

Kemi Badenoch MP
Leader of HM Official Opposition
Member of Parliament for North West Essex
(via email)

24 June 2026

Dear Mrs Badenoch,

As Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, I am writing on behalf of the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR), the regulatory arm of the Authority. OSR promotes and safeguards the appropriate use of statistics in public debate and considers concerns raised with the Authority where there is a risk that statistics may be misunderstood or misused.

I write regarding a statement in the Conservative Party's [Alternative King's Speech](#)¹ on 11 May 2026, which reads: "for the first time ever, the total welfare bill is now higher than total receipts from income tax." This was brought to our attention by Full Fact, which had [checked² this claim](#) against publicly available welfare and income tax data supplied by the [Department for Work and Pensions](#)³ and [Office for Budget Responsibility](#)⁴. Following your speech, this statement has attracted considerable attention in the media and wider public discussion.

We have reviewed the published statistics and assessed that this claim is not wholly accurate. The statistics do show that welfare spending in the UK currently exceeds income tax receipts. However, this is not a recent or first-time occurrence as the claim suggests: figures from the Office for Budget Responsibility show that welfare spending has exceeded income tax receipts since [at least 2011](#)⁵. Furthermore, the gap between welfare spending and income tax receipts has narrowed in recent years, with the positions forecast to reverse in 2026/27 and beyond.

¹ [Alternative King's Speech](#), The Conservative Party, 11 May 2026

² [Welfare payments have not exceeded income tax 'for the first time ever'](#), Full Fact, updated 15 May 2026

³ [Benefit expenditure and caseload tables 2026](#), Department for Work and Pensions, 14 April 2026

⁴ [Forecast in-depth: Income tax](#), Office for Budget Responsibility, 26 November 2025

⁵ As presented in [Katie Lam wrongly claims welfare has exceeded income tax 'for the first time ever'](#), Full Fact, 4 June 2026

We have also considered the claim in terms of the wider context in which it was presented. The [Code of Practice for Statistics](#)⁶ is clear that statistics should be presented in ways that are clear, accurate and support understanding. In particular, the [Standards for the Public Use of Statistics, Data and Wider Analysis](#)⁷ highlight the importance of providing sufficient context so that statistics can be correctly interpreted.

In official statistics, “welfare spending” refers to the full range of social security expenditure. This includes a broad range of payments provided in different circumstances, including old age, disability, employment, and low income. Within this definition, a substantial proportion of total welfare spending relates to pensioner benefits; [guidance](#)⁸ from the Department for Work and Pensions highlights that approximately 55% of social security expenditure is spent on pensioners, with the State Pension forming the single largest component.

The Alternative King’s Speech focused primarily on out-of-work and sickness-related benefits. In that context, we consider that it would have been preferable to make clear that the “total welfare bill” referred to in the comparison includes pensioner benefits, such as the State Pension. Without this context, there is a risk that users interpret the figure as relating more narrowly to the areas of welfare policy discussed in the surrounding narrative.

Overall, we are concerned that the inaccuracy of the “first time ever” element of the claim, combined with the absence of this contextual explanation, could lead to misunderstanding among members of the public about welfare spending.

We refer to [our previous correspondence of 8 May 2026](#)⁹ regarding the use of welfare statistics in parliamentary debate. While oral exchanges may limit the ability to provide full context, written speeches and publications offer greater opportunity to present statistics clearly and with appropriate context, thereby supporting public understanding and reducing the risk of misinterpretation.

Given the prominence of this claim, and the evidence that it is not accurate, we hope that you might consider how best to clarify it so that it fully supports public understanding of trends in taxation and welfare spending. We note that some media

⁶ [Code of Practice for Statistics](#), November 2025

⁷ [Standards for the Public Use of Statistics, Data and Wider Analysis](#), November 2026

⁸ [Guidance and methodology: Benefit expenditure and caseload tables, Department for Work and Pensions](#), 14 April 2026

⁹ [Letter from Penny Young to Kemi Badenoch MP](#) – Universal Credit claimants, UK Statistics Authority, 6 May 2026

outlets have already corrected similar claims, which demonstrates the importance of ensuring that the public record reflects the statistical evidence accurately.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Penny Young". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Penny Young
Interim Chair