Department for Work and Pensions statistics transformed

The modernisation of the DWP's data sources and statistical publications

A National Statistics paper

Department for Work and Pensions

Information Directorate

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Department for Work and Pensions statistics transformed – the modernisation of the DWP's data sources and statistical publications.

Summary

The Department for Work and Pensions will soon be making major changes to the National Statistics which it publishes, both in the data sources employed and methods of delivery.

The forthcoming changes will switch many of the regular DWP benefit publications to a new 100% administrative data source, the Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study (WPLS), which offers substantial advantages over the 5% sample data currently used. The most innovative feature of the WPLS will be its unprecedented capacity to link claims over time between working age benefits, employment schemes (e.g. New Deals) and employment. It therefore offers a striking improvement over current methodology in the information available concerning flows of clients between working age benefits and employment schemes and, following further development work, to employment. Information highlighting flows of claimants through the benefit system will provide crucial evidence to assist policy design and evaluation. Other advantages are improvements to the accuracy of benefit caseload estimates and, because it is free of sampling error, expansion of the capability to produce statistics for small areas.

As part of these changes, DWP are introducing a new statistical group classification reflecting the benefit or combinations of benefits which clients receive. By taking advantage of the greater range of benefits appearing in the WPLS, the new classification permits categories to be defined more closely. In addition, the new breakdown crosses the working age to State Pension age boundary, allowing analysis of benefit claimant cohorts through work and into retirement.

A further important change is that in summer 2005, DWP will begin releasing aggregate statistics using a new Internet tabulation tool. Initially this will be

restricted to 5% sample statistics. The tabulation tool will enable users to download bespoke tabulations, designed to their specific needs.

The first batch of benefit statistics utilising 100% data will be released in October 2005. Current plans see the release of benefit/ employment flows in the first half of 2006.

Section 1 Introduction

Many of the National Statistics published by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) concerning benefit claimants and welfare-to-work programme participants will shortly be changing to utilise the new Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study (WPLS) database[1]. From October 2005 many of the DWP's core statistical publications for benefits will be based on the WPLS. At the same time as adopting the new data source, DWP is making important changes to the dissemination of its statistics, especially in harnessing the capacity of the Internet further.

Although based on the same underlying administrative benefit computer systems, there are several crucial differences between the WPLS database and the databases that are currently employed. First, the WPLS enables the production of statistics based on 100% of claimants, compared to the 5% samples (rated up by a factor of 20) which are currently reported in most benefit publications. Second, it is possible to update data held in the WPLS to include information which is received late, producing more accurate caseload estimates. (Further discussion about so-called 'retrospection' appears in section 2.5.). Third, the WPLS incorporates employment data obtained from Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC)[2]. Furthermore the WPLS makes it possible to link claimants between separate benefits and welfare-to-work programmes, and to employment information obtained from HMRC.

As a result, use of the WPLS will widen the scope of DWP's statistics and yield further improvements to accuracy compared to the existing 5% data. Distinct advantages will be greatly improved information about claimant flows between benefits and, for the first time, flows between benefits and

[1] A public consultation of proposed changes was conducted in mid-2004. A consultation paper describing the proposals, together with the DWP's response to submissions received may be found at www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/stats_consultation/stats_consultation.asp
Further information about the WPLS can be found at
http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/longitudinal_study/ic_longitudinal_study.asp

[2] New data-sharing provisions introduced in the Employment Act 2002 opened the way for DWP to receive data on employment from HMRC for the first time

employment schemes and employment. Improvements in small group statistics, such as small geographical areas, will also be obtained.

Strict rules govern access to the WPLS database and the uses to which it may be put. The WPLS was announced in a written statement to Parliament and accompanying press release on 16th December 2003. DWP have a legal and ethical responsibility to ensure that the WPLS is used appropriately. We have, therefore, developed a set of safeguards around anonymisation of outputs, access rights, system monitoring, storage/retention of the information and vetting new uses. Information on this, and a full range of the Study's uses, is available in the House of Commons library and on the DWP internet site (see the link at the bottom of the previous page).

Section 2 compares the WPLS to the data sources currently used to produce DWP's statistical outputs. In the remaining sections the impact of adopting the WPLS as the principal data source is discussed, concentrating on differences between 'current' (5% sample) and 'new' (WPLS) outputs, and highlighting some practical issues including timing of publication. Two other changes which will occur in conjunction with the introduction of WPLS data for publications are also described. These are the revision of statistical group definitions, and planned changes in methods of dissemination.

