

# Assessment of compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics

## Benefit statistics

(produced by the Department for Work and  
Pensions)

## Office for Statistics Regulation

We provide independent regulation of all official statistics produced in the UK. Statistics are an essential public asset. We aim to enhance public confidence in the trustworthiness, quality and value of statistics produced by government.

We do this by setting the standards they must meet in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). We ensure that producers of government statistics uphold these standards by conducting assessments against the Code. Those which meet the standards are given National Statistics status, indicating that they meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and value. We also report publicly on system-wide issues and on the way statistics are being used, celebrating when the standards are upheld and challenging publicly when they are not.

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# Executive Summary

## Judgement on National Statistics Status

- ES.1 This assessment report was produced during the COVID-19 pandemic which has seen dramatic shocks to the labour market and placed increased pressure on the welfare system. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has continued to produce its statistics despite significant resource pressures, and we highlight the impact of COVID-19 on these statistics where relevant in this report.
- ES.2 We identified several actions for DWP to further enhance the public value, quality and trustworthiness of the DWP benefit statistics, as described in chapters one to three of this report. Fulfilling the requirements of this assessment will ensure that these statistics can continue to be designated as National Statistics.

## Key Findings

### Public Value

- ES.3 As Universal Credit continues to roll out, the statistics on other available benefits are vital in providing valuable insight into how the roll out affects the provision of other benefits and how the government is financially supporting those who are eligible. COVID-19 has brought to light users' interest in information on the characteristics of individuals or households claiming benefits. Solving these data gaps would aid understanding of which groups have been most impacted by the pandemic so that services and policies can be targeted effectively.
- ES.4 The statistics highlight the trend of decreasing caseloads for legacy (existing) benefits as the Universal Credit caseload increases. However, the statistics don't illustrate how individuals move through the benefits system. Addressing this user need would help tell the story of how the effect of these policies changes over time. Currently, users must look at statistics produced by both DWP and HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) to gain a complete picture of how many households are claiming benefits.
- ES.5 While users told us that they understand that the 6-month lag for several of the benefit statistics allows for greater accuracy, it does not enable services to be responsive to shifts in the data. The statistics team needs to revisit its approach to determining the trade-off between quality and value, and consider whether the current balance is best suited for the needs and uses of the data, to ensure they serve the purpose they are intended to.
- ES.6 The statistics team has incorporated opportunities for users to feedback on the statistics throughout the statistical products, but we found that it needs to do more proactive and outward facing user engagement, to promote the awareness and use of the statistics. There has been enhanced interest in the statistics during the pandemic and this is likely to continue in the immediate aftermath. It is therefore essential that the team is acutely aware of the user need and does not rely on users contacting the team to find out what the need is.

## Quality

- ES.7 DWP maintains a good working relationship with its data suppliers and engages with them regularly. The team publishes methodology and quality statements on the main benefit statistics landing page. However, the accessibility of this information needs to be improved to minimise the risk that users are misled or misuse the information if they do not understand aspects of the data such as terminology, strengths and limitations.
- ES.8 Users shared some specific examples with us of when it is difficult to make decisions based on unintuitive results as there is a lack of supporting commentary. To ensure the data and statistics are understood and used correctly, DWP needs to explain the impact of changes and limitations on using the data.
- ES.9 The statistics represent a large volume of administrative data and DWP needs to ensure it documents its understanding of quality issues of administrative data. Applying our Quality Assurance of Administrative Data (QAAD) framework to its work, would help the team reassure itself and users of the level of quality at all stages of the production process.

## Trustworthiness

- ES.10 The statistics are presented impartially and objectively. DWP preannounces all publications on the gov.uk website and any changes to pre-announced release dates are agreed by the Chief Statistician and the reason for change is given in the notice. We found that DWP has a range of policies in place that ensure strong data governance, including an information management policy and a policy statement on confidentiality and access. These measures enhance trustworthiness and give users confidence that the data are being managed securely.
- ES.11 The statistics team, under the guidance of the Chief Statistician, needs to ensure that development plans are transparent and that data are equally accessible to all. Doing so gives users the confidence that the statistics are produced independently and for the public good. We spoke to some users who were unaware of the outcome of previous consultations or who expressed difficulty in obtaining additional data relating to the statistics. The team must focus on supporting users to achieve a good outcome, to enhance trustworthiness in both the team and statistics.

