Income Support Statistics Quality Review 2001

This is the first review to be completed under the National Statistics Social and Welfare theme.

Following consultation with users and an in-depth analysis of the processes involved in producing the statistics, it was felt that the statistics are of high quality and meet most of the requirements of users. A number of recommendations for improvements have nevertheless been agreed and will be acted upon.

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National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure that they meet customer needs. They are produced free from any political interference.

NATIONAL STATISTICS QUALITY REVIEWS

The White Paper *Building Trust in Statistics* set out the framework for quality assuring National Statistics. A key component of the framework is:

“a programme of thorough reviews of key outputs, at least every five years, with the involvement of methodologists and outside expertise, as appropriate.”

This programme of quality reviews is an important way of ensuring that National Statistics and other official statistical outputs are fit for purpose and that we are continuing to improve the quality and value of these outputs.

Further advice and information on the review programme is available from the Review Programme Management Team.

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Report to the National Statistician

Introduction

The Income Support (IS) Statistics publication presents data from the IS Quarterly Statistical Enquiry (QSE) which covers claimants in Great Britain. Its main purpose is to:

- give summary analyses which show the key features of the IS population and how they compare with earlier periods;
- provide a basic summary of the main features of IS and how they affect numbers of recipients and amounts of benefit in payment;
- provide a menu of the types of analysis which can be produced from the QSE data set.

IS is intended to help people on low incomes who do not have to be available for employment. It can normally be claimed by people who are aged 16 or over; work under 16 hours (and/or with a partner working under 24 hours); are not required to be available for full-time employment; and have insufficient income to meet prescribed needs. The main types of people who receive it are pensioners, lone parents, the long- and short-term sick, people with disabilities, and other special groups.

The amount of IS which a claimant can receive depends mainly upon their age; whether they have a partner and dependent children; whether they have special needs such as a disability or caring responsibilities (known as premia); and whether they have liabilities for certain types of housing costs, such as mortgage interest payments. The maximum amount that a claimant can receive is reduced by income from other sources, including benefit payments.

The IS QSE is a 5% sample of all IS claimants which is conducted each year on the last weekend in February, May, August and November.

Scope of the review

The review aimed:

- to discover whether the outputs meet the requirements of users;
- to determine whether the methods employed are appropriate and in line with best practice; and
- to produce an action plan that addresses shortcomings in the outputs and potential improvements.

The review was overseen by a project board with much of the investigative work carried out by a review team. The project board's responsibilities were to:

- oversee and advise on the work programme for quality reviews of National Statistics produced by DWP;
- advise the review team on the emerging review findings;
- approve the review team's report; and
- prepare an annual report to the National Statistician with recommendations for a quality improvement programme based on the reviews.

The project board comprised:

- Fred Johnson, DWP (chair)
- Jason Bradbury, DWP
- Martin McGill, DWP
- Mike Noble, Oxford University
- Caroline Bustard, ONS (correspondence member)

Mike Noble provided an impartial, non-DWP assessment of the quality of the processes involved.

The review team comprised:

- Katie Dodd, DWP
- Carol Jenkinson, DWP
- Judith Ridley, DWP

Their responsibilities were to:

- undertake an end-to-end scrutiny of the production process for the three projects under review;
- highlight areas where improvements should be made or where further investigation is required;
- draw up an action plan for the project board's consideration; and
- contribute to the evaluation of completed questionnaires.

The review programme team at the Office for National Statistics were kept informed of progress and provided advice and guidance. Further detail on the review's organisation can be found in the Project Initiation Document (PID) at Annex A. (Note that the review was set up to look at three projects concurrently: Income Support Statistics, Jobseeker's Allowance Statistics and Child Support Agency Statistics; the PID reflects this.)

Consultation on customers' needs

The user consultation was underpinned by a questionnaire that was sent to around 200 users of Jobseeker's Allowance, Income Support and Child Support Agency statistics. There were replies from 49; apart from DSS users these included:

- University of Edinburgh
- Lancashire County Council
- Employment Service
- National Council for One Parent Families
- University of York
- Department for Education and Employment
- Welfare Rights Service
- Scottish Executive
- Employment Service
- Derby City Council
- House of Commons
- Northern Ireland Department for Social Development
- Department of Health
- London School of Economics
- University of Glasgow
- University of Southampton
- Council of Mortgage Lenders

Six users who had expressed an interest in being interviewed were seen in person. The questionnaire sought opinion on:

- presentation;
- sufficiency of detail;
- accuracy;
- frequency and timeliness;
- accessibility; and
- user support.

Main findings

Fifty-nine per cent of users felt that the statistics were **well-presented** and only 3% felt they were poorly presented.

Thirty-two per cent of users expressed a desire for **additional figures** not currently included.

Too little detail was complained of amongst 22% of users.

Nobody complained of too much detail.

Ninety per cent of users rated **accuracy** as either very or fairly reliable.

The explanation of **sampling error** was considered 'fairly easy' to understand by 39% of users, with 36% finding it 'very easy'. 11% considered it 'not very easy', but nobody found it 'difficult'.

Twenty-four per cent of users had had difficulty **reconciling** the statistics with those from other sources.

Nineteen per cent of users required the statistics **monthly rather than quarterly**.

Timeliness was a concern for 31% of users. These respondents felt that the statistics were not published sufficiently soon after their reference date.

The most common means of receiving or accessing the statistics was paper (49%). Twenty-seven per cent received the statistics by email and 22% via either the internet or the DWP intranet.

Sixty per cent of external users were aware that the statistics were available on the **internet**.

Thirty per cent of users needed to **cut and paste** the statistics into other documents.

While no users experienced 'great difficulty' obtaining answers to **queries**, 17% had had 'occasional difficulty'.

A complete listing of users' comments can be found at Annex C.

Methodology review

Examination of the production process involved detailed scrutiny of such issues as:

- the quality of incoming data and what was done to improve that quality;
- the cost-effectiveness of these improvements;
- the documentation available;
- whether there was back-up for key staff; and
- the robustness and timeliness of final figures.

The full process description can be found at Annex D.

Response to consultation and methodology review

User consultation and the review of methodology resulted in the following recommendations:

Note: *No mention is made of future changes that will be required in response to changes in government policy, for example the introduction of the Integrated Child Credit and other welfare modernisation initiatives. However, each represents areas where development or investigation could be consider following consultation with users.*

Recommendation 1:

A web site has been established on the Intranet where publications and tables are made available. Raising the profile of both the electronic copies and the web site will improve dissemination.
Users should be made aware that, on request, ad hoc analysis can be produced from the Income Support QSE data.
The existence of the web site and availability of ad hoc analyses could be highlighted by means of a one-off 'flyer' contained within one issue of the publication. It would raise awareness of what was available and where at a relatively low cost. Future publications should include the web site address and contact details for ad hoc analysis as standard.

SHORT TERM This could be included with effect from the next QSE May 2001 (planned publication date 23 August 2001). Any user groups set up should also include these items for discussion.

Recommendation 2:

Training manuals are reviewed regularly and are largely effective. Routine tasks can be carried out purely based on the training documentation. Some more complex tasks do require further guidance from the trainer/colleagues.
Training manuals could be reviewed and standards set as to how complex tasks could be comprehensively covered. However, training manuals are usually updated on a regular basis consistent with any change in processes. A more efficient method would be to review those documents specifically relating to the more complex of the tasks.

SHORT TERM Specific complex tasks where instructions do not suffice should be addressed and instructions simplified.

Recommendation 3:

The Income Support figures published at present are known to underestimate the total population of claimants by around 30,000. This is due to the time it takes for a claim to be input onto the Income Support computer system. Although we mention this undercount in the IS QSE, no attempt is currently made to gross for these cases. Forecasters build an addition into their forecasting models to allow for the difference.
Consideration should be given to the systematic undercount as a key element of our future work plan. This would require further investigation in order to understand the undercount (and its biases) in detail. The undercount is mentioned in the publication but not in any detail.