Section 2 Underlying differences between WPLS and 5% sample data

2.1 Overview

Broadly speaking, the 5% sample and WPLS databases are both generated from the same data sources – the DWP's various administrative benefit computer systems. However, some important differences exist in the methodology for data extraction with the outcome that the two resulting databases represent slightly different populations. Consequently (and inevitably) there will be consistent and quantifiable differences in the statistics obtained from the two. This section examines these underlying technical differences and their broad impacts, with some benefit-specific comparisons following in Section 3.

2.2 Database structure

A key difference exists between the structure of the WPLS and 5% sample data. The 5% sample data sources consist of a series of separate databases, one being produced for every benefit, each quarter (half yearly for State Pension). Once a database has been produced for a reference date it is 'frozen'. That is, no changes will be made to it if information about any claims is received at a later date. By contrast, the WPLS may be envisaged as a single database which includes all benefits and all dates. Each time a scan is performed (i.e. data is extracted from the computer system), as well as adding new claims, existing claim records are updated if there has been a change since the previous extract.

2.3 Scan frequencies

Currently, most DWP benefit statistics are published on a quarterly basis from 5% samples of claimants[3]. The 5% sample data are of two types. The majority of benefits (Income Support, Pension Credit, Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance, State Pension, Widow's Benefit, Bereavement Benefit) use 'Snapshot' extracts for which the data extracted on the day of interest (the

[3] Although there are important exceptions, most notably statistics relating to Welfare to Work programmes which are generally published quarterly from 100 percent sample data.

'statistical enquiry date') consist exclusively of cases which are 'live' at that date. Cases which have terminated since the previous scan are not included in the extracted data.

A different methodology is employed for Incapacity Benefit/Severe Disablement Allowance (IB/SDA) and Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). As well as including a snapshot of claims which are live on the statistical enquiry date, these databases contain cases which have terminated in the 3 months prior to the statistical enquiry date. That is, they include all sample cases which have been live during a quarter. In addition, the JSA figures are scaled to match the Claimant Count.

The 100 per cent samples are 'snapshot' data but are taken at more frequent intervals than the 5% sample scans. Scans take place every six weeks for IB/SDA, State Pension (SP), Widow's Benefit (WB) and Bereavement Benefit (BB); every 4 weeks for Attendance Allowance (AA), Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Carer's Allowance (CA), and fortnightly for Income Support (IS), Pension Credit (PC) and JSA. Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) data are received every 2 weeks plus Industrial Injuries Benefits every 4 weeks. However, HB, CTB and Industrial Injuries Benefits do not appear in the WPLS yet because data quality issues are still being addressed.

2.4 Impact of extract frequencies –detecting short claims

Differences exist in the ability of the 5% sample and WPLS data to identify claims of short duration and these have a marked effect on the totals obtained. These short duration cases also affect the numbers starting a new claim (on-flow) or ending a benefit claim (off-flow) with reference to a certain time period.

Currently, for those benefits for which 'snapshot' data are used, claims which both start and end between two consecutive extract dates will not be detected. For the 5% sample data, because there is a 3 month gap between extracts,

some claims with a duration of from one day up to almost 3 months will be missed. The WPLS data offers an improvement in this respect. Because of the shorter interval (2, 4 or 6 weeks) between extracts, many of the cases 'missed' during 5% sample data extraction will appear in the WPLS data (although claims starting and ending within the fortnight -or 4 or 6 weeks- between extracts will still be 'missed').

The situation is different for IB/SDA and JSA for which the detection of short term claims by WPLS data is slightly worse. Whereas 5% sample data capture every live case in the quarter, including those which were terminated, 100% 'snapshot' data is drawn at 2-weekly (JSA) or 6-weekly (IB/SDA) intervals. As a result some cases lasting from 1 day to almost 6 weeks will not be detected, and the resulting flow information for these two benefits will be slightly worse than the current situation.