## Next Steps

- ES.12 The deadline to report back to us is April 2021, where we will review the progress that the team has made in addressing the requirements. DWP should publish an action plan alongside the statistics on its website which sets out its proposals for addressing the assessment requirements.

# Chapter 1: Public Value

## Introduction

- 1.1 Value means that the statistics and other numerical information are accessible, remain relevant and benefit society; helping the public to understand important issues and answer key questions.
- 1.2 Value is a product of the interface between the statistics or other numerical information and those who use them as a basis for forming judgements.

## Findings

### The benefit statistics provide important context to the changing welfare system

- 1.3 The [DWP benefit statistics](#) publication brings together key statistics on DWP-administered benefits and covers elements such as the number of people claiming, the average amount of benefit claimed and how long the claims are for. The publication contains a mix of national, official and experimental statistics, and acts as a compendium of benefit statistics, where the frequency and reference date vary across the benefits.
- 1.4 With Universal Credit becoming the dominant benefit, the benefit statistics provide valuable context to the way in which Universal Credit is being rolled out and tell the story of the changing welfare system. The publication also includes statistics on Housing Benefit (which are administered by local authorities) and key experimental statistics on Universal Credit, to create a complete picture of benefits which DWP is responsible for.
- 1.5 The benefit statistics are used by a range of users including devolved and local government, disability campaign groups and think tanks. Users that we spoke to as part of this assessment highlighted a range of uses, including:
  - Local service planning
  - Labour market analysis
  - Analysis to support the development of devolved employability services
  - Forecasting caseload and expenditure of benefits
  - Cost-benefit analysis of changes to welfare policy and delivery
  - Understanding the take up of benefits for those with disabilities or childcare responsibilities
  - Understanding poverty and deprivation
- 1.6 The roll out of Universal Credit for new claimants across the UK is now complete and the government is set to begin its managed migration stage for Universal Credit – where many existing benefits and tax credit claimants will be moved onto Universal Credit. This staged roll out has complicated the picture of benefits, with fewer people claiming legacy benefits. The benefit statistics provide users with insight into how the government is financially supporting those who are eligible, and the trends in uptake and length of time receiving these benefits help decision makers take a targeted approach to deliver support.

## Accessibility of the statistics needs to be improved

- 1.7 The statistics team publishes a [summary bulletin](#) every six months, which presents the latest quarterly data with a brief commentary. The summary is published in HTML which makes it accessible for different screen sizes and assistive software. The commentary in the summary bulletin does not provide context to the statistics being presented. Additional knowledge is needed to make sense of the statistics and users have to work to bring out the insight, particularly where there are unintuitive changes or results. Several users expressed an interest in DWP producing thematic ad-hoc reports or deep dives to maximise the public value of the available data and provide more insight from DWP's perspective about what the data show – for example a specific analysis of disability benefits.
- 1.8 The statistics are published each quarter on [Stat-Xplore](#) – an interactive dissemination tool which hosts DWP benefit statistics relating to 16 different benefits and programmes. Stat-Xplore allows users to create customised tabulations, view results in interactive charts and download data into common file formats. The tables include historic data, which enables users to perform time series analysis of the different benefits. Support is offered to users via the Stat-Xplore team inbox as well as bespoke training sessions for users within DWP. The users we spoke to were divided on their opinion of Stat-Xplore – with regular users of the statistics praising the tool for its customisability and other users finding it difficult to navigate. The benefit statistics had previously been published on [NOMIS](#) (a data access service provided by the Office for National Statistics) which had additional functionality such as the ability to calculate rates of benefit claimants for different benefits and geographies. Some potential users of the statistics that we spoke to felt that Stat-Xplore was not intuitive and led to them giving up with trying to access the statistics.
- 1.9 Stat-Xplore provides users with the flexibility to generate data at different geographical levels and filter their searches to group together geographies of interest. The users we spoke to said that they would like more consistency of geographies between different benefit datasets to improve the comparability of caseload trends between benefits. The job centre unit geographies were mentioned by several users as an area of interest which are currently available in the experimental Universal Credit statistics but not all of the legacy benefits.
- 1.10 As the majority of users we spoke to said that they access the statistics through Stat-Xplore directly, many were unfamiliar with the summary commentary. Improving the signposting between Stat-Xplore and the summary bulletin would aid users' understanding of the statistics and prevent them from misinterpreting the data. Greater signposting more generally would enhance the accessibility of the statistics. For example, linking the relevant data tables to the benefit names on the landing page would help users find the exact data they need. Some users within DWP that we spoke to were unaware that the official statistics for the benefit they work on existed separately from the summary and said that it would reduce their reliance on front line staff if they knew the statistics were available. Similarly, while the landing page does state that some of the benefits data are published in data tables rather than Stat-Xplore, some users told us that they had difficulties finding these data tables.

## Insight into who and how benefits are claimed would add value to the statistics

- 1.11 The COVID-19 pandemic has created enormous uncertainty and significant challenges for the labour market, with the level of new claims to Universal Credit

reaching record highs in the first month of restrictions being in place. This uncertainty has led to greater scrutiny of the statistics and has intensified users' interest in information on the characteristics of individuals or households claiming benefits. Benefit statistics play an important role in understanding the most vulnerable groups during this pandemic and users told us that the data gaps on characteristics is a barrier to understanding which groups have been most affected by pandemic so that services and policies can be targeted effectively. Although the DWP benefit statistics do provide breakdowns by some characteristics, we identified several additional breakdowns that users would like to see:

- Number and age of children in households
- Ethnicity of household members
- Employment status (for benefits where this is not already provided)
- Number of bedrooms households are entitled to
- Type of Limited Capability to Work entitlement that applies to the household
- Lone parent flags (for benefits where this is not already provided)
- More-granular Employee Support Allowance data (ESA) on disability type (in line with Personal Independence Payment (PIP) statistics)

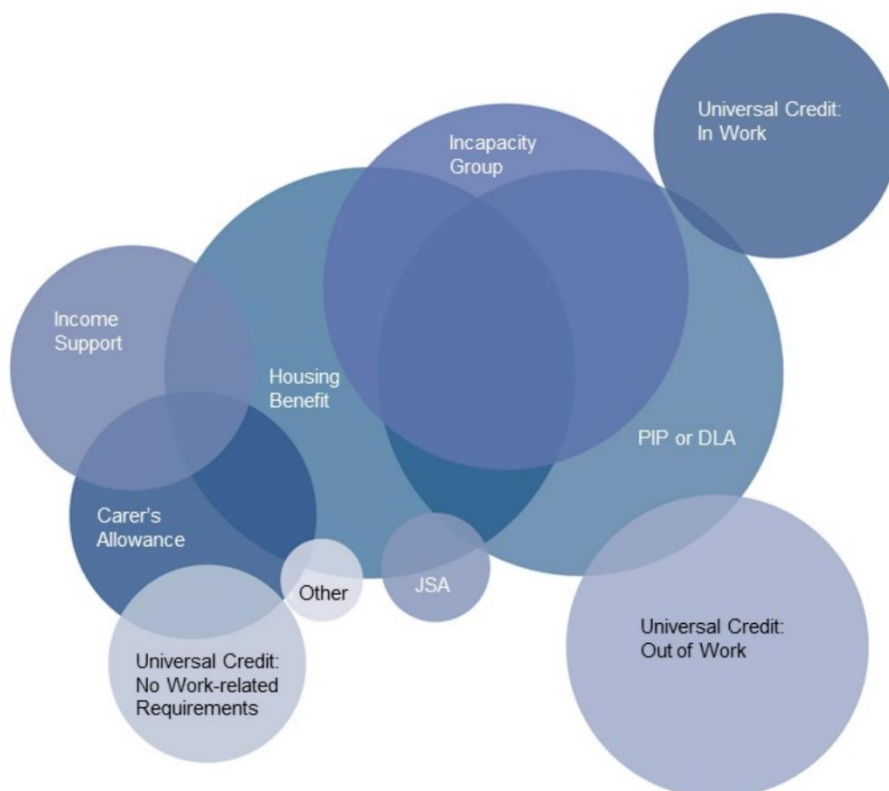
1.12 The statistics team is aware of the interest in these breakdowns and has been considering the feasibility of their publication. It told us its ability to publish additional breakdowns of characteristics is limited by what is provided in the source data and the accuracy of that information. As the DWP benefit statistics include key figures from the Universal Credit experimental statistics release, some users told us of their interest in more information on the characteristics of Universal Credit claimants. These included:

- Disability flags or self-reported disability
- Employment status of households
- Greater distinction in 'conditionality regime' to distinguish between those who are claiming Universal Credit for health reasons or childcare responsibility
- Number of claimants with a deduction for Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy

1.13 As part of the DWP benefit statistics publication, DWP produces experimental statistics on working-age benefit combinations, which illustrate possible and the most common combinations of benefits that are claimed. They are presented in a Euler diagram (reproduced below as Figure 1), which is an innovative way to show the complexity of the individual circumstances that can lead someone to be eligible for benefits. The background methodology note invites users to comment on the development and relevance of these statistics, which demonstrates the DWP's commitment to developing these experimental statistics.



Figure 1: Euler diagram of working-age benefit combinations statistics



An accessible breakdown of the figures used to create this diagram can be found at: [DWP Benefit statistics, August 2020](#)

- 1.14 The users we spoke to were positive about the development of the experiment benefit combinations statistics. However, they felt the main disadvantage is that Tax Credits and Child Benefit (which are administered by HMRC) are not included, which prevents them from seeing the overall spread of benefits (including credits). The combination statistics are produced by a separate team and it is good that the team is already undertaking work to develop them in line with user feedback to ensure any changes in the benefit policies are reflected in the statistics themselves. For example, Housing Benefit for working-age renters is being replaced by a housing element in Universal Credit for most claimants but in some circumstances both benefits can be claimed at the same time. Cleaning rules are applied to remove the Housing Benefit claim where claims overlap due to administrative or reporting lags, but these rules have recently been revised to ensure that genuine cases where Universal Credit and Housing Benefit are claimed concurrently are allowed to remain on the data.
- 1.15 As Universal Credit is designed to bring together most of legacy benefits, it has led to changes in the way individuals or households are classified and their circumstances defined. This creates issues for continuity in the time series of benefit caseloads, which DWP has worked hard to mitigate. From November 2020, the statistics team plans to publish experimental Housing Benefit flows datasets (both on-flow and off-flow data) on Stat-Xplore. This development is a promising first step in addressing user interest in longitudinal analysis of flows on and off benefits and will help users understand how individuals move through the welfare system. At the moment, users told us they are estimating this using data on claim duration. DWP has previously invested time in developing a flows methodology but

the statistics team told us it requires further development which it hasn't been adequately resourced to take forward in light of other priorities. The team needs to work with users to understand where the flows data sit within the list of development priorities.

#### Maximising the value of benefits data through collaboration

- 1.16 There is a natural cross-over in the work of DWP and HMRC given the link between tax and employment. We have seen DWP and HMRC take a joined-up approach in developing the [children in low-income families](#) publication which was released for the first time in March 2020. This release has replaced DWP's [Children in out-of-work benefit households](#) and HMRC's [Personal tax credits: Children in low-income families local measure releases](#). The new statistics provide a more coherent picture of children in low-income families by drawing together administrative data from both producers to provide insights on benefits, tax credit and employment incomes within families from which local area estimates of children in low-income families are published.
- 1.17 Taking a similar joined up approach to benefit statistics would improve the coherence of data concerning the welfare system and low-income households, as some benefits (Tax Credits and Child Benefit) are administered by HMRC and not DWP. The number of households claiming tax credits is an important proxy for child poverty but currently the Universal Credit household-level data cannot be matched to the tax credit data from HMRC. In the short term, a guidance note setting out what statistics are available and how they can be compared, would aid understanding.
- 1.18 The team responsible for the working-age benefit combinations statistics told us that it has been working with HMRC over the last two years to develop a joint publication which would bring together the Tax Credits and Child Benefit statistics together with those produced by DWP. Currently users need to look at statistics produced by both the DWP and HMRC to gain a complete picture of how many families and households are claiming benefits. There have been challenges with delivering this work due to the difference in timing of the data feeds that DWP and HMRC work with. However, they are working towards producing annual statistics on the numbers of individuals claiming common combinations of benefits which DWP and HMRC are responsible for, on a common snapshot date.

#### The timing of the statistics does not best meet user need

- 1.19 DWP has shown its ability to respond and adapt to changing demands and users welcomed the introduction of weekly management information on Universal Credit during the pandemic, which provided real-time insights into the extent to which the pandemic was affecting the labour market. The pandemic will also have affected those on legacy benefits and it is vital that the statistics continue to provide these necessary insights to inform service provision in a timely way over the coming months.
- 1.20 Several of the DWP benefit statistics are published with a 6-month lag and some users told us that it has been a hindrance during the pandemic as it has been difficult to identify communities most in need of support in a timely manner. While users understand that this lag allows for improved accuracy, some users felt that the benefits of more timely statistics would outweigh the potential loss in accuracy and enable services to be more responsive to shifts in the data. This reflects a general trend that we've observed through the pandemic – that users have found

more-timely but less-accurate data to be more valuable. The statistics team told us that it has previously experimented with publishing indicative Employee Support Allowance (ESA) estimates with a shorter lag but that it was only possible for the headline caseload and not breakdowns by characteristics of the claimant and claim. At the time, the feedback showed that without these breakdowns, the timelier estimates were not meeting users' needs.

- 1.21 The team's ability to produce more-timely estimates is currently restricted by the way it obtains cuts of data from the National Benefits Database, which relies on 6-week intervals to capture the right information for data on State Pension and Pension Credits. However, the data suppliers we spoke to told us that they provide monthly extracts for other legacy benefits as part of the statistics team's quality assurance process. DWP needs to reconsider and meet as best it can users' needs, which involves proactive engagement with users. The team should review the trade-off it is making between value (timeliness) and quality (accuracy of the figures) and explore options for making greater use of the monthly extracts.

#### DWP must proactively engage with known and potential users of the statistics

- 1.22 The statistics team has incorporated its contact details and opportunities for users to feedback on the statistics throughout the statistical products – such as the landing page, summary bulletin and Stat-Xplore pages. The team participates in wider stakeholder groups, such as the [Central and Local Information Partnership \(CLIP\)](#) and [StatsUserNet](#), to remain alert of emerging issues and inform stakeholders of planned developments. The team told us that it plans to extend its user groups to include more external stakeholders in the future to widen its user engagement. Users we spoke to were positive about the statistics team, saying it was approachable and noting the resource constraints that the team is under. Users from both local and devolved government told us that they had good direct engagement and were able to work in collaboration to achieve common goals.
- 1.23 Our user feedback found that users were mainly reaching out to the statistics team and that the statistics team does not reach out to users. We spoke to a few potential users of the statistics who had been unaware of the statistics and felt that DWP could do more to promote the statistics, to encourage their use. The statistics team told us it has a user list but the users we spoke to said they are not informed of issues or changes to the statistics directly and that they rely on notices on the landing page or StatsUserNet to become aware of them. The statistics team did, however, tell us that it plans to invite users to subscribe to a mailing list to create a mechanism for regular engagement and consultation of proposed developments.
- 1.24 The team does not charge for data requests and advises users to request information through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. Client Statistics, the wider team in which the DWP benefit statistics team sits, has a dedicated team to deal with a large volume of parliamentary questions (PQs) and FOIs that it receives. The statistics team told us it has regular communication with this team but that it does not currently take a strategic view in understanding what requests are being received and whether there are any common themes. With enhanced interest in the statistics during and immediately after the pandemic, the statistics team should develop its engagement with the team responsible for PQs and FOIs to remain alert to areas of emerging interest and consider how commonly requested data can be addressed as part of the ongoing development of the statistics.

Table 1: Value – Findings and Requirements

Findings	Examples	Requirement
<p>DWP should enhance accessibility of the statistics and supporting commentary.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Users said they would like the corresponding data tables to be linked to the benefit names listed on the statistics landing page, as it was difficult to find the data they needed.</li> <li>• Users who get the statistics directly through Stat-Xplore did not know the bi-annual summary bulletin existed.</li> </ul>	<p>1. To enhance accessibility of the statistics and summary bulletin, the statistics team should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Improve signposting to individual benefits data by adding hyperlinks to the list of benefits on the benefit statistics landing page.</li> <li>b) Include hyperlinks to the methodology and quality documents and the biannual statistical summary within Stat-Xplore data tables.</li> </ul>
<p>DWP does not help users understand the complexities of the welfare system, beyond national trends. There are several data gaps around who is claiming benefits, how they are claiming and their journey through the system.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Users said they would like to see more data on the characteristics of claimants.</li> <li>• There is limited scope to conduct longitudinal analysis of benefit claimants.</li> <li>• Users expressed an interest in thematic analyses, looking at a combination of benefits in relation to a specific group (for example disabled claimants)</li> </ul>	<p>2. To ensure that the statistics keep pace with the roll out of Universal Credit, and meet user needs, the statistics team should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Work closely with a range of users to understand their data needs and work with data suppliers to identify potential solutions to filling data gaps.</li> <li>b) Set out publicly plans for addressing users' need and provide a clear explanation where gaps cannot be addressed.</li> </ul>
<p>DWP is working with HMRC to enhance the coherence of benefit statistics through linked data but the work is not sufficiently prioritised.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Users must look at data produced by HMRC to get a complete picture of benefits being administered.</li> </ul>	<p>3. To enhance the coherence of benefit statistics DWP, working with HMRC, should ensure the work to develop the experimental benefit combinations statistics is given higher priority and is sufficiently resourced.</p>

Findings	Examples	Requirement
<p>The timeliness of the statistics does not meet the needs of users.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Users said that the statistics would be more valuable if timeliness was prioritised over accuracy, as a 6-month lag can reduce the relevance of the statistics for local service planning.</li> </ul>	<p>4. To ensure that the statistics best meet the needs of users, the team should work closely with users to reconsider the trade-off between the timeliness and accuracy of the data.</p>
<p>DWP does not use strong user engagement to inform all the decisions it makes with regards to the development and production of the statistics.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Users said that direct engagement with the statistics team would allow development plans to better meet their needs.</li> <li>• Potential users told us that the DWP could do more to promote the use of the statistics.</li> <li>• Prior knowledge of benefits is needed to understand the statistics and users have to put in the work to bring out the insight from the statistics.</li> </ul>	<p>5. To maximise use of the statistics and ensure their development is informed by users, the statistics team should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Embed regular communications (such as mailing lists or page alerts) to keep users updated of planned developments and to promote the statistics more widely.</li> <li>b) Form a more strategic relationship with the PQ and FOI team to identify new users and to discuss priorities for developments.</li> </ul>

# Chapter 2: Quality

## Introduction

- 2.1 Quality means that the statistics and numerical information represent the best available estimate of what they aim to measure at a particular point in time and are not materially misleading.
- 2.2 Quality is analytical in nature and is a product of the professional judgements made in the specification, collection, aggregation, processing, analysis, and dissemination of data.

## Findings

### The team has a good relationship with its data suppliers

- 2.3 The statistics team maintains a good working relationship with its data suppliers and engages with them regularly to resolve issues when they occur. For example, the data suppliers send the data extracts through in a timely manner and any queries are dealt with quickly.
- 2.4 The statistics team publishes a [Methodology Statement](#) and [Quality Statement](#), which were last updated in August 2020. These documents provide high-level information on the data production process, suitability of data sources, and provide some information on quality assurance processes.
- 2.5 The benefit statistics landing page informs users of recent changes to individual benefit datasets. For example, the statistics team has recently started using data from DWP's Customer Information System to verify and corroborate age and sex variables for several of the benefits which has helped reduce the number of unknown values for age and gender. This change provides additional assurance of the data by triangulating sources to reduce the level of unknown information.

### Clarity and accessibility of quality information needs to be improved

- 2.6 Information about the quality of benefit statistics is available on the main benefit statistics landing page on the gov.uk website making it accessible for users. As Stat-Xplore is the primary dissemination tool and the primary way in which users access the data, accessibility of quality information needs to be enhanced as there is no quality information provided in Stat-Xplore. Not linking the quality information from the data creates a risk that users are missing key updates that explain how the statistics are produced or that they are unaware of issues concerning the data. The statistics team told us it has been working with the Stat-Xplore team to investigate where statistical summaries and supporting information can be linked to alongside the datasets.
- 2.7 Some users highlighted to us a lack of understanding of technical terms and definitions which depend on prior knowledge of the statistics. Non-expert users would benefit from the terms being explained clearly in an accessible way to avoid misuse of the statistics. For example, some users questioned the difference between terms such as 'spells' and 'award length'. Clarifying definitions would particularly benefit users in understanding the differences in how some benefits are administered and why particular breakdowns may not be available – for example, benefits that are administered to households rather than individuals.