LONG TERM This will be considered in our future work plan.
SHORT TERM Clarification of the undercount will be included in future QSE publications.

Recommendation 4:

The definition of dependants includes those aged 16 –19 who are still in full-time education. However, lone parents cease to be 'lone parents' in policy terms when their youngest child turns 16. This means that we are including a number of cases (approximately 20,000, or 2% of the total) whose youngest child is aged 16-19 in the lone parent group, when actually they now qualify for IS for other reasons, e.g. short-term sickness/carer. The series as it stands goes back as long as the QSE but, following the identification of this mis-match, a review should be considered of the definition in consultation with users.

The data now identify cases where the youngest child of a lone parent is aged between 16 and 19 and the relevant tables in the QSE are noted with the fact that the lone parent category contains these cases. Ad hoc analysis is available for those users requiring figures for lone parents with dependants aged under 16. To revise this methodology would mean extensive amendment to historical data and back series tables within the publication. User consultation would need to take place to ascertain if the benefit of the amendments would outweigh the demand on staff resources.

LONG TERM Determine user demand for this change.

Recommendation 5:

There have been internal expressions of interest for information on IS terminations. As the Income Support QSE only relates to cases live and in payment on the extract date these requests have been met through the merging of successive quarters' data. This process understates the true number of

terminations since cases that come on and go off benefit between the two quarters cannot be included.
To begin collection of IS termination information would require a re-design of the existing data extract, which is a costly exercise. Consulting potential users and the extract providers would be essential to establish whether or not the usage and value of such data would outweigh the costs of extract development and processing.

LONG TERM Determine user demand.

Recommendation 6:

Clerical cases have been reducing in number since May 2000 since the set-up of a team whose specific aim is to deal with corrupt cases (i.e. cases that cannot be maintained on the Income Support computer system and have to be maintained clerically). When this team requests certain case types from benefit offices the payment books can be recalled and the cases re-built on the Income Support computer system.
Recent checks with benefit offices have found that this exercise has been run once and is currently being run for a second time. When completed it is likely that it will be run again to bring the clerical case count to a minimum. It is also presumed that the exercise will be run in future to keep the number of clerical cases to a minimum.

LONG TERM While this exercise is ongoing any review of the clerical procedures would be unlikely to be cost-effective.

Should a review result in the recommendation of the continued collection of IS clerical figures, an additional possibility is the further utilisation of 'Scanfile' software. A third party add-on to this software called 'TELEform' would enable documents scanned on the system to be 'read' using optical character recognition (OCR). Initial indications show that, implemented branch-wide, this could be more effective than current clerical procedures. It is, however, in the very early stages of assessment.

Recommendation 7:

The project board believed that there was a need for a group of external users with whom there was regular contact and who could rapidly be canvassed for views. Such a group would be useful for all departments in the Social and Welfare Theme Working Group (TWG) in helping to improve the relevance of their data.

The main users of departmental data are the policy analysts within the departments, but there are others who will look at issues in a different way. Their needs can easily be met if good channels of communication are in place. The opportunity to explain the problems in data collection and the constraints within which government statistics operate would also be valuable.

Bringing ‘outsiders’ into the discussion may help us to understand the gaps in our information and, in some cases, fill gaps with information from other sources. The perspective of non-UK specialists in the field would improve our understanding of how best to move forward.

The Statistics User Council has been established for many years and supports subsidiary groups on Health, Transport, Finance, and so on. A conference or seminar might be sponsored jointly with the Council and a permanent user group set up as a result of such an event.

The Social and Welfare TWG will therefore approach the Council with a view to sponsoring a seminar on social and welfare statistics later this year, with the aims of:

- advertising what is available and highlighting its limitations;
- seeking views on gaps;
- finding out more about non-GSS data sources;
- helping us to firm up a coherent strategic plan; and
- forming a user group as an aid to communication.

SHORT TERM Establish a group of external users as an aid to communication.

Annex A

Project Initiation Document for the review of Income Support Statistics, Jobseeker's Allowance Statistics and Child Support Agency Statistics

Introduction

The government's 1999 White Paper 'Building trust in statistics' included a commitment to assuring the quality of National Statistics and refers to a programme of thorough reviews of key outputs. The first 'chunk' to be reviewed from the social and welfare theme comprises three DWP outputs: Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance and Child Support Agency Statistics.

These outputs consist of quarterly statistics on the characteristics of either benefit claimants (in the case of Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance) or customers of the Child Support Agency. Uses of the figures include policy formulation and costings, benefit expenditure and workload forecasting, and answering parliamentary questions and other ad hoc queries. They have a wide demand from both within government and beyond.

Aims of the review

The review aims:

- to discover whether the outputs meet the requirements of users;
- to determine whether the methods employed are appropriate and in line with best practice; and
- to produce an action plan that addresses shortcomings in the outputs and potential improvements.

Elements of the review

The review will involve a user consultation exercise and an examination of the processes involved in the production of the outputs.

The user consultation will be underpinned by a questionnaire that will be sent to known users of the statistics, both within and outside government. There will be follow-up interviews with a number of users. The questionnaire will ask users:

- how they use the statistics;
- how they rate the standard of presentation;
- whether there are additional statistics that they would like included;

- how they rate the reliability of the statistics, the clarity of explanations of the data's limitations, the ease with which they can obtain information from listed contacts, and the timeliness and frequency of publication; and
- their current, and their preferred, medium for receiving the publication.

Examination of the production process will involve detailed scrutiny of such issues as:

- the quality of incoming data and what is done to improve that quality;
- the cost-effectiveness of these improvements;
- the documentation available;
- whether there is back-up for key staff; and
- the robustness and timeliness of final figures.

It is hoped that this will identify a number of potential improvements or savings in the processes.

Organisation of people involved

The review will be overseen by a project board with much of the investigative work carried out by review teams. The terms of reference of the project board are as follows:

- Oversee and advise on the work programme for quality reviews of National Statistics produced by DWP.
- Approve the project teams' reports on reviewed outputs.
- Prepare an annual report to the National Statistician with recommendations for a quality improvement programme based on the reviews.

The project board will comprise:

- Fred Johnson, DWP (chair)
- Jason Bradbury, DWP
- Martin McGill, DWP
- Mike Noble, Oxford University
- Caroline Bustard, ONS (correspondence member)

The review team will comprise:

- Katie Dodd, DWP
- Carol Jenkinson, DWP
- Judith Ridley, DWP

Their responsibilities will be as follows:

- Undertake an end-to-end scrutiny of the production process for the three projects under review.
- Highlight areas where improvements should be made or where further investigation is required.
- Draw up an action plan for the project board's consideration.
- Contribute to the evaluation of completed questionnaires.

The review programme team at the Office for National Statistics will be kept informed of progress and will provide advice and guidance.

Annex B

User consultation – Questionnaire

1. Which of the following statistics produced by ASD's Information Centre do you use:

Income Support	37

2. How do you rate the way the statistics are presented?

Well presented	22
Reasonably presented	13
Poorly presented	1
No opinion	1

3. Are there any other figures that are not currently produced by the Information Centre that you would like to see produced in the future?

Yes	11
No	15
Don't know	8

4. If yes to Q3, please specify below:

See Annex C 'User comments'.

5. Are there any areas where there is too little detail?

Yes	7
No	20
Don't know	5

6. If yes to Q5, please specify below:

None.

7. Are there any areas where there is too much detail?

Yes	0
No	28
Don't know	4

8. If yes to Q7, please specify below:

See Annex C 'User comments'.

9. How do you rate the reliability of the statistics?

Very reliable	18
Fairly reliable	15
Not very reliable	0
Not at all reliable	0
No opinion	4

10. All IS statistics are accompanied by an explanation of the sampling error. How would you rate these explanations?

Very easy to understand	13
Fairly easy to understand	14
Not very easy to understand	4
Difficult to understand	0
Don't know	5

11. Have you had any problems reconciling the statistics from the Information Centre with those from other sources?

Yes	8
No	19
Don't know	6

12. If yes to Q11, please specify below:

See Annex C 'User comments'.

