



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE
Chairman
UK Statistics Authority
1 Drummond Gate
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07 September 2015

Mark Andrew

I am writing to you regarding the data published by the Department for Work and Pensions on the number of benefit claimants who have been sanctioned.

The Department's data makes clear that between 22 October 2012 and 31 March 2015 benefit was withdrawn from 971,348 Jobseeker's Allowance claimants. This is the figure given in table 1.7a of its 12 August 2015 release. When one looks further into the data, however, it is impossible to tell how many of these claimants were sanctioned once, twice, three times or more, and for how long they were left without money from benefit income. Table 1.7 in the August release shows that in the given period:

- Decisions to apply a first sanction were made on 855,239 occasions
- Decisions to apply a second sanction were made on 188,067 occasions
- Decisions to apply a third sanction were made on 121,090 occasions

This gives us a total of 1.16 million decisions covering 971,348 claimants. No indication is given as to the actual number of individual claimants sanctioned once, twice, or three times. An accompanying footnote clarifies that a claimant who has received more than one category of sanction may be included in the data more than once; hence why the totals do not correspond.

Table 1.7 also states:

- Decisions to apply a low- or intermediate-level sanction – which entails a loss of benefit for either four or 13 weeks – were made on 1,026,769 occasions
- Decisions to apply a high-level sanction – which entails loss of benefit for either 13 weeks, six months or three years – were made on 137,627 occasions

Again, however, one can only guess how many claimants actually lost their benefit for certain periods of time as each claimant could, of course, have been sanctioned once, twice, or three times.



A further issue arising from the Department's data is the apparent lack of information on what happens to claimants once they have been sanctioned. The Department seems unable to answer with any certainty how many claimants fall off the radar, and what happens to them if and when they do, once they have been sanctioned.

Might I therefore ask please whether the Department has consulted with the UK Statistics Authority on its sanctions data, and if not, might you please consider undertaking a short review of its data collection methods to help maximise its effectiveness for the purpose of shaping public policy?

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Nigel', with a large, sweeping flourish that curves upwards and to the left.