- 2.8 The benefit statistics represent a large volume of administrative data and DWP should ensure that it documents its understanding of quality issues of administrative data. The producer team uses SAS largely to assure the quality of the data and reviews its processes when it becomes aware of any policy changes or issues with the data. Eighteen months ago, the team introduced new logbooks using the [AQUA principles](#), which has added value – the additional checks have successfully identified issues with the data on occasions, which the team were able to quickly rectify.
- 2.9 The statistics team should apply our QAAD framework to help reassure itself and users of the level of quality at all stages of the production process. The team could collaborate with other teams across DWP that use these data sources to develop this quality documentation so different teams aren't producing slightly different QAAD documentation. Since speaking to the team about our Quality Assurance of Administrative Data (QAAD) it is encouraging to hear that it has decided to use the framework and build it into the role of the team's quality champions.

#### Source data and changes in data should be supported by a narrative

- 2.10 Users shared some specific examples with us of when it is difficult to make decisions based on the lack of supporting commentary and methodology notes. One example given was the divergence between Disability Living Allowance (DLA) statistics on the amount of money administered to DLA, and the actual annual spend data because of back-payments or over-payments, which isn't explained. Another example was the Carers Allowance caseload, which experienced a large dip but there is no supporting information explaining why this happened. This makes it difficult for users to understand the cause and impact of this change. To ensure the data and statistics are understood and used correctly, the DWP needs to explain the impact of changes and limitations on using the data.
- 2.11 When the caseload is multiplied by the average amount of benefit awarded all benefit statistics require an 'adjustment factor' in order to reconcile this with published expenditure. There is no supporting information explaining why this is the case and what causes this difference. This means the level of spending implied by the caseload and average award values does not match the financial data published elsewhere – such as DWP Accounts, Benefit Expenditure and Forecast tables, and by OBR. While benefit expenditure tables do not sit within the DWP Benefits Statistics remit, users told us that they would like an acknowledgement and explanation of this in the notes for each series so that users do not misinterpret the implied spending with actual spending on benefits.
- 2.12 Similarly, some users were unclear on the methodology used to produce the statistics which are based on a 5% sample (unlike the other benefits that are 100%) – maternity allowance and state pension. The methodology statement provides an overview of the source and limitations of the sample data, such as the sample being based only on cases which are 'live' on the system. However, it does not provide a clear explanation of how this sample is scaled up to produce the statistics. This information should be provided as part of the methodology documentation and alongside the statistics.

Table 2: Quality – Findings and Requirements

Findings	Examples	Requirement
<p>The quality and methodology information does not provide sufficient detail to support users in using the statistics appropriately.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some users were unclear of definitions and terms used in the statistics.</li> </ul>	<p>6. DWP should review its quality and methodology information to ensure that it is comprehensive and clear, to enable users to understand the terminology and appropriate use of the statistics.</p>
<p>DWP publishes some information on quality assurance but it does not detail its understanding of administrative data.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is little published quality assurance information available to users.</li> <li>To prevent misuse, users need an explanation about the data quality and impact on the statistics.</li> </ul>	<p>7. To reassure itself and users of the quality of all administrative data, DWP should apply our QAAD framework.</p>
<p>Changes to source data or unintuitive results are not explained in the commentary.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is a lack of information on the data sources used.</li> <li>There is a lack of information on the driver of fluctuations and dips in the timeseries.</li> </ul>	<p>8. The commentary and supporting information on data sources and methods needs to be embedded alongside the statistics, to help users use and interpret the statistics.</p>



# Chapter 3: Trustworthiness

## Introduction

- 3.1 Trustworthiness means that the statistics and other numerical information are produced free from vested interest, based on the best professional judgement of statisticians and other analysts.
- 3.2 Trustworthiness is a product of the people, systems and processes within organisations that enable and support the production of statistics and other numerical information.

## Findings

### The statistics and data are managed securely

- 3.3 The statistics are presented impartially and objectively. DWP also has a clear corrections and revisions policy on its website, which is transparent about the procedures in place to deal with errors. Given the administrative data from which the benefit statistics are sourced continues to undergo change, there have been several unscheduled revisions and corrections, which the statistics team has explained clearly on the landing page and within the Stat-Xplore data tables.
- 3.4 DWP has a range of policies in place that ensure strong data governance, including an information management policy and a policy statement on confidentiality and access. The statistics that are published on Stat-Xplore have random small values applied to the values to help prevent disclosure of the underlying data. DWP has a service level agreement, data access agreement or data sharing agreement in place with the devolved administrations, and these are reviewed on a regular basis.

