



Complaints Manager
UK Statistics Authority
Segensworth Road
Titchfield
Fareham
Hampshire
PO15 5RR

Sent By Email

To whom this may concern at the Complaints Department of the UK Statistics Authority,

I am writing to you in relation to a graphic published by The Conservative & Unionist Party Headquarters and then tweeted on the 2nd November 2022 by the current Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Minister for Intergovernmental Relations, Michael Gove MP, that read:

We've secured new free trade deals with over 70 countries since 2016. That's over £800 billion worth of new global trade.

The same graphic was also shared by the Conservative Party, and retweeted by over a dozen Conservative MPs.

I write in the interests of supporting the proper and accurate use of statistics and data and the ever-present need for integrity in Government. For the sake of clarity, it is important that the context of these statements should be set out.

Claim 1: We've secured new free trade deals with over 70 countries since 2016.

I am of the firm opinion that the use of the word "new" in this circumstance is wholly misleading for the following reasons:

- The majority of these deals were rolled over from existing EU agreements and are therefore continuity deals, rather than new Free Trade Agreements.
- The vast majority of these deals are exact "copy and paste" replicas of the of deals the UK previously had when it was an EU member, rather than creating new trading arrangements, taking the exception of the deal the UK struck with Japan which has some new digital clauses inserted which some campaigners deem to be problematic.
- The total number of rollover deals the UK Government has managed to secure, is smaller than the number of countries the EU has agreements with.
- To take some examples, the UK does not currently have a trading agreement of any kind with with Algeria, but it did as a member of the EU. The UK does not currently have a trading agreement of any kind with Bosnia & Herzegovina, but it did as a member of the EU. The UK does not currently have a trading agreement with Montenegro, but it did as a member of the EU.
- That all means we are part of fewer trade agreements now, than we were as a full member of the EU, which goes against the tone that the graphic tries to strike.

I am of the firm opinion that the usage of “free trade deals” in this circumstance is wholly misleading for the following reasons:

- It has been reported by the BBC on 20 September 2022, that the UK Government has “secured rollover deals with 69 of the original countries” we traded with as a full EU member.
- Rollover deals are not necessarily Free Trade Agreements.
- The EU is keen to stress that it has 41 trade agreements in place with 72 countries, but they are not all Free Trade Deals – some are free trade agreements (FTAs), some are economic partnership agreements (EPAs) and some are association agreements (AAs).
- To suggest that all agreements the UK has struck with all 70 countries are Free Trade Deals is misleading and also goes against the published information provided by the Department for International Trade.
- It is for that reason that we seek clarity on that the provenance of that figure.
- Indeed, the Department for International Trade’s website only lists 67 countries the UK Government has trading agreements in principle or ratified deals with, so the provenance of the figure of 69 [BBC article] and indeed 70 [infographic in question] is not clear.
- Of the 69 deals listed on the Department for International Trade’s website, 41 of those are full ratified deals and 26 of those are indicative of provisional applications submitted for free trading terms,

Claim 2: That’s over £800 billion worth of new global trade.

I am again of the firm opinion that the use of the word “new” in this circumstance is wholly misleading for the following reasons:

- The claim does not specify any context or accountancy time frame.
- I believe that the figure refers to the total value of goods and services trade between the UK and countries it has agreed trade deals with in 2021 [£818 billion, Office for National Statistics, 27 October 2022] - not what the impacts of the trade deal terms themselves add to the UK economy.
- Not all trade is a result of countries having trade deals. The UK does not have a free trade deal with China and China is one of the UK’s largest trading partners. To say that the Free Trade Deals themselves are responsible for this total sum is misleading, and that is before we speak to the use of the word “new”.
- To use the term “new” is misleading for the aforementioned reasons in Section 1 of this letter.
- The UK Government has said itself that it was its policy to develop “new bilateral agreements that replicate, as far as possible, the effects of the UK’s existing trade agreements with existing partners, through its previous membership of the EU”.

I hope you will agree that public trust requires a complete statement that affords due regard to economic context. We urge you to raise the importance of these issues with the Conservative Party.

Yours sincerely,

Drew

MP for Inverness, Nairn,
Badenoch & Strathspey



Phone.
01463 611024



Email.
drew.hendry.mp@parliament.uk



Social Media.
@drewhendrysnp