In its evidence to this Committee, the Royal Statistical Society said:

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.).²⁵

32. Furthermore, as UKSA indicated in its written evidence, certain characteristics of migrants are not recorded by the IPS at all; such as ethnicity, religion, language, and educational qualifications.²⁶ The Royal Statistical Society noted that the absence of data on ethnicity in particular “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”.²⁷

33. The ONS told us the IPS was not an appropriate source of data for detailed information on the characteristics of migrants.²⁸ It did not recommend trying to improve the level of detail available in migration estimates by increasing the size of the IPS, because even a very large increase in the number of people surveyed would not provide the level of detail users of migration statistics need. For this reason, the ONS argued that increasing the IPS would be “poor value for money”.²⁹ Instead, it recommended that migration statistics could be improved more cost-effectively by developing new sources of data on migration, such as by fully integrating the IPS with e-Borders and by conducting specific routine surveys of migrants living in the UK.³⁰

²⁴ The A8 countries are the eight Eastern European countries that acceded to the European Union in May 2004, comprising Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

²⁵ Ev w11

²⁶ Ev w31

²⁷ Ev w18

²⁸ Q 59

²⁹ Q 61

³⁰ Q 63

34. Migration estimates based on the International Passenger Survey do not provide sufficient detail on the characteristics of people migrating to and from the UK to judge properly the social and economic consequences of migration and the effects of immigration policy. These data are indispensable for anticipating demand for public services such as schools and the NHS. *Migration statistics should provide detailed information on the characteristics of people migrating to and from the UK within particular periods, including information that is relevant to evaluating the impact of immigration policy and necessary for planning services. The ONS should broaden the information it gathers on the characteristics of migrants to include level of educational qualification, labour market skills, ethnic group, and languages spoken.*

35. e-Borders data could potentially provide detailed information on the characteristics of migrants subject to visa control. However, e-Borders data alone will not provide detailed information on the characteristics of those migrants not subject to visa control, or any information on the geographical origin and destination of migrants within the UK. If the International Passenger Survey is not an adequate source for this information, and no other sources are available, new sources of migration statistics are needed, even though they may come at some cost.

36. *The ONS should develop new sources of data that can provide accurate statistics on the numbers and characteristics of people migrating to and from the UK, and on their areas of residence within the UK. The ONS should link International Passenger Survey responses to e-Borders data as soon as possible. However, the need for further data may also require the creation of a new routine migrant survey covering the whole of the UK.*

3 Local area migration estimates

37. The ONS produces estimates of international migration to and from local authority areas. These are based principally on the same IPS data that are used to estimate migration for the UK as a whole, which are adjusted using administrative data.³¹ Users of migration statistics identified local area migration statistics as being particularly weak. This is despite the ONS taking steps to improve local area migration statistics as part of its Migration Statistics Improvement Programme. The Royal Statistical Society told us:

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.³²

38. The population of England and Wales recorded at the 2011 Census was 476,000 larger than the ONS expected, based on its methodology for estimating the population between Census years. The ONS attributed 267,000 of this difference to inaccuracies in the measurement of net international migration over the decade to 2011, of which around 175,000 was attributed to systematic underestimation of net migration by the IPS.³³

39. The ONS told us the total discrepancy between the Census and the estimated population in March 2011 was just 0.8% of the population of England and Wales. They suggested this was “not bad”,³⁴ although in absolute terms it represents a population equal to the city of Liverpool. In some local authorities the discrepancy between the Census and the expected population was much greater as a proportion of the population than for England and Wales as a whole. In around 11% of local authorities the difference was greater than 5% of the population, and in 9% of local authorities it was greater than 10,000 people. In the London Borough of Brent, the population was around 35,000 larger than expected, which was more than 10% of the expected population, while in some local authorities the population was smaller than expected.³⁵

40. The Oxford Migration Observatory drew attention to the fact that there is no source of data on migration in local areas that is both complete and accurate other than the decennial Census, which rapidly becomes out of date and may not continue in its current form. The ONS’s “Beyond 2011” programme is examining options for the future of the

³¹ ONS, *Improved Methodology for Estimating Immigration to Local Authorities in England and Wales*, November 2011

³² Ev w18

³³ ONS, *Explaining the Difference between the 2011 Census Estimates and the Rolled-Forward Population Estimates*, September 2012, pp 2-8

³⁴ Q 60 [Mr Humberstone, ONS]

³⁵ ONS, *Explaining the Difference between the 2011 Census Estimates and the Rolled-Forward Population Estimates*, September 2012, p 12

Census. PASC will conduct its own study into the Census as part of its wider programme of work on statistics and their use in Government. The Observatory also drew attention to the difficulties caused by the lack of robust data on migration at the local level:

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.³⁶

41. Westminster City Council was particularly critical of migration estimates for local authorities, especially in their effect on local area population estimates. It said the migration estimates were unreliable and complained that frequent revisions to the estimated local authority population made it difficult to plan services. It argued that the current methodology for estimating migration was not robust enough to support accurate local level estimates, and it was concerned that the unreliability of the estimates “will cause severe detrimental impacts in the future grant settlements.” It said recent changes to the methodology for estimating migration in local areas had “not improved the measurement of migration for places like Westminster”, and it concluded that “the measurement of migration from the perspective of a LA [local authority] user and as reliable information on our residents is failing”.³⁷

42. The ONS told us the factors leading to the underestimation of net migration in the decade to 2011 had largely been addressed through improvements to the local area migration estimates introduced in 2009 as part of the Migration Statistics Improvement Programme. It argued that, had these improvements been introduced at the start of the last decade, “the population estimates would have been much closer to what the Census said”.³⁸ But this claim is untested. The extent of any systematic error in the new methodology for estimating international migration in local areas is unknown.

43. The basis for estimates of international migration in local areas is IPS data on migrants’ origins and intended destinations within the UK. The weakness of these estimates is mainly due to the size of the IPS sample and its inability to provide detailed information on the characteristics and behaviour of migrants.³⁹ In addition, many immigrants do not know their ultimate destination upon arrival in the UK. All of the problems with migration estimates at a national level are magnified at the local level.

44. In its recent review of the robustness of the International Passenger Survey, UKSA concluded that:

The IPS sample size is too small to enable the production of reliable international migration estimates at a local authority level, and cannot realistically be made sufficiently large to achieve robust local estimates.⁴⁰

³⁶ Ev w10

³⁷ Ev w22

³⁸ Q 86 [Mr Humberstone, ONS]

³⁹ See Chapter 2 above.

⁴⁰ UKSA, *Monitoring Brief reviewing the robustness of the International Passenger Survey*, June 2013, p 5

In oral evidence, the ONS acknowledged the weakness of the IPS as a source of data on migration in local areas.⁴¹

45. The International Passenger Survey does not provide accurate estimates of international migration in local areas. The Census provides the most accurate data on the number and characteristics of migrants at the local level, but it is too infrequent to act as a routine source of data. The future of the Census is also uncertain. As the only reliable source of data on migrant populations in local areas, the potential loss of the Census is a concern. *Accurate estimates of migration in local authorities must be available independent of the Census. The ONS should develop new sources of data on international migration that are robust enough to provide accurate estimates of annual migration flows to and from local authority areas, even if the Census continues.*

⁴¹ Q 59, Q 61

4 Home Office migration statistics

46. Home Office migration statistics record events and processes within the administration of immigration control, such as grants of visas, applications for asylum, admissions at ports, grants of settlement and citizenship, enforced removals and voluntary departures, and detentions under Immigration Act powers. They categorise people by their route of entry, whether as workers, students, or family members. They only record people leaving the UK where those people have breached the immigration rules in some way.

47. The Home Office increased the range of statistics it publishes on immigration in August 2011, when it stopped producing the annual “Control of Immigration” figures and replaced them with more detailed quarterly statistical releases online. The new releases provide annual and quarterly data in much more detail than was previously available.

48. However, Home Office immigration statistics provide only limited information on migration. Nationals of countries in the European Economic Area (EEA) and Switzerland are not subject to migration control, so Home Office data covers only a subset of people moving into and out of the UK. Furthermore, the Home Office does not currently record the exit of most visa holders.⁴² This means there are no statistics showing the number of visa holders with valid leave to remain in the UK, or the number of those that overstay their leave to remain.

49. The Home Office does publish some data on the pathways taken by migrants through the immigration system in a research series called “The Migrant Journey”.⁴³ However, the analyses in this series examine the pathways taken by cohorts of migrants over a five year period and each analysis is typically published a year after the end of this period for the most recent cohort, so the data relates to immigration flows from several years in the past. Furthermore, this research compares migrants’ outcomes based on their immigration status as recorded by the Home Office, which does not necessarily reflect the geographical location of the migrant. For this reason, the research does not provide information on the number of controlled migrants actually resident in the UK, or the extent of their compliance with the Immigration Rules.

50. There are no official estimates of the number of people who are living in the UK illegitimately, known as “irregular migrants”. The most recent figures, produced by researchers from the London School of Economics for the Greater London Authority in 2009, estimated that there were between 373,000 and 719,000 irregular migrants living in the UK at the end of 2007, not including children born to irregular migrants after they moved to the UK.⁴⁴

⁴² The EEA comprises the countries of the EU plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway.

⁴³ Most recently, Home Office, *The Migrant Journey: Third Report*, Feb 2013

⁴⁴ Gordon, I and Scanlon, K and Travers, T and Whitehead, C M E, *Economic impact on the London and UK economy of an earned regularisation of irregular migrants to the UK*, GLA Economics, GLA, 2009

51. In their evidence to this Committee, several users of migration statistics expressed concern that there was no clear relationship between ONS migration estimates and Home Office statistics on migration control.⁴⁵ The two sources of data are incompatible in several respects.

52. Firstly, ONS migration estimates do not record the immigration status of migrants, so it is not possible to identify which migrants within the ONS estimates are subject to particular categories of migration control. It is not possible to tell how many of the immigrants identified by the ONS entered the UK in particular visa categories, for example. It is possible to match loosely some very broad categories of migration in the ONS estimates with those used in control of immigration (for example, nationals of non-EU countries whose main reason for coming to the UK is to study), but the reasons for migration recorded in the International Passenger Survey do not fully correspond with Home Office visa categories and may not in practice indicate a migrant's visa status.

53. Secondly, ONS migration estimates measure migration by people changing their country of residence for a period of at least a year, while Home Office data does not distinguish between immigrants based on their length of stay (except indirectly, in those visa categories which explicitly restrict leave to remain in the UK to a fixed period).

54. Finally, the geographies used by the ONS and the Home Office do not match. The ONS separates migrants based on nationality, country of birth, and country of last or next residence into EU and non-EU countries, while Home Office immigration controls apply to nationals of countries outside the EEA and Switzerland.

55. In its evidence, the Oxford Migration Observatory said the lack of information on migrants' immigration status in ONS migration estimates gave rise to at least three problems in the evaluation of immigration policy:

- We do not know the numbers and characteristics of migrants with different types of immigration status;
- We do not know how different types of immigration status affect the economic and social outcomes of migrants in the UK; and
- We cannot systematically assess the impact of migrants with different types of immigration status on the UK labour market, economy and society.⁴⁶

56. In both written and oral evidence, producers and users of migration statistics said that international passenger data collected as part of the e-Borders programme could potentially address some of the weaknesses of Home Office migration statistics and strengthen their relationship with ONS migration estimates.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ev w8, Ev w8, Ev w10

⁴⁶ Ev w10

⁴⁷ Ev w1, Ev w2, Ev w8, Ev w10, Ev w13, Ev w18, Q 40, Q 44, Q 63, Q 94, Q 97

57. The e-Borders programme captures only limited information about each passenger: their name, sex, date of birth, nationality, and passport number. For this reason, the ONS said the main benefit to migration statistics of using e-Borders data would be more accurate measures of total immigration, emigration, and net migration.⁴⁸ In principle, these figures could be broken down by the variables recorded in travel document information: age, sex, and nationality.

58. The Home Office told us that in future it would be possible to link e-Borders data on people entering and leaving the UK with information on the visas they hold.⁴⁹ This not only has the potential to provide information on the immigration status of migrants and their compliance with the Immigration Rules, it also offers an opportunity to gather detailed information on the characteristics of migrants subject to visa control. In written evidence Migration Watch wrote:

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.⁵⁰

59. However, in their oral evidence both the Home Office and ONS indicated that there were obstacles to making full use of e-Borders data for statistical purposes.⁵¹ The e-Borders programme does not yet provide full coverage of all passengers travelling to and from UK ports, and it is not always possible to correctly match passengers' entries and exits.⁵² Furthermore, the Home Office suggested it may be several years before e-Borders and visa data could be fully linked.⁵³ The Home Office attributed the difficulty of integrating the various data they collect to weaknesses in its IT systems, which it told us "are not where we want them to be".⁵⁴

60. On 26 March 2013, the Home Secretary Theresa May announced that the UK Border Agency (UKBA) would be abolished and its functions transferred to the Home Office. In her statement to the House of Commons about the abolition, the Home Secretary acknowledged the weaknesses of Home Office IT systems for managing immigration and announced they will be modernised under a new plan:

UKBA's IT systems are often incompatible and are not reliable enough. They require manual data entry instead of automated data collection, and they often involve paper files instead of modern electronic case management. So I have asked the permanent secretary and Home Office board to produce a new plan, building on the work done

⁴⁸ Q 94 [Mr G Goodwin, ONS]

⁴⁹ Q 94 [Mr J Simmons, Home Office]

⁵⁰ Ev w8

⁵¹ Qq 91-96

⁵² Q 96

⁵³ Q 94 [Mr J Simmons, Home Office]

⁵⁴ Q 90 [Mr J Simmons, Home Office]

by Rob Whiteman, UKBA's chief executive, to modernise IT across the whole immigration system.⁵⁵

This presents an opportunity for the Home Office to produce much better administrative data on migration, which UKSA identified as vital to improving migration statistics:

The key step, without which other steps will have only limited benefit, will be the introduction of better administrative data, particularly that from the e-Borders system. Ideally this would be joined up with IPS data, as well as from other sources, such as National Insurance Number allocations and higher education student data, to give a more complete picture. Only then would government statisticians be in a position to make major improvements.⁵⁶

However, as UKSA also acknowledged, while better administrative data would lead to more accurate headline migration estimates, and more detailed information on migrants subject to visa control, it would not provide information on migrants' reasons for migration or on their origins and destinations within the UK.⁵⁷ There would still be a need for an additional source of data on migration even if Home Office administrative data were fully exploited.