13. How frequently would you prefer the statistics to be available? (They are currently available quarterly.)

Monthly	7
Quarterly	25
Annually	1
Other (please specify)	0
No opinion	3

14. How do you rate the timeliness of the statistics?

They are published sufficiently soon after the date to which they relate	21
They are not published sufficiently soon after the date to which they relate	11
Don't know	4

15. How do you receive or access the statistics?

Paper copy	22
Email	12
Internet	4
DWP intranet	6
Other (please specify)	1 - SAS

16. Were you aware that these statistics are available on the internet?

Yes	21
No	14
Don't know	0

17. Do you need to cut and paste them into other documents?

Yes	10
No	22
Don't know	1

18. How easily can you obtain answers to queries about the statistics from the contacts listed in the publication?

Easily	17
With occasional difficulty	6
With great difficulty	0
Not tried	12

19. Have you any other comments on the IS statistics provided by ASD's Information Centre?

See Annex C 'User comments'.

20. If you would you be interested in discussing further any of the issues raised by this questionnaire, please complete the following:

Name (and organisation if not DWP)	**Telephone number**

Annex C

User comments

A number of users commented further on their desire for additional statistics or more detail, as well as their problems reconciling the figures with those from other sources; their comments can be found in "Further detailed comments". In summary, the Information Centre's ability to respond to requests for more information is dependent upon whether additional data need collecting in order to generate the required statistics. There is virtually no prospect of extra data being collected by DWP staff responsible for administering payment of benefit. More feasible is the inclusion of extra data fields in the IC's extract taken from the benefit computer system, although this would only happen if a strong case could be made as to the usefulness of resulting statistics. Most likely to receive a positive response are those requests for statistics that involve the collection of no extra data.

Responses to user comments are included against the comments themselves.

Further detailed comments

(plus Information Centre recommendations/responses in bold)

Are there any other figures that are not currently produced by the Information Centre that you would like to see produced in the future?

IS – Up to date benefit status flags for CSA cases. IS customers referred to CSA on IS QSE; IS customers receiving maintenance but debatable whether IS statistics should show this or CSA statistics; possibly data on people who have been assessed but did not get an assessment, ie suspended closed cases.

Response: **All of this can be done but weighing the resource required against the amount of user demand suggests that for now only ad hoc analysis should be provided; however, we can review this approach as resources permit.**

It should be noted, however, that an electronic interface between the Income Support computer system and a new Child Support Agency computer system, being introduced from April 2002 as a result of child support

reforms, means that IS data will contain new status flags.

Given the new corporate agenda it would be useful to see more contextual material from other benefits. e.g. the number of lone parents on IS.

Response: **The new client-based approach is already catered for in the client group analysis publications (covering families and children, the working age, and those over state pension age).**

IS – duration of claims; repeat claims.

Response: **Claim duration statistics are already provided. Ad hoc analysis of repeat claims will be provided if a repeat claim indicator exists; otherwise such analysis is dependent on more resources becoming available to do the work.**

District-level analysis of IS claimants (plus type of benefit claimed), or if this is impossible county-level. Helpful if all other data could be routinely provided at this level too so that impact of local adjudication and other factors on local population groups can be appreciated. More limited range of tables in SSS, as compared with some years ago, rather frustrating; applies beyond IS. Statistics more specifically related to Scotland and its LAs/postcodes.

District-/ward-level data – this is a very important issue for LA advice services; reason claim disallowed. More local data.

IS– sub-GOR-level analysis.

Response: **District- and ward-level analysis is already available on the internet (at the Neighbourhood Statistics Service site http://www.statistics.gov.uk/neighbourhood/home.asp). This will in future be highlighted in the Information Centre's statistical publications.**

I periodically need to request more detailed breakdown for the RCNH IS data. For example, by age and country; length of time on benefit and stats broken down by type of lone parent (divorced, separated, widowed, single, etc), by gender and by age of child for each group (ages to cover 0-4, 5-10, 11-15, 16-18, etc).

Response: **Length of time on benefit is already provided. The marital status breakdown is no longer collected as it is not needed for benefit payment purposes.**

IS/JSA like to see them linked re mortgage assistance. Need more detailed tables on length of claim by type by amount. Pre- and post-1995 changes to ISMI – need profile of both.

Response: **We would be pleased to provide these analyses but, due to limited resources, only as ad hoc exercises for now.**

Are there any areas where there is too little detail?

Table 5.3 in the QSE, I would like numbers as well as percentages

Response: We will do this.

More information on housing requirements of home owners, eg the number with housing requirements who pay mortgage interest but are subject to the 9-month waiting period.
Data needs disaggregating to be really useful. Time series also needed.

Response: We will do this but limited resources will currently limit such work to an ad hoc basis.

Statistics more specifically related to Scotland and its LAs/postcodes.
Sub-GOR-level analysis.

Response: District- and ward-level analysis is already available on the internet (at the Neighbourhood Statistics Service site http://www.statistics.gov.uk/neighbourhood/home.asp). This will in future be highlighted in the Information Centre's statistical publications.

Have you had any problems reconciling the statistics from the Information Centre with those from other sources?

Specific problem in reconciling IS and CSA data to get the total number of ISLPs receiving maintenance – there are some ISLPs in receipt that do not appear in the CSA data, thus the CSA statistics underestimate the figure.

ASD3 (Alex Beer) carried out a study recently to determine IS LPs receiving maintenance; she found some discrepancies between IS and CSA due mainly to cases being on one system and not on the other; main problem was IS Net cases – NRP pays direct to PWC.

Other ASSIST data sets; BA MIS data.

Differences to survey evidence – generally because surveys are poorer.

With FRS equivalents, but this is well known.

There are issues around how the RCNH RA data compare with DH data on supported residents but differences may be due to factors that can be explained.

IS/CSA – difficult to compare to GHS numbers and proportions of LPs. ONS figures are generally older. Also, large-scale surveys show other interesting facts, eg only 30% of LPs get any maintenance (from DWP/PSI studies).

Response: Discrepancies between statistics from different sources are a perennial problem and there is little that we can do to make our figures a better match with those from elsewhere.

Have you any other comments on the IS statistics provided by ASD's Information Centre?

It would be helpful to have access to the database from which the stats are produced, for record purposes, downloadable from the internet.
The statistics are presented for general use. I have specific needs re mortgage borrowers. The data is not nearly as useful as it might be and the fact it is now in 2 volumes makes life over-difficult.

Response: Other than in exceptional circumstances, confidentiality considerations prevent our making microdata available beyond the Department.

Annex D Process description

Identifying material

Part A: Establishing requirements and changes to them

A1 User consultation
- *A1 a Historic/existing consultation arrangements*
- *A1b Consultation as part of the IS quality review*
- *A1c Future arrangements for consultation*

A2 Data providers' interests
A3 Authority for production

Part B: Designing and implementing the process and changes to it

B1 Concepts and definitions
B2 Methodology
B3 Completeness and fitness for purpose
- *B3 a Justification for current design*
- *B3 b Considered options for change*
- *B3 c Improvements*

B4 Key assumptions
B5 Risk assessment and contingency planning
B6 Implementation

Part C: Operating the System

C1 Training and instructions
C2 Incoming data quality
C3 Response (where applicable)
C4 Outgoing data quality
C5 Accuracy
C6 Confidentiality

Part D: Disseminating the results

D1 Availability of statistics
D2 Pre-release arrangements
D3 Metadata
D4 Comparability and revisions

Part E: Re-establishing requirements… (links back to Part A)

E1 User satisfaction
E2 Review

Identifying material

Title

Income Support Statistics

Brief description:

The Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry (QSE) is a 5% sample of recipients of Income Support in Great Britain. The data are extracted from the administrative computer system at the end of each quarter. Statistics on the characteristics of claimants, their partners and dependants are then generated.
The publication is designed to:

- give summary analyses which show the key features of the IS population and how they compare with earlier periods.
- supply a basic summary of the main features of IS and how they affect numbers of recipients and amounts of benefit in payment.
- provide a menu of the types of analysis which can be produced from the QSE data set.