### DWP needs to be transparent about its approach to development and engagement

- 3.5 The benefit statistics are covered by a [Customer Service and Engagement Strategy](#) for DWP statistics, which sets out the DWP's commitment to helping users and its approach to user engagement. The strategy states that the DWP will respond to every consultation providing a summary of all responses, the way forward which will be taken and the rationale for the decisions on the way forward. However, some users told us that they contributed to the consultation on future developments to Universal Credit experimental statistics in 2017 (which covered aspects of legacy benefits) and were unaware of the outcome of the consultation and the rationale for which developments were taken forward. DWP published a [release strategy](#) with the outcome of the consultation but it should signpost this to users more clearly on the statistics landing page and in the bulletin. The statistics team needs to improve the way it informs users of which developments are being taken forward and why.
- 3.6 As highlighted in the chapter on value, the team advises users to request information through FOI requests and some users told us that they were unclear about the reason for their request being rejected. Some users told us that their requests have mixed success with cost exemptions often being given as the reason for the request being rejected. These users also mentioned that on occasion, data used in response to PQs has not been available on Stat-Xplore or other means and is therefore not equally accessible to all. The PQ and FOI team told us that under Section 16 of the FOI legislation, it always offers guidance on how the request can

be amended to fall below the cost threshold. While the team does not have responsibility for DWP’s management information, it ensures that it engages with the relevant teams to provide that information in response to requests where users confuse management information used elsewhere with the official statistics. During the pandemic, DWP has updated its internal guidance to set out that unpublished information should be made publicly available if it will be used in public statements – therefore demonstrating their continued push for transparency in their approach to data. The statistics team, under the guidance of the Chief Statistician, must ensure that data are equally accessible to all.

Table 3: Trustworthiness – Findings and Requirements

Findings	Examples	Requirement
<p>DWP should enhance transparency around user engagement activities and its approach to responding to data requests.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Users who participated in the 2017 Universal Credit Consultation were unaware of its outcome and did not understand why some developments were not taken forward.</li> <li>• Disproportionate cost or cost exemption is given as a refusal to FOI and PQ requests for data.</li> </ul>	<p>9. To demonstrate transparency in user engagement, DWP should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Ensure users who participate in consultations, surveys or other engagement activities are informed of the outcome.</li> <li>b) Embed regular reviews of frequently requested data to feed into its development plans.</li> <li>c) Produce guidance for submitting data requests including information on the differences between management information and official statistics.</li> </ul>

# Annex 1: The Assessment Process

- A1.1 This Assessment was conducted from March to October 2020.
- A1.2 This report was prepared by the Office for Statistics Regulation and approved by the Regulation Committee on behalf of the Board of the UK Statistics Authority, based on the advice of the Director General for Regulation.
- A1.3 The regulatory team – Elise Baseley and Catherine Bremner – agreed the scope of and timetable for this assessment with representatives of DWP in March 2020. Documentary evidence for the assessment was provided by the DWP statistics team between June and August 2020.
- A1.4 The regulatory team discussed and met with the statistics team in September 2020 to review compliance with the Code of Practice for Statistics, taking account of the evidence provided and research performed.
- A1.5 A key part of the assessment was talking to people who use the statistics, to help us to understand the current value of the statistics, and where there is the potential to increase this. We approached known and potential users of these statistics and conducted six interviews and received nine submissions of written feedback. These users worked within DWP, local and devolved governments, and think tanks or campaign groups concerned with benefits. Our engagement gave us some insight into the extent to which the statistics meet different users' needs and to which users feel that the statistics' producers engage with them.

## Key Documents

- A1.6 Evidence provided by the statistics team includes:
- Benefit statistics data tables, Stat-Xplore tables and biannual summary
  - Benefit statistics – background methodology information
  - Statistics team organisational chart
  - DWP User engagement strategy
  - Revisions and corrections policies
  - Disclosure controls note
  - Quality assurance toolkit
  - Service level agreement documentation
  - Staff recruitment and training guidance