61. We welcome improvements in the breadth of migration data published by the Home Office since 2011. *The Home Office and ONS should use e-Borders data to produce more accurate measures of immigration, emigration and net migration by age, sex and nationality at the national level as soon as possible.*

62. *The Home Office should move as rapidly as possible towards integrating visa information with e-Borders data, with the aim of measuring immigration, emigration and net migration by people in different visa categories. This would also provide data on the number of people in different visa categories currently living in the UK, and would enable the Home Office to gather detailed information on the characteristics of migrants subject to migration control. The Government should formulate and publish a plan for integrating UKBA's IT, which sets out its objectives, how they will be achieved, and in what time.*

63. The Home Office's programme to modernise IT across the immigration system provides an opportunity to improve significantly official migration statistics. *It is vital that ONS and other government statistical needs are fully understood and incorporated into new IT specifications. The Home Office and ONS should together develop a coherent strategy for better migration statistics.*

⁵⁵ HC Deb, 26 March 2013 col 1501

⁵⁶ Ev w31

⁵⁷ Ev w31

5 Communicating migration statistics

64. In May 2013, we published a report into communicating statistics. In that report, we concluded that significant improvements can be made to the ease of access to, presentation and explanation of government statistics.⁵⁸ This section builds on that work and examines specific issues with the presentation and dissemination of migration statistics in particular.

65. Respondents to the Committee’s call for evidence welcomed recent improvements in the reporting of migration statistics, including in the ONS Migration Statistics Quarterly Report and the increasing breadth of migration statistics published by the Home Office.⁵⁹ Users of migration statistics also said the ONS and Home Office engaged positively with users: they were responsive to feedback and generally implemented users’ suggestions where they could.⁶⁰

66. However, several users expressed concern that, despite improvements in the communication of migration statistics, there remained a considerable lack of understanding of migration statistics among the general public.⁶¹ They noted that, in the public debate about levels of migration, people frequently confused immigration with net migration and did not understand the role of emigration in population change.⁶²

67. The Government’s policy places all its emphasis on reducing net migration. Research on public attitudes to migration suggests the public is most concerned about immigration rather than the level of net migration.⁶³ It also suggests that members of the public identify “immigrants” using a different definition than that used in official statistics.⁶⁴

68. The net migration target can disguise the nature of actual population change in the terms which concern many members of the public. Members of the public do not always understand the distinction between immigration and net migration, and many are more concerned by some types of immigration than others. The Government should do more to enable better public understanding of migration, in order for the net migration target to be meaningful to, and understood by, the public.

69. Users of migration statistics also felt the public did not appreciate the degree of uncertainty surrounding migration estimates and thought it could be given greater prominence in official releases.⁶⁵ The British Society of Population Studies told us:

⁵⁸ Public Administration Select Committee, First Report of Session 2013-14, *Communicating statistics: Not just true but also fair*, HC 190

⁵⁹ Ev w2, Ev w8, Ev w8, Ev w18

⁶⁰ Ev w2, Ev w8, Ev w8, Ev w18, Ev w22

⁶¹ Ev w2, Ev w10, Ev w18, Ev w22, Ev w27

⁶² Ev w2, Q 2

⁶³ Oxford Migration Observatory, *Thinking Behind the Numbers: Understanding Public Opinion on Immigration in Britain*, October 2011

⁶⁴ As above

⁶⁵ Ev w2, Ev w10, Ev w18

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.⁶⁶

70. Some users said that while the reporting of migration statistics was effective for expert users, it was ineffective for non-expert and occasional users of the data, such as journalists and members of the public.⁶⁷ Users complained that the ONS and Home Office websites were difficult to navigate. The Oxford Migration Observatory wrote:

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 or the Home Office 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 “casual” 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.⁶⁸

71. The British Geographical Society echoed this criticism and noted that: “The LTIM estimates are difficult to locate on the ONS website and it is difficult to switch between the data, methodology and interpretation”.⁶⁹

72. The ONS and Home Office have both taken steps to improve the presentation of migration statistics online. The ONS recently added a new topic page on migration to its website, which summarises the most recent headline migration estimates and includes links to relevant statistical releases. The Home Office website recently moved to Gov.uk, a new website for government departments that is designed to make it easier for users to find the information they need. The Home Office also publishes an Immigration Statistics User Guide as part of its quarterly immigration statistics, which provides table by table guidance on the available data.

73. Public understanding of migration statistics is poor. This is partly because migration is a complex phenomenon, but also because official migration statistics do not present a full and accurate picture of migration to and from the UK. As a consequence, the public debate about migration has too often focussed on the headline measure of net migration, without considering the size and composition of its component flows, the range of behaviour it summarises, and the different types of people it covers.

⁶⁶ Ev w2

⁶⁷ Ev w2, Ev w8, Ev w10, Ev w18

⁶⁸ Ev w10

⁶⁹ Ev w1

74. We welcome improvements in the reporting of migration statistics by the Home Office. The Home Office has substantially increased the range of data it publishes on immigration control. The Home Office Immigration Statistics User Guide is an effective summary and explanation of the available statistics. We also welcome the new Home Office website at Gov.uk, which addresses some of the criticisms of the Home Office website made in evidence to this inquiry.

75. We welcome improvements in the reporting of migration statistics by the ONS, including the Migration Statistics Quarterly Report, which summarises the most recent migration statistics, and the new topic page for migration on the ONS website. However, the clarity and accessibility of the information that the ONS provides on migration statistics could still be improved. *The ONS has improved the presentation of the material it publishes on migration statistics but it should also consider the content of this material, and the way it is explained and presented. The aim should be that a non-expert user should be able to develop an understanding of migration statistics with no prior knowledge or experience. Migration statistics should be presented alongside related guidance on their sources, methodology, use and interpretation.*

76. *The ONS should produce a user guide to ONS migration statistics similar to the Home Office's Immigration Statistics User Guide. This should explain what migration statistics measure, how they are produced, and what data are available—including table by table guidance. It should be honest and open about the weaknesses of the data.*

Conclusions and recommendations

Quality of international migration estimates

1. We welcome work the ONS has done to improve the quality of migration statistics. The ONS has done its best to produce informative migration statistics using the International Passenger Survey. However, the International Passenger Survey is inadequate for measuring, managing and understanding the levels of migration that are now typical in the UK. The Government must plan to end reliance on the International Passenger Survey as the primary method of estimating migration: it is not fit for the purposes to which it is put. (Paragraph 23)
2. e-Borders data has the potential to provide better headline estimates of immigration, emigration and net migration from 2018. The ONS and Home Office should move as quickly as possible to measuring immigration, emigration and net migration using e-Borders data. (Paragraph 24)
3. Migration is an international phenomenon. Data held by other countries on migration to and from the UK could help improve the depth and quality of UK migration statistics. The ONS should co-operate further with foreign national and international statistics agencies to improve the quality of UK migration statistics. (Paragraph 25)

Measuring progress against the net migration target

4. In the longer term, migration estimates based on the International Passenger Survey are too uncertain for accurate measurement of progress against the Government's net migration target. We are struck by the advice of the Migration Advisory Committee to the Government that it should aim for net migration of only 50,000 as the only means of being certain that net migration is in fact below 100,000. The Government should not base its target level of net migration on such an uncertain statistic: doing so could lead to inappropriate immigration policy. (Paragraph 29)

Understanding who is migrating to and from the UK

5. Migration estimates based on the International Passenger Survey do not provide sufficient detail on the characteristics of people migrating to and from the UK to judge properly the social and economic consequences of migration and the effects of immigration policy. These data are indispensable for anticipating demand for public services such as schools and the NHS. Migration statistics should provide detailed information on the characteristics of people migrating to and from the UK within particular periods, including information that is relevant to evaluating the impact of immigration policy and necessary for planning services. The ONS should broaden the information it gathers on the characteristics of migrants to include level of educational qualification, labour market skills, ethnic group, and languages spoken. (Paragraph 34)

6. e-Borders data could potentially provide detailed information on the characteristics of migrants subject to visa control. However, e-Borders data alone will not provide detailed information on the characteristics of those migrants not subject to visa control, or any information on the geographical origin and destination of migrants within the UK. If the International Passenger Survey is not an adequate source for this information, and no other sources are available, new sources of migration statistics are needed, even though they may come at some cost. (Paragraph 35)
7. The ONS should develop new sources of data that can provide accurate statistics on the numbers and characteristics of people migrating to and from the UK, and on their areas of residence within the UK. The ONS should link International Passenger Survey responses to e-Borders data as soon as possible. However, the need for further data may also require the creation of a new routine migrant survey covering the whole of the UK. (Paragraph 36)

Local area migration statistics

8. The International Passenger Survey does not provide accurate estimates of international migration in local areas. The Census provides the most accurate data on the number and characteristics of migrants at the local level, but it is too infrequent to act as a routine source of data. The future of the Census is also uncertain. As the only reliable source of data on migrant populations in local areas, the potential loss of the Census is a concern. Accurate estimates of migration in local authorities must be available independent of the Census. The ONS should develop new sources of data on international migration that are robust enough to provide accurate estimates of annual migration flows to and from local authority areas, even if the Census continues. (Paragraph 45)

Home Office migration statistics

9. We welcome improvements in the breadth of migration data published by the Home Office since 2011. The Home Office and ONS should use e-Borders data to produce more accurate measures of immigration, emigration and net migration by age, sex and nationality at the national level as soon as possible. (Paragraph 61)
10. The Home Office should move as rapidly as possible towards integrating visa information with e-Borders data, with the aim of measuring immigration, emigration and net migration by people in different visa categories. This would also provide data on the number of people in different visa categories currently living in the UK, and would enable the Home Office to gather detailed information on the characteristics of migrants subject to migration control. The Government should formulate and publish a plan for integrating UKBA's IT, which sets out its objectives, how they will be achieved, and in what time. (Paragraph 62)
11. The Home Office's programme to modernise IT across the immigration system provides an opportunity to improve significantly official migration statistics. It is vital that ONS and other government statistical needs are fully understood and incorporated into new IT specifications. The Home Office and ONS should together develop a coherent strategy for better migration statistics. (Paragraph 63)

Communicating migration statistics

12. The net migration target can disguise the nature of actual population change in the terms which concern many members of the public. Members of the public do not always understand the distinction between immigration and net migration, and many are more concerned by some types of immigration than others. The Government should do more to enable better public understanding of migration, in order for the net migration target to be meaningful to and understood by the public. (Paragraph 68)
13. Public understanding of migration statistics is poor. This is partly because migration is a complex phenomenon, but also because official migration statistics do not present a full and accurate picture of migration to and from the UK. As a consequence, the public debate about migration has too often focussed on the headline measure of net migration, without considering the size and composition of its component flows, the range of behaviour it summarises, and the different types of people it covers. (Paragraph 73)
14. We welcome improvements in the reporting of migration statistics by the Home Office. The Home Office has substantially increased the range of data it publishes on immigration control. The Home Office Immigration Statistics User Guide is an effective summary and explanation of the available statistics. We also welcome the new Home Office website at Gov.uk, which addresses some of the criticisms of the Home Office website made in evidence to this inquiry. (Paragraph 74)
15. We welcome improvements in the reporting of migration statistics by the ONS, including the Migration Statistics Quarterly Report, which summarises the most recent migration statistics, and the new topic page for migration on the ONS website. However, the clarity and accessibility of the information that the ONS provides on migration statistics could still be improved. The ONS has improved the presentation of the material it publishes on migration statistics but it should also consider the content of this material, and the way it is explained and presented. The aim should be that a non-expert user should be able to develop an understanding of migration statistics with no prior knowledge or experience. Migration statistics should be presented alongside related guidance on their sources, methodology, use and interpretation. (Paragraph 75)
16. The ONS should produce a user guide to ONS migration statistics similar to the Home Office's Immigration Statistics User Guide. This should explain what migration statistics measure, how they are produced, and what data are available—including table by table guidance. It should be honest and open about the weaknesses of the data. (Paragraph 76)

Formal Minutes

Tuesday 16 July 2013

Members present:

Mr Bernard Jenkin, in the Chair

Alun Cairns
Charlie Elphicke
Paul Flynn
Kelvin Hopkins

Greg Mulholland
Mr Steve Reed
Lindsay Roy

Draft Report (*Migration Statistics*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 76 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Seventh Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

Written evidence was ordered to be reported to the House for publishing on the internet.