Main purpose for which the information is required:

Analyses from QSE data are valuable components in benefit expenditure forecasts and policy formulation/evaluation, and are a key feature in Departmental responses to PQs and ad hoc requests. It is also a significant contributor to social research on poverty and social exclusion and answers external demand from academics and interest groups.
The data are regularly supplied to operational and social researchers, policy development and evaluation staff, benefit expenditure forecasters, analysts and economists within DWP.
The data are also used by other government agencies and departments including the Welsh Assembly, Scottish Parliament, Northern Ireland Assembly, Employment Service and Benefits Agency. Wider distribution is also made to academics, centres of higher and further education, established market research organisations and interest groups.

Department/section responsible:

DWP, Analytical Services Division

Report compiled by:

Katie Dodd
Joanne Lishman

PART A: Establishing requirements and changes to them

A1 User consultation

A1a Historical/existing consultation arrangements

DWP user requirements were initially developed through in-depth discussion and correspondence. Subsequent requirements are established via formal quarterly meetings with customers, regular informal contact with customers and from written feedback on the publication.

Having identified common themes in requests for ad hoc IS QSE information the publication saw the addition of detailed tables on claimants' capital and flows on and off benefit. Exact requirements were actively sought and established through consultation with main users and changes to the published document have since been made.

A web site has been established on the DWP Intranet. Publications and tables are made available on the sites on the publication date. In addition contact details are provided. This will be further developed when publishing the data on the Internet.

In response to customer consultation an electronic data warehouse (called the Repository) has been developed. It provides a single source of trusted data to the Department's analysts, economists and researchers.

There have been internal expressions of interest for information on IS terminations. As the Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry only relates to cases live and in payment on the extract date these requests have been met through the merging of successive quarters' data.

This process understates the true number of terminations since cases that come on and go off benefit between the two quarters cannot be included. To begin collection of IS termination information would require a re-design of the existing data extract and could be a costly exercise.

We would need to consult potential users and the extract providers to establish whether or not the usage and value of such data would outweigh the costs of extract development and processing.

A1b Consultation as part of the IS quality review

As part of the IS quality review around 200 questionnaires were sent to known users of the statistics, both within and outside government. There were follow-up interviews with a number of users. The questionnaire sought opinion on presentation, sufficiency of detail, accuracy, frequency and timeliness, accessibility and user support.

The results of the questionnaire will be used to produce an action plan that addresses shortcomings in the outputs and consider potential improvements.

A1c Future arrangements for consultation

The project board believed that there was a need for a group of external users with whom there was regular contact and who could rapidly be canvassed for views. Such a group would be useful for all departments in the Social and Welfare Themed Working Group in helping to improve the relevance of their data.

The main users of departmental data are the policy analysts within the departments, but there are others who will look at issues in a different way. Their needs can easily be met if good channels of communication are in place. The opportunity to explain the problems in data collection and the constraints within which government statistics operate would also be valuable.

Bringing 'outsiders' into the discussion may help us to understand the gaps in our information and, in some cases, fill gaps with information from other sources. The perspective of non-UK specialists in the field would improve our understanding of how best to move forward.

The Statistics User Council has been established for many years and supports subsidiary groups on Health, Transport, Finance, and so on. A conference or seminar might be sponsored jointly with the Council and a permanent user group set up as a result of such an event.

The Social and Welfare TWG will therefore approach the Council with a view to sponsoring a seminar on social and welfare statistics later this year, with the aims of:

- advertising what is available and highlighting its limitations;
- seeking views on gaps;
- finding out more about non-GSS data sources;
- helping us to firm up a coherent strategic plan; and
- forming a user group as an aid to communication.

A2 Data providers' interests

Compliance costs to Benefits Agency of about £8,000 per year are relatively low - most of the data comes directly from DWP's computer systems. There are some clerical returns from local benefit offices and their interests are managed by keeping them well informed of future release and return dates.
Household level information cannot be produced from administrative data since benefits are generally paid in respect of the individual or family unit. No other alternative sources could be considered, as DWP is the sole source of claimant data.

A3 Authority for production

Authority regarding collection of the data comes directly from government based on its requirements to formulate and evaluate policy and forecast benefit expenditure.
Annual customer contract meetings between ASD, policy customers, Information Technology Services Group (ITSG, the DWP IT agency) and Benefits Agency decide service levels and the acquisition of the data for production of the QSE.

Part B: Designing and implementing the process and changes to it

B1 Concepts and definitions

Categorisations depend on the data held on the system, and these are driven mainly by operational requirements. Where possible definitions are harmonised - for example, in allocating cases to regions, information is produced by government office region rather than DWP administrative region.
A breakdown of the regions is supplied within the publication readily available for data users.
Within the IS QSE the current definition of the lone parent group is 'all single people (aged under 60) who are not in receipt of a disability premium, and have dependants'.
The definition of dependants includes those aged 16 –19 who are still in full time education. However, in policy terms 'lone parents' cease to be lone parents when their youngest child turns 16. This means that we are including a number of cases (approximately 20,000, or 2% of the total) whose youngest child is aged 16-19 in the lone parent group, when actually they now qualify for IS for other reasons, e.g. short-term sickness/ carer. The series as it stands goes back as long as the QSE, but following the identification of this mis-match, we should consider a review of the definition in consultation with users.
A change in definition would require a revised back series to be produced and would impact on a wide range of users who are familiar with our current definition. For example, figures are not just used by DWP internally, but also in responses to PQs, provided to external organisations such as LAs and the CLIP group (Central & Local government Information Partnership).
Within the Repository there is a data standard definition for common variables across benefits. The system contains a facility to trace and compare these variable names.

B2 Methodology

Process maps (see Annex D2) and instruction manuals have been developed and are maintained by the members of the Income Support team, and are designed to minimise loss of knowledge should key members of staff move on.
Checks against management information and forecasts are carried out.
Checks and documentation are generally comprehensive and could not be improved without additional resource.

B3 Completeness and fitness for purpose

The statistics are drawn from a 5% random sample, based on claimants' National Insurance numbers. A 5% sample is used because:

(i) the work involved validating the data necessitates the taking of a sample rather than 100% data;
(ii) 5% allows sample numbers to be grossed up by an integer (20), thereby giving integer population figures; and
(iii) claimant sub-groups numbering 500 or more merit accurate measurement, and a 5% sample yielding estimates of 500 is deemed sufficiently accurate (having confidence intervals no wider than +/- 40%)

The resulting sample size of around 200,000 provides comprehensive coverage. Limitations of this, however, are indicated by the fact that some cases (around 600 cases for February 2001 data) are not available on source systems and have to be collected clerically.
There is no evidence that these statistics have been used inappropriately.

B3 a Justification of current design

The current design is justified mainly because the required accuracy is achieved relatively cheaply and given the means available to collect, process and publish the data. See Annex D3 for details of staff resources used in processing the QSE.
The 5% sample can provide analysis by statistical group (i.e. lone parents, disabled, over 60's, other) down to parliamentary constituency level (ie figures above the accuracy threshold of 500), which meets the requirements of its users. Data will not be made available at ward or postcode sector level from the 5% sample as investment in 100% data has meant that small area statistical requirements are met elsewhere. Providing analysis on 100% data in line with what is currently provided on 5% data within the same time frame has resource implications that are unlikely to be feasible due to the commitment that would be required in cleaning and validating the data.
The cost-efficient method by which the data are obtained would be difficult to improve, as the only source of the data used is the DWP benefit systems.

