

Immigration: known unknowns

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The Home Office is on the [rack](#) because of the [Daily Mail](#) story that it knew that there was a problem with the unknown number of illegal immigrants (we don't know how many there are of those) working in security jobs and didn't tell us. Home Secretary Jacqui Smith claims she was waiting until she had better information. Is she simply very patient, spinning us, or has she found a way through the usual cock-up>>cover-up>>leak>>meltdown sequence that has deviled the Home Office over the last few years?

Well the BBC's Nick [Robinson](#) has done the maths more convincingly than most and he doesn't know what the right figure might be. So if the Home Office had released imperfect data and then revised it the story would have then shifted in to a fresh narrative about how the Home Office is changing the numbers or moving the goalposts. We can't expect civil servants to give a running commentary on their work can we?

The fact is that illegal immigration is almost impossible to quantify by its very nature unless you want the state to impose draconian ID card systems, surveillance and vast amounts of red tape on businesses. How many media organisations know the number of illegal immigrants working for them? There will certainly be one somewhere cleaning the offices or guarding the car park.

The good thing about this debate and the sterling journalism of the Daily Mail is that it is forcing us all to face up to the realities of allowing mass immigration to support our economy with cheap labour. Whatever your views on this highly touchy subject, media pressure is bringing more information in to the public realm and forcing the civil servants to get their act together: not just on presentation but on basic information, the bed-rock of accountable and efficient government. ♦

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