[Adjourned till Tuesday 3 September at 9.15am]

Witnesses

Wednesday 24 April 2013

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Professor John Salt, Co-Director, Migration Research Unit, University College London, **Dr Scott Blinder**, Acting Director, Oxford Migration Observatory, **Cllr Phillipa Roe**, Leader, Westminster City Council

Ev 1

Mr Guy Goodwin, Director for Analysis and Dissemination, ONS, **Mr Ben Humberstone**, Deputy Director, Population Statistics, ONS, **Dr Chris Kershaw**, Head of Migration, Policing and Other Statistics, Home Office Science, **Mr Jon Simmons**, Director, Migration and Border Analysis and a Deputy Director In the Home Office Science Directorate

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Second Special Report	Special advisers in the thick of it: Government Response to the Committee's Sixth Report of Session 2012–13	HC 515
First Report	Communicating statistics: not just true but also fair	HC 190
Second Report	Public engagement in policy-making	HC 75
Third Report	The role of the Charity Commission and "public benefit": Postlegislative scrutiny of the Charities Act 2006	HC 76
Fourth Report	Engaging the public in National Strategy	HC 435
Fifth Report	Appointment of the Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life	HC 516
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Second Special Report	Leadership of change: new arrangements for the roles of the Head of the Civil Service and the Cabinet Secretary: Further Report: Government Response to the Committee's Twenty Third Report of Session 2010–12	HC 313
Third Special Report	Strategic thinking in Government: without National Strategy, can viable Government strategy emerge? Government Response to the Committee's Twenty Fourth Report of Session 2010–12	HC 573
Fourth Special Report	The Role of the Cabinet Secretary and the Resignation of the Chief Whip: Government Response to the Committee's Eighth Report of Session 2012–13	HC 968
Fifth Special Report	The Prime Minister's Adviser on Ministers' Interests: independent or not? Government Response to the Committee's Twenty Second Report of Session 2010–12	HC 976
First Report	The Big Society: Further Report with the Government Response to the Committee's Seventeenth Report of Session 2010–12	HC 98
Second Report	The Honours System	HC 19

Third Report	Business Appointment Rules	HC 404
Fourth Report	Appointment of the Chair of the Charity Commission	HC 315-I
Fifth Report	End of term report: 2011–12	HC 316
Sixth Report	Special advisers in the thick of it	HC 134
Seventh Report	The Honours System: Further Report with the Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2012–13	HC 728
Eighth Report	The Role of the Cabinet Secretary and the Resignation of the Chief Whip	HC 864 (HC 968)
Ninth Report	Public Trust in Government Statistics, A review of the operation of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007	HC 406
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First Report	Who does UK National Strategy?	HC 435 (HC 713)
Second Report	Government Responses to the Committee's Eighth and Ninth Reports of Session 2009–10: Goats and Tsars: Ministerial and other appointments from outside Parliament and Too Many Ministers?	HC 150
Third Report	Equitable Life	HC 485 (Cm 7960)
Fourth Report	Pre-appointment hearing for the dual post of First Civil Service Commissioner and Commissioner for Public Appointments	HC 601
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Sixth Report	Who Does UK National Strategy? Further Report with the Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2010–11	HC 713
Seventh Report	Smaller Government: What do Ministers do?	HC 530 (HC 1540)
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Thirteenth Report	Change in Government: the agenda for leadership	HC 714 (HC 1746)
Fourteenth Report	Public Appointments: regulation, recruitment and pay	HC 1389
Fifteenth Report	Smaller Government: What do Ministers do? Further Report with the Government Response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2010–12	HC 1540 (HC 1746)
Sixteenth Report	Appointment of the Chair of the UK Statistics Authority	HC 910

Seventeenth Report	The Big Society	HC 902
Eighteenth Report	Change in Government: the agenda for leadership: Further Report, with the Government Responses to the Committee's Eleventh, Thirteenth and Fifteenth Reports of Session 2010–12	HC 1746
Nineteenth Report	Leadership of change: new arrangements for the roles of the Head of the Civil Service and the Cabinet Secretary	HC 1582
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Twenty First Report	Future oversight of administrative justice: the proposed abolition of the Administrative Justice and Tribunals Council	HC 1621
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Twenty Third Report	Leadership of change: new arrangements for the roles of the Head of the Civil Service and the Cabinet Secretary, Further Report, with the Government Response to the Committee's Nineteenth Report of Session 2010–12	HC 1914
Twenty Fourth Report	Strategic thinking in Government: without National Strategy, can viable Government strategy emerge?	HC 1625

Oral evidence

Taken before the Public Administration Select Committee on Wednesday 24 April 2013

Members present:

Mr Bernard Jenkin (Chair)

Alun Cairns
Paul Flynn

Robert Halfon
Kelvin Hopkins

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Professor John Salt**, Co-Director, Migration Research Unit, University College London, **Dr Scott Blinder**, Acting Director, Oxford Migration Observatory, and **Cllr Philippa Roe**, Leader, Westminster City Council, gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: Order, order. Can I welcome our first panel of witnesses this morning on the subject of migration statistics? Could I ask each of you to introduce yourselves for the record please?

Cllr Roe: Philippa Roe; I am the leader of Westminster City Council.

Professor Salt: John Salt, from University College London.

Dr Blinder: Scott Blinder, from the University of Oxford, the Migration Observatory.

Q2 Chair: I am very grateful to all of you for your excellent written submissions, which, I have to say, have been quite a revelation to some of us. I wonder if we could start by asking about what we think the public understand about immigration statistics when they read about them in the newspapers, and indeed what journalists think they are conveying when they write about immigration statistics. I often ask myself, “If I go into the chip shop in Harwich in my constituency and say, ‘Net immigration has been cut by a third,’ what does this mean to my voters, who say they are very concerned about levels of immigration?” Could you comment on that?

Dr Blinder: Sure. At the Observatory we get a lot of queries, particularly from journalists and other members of the public. There are quite varying levels of understanding, I think. You are right that to focus on net migration is a particularly confusing starting point, but it has been central to the debate, so it is what a lot of people are interested in. It is difficult intuitively in that there is really no such thing as a “net migrant”; it is the difference between immigration and emigration. I think that is not always understood. There are confusions between net migration and immigration sometimes. There are confusions between flows and stocks, and this is something we have talked about with journalists who are seeing a figure that is based on a survey of the population and gives them a stock figure—so how many migrants born in a certain country are living in Britain—and they are confused and they think it is a measure of how many people are coming to Britain from this country each year.

Q3 Chair: What does net migration actually mean? Explain it to us.

Dr Blinder: Net migration is the difference between immigration and emigration. It is people arriving in Britain minus people departing, with the caveat that the only people who count in these two measures are people who are moving for 12 months or more.

Q4 Chair: So when the Government says they want to reduce the number of immigrants from hundreds of thousands to tens of thousands, that is cutting immigration by 90%, is it?

Dr Blinder: No. That goal refers to net migration, so that figure can be changed by either changes in immigration or changes in emigration, or both.

Q5 Chair: So what exactly does the target mean?

Dr Blinder: Policies aimed at this target are attempting to ensure that in any given year the number of people arriving in Britain for at least 12 months or more is no more than 100,000 greater than the number of people leaving Britain for 12 months or more. It is a difference.

Q6 Chair: How is this difference actually measured?

Dr Blinder: Immigration and emigration are measured separately by the International Passenger Survey, plus a few adjustments.

Q7 Chair: This is like an opinion poll of passengers coming in and out of the country, is it not? Can you explain what it is? It is not an opinion poll, it is a survey.

Dr Blinder: It is a survey; it is not measuring their opinions, it is trying to measure their behaviour. But yes, it is a survey; it is a sample survey.

Q8 Chair: So in fact, the number of people coming in and out of the country is not actually counted?

Dr Blinder: No.

Q9 Chair: Do you think the public understand that there is some uncertainty about the numbers that are put out?

Dr Blinder: The public encompasses a general audience and then a variety of other users, but I think probably the understanding of that is not very widespread in the general public.

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Q10 Chair: I am very anxious for the other witnesses to contribute to this bit of the discussion.

Dr Blinder: Sorry.

Cllr Roe: If I can talk from the point of view of the residents that I get to talk to, I think there is a complete lack of understanding about what net migration actually means. There is also a belief, quite wrongly, that people are counted as they come into the country and as they leave. As we know, certainly as you have seen from the submissions, it is a tiny sample, and counting emigration is even harder than that, because people do not necessarily tell you when they are not coming back. There is no mechanism for bringing that data together. I also think it is extremely confusing on another level, because if we are talking about net migration you are not talking about who is coming and who is going, and the nature of those individuals. A lot of policies that we would like to put forward as a local authority, and I think also nationally, should be looking at those that determine who is coming and going.

We do not have the evidence, because the evidence is so weak, but anecdotally from Westminster we think we are losing considerably more economically active, better-off people—be they British people emigrating abroad or foreigners who have lived here for a while going back—than we are gaining more lower-skilled people who are coming in. They have a value to society, I am not disputing that. Some of the policies that we need to be thinking about need to be a lot more sophisticated than just ‘net migration’. I think that is what our population would be expecting to come out of this, rather than just the blunt instrument of the difference between people going and people coming.

Professor Salt: I think there are two issues. One is that net migration is trying to oversimplify something that is enormously complicated. There are different migration streams: there are people coming in for labour, family, asylum or study reasons, and you can break these down further. Migration is taking place at different geographical scales. We are looking at things nationally, regionally and at the local authority level. There are different sorts of sources: there are administrative sources and survey sources. The problem with the net migration target is that it is not concerned just with those people coming in; it is concerned with those people going out as well. To make it sound really rather silly, the Government could bring its net migration target down by encouraging more Britons—probably more skilled Britons—to go and live and work in Australia, Canada, the United States, New Zealand and so on. That is how the net migration target works.

The first point I would make is the enormous complexity, and the difficulty of hitting a single numerical target is that it does not force you to balance the different migration streams. You are not saying, “What do we really need for labour? How much compassion should we have? Can we measure it out, and therefore take so many asylum seekers? What is a reasonable number of family migrants that we can cope with coming in each year? How much dependence does the education sector have on students coming in?” and so on. That is the main

problem in my mind associated with the single net migration target. It is a rather blunt instrument anyway, but it does not take account of the enormous complexities and movement. I have not mentioned the difference between longer term, which Scott said is over a year, and shorter-term movement.

Q11 Chair: Say something about the error margin in these figures.

Professor Salt: That was my second point: plausibility. The migration statistics story over the last 10 years is a good one. It might not seem like that. There have been enormous strides made in the accuracy and volume of the data, and one of the big strides that has been made is to make what used to be called sampling errors and are now called plausibility ranges. If you have a sample survey, it can be more or less than the middle figure. I do not think there is much understanding at all about plausibility ranges, and certainly when I look at the newspapers and things that people say in public, there is no indication that there is anything other than a single solid figure. Over the last 18 months or two years more data have been put out by the authorities, particularly by the ONS, which gives us the plausibility ranges and therefore says, “It is somewhere between that figure and that figure.”

Q12 Chair: Give us an example. I have heard that if net migration is 200,000 then there is only 95% confidence that that figure is correct: 35,000 plus or minus.

Professor Salt: Yes, that is right.

Q13 Chair: The Government could be saying it is achieving its target when it is miles off it, or we could be applying draconian immigration controls in the belief that we have not achieved the target when in fact we have exceeded the target. That is possible, is it not?

Professor Salt: Yes, oh yes.

Q14 Chair: In order to raise the tone of the debate and make sure that commentary about this is more informed, what is lacking? Is it the presentation of the statistics by the ONS?

Professor Salt: I do not think it is the presentation by the ONS. The ONS now makes its statistics available and it does talk about levels of accuracy and plausibility levels. Ultimately I think it is the unwillingness of many people to get to grips with statistics and numbers, and to understand what numerical data actually mean.

Q15 Chair: Does that include commentators who should know better, like the BBC? The BBC has some very good statisticians, and Mark Easton is very scrupulous about matters statistical, but I do not know whether he spends much time on immigration statistics. How do you feel the BBC reports immigration?

Professor Salt: That would mean making a value judgment on the BBC compared to others.

Chair: Please do.

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Professor Salt: I have found that the BBC on the whole is pretty good, but they have editorial lines, just as all media outlets have editorial lines. When I comment to the media and in radio broadcasts recently, one of the things I have felt it necessary to point out was the fact that the numbers do not always mean what they seem to mean, or how a particular interpretation is not necessarily the only interpretation. I think the nub of the problem is getting to grips with what numbers actually mean, and getting information on what we call the metadata, which is information on statistics: it is how they are collected, what the errors are likely to be, how the survey is collected, if it is a survey, and so on.

It is getting that information out to the public that is a real problem. That is where you get to understanding, but I do not know whether that is the sort of understanding that we tend to go for in the lecture room, rather than in a newspaper or on the air, where you probably only have two minutes in order to say something very complicated.

Q16 Chair: Briefly, before we move on to the next question, are you happy with the ONS and Home Office websites? Are they easy to use? Do they provide the information that an informed commentator would obtain easily, in order to help better informed commentary about statistics?

Professor Salt: I think they are works in progress.

Chair: Ha.

Dr Blinder: I think they have improved the presentation and the usability of the data, in terms of the actual tables, quite a bit, and they are quite useful. Finding them, particularly on the ONS website, is difficult. The experienced user can find them, but I think it is difficult for a beginner user.

Cllr Roe: I also think if you know what you are looking for and you know what you are doing, then they are easier to interpret than if you are the average layperson coming to look at them. I think it depends on the historical knowledge, and I also think there is a belief that the statistics are based on more robust survey material than they actually are. Most people think everybody is counted coming in, rather like an e-Borders-type arrangement, which I would think are more the solution. I have just come back from Disney World with my kids. You have your fingerprint every time you go in with your pass; if they can do it at Disney World, I am sure we can do it on our borders. I think people think there is that level of counting, and that is where we should be moving towards.

Dr Blinder: On that last point, I would not attribute that to anything that ONS is doing or not doing. I think they are perfectly clear about their methods.

Cllr Roe: Yes, but I think to the layperson looking at it—

Dr Blinder: Yes, you would not know.

Cllr Roe: They make assumptions when you are looking at the data that unless you know the background, you would not realise quite how unrobust this all is.

Q17 Chair: Thank you for that discussion. We always enjoy a little interplay between our witnesses.

Have you ever been consulted about how you want these websites to work?

Professor Salt: I have been. Any user has been consulted, usually through an email system, on any number of changes that have been proposed over the years

Q18 Chair: Are you getting the changes you want?

Professor Salt: It does not necessarily mean that the changes that might be suggested will be the ones put in place.

Q19 Chair: What sort of changes are you looking for?

Professor Salt: I would be looking for changes making it easier to move around and find, particularly on the ONS website. It is much better than it was but it is still difficult for someone who knows what the information looks like to find it.

Q20 Chair: And the Home Office website? Anybody? Is it better?

Professor Salt: I think the Home Office website is very much better than it was, simply because there is an awful lot more information there. I think one of the problems maybe we get into now is information overload, with very large numbers of statistical tables.

Chair: Just to reassure you that the unusability—that is perhaps a little unfair—or the difficulty of accessing ONS websites is a recurring theme that we encounter in all these inquiries about statistics that we are conducting. I would like to move on now to the question of the accuracy.

Q21 Robert Halfon: When the last Government were talking about the number of Eastern Europeans, particularly people from Poland, coming, they suggested it would be about, I think, 20,000-odd, if my memory serves me correctly. It ended up being 700,000-odd. Why did that huge statistical error happen? Was it because of the politics of the issue, or was it just that they got it completely wrong?

Dr Blinder: That is a bit of a different question. The data that we can hope to have accurately represented are things that have occurred, so projecting into the future will always be a much more difficult exercise. It is difficult enough to measure what has actually happened. I think that is a bit of a different question.

Robert Halfon: It is not just 100,000; you are talking about many hundreds of thousands out of kilter.