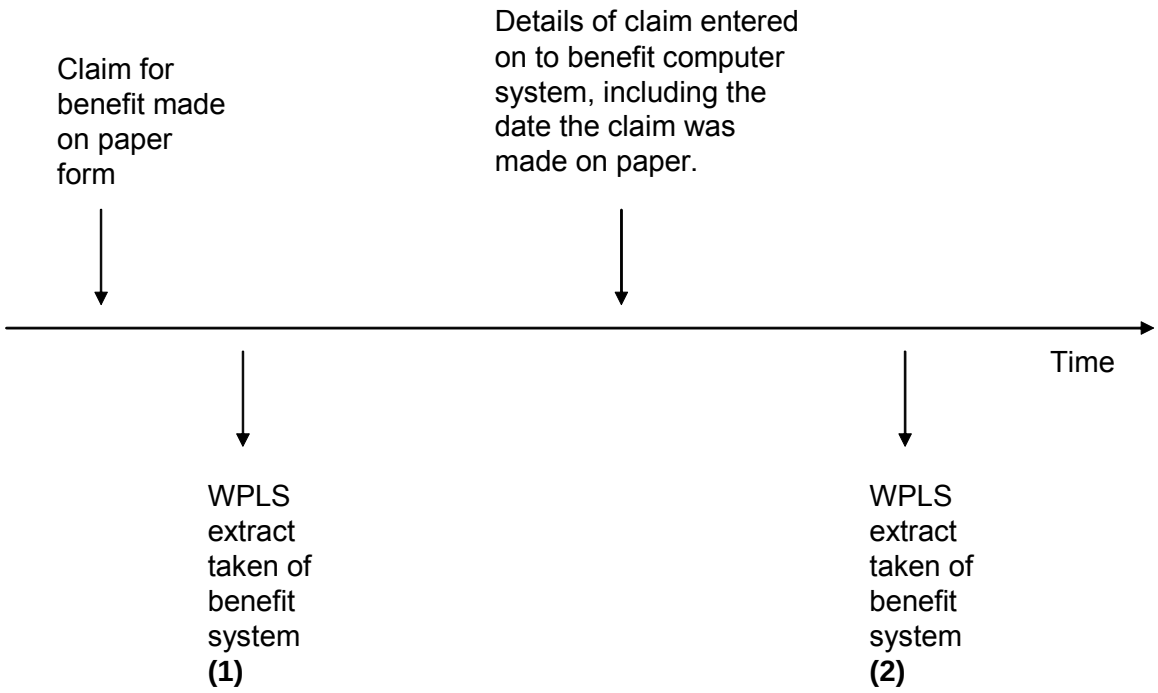
2.5 Impact of updating – 'retrospection'

In practice delays occur between some new claims starting and their entry onto the computer system (so called 'late starts'). Likewise there can be 'late terminations' - delays in entering details about claims that have finished - although these are small in number. This 'late' information will be absent from extracts taken before the information is received and as a result is missed by the 5 percent data, which will underestimate the number of new claims (and total claims).

The 100 percent data offers greatly improved recording of late starts. Data is collected not only at the reference date but also by further extracts which occur during the following 3 months, permitting 'late' information to be added to the database (with respect to the reference date) retrospectively. The 100 percent total therefore represents the 'live' caseload at a date more accurately, and is especially useful for benefits such as Incapacity Benefit and Disability Living Allowance where claims are often complicated and may take a long time to process. Section 3 demonstrates that for the majority of benefits the caseload appearing in WPLS data is larger than the 5% caseload. The

primary cause of this difference is retrospectively adding late claims which are not collected on the 5% data.

Figure 2.1 – Illustration of how late claims are added to WPLS



For example, the diagram above shows the progress of a claim for benefit alongside the benefit computer system extracts used for DWP statistics. As the claim is not entered on to the benefit computer system until after extract 1, the first extract does not include that claim. Extract 2 includes the claim in question and the date of the original claim for benefit on the paper form. As the WPLS is updated when additional information is received, the addition of extract 2 allows the claim to be reported as live at the time of extract 1. The later extract 2 allows more accurate statistics for an earlier point in time.

A three month period for adding this late information has been selected as it provides an acceptable compromise between capturing the vast majority of 'late starts', and timeliness of publication. Updating will continue as new data is available, though of course the number of changes with respect to a particular date will diminish over time. As a result the data held by DWP with respect to a particular date will change slightly over time. The practical implications of this issue are discussed further in Section 5.3.

2.6 Sampling error

Statistics published from 5% sample data are subject to sampling error whereby estimates of the true population value (obtained by rating up by a factor of 20) may, by chance, be slightly lower or slightly higher than the true population value. An indication of the effect of these sampling errors can be gained from Table 2.1. Column (a) shows the estimated value. The true population value will most probably lie somewhere in a range around the value estimated by the sample data. This range is shown in Column (b). Usually this interval is approximately symmetric so, for example, an estimate of 10,000 is really showing that the true value probably lies in the range 9,100 to 10,900. Column (c) demonstrates that as estimated values decrease (e.g. analysis of small sub-groups) then the width of this range increases as a proportion of the estimated value.

