

# Government Statistics: misrepresentation and data gaps

Full Fact report on the repeated misleading use of data by government ministers and gaps in departments' data

Statistics, data and analysis should improve public debate and understanding. However, in the course of our work fact checking government claims<sup>1</sup>, Full Fact too often sees examples of ministers or departments representing their own official information in misleading ways or not providing the evidence to support their analysis.

In this report we provide examples of this happening within the past 2 years at the Home Office, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, by the Prime Minister, and how others have used a data gap at the Department for Education to make inaccurate claims. We show how current processes and protections on official statistics and analysis are insufficient.

## Background on government use of data

The way statistics are presented is a crucial part of how they are interpreted and understood by the public. If data is presented without context or caveats, if it is described incorrectly, or if data is given too much weight, it can give an incomplete or misleading picture.

In our Full Fact 2023 report, *Informed citizens: Addressing bad information in a healthy democracy*, we give examples of this happening in defence funding announcements that 'roll up' years of annual spending increases to give a higher sounding cumulative figure, in Home Office spending figures that do not take into account inflation, and by the former Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, repeatedly misusing employment figures to claim that there are more people in employment than there actually were.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Full Fact, Fact Checks, 2023, <https://fullfact.org/facts/>

<sup>2</sup> Full Fact, Full Fact Report 2023, <https://fullfact.org/about/policy/reports/full-fact-report-2023/>

We are fair enough to recognise that in some cases this is simply done in error, and is understandable in a one-off scenario. However, **when this happens repeatedly, even after the error has been pointed out, then this appears to be being done in pursuit of political advantage.**

Public trust in official statistics is generally high,<sup>3</sup> and the government has a responsibility to ensure that the information, statistics and analysis it publishes is presented transparently. However, this trust is heavily undermined when official information is found to be unevidenced, lacking the full context or misleading.

Without the full information, fact checkers, journalists, Parliamentarians and the public are kept in the dark and are unable to scrutinise or ask important questions. As the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) states in its Regulatory Guidance, selective use of data or use of data without appropriate context can lead to misuse which damages public trust.<sup>4</sup>

The Code of Practice for Statistics requires those producing official statistics to ensure that any limitations are identified and explained and that they are presented in such a way that they can be understood by all types of users. The Code is also clear that government statements that refer to official statistics should contain a prominent link to the source data, and be accurate, clear and impartial.<sup>5</sup>

In 2022 the OSR had to write to government departments at least ten times about the lack of transparency in their use of statistics<sup>6</sup>, including many of the examples we use in this report.

When Full Fact has asked departments and ministers to address these patterns of behaviour there has sometimes been slow progress. In some cases there appears to be insufficient will to make a cultural change or an insufficient commitment from ministers to the standards they have signed up to.

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<sup>3</sup> National Centre for Social Research, Public Confidence in Official Statistics 2021, <https://natcen.ac.uk/publications/public-confidence-official-statistics-2021>

<sup>4</sup> Office for Statistics Regulation, Regulatory guidance for the transparent release and use of statistics and data, 2022, <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/regulatory-guidance-for-the-transparent-release-and-use-of-statistics-and-data/>

<sup>5</sup> UK Statistics Authority, 2023, Code of Practice for Statistics, <https://code.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/>

<sup>6</sup> Full Fact, Full Fact Report 2023, <https://fullfact.org/about/policy/reports/full-fact-report-2023/>

## The Home Office and data on asylum

Since the summer of 2022, Full Fact has become aware of a concerning trend at the Home Office of claims being made based on unpublished operational data as well as a lack of transparency around the sources of some claims made in public debate.

In addition to this, ministers, including the Home Secretary, appear at times to be selectively using and describing data to give a misleading impression about what figures actually show. In this section, we outline examples of claims relating to the Home Office's area of responsibility.

