

Jobseeker's Allowance Statistics Quality Review 2001

This review is part of the first tranche to be completed in 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.

Department for Work and pensions
Room BP5201
Benton Park View
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE98 1YX
Telephone 0191 225 5512
Fax 0191 225 3193
Web site: www.dss.gov.uk/asd/index.html

National Statistics Public Enquiry Service
Room DG/18, 1 Drummond Gate
London SW1V 2QQ
Tel: 020 7533 5888 (minicom 01633 812399)
Fax: 01633 652747
e-mail: info@statistics.gov.uk
Web site: www.statistics.gov.uk

Ó Crown Copyright 2001

*Copyright in the typographical arrangement rests with the Crown.
This publication, excluding logos, may be reproduced free of charge in any
format or medium for research, private study or for internal circulation within an
organisation. This is subject to it being reproduced accurately and not used in a
misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Crown copyright and
the title of the publication specified.*

*This is a value added publication which falls outside of the scope of the HMSO
Class Licence.*

*For any other use of this material, please write to HMSO, The Copyright Unit, St
Clements House,
2–16 Colegate, Norwich NR3 1BQ. Fax: 01603 723000 or e-mail:
copyright@hmso.gov.uk.*

Contact points

For enquiries about this review publication, contact
Judith Ridley, DWP
Tel: 0191 225 3883
e-mail: J.Ridley@MS03.dss.gsi.gov.uk

For enquiries on the review programme, contact
The review programme management team, ONS
Tel: 020 7533 6208 / 6298
e-mail: ns.quality.reviews.team.ldn@ons.gov.uk

Further copies of this publication are available from:

National Statistics Direct
Room D130
Government Offices
Cardiff Road
Newport
South Wales NP10 8XG
Telephone orders and enquiries: 01633 812078
Fax orders: 01633 812762

ISBN 1-85197-9379

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.

Contents

	Page
National Statistics Quality Reviews	5
Report to the National Statistician	6
Annex A Project initiation document	12
Annex B User questionnaire	15
Annex C User comments	19
Annex D Process description	24

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.

Tel. 020 7533 6208/6298 or e-mail ns.quality.reviews.team.ldn@ons.gov.uk

Report to the National Statistician

Introduction

The Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) publication presents data from the JSA 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 JSA population and how they compare with earlier periods;
- provide a basic summary of the main features of JSA 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.

JSA was introduced on 7 October 1996. It replaced Unemployment Benefit and Income Support for unemployed people and brought them together in a unified benefit with two routes of entry: it can be claimed by people who are available for and actively seeking employment, including those in remunerative work for less than 16 hours a week on average, and by people on a government training scheme.

The JSA QSE was introduced in November 1996 to provide benefit-related statistics on JSA claimants in Great Britain. It is a 5% sample of all JSA claimants conducted on the second Thursday of 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.

The project board comprised:

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

The review team comprised:

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

The review was set up to look at three projects concurrently: Income Support Statistics, Jobseeker's Allowance Statistics and Child Support Agency Statistics; the Project Initiation document at Annex A reflects this.

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 PID at Annex A.

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

Too little detail was complained of by 28% of users. Nobody complained of too much detail.

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

The explanation of **sampling error** was considered 'fairly easy' to understand by 47% of users, with 25% finding it 'very easy'. Thirteen per cent 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.

A large proportion of users wanted the statistics **more frequently**: 27% wanted them monthly.

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 **media** for receiving or accessing the statistics was paper (51%). Thirty per cent received the statistics by email and 16% via either the internet or the DWP intranet.

Fifty-two per cent of external users were aware that the statistics were available on the **internet**.