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

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

Because the impact of sampling error is most marked for small groups it will, for example, prevent the release of statistics for small geographical areas produced from 5% sample data. Consequently Parliamentary Constituency is the smallest area currently published from the 5% sample data sources. By definition, WPLS data yields the true population value, which enables figures from smaller regions to be compared.

2.7 Specification

In some cases, there are differences between the definitions of which cases are included in the data extracts. For example, as indicated in Section 3.3, Incapacity Benefit cases approaching pension age do not appear in the 5 per cent sample but are included in the WPLS.

Section 3 Impacts on individual benefits and New Deal

3.1 Overview

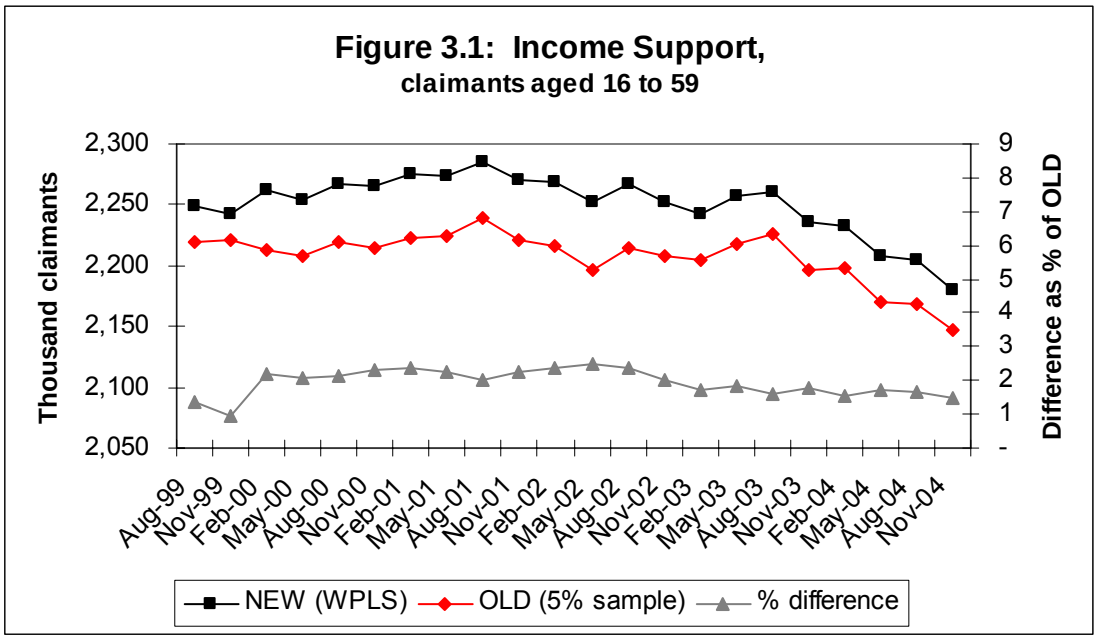
Sections 3.2 to 3.4 provide summaries, for three contrasting benefits, of the net differences between totals obtained from the 5% sample and WPLS data sources. For each, time series data of total caseloads were compared, and the underlying causes of the differences investigated and quantified. These case studies illustrate that the WPLS caseloads, although generally higher than the 5% samples for all benefits, exhibit very similar trends to caseloads from 5% sample data. Also, that although there are distinct, benefit-specific causes of differences, there are others, such as those arising from retrospection and the use of estimated end dates, which are common to several benefits. Similar analyses for all key benefits will be made available in October 2005.

Section 3.5 describes the impact of using the WPLS on statistics produced for the New Deal employment programmes. Unlike the benefits already mentioned, New Deal already utilises 100% data in its routine publications.

It is important to emphasise that some issues remain to be resolved. Figures provided in Section 3 are based on work which is still in progress, and should be regarded as for guidance only and not as definitive final figures.

3.2 Income Support

Comparison of claimants aged 16 to 59 for the period August 1999 to November 2004 revealed that the WPLS data identify on average a net excess of 43,000 cases (2.0%) over the 5% sample data caseload.



A detailed investigation of data for November 2003 revealed a net difference of 41,000 cases. The main causes are identified in Table 3.1 and described below.

Table 3.1: Income Support November 2003 – differences in caseload.

