

Future plans for the Child Support Agency National Statistics: Results of the external consultation and the DWP's response.

Introduction

On 27 October 2005, DWP launched an external consultation in relation to the publication of statistics relating to cases on the new CSA computer system. The consultation document 'Child Support Agency National Statistics: A consultation on future plans' may be viewed at:

http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/child_support/CSA_External_consultation.pdf

The consultation was open to everyone, although key stakeholders were informed of it by e-mail. The organisations informed were:

- One Parent Families
- National Citizens Advice Bureau
- Child Poverty Action Group
- Resolution
- Fathers Direct

The closing date for responses was 12 January 2006. In all, four respondents provided written submissions. DWP thanks those who have participated in the consultation.

Responses to the consultation

The responses to the consultation were similar in their suggestions and criticisms. The main thrust of the responses was:

- Many of the tables in the revised Quarterly Summary of Statistics were acknowledged as useful.
- Users made a number of detailed requests regarding better footnotes and table titles.
- Users made requests for additional tables or breakdowns.

Summary DWP response

The full text of the response is at Annex A. This report of the consultation response is structured into three sections, based around the questions in the consultation document.

As mentioned in the original consultation document, until recently, the Agency's Information Technology difficulties have meant robust information regarding cases on the new computer system has been 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.

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 by DWP Internal Audit as correct. Information on these topics is now "fit for purpose" and can be released under the National Statistics banner.

National Statistics for the whole Agency (i.e. across both systems) were published in October 2005; and then quarterly thereafter.

During the next nine to twelve months, DWP will publish further statistics to meet the vast majority of customer requirements. The quality assurance work to deliver many these requests is still ongoing. Therefore, Annex A provides an estimate of the likely delivery date.

The June 2006 QSS will contain figures relating to June 2006. It will be released at the end of July 2006. The September 2006 QSS will contain figures relating to September 2006. It will be released at the end of October 2006. The exact dates will be announced via the ONS National Statistics update service ahead of publication. DWP releases from June 2006 onwards can be accessed at:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/ReleaseCalendar/findreleases.asp?releasetitle=&releaseorganisation=20&releasetheme=&daterange=4&sday=1&smonth=6&year=2006&showHits=10&sortOrder=0>

Conclusion

The results of this consultation set out the CSA National Statistics work programme for the next nine to twelve months or so. At the end of this time, the DWP will have published robust National Statistics for the vast majority of key areas requested by consultation respondents. The small number of areas that cannot be addressed within the twelve month time scale will remain on our work programme and be tackled in the future.

*Department for Work and Pensions
May 2006*

Annex A

Which tables, issued in the new publication, are most useful? Would you like to make any changes to those tables?

Positive aspects

Comment
The information on the number of cleared cases is very useful and shows the difference between cases closed due to CSA intervention and those closed before the CSA has had a chance to calculate the level of maintenance.
The timeliness tables provided a better picture of the Agency's performance over time.
The compliance tables enable people to see if the CSA is effective in actually getting money from NRPs.
The table on Child Maintenance Premiums is important as it shows exactly how many families are benefiting.
It is useful to have all of the information given as it provides a greater depth of information than was previously available on CS2.

Definitional issues and clarification

Issue	DWP response
Some tables in the new QSS are unclear: e.g. What is in the 'Total' column in each table. What is the methodology for the PSA target regarding the proportion of PWCs on either JSA (IB) or IS receiving maintenance?	Some of these issues were addressed in the December QSS. This can be found at: http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/child_support/csa_quarterly_dec05.asp Others have been addressed in the March QSS. This can be found at: http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/child_support/csa_quarterly_mar06.asp

<p>What is the difference between Nil liability and Nil assessments? Can this be made clear on the relevant tables.</p>	<p>This has already been addressed in the March QSS through adding a footnote to the relevant tables..</p> <p>This can be found at: http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/child_support/csa_quarterly_mar06.asp</p> <p>Cases classed as nil assessed or nil calculated in table 14 comprise all cases in which the regular maintenance assessment at the end of the reporting period was zero.</p> <p>In certain circumstances, it is possible for cases with a nil assessment or calculation to have had maintenance due via the collection service in the previous quarter. For example, where a cases has become nil assessed during the reporting period, or if the regular assessment is zero, but arrears are outstanding.</p> <p>Cases classed as having a nil liability in tables 1 and 6, comprise only those cases with a nil calculation/assessment in which no maintenance (regular or arrears) was due via the collection service in the previous quarter.</p>
<p>Is there any evidence that NRPs in cases which are Maintenance Direct do actually make payments?</p>	<p>As the payment arrangement is direct between the NRP and PWC, we do not have any direct evidence that a payment is being made. Of course, in cases where the NRP is not paying the correct maintenance, the PWC has the option of returning to the collection service.</p> <p>This issue is being explored further in a piece of qualitative research which is currently ongoing, and due to report in Autumn 2007.</p>

What important areas of CSA work and performance are not represented in these statistics?