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

While no users experienced 'great difficulty' obtaining answers to **queries**, 20% experienced "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:

- A number of users commented on their desire for the publication to show additional statistics; for example, flows data showing comparisons between quarters or years. This will be provided but on an ad hoc rather than on a routine basis.
- Review of the publication content will become more frequent and the inclusion of external customers in the consultation process will add further value to the data.
- DWP estimates of the duration of JSA claims differ from those from the ONS claimant count, despite the fact that they refer to the same people. We have investigated this difference as the results are important to the Government Actuary's Department for the production of forecasts for the contributory element of JSA. Other customers have also expressed a desire for consistency of duration data across benefits using the same methods as those used in the claimant count. Work is ongoing and we have raised a 'change request' to add an alternative claim start date - the same as ONS use - onto our JSA data.
- The JSA dataset also holds information on claimants on government training schemes, on terminations of claims, and on the back-to-work bonus. We will consult users and establish whether there is demand for further analysis in these areas.
- We have invested a small amount of time in quality assuring the short-term sickness indicator and related variables on the JSA database and provided some ad hoc analysis. This will continue until these variables are validated further.

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 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 TWG theme group will consider how best to widen the consultation process, 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.

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 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 comprises:

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

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

The review team comprises:

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

Their responsibilities are 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:

Jobseeker's allowance	33 users
-----------------------	-------------

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

Well presented	18
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	9
No	13
Don't know	10

4. If yes to Q3, please specify below:

See detailed comments in annex C

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

Yes	8
No	17
Don't know	4

6. If yes to Q5, please specify below:

None.

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

Yes	0
No	25
Don't know	3

8. If yes to Q7, please specify below:

See detailed comments in Annex C

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

Very reliable	17
Fairly reliable	13
Not very reliable	0
Not at all reliable	0
No opinion	3

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

Very easy to understand	8
Fairly easy to understand	15
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	7
No	15
Don't know	7

12. If yes to Q11, please specify below:

See Detailed comments in Annex C

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

Monthly	9
Quarterly	19
Annually	1

Other (please specify)	0
No opinion	4

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

They are published sufficiently soon after the date to which they relate	19
They are not published sufficiently soon after the date to which they relate	10
Don't know	3

15. How do you receive or access the statistics?

	JSA
Paper copy	19
Email	11
Internet	3
DSS intranet	3
Other (please specify)	1 – SAS

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

Yes	16
No	15
Don't know	0

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

Yes	10
No	18
Don't know	1

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

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

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

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 DSS)	Telephone number

Annex C

User consultation – 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 below (“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.

Further detailed comments

Given the new corporate agenda it would be useful to see more contextual material from other benefits.

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).

District-level analysis of JSA 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 JSA. Statistics more specifically related to Scotland and its LAs/postcodes.

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.

Flow data, eg % of claimants who receive JSA(CB); more detailed analysis, merging one or two years’ data possibly.

Response: This can be provided on an ad hoc basis; routine provision is dependent on the availability of more resources.

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

In addition to the data currently published, users require data on the number of people who are temporarily sick and claiming JSA to be made available regularly. There is a strong interest in the relationship between different benefits and this part of the JSA system is considered important in this context. We would also like duration structures to be introduced. We would like to see the recording of claim start and end dates and publication of duration structures with the regular output. Our aim in the longer term would be to have duration included in the cross-benefit client group analyses. In order to achieve this we would like duration recording introduced consistently across all benefits, using the same methods as the Claimant Count published by ONS.

Response: Numbers temporarily sick and claiming JSA, duration figures, and statistics relating to claim start and end dates, are already published. A request has been made for the extract to include an alternative claim start date so as to be consistent with ONS.

JSA– sub-GOR-level analysis.

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?

JSA childless couples by age group to assist New Deal for Partners. I am not sure from the text on JSA how you rate the sample of JSA beneficiaries to the actual numbers of unemployed for that particular month of the QSE and how the relationship between JSA (C), JSA (IB), JSA (C&IB) and credit only cases is dealt with.

Response: We will provide JSA childless couples by age group and will give clearer explanations of how sample numbers are rated up.

JSA - 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 de-segregating 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.

JSA – Yes, on flow data.

JSA

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?

IS/JSA – other ASSIST data sets; BA MIS data.

JSA – with FRS equivalents, but this is well known.

JSA – there is a question about the duration's on JSA. ASD(IC) and ONS have different definitions of duration.

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

JSA

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.

Interviews with users

John Marais, ASD4 (JSA statistics user)

Can we get the statistics to ASD4 more quickly? The presentation doesn't need to be publication-standard.