Cause of difference	Estimated impact
Retrospection	40,000 extra cases in WPLS data
Estimated claim end date	7,000 extra cases in WPLS data
Cleaned cases	4,000 extra cases in WPLS data
Clerical cases	3,000 extra cases in 5% data
Other	7,000 extra cases in 5% data (net)

Retrospection

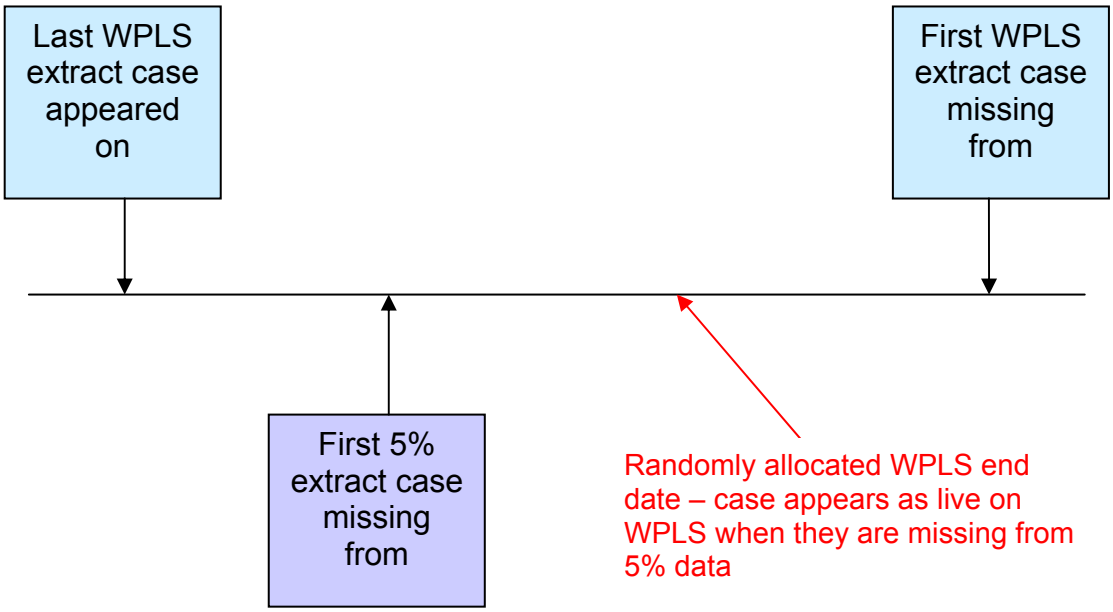
The main cause of different caseload totals is due to retrospection – the inclusion of extra cases in the WPLS data resulting from incorporating 'late' information (see Section 2.5).

Estimated end dates

Claim end dates are not received in the data extracts. In the case of 5% sample data, a claim that terminates, although appearing in the database prior

to termination, will be absent from the next one. By contrast a claim end date is estimated for the WPLS. This is done by randomly allocating an end date between the date of the last scan on which the claim was live and the first subsequent scan in which the claim is no longer included.

Figure 3.2 – Random allocation of end dates



As illustrated in Figure 3.2, if the date at which the claim is first 'missing' from the 5% sample data is between the two WPLS data extracts, then some claims that terminated before the date of the 5% extract will be randomly allocated an end date after that date. They will thus be incorrectly counted as 'live' in WPLS.

Data cleaning

The 5% sample is subject to validation by which automated and manual cleaning are used to 'tidy up' the data with the consequent removal of a small amount of cases from the database. These cases do, however, appear in the WPLS database. Such cleaning is not possible on WPLS data.

Clerical cases

A claim will appear in the 5% sample data but not the WPLS if the claim is held clerically. This situation arises if there is a delay in adding a new claim to

the computer system and a clerical record only is held. Clerical cases will not be added onto the 100% database: they make up a small proportion of the total caseload and their numbers are currently decreasing. However when a clerical claim is finally entered onto the benefit computer system, it will be captured in the WPLS. We will regularly check that the number of clerical cases remains small, revisiting our methodology if necessary.

Conclusions, WPLS and Income Support

The Income Support statistics obtained from the WPLS offer clear advantages over the 5% sample data. The WPLS, on account of 'retrospection' and much greater extract frequency, enables slightly more cases to be identified thereby enabling caseload, on-flow and off-flow to be quantified more accurately. There are only minor differences in specification, with the inclusion of cleaned cases in the WPLS only and with clerical cases appearing in the 5% data only. Unexplained differences remain very small, at approximately 7,000 cases, equivalent to less than half a percent of the total caseload.