Professor Salt: Can I respond to that? The particular study I think you are referring to was carried out for the Home Office by Christian Dustmann and co. It was an econometric study, and they were asked to come up with a figure. They applied econometric models that were relating flows to income differences and various other labour market differences. They had two problems. One is that they were asked to do the study before it was known that the rest of Europe, in effect, and particularly Germany, would not be opening up their borders. The second problem was that they did not have any data for Eastern Europe. We just did not have flows of people coming in from there, so there was no precedent.

It has often been published—perhaps it is public and political lack of understanding of numbers again—that the Home Office expected something between 12,000–15,000 people to come in. The study actually says—and I am not an apologist for the study, but it is there—that over a 10-year period, an average of 12,000–15,000 net migrants would come in, which could mean very large flows in, and very large flows out, and that could be assumed. Recently I heard Christian Dustmann say that they did an alternative calculation, which assumed that Germany would not open up its labour market, and the calculation they came up with if Germany did not open up its labour market was 46,000, which is about 4,000–5,000 different from what it has been, on average, over the years.

You rely on your econometric models and they give you the result as things are at the time. However, I think it is actually important to make sure that if you are going to quote these statistics you look at what they mean. I do not think enough people have done that. The Home Office has been castigated for saying it is a Home Office statistic. It was not. It was produced by a series of academic consultants, and then the interpretation of the statistic was wrong anyway.

Q22 Robert Halfon: Should it not have been the responsibility of Government to ensure the public were given the correct information?

Professor Salt: I do not know. It did seem to me that there was a lot of defensiveness from both the Home Office and from the people who wrote the report, but I cannot explain why.

Q23 Robert Halfon: Would you believe that the Government really believed that it would be much less than it turned out to be?

Professor Salt: I do not know.

Dr Blinder: I could not speak to that.

Q24 Robert Halfon: How does that fit into the issue of the Romanian and Bulgarian immigrants and assessing the number who might decide to come here? Will the same mistakes be made, or do you think things will be done differently?

Professor Salt: The difference between now and then is that two things are available now that were not available then. One is that we know that other countries will open up their labour markets, and the other is that there are now statistics that give us an indication of the sizes of flows from Eastern European countries. Therefore there is a much sounder basis for making the calculation. I cannot believe that a calculation has not been made. It may not have been publicised, but I would be extremely surprised if there is not a file somewhere that has some numbers in it.

Q25 Robert Halfon: What is your assessment of the information given by the Government thus far about the number of Romanian and Bulgarian immigrants expected? Do you see that to be accurate, or do you think we need further information?

Professor Salt: I do not know. There are no hard numbers to go on. I have colleagues who work in

Romania and Bulgaria, and in fact I have asked them what is going on there. In a sense it is anecdotal, but the message is that there is no expectation that very large numbers will flow. I do not know what a “very large number” would be; I do not know what a small number would be.

Q26 Robert Halfon: Have any of you made any estimates yourselves about the numbers expected?

Cllr Roe: We have not made any estimates as such, because it is so difficult to tell and we do not have the information, but we have been seeing for some while particularly Romanians coming into Westminster, and we have had quite a significant low-level crime and begging issue around the Marble Arch area with people sleeping rough. It has gone into prostitution. We did a report recently looking at the sex trade, and one of the issues they are facing is a reduction in pricing. Part of that is driven economically, but another part of that is a flooding of the market by people coming in from Eastern Europe. We are already seeing quite an impact, and we are making the assumption that quite a lot of those people may well look to us when they can have services—if they can have services—to support them. Even if they cannot, we are expecting quite a lot of homeless people, based on just historical experience on the ground.

Q27 Robert Halfon: Do you have the figures at the moment of the increase in migrants from Eastern Europe, and Romania and Bulgaria particularly, or not, just into your borough?

Cllr Roe: It is hard to be precise, because they go into the society and we do not necessarily know they are all there. Just today we have 50–60 people sleeping rough around the Marble Arch area, and that is the tip of the iceberg.

Q28 Robert Halfon: And are they from Eastern Europe?

Cllr Roe: They are from Romania.

Robert Halfon: From Romania.

Cllr Roe: Specifically from Romania. Over the Olympic period we had up to 900 different names of people who were sleeping rough in that area. They were churning: they were not all there at the same time, they were churning. It was a very significant issue.

Q29 Robert Halfon: Of the percentage who sleep rough, in general, those 60, what percentage is that, do you know?

Cllr Roe: It is so hard to tell, because the buses bring them in and they drop them off in Central London—just off Marble Arch somewhere—and they go, and we do not even know they are being dropped off, so they disappear. We can make very broad assumptions, but it is not robust.

Q30 Robert Halfon: Have you done estimates of the number of Romanians and Bulgarians coming here?

Dr Blinder: We have not done an estimate, and in our view, although certainly the points that Professor Salt made are well taken, that there is more information now than perhaps there was in 2004, in our view there

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is not a sound methodology to make accurate forecasts, so we have not done it at all. Another source of information that has just come out recently is the survey that the BBC has undertaken and publicised. It is a very different approach from the econometric modelling, but it also has its problems, and it is not well established in the research how to translate from these sorts of intentions that people report on surveys to actual behaviour.

Q31 Robert Halfon: When you say it is not sound methodology, this is a huge public policy issue. Is that not quite worrying that your organisation cannot even assess correctly the number of people from Romania and Bulgaria who may choose to come and settle here? Is this not the nub of the issue, really? This is what creates the level of public concern, because no-one can seem to tell us what the actual picture is out there.

Dr Blinder: I am sure it is worrying to a lot of people. That does not mean that we can do it. That does not mean that anyone can do it. It is a future event. It will always be difficult to predict the future. I would certainly concede that it is worrying to a lot of people. On whether it is the nub of the issue, it is an area of importance, but another one that is not talked about as much is what the pattern of movement and settlement will be. With the arrival of Polish and other A8 nationals over the past decade—

Chair: You will have to explain what A8 nationals are.

Dr Blinder: The eight countries that acceded to the European Union in 2004. One issue has been where they have moved and where they have settled. Polish-born people in particular were more likely than previous migrant streams to settle outside of London, so they changed a lot of communities in other parts of the country that have had less experience with migration before, and that may have had a significant impact on various services in these locations and also perceptions of migration.

Q32 Robert Halfon: If you guys, who are the specialists at this, cannot assess this correctly, or find it difficult, how on earth can Government Departments do it?

Dr Blinder: I think they cannot forecast an accurate number, and that is why they need to think about other issues. I am not an expert in cross-Governmental Departments but surely there are other situations where the outcomes cannot be known in advance but some amount of planning has to be done. I would imagine that that is true both nationally and locally. You cannot know this in advance, but you might want to have scenarios in mind—“Will this be relatively large or small? Will it be concentrated in London or in other areas?”—and plan on the basis of not being able to know for certain, but that there are different possible scenarios.

Cllr Roe: The difficulty from the local authority perspective is that we have to plan. Currently, in Westminster, 50% of our population was not born in Britain and 70% of our schoolchildren are born to parents who were not born in Britain. That has massive implications for us going forward. It is much

more than just Romanian and Bulgaria: we are anticipating quite a large influx. It has enormous impacts on our social housing, our education, our healthcare, and every aspect: our worklessness, our skills training and all of that. If we do not plan for that, we will be in serious difficulties.

What is more, we need to get the funding as well. We had real issues with our census, which I think was part of our submission, where we think we are significantly undercounted, not just in longer-term people living here but also in our short-term migration. That has very serious funding implications for us. We have to try to get a better handle on this. We do not have the resources as a local authority to do what central Government ought to be doing, to be able to count these people up. We can make various assumptions, but they are very broad-brush. We do need some support and help in this, because the implications are serious if we get it wrong.

Q33 Chair: Measuring, or trying to measure, what is actually happening: what level of detail does that give us at local level? We have already established that at national level the error margins are massive, of the order of 18–19%. For example, the A8 migration, on the basis of the sample size, has an error margin of around 50%. Would that be correct? Would you agree with that? On the basis of the sample of A8 migrants who are surveyed coming into the country, the error margin is plus or minus 14,000, which is a 28,000 error margin on a total of about 50,000. The error margin is 50%. Would you agree with that?

Professor Salt: I would need to look at the figures before I—

Chair: It does not sound unreasonable, does it?

Professor Salt: I would be extremely surprised if it was so high.

Cllr Roe: I would not be, because the sample sizes are so small that when you start looking at the number of Romanians, Bulgarians, Poles and whatever, you are looking at three or four people sometimes. The error margin is bound to be huge. Also, to some degree, when you are doing these samplings, to a degree it is self-selecting, because people do not always tell you the truth, they do not necessarily want to answer questions and walk off. I think the error margins are quite significant.

Q34 Chair: I must just correct my figures. The ONS estimated net migration by nationals of A8 countries to be 28,000. The error margin at 95% confidence is 14,000. That is a 50% error margin. Of course we do not collect information about nationality, country of birth, country of last or next residence. Do these surveys not need to include much more detail in order to be useful to, for example, a local authority?

Cllr Roe: I would agree. If they are going to continue with surveys they need to be far larger numbers in far greater detail. I think also some form of e-Borders mechanism, which I know has been looked at for some while but has been delayed and delayed, has to be the way forward. As I say, if Disney World can do it—

Chair: We are not counting these people. We are assessing on the basis of a survey the numbers of

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people. We do not know their ethnicity, their religion, their language, or their educational qualifications.

Cllr Roe: Absolutely. This goes back to the point I made slightly earlier, and in fact the Professor sitting next to me made it more robustly. It is not just about the numbers of people coming and going; it is about who is coming and who is going, and what we need to do to ensure that we are attracting the right people, keeping the right people, and not just being an open door.

Q35 Chair: Different countries measure this in different ways. We do surveys of people coming in and out of the country, informed by e-Borders checks, but they are merely moderating what the estimates are. Germany has a population register, and we also have census information, which then cross-checks what has actually happened to the population, compared to what we thought was happening. What surprises did you have in Westminster in the latest census?

Cllr Roe: The Census we do not think is particularly robust with counting our population. It came in significantly lower than we were anticipating this time round. When the 2001 census was done, we argued very robustly and got it revised. If we had not, we would have had a funding shortage of £50 million, which for a local authority is very substantial. This time we were expecting a population of something just under 250,000. We ended up with 219,000.

Chair: So yours was nearly 40,000 down.

Cllr Roe: Slightly under that, but yes, very significantly down. If you look at things like GP registers, in some of our most deprived wards, where you are unlikely to have second homes or investment properties that are empty, and things like that, we have a very significant difference between GP registers and what the Census is saying. Over Westminster as a whole it is 24,000 different.

Q36 Chair: In fact, you do not think the Census is very useful?

Cllr Roe: There are two problems with it. One, I do not think it is useful because I do not think it accurately reflects our population. We have households who, for whatever reason, if they do fill the form in do not fill in the right number of people living there, because they have economically active people living there that they do not want to declare because they are getting benefits, they have illegal immigrants living there, or whatever. Household sizes, I think, are under-represented, and I think they are also missing off households.

The other problem with it is that Westminster has a million visitors a day. It generates about the same GDP for the country as the City, and yet we do not get a penny to support the impact of those visitors into Westminster. That costs us about £50 million a year of unfunded costs in planning, licensing, enforcement, street cleansing, etc. We would question whether the Census is the right funding formula for an area like Westminster.

Q37 Chair: Do the national immigration statistics give you any help in informing you what your resident population turnover is?

Cllr Roe: No, not really. The national statistics do not say where people are going. A large number will come into London, because its streets are supposedly paved with gold, but those national statistics are not terribly useful. We have found it much more useful to do the stuff that we do on the ground with our own surveys and things, to find out what the population is.

Q38 Chair: Do our national immigration statistics constitute an adequate tool for informing immigration and visa policy? Yes or no?

Cllr Roe: I do not find it particularly useful from the local authority level.

Professor Salt: I think the IPS is inadequate for any kind of detail, whether it is detail at local level or detail as far as the characteristics are concerned. There is only one way in my mind that we can bring about a step-change improvement in migration data, and that is by establishing a population register. It is not foolproof, and there is especially a problem with deregistration. People are much more likely to put their names on the list when they come in, but not to take them off when they go out. However, it is the only way in which we are likely to be able to have reasonable counts of the population. It is, I suspect, politically impossible, because as soon as you mention a population register, someone will say “identity cards” and then the whole debate gets opened up again. At least what I think ought to be done is a feasibility study to find out what would happen and how accurate a population register would be, how acceptable it would be, and what it would entail. We do not have to bring in the thing, but just have to find out to what extent it might help and what the costs and benefits associated with it would be.

Q39 Chair: The problem with a population register is that the people whom you most want to be registered, so you can do something about them, are the least likely to be the people who let themselves be registered.

Professor Salt: That is the problem with any system. If you are thinking of illegal or irregular migrants then we cannot know. I think there are probably two countries in the world where there is a pretty good idea of how many irregular migrants there are. One is Australia, because it is a big island and everybody is counted in and out, and they can identify overstayers. The other, I think, is North Korea, and we do not want to emulate that. What I would do is rehearse the study the Home Office carried out back in 2005 using the 2011 census data as they used the 2001 census data. It would give us a figure that would not be accurate, but it would be better than nothing.

Q40 Robert Halfon: Do you think therefore, given what you have said, that any Government should not make major public policy decisions on immigration, i.e. the agreement allowing Eastern Europeans to come in, until we can be 100%—or not 100%, but pretty accurate—about the statistical implications of that immigration into this country?

Professor Salt: No Government will have, in my opinion, really accurate statistics. The complexities

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are too great: people coming in and out, all sorts of durations, and so on.

Cllr Roe: Getting it absolutely accurate will obviously be extremely difficult, because people will find ways around the borders if they want to do so. I think we need to get a much better handle on it, because a lot of the policy decisions we make, both at the local and the national level, need to be better informed about who is coming and who is going, and indeed trying to keep people we want to keep, etc. We need to get that. I think you either do it by a much, much larger survey size, or a much more robust e-Borders programme.

Chair: Most people think the immigration statistics come from counting people in and counting people out.

Cllr Roe: They do, absolutely.

Q41 Chair: However, there is no country that formulates their statistics on that basis, because it is an impossible task. Your solution, Councillor, is of limited utility.