B3b Considered options for change

Taking into account current response rates and the proportion of the IS caseload that clerically-received data represent, we have previously considered options for ceasing clerical collection and the attached paper (Annex D1) highlights the main issues. At the time this paper was circulated, responses supported the continuation of our current procedures given the biased characteristics of the clerical group.
There were suggestions that, once a long enough series of electronic data (containing a clerical data indicator) became available, the forecasting models could be adapted to model adjustments for the clerical load.

Cessation of clerical data collection would result in a break in series. This would not be unmanageable provided a back series could be made available showing how the IS caseload would have looked if clerical cases had been excluded at an earlier stage.
An additional possibility in the initial stages of being investigated is the further utilisation of 'Scanfile' software. A third party add-on to this software called 'TELEform' would enable documents scanned on the system to be 'read' using optical character recognition (OCR). Initial indications show that, implemented branch-wide, this could be more effective than current clerical procedures; it is, however, in the very early stages of assessment. However, in respect of IS, clerical cases have been reducing in number since May 2000 since the set-up of a team whose specific aim is to deal with corrupt cases (i.e. cases that cannot be maintained on ISCS and have to be maintained clerically). When this team requests certain case types from benefit offices the payment books can be recalled and the cases re-built on the Income Support computer system. A further review of the clerical load should be conducted when this exercise concludes.

B3c Improvements

The process involved in validating Income Support data has been radically improved since November 1996 with the development of ASSIST, the generic system developed by ASD IC to support the branch core business. The 'go live' in November 1996 of this system has meant timeliness has improved from nine months to three months from extract date to publication. On-line validation has meant a higher level of accuracy has been achieved as a higher proportion of the data is being cleaned.
Reviews of the publication have meant presentation and analysis of data have been revised to support the Department's focus on client groups.
Functions within ASSIST are being utilised to develop a tabling process that will be more user-friendly and flexible in response to customer needs. The data warehouse within ASSIST (called the Repository) provides a single source of trusted data for the Division's analysts, economists and researchers consistent with published statistics.

B4 Key assumptions

We assume that the allocation of National Insurance numbers (NINOs) within the population is random and that the sample selection by NINO is, therefore, unbiased. This assumption is implicit in explanations as to how the sample is drawn. We have examined the distribution of NINO endings in the 100% data sets collected annually and found that they do appear randomly distributed.

B5 Risk assessment and contingency planning

There is little risk to receipt of data from benefit systems. Should risks materialise, forecasts could be used for a limited period to project latest population sizes. Risks have been identified and assessed; all processes have a series of built-in checks and contingency options as follows:

Collection of data

- If the Income Support computer system (ISCS) is unavailable it is usually because,
  - i) a new release is taking place at the same time as the extract, or
  - ii) the system has failed.

  In the first instance, the extract would be taken retrospectively at a later date. In the second instance, if ISCS fails it is usually unavailable for a maximum of half a day to a full day; the extract would be taken retrospectively when the system became available.

- Should the tapes containing the data not be received on the due date providers are immediately contacted by telephone and the progress of the data from providers to ASD is monitored. If necessary duplicate copies can be couriered to ASD within 24 hours.

Load of data onto ASD systems

- Should the tapes prove to be corrupt on receipt, duplicates can be obtained from data providers within 24 hours.
- The tapes are held in ASD until data are successfully loaded onto ASD systems.
- Once loaded a back-up of ASD systems is run each night and compressed data are stored on disk.
- The overall caseload figure is compared with provisional figures.
- Data is subjected to on-line validation and cleaning. Anomalies in the data can be investigated and corrected using this method. In the event of an error in the data being detected that cannot be corrected in this way a revised extract can be taken retrospectively.

Creating data set to allow production of QSE

Frequency counts are run to check that the data set created is complete and contains no anomalies. Should it contain errors they can be overwritten with the original data received which is stored on a different server, or if the data set is corrupt to a degree that would make amendment impractical it can be re-created.

Producing tables for the QSE

Initial caseload figures for individual client groups are checked, and only when approved by the statistician the rest of the QSE is tabled. If the figures prove suspect referral would be made to the original data loaded and checks would be made on each step in the overall process used to produce the figures.

Publication
An electronic copy of the publication is retained, both in Word format and portable document format (pdf). A copy is also saved to floppy disk and a hard copy produced.

Data Warehouse (Repository)
- Data to be transferred to the Repository is checked against those used to create the QSE. If any anomalies are found the data is corrected before being transferred to the Repository. In the event that incorrect data are transferred into the Repository it can be removed, corrected and re-transferred.
- The London server mirrors data held on the Newcastle server as back-up. Following the transfer of data into the Newcastle Repository an electronic process is set in motion to update the London Repository; this would take a matter of minutes. Should this electronic back-up fail the transfer can be completed manually the same day.

B6 Implementation

Future changes are documented in change request impact analysis details, high level functional design documents and revised record descriptions of incoming data received in the Branch.
Changes are usually due to
(i) new/revised legislation, or
(ii) amendments to customer requirements.

Layouts into which the data are loaded are amended and test case scenarios are received 1-2 months before the data containing the changes. This enables thorough checking and adjustments if necessary to the scan that extracts the data.
Contingency action would come into effect if after conducting frequency counts and trend checks a scan should prove to be corrupt. The facility is available to have the scan re-run.

Part C: Operating the system

C1 Training and instructions

An induction pack is available for staff new to the team. The pack includes: -

- a summary of the induction process
- inductee's general duties
- where the work of the section 'fits in'
- an overview of the sections, the branch and the division

as well as domestics, health and safety, security and office services

In addition, comprehensive process maps and training manuals exist for IS processing. Individual members of staff are also responsible for providing supporting documentation.

Training manuals are reviewed regularly and are largely effective, tasks can be carried out based purely on the documentation. Some more complex tasks do require further guidance from the trainer/colleagues which may indicate a need for more detailed documentation.

A large part of the training is provided at the workstation by colleagues; IT training is supplied by ASD's computing section and is usually designed specifically to meet the needs of the individual or team.

The division's training and development section also provides a wide variety of training courses. These are advertised in the Department's regular news bulletin.

In-house consultants provide training based on the ASSIST system, again specifically designed to meet the individual's or team's requirements.

Personal training needs are identified in forward job plans and personal development plans and are reviewed at least every six months.

Section training requirements are identified at 'individual section' weekly meetings. Wider issues are discussed and taken forward at monthly Collation/Analysis Team meetings and as a result of annual awaydays.

C2 Incoming data quality

We receive and comment on change request impact analysis details and high level functional design documents and check new data items through test data received in advance of the actual scan data.

The quality of the incoming data is checked through a series of frequency counts and trend checks. In addition, provisional analysis is compiled to provide the latest caseload estimates and highlight the main trends. These measures are designed to highlight any unexpected changes in the data.

Incoming data are also subjected to a 'cleaning' process whereby errors per benefit case are identified and corrected. Where the cause of the error is not immediately identifiable we refer to the on-line benefit system, i.e. that which is used in the administration of benefit payments. There are usually around 5,500 cases in a sample of about 200,000 that are in error (approximately 2.8%).

Common errors can be cleared using a 'Fire Once Rule' which is a set of conditions that is run against the data and automatically makes an adjustment to correct it where it meets the set criteria. Around 500-1,000 errors can be cleared by this method. Referral to data providers is also a considered course of action; for example where records in the sample have a claim date later than the extract date an error with the scan is indicated rather than with the data. The remainder are checked and validated on-line by members of the team.

Errors that can be cleared using the 'Fire Once Rule' are usually cases where the amount of IS recorded as being in payment differs from the amount the system has calculated should be in payment, based on current benefit rates. This is usually due to old rates of benefit being recorded on ISCS; an automatic adjustment is made to offset this error without changing the amount of IS recorded as being in payment.

