
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir David Norgrove

Dr Mary Bousted and Kevin Courtney
Joint General Secretaries
National Education Union
(via email)

15 October 2019

Dear Joint General Secretaries,

Thank you for your letter regarding an announcement on school funding made by the Department for Education (DfE) on 30 August¹. You asked the UK Statistics Authority to look at two of the Department's claims.

First, you questioned the assurance that every school would receive the minimum levels of per pupil funding set out in the announcement. As you point out, I wrote to the former Secretary of State last year regarding a similar claim². I understand that DfE has since announced a consultation³ and published a policy paper⁴ on changes to local funding formulae which, if implemented, would mean that all schools would receive the minimum levels. In the meantime, I welcome the withdrawal from your website of a statement about the £5,000 per pupil minimum.

Secondly, you argued that the use of the GDP deflator to calculate real terms changes to funding was misleading. The Spending Round 2019 document⁵ uses the term inflation to refer to GDP deflators. Use of the GDP deflator is the standard method for adjusting public spend in Spending Rounds, and while it may not fully adjust for the change of prices in all sectors, it enables consistent comparisons.

As I understand it, the references on your website to real terms spending cuts are based on an alternative deflator. We would recommend that you make it clear in your statements how changes in spending are calculated, to enable the public to draw their own conclusions about the impact of changes in spending.

As the Authority has previously recommended to DfE, public debate on school funding would be improved by a consistent and comprehensive set of official statistics on the subject. We urge the Department to provide a public update on their progress towards this publication.

I am copying this letter to Neil McIvor, Head of Profession for Statistics at DfE.

Yours sincerely,



Sir David Norgrove

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-boosts-schools-with-14-billion-package>

² <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/response-to-statements-regarding-school-funding/>

³ <https://consult.education.gov.uk/funding-policy-unit/mandatory-minimum-per-pupil-funding-levels-in-5-16/>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-funding-formula-for-schools-and-high-needs>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spending-round-2019-document>