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Ed Humpherson

Office for Statistics Regulation

15th March 2018

Dear Ed

DWP Benefit Sanctions Statistics – update on developments

My predecessor Neil McIvor wrote to you on 6th April 2017 providing an update on DWP work on benefit sanction statistics. I'd like to provide you with a further update on the progress we have made with these statistics.

During 2017 we further developed the sanctions statistics and published a dedicated Benefit Sanction Statistics¹ publication. We did this in response to the level of public interest in sanctions statistics and the increased range of statistics that we've developed.

The developments include:

- Sanctions statistics that now cover all benefits that can be sanctioned with methodologies aligned: Universal Credit (UC), Jobseekers Allowance (JSA), Employment Support Allowance (ESA) and Income Support (IS).
- A measure of the proportion of claimants that are sanctioned.
- Information on the duration of sanctions for UC, JSA and ESA.
- Statistics on the benefit destinations of claimants following a decision to sanction.

¹<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/jobseekers-allowance-sanctions>

²<https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/jsf/login.xhtml>

We have also improved the commentary and presentation of the statistics and supporting documentation through advice and guidance from the Government Statistical Service (GSS) Good Practice Team.

We recognise that there is always more to do but welcome your view on the progress made to date.

In Annex A I have listed the 5 recommendations of your letter from August 2015 with a detailed update against them.

Yours sincerely,

Tom Davies
Acting Chief Statistician

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Annex A

Here are the five bullet points from the August 2015 letter and an update on progress against each.

- **Provide users with benefit sanction statistics based on the actual number of sanctions applied, making clear the numbers of reviews, reconsiderations and appeals**
Users are provided with JSA and ESA benefit sanction breakdowns of the different stages of a sanction, under both the old and new rules and IS from October 2016. Included in the statistics are the numbers of decision reviews, mandatory reconsiderations and appeals. Since May 2017 we have produced sanctions statistics on Universal Credit (UC) that cover sanction decisions, reasons for sanction and decisions to apply a sanction by stage. Sanctions data is also available for users in DWP's dissemination tool Stat-Xplore², where there are also additional breakdowns of the data available.
- **Make clear the limitations associated with the statistics**
We developed a 'Background Information and Methodology' main document to support the sanctions statistics with advice from a number of stakeholders including policy, and operational colleagues. The document has a section providing information on the limitations of the statistics and, as a living document, is updated each time we publish. We also have a further three supporting documents to explain the different complex areas (durations, destinations and rate).
- **Include in the quarterly benefit statistics bulletin a statement of the proportion of JSA claims subject to a sanction, as well as the proportions of claimants who have been sanctioned during the most recent one-year and five-year periods, and the numbers on which these proportions are based**
In 2017, for JSA, ESA and UC we introduced a new measure which is the proportion of people on benefit at a point in time with a deduction from their benefit due to a sanction. We only intend to publish this single measure to avoid confusing users with various measures and hence won't be publishing a one year or five year rate.
- **Ensure all statements made using the official statistics are objective and impartial and appropriately apply the definitions of the variables underpinning the data, including 'actively seeking work'**
The content and style of the sanctions statistics within the Quarterly Benefits Summary (QBS) were given their first revamp in August 2015 following feedback from users. The statistics and commentary for each benefit, JSA and ESA, were extended and definitions expanded to help users understand the figures and context. A further revamp has just taken place with the production of the Benefit Sanctions Statistics publication. This was done with advice and guidance from the GSS Good Practice Team.
- **Extend the range of benefit sanction data available by addressing the gaps in information on repeat sanctions and hardship payments,**

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alongside the development of sanction data from the Universal Credit system

The sanctions strategy published in April 2016 outlined future development of the sanctions statistics and included a number of improvements like the publication of Universal Credit and Income Support sanctions. Since the strategy was published everything in it has been developed.

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