Response: We will investigate adding Mr Marais to list of internal reviewers of pre-release statistics.

A contact name in the publication would be helpful.

Response: We will do this.

Why does the IC change variable names? This can be confusing.

Response: Variable names were changed in order to be consistent with the data naming standards in the ASSIST computer system.

Annex D - Process description

Part A: Establishing requirements and changes to them

- A1 User 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*
- B3a Justification of Current Design*
- B3b Limitations and Considered options for Change*
- B3c Improvements and Future Plans*
- 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*

Annex D1: Staffing resources used to produce JSA QSE

Title

Jobseeker's Allowance, Quarterly Enquiry

Brief Description:

The Jobseeker's Allowance Quarterly Statistical Enquiry (QSE) is a 5% sample of recipients of Jobseeker's Allowance in Great Britain and is extracted from the administrative computer system three weeks after the enquiry date, which is the second Thursday in each quarter. Statistics on the characteristics of claimants, their partners and dependants are then generated.

The publication presents data from the JSA QSE together with historical data on unemployed claimants of Unemployment Benefit and Income Support. Its main purpose is to:

- give summary analyses which show the key features of the JSA population and how they compare with earlier periods;
- supply a basic summary of the main features of JSA and how they affect numbers of recipients and amounts of benefit in payment; and
- 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 forecast policy formulation/evaluation and are a key feature in Departmental responses to parliamentary questions 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 is regularly supplied to operational and social researchers, policy development and evaluation staff, benefit expenditure forecasters, analysts and economists within DWP. The data is also used by other government agencies and departments including the Welsh Assembly, Scottish Parliament, Northern Ireland Assembly, Government Actuary's Department, Employment Service and Benefits Agency. Wider distribution is also made to academics, centres of higher and further education and established market research organisations and interest groups.

Department/Section responsible:

DWP, Analytical Services Division

Report Compiled by: Judith Ridley

PART A: Establishing requirements and changes to them

A1 User consultation

DWP user requirements were initially developed through in-depth discussion and correspondence. Subsequent requirements are established via frequent contact with customers and from written feedback to the standard release. There are no formal regular meetings organised, however this may be something which we can look to organise in the future, especially now that new customers are established due to recent DWP organisational changes.

There is also an increasing desire for local level information, which has prompted a greater investment in 100% data. Review of the publication content could become more frequent and possible inclusion of external customers in the consultation process could add further value to the data and develop the Information Centre's part in the Divisional Plan.

A website has been established on the DWP Intranet as well as on the Internet, and publications, tables and press notices are made available on the release date. In addition contact details are provided.

In response to internal user consultation an electronic data warehouse (called the Repository) has been developed containing historical and current datasets with standard data names to allow analysis on customers of working age and the benefits they are receiving.

As part of this review we have undertaken a user consultation questionnaire, full details of which are in Annex B, which was sent to known users of the statistics both within and outside government. There were follow-up interviews with a number of users.

The project board believed that there was a need for the setting up of a user group of external users with whom there was regular contact and who could rapidly be canvassed for views.

A2 Data providers' interests

Compliance costs to the Benefits Agency are negligible given that most of the data comes directly from DWP's computer systems.

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 benefit claimant data.

A3 Authority for production

Government requires the collection of data in order to formulate and evaluate policy and forecast benefit expenditure. There are regular discussions between statistical staff, representatives of ITSA (DWP's IT agency) and main customers to agree procedures and changes.

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.

Variables across benefits have been renamed according to a data standards convention, which allows cross benefit analysis.

Definitions and conventions have also been standardised across benefits for example a child is 'a dependant under 16' a couple is 'two persons either married or living together as husband and wife and a lone parent is 'a claimant without a partner but with one or more dependants.

B2 Methodology

Process maps and instruction manuals have been developed and are maintained by the members of the Jobseeker's Allowance team. These documents have been widely used and have proved extremely beneficial to all staff, particularly those new to the team. All documentation involved in the data production process is regularly updated.

There are checks that the methods we use are appropriate using comparisons with Office for National Statistics claimant count data, management information data and forecasts. Checks and documentation cover all aspects of the data items collected.