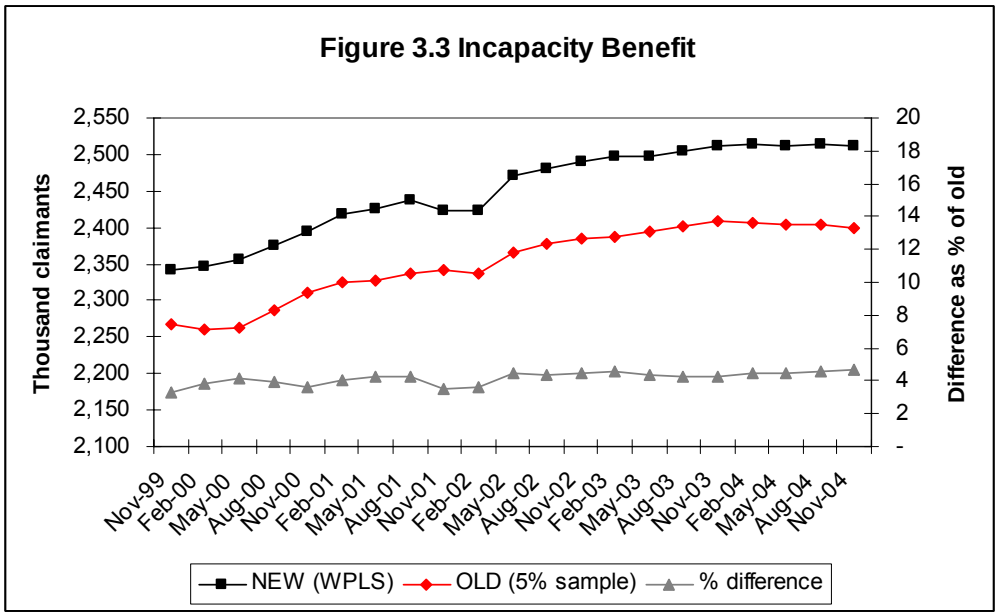
3.3 Incapacity Benefit

In practice, Incapacity Benefit figures are usually presented combined with Severe Disablement Allowance (SDA) for working age claimants. Preliminary quality assurance work for SDA claimants of all ages shows that WPLS estimates are around 7% higher than the 5% samples, equivalent to 24,000 extra cases. However, this section focuses solely on Incapacity Benefit.

The figures in this section have been produced as part of considerable quality assurance work on the 100% data. However, given the complexities of Incapacity Benefit data, future methodological improvements may lead to small revisions to the figures below.

IB stocks from November 1999 until November 2004 were shown to be on average 4% higher than stocks obtained from the 5% sample data. In terms

of magnitude, WPLS data for August 2004 gives caseloads around 110 thousand higher than the 5% data.



A detailed investigation of data for August 2004 is summarised in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Incapacity Benefit, Aug 2004 – differences in caseloads

Cause of difference	Impact on caseload
Retrospection	40,000 extra cases in WPLS data
Specification	
Approaching State Pension age	12,000 extra cases in WPLS data
Coverage issues	49,000 extra cases (net) in WPLS data
Estimated claim end dates	14,000 extra cases (net) in WPLS data
Short claims	5,000 extra cases in 5% data
Other	1,000 extra cases (net) in WPLS data

Coverage

In August 2004, around 70,000 cases appear in WPLS only. Investigation has shown that there are two main types of cases. Some of these are genuine short term claims which are picked up by WPLS and not in 5% sample data. However, a smaller number of longer duration cases are left on WPLS because of a problem in identifying end dates. A further issue is the inclusion of approximately 21,000 cases in the 5% sample data only. These consist

largely of claims for which no benefit is paid but for which claimants receive National Insurance credits. DWP are investigating the possibility of obtaining new data sources that would shed light on these issues.

Specification – claimants approaching state pension age

Claimants approaching pension age (currently 60 for women and 65 for men) do not appear in the 5% data. Approximately 6 months prior to reaching pension age their details are transferred to the pensions side of the administrative computer system while their forthcoming claim for State Pension is set up. They do, however, correctly appear in the WPLS data as IB claims.

Short claims

As indicated in Section 2.4, short claims for Incapacity Benefit (i.e. those of less than 6 weeks duration) may be missing from WPLS data if the claim starts and ends between 2 consecutive scans. By contrