

Guidance for Users

Experimental Statistics on Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Flows

Information Directorate

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1. Summary

This document aims to assist users wishing to use the new Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) flows data. It provides background information on the justification for publishing flows data, potential data issues you may need to be aware of, and a description of how the flows data is constructed.

The flows statistics are designed to supplement the National Statistics on caseloads published by DWP. The figures are currently being released as 'experimental statistics', more detail on which is available later in the paper.

2. What are HB/CTB Flows?

The flows statistics cover information on the number of new and closed claims for a HB/CTB each month.

Definition of an On-Flow

An on-flow is defined as being the start of a new claim for HB/CTB.

Definition of an Off-Flow

An off-flow is defined as being the end of a claim for HB/CTB.

3. Why are the Benefit Flows figures being labelled as experimental?

Labelling the benefit flows figures as experimental is consistent with UK Statistical Authority guidance on new statistical outputs. It helps to identify the figures as new and demonstrates that we are open to feedback on their usefulness. For more information and guidance on the use of experimental statistics, please visit the following page on the ONS website:

[GUIDE TO USING EXPERIMENTAL STATISTICS](#)

If you have any feedback on the usefulness of the flows statistics, then we would be pleased to receive this using the following email address:

IFDDMS.HBMSDIT@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

4. How are the caseload and flows data related?

Many users may assume that the figures contained within the caseload National Statistics and the flows data can be exactly reconciled, so that the opening caseload, plus the people flowing onto the benefit over the quarter, minus the number flowing off benefit over the quarter, will equal the closing caseload for a benefit.

However, although often very close, the relationship between the datasets is more complex with differences arising due to the following:

Flows data is derived by linking two “frozen” caseload datasets together. It is this ‘frozen’ dataset that is used to produce monthly National Statistic¹ caseload statistics.

The methodology used to derive caseload can be accessed at the following [link](#).

Off-flow

An off-flow is counted if a claimant appears on Month X and not on Month Y e.g. the May 2009 off-flow figure is calculated by counting claimants that are on the National Statistic “frozen” dataset in April 2009 and not on the May 2009 dataset.

On-flow

An on-flow is counted if a claimant does not appear on Month X and does appear on Month Y e.g. the May 2009 on-flow figure is calculated by counting claimants that are not on the National Statistic “frozen” dataset in April 2009 and appear on the May 2009 dataset.

Limitations

- The main limitations with the flows data is that a number of records have missing start dates on the source data² and are therefore removed from the “frozen” caseload dataset. Subsequently the start date can appear in the following months “frozen” dataset so there is a large off-flow one month followed by a large on-flow the next.
- The “frozen” datasets contain data that is substituted for months with missing or dubious caseload. This results in inconsistent flows data for these LAs.
- The flows data records people flowing on and off HB/CTB based on their address at **the time of flow**. It will therefore exclude people who remain on HB/CTB but move between one Local Authority to another. However, this latter group will be reflected as a change in the overall caseload for a particular Local Authority;
- Rounding to base 10 make it difficult to produce exact reconciliations between the caseload and flows information.

5. Rounding Policy

The same policy on data protection and rounding has been adopted for both the National Statistics caseload and flows data which involves rounding to base 10.

¹ National Statistics are prepared in accordance with the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Further information can be found at:- <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk>

² The source data is the Single Housing Benefit Extract (SHBE).