The remaining 4,000 – 4,500 errors that require manual cleaning and possibly checking against the live benefit system include, but are not exclusively, the following:

- A customer has attained age 60 and the premium category and statistical group requires amending.
- There is an additional child noted on the record but not being included in the award
- ISCS appears to record no award present.
- Seemingly excessive housing costs are queried (usually the result is that monthly costs have been recorded as being charged on a weekly basis).

The instruction booklet to benefit offices for clerical returns is now out of date and is in the process of being revised. This has not seriously affected data quality on clerical returns as the revisions required to the booklet are not to processes, which have remained constant, but to items such as allocating codes to new benefits.

C3 Response

The main body of data is received via an electronic scan of ISCS. Clerical data are also collected for cases that are not held on ISCS. Each quarter we receive approximately 1,000 returns (approx. 0.5% of the IS sample) from local offices and these are keyed into ASSIST and then included in the final sample. Clerical response rates from benefit offices are usually around 62%. We do not, however, make any adjustments for non-response even though we are aware that some offices never provide returns. There is some question as to whether resources to pursue follow-up of non-responding local offices could be increased (see Annex D1).

C4 Outgoing data quality

Frequency counts and trend checks are conducted and comparisons are made with monthly caseload statistics (aggregate system generating stock counts produced monthly from ISCS) to validate the outputs.
There is liaison with policy customers and other areas of ASD if querying trend changes. If outliers are discovered then checks are made against live benefit systems and, where appropriate corrections are carried out.
Numeric and trend checks are made on tables and charts created from the data, and any disparities investigated.
In the event of the primary result not being considered credible the incoming data and processes would be revisited and if necessary data suppliers contacted and asked to investigate. If necessary the extracts would be run again.

C5 Accuracy

The main source of error is sampling error. Comparisons are made with the previous quarters' data and confidence intervals are published within the routine publication.
The IS figures published at present are known to underestimate the total population of claimants by around 30,000. This is due to the time it takes for a claim to be input onto ISCS.
For example, the May 2000 IS QSE contains information on cases live at 26 May 2000. However, some claims made shortly before this date would not have been keyed onto the Income Support Computer System by 26 May and would, therefore, be excluded from the May 2000 extract. This results in an underestimate of the true caseload. The extent of the systematic undercount can be quantified simply by undertaking a match with the following quarter's data and identifying cases that are on in the later quarter (but not the earlier quarter) with a duration of more than 91 days.
Although we mention this undercount in the IS QSE, no attempt is currently made to gross for these cases. Forecasters build an addition into their forecasting models to allow for the difference.
If we were to allow for the systematic undercount in the QSE, there are two obvious options.

1) Gross up all figures using a non-standard rating factor - it would not simply be a case of multiplying all cases with the same factor since there will be biases in the types of cases that take longer to be input to the system; or example, residential care/nursing home cases, mortgage interest cases, etc.
2) Include a table in the release quantifying the overall amount of the undercount over time.
3) A third and more radical option would be to run the IS QSE with a period of retrospection as is carried out for JSA. This would allow for a large proportion of the later keyed cases to be processed, but would delay the receipt, processing and publication of the final report. The above assumes

delays at the front end of the claim process and does not consider potential delays at the back end, for example, backdated claim terminations. It is a fair assumption that most delays will occur at the front end since there is a clear business need to terminate a case and stop payment immediately the termination is notified. However, if we were to consider the systematic undercount as a key element of our future work plan, we would need to investigate and understand the undercount (and its biases) in detail. Further to this, any work carried out on IS would set a precedent for similar estimates to be made for other benefits. This could result in a large and costly exercise.

C6 Confidentiality

Information will not be released where there is a risk of an individual being identified from the data. ASD has a release policy covering this, namely that we release figures down to parliamentary constituency level and round to the nearest five.

On receipt of the data and before general release, personal identifiers are encrypted or removed and postcodes truncated on Repository data sets provided to customers. The Repository itself is password-protected.

Electronic data are compressed and stored on back-up disk.

A clear desk policy is operational within the branch and documentation holding unpublished figures and data where individuals could be identified are kept in lockable cabinets.

Part D Disseminating the results

D1 Availability of the statistics

Statistics are available within three months of the quarter's end, and details of the publication are available on Statbase.
Users can obtain further details by contacting the Department in writing, or by 'phone, fax, email and (in future) the Internet.
On release date:

- Tables are available on the DWP Intranet site.
- The full publication is available in portable document format (pdf) for DWP Intranet users.
- Data is made available in the Repository.
- Publications are disseminated by
  - hard copy to internal and external customers
  - electronically in pdf to internal customers.
  - Internet/Intranet

Less detailed publications and increased electronic dissemination would enable quicker release. The availability of data on the Internet has increased public access and reduced the number of hard copies that are distributed.
Raising the profile of electronic copies and of the web site and its location will improve dissemination.

D2 Pre-release arrangements

Contributions are made weekly to ASD's 'Forward Look' document that informs Ministers of forthcoming publications over three months. ONS are advised on a monthly basis of details relating to publications due over the forthcoming four months for inclusion in the National Statistics Update.
State Pensions, Welfare to Work, Financial Support Change, News Media Relations and Working Age Presentation Strategy and ASD forecasters are supplied with a draft of the first Release and submission for comment.
The completed publication is sent to reprographics two weeks before release date to allow time to produce and check printing and formating.
On the Friday before release (release usually being a Thursday) 12 hard copies of the publication accompanied by the First Release and submission are sent to Parliamentary Relations Unit, to be made available in the House of Commons and House of Lords libraries. In addition 30 copies accompanied by the First Release are sent to the press office.
Ministers and relevant key officials are supplied with final copies of the publication and press release 48 hours before publication.

D3 Metadata

Published statistics are accompanied by relevant background information. This includes a description of the benefit and who is entitled to it, the source of the data, a glossary of terms used, an explanation of the sampling method, and a table of confidence intervals.

The electronic data warehouse (Repository) accessed by users includes a regularly updated metadata section, which lists all variables, the descriptions and decode values. Record descriptions in spreadsheet form are also available for users on the Intranet and to external users on request.

D4 Comparability and revisions

The main change to definitions which has occurred in recent years is the introduction of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) which removed the unemployed from the IS caseload. There was a step reduction in the IS caseload and a back series was produced excluding the unemployed so that comparison pre- and post-JSA could be made.

Should the need arise to revise data, tables and explanatory notes are included within the next quarter's release.

There are changes to benefit rates each April (and occasionally in October/ November). New legislation frequently means the introduction of new benefits and amendments to existing benefits, for example Working Families' Tax Credit and Disabled Person's Tax Credit from October 1999, and Bereavement Benefits from April 2001.

These are fully documented in publications, and both types of change are permanently recorded in Annexes 4 and 5 of the publication. Legislative changes are also initially included in the publication's main findings and introduction.

Part E Review:

E1 User Satisfaction

User satisfaction is assessed via quarterly meetings with main customers and other correspondence. Through discussion and consultation, changes are implemented where appropriate and possible.

The possibility exists for a readership survey to be conducted, and this again could improve the process.

E2 Review

The need for more client group analysis in support of welfare to work policy development and greater investment in client group-based work have resulted in the re-organisation of business.

Subsequently, reviews of these statistics and the methods have been ongoing.

ANNEX D1

REVIEW OF CLERICAL CASES ON THE INCOME SUPPORT QSE
(Paper written and circulated in June 1999)

Background

Clerical cases have historically been collected as part of the regular Income Support QSE process. Each quarter clerical forms are posted to each local office and details are requested for cases with National Insurance numbers ending in ‘14’, ‘24’, ‘44’, ‘64’, ‘84’. Not all offices return their forms, but every attempt is made to encourage a full response.

The cost of capturing clerical cases

Collecting and processing clerical IS information requires an ongoing resource commitment of approximately 0.5 AOs within ASD1C. On top of this there are significant staff costs within local offices nationwide and also printing, postal and computing expenses.

