



House of Commons

Sir Robert Chote
UK Statistics Authority
1 Drummond Gate
London
SW1V 2QQ
Via email

18 November 2022

Dear Sir Robert,

Misleading DHSC chart on nurses' pay

I am writing to raise concerns over a chart, recently published by the Department of Health and Social Care, which I believe to be deliberately misleading.

I have attached a link to the chart entitled 'How Nurses' Pay Has Increased' to this letter.¹ You will no doubt notice that the chart is marked with the Royal coat of arms, and was tweeted from the Department of Health and Social Care's official Twitter account on the 10th of November, suggesting it is an official DHSC publication rather than a party-political image. A number of decisions have been made in creating the chart which are cause for concern, and which I would appreciate your views on.

The first is that the data has been presented without the effect of inflation. With inflation at 11.1%, it is disingenuous to claim that nurses been awarded a pay rise, when in fact the average pay of a nurse has fallen by 8% since 2010.² A recent analysis found that the real-terms salary of an experienced nurse has fallen by 20% in the same period.³

Even within the (limited) parameters of the time-period the graph represents, the average earnings of an NHS nurse have fallen in real-terms since March 2021 once inflation is considered.⁴ There also seems to have been a conscious decision to choose the top and bottom of bands rather than the mean or median in each band.

In addition to this – and as highlighted by Dr Duncan Robertson at Loughborough University – the graph has been plotted without starting the y axis at zero. This leads to presentation of

¹ [How Nurses' Pay Has Increased - DHSC Twitter Post](#)

² <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2022/nov/09/real-terms-fall-in-uk-nurses-pay-is-part-of-wider-trend>

³ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/nurses-leaving-nhs-real-terms-pay-cut-nt88h36k7>

⁴ <https://www.health.org.uk/publications/long-reads/where-next-for-nhs-nurses-pay>



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the 'increase' as being more pronounced than it otherwise would have been. Furthermore, there clearly seems to be a discrepancy between the lower to upper ratio for distance and the lower to upper ratio for £ value on the y axis. There is also a steeper gradient on the line plotting Newly Qualified Nurses' pay, despite this being less of a purported 'increase' than that received by those at the top of band 6.

All these factors taken together result in a poorly plotted chart, which seems to have been manipulated in a way which has the effect of supporting recent comments made by the Secretary of State for Health, who has stated that "we [...] have given over one million NHS workers a pay rise of at least £1,400 this year on top of a 3% rise last year".⁵

It is my view that this graph essentially amounts to misleading Conservative party-political campaigning material. It is not appropriate that official departmental channels are used in this manner and would welcome an investigation into this matter by the UKSA.

Kind regards,

Andrew Gwynne
Shadow Minister for Public Health

⁵ https://twitter.com/SteveBarclay/status/1590360946454958082?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw
Government Communication Service - Propriety in digital and social media