B3 Completeness and fitness for purpose

The statistics are based on 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 (approx 20), thereby giving integer population figures; and
- (iii) claimant population 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 100,000 provides very comprehensive coverage. Extracting the data 21 days after the enquiry date enables a better estimate of the true number of cases entitled to claim. This is because it allows for the inclusion of claims, which had not been put on the system by the enquiry date, and the exclusion of any claims, which had ended.

B3a Justification of current design

The current design is justified mainly because the required accuracy is achieved most efficiently, given the means available to collect, process and publish the data (see annex D1 for details of staff resources used). The cost-efficient method with which the data is obtained would be difficult to improve as the only source of the data used is the DWP benefit systems.

The ONS unemployed claimant count is used to gross up the sample data collected by the JSA QSE to reflect the total number of JSA claimants. The ONS count includes clerically processed claims(0.6% of all claims), which means that these are also reflected in the results of the JSA QSE. There is no evidence to suggest these clerically processed claims are different to other claims, and therefore no suggestion of bias.

The JSA publication also presents data from a data set, which contains claims, which have terminated before the extract date. This enables us to analyse claims, which ended in the 13 weeks prior to the enquiry date (these include claims that started and ended within those 13 weeks).

B3b Limitations and considered options for change

A limitation of collecting data electronically direct from the JSA Payments System (JSAPS) is indicated by the fact that some data items are not available on source systems and have to be collected clerically. One example of this is where DWP's Central Data Unit collect information from job centres clerically and email us the details on an Excel spreadsheet.

The 5% sample can provide client group analysis down to parliamentary constituency level (ie figures above the accuracy threshold of 500), which meets the requirements of users. Data will not be made available at ward or postcode sector level from the 5% sample as estimates are insufficiently accurate. Investment in 100% data means that some small area statistical requirements can be met elsewhere. Providing analysis on 100% data in line with what is currently provided on 5% data within the same timeframe has resource implications that make it unfeasible due to the commitment that would be required in cleaning and validating the data.

B3c Improvements and future plans

The process involved in validating the data has been radically improved since November 1996 with the development of a generic data analysis system (ASSIST), to support the branch's core statistical business. The use of this system has meant that timeliness has improved from nine to three-and-a-half months from the extract date to publication. It has also improved quality, as it allows validation rules to be written and run on personal PCs, enabling a greater number of rules to be run in a short space of time.

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 an analysis process that will be more user friendly and flexible to changing customer needs.

The ASSIST Repository provides a single source of trusted data for the Division's analysts, economists and researchers that is consistent with published statistics.

We are currently in the process of raising a 'change request' with the JSA data providers to include an extra variable in our data to match the claim start date on JUVOS data. This is to facilitate Government Actuary's Department (GAD) work on forecasting expenditure of contributory JSA. Currently, ASD and JUVOS extract claim start date from different sources in JSAPS due to both parties holding correct but different claim start date definitions, causing GAD problems when trying to match durations from the two datasets. Defining a common claim start date definition may be something which ASD and JUVOS may need to decide in the future.

The JSA dataset also holds information on claimants on government training schemes, on terminations of claims, and on the back-to-work bonus. We will consult users and establish whether there is demand for further analysis in these areas.

At present the terminations data contains only the first termination in a claim; it does not show multiple terminations. One customer has requested that we enhance the data to show multiple terminations within the quarter and work has already begun to do this for historic and future data.

B4 Key assumptions

It is assumed that the allocation of national insurance numbers within the population is random and that the sample selection by NINO is, therefore, unbiased. Analysis of the distribution of NINO endings in the 100% datasets collected annually supports the assumption.

Also that the data by the JSAPS computer system is accurate.

B5 Risk assessment and contingency planning

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

- The collection and processing of the data is paramount and processes are in place to make sure the data is available on the specified release date. Data is extracted directly from JSAPS; if for any reason the system should fail the data can be extracted retrospectively at a later date. We store our data separately from that of the Benefits Agency (BA); moreover, our data is stored on two separate storage sites within Headquarters.
- Should the data prove to be corrupt on receipt, duplicates can be obtained from data providers within 24 hours. Once loaded, a back up of ASD systems is run each night and compressed data is stored on disk. In the event of an anomaly with the source data a revised extract can be taken.
- In the unlikely event of the data being corrupt and time not permitting a re-run of the scan, GMS (Generalised Matching Service, part of BA) data can be used.
- Where certain data are not stored electronically on JSAPS, information can be collected clerically by local offices, keyed by Central Data Unit and issued to ASD in Excel spreadsheet format. There is a certain element of risk with this method of data collection as it is prone to errors during collection and keying.
- In order to ensure timely and convenient customer receipt, data can be viewed by a number of methods (hard copies, e-mail, intranet and internet).

B6 Implementation

Future changes are documented in 'Change Request Impact Analysis' details and 'High Level Functional Design' documents. Any changes are usually due to new/revised legislation or amendments to customer requirements.

All development work is designed and tested prior to going live. Any new data required are received from suppliers and loaded and checked in a test environment.

Part C: Operating the system

C1 Training and instructions

Training and instructions for staff, relating to Jobseeker's Allowance collation procedures, have been documented in detail in a training manual which is regularly updated. Individuals on the section responsible for carrying out the processes compiled the manual. The training guidance has been checked by other members of the team.

Training needs for staff are identified with line management and included in Forward Job Plans and Personal Development Plans. This planning process has proved very effective, as time has been spent focusing on individual team members' needs.

Most training is provided via in-house courses or desk training. Training courses are highlighted in a course manual and a weekly Headquarters circular, which are made available to all staff. Training within the team is a continuous process.

C2 Incoming data quality

Prior to receiving the data we contact the supplier to ensure they hold the correct run dates and extract dates for the coming year.

We receive details of new variables on JSAPS through Change Request Impact Analysis notifications and High Level Function Design documents. If a new variable is required, we notify the provider and receive test data and a revised record description. This is to enable us to amend layouts, and load and test new variables. We need to ensure that all the required information is shown and that the original data is not affected.

The quality of the incoming data is checked through a series of processes:

Initial data loading checks are carried out against the record descriptions/layouts

Checks against number of records held for previous quarter.

Computer derivation/validation checks. A validation analysis is run against the data to show the type and quantity of errors. There are usually around 4,500 cases in error (5% of the total sample); around 500 can be cleaned in bulk by writing 'fire-once' rules and 4,000 have to be cleaned manually. Fire-once rules can be written in ASSIST to run against the data and correct errors. When a case is validated the weekly payment is assumed to be correct as it is assumed that this is the most validated entry in the local office. Where an error is not

obvious individual record details are examined or the relevant Employment Service office contacted to obtain the correct details.

When the data is completely cleaned frequency counts are ran against it to highlight any anomalies. As our experience and knowledge has grown we have enhanced these checks to provide a final dataset adequate for our users needs.

C3 Response

The response rate for the data is 100% effective due to the data being received via an electronic scan of the JSA computer system (JSAPS). As JSAPS is the method by which virtually all benefit payments are made we are confident that virtually all coverage is comprehensive. The clerical cases that are not collected represent only around 0.6% of the total caseload and this figure is continually falling. However, grossing to ONS claimant count data allows for these clerical cases.

C4 Outgoing data quality

Frequency counts and trend checks are conducted and comparisons made with ONS's Labour Market Trends, which is a 100% Great Britain count (including clerical cases), to validate the outputs. There is liaison with DWP Policy Group and other areas of ASD if trend changes are queried. If outliers are discovered then checks are made against live benefit systems and corrections/removal are carried out. Numeric and trend checks are made on tables and charts created from the data and disparities investigated.

In the event of the primary results 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.

The outgoing data quality has improved immensely since the development of ASSIST. Prior to ASSIST the cleaning process was lengthy: validation rules were run against the data on a mainframe computer held on a different site. After manually cleaning the data was downloaded onto the mainframe computer and validation rules run. This process usually occurred two or three times and the data was never 100% clean. ASSIST enables us to write and run our own rules and automatically validate cases on our own PCs, which enables us to ensure every case is cleaned.