It is estimated that the total cost of collecting clerical information, including all of the above, is in the region of £4,600 per quarter (£18,400 per year). This can be broken down as follows:

- ASD1 staff costs - £2,000 per quarter
- Local office staff costs - £2,000 per quarter
- Printing and postal costs - £600 per quarter

Is it worth it?

Clerical cases represent around 0.4% of the total Income Support caseload and around 0.6% of weekly IS expenditure. However, it is likely that this undercounts the total number of clerical cases as in any one quarter only around 200 out of 322 offices (62%) return a clerical form. No attempt is made to gross up for this non-response as without further administrative resource being put into contacting all non-responding offices, it is not possible to know whether the non-responding office has no clerical cases or whether there are cases but the form has not been returned. Secondly, if we were able to gross up the caseload we could not account for any variation in the characteristics of clerical cases.

What are the characteristics of clerical cases

The main reason cited by local offices for cases becoming clerical are:

(i) there are too many housing loans,

(ii) the interest charges on the housing loans are incompatible with the system,

(iii) there are too many dependants,

(iv) there are too many changes of circumstances, i.e. address, name, local office, etc, and

(v) short term clerical cases are created because the partner was claiming JSA as a couple.

Some of these reasons are obvious within the analysis of the November 1998 QSE clerical load outlined below.

At November 1998, the overall average amount of Income Support was £59.86. Among the clerical cases, however, the average was £79.27 per week, i.e. higher by nearly £20 per week. This difference varied from more than £35 per week amongst the over 60s to only pence amongst lone parents (Table 1).

Table 1: Caseload and average weekly IS broken down by record type: November 98

Thousand/£ per week

	All	60 or over	Disabled	L Parents	Other
All	3,824.5	1,640.9	903.2	938.2	342.1
Clerical	16.3	5.0	4.7	3.6	3.1
All	£59.86	£42.38	£65.42	£82.74	£66.26
Clerical	£79.27	£77.68	£77.94	£82.35	£80.27
Difference	£19.41	£35.30	£12.52	-£0.39	£14.01

Based on their average IS it is clear that clerical cases are different from the average IS case with the exception of lone parents. It is possible to explain the differences by examining the characteristics that most affect the amount of weekly IS, i.e. number of dependants, receipt of premia, levels of other income and the existence of special circumstances and housing requirements.

Starting with the latter two, special circumstances and housing requirements do account for a significant proportion of the extra average amount of IS received. Nearly a third of clerical cases were either in residential care/nursing homes or received help with housing costs in November 1998. This is roughly twice the overall proportion of the rest of the IS load.

Removing these cases from the comparison of average IS amounts drastically reduces the difference in the amount of IS for clerical cases compared to the overall load (Table 2). However, the continued existence of differences in most of the groups suggests that there are other differences in the characteristics of the clerical load.

Table 2: Caseload and average weekly IS (excluding cases in RCNH and with Housing Requirements) broken down by record type: November 98

Thousand/£ per week

	All	60 or over	Disabled	L Parents	Other
All	3,229.6	1,287.0	785.4	865.0	292.3
Clerical	11.5	1.9	3.6	3.4	2.6
All	£53.37	£31.87	£62.32	£79.14	£47.67
Clerical	£65.88	£40.17	£74.96	£79.76	£54.51
Difference	£12.51	£8.30	£12.64	£0.62	£6.84

Further investigations reveal that the reasons for differences in average IS vary between the client groups. For the over 60s it is receipt of fewer other incomes that account for the difference, whereas for the disabled and others it is because of a higher number of dependants and premia (Table 3).

**Table 3: IS characteristics (excluding cases in RCNH and with Housing Requirements)
Broken down by record type: November 98**

	ALL	60 or over	Disabled	L Parents	Others
Caseload					
All	3,229.6	1,287.0	785.4	865.0	292.3
Clerical	11.5	1.9	3.6	3.4	2.6
Non Clerical	3,218.1	1,285.0	781.8	861.6	289.7
Average IS					
All	£53.37	£31.87	£62.32	£79.14	£47.67
Clerical	£65.88	£40.17	£74.96	£79.76	£54.51
Non clerical	£53.32	£31.86	£62.26	£79.14	£47.61
Average claimant age					
All	51	75	41	31	36
Clerical	41	70	40	31	33
Non clerical	52	75	41	31	36
Average No of Deps					
All	0.65	0.03	0.45	1.86	0.38
Clerical	1.01	0.04	0.78	1.98	0.76
Non clerical	0.65	0.03	0.44	1.86	0.38
Average No of premiums					
All	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.1	1.2
Clerical	1.3	1.2	1.6	1.0	1.4
Non clerical	1.3	1.3	1.4	1.1	1.2
Average No of Incomes					
All	1.3	1.5	1.4	1.2	0.4
Clerical	1.0	1.2	1.1	1.1	0.4
Non clerical	1.3	1.5	1.4	1.2	0.4
Average value of other incomes					
All	£38.19	£56.29	£30.58	£26.19	£14.45
Clerical	£27.54	£44.47	£28.91	£24.02	£17.52
Non clerical	£38.23	£56.31	£30.59	£26.20	£14.43

Is it worth collecting clerical case information?

With declared clerical cases representing only 0.4% of the caseload and the potential for error due to non-response it is questionable as to whether the effort of collecting, keying and analysing clerical forms is cost-effective in its current form. Clearly there are differences in the characteristics of clerical cases, but for only 0.4% of the caseload we should consider whether the quarterly resource investment is necessary or could alternatively be invested in further improving the quality and timeliness of the computerised claims.

The main reason for continuing to collect clerical cases is to maintain consistency within the ASD4 forecasting model. Therefore, if we were to cease collecting clerical cases in future, it would be necessary to run the model using the last two years' data excluding clerical claims. An adjustment for the cost of clerical cases could then be made by adding an amount for known clerical expenditure or by applying a suitable grossing technique.

There are several alternatives to the current situation:

1. No change – continue to collect quarterly clerical cases as at present.
2. Continue collecting quarterly clerical returns and invest in reducing non-response.
3. Switch clerical case collection to an annual cycle, invest in reducing non-response and gross up quarterly data sets to include an estimate for the clerical load.
4. Switch clerical case collection to an annual cycle, invest in reducing non-response and produce annual analyses of the characteristics of clerical cases in order to improve expenditure forecasts.
5. Cease clerical case collection completely.

Option 1 No change – continue to collect clerical cases quarterly as at present

This option clearly has the benefit of least short term impact, particularly on the IS forecasts. However, it would not address the current likelihood of a clerical undercount and does not allow the potential for the diversion of resource into further improving the cleaning rate and timeliness of the IS publication.

Option 2 Continue collecting quarterly clerical returns and invest in reducing non-response.

This option basically means continuing with the existing arrangements and then investing more in contacting local offices to reduce non-response. This would increase ASD costs and also local office costs, but would improve the quality of the clerical data. However, given the relative size of clerical cases to the overall IS load it is debatable whether the increased costs are justifiable.

Option 3 Switch clerical case collection to an annual cycle, invest in reducing non-response and gross up quarterly data sets to include an estimate for the clerical load.

Switching clerical data collection to an annual cycle would shorten the time taken for the IC to produce the IS QSE and would allow publication time to be reduced further. To allow for the excluded clerical cases we could take a sample of clerical cases once each year which would provide summary characteristics with which to gross the rest of the year's QSEs. More effort could be invested in improving the quality of the clerical data if they were only collected once a year and we could spend time contacting local offices to reduce non-response.

In simple terms we could then apply a grossing factor to all computerised claims that would uprate the caseload to include the estimated clerical load as follows:

20 (the rating factor for a 5% sample) * 1.004 (will add an extra 0.4% to the caseload) = 20.08

However, the drawback of this simple grossing technique is that it would make no allowance for the differing characteristics of the clerical load. More accurate grossing could be achieved by the application of a multi-dimensional grossing technique that could take account of factors such as statistical group, number of dependants, premia, incomes, special circumstances and housing requirements.