### 1. Data on small boat arrivals

We fact checked former Home Secretary Priti Patel MP's claim in Parliament in September 2022 that, over the Summer of 2022, the majority of arrivals in small boats from France were Albanian nationals (about 60%). This claim was further repeated in the media.<sup>7</sup>

When Full Fact wrote to the Home Office about this, they confirmed that the Home Secretary had been referring to provisional operational data. We asked the Home Office to publish this data but this has not yet happened. After obtaining this data via a Freedom of Information request, we were able to establish that Ms Patel's claim was incorrect.<sup>8</sup>

### 2. Data on asylum seekers' age

We fact checked immigration minister Robert Jenrick MP's unevidenced claim in Parliament in November 2022 about the percentage of adult men arriving at Western JetFoil asylum processing centre that are claiming to be under 18.<sup>9</sup>

The Home Office told us that this claim was again based on provisional operational data, which has not been made public. Despite our attempts, we have not been able to obtain this, so are not able to establish if what Mr Jenrick said was accurate. As far as we are aware, there is still no published data which supports what Mr Jenrick said.

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<sup>7</sup> Full Fact, Evidence for claim that 60% of small boat arrivals are Albanian not yet published, 2022, <https://fullfact.org/immigration/home-office-albania-small-boat-crossing-60-percent/>

<sup>8</sup> Full Fact letter to the Priti Patel MP, 2022, [https://fullfact.org/media/uploads/priti\\_patel\\_letter\\_small\\_boats\\_claim\\_12\\_2022.pdf](https://fullfact.org/media/uploads/priti_patel_letter_small_boats_claim_12_2022.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Full Fact, No published data to support minister's claim about migrants saying they're under 18, 2022, <https://fullfact.org/immigration/robert-jenrick-fifth-male-migrants-under-18/>

### 3. Data on the asylum backlog

We fact checked Home Secretary Suella Braverman MP's claim in Parliament in March 2023 about the asylum backlog.<sup>10</sup> Ms Braverman said: "If we go down the path of comparing backlogs, the Labour Party will be found wanting. The backlog with which we are dealing bears no comparison whatsoever with what the Labour Party left us with in 2010."

When we asked the Home Office about Ms Braverman's comments, it denied that she had made any comparison between the size of the asylum backlog currently and when the Labour Party left government, and stated that she had simply meant that it was not possible to make such a comparison. The asylum backlog was then many times larger than it was when Labour was last in office so it would be misleading to suggest the Labour Party would be "found wanting" in a comparison of the size of the asylum backlog.

We additionally fact checked Ms Braverman's claim in Parliament on 5 June 2023 that "the asylum initial decision backlog is down by 17,000".<sup>11</sup> This was not correct in terms of the total number of asylum cases awaiting an initial decision.

Home Office data shows the number of applications awaiting an initial decision had actually increased since the Prime Minister outlined a five-point plan to tackle the asylum backlog in December 2022.<sup>1213</sup> Ms Braverman was questioned about this by the Home Affairs Select Committee on 14 June 2023 and accepted that the 17,000 figure referred to the backlog of initial decisions relating to asylum applications made before 28 June 2022, however this was not made clear when she spoke in Parliament on 5 June.

We have also fact checked the Prime Minister Rishi Sunak MP's unevidenced claim made in Parliament in March 2023 that there were 6,000 fewer people in the caseload of the asylum backlog.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Full Fact, The asylum backlog is far higher now than when Labour left government, 2023, <https://fullfact.org/immigration/suella-braverman-asylum-backlog-labour/>

<sup>11</sup> Full Fact, The total asylum initial decision backlog has increased since December, 2023, <https://fullfact.org/immigration/braverman-asylum-initial-decision-backlog/>

<sup>12</sup> The Home Office, Asylum and resettlement datasets, 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/asylum-and-resettlement-datasets>

<sup>13</sup> Rishi Sunak MP, Illegal Immigration, 13 December 2022, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2022-12-13/debates/DB61C374-16B5-411C-9A29-CC3DCA119EB3/IllegalImmigration#contribution-0956F9E3-33B1-435A-B085-6B124DAD75AD>

<sup>14</sup> Full Fact, No evidence to support Rishi Sunak's asylum backlog claim, 2023, <https://fullfact.org/immigration/rishi-sunak-asylum-backlog/>

The Home Office said at the time it would not comment on the source of the 6,000 figure, or the claim that the backlog was falling. We wrote to Mr Sunak to ask for the source of his claim but we have not received a response. However, the Home Office has subsequently started publishing ad hoc data on the “legacy backlog” which shows that Mr Sunak’s claim was broadly correct, although he didn’t specify that this was the backlog he was referring to.