Additional tables and information

Requested information	DWP response
Tables on Change of Circumstances.	This work is currently under development. We hope it will be included in the September QSS.
Breakdowns of reasons for closure.	This work is planned for the next stage of the development of robust management information and statistics. We hope it will be included in the September QSS.
Breakdowns by NRP employment status, NRP income bands, CSA assessment bands, PWC benefit status.	Work on these items is planned for the next stage of the development of robust management information and statistics. After quality assurance work we expect it to be included in the September QSS.
Administration costs.	<p>It is planned to include details of both administrative costs and the amount of maintenance collected in the QSS following the publication of the 2005/6 CSA Annual Report and accounts later this year.</p> <p>This information will be included in the QSS in either June or September 2006, depending on the timetable for the publication of the Annual report and Accounts</p>
Age of New Scheme applications.	<p>This was included in the December QSS. This can be found at: http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/child_support/csa_quarterly_dec05.asp</p>

Breakdown of the uncleared applications by stage in the application process	This will be included in the June QSS.
Clerical cases.	Basic information on volumes was included in the March QSS. This can be found at: http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/child_support/csa_quarterly_mar06.asp
Cases which are awaiting action because the NRP cannot be traced.	This is an area in which management information is extremely limited. We recognise the importance of having robust statistics in this area, an issue which is being addressed by the Agency in the redesign of various business processes as part of the Operational Improvement plan. Unfortunately, we are not currently able to give any firm commitment as to when this information will be available.
An extended PSA target time series.	A time series to November 1997, the earliest date at which we can report against this target. This has been included in the March QSS. This can be found at: http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/child_support/csa_quarterly_mar06.asp
Staffing levels, sickness, and staff turnover.	Statistics on staffing levels and sickness absence have been included in the March QSS. Figures for turnover will be in the June QSS. The March QSS can be found at: http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/child_support/csa_quarterly_mar06.asp
Information at parliamentary constituency level.	This will be included in the June QSS.
Outstanding debt.	Information on outstanding debt will be included in the June QSS.

Enforcement	Volumes of deductions from earnings orders are already report in the QSS. Other information on legal enforcement action was included in the March QSS. The March QSS can be found at: http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/child_support/csa_quarterly_mar06.asp
The number of NRPs for which the CSA does not hold address details.	It is not planned to include this information in the QSS on a routine basis, but it the Agency should be in a position to provide a robust answer to this question by July 2006.
Compensation	We will investigate what information in this area is readily available, with a view to including it in the June QSS.
The accuracy of decision making.	This was included in the December QSS. See http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/child_support/csa_quarterly_dec05.asp
Migrated and converted cases.	This will be included in the June QSS.
Full/ partial/ nil compliance as a percentage of all live and fully assessed cases.	<p>Information on the percentage of compliant cases that paid in full or in part, and also maintenance paid by compliant cases as a proportion of the amount due is included in tables 8.1 and 8.2 of the QSS.</p> <p>These tables show, that whilst only around 60% of cases in which maintenance is due were recorded as paying in full, they paid, on average, 90% of the amount due.</p> <p>As the above figures seem at first glance somewhat counter intuitive, further investigation was carried out which revealed that, whilst many cases are recorded on the system as not having paid in full over a particular reporting period, this is because maintenance was being received in a different month to that in which it was charged. Many such cases were to all intents and purposes fully compliant, with a lag between the date on which maintenance was charged and received. This a reporting issue, which particularly affects cases subject to a deduction of earnings order, in which the employer has up until</p>

	<p>the 19th of the month following that in which the charge was made to comply, and deductions from benefit, in which monthly entitlement varies according to the number of weeks in the month.</p> <p>Given the above, it was felt to be misleading to include a table that gave the percentage of all cases with an assessment or calculation that paid in full, as the information presented in both tables 8.1 and 8.2 is required to give the full picture in this area.</p>
<p>Compliance tables which distinguish between regular and arrears accounts.</p>	<p>We will carry out analysis to investigate the extent to which breaking down compliance in this way would add value to information currently presented in the QSS with a view to inclusion in the September QSS if it is felt appropriate to do so.</p>
<p>All four respondents asked for more characteristic breakdowns to be included, similar to those which were previously published for the Old Scheme data. For example: gender, age, distance living apart, repartnering, qualifying children).</p>	<p>Some of this type of information, such as gender will be available in the June QSS, with further breakdowns, such as family circumstance, in the September QSS. In Winter 2006/07, the Tabulation Tool will give users interactive access to a range of breakdowns.</p> <p>Some of the previous tables will never be reproduced as the information contained in them is no longer relevant for the maintenance assessment under the New rules. For example, some information regarding re-partnering is no longer available.</p>

General comments

Comment	DWP response
<p>Almost 3 years have passed since the introduction of the new child support scheme. The amount of statistics is still limited.</p>	<p>The lack of statistics regarding the Child Support system is being addressed through this consultation. Since January 2005, 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. The range of quality information is now expanding. It is being published under the National Statistics banner as it becomes available.</p>
<p>DWP changed the QSS and start the consultation at the same time. It might have been better for this consultation to have preceded such a change.</p>	<p>The old QSS focussed on case processed on the old computer system only.</p> <p>Robust information from the new CSA computer system came available in time for the September 2005 QSS. Given the incompleteness of the old QSS we made statistics on the whole Agency (across both systems) the priority.</p> <p>We always welcome comments on how to improve the National Statistics. As a result of this consultation have taken on board number of suggestions.</p>

Would you like information to be made available using the DWP Tabulation Tool ?

Comment	DWP response
<p>The tabulation tool will be a useful vehicle for the CSA data, if data on client characteristics are included.</p>	<p>The tabulation tool for CSA data will become available in winter 2006/2007 and will enable ad hoc breakdowns to supplement the basic information given in the published tables. These breakdowns will include client characteristics.</p>

Annex B – Abbreviations

DWP – Department for Work and Pensions

CSA - Child Support Agency

PWC – Parent with Care

NRP – Non-Resident Parent

QSS – Quarterly Summary of Statistics

CS2 – The new Child Support computer system

JSA (IB) – Jobseeker's Allowance (Income Based)

IS – Income Support