

Dear Sir Andrew,

I am writing with regard to your letter to the Rt Hon Norman Lamb MP, and the letter from Jonathan Athow attached to it.

We at [www.infacts.org](http://www.infacts.org) have been concerned about claims that the UK sends GBP 350 million per week to the EU. We are pleased that your letter describes such claims as potentially misleading.

However, we continue to be concerned that there is scope for erroneous statements about the UK's budget contributions to the EU. We believe that this would be reduced if the Office for National Statistics were to alter the layout of Table 9.9 in the Pink Book.

The separation of the rebate and the 'gross' contribution into credit and debit items is liable to confuse readers. It opens the door to those who would like to persist with statements that are, as you have said, potentially misleading.

As evidence of this danger, consider the following passage from the BBC's article on your letter to Mr Lamb:

"But Vote Leave stood by the figure, and said the campaign would be writing to Sir Andrew on the issue.

A spokesman said: "As the Office for National Statistics makes clear, the EU takes £350m from us every week. That is the total debit made from our national accounts."

A situation in which the ONS tables are presented in a manner which means that a letter from the chair of the UKSA is insufficient to clarify the facts is surely not desirable.

We suggest that some simple changes to Table 9.9 could improve the quality of the UK debate, and that they are therefore a matter of urgency. Specifically, the Fontainebleau Abatement [FKKL] in the top half of Table 9.9 could be moved to the bottom half and subtracted from the Total GNI contribution [M9LL]. This would generate a new series reflecting the actual money flows from the UK to the EU budget. You could then disaggregate this new headline number by showing its components. A similar improvement to the table could be achieved by bringing QWUE from the top (Credits) to the lower half, and presenting a new series that would be a net number generated by taking the duties and levies in the lower half of the table and subtracting QWUE.

Taken together, these changes would ensure that the 'credit' and 'debit' columns accurately reflect the flows in and out of the UK. They would improve the quality of the information reaching the UK public.

We realise that changing ONS practices usually takes time and requires careful deliberation. However, we believe this is a special case. The changes we propose are simple, and given the referendum they are urgent. At a minimum, the ONS should issue an ad-hoc release making it clear exactly how much money leaves the UK, and how much returns.

We plan to publish an article on Table 9.9 next week. But we would like to give you a chance to respond first.

Thank you, and best wishes,

Sam Ashworth-Hayes  
Journalist  
[www.infacts.org](http://www.infacts.org)