

# Child Support Agency National Statistics

A consultation on future plans

A National Statistics consultation paper

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# **Child Support Agency National Statistics – a consultation on future plans**

## **Summary**

Following a period of quality assurance work involving Departmental statisticians and the Child Support Agency (CSA), DWP are now in a position to begin formal publication of statistics relating to cases on the new CSA computer system. Although the initial range of statistics is somewhat limited, this represents a welcome step forward for the Agency.

On 27 October 2005, DWP released CSA National Statistics across both schemes and computer systems for the first time. These statistics relate to the end of September 2005. Publication will continue on an ongoing quarterly basis. In this way, up to date CSA National Statistics will be released on a frequent basis.

This paper marks the beginning of a twelve week consultation period. During this time, the publication of quarterly statistics will continue. Consultation replies will be gathered by Departmental Statisticians and a response will be released in Spring 2006.

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## Section 1 Introduction

The Child Support Agency (CSA) was launched on 5th April 1993, as an executive agency of the then Department of Social Security. The CSA was given the role of implementing the 1991 Child Support Act and subsequent legislation with the purpose of ensuring that parents who live apart, both fulfil their responsibility to maintain their children whenever they can afford to do so. The Agency is responsible for tracing non-resident parents (NRPs), calculating how much they should pay and, if required, collecting and enforcing payments.

Since 3 March 2003, all new cases have been calculated under a new scheme on a new computer system. This new computer system also handles old scheme cases where one of the parents is also part of a new scheme case.

Implementation of the new scheme needed new computer and telephony systems. The telephony system links calls to and from clients direct to their records on the child support computer system. Preparations were made on the basis that the systems would meet the Agency's requirements. When they did not, this impacted negatively on performance and meant the focus had to be on working with the IT supplier to fix the technical problems and support staff in their efforts to shield clients from the worst impact. During 2004-05 significant problems remained with the new computer and telephony systems which slowed Agency progress towards recovery.

Similar IT difficulties have occurred with the new management information computer system. For some time now, this has meant robust information on new scheme cases is unavailable. However, since January 2005, the Agency have been working with the Department's Information Directorate (responsible for National Statistics and Business Information) to revise and quality assure statistical data. Since then much progress has been made.

The Child Support Agency Quarterly Summary of Statistics (QSS) is the National Statistics publication<sup>1</sup> about the Agency's work. The old scheme tables are drawn from a 5% sample of child support cases in Great Britain from the Child Support Computer System. Almost all the tables relate to old scheme cases from the Child Support Computer System.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on National Statistics and associated protocols, see: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/default.asp>

Now that a range of quality assured statistics are available from the new computer system, we are in a position to start publishing details under the National Statistics banner. For the short term, we have chosen a number of key tabulations (across both computer systems) which can be published on the DWP internet site<sup>2</sup> regularly, starting from October 2005. As this represents a major change to CSA National Statistics, the Department is opening a consultation about the contents of the publication. This is in line with National Statistics protocols. The Department will issue a response document to the consultation. Then in the medium to long term, the CSA National Statistics will develop in line with the consultation conclusions, as far as possible.

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/csa.asp>

## **Section 2 Data sources**

CSA National Statistics are produced from two complimentary data extracts. One extract covers cases on the old computer system (therefore on the old scheme). The other covers cases on the new computer system. This contains a mixture of new scheme cases and old scheme cases. All old scheme cases on the new computer system have a link to a new scheme case. The data extracts can be described as follows:

- Selected information for a 5% sample of cases drawn from the Child Support Computer System. This data has historically been used for National Statistics publication. As the production of the data set exerts a strain on the live Child Support Computer System, it is not possible to run it on a larger sample of cases. For publication purposes, the numbers obtained from this source are grossed up by a factor of 20 to produce estimates for the total population of CSA cases. As the number of cases on the old system reduces, this extract will reduce in importance. When cases are migrated from the old system to the new system, this 5% sample extract will cease.
- A 100% download of selected sections of the new computer system (CS2). A complete list of all data updates (e.g. changes made by caseworkers to cases or batch data updates) on the new computer system are available on a daily basis. Therefore, a range of breakdowns, covering the breadth of CSA responsibility are available on the usual quarterly basis.

### **Quality Assurance**

CSA has been working closely with Departmental Statisticians to produce a set of methodologies for producing robust statistics and business information for a small range of key topics. Each methodology has been tested against the live system to ensure that outcomes reported in the statistics relate to real life events. Furthermore, a valid sample of cases has been independently verified as correct.

### **Sampling Error**

Statistics published from 5% sample data are subject to sampling error whereby estimates of the true population value (obtained by rating up by a factor of 20) may, by chance, be slightly lower or slightly higher than the true population value. An indication of the effect of these sampling errors can be gained from Table 2.1. Column (a) shows the estimated value. The true population value will most probably lie somewhere in a range around the value estimated by the sample data. This range is shown in Column (b). Usually this interval is approximately symmetric so, for example, an estimate of 10,000 is really showing that the true value probably

lies in the range 9,100 to 10,900. Column (c) demonstrates that as estimated values decrease (e.g. analysis of small sub-groups) then the width of this range increases as a proportion of the estimated value.

**Table 2.1: Impact of sampling error on estimated values produced from 5% sample data**

(a)	(b)	(c)
Estimated value	95% confidence interval (+ or -)	Confidence interval as % of estimate (+ or -)
1,000	270	27
2,000	382	19
5,000	604	12
10,000	854	9
50,000	1,910	4
100,000	2,702	3
500,000	6,041	1
1,000,000	8,543	1

Because the impact of sampling error is most marked for small groups it will, for example, prevent the release of statistics for small geographical areas produced from 5% sample data. Consequently Parliamentary Constituency is the smallest area currently published from the 5% sample data sources.