We have continued to fact check claims by ministers about the asylum claim backlog without specifying which backlog they are referring to.

#### 4. Data on the cost of housing asylum seekers

We have also noticed that several claims have been made in public debate recently about the cost of housing asylum seekers in hotels and on Bibby Stockholm.<sup>15</sup> The government has claimed that it is more cost effective to house asylum seekers on the barge, as opposed to hotels, but it hasn’t published figures to support this. It would be helpful if this information was made publicly available considering policy decisions are based on this.

#### Analysis of Home Office data

Full Fact finds this pattern of ministers using statistics without publishing the source data to be highly problematic and particularly acute with the Home Office in relation to asylum and immigration policy.

This policy area can be particularly polarising in public debate. The lack of transparency over data used by ministers prevents us and others from being able to properly scrutinise, and if necessary challenge, these claims. Transparency and clarity over the sources of government data would go a long way in ensuring everyone is able to make informed opinions.

A clear example is around the use of the term “backlog”. When people hear the term “backlog”, it is reasonable to assume they might think this means the backlog of all applications, and not just applications submitted before a time period that the government has decided upon. It’s therefore misleading to use only the word “backlog” without being clear which backlog a minister or government department is referring to.

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<sup>15</sup> The Home Office, Factsheet: Asylum accommodation on a vessel in Portland Port, 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/asylum-accommodation-factsheets/factsheet-asylum-accommodation-on-a-vessel-in-portland-port>

In March 2023 Full Fact wrote to both Sir Matthew Rycroft, Permanent Secretary at the Home Office, and Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation at the OSR, to raise our concerns about this pattern of behaviour at the Home Office.

In Mr Humpherson's response to us,<sup>16</sup> he shared our disappointment that claims continue to be made by ministers that cannot be verified from the Home Office's published statistics. He informed us that the OSR has been engaging with the Home Office both publicly and privately for some time. Whilst the OSR is encouraged by the positive engagement and welcomes the positive developments at the official level, Mr Humpherson said the OSR remains concerned that the continued misuse of these data by ministers may undermine public confidence in the statistical and analytical outputs of the department and of ministerial statements related to them.

In Sir Matthew's response to our letter, he told us that where data is misused or misrepresented, he agrees it is paramount to clarify misunderstandings. Sir Matthew informed us his Chief Statisticians remind the department regularly of the national statistics guidance and the importance of intelligent transparency.<sup>17</sup> Sir Matthew detailed the steps he was taking to ensure statistics are used and disseminated appropriately. He also told us that he intended to discuss the potential reputational impacts of issues we raised with the Home Secretary and establish how they can better support ministers to prevent such instances in future.

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<sup>16</sup> Ed Humpherson to Will Moy: Home Office Transparency, 23 May 2023, <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/ed-humpherson-to-will-moy-home-office-transparency/>

<sup>17</sup> The Office for Statistics Regulation, Intelligent transparency, 2023 <https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/transparency/>

## Department for Education data on ghost children

Since June 2021 Full Fact has fact checked ten versions of a claim that 100,000 to 140,000 children left school during the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown measures and never came back. These children have been referred to as “ghost children”.<sup>18</sup> This claim has been made by both the media and politicians.

Most of these numbers can be traced back to analysis produced by the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) on school attendance and the number of children in England who missed at least half of their sessions in Autumn 2020, which was based on statistics from the Department for Education (DfE).<sup>19</sup> Full Fact does not believe that the CSJ’s current presentation of these figures is problematic.