The savings associated with this option would allow further automation of other aspects of the cleaning process with the potential that publication lead times could be reduced further.

Option 4 Switch clerical case collection to an annual cycle, invest in reducing non-response and produce annual analyses of the characteristics of clerical cases in order to improve expenditure forecasts.

Instead of collecting clerical cases annually and grossing up each quarter's data a simpler approach would be to use the annual clerical sample to provide information with which to calculate an estimate for the amount of clerical expenditure for addition to the Income Support forecasts.

The increased effort to reduce non-response on the annual sample would result in better quality clerical data. However, without any attempt to gross the computerised caseload there would be a step reduction in the number of IS claims in the caseload series. This would cause presentational difficulties when making comparisons of caseload changes over time, particularly among the groups to whom clerical cases significantly contribute, i.e. those receiving help with mortgages, etc.

Option 5 Cease clerical case collection completely.

Ceasing clerical case collection completely would save approximately £4,600 per quarter in ASD and local office staff costs and in postage and printing. However, as identified in option 4 there would be an impact on the continuity of the IS series if nothing was done to estimate the clerical load. In addition, if no clerical information was collected at all, it would not be possible to update the estimate for the cost of clerical cases when producing estimates of future benefit expenditure.

ANNEX D2
Income Support Process Map

ASSIST (NEWDU1)

Approx 6 months before extract

Receive system design documents informing us of future changes to IS.

Inform customers of future changes and obtain their requirements .

Request additional variables for scan

1 month before extract

Receive revised record descriptions/test scenarios, prior to receiving extract data

2 weeks before extract

Create new sample. Update rules record layouts.

Send out clerical forms

Extract date

Scan run and copied onto data cartridges

2-3 days after extract date

On receipt of data load into temp tables. Run ignore scripts/ direct mappings in ASSIST

Check number of processed records in ASSIST are in line with expected numbers

Run rules validation conditional mapping derivation

Investigate any anomalies e.g. If data size appears incorrect investigate. Consult ASSIST User Support team where appropriate

Refer back to supplier if necessary

Correct error where possible

Key clerical cases and send any reminders

Run validation analysis to show types of errors and consequently run fire once rules to clean bulk errors

Run 'assesscheck' SAS programme to identify amounts in error and run extra fire once rules to clear bulk cases with obvious error

2-3 weeks after extract

On-line data validation against source system and phone local offices where necessary.

4-5 weeks after extract

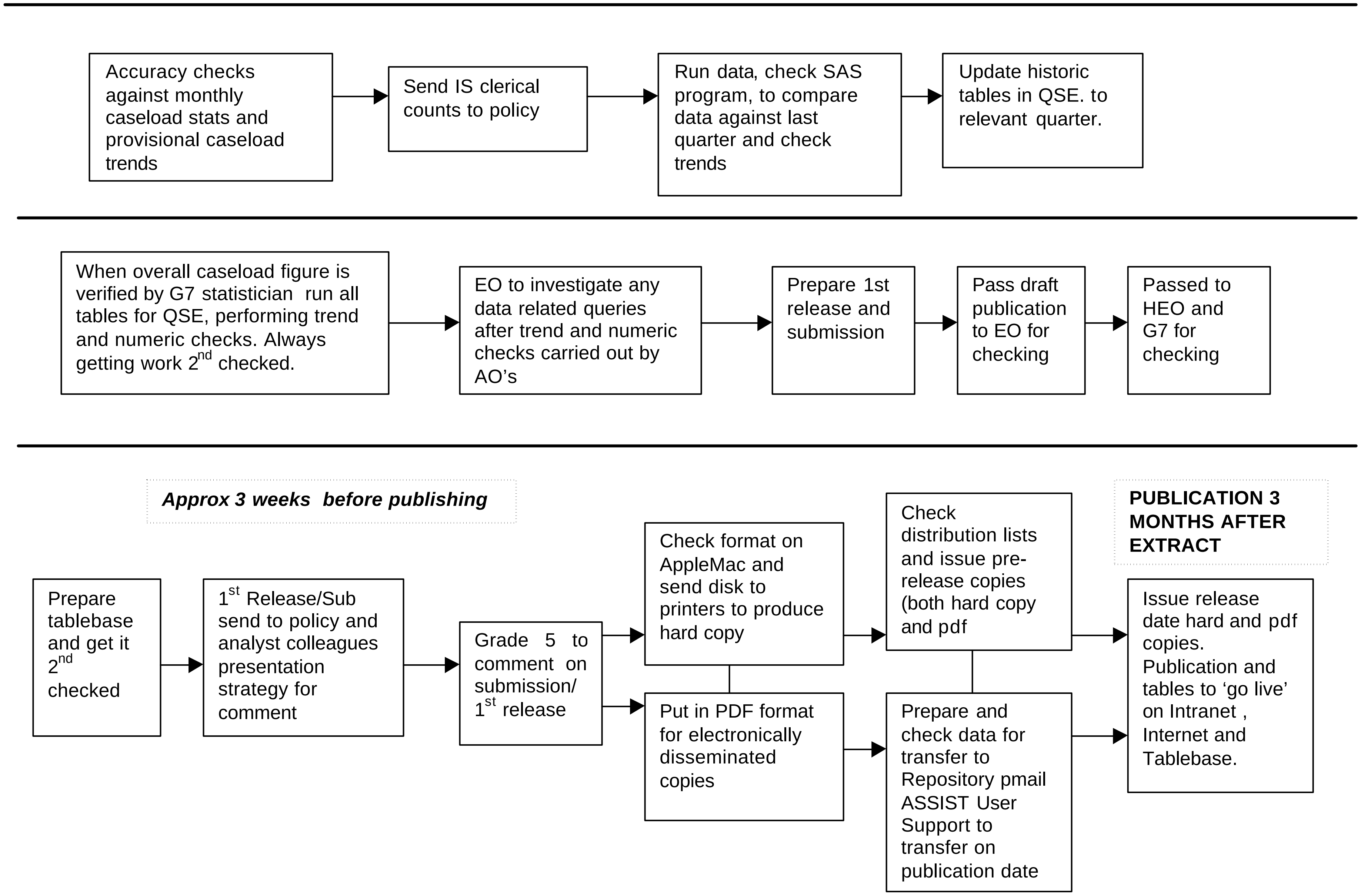
Run frequency counts on cleaned data, to search for missing values. Use source system to complete them.

6 weeks after extract

Transfer of data from ASSIST to Newdu4

Run tabling file adding Government Office Regions during process.

NEWDU2


Accuracy checks against monthly caseload stats and provisional caseload trends
Send IS clerical counts to policy
Run data, check SAS program, to compare data against last quarter and check trends
Update historic tables in QSE. to relevant quarter.
When overall caseload figure is verified by G7 statistician run all tables for QSE, performing trend and numeric checks. Always getting work 2nd checked.
EO to investigate any data related queries after trend and numeric checks carried out by AO's
Prepare 1st release and submission
Pass draft publication to EO for checking
Passed to HEO and G7 for checking
Approx 3 weeks before publishing
PUBLICATION 3 MONTHS AFTER EXTRACT
Prepare tablebase and get it 2nd checked
1st Release/Sub send to policy and analyst colleagues presentation strategy for comment
Grade 5 to comment on submission/ 1st release
Check format on AppleMac and send disk to printers to produce hard copy
Put in PDF format for electronically disseminated copies
Check distribution lists and issue pre-release copies (both hard copy and pdf
Prepare and check data for transfer to Repository pmail ASSIST User Support to transfer on publication date
Issue release date hard and pdf copies. Publication and tables to 'go live' on Intranet , Internet and Tablebase.

ANNEX D3

Staffing resources used to produce IS Quarterly Statistical Enquiry