However, figures from the CS2 source yield the true population value without sampling error. This enables figures from smaller regions to be compared and the production of accurate figures for small groups.

**Disclosure control**

Because the 100% CSA data from the new computer system is by definition free from sampling error, it is possible to produce exact statistics for small groups of claimants. Typically this might be at ward level geography. However this raises issues of disclosure – the possibility that an individual can be recognised by themselves or others from the attributes captured in the data.

It is DWP policy (in accordance with the Data Protection Act) to only publish counts of the benefit caseloads at levels that are deemed to be secure, and do not allow an individual claimant or their family to be identified, or carry an unacceptable degree of risk that they could be identified. To protect the confidentiality of claimants, figures in publications (and other analyses) will be rounded.

## Section 3 New Opportunities

### New Publication Scheme

The new CSA publication brings together information from new and old schemes for the first time, something which has not previously been possible due to issues with the robustness of new scheme statistics. The report provides basic high level information on CSA performance, and incorporates elements of the current QSS that can be easily replicated across both schemes. For example, tables on new scheme applications and clearances; speed of clearance on the new scheme; case and cash compliance across both schemes; arrears and accuracy targets; PSA target etc.

The first release of these tables, on 27 October 2005, released CSA statistics up to September 2005. This is significantly more up to date than under the previous publication scheme. This report also contains a short back series. DWP will update this publication, via an internet only release, on a quarterly basis. The release dates will be pre-announced publicly. In the first few releases, the back series will be extended to the beginning of the new system (March 2003). Statistics on the CSA will continue to be included in the quarterly DWP Statistical Summary<sup>3</sup>, which is issued as a press notice.

### Current Breakdowns

The following breakdowns are included in the October 2005 release:

- Caseload by scheme
- New application intake, clearances and work on hand
- Cohorts of new scheme applications by month of application and whether or not cleared in certain time bands
- Age of new scheme applications at clearance by month of clearance
- Age of uncleared new scheme applications (scheme to date)
- Case Compliance Status
- Collection Service Rolling Last Quarter Case Compliance for 'Live' and Fully Assessed Cases on CSCS and CS2
- Of compliant cases (rolling last quarter), % who are fully complaint and amount of maintenance received as % of maintenance charged
- Live and assessed/calculated caseload with maintenance liability by Method of Collection
- Collection Service Rolling Last Quarter Case Compliance (%) by Method of Collection

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<sup>3</sup> See [http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/statistical\\_summaries.asp](http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/statistical_summaries.asp) for past issues of the DWP Statistical Summary

- Cash Compliance levels (regular payment accounts and arrears accounts) for 'Live' and Fully Assessed Cases on CSCS and CS2
- Arrears target for 'Live' and Fully Assessed Cases on CSCS and CS2
- PSA target - Percentage of Parent With Care(PWC) on Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance (income based) with an assessment/calculation who are currently receiving maintenance
- New Scheme number and amount of Child Maintenance Premiums
- Weekly Maintenance liability by scheme (percentage of cases)

Many of these tables have been produced from the newly available quality assured CSA data. Others have been produced from other data that whilst have not been quality assured to the same degree, are recognised in DWP as being “fit for purpose” for National Statistics.

### **Future Publications**

Further additions will be made to the CSA National Statistics publication in the quarters ahead. As far as possible, this will be guided by the responses to this consultation. However, some requests from the consultation may not be possible until the necessary development and quality assurance work has been undertaken.

### **Dissemination - Tabulation tool**

A major change to the principal means by which DWP statistics are published, began in October 2005. For the past few years, statistics have been primarily published as Excel tables which may be downloaded from the Internet, though a small number of PDF publications are also produced. Now the principal means of dissemination (for benefit and welfare to work statistics) is a tabulation tool, accessible from the DWP's website. Users both within and outside the DWP are now able to select variables for cross tabulation, and so produce analyses tailored to their own requirements.

Tables obtained from the Tabulation Tool are in html format and are accessible within a web browser. They may be printed out or downloaded for use in a spreadsheet program. DWP will continue to provide an 'ad hoc' analysis service to provide statistics which cannot be obtained from the Tabulation Tool, although its resources are limited. Printed tables are available at cost to those with no Internet access.

At present, this tabulation tool is not available for CSA statistics. However if it appears that there is a demand for this service, then it would be possible to deliver information in this way in the medium term.

## Section 4 Consultation

In response to this consultation, DWP invites comments on any area of CSA statistics. In particular:

- Which tables, issued in the new publication, are most useful? Would you like to make any changes to those tables?
- What important areas of CSA work and performance are not represented in these statistics?
- Would you like information to be made available using the DWP Tabulation Tool<sup>4</sup>?

Please feel free to comment on other areas of this consultation too.

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<sup>4</sup> You can use the Tabulation Tool for benefit statistics at <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/tabtool.asp>

## Section 5 Next steps

The CSA National Statistics consultation will run for 12 weeks, until 12 January 2006. DWP Statisticians will collate all the replies to the consultation and issue a response in Spring 2006.

This consultation is open to everyone – CSA clients, current users of the statistics, members of the public, MPs, academics and any other interested parties. We want to develop these statistics according to the views and needs of users..

The contact point for further information and comments is:

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Please indicate the name or type of organisation for which you work.

If you wish your comments to be treated as confidential, please indicate this in your reply.