Numeric and trend checks are carried out on all tables and charts prior to release. Any disparities are investigated in depth. The final publication is thoroughly checked by people not involved in production within the statistics division, as well as by Policy colleagues.

C5 Accuracy

The main source of error is sampling error. Comparisons are made with previous quarters' data and confidence intervals are published within the routine publication. In order to produce statistics as accurate as possible the JSA data is grossed up to ONS's Labour Market data. This is a 100% scan, which includes clerical cases however only contains limited variables. The rating factor is derived from sex, marital status and government office region.

C6 Confidentiality

The ASSIST database, which is used to collate the JSA data, is password protected. All documentation is stored in lockable filing cabinets.

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 the data Repository available to customers. Electronic data are compressed and stored on back-up disk.

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

Part D Disseminating the results

D1 Availability of the statistics

Statistics are available within three-and-a half months of the quarter end. Details of the publication are available on Statbase and tables are available on the DWP intranet and internet. Publications are available in hard copies and electronic copies are available on the intranet and internet on the release date. Users can obtain further details by contacting the Department in writing, by 'phone, fax and email, and via the intranet and internet. All contact numbers are made available in the documentation.

Jobseeker's Allowance data, both live and terminated, are made available for internal DWP users in the Repository on release date. The variable names in the Repository have been renamed according to data standard conventions; this enables comparisons of data for cross-benefit analysis purposes.

Less detailed publications and further electronic dissemination would enable quicker release. Also, an increased awareness of where data is held on the internet would encourage more website users and reduce the number of hard copies disseminated.

D2 Pre-release arrangements

Contributions are made weekly to ASD's Forward Look Diary informing ministers of forthcoming publications over the next three months. ONS are advised monthly of publications due over the forthcoming four months for inclusion in the National Statistics Update. Policy Group and ASD economic analysts are supplied with drafts of the First Release and ministerial submission for comment. The completed publication is sent to reprographics two weeks before release date to allow time to produce and check printing and formatting. On the Friday before release (release usually being a Thursday) 12 hard copies accompanied by the First Release and submission are sent to Parliamentary Relations Unit (PRU) to be made available in the House of Commons and House of Lords libraries. A covering letter is attached giving strict instructions for the publications not to be made available until the release date. In addition, 30 copies accompanied by the First Release and submission are sent to the DWP Press Office. Ministers and relevant key officials are supplied with final copies 48 hours before publication. To ensure this deadline is met, they are disseminated via email on the Monday prior to release, using a security coversheet, which allows us to highlight any key information. Press Office receive an electronic First Release prior to release date, to allow them to format the document and make it available to the press on release date.

On release date publications are distributed electronically and manually, depending on preference, to other customers. If a customer has an email address we usually disseminate electronically, unless they contact us to request a hard copy. Electronic copies are free but external customers are charged £5 for hard copies. We send a list of approximately 15 paying customers to the secretariat, who in turn invoice them.

In order to ensure that electronic tables and publications are available on the intranet and internet it is important that we provide the ASSIST user group support team with the correct documents and links well in advance.

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.

Within the Repository a decode editor facility exists which is updated every quarter to reflect any amendments to the data. Also, record descriptions exist for every JSA data set, live or terminated, in the Repository. These contain a complete list of variables on the data set, their data standards name and a list of codes and descriptions.

D4 Comparability and revisions

The main change to definitions has been the replacement of Unemployment Benefit (UB) and Income Support for unemployed people and brought them together in a unified benefit with two routes of entry. There is full documentation of the impact of these changes in the JSA quarterly publication and certain historic tables show JSA comparisons with UB data.

Part E Review:

E1 User Satisfaction

User satisfaction is assessed via contact and correspondence with main customers. Through discussion and consultation changes are implemented where appropriate and possible. The possibility exists for a readership survey to be conducted and for a more formal mechanism for collecting user comments.

E2 Review

The key feature for the future is the need to link the datasets for different benefits so that the position of client groups (children and families; working age; pensioners) can be assessed. We expect this to be the driving force for future developments on harmonisation, political analysis etc.

Annex D1
Staffing resources used to produce JSA Quarterly Statistics