Cllr Roe: Not necessarily. If you have proper e-Borders with fingerprint technology or whatever, surely there is a mechanism for linking—it would not be beyond the wit of the technology to count those people up and where they have come from, because you would have the passport details with their fingerprints coming in. It is not a difficult—

Q42 Chair: So biometric passports are the solution?

Cllr Roe: I think so. As I say, if Disney World can do it with your pass and your fingerprint, I am sure Britain can do it. America does it and has done it for quite a while.

Q43 Kelvin Hopkins: My experience is very similar to Councillor Roe's, because I represent Luton. Luton is not so different from Westminster in many ways. We have a very diverse population with a very large number of immigrants, although not so many emigrants. Dr Blinder, you told us in written evidence that official migration estimates do not record the immigration status of migrants. Could you give us a bit more information on what problems result from the lack of compatibility between ONS and Home Office migration statistics?

Dr Blinder: There are two slightly different questions in there. On the second point, first there is a discrepancy between official statistics based on the IPS survey, and then counts that the Home Office can do of, say, visas and entries at the border. There are always many more visas for each particular group—students, work, etc.—than we count as migrants in the IPS. There are some reasons that we expect would explain at least part of this difference, but the relationship is not always consistent. That is an area that it would be helpful to sort out. I believe the Home Office has done a bit of work on this, but there is not much known about why these counts are quite so different.

The other point we made in the written evidence, about immigration status, is true of the International Passenger Survey, but we had in mind more the Labour Force Survey, which gives us measures of migrant stocks rather than flows. The problem there is

that we know if people were born in another country or are of another nationality, but we do not know if they are, say, on a Tier 2 visa, a Tier 4 student visa, or a family visa. This means it is harder to assess the impact and effectiveness of the policies that create and maybe change these groups.

There have been recent changes to dramatically restrict Tier 1, and the evidence base came in part from an ad hoc study that the Home Office did, where it had to go through its own management data, pick out Tier 1 migrants and figure out what they were doing. It would be really valuable to have a publicly available evidence base so people could do a bit of proper studies available for public scrutiny on what types of jobs Tier 2 migrants are doing, their wages, their rates of employment and unemployment, things like that. It is not possible to do that right now with the public evidence base.

Q44 Kelvin Hopkins: We heard reference to biometric passports. The problem with analysing numbers is basically because the numbers are such nonsense. We do not have good numbers or statistics to work on. Therefore analysing them is a bit pointless until we get accuracy. Would it not be very simple for all people who are not born in the United Kingdom to be required to have biometric passports and to record their migration status, every year, in that passport? Would that not resolve the problem?

Dr Blinder: I do not know how simple or difficult it would be to implement. It would provide a great deal more information. I am not sure it would solve the problems entirely. There will always be problems with any system, but I am hopeful that e-Borders system, while it will not be a panacea, will make for an improvement, especially if it is linked to visa data and/or helps us better benchmark the results we are getting from the passenger survey. None of these systems are perfect, including the Census.

Q45 Kelvin Hopkins: With biometric passports and this all recorded, I suggest that we would overcome those problems. The largest component of my casework in my constituency is immigration. I heard from a member of one of our communities, who told me as a friend, that somebody who had been deported was back in the country six months later with a completely different identity. It was so easy to get through. Biometrics would overcome that problem, but also people come to my surgeries and we cannot really find out what their history is; and we have to lever it out of them. If it were all recorded, it would be very simple.

Dr Blinder: It is not only recording, but linking it to other sources of information, but yes.

Q46 Kelvin Hopkins: As Councillor Roe said, getting in and out of Disney World is not difficult. Why can we not just do that for countries as well? I think I have made my point.

Q47 Paul Flynn: Councillor Roe, you have given us an example, the inspiration of Disney World. Most of us believe that we already living, as far as immigration figures are concerned, in the world of

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fantasy and illusion. You have given an account of how 5% of your population were magically culled overnight by a change in the methodology. We would agree with your criticism of the problems with the Census in giving false returns. What system would you think would work, in order to eliminate the inaccuracies of the Census?

Cllr Roe: It is hard to have one solution to it. I think it is a combination. There has to be more detailed account taken of other factors, such as GP registers, such as people registered for electoral registers and council tax and those sorts of influences, and a greater coordination working with local authorities. I know there is a bit of a conflict of interest there, because local authorities want to get their numbers up as much as possible, because funding is driven by it, but we know our populations quite well.

We have hidden populations who do not like to engage with authority, who will not fill in forms. We can help with those areas as well. I do not think there is one solution, and I question whether the Census is the best way, with so much of our funding being derived from that one route.

Q48 Paul Flynn: The Ambassador for Romania has said that there are large numbers of economically inactive British people who have homes in Romania—5,000, including Prince Charles. There is no information as to what sort of burden he might be on the social services of the country. He might well be one of your residents, but disproportionately, these economically inactive persons would be over-represented by the population of Westminster. Have you any idea of what percentage of your population, in fact, are living outside the country and are immigrants to other countries?

Cllr Roe: If they are living outside the country they will not be part of our population. People may have second homes or even just holiday homes in places like Romania, and obviously I would not have any record as to how many they are. They may be economically inactive in Romania, but they are nevertheless probably investing in their homes there—maybe employing a few people to look after the gardens or whatever, and in maybe a small way contributing to the economy there. Where we have more of an issue is the type of immigration coming in and what burdens they will put on us as a local authority for services that we need to plan for and provide. I think it is different. I do not know whether that figure is accurate or not: they may have 5,000, but I doubt that those 5,000 are costing the country and that the country needs to plan their services in the way that we would in Westminster.

Q49 Paul Flynn: I think the submission that you put in will be recognised in Luton, and in my constituency in Newport, as a *cri de coeur* that we all feel. The problems I think we have, which you suggested, are with tiny groups of immigrants, often from one village or even one extended family, who can cause havoc. Slovakia has been a problem rather than Romania in my constituency. Do you think there is any way of dealing directly with this, rather than applying the

blame to the whole of Romania or Bulgaria or Slovakia?

Cllr Roe: I agree that it is much more complex. If you are talking about criminal activity, I do not think it is just one family, extended family or village. It is certainly our experience with the Romanian issues we have at the moment that it is a much, much broader group. Some of them know each other, some of them do not. It started with the Olympics, when they felt it was a massive opportunity to make a bit of money, and now the summer is coming again and they are back again. I also agree that there are people coming from the same country who will economically contribute, mostly in lower-skilled jobs, and therefore over time there may be costs as a local authority in looking after these people, and we need to get a real handle on what that is likely to be.

Q50 Paul Flynn: Depressingly, you report that attempts to improve immigration estimates have brought forward numerous changes to methodology, resulting in no improvement, by the sound of it, but resulting in uncertainty and volatility that has undermined confidence in official estimates. Are improvements likely to be more damaging than the status quo?

Cllr Roe: Hopefully improvements will improve, but changes may or may not be more damaging. It depends what they are. Attempts to get it 100% accurate will probably never be successful. We can possibly make improvements to get a better number, but one of the difficulties we face as a local authority with things like the Census is the variability of it. Our projections, going out for our population to 2020, vary from 315,000 to 256,000. That is six schools' difference, so our planning is deeply hampered by this. If our funding goes like this from year to year, we cannot make any sensible planning even on what we do know. It has to be a robust, sensible methodology that gives us an opportunity to properly plan. Even if the basis is actually slightly wrong, if we can plan properly it makes it easier.

Paul Flynn: You are beginning to undermine my faith in this Government, but I shall go on.

Cllr Roe: I do not think it is an issue for this Government. It is an issue that has been going on for a long time.

Paul Flynn: All the improvements brought in recently have created greater problems, according to your submission.

Cllr Roe: There have been changes brought in continually, not just by this Government; the previous Government brought in changes as well. What it highlights is the difficulty of getting it right, and what I think is a slightly adversarial relationship between local authorities, who want to make sure their population numbers stay up because it links to our funding, and the people doing the analysis, who perhaps have drivers the other way.

Q51 Paul Flynn: There is one final point in the penultimate paragraph of your letter that puzzles me. There is a word missing, but what it says is that, "In the 2011 census estimates, there"—and I assume the missing word is "appeared"—"there appeared to be

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only 3,100 over-85s in Westminster, when there were 6,800 claims for a pension here.” What is surprising in that? There are a lot of people between the ages of 60–65 and 85. Why should that be a difficulty?

Cllr Roe: You would think the Census would reflect the accurate number of pensioners.

Paul Flynn: It possibly does, because you are comparing—

Cllr Roe: If you have 3,000 people claiming pensions who should not—

Paul Flynn: You can claim a pension when you are 65. The figure you are comparing it to is over 85.

Cllr Roe: I think what that is trying to say is that there is a difference on a like-by-like basis of the number of pensioners in the pot.

Paul Flynn: Whatever it is trying to say, it does not say.

Cllr Roe: I will speak to the office to try to clarify that.

Q52 Alun Cairns: Professor Salt and Dr Blinder, primarily, can I ask you about e-Borders? A lot of the evidence the Committee has received has some great hope in terms of what they will achieve. Can I therefore ask, will they deliver what people are expecting, or will we simply still rely on the IPS, because of the reasons that the IPS have given?

Dr Blinder: Probably you will get a better answer to this in the next session, from the ONS representative, but from what I understand, there may be some very high expectations that will not necessarily be met, mainly because e-Borders will only collect some very basic information about passengers. To know any detail beyond “somebody is coming in, somebody is leaving” and to know anything about them, including whether they will stay long enough to be counted as a migrant, we will still have to rely on other sources of data, including the IPS. However, there is a hope that e-Borders can make estimates from the IPS more accurate, in aggregate.

Q53 Alun Cairns: Professor Salt, do you have anything to add?

Professor Salt: e-Borders has been the cavalry charging to the rescue for quite a number of years now, and it is still a long way off. The real answer will come, I think, from the next session. There are enormous technical problems in handling the e-Borders data. There are all sorts of things like what we do with people with dual passports, for example. What I have found frustrating is that I still cannot come across or find a list of exactly what tables and information will be available from e-Borders.

What is known is that, as Scott said, the amount of detail will be restricted and we will not know very much about duration, reason for moving, occupations, characteristics, where people are going to, or where in the country they have come from. All sorts of detail that put flesh on the migration raw flow, I do not think at the moment that this will come out of e-Borders. I

may be wrong and the people behind me may come up with an answer shortly, but at the moment I think e-Borders will help tweak the information we have, rather than substitute for it, but I do not know.

Q54 Chair: I feel you have painted us a pretty bleak picture, but you have been very informative. Is there anything else you want to add before we go on to our next panel?

Professor Salt: I would simply reiterate what I said at the beginning: a lot of strides have been made recently. Things are much better, not least the cooperation between the ONS and the Home Office, and all sorts of other improvements—the migration timeline, the policy timeline, the migrant journey studies. There are many more data available now than there ever have been. The one thing I think is missing is some kind of manual that lists all the information sources and how the data are collected, so there is one source that one can go to and find out what is available.

Chair: That is a good challenge to our next panel.

Cllr Roe: I was just going to say that I agree with that, but it is still very much at the national level. The question then is how that data is used, and how it could be usefully used. Certainly at a local authority level that is all very interesting, but it does not give us much.

Dr Blinder: Mainly to echo this: I think there is a lot of focus at the national level on net migration. There is maybe a lack of understanding that this is two separate types of data, and we have really very little information about emigration. There will be improved collection, and a lot of the focus is on immigration, but if we care about net migration we need to work on that side as well.

Q55 Chair: What you are saying is net migration is a statistic derived from apples and oranges, but the immigration is survey data and emigration is counting people out, and therefore we are netting these two to knock it off?

Dr Blinder: Not quite. They are both measured on surveys, but with immigration there are more ways to check our work and there are other sources. With emigration it is really only this survey.

Chair: Okay. Thank you for clarifying that.

Q56 Kelvin Hopkins: Just a quick comment. I have to say it is very interesting, what you have to say. Is it not just a question of political will by a serious Government, to take this issue seriously and then provide the resources to deal with it properly—to collect the numbers and deal with them?

Chair: You might decide that that is a political question.

Dr Blinder: I think that is beyond me to judge.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed to the three of you. I am most grateful to you.

Examination of Witnesses

Witnesses: **Mr Guy Goodwin**, Director for Analysis and Dissemination, ONS, **Mr Ben Humberstone**, Deputy Director, Population Statistics, ONS, **Dr Chris Kershaw**, Head of Migration, Policing and Other Statistics, Home Office Science, and **Mr Jon Simmons**, Director, Migration and Border Analysis and a Deputy Director in the Home Office Science Directorate gave evidence.

Q57 Chair: Order, order. Thank you to our new panel. I wonder if you could each identify yourselves for the record, please?

Guy Goodwin: I am Guy Goodwin. I am a member of the Executive Leadership Team at ONS and a member of the ONS Board, and until recently I have had oversight of the population and migration statistics at ONS.

Ben Humberstone: I am Ben Humberstone. I am the Head of the Population and Statistics Division at ONS.

Dr Kershaw: I am Chris Kershaw. I am Programme Director for Migration Statistics in the Home Office.

Jon Simmons: I am Jon Simmons. I am the Head of Migration and Border Analysis within the Home Office Science Directorate in the Home Office.

Q58 Chair: And at the Home Office and ONS, are you all best friends?

Guy Goodwin: Yes.

Jon Simmons: Yes. We are all members of the Government's statistical service, so in that sense we very much work together.

Guy Goodwin: There is a serious point there, that the cooperation between the various Departments—which John Salt mentioned in his evidence—and also with the Department for Work and Pensions has improved hugely over recent years, including in terms of how we report on the migration now, rather than report it all in lots of separate publications, in one coherent publication.

Q59 Chair: We have heard in our first session how the long-term international migration statistics are derived from the International Passenger Survey, which is based on stopping 800,000 passengers a year and finding about 5,000 immigrants who become respondents in the survey. That is an astonishingly small sample compared to the complexity and scale of what we are trying to measure, leaving very big error margins when we get into detail. In a word, do you think we have a satisfactory tool on which to base immigration policy in this country?

Guy Goodwin: Let me start on that—

Chair: I thought it might not be a word. I will allow you more than one.

Guy Goodwin: I might need more than one word. I do want to pick up on the IPS point. The migration statistics are fit for purpose. They have been looked at and quality assured by the UK Statistics Authority against our Code of Practice, and that is all fine. However, you are right to have this discussion about the International Passenger Survey. That survey, in my personal view, does exactly what it says on the tin. You are quite right: we go out and interview, say, between 800,000–900,000 people per annum at all the different exit and entry routes into the country. Of course, if you are basing your statistics, as flow data and so on are, on that very large sample—that is a huge sample—then that is robust. However, if what

you are actually looking for when you are interviewing those people are migrants, although it is not like looking for a needle in a haystack, they are a rare sub-group within those travel movements.

You are quite right: you get about 5,000–6,000 migrants in any year at the moment identified from that 800,000. Now, that is a smaller sample. If you were to start breaking that down and use it for a whole load of characteristics—so if my Westminster colleagues wanted to look at students by nationality within Westminster from that sample—well, the sample is going to be minute, is it not? However, that is not really what the focus of the IPS is there for. That is to pick up the general flows, and really you should not be using the IPS for such fine detail. The mechanism for doing that in this country is the decennial Census, and, of course, that is decennial by nature, but that is where you pick up information about small sub-groups in local authorities and so on. Why I have said the IPS does what it says on the tin is because you could increase the sample size of the IPS to four times what it is now and it still would not be a big enough sample to go into the fine-detailed characteristics, because it is a sample survey.

It is a bit of a long answer, but I hope that helps. There are two levels you are talking about here: one for measuring the general numbers for flows. If you are really trying to get into the characteristics, the IPS cannot be the vehicle for fine detail.

Q60 Chair: Mr Humberstone, anything to add on that or is that a comprehensive answer?

Ben Humberstone: No, that is a comprehensive answer. The only thing I would say is that one of the best tests of the IPS in the long-term international migration estimates that we produce is the decennial Census, to see how far out we are in terms of our rolled-forward data, and what the Census says the population of the country is. We were within 0.8%, taking on board the population change that the IPS and consequently our migration figures suggested, which is not bad, and there were a lot of improvements introduced to the IPS from 2007, but particularly in 2009. If we had been able to roll those improvements back further across the decade to 2001 then we would have been much closer than that. It is a good source for looking at population change as a whole. As Guy says, it is not possible to look at the detailed subsets or detailed local authority migration from the IPS.

Q61 Chair: It has been suggested to me that we could increase the quality and accuracy of this data, obviously, by increasing the sample size, but it would need to be a significant increase, perhaps stopping 2.3 million passengers per year instead of 800,000 in order to get a significant increase in the accuracy. What do you think about this?

Guy Goodwin: I think you need to tease through what you are trying to get from such a big sample size

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increase. If it is to try to get better figures at a local level, for example—you come in as a migrant and are interviewed on the International Passenger Survey, and you will typically be asked, “Where are you going to go and live?” I might say, “I am going to go and live in Westminster,” and in reality, of course, I might not end up living in Westminster. I might end up elsewhere in London; in Newham, wherever. You are only asking their intentions at that point. You can increase the sample size as much as you like, but it will not be the vehicle that will give you those characteristics at a local level in that sort of way. It will only pick up the flow data for you. You have really got to have a census or a specific survey targeted at migrants—some countries have gone for large migrant surveys—or you have to really go for some sort of stock approach, rather than trying to do it through these flows, because people do not know where they will end up living, necessarily, or even if they are going to stay or for how long, when they come in at that moment in time.

Chair: I should just say, I should have said 3.2 million, not 2.3 million.

Guy Goodwin: I would not be in favour of a big increase. I think it would be poor value for money.

Q62 Chair: How much would it cost?

Guy Goodwin: At the moment the IPS costs £5 million. To quadruple it would add another £15 million.

Chair: I think that would be very bad value for money.

Guy Goodwin: I think you could spend that money better, yes, is what I am saying.

Q63 Chair: On immigration statistics, where would you concentrate the expenditure?

Guy Goodwin: If you gave me an extra £15 million—

Chair: No, you are not getting an extra £15 million.

Guy Goodwin: I know I will not. You would do better to invest it in areas like making sure the e-Borders system and the IPS get fully integrated. You could improve it by covering communal establishments—which many use, as your evidence has pinpointed—by getting a good on-going address list of communals and surveying them on a regular basis. I think that would help with the estimates. You might well think about having a specific migration survey, of the type that Spain and others have done, say in a mid-census period.

Q64 Chair: So, going to a local authority area like Westminster and deciding to survey a particular geographical area?

Guy Goodwin: You could actually have a specific migration survey, targeted at migration across the country, but it would have to be a pretty big survey.

Q65 Chair: How much would that cost?

Guy Goodwin: I have not costed it. Altogether, it might come to £15 million, all of those things. It is the same sort of order.

Q66 Chair: Any comments from our other witnesses?

Jon Simmons: No, except that we agree. I think that the point made about the Census being the best check on the quality of the IPS over the long term is a really important one.

Q67 Chair: You heard what Councillor Roe was saying about the inadequacies of the Census. The very people you want to capture are the people least likely to fill in the form.

Ben Humberstone: Could I just pick up on that? I do not think that we accept that there are great inadequacies with the Census at all. The starting point for the Census in 2011 was setting up address registers to identify exactly the sorts of hard-to-count areas that we are talking about here: the populations that are difficult to get to in local authorities. Those were negotiated and consulted on with local authorities to gain that local insight and to make sure we were going to the right places. We then took the Census; the fieldwork went extremely well, the gathering of forms and getting people to fill them in and send them back. Then we had a Census coverage survey, which was done on an independent method, sending people out into local authorities to identify precisely the sorts of areas, ‘sheds with beds’, etc., where people might be and might not have filled in their forms. We put all that information together in order to produce the final Census estimates.

I am not sure—I mean, we heard in the previous session comparisons with administrative data. That is notoriously difficult to do, because administrative data like GP registers have known problems with list inflation at particular ages, where people register with a GP and then move on to another area. If they are young men, for example, they might not re-register with a GP until they are severely ill, whereas other groups of the population are much better at doing that sort of thing. I do not think we accept the issues with the Census that were presented.

Q68 Chair: Lastly, before we move on, it has been suggested that we will not have another census. From a migration statistics point of view, that would sound as though it would be pretty disastrous, because—albeit at a 10-yearly interval—that is the only control check on population changes that we have.

Guy Goodwin: There are three strands of improvement work we have been looking at. One is something called the Migration Statistics Improvement Programme, which has now finished and which were the sorts of improvements that John Salt was describing earlier. We can take you through those. The second is the 2011 census, where we invested huge amounts of money in getting it right this time. Even in areas like Westminster, there is some good evidence, like response rates, that we have done a lot better. The third area is really what we are calling Beyond 2011, which is looking at how we do, effectively, census-taking in the future, which may not be through a traditional census. It could be through other means. In that exercise, which is on-going, we are looking at a whole load of factors and success criteria, and of course how we collect information, not just on migration but on all the other sorts of

characteristics a traditional census collects: ethnicity, religion and so on are part of that exercise.

Q69 Paul Flynn: Could I come in just briefly? Do you think the 50 people who were dropped off in buses at Marble Arch and were a major headache for Westminster Council would have been included in the Census?

Guy Goodwin: You will never, ever, in any census, collect everybody—

Chair: I think that is a “no”, is it not?

Paul Flynn: I will read up from that; I think you will say it is likely that they would not be. This is not a new criticism. It was made by this Committee about eight years ago; that the idea of having a 100% sample instead of the 1% sample, a 0.001% sample, will give you results. The tiny sample, which is the methodology that ONS and everyone else would use for every other investigation, there are huge resources put into it, but there is also a large factor in which people who avoid the Census could be more important. There are new inaccuracies, and the amount spent on this biblical census of the entire population produces its own problems and is a hugely wasteful expense. Of course there should not be another mass census.

Q70 Chair: I think you are saying that you do accept we may have had the last Census, but there will be census-type activities that will continue.

Guy Goodwin: There is an EU census regulation which means we have to collect census-type statistics. It does not say how you have to do it. Some countries collect it through a population register—

Q71 Paul Flynn: Can I simplify the question? If you took a sample that was not 100% but a thousandth of the population, the difference in the accuracy would be tiny in the results.

Guy Goodwin: It depends what level we are talking about. If you are talking about very local levels, and you are getting into characteristics, then actually the Census solves the problem that we were discussing earlier with the International Passenger Survey, because you have the comprehensive coverage down to small areas. That is what it gives you in addition. You will never cover every illegal migrant or every small group of people.

Q72 Chair: Your sample has to be much more than 1,000, because if you want to capture and analyse students and subsets of students, you have to start with many more than 1,000, because only a small percentage of your 1,000 will be students.

Guy Goodwin: Precisely, which is why you want a comprehensive coverage, whether it is through a traditional census or through other mechanisms like reusing existing administrative sources, which is one of the options we are looking at.

Chair: In summary, what you are saying is the old Victorian census may well be dead, but there will continue to be census data, which is absolutely vital to migration statistics.

Guy Goodwin: That is what the Beyond 2011 Programme is looking at. A decision has not come to

whether we need some sort of traditional census or not, yet.

Q73 Paul Flynn: Do you reject the idea that Councillor Roe is saying, that we do not need to have a census of the Northern Isles or some remote part of the country where the population is very stable but, in these areas like Westminster where it is very fluid we need to concentrate the investigation there and not do the entire country?

Guy Goodwin: I do not reject that at all, because it is right to say there is more variation in different areas of the country. One option might be to skew it in a different way. I would not rule that out, no.

Q74 Chair: That is very interesting. Are there any other fundamental changes in the way we measure migration that should be investigated?

Guy Goodwin: I think it is really a change in structure. It is what Beyond 2011 is looking at; it is e-Borders, and integrating the IPS in there, and adding in specific questions.

Q75 Chair: The next question is very relevant.

Jon Simmons: Could I possibly just come back on the coachload of Eastern Europeans who turned up in Westminster? I think there is a public assumption that statistical sources do not capture illegal migration very well. They certainly do not capture it perfectly, but if those 50 Eastern Europeans then reside permanently in a household within Westminster, the Census does capture that because of the coverage survey. If they did not fill out a form but then the Census people went round and saw that, “Actually, there is a building there that appears to be occupied, and although we only got three forms back it appears to be occupied by 10 or 12 people”, they would register that, and the Census results are adjusted for that. Now, if the coachload of 50 people come on the coach, work for three months over the summer and go home again, then they are very unlikely to be captured in a census, and they would need to be captured through other means. There is a public misunderstanding: this assumption that we cannot capture people, or that we only capture people who fill out forms. That is not actually true. That is not quite the way the Census works.

Ben Humberstone: That is absolutely right, and, as Jon says, the Census provides an estimate, not a count. The idea that it is a Victorian thing, where you fill in a form and your form is counted, and if you fill it in you are counted and if you do not, you are not, is wrong. We perform a statistical estimate based on linking the Census and the Census coverage survey, which will include a proportion of the types of people that Mr Flynn has described.

Q76 Paul Flynn: What sort of proportion?

Ben Humberstone: Well, we do not know. On the basis of that 50—

Q77 Paul Flynn: It is a proportion of them, and you do not know what the proportion is. It is not too impressive, is it, as a statistical argument?

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Ben Humberstone: If you are talking about small numbers like that, the Census will still be the best way to get at those small numbers.

Paul Flynn: To my colleague and I, three-quarters of my cases are immigration. There are MPs who have been here for 30 years and have never had an immigration case. It is extraordinary how local it is. In my own county, I mean, of the constituents we have, there are constituencies that have no immigration whatsoever. The idea that we cover the entire land with these enquiries, when what we need is something in Westminster, as Councillor Roe suggested, that is directed to her and gives her a result, instead of the distortions we have, which is deluged with figures that are based on the 100% population.

Chair: We need to move on. Is there anything you want to add to that point that you have not already said?

Guy Goodwin: That is fine, thank you.

Chair: Thank you. I think we take your point, Mr Flynn.

Kelvin Hopkins: Just before my question, I am a passionate supporter of the Census, and I hope we continue it, even though in Luton it is incredibly inaccurate.

Paul Flynn: That is not rational.

Q78 Kelvin Hopkins: In the 2001 census, we had an official population of 185,000. The local authority did a count in all sorts of ways, doctors' lists and so on, and they thought the population was probably more like 220,000. It was 30,000 out. Of course, we have a very high immigrant population, many of whom do not have regularised statuses and will be hiding from the Census. That is quite understandable, because they do not want to be taken back to where they came from. Currently, we do not know how many international migrants fall within different visa categories, whether it is work or student visas. What problems does this create, and what can be done to improve it?

Guy Goodwin: I will let Chris or Jon come in on this in a moment. I just wanted to say, in general, of course, we are using primarily a survey source-based system along with the Census here, and if we are asking specific questions about immigration status or about these sorts of things, and it is a voluntary survey, there is a risk involved with that that you may get people not wishing to answer in a particular way. That is one of the difficulties of doing that through a survey system rather than some form of registration or administrative system. We have to acknowledge that up front.

Dr Kershaw: We do publish detailed breakdowns of people arriving for work, study or family reasons; breakdowns of individual types of endorsements on visas. From our last release in February, we have those tables broken down by quarter, by nationality, so we have detailed information there. Also, last year we introduced new tables relating to certificates of acceptance for study, which break down the numbers by tier of education with respect to study. That is a new innovation, which I think has been very useful. We also now publish data on certificates of sponsorship for work, which break down by sector of

employment, so we are introducing a great deal of detail there, and I think it does provide a much richer picture than we had, say, two years ago.

Jon Simmons: It is worth adding, as was said in the previous session, there is no single solution. There is not a single system that will solve all of these problems. The trick is to combine different sources: to look at what the IPS statistics are saying, look at what the visa statistics are saying, look at what other sources are saying and come to conclusions. Sometimes it is hard to make judgments, because there are gaps and it is difficult, but that is what we do. Actually, over the last couple of years we have published within the Home Office reports charts showing the trends from the different sources from the IPS, from the visa statistics and from the landing card admission statistics. The trends are pretty consistent. That gives a lot of confidence that the trends we are seeing in the different sources, and therefore some of the sub-divisions you can get from only one source, are probably not bad. That does not mean they are precise and 100% accurate, but they are not bad, and that information is publically available.

Dr Kershaw: I would just add to that that the visa data has been a leading indicator for non-EU immigration. Some of the falls that we have seen via the IPS did not come as a surprise to us because our visa figures come out six months prior to the IPS period, and that kind of consistency in trend is very encouraging, that we are not seeing a different picture coming out of the IPS in respect of non-EU immigration. Recently, the non-EU immigration has been the driving factor behind the trends in net migration as a whole.

Q79 Kelvin Hopkins: Biometric passports with everything listed, including the legitimate educational institution they are supposed to be attending, would be helpful. This is really to Mr Kershaw and Mr Simmons: the Government aims to reduce net migration from hundreds of thousands to the tens of thousands. How do you measure the effectiveness of immigration policy in achieving this objective without being able to directly measure the effects of specific changes to the immigration rules on levels of immigration? To an extent, we covered this in the first session, but would you like to comment on that?

Dr Kershaw: We can monitor the effect of the policy in respect of visas. For example, last time we published in February, we showed that there was a 22% fall in the certificates of acceptance for study overall, but there was a 3% increase in the university sector, which has no cap on it. There is no restriction on the university sector. We could see the way the policy was operating, and it was pretty consistent with what we would be expecting.

Jon Simmons: That is true. The Government has also published impact assessments for its policies, where we try to estimate the impact of the policy changes being proposed on the net migration figures. Of course, you could track what we said would happen a couple of years ago, and we have published those impact assessments as to what has happened, and—as my colleague has said—it is reasonably in line. There is no precise relationship, of course, because we are dealing with statistics, but it is reasonably in line with

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what we expected. There is work that we do to look at those sorts of issues.

Q80 Kelvin Hopkins: Is it not the case that there are still supposed illicit educational institutions that are exploiting immigrants who want to get into Britain? I know there to be a case in my own constituency. Is that not the case?

Jon Simmons: Yes, we come across such examples through enforcement. My colleagues in the former UK Border Agency are better placed to answer.

Q81 Paul Flynn: The criticism from Westminster was contained in this sentence, where they suggested that the medicine was worse than the malady; that “ONS, in its attempts to improve migration estimates, has brought forward numerous changes in its methodology.” Resulting in improvements? Nothing of the sort, sadly: “Resulting in uncertainty and volatility that has undermined confidence in official estimates, especially at LA level. Westminster population estimates”—it uses the example of this 5% of the population that was culled overnight because of a statistical change. It makes life impossible for people working in local authorities, when they have these changes, which are presented as an improvement that actually add greatly to their headaches.

Guy Goodwin: I will just say a few words and then I will pass over to Ben. Discontinuities in statistical series, particularly when they are being used for things like, potentially, resource allocations and so on, are never ideal. If you are looking to improve the statistics, though, they are an inevitable consequence of changes that if you are dealing with so many local authorities you do unfortunately get them. I do not, obviously, agree with Philippa’s conclusions on the improvements. There are recognised improvements in scope, timeliness and frequency of the migration data. For example, we now produce estimates of short-term migrants—which was something local authorities were very keen on—down to local authority level. They have been quality assured and checked to have National Statistics status. We are now using administrative data in this process to get estimates at local authority level, which was something that local authorities were very keen for us to do—use GP and other data. We are now doing that. We have significantly redesigned the International Passenger Survey to do precisely some of the things that users were asking us to do.

Q82 Paul Flynn: But why is it not working?

Guy Goodwin: They are working.

Paul Flynn: The redesign was worse than the original design.

Guy Goodwin: Not at all. It has increased significantly, for example, the numbers of emigrants that we now identify in the system: three times the number we used to do. We are also now much better covering regional routes and so on, and have boosted samples in that. I cannot totally align with Westminster’s comments on this, because they have, like other local authorities, input into these improvements, and they are very significant ones. I do

not think that any of those could be debated or disputed by local authorities.

Ben Humberstone: As Guy says, the key change to Westminster’s and the other changes that we saw to local authority population estimates were as a result of precisely the types of criticisms that were being discussed earlier: about the IPS being relatively robust at measuring immigration and emigration at a national level, but no good at measuring it at local authority level. We took the national-level figures and we broke them down to local authority using precisely the types of administrative data—GP registers, National Insurance number registrations, school census and a whole range of other sources—to make sure that we were trying to do that as well as possible. When we have a better set, a better methodology, which we introduced just before the Census, which is what this refers to, we try to introduce it as soon as possible, bearing in mind that we do not want too many of these big changes in too short a space of time, because there are these discontinuities that you have discussed. Inevitably there will be some change when we improve the methods, which is what we have done.

Q83 Paul Flynn: Can we say now that Councillor Roe can look forward to a period of stability and certainty in official statistics from you?

Guy Goodwin: The Migration Statistics Improvement Programme has now stopped, so unless we see some significant improvement that can be made, yes, there will be a greater period of stability. The next big change, I guess, is where the Beyond 2011 programme will be taking us. Just one other comment; it is relevant to the comments your colleague from Luton made as well. Where these changes have not really helped Westminster is getting to the nitty-gritty of the very fine detail at local authority level, because the IPS just is not the right vehicle to do that. Those data, the Census data: that is the best data available from the centre at the moment, coupled with local knowledge, but the IPS does not get you to that point.

Q84 Paul Flynn: We look for a bed of roses in the future. We can look forward with great confidence that they will not suddenly, in local authorities, be presented with the fact that a large percentage of their population have been culled overnight, and they have to sack 5% of the staff in that area and so on. That will not happen in future.

Guy Goodwin: The Census data we have just brought in, we compared with the rolled-forward population estimates, as Ben said earlier, and the comparison has been much, much better. We are not in the same situation as 2001, so even in areas like Westminster, where we did have problems in 2001—we have acknowledged that; there were response rates of something like 60-something per cent—every local authority, response rates of over 85% this time, with good coverage. The comparisons are a lot better, so we are not going to be in a 2001 scenario where we will have really massive changes—we hope, at any rate, unless something completely surprising comes up. The original reconciliations are very good and encouraging from the Census.

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Paul Flynn: I shall live for this moment when we examine this utopian future you present. Thank you.

Q85 Kelvin Hopkins: Given that an area like Haywards Heath had very accurate Census returns, and Westminster very inaccurate, it gives a very distorted picture of the population of Britain. Some populations might be substantially larger if we accurately recorded them. If the inaccuracy was the same across the whole country we could understand it, but it is not.

Guy Goodwin: We have no evidence at all at our doorstep at the moment, that the 2011 Census is inaccurate for Westminster. We are discussing this with them, and they have said they may wish to come back with evidence, that they are looking for detailed data and so on, but actually the statistics as we are looking at them at the moment: we have not got the same vibes as in 2001, where we looked at it and thought, “Yes these response rates are not ideal.” I do not accept the point that it is inaccurate, but I do accept that there is variation in difficulty across the country.

Jon Simmons: Yes. There are two issues going on here. There is the issue about normally-resident population, the long-term residents, where we can compare doctors, registration and so on and so forth and come to conclusions, but different systems produce different numbers, and that is in the nature of things. The other thing which Westminster is alluding to, which is very important, is the short-term migrant population. The Census is not designed to capture that very well. It tries to capture some of it, but of course it occurred in the spring, in March, where a lot of people who will come for the summer, for example, just for maybe three or six months, will not be captured through that form. I think it is an important point, that other methods would do well in capturing those other sorts of issues and problems, but that may not undermine confidence in the bigger picture, which is the normally-resident population.

Guy Goodwin: It is a very well-made point. Westminster is right when they talk about data on populations, short-term migrants, the number of second homes, large population turnover, and so on. The reassurance I can give Members, though, is that we are capturing most of those things now: short-term migrants down to local authority level are available; second homes down to local authority level have been made available from the Census. These figures are now available and in the public domain.

Q86 Chair: I think the point that Westminster is making is that just measuring resident population on one night is not necessarily the best way to assess what the demands on their services are likely to be, because of the very big factors that affect Westminster, which may be completely unique to Westminster. The corollary of this is if you trust the Census data then the discrepancy between the Census data and the conjectural population data that we derive from the immigration statistics and the e-Borders checks is disturbingly inaccurate. For example, in Westminster they said they had a substantial number less on the Census survey than they expected, but in

Newham, for example, they found they had a substantially larger population than they thought they had. The population as a whole was substantially bigger than expected as a result of the Census. Does this not raise serious questions about the accuracy of the migration statistics, and the confidence we can have in them?

Ben Humberstone: There are a couple of points there. The first is, over the last decade we have seen an unprecedented change in international migration. There is the massive increase—

Chair: I understand that, but the migration statistics are not picking this up.

Ben Humberstone: But they are now, and as a result of that we have made significant changes to the IPS. We have changed the ports and airports that we sample at to reflect the new flows from Eastern Europe and the rise of low-cost airlines and so on, bringing people in to and out of the UK. We are starting from a point from about the middle of the last decade, from which we have really upped our game and changed the way that we record migration statistics to reduce this gap, as you say, between our population estimates and what the Census tells us is the population resident. As I said, it was about 464,000 for the UK as a whole, which is about 0.8%, but in local authorities it is different. What we have done with areas such as Newham has, as a result of these changes, better captured the movements of people from Eastern Europe and changed our methods for distributing immigration down to local authority level, which I have already mentioned. We have improved the estimates for Newham and, we think, for Westminster. If we had been able to roll those improvements back over the whole of the last decade then the population estimates would have been much closer to what the Census said.

Q87 Chair: Can I just pick you up on something you said earlier, about the problems of using administrative data, which suggests that we should not use administrative data—we do use administrative data, do we not?

Guy Goodwin: We use multiple sources, and it is the way you should do things, triangulating across.

Q88 Chair: But to produce local area statistics: is Mr Humberstone saying that actually these local area statistics are likely to be suspect, because we are using administrative data which has, in his own words, problems?

Ben Humberstone: The point I was making was that if you look at one source in isolation you will get a peculiar answer. Jon has already mentioned that if you look at multiple sources and you see that all the trends are pointing in the same direction, and then you overlay survey sources on top of that—like the IPS or the Census—and everything is pointing in the same direction, then you can draw confidence from that. What you can use admin sources to do is essentially to triangulate your estimates, to say, “If all of these things are pointing in the same direction in terms of change or absolute numbers, then we can have more confidence than otherwise.” I would not recommend using an admin source on its own.

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Chair: It all sounds horribly artistic rather than scientific.

Guy Goodwin: It is very scientific, actually. You probably do not want to know how scientific.

Q89 Alun Cairns: The information and the understanding about immigration is pretty patchy, to be polite. Some people even confuse the difference between immigration and net migration, and so on. How effective do you think the website is in helping people find their way, and in understanding what the terms actually mean?

Guy Goodwin: Let me just start with a general answer, and then perhaps, Ben and Jon, you can pick up on the websites. The general answer is that, if we look at the public as a whole, or the non-specialist, non-tailored users—not the John Salts and people who know their way round these things—most of how they pick up information on migration is inevitably through media coverage. We make considerable efforts in terms of getting out and about, but also to be open and interviewed and so on by the media. For example, in December, when the Census results came out, we had a very full media briefing, and it was very well covered.

As you do that, of course, you try to get over some of these messages, such as that immigration and net migration are different, and net migration is the difference between immigration and emigration. You try to get over the message of uncertainty and so on. Inevitably, if the media are the prime link with the public, it does not always get completely translated from A to B; we have to recognise that. We have put a lot of investment into that media training, and indeed colleagues like Ben, who was on BBC News, I think, either earlier this week or late last week, about the Romanian and Bulgarian migration issues. We do try to get about, and we are trained to do that, so that is good. Do you want to comment about the website particularly, Ben?

Ben Humberstone: Yes. We are aware of user concerns. We do an awful lot of consultation with users, and the feedback has been as you say. It is difficult for non-specialist users—and sometimes for specialist users—to get directly to what they want. What we have done in the last month is to introduce a new population landing page on the ONS website, which provides all the headline information that people would need on one page. It also includes links to things like the migration timeline, which Professor Salt mentioned earlier, which provides a long-term series of migration statistics in a very accessible, easy-to-use form, that also presents the context for the migration patterns that people are looking at. We are making a lot of steps. We are looking into things like podcasts and infographics and so on, building on our media contacts as well to try and make sure that people can find everything they need in one place. As I say, the population page has only been up for about a month; we are getting very good feedback on it from users, but we are constantly looking to improve the experience that people have when they come to that website.

Guy Goodwin: If I just summarise, I think John Salt said about the ONS website earlier that it is work in

progress and going in the right direction. Actually, I would concur with that view. There have been concerns on the website. We have to hold our hands up and say that we got some elements wrong in terms of how we implemented that. We are going in the right direction now; there are improvements, but it is work in progress and we acknowledge that.

Jon Simmons: From the Home Office perspective, there is always work to be done in improving the presentation of statistics, always, and I am sure that is true in every centre of statistics. I would not say there is no room for improvement, but if you compare how things were, say, three, four or five years ago to how they are now: four or five years ago we had 42 publications each year related to migration coming out of the Government Statistical Service. Now, we coordinate releases so they are done in a coordinated way one key day each quarter, and there are a few other releases that come out from the population side and other things between that. Most of the main statistics are now essentially coming out in one form, one day each quarter through a coordinated release—the Migratory Statistics Quarterly Report—which tries to summarise the overall picture from all the sources and bring it together in a reasonably simple way: not too simple, because they are complex data. We do rely on the media understanding that, of course, and interpreting that. Most members of the public are not willing to sit down and listen to statisticians talking to them for an hour, but I think the media reporting has got better as a result of the improvements we have made and the way in which we present the data.

On the Home Office side, we used to publish a very thick command paper in hard copy. It was a big book full of lots of statistical tables. It was very difficult to read. Certainly when I arrived and was trying to grapple with the immigration statistics, I found it very tortuous and quite tedious to read. We have changed that completely. We now publish statistics on a website, with very short topic pages on work migration, study migration, family migration, admissions, visas issued, asylum and enforcement issues. There are topic pages, short summaries, on each of those issues from a Home Office perspective which are there and available to people who want to read about these things. I think they provide a reasonably clear set of information. That is not to say it cannot be improved, but I think there have been quite significant improvements over the last few years.

Dr Kershaw: We have tried to avoid jargon, getting away from “tier this and tier that”, talking about what concepts mean. We have had very positive feedback from the migration stats user forum that we work with. On top of that, we have altered the tables we put out to have them broken down by individual nationalities, which was a big bugbear for users: that they could not do the kinds of tabulations that they wanted to do. That has meant in some ways we do not hear so much from users, because they can produce those stats themselves. That has been a big step forward, both simplifying and making more accessible the summary of the data, and also providing more data that is manipulable via spreadsheets. We also contribute to the Migration Stats Quarterly Report. Within that there are cross-references to our

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publications, so a user can go to that report and still see where they can find the DWP and the Home Office information very directly.

Q90 Alun Cairns: Thank you. Can I ask you about the IT systems in what was the UK Border Agency and any plans for improvement? They have been described as “incompatible” and “not reliable enough”. I had the privilege of visiting the Agency in India just a couple of weeks ago, and I would say that the IT processing systems they were using, bearing in mind the demands that come from that part of the world, were completely inadequate. I would take guidance on who to answer—Mr Simmons, what plans are there to improve it and to ensure that we do overcome the “incompatible” and “not reliable” problem?

Jon Simmons: We completely acknowledge the fact that the IT systems are not where we want them to be. I say “we”, I mean the Home Office and the different parts of what was the Border Agency. Part of that is historical; the visas that are processed overseas are really still dealing with systems that were gifted to them from the Foreign Office when that process was moved to the Home Office from the Foreign Office some years ago. There is a long-term programme to improve that integrated case-working programme, which is looking to bring together those different casework systems. It is an on-going process, some of which has been rolled out in certain areas, but it is not covering all of them yet. It is a process that is under way, and that will lead to significant improvements in integration.

It is worth saying that a lot of the problems are about that case-processing process. They are not about the accuracy of the actual data that we hold and that we publish as national statistics, and I just want to make that clear. I think there is an assumption that because there are flaws and issues with some of the IT systems that we currently use for case processing that means all the data are wrong. That is not our experience. We have looked at this, and the UK Statistics Authority are tasked with looking at this every so often as well, and they have not come up with any problems either, but when people apply to us, applying for a visa, for example, the applications reported in our published statistics and visas, are an accurate record of the number of applications we are receiving. Now, of course, once we go through processing issues, how many are granted and when they are granted, you come to a different set of problems, but in terms of the basic national statistics we publish, we think these are of reasonable quality.

Dr Kershaw: We have a great deal of confidence in them, and they were re-designated as National Statistics by the UK Statistics Authority last year. They were “readily accessible and produced according to sound methods, managed impartially and objectively in the public interest,” so we were pleased by the report we got back from them. With respect to the key steps in the immigration process—a visa being granted, someone applying for asylum, someone being given settlement or an extension on a visa—we have every confidence that those are recorded with high quality. There are issues around case-working

systems, and there are issues when we bring new data out. Last year we produced better breakdowns of removals and voluntary departures, and we did a lot of work with UKBA to get those figures right. In connection with the certificate of acceptance for studies, we also worked with UKBA to ensure that the breakdowns we were making were sound, looking in detail at the cases. Where we bring forward new material as prospective National Statistics, we take every care to ensure that it is reliable.

Q91 Chair: We are scanning more and more passports, which is a good thing. What information do we actually get by scanning passports?

Jon Simmons: This plays in to the whole e-Borders issue; apologies if this is already known to the Committee, but e-Borders is there to collect only limited information that we get in advance from carriers. When you buy a ticket from easyJet, for example, easyJet ask you to fill out a little bit of information. Generally they get your name, they will have your gender, they ask for your passport number and that will have your nationality, but it is very, very limited information. easyJet, and any other airline, will not ask you what your purpose for coming to the UK is, for example. They do not ask you any of the information that we get on the Census, for example, on your language ability and so on and so forth. It is a very limited set of information. That would be the case whether it is from data held on electronic passports or from information that is entered into carriers’ databases when you are buying a ticket.

Q92 Chair: I am almost tempted to ask: what is the point of scanning passports?

Dr Kershaw: When you have scanned the passport, the information on that passport is read across against a warnings index, which is used for policing the border. This is not statistical, but it is telling you whether somebody is on some kind of watch list.

Q93 Chair: So again, this public perception that somehow if we read everybody’s passport very carefully and we knew exactly who was going in and out of the country, this would give us all the information we need: you are not going to get that information?

Jon Simmons: Not for statistical purposes, no. E-Borders and passport scanning, and checking against various indices, is important for operational purposes.

Chair: If you are trying to intercept certain individuals.

Jon Simmons: There have been somewhere around 14,000 arrests resulting from this process, so it is a very significant operational process. For statistics, as was said in the earlier session, e-Borders on its own, or systems like that, will not give you all the information you need for statistical purposes.

Q94 Chair: Are there any plans? Is there any possibility that we could collect more information about the nature of migrants and their purposes from e-Borders checks, or are we just barking up the wrong tree?

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Jon Simmons: There will be some possibility to link e-Borders data in the future, in due course—and we are talking a few years down the line now—with other systems. The new integrated case-working system, for example, will tell us, for those people who have to apply for a visa, we can then link that with the visa information. We will be able to know, for those people crossing the border, which visas they hold, for example. Simple things like that will be feasible going forward, but it will not provide 100% of the information.

Guy Goodwin: One of the improvements in migration statistics terms that potentially you will get from e-Borders is that you will get a count-in and a count-out of people, a more comprehensive coverage of the flows. You will potentially see it is the same people coming in and out, whereas of course if you are doing a sample survey you may be interviewing different people. Therefore you can use it to improve your estimates of migration, your national estimates. You still need an International Passenger Survey to get some of the finer detail, unless it were to be collected in e-Borders, and if you are talking about very local information on where people go to, that is not something that is going to be coming very readily from e-Borders. I think that is the summary.

Dr Kershaw: A point I would make to put e-Borders in context is that there are about 100 million people arriving in the UK every year, and 100 million leaving. Within one day that comes out to about half a million people coming and going across the border. We are looking at around 200,000 annually, in recent estimates of net migration. It is a very small proportion of the flows, and, of course, the British and EU people are not subject to any immigration control, so you cannot infer their purposes except by seeing that they have a return ticket, but they will not always have return tickets, and so on.

Q95 Chair: To end on a slightly more positive note, we are now checking, reading and scanning passports of people who are leaving the UK, correct?

Dr Kershaw: I would have to come back to you.

Jon Simmons: We would have to come back to you on that.

Chair: We used to not check who left the UK at all, but we are now checking who leaves the UK.

Jon Simmons: There are plans in place to introduce exit checks. I am not sure what stage those are at the moment.

Q96 Chair: That means that we have no idea how many people remain beyond their visa term, at the moment, because we do not check when they leave. We have no system of checking when people leave the UK.

Jon Simmons: There are some checks made. For example some of the visa expiry and some of the failed asylum seeker cases are checked against e-Borders, but of course e-Borders is not a complete record. It is perfectly possible that we might identify cases that do not appear to have been recorded as leaving the country that may well have left the country; we have just not recorded them. It would not be a very good or accurate picture.

Q97 Chair: In an ideal world, we would be checking who leaves the UK and if somebody's visa has expired, and we do not have a record of them leaving the UK, we know we have another unauthorised migrant overstaying their welcome in the UK.

Jon Simmons: Potentially that is one of the benefits we will get from the e-Borders system in due course.

Q98 Chair: When will we get to that situation? Not for some years yet, because we have not been checking, have we?

Jon Simmons: It will be some years. ONS published a very good paper on the statistical benefits from e-Borders about a year ago. It is on their website. There, we were making an assumption that if we had, for example, e-Borders with very high levels of coverage in place by 2015, we would still need to wait a year for a year's worth of passengers to pass through the system. We would need to wait a year for those at the end of that year to have had the opportunity to stay for a year and become permanent migrants before they could be registered as either not leaving or having left. Then of course we would need to process the data. Therefore it probably would not be until 2018 when we would produce statistics from that sort of system. That is what we published in the paper a year or so ago. Obviously it is dependent on a lot of other things happening over the course of time. It is a long process, though.

Q99 Chair: But it is worth getting on with this, though, is it not?

Jon Simmons: Yes.

Chair: Because it will significantly increase our data about who is overstaying their welcome in the UK. Speaking on behalf of my voters, that is the big concern: that there are a whole lot of people here that we do not know are here, who should not be here. Addressing that is more meaningful to them than perhaps trying to meet targets about net immigration, whatever that means to them.

Jon Simmons: Well, e-Borders is a big, active programme. It is a 13-year programme. We are only about halfway through it, as I understand.

Q100 Chair: Is this programme getting political backing? Is it being pushed forward?

Jon Simmons: That is probably a question you need to ask politicians, but yes.

Chair: I am asking you as a matter of fact: is this being implemented?

Jon Simmons: It is being implemented. I am seeing results from it. I mean, I was told—as I said earlier—that 14,000 arrests have resulted from the sorts of checks that e-Borders introduced.

Chair: So this is progress: new arrests that would not have been made otherwise?

Jon Simmons: Yes. I was told this included 76 murderers who were identified through these sorts of checks, and if these checks were not in place we would not have been aware that these people were getting on flights to come to the UK. It is important.

Dr Kershaw: I understand that there is now 100% coverage of e-Borders for flights originating outside of the EU and about two-thirds of those originating

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inside the EU. There are plans to introduce e-Borders to cover the maritime routes next year.

Q101 Chair: Finally, do you have any views about how the Schengen area is handling the equivalent issues and problems? Have they got a handle on this? Have we got lessons to learn from them?

Dr Kershaw: There is no analogue of our system of borders, is there, because people can cross the borders.

Jon Simmons: Effectively, no, because the Schengen border is effectively an open border within the Schengen area, so of course they do not know how many people travel from Austria to Germany, for example.

Q102 Chair: What about people who are travelling in and out of the Schengen area? Have they got a good handle on that?

Jon Simmons: In theory, yes. In Schengen, at the border, the checks should be as good as anywhere else in the EU. Whether they are or not is a matter of judgment, I think.

Dr Kershaw: There is a lot of reliance on population registers in Europe, but these are problematic. In recent years the flow of Poles from Poland into Germany, the Germans recorded about 10 times as many arriving as the Poles recorded leaving. As Professor Salt was saying, the population registers are not a panacea for monitoring these flows.

Q103 Chair: Anything to add? Do you envy the Schengen controllers their border controls?

Guy Goodwin: I do not have a view on the politics of it. I do not think that is my role.

Q104 Chair: Do you think they are doing better than us at the moment on their e-Border checks?

Jon Simmons: No, I certainly do not think their estimates on migration are better than ours, from what I have seen. I do look at a lot of international migration statistics, and one thing I would say to this Committee is that it strikes me we do have a very good set of statistics, a much wider set of statistics than are available in other countries. People look at Australia as a shining example, but it is probably the only one, to be honest, that is a shining example. Part of that is because of the very strong interest in migration as a political issue within the UK, so it has forced us to up our game.

Chair: I said inaccurately that no country uses e-Borders checks as their main source of data, but it was mentioned that Australia and North Korea are the two countries.

Dr Kershaw: I am not sure if e-Borders is in North Korea.

Q105 Kelvin Hopkins: We have covered most of the questions, and I have to say I am impressed with what you have said. My impression is that you are doing your very best with all the statistics that you get. The problem is that we do not get enough statistics and we do not measure these things enough. We talked about e-Borders and passports and whatever: if we had that, combined with compulsory biometric passports for all people not born in the UK whenever they registered

with doctors, with the police or whatever, they would have to show their passport with the biometrics. That would begin to solve the problem. Can I suggest that to the Home Office, and they might put it to their political leaders?

Jon Simmons: Sorry, just to comment on that briefly: yes, it would improve the data sources a lot, undoubtedly, but it is worth remembering that a lot of our problem migrants are people who may come here on an ordinary tourist visa, for example, decide they like it, meet friends and whatever, and end up staying out of ignorance of the visa regulations, or perhaps wilfully going around them. Would we require biometric information from every single tourist that comes to the UK? We could; all these things are feasible, but it is a different sort of society and a different sort of system, and that would obviously need some sort of political and public debate.

Guy Goodwin: From a purely statistical point of view, yes, you could improve statistics, and of course if you had a comprehensive, quality population register as well, we would use it to improve our statistics. From a purely statistical point there are limitations, but yes, if it was there, we would use it.

Q106 Kelvin Hopkins: It is not necessarily the people coming in; it is the people who are here. If they were required to have a biometric passport, everybody who was not born in Britain to have a biometric passport as a kind of identity card, if you like—in fact, when I voted against identity cards, it was precisely this point that some of my colleagues said that if we had biometric passports, we would not need identity cards. We have not gone that far yet.

Guy Goodwin: It is the sort of thing that could be used in something like the Beyond 2011 programme, or looking at alternatives to a traditional census.

Dr Kershaw: Of course, about half of the people who were born outside of Britain are now British citizens as well.

Kelvin Hopkins: Yes, but even so.

Chair: We appreciate we are asking about a very big policy issue, and we are not expecting you to have expressed an opinion on this, and nothing you have said will be taken as an opinion.

Q107 Paul Flynn: Do you have a sense of despair about how you will combat the perception of immigration? All you have are science, reason and facts, against the baying hyenas of racism and hysteria that infest the national press.

Guy Goodwin: No. It does not, essentially, unduly worry me. Of course, the way that migration statistics can be construed sometimes in the press, you look at it and you think you cannot have it both ways: you cannot have the equivalent of exceptionally detailed data based on survey data. Sometimes there are unrealistic expectations, but no, I would not say it particularly concerned me.

Q108 Paul Flynn: You are going to win in the end?

Guy Goodwin: I hope so. We may not.

Chair: Thank you very much indeed for your evidence to us this morning. Along with the other panel it has been very informative; quite eye-opening,

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this little study that we are doing. Can I take this opportunity to thank you for your work, which is obviously of huge importance and of great interest to the public? Please pass those thanks on to your staffs.

Also, this is an opportunity to thank all those people who work in the immigration service, visas and the Borders Agency, or whatever it is becoming, to thank them for their work, as well.

ISBN 978-0-215-06133-1



Printed in the United Kingdom by The Stationery Office Limited
07/2013 030337 19585