However, the problem stems from the fact that data from the DfE does not exist on the number of children with total non-attendance due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In fact the DfE has stated that “ghost children” isn’t an official government term<sup>20</sup>, and we know that “ghost children” and “missing children” are used interchangeably to refer to children who have left school rolls and children who are on school rolls but are missing most or all lessons. According to the Children’s Commissioner, DfE knows what percentage of children are in school each day, but not whether it is the same children.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Full Fact, government figures don’t show 140,000 children were ‘completely missing’ from formal schooling last year, 2023, <https://fullfact.org/education/ian-mearns-pupil-absence/>, Full Fact, No evidence for MP’s claim 100,000 ‘ghost kids’ disappeared from school rolls in pandemic, 2023, <https://fullfact.org/education/bob-seely-ghost-kids/>, Full Fact, School statistics don’t show 140,000 children ‘never came back’ after pandemic disruption, 2023, <https://fullfact.org/education/karren-brady-ghost-children/>, Full Fact, Think tank figure does not show 100,000 children ‘never went back to school’ due to lockdown, 2023, <https://fullfact.org/education/100000-ghost-children-isabel-oakeshott/>, Full Fact, We don’t know how many children aren’t on school rolls, 2022, <https://fullfact.org/education/children-off-school-roll-covid/>, Full Fact, Iain Duncan Smith’s figures on school absence are out of date, 2021, <https://fullfact.org/education/iain-duncan-smith-school-absence-covid-lockdown/>, Full Fact, Claim that up to 135,000 children have not returned to school needs more context, 2021, <https://fullfact.org/education/135000-children-missing-school-autumn-2021/>, Full Fact, Figure of 100,000 children missing from school is out of date, 2021, <https://fullfact.org/education/evening-standard-missing-school-children-covid/>, Full Fact, Pandemic school attendance: fact checked, 2021, <https://fullfact.org/education/school-pupils-return-classroom-covid/>

<sup>19</sup> Full Fact, Iain Duncan Smith’s figures on school absence are out of date, 2021, <https://fullfact.org/education/iain-duncan-smith-school-absence-covid-lockdown>

<sup>20</sup> department for Education, What are ‘ghost children’ and why is school attendance important?, 2023, <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2023/07/27/what-are-ghost-children-and-why-is-school-attendance-important/>

<sup>21</sup> BBC, Covid in schools: Inquiry launched to find 100,000 pupils absent in England, 19 January 2022, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-60054253>

Since the Covid-19 pandemic there has been much debate on school attendance, and this area is part of a wider debate on the impact the lockdown measures had on children and education.<sup>22,23</sup> In this particular area, a lack of understanding about what the government data shows is resulting in persistent false claims that are influencing public opinion.

In response to concern about “ghost children”, in 2022 the government announced it would create local authority-administered registers for children not in school, to allow it to support local authorities.<sup>24</sup> To provide further clarification, in 2023 DfE also produced a blog on what they are doing to tackle non-attendance at school<sup>25</sup>, and released ad-hoc data on children missing education<sup>26</sup> and home education.<sup>27</sup>

It is welcome that DfE has responded to the public concern and has been tracking how their work is used and is taking proactive steps to try to improve public debate. However, despite this, there is still no data which answers the question of how many children left school during the lockdowns and did not return, nor the extent to which the pandemic may have caused them to be mostly or completely absent.

This means inaccurate claims continue to be made about “ghost children” on the basis of the analysis by the CSJ. This includes multiple examples on Hansard about “ghost children” which characterise these children as “lost to school”, as well as claims made in the Daily Mail, the Mirror, Birmingham Live, and Joe, as well as on Twitter and during live interviews.<sup>28</sup>

The claims have also been used to criticise pandemic lockdown ‘nonsense’ or to criticise strike action. There are also concerns about the potential effects of non-school attendance, including limited life opportunities, lost teaching, mental health problems

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<sup>22</sup> Mrs Flick Drummond MP, Children Not in School (Register), 16 May 2023, [https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2023-05-16/debates/3D41E8B4-7CA9-4E6A-A47F-5C8CD27D6590/ChildrenNotInSchool\(Register\)](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2023-05-16/debates/3D41E8B4-7CA9-4E6A-A47F-5C8CD27D6590/ChildrenNotInSchool(Register))

<sup>23</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, Strengthening Home Education, 2021, <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/6974/documents/72808/default/>

<sup>24</sup> Department for Education, How we plan to support families who choose home education through registers of children not in school, 2023, <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2022/02/03/how-we-plan-to-support-families-who-choose-home-education-through-registers-of-children-not-in-school/>

<sup>25</sup> Department for Education, What are ‘ghost children’ and why is school attendance important?, 2023, <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2023/07/27/what-are-ghost-children-and-why-is-school-attendance-important/>

<sup>26</sup> Department for Education, Children missing education, 2023, <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-missing-education>

<sup>27</sup> Department for Education, Elective home education, 2023, <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/elective-home-education>

<sup>28</sup> Full Fact is able to provide further details on all claims found on request.



and a descent into crime and gangs, concerns around the physical safety of children after the death of Arthur Labinjo-Hughes, parents who have ‘given up’ and gone on holiday, and parents who have taken their children out of the country and not come back.

The lack of this specific data and the misunderstanding about what other DfE data shows threatens to obscure and distract from public debate about solutions for both of these very real problems, and highlights the need for government departments to better understand data needs in the present as well as future emerging trends that a lack of data could exacerbate.

Since Full Fact met with DfE to share examples of the claims we are seeing and discuss ways of preventing these from being repeated, the department has added a paragraph to its latest statistics on pupil absence in schools to help users better understand the difference between persistent absence and children missing education. Full Fact welcomes this change, which DfE hopes will make the distinction clearer and avoid misuse.

## Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office data on Russian sanctions

On 5 March 2022, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) tweeted a graphic which showed the value of Russian bank assets sanctioned by the UK (£258.8 billion).<sup>29</sup> On the same day, a Telegraph article published an unreferenced comparison of the amounts sanctioned by the US (£240 billion) and the EU (£38.8 billion).<sup>30</sup> A number of MPs, including the then minister for Brexit Opportunities and government Efficiency, Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg MP, also tweeted a chart which showed this comparison.<sup>31,32,33</sup>

Clearly it is important to understand how much the UK and other governments are doing to sanction Russian banks, in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, upon investigation, Full Fact was not able to establish what the figures referred to, how they were calculated, or whether the information used was comparable. At the time FCDO had not published this information, and when we approached FCDO for

<sup>29</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, Twitter, 2022, <https://twitter.com/FCDOGovUK/status/1500096229509898242>

<sup>30</sup> The Telegraph, Britain freezes more Russian bank assets than any other country in the world, 5 March 2022,

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2022/03/05/britain-freezes-russian-bank-assets-country-world/>

<sup>31</sup> Danny Kruger MP, Twitter, 2022, [https://twitter.com/danny\\_kruger/status/1500111472562774019](https://twitter.com/danny_kruger/status/1500111472562774019)

<sup>32</sup> Rachel Maclean MP, Twitter, 2022, <https://twitter.com/redditchrachel/status/1500888580469805066>

<sup>33</sup> Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg MP, Twitter, 2022,

[https://twitter.com/Jacob\\_Rees\\_Mogg/status/1500125956140371969](https://twitter.com/Jacob_Rees_Mogg/status/1500125956140371969)

clarification it repeated only that the £258.8 billion figure was the total value of bank assets designated for sanctions.<sup>34</sup>

Because of this we were not able to establish whether the information that was being used to promote the UK's response to the war in Ukraine was reliable. For instance, we didn't know whether the figures only cover assets sanctioned since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, or what criteria were used to count assets affected by the different sanctions.

We raised our concerns with the OSR, who called for greater transparency around statistics relating to UK asset freeze targets under the Russia regulations, and stated that "transparency and clarity are the key elements in avoiding the risk of misinterpretation or misleadingness in statistics about sanctions".<sup>35</sup>

Following the intervention by Full Fact and the OSR, it was welcome to see FCDO publish an explanatory note on sanctions data which included the methodology used to compare the value of Russian bank assets that had been sanctioned.<sup>36</sup> Subsequently, in November 2022, the Office for Financial Sanctions Implementation (OFSI) announced an annual review and provided further clarification, setting out that the full effect of UK sanctions on Russia included £18.39 billion of Russian assets frozen and reported to the OFSI.<sup>37</sup>

However, the explanatory note and response to the issues Full Fact had highlighted came months after the chart was published, in which time public debate around the government's response to the war in Ukraine was, in part, undermined by the lack of clarity.

Whilst it is encouraging to see FCDO making changes to prevent a similar situation from happening again, it should never have been the case that a government department can publish data of this level of importance to influence public debate without providing the data and methodology to back it up.

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<sup>34</sup> Full Fact, government has not backed up Russian sanction claims, 2022,

<https://fullfact.org/economy/russia-ukraine-bloomberg-sanctions/>

<sup>35</sup> Office for Statistics Regulation, OSR calls for greater transparency around statistics relating to UK asset freeze targets under the Russia regulations, 2022,

<https://osr.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/osr-calls-for-greater-transparency-around-statistics-relating-to-uk-asset-freeze-targets-under-the-russia-regulations/>

<sup>36</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, Russia sanctions: notes on designations data, 2022,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/russia-sanctions-notes-on-designations-data/russia-sanctions-notes-on-designations-data>

<sup>37</sup> Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation, UK sanctions on Russia top £18 billion for the first time, 2022,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-sanctions-on-russia-top-18-billion-for-the-first-time>

## Prime Minister's claims on the dental workforce

In June 2023 Full Fact fact checked the Prime Minister's claim that there are over 500 more dentists working in the NHS this year compared to last year.<sup>38</sup> We also fact checked him when he made similar claims in January.<sup>39</sup>

This wasn't right when he made the claim, according to the latest published statistics by NHS England at the time. The figure used by the Prime Minister appears to refer to the increase in the number of dentists in England carrying out NHS work in 2021/22, not "this year". In actual fact, the latest NHS data published since the Prime Minister made the claim shows that for 2022/23 there were 121 fewer dentists performing NHS activity than the year before.<sup>40</sup>

There is also a wider issue that a headcount of the number of dentists doing some NHS work does not tell the full story about NHS dental capacity, given that the proportion of NHS work which these dentists do may also vary significantly. According to the British Dental Association's analysis of official data, there are hundreds of dentists doing the equivalent of a single NHS check-up a year.<sup>41</sup>

Full Fact wrote to NHS England to raise concerns about the quality of publicly available data on the dental workforce which is impacting the quality of public debate on this subject and to ask that they take steps to address this.

We pointed out that in order for a more meaningful debate on this subject, data showing the number of full-time equivalent dentists carrying out NHS work should be collected and published, which was particularly important in the context of the launch of the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan. We said that without more in depth information on NHS dental capacity, it is difficult for proper scrutiny of policy decisions about dentistry training places.

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<sup>38</sup> Full Fact, NHS dentist statistics don't support PM's claim that there are over 500 more 'this year', 2023, <https://fullfact.org/health/nhs-dentists-rishi-sunak-bda/>

<sup>39</sup> Full Fact, Are more dentists now working in the NHS?, 2023, <https://fullfact.org/health/rishi-sunak-nhs-dentist-numbers/>

<sup>40</sup> NHS Digital, NHS Dental Statistics for England, 2022-23, Annual Report, 2023, <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/nhs-dental-statistics/2022-23-annual-report>

<sup>41</sup> British Dental Association, Hundreds of dentists doing one NHS check-up a year, 2023, <https://bda.org/news-centre/press-releases/Pages/Hundreds-of-dentists-doing-one-NHS-check-up-a-year.aspx>

NHS England acknowledged the lack of data on the dental workforce is an issue. Full Fact welcomes the steps that NHS England has subsequently taken to address this. In September 2023, NHS England announced a new bi-annual national dental workforce collection which began on 1 October 2023.<sup>42</sup> This should address the information gap and provide a more accurate picture of NHS dental capacity.

## Recommendations

Full Fact makes the following recommendations to ensure that government ministers and departments present official statistics and analysis in a way that is fair, accurate and transparent.

- Paragraph 8.15 of the Ministerial Code states that ministers ‘need to be mindful’ of the UK Statistics Authority’s Code of Practice for Statistics when using official statistics. The Ministerial Code should be strengthened to make it clear that ministers should adhere to the principles of the Code of Practice for Statistics for all data they use to back up statements they make.
- Government ministers and departments should correct themselves when challenged and ensure that errors are not repeated. The OSR must continue to act swiftly and publicly to call out non compliance.
- Permanent Secretaries and the Heads of Professions for Statistics should take the lead in fostering a culture of transparency and integrity within their departments and ensuring staff are properly trained so that they understand these expectations and have the skills to meet them.
- Parliament and Select Committees should take a more active role in scrutinising and holding ministers and departments to account about the way they evidence their claims. To support this, each department’s annual report should report any concerns raised publicly by the OSR and set out the department's response.

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<sup>42</sup> NHS England National dental workforce collection  
<https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/national-dental-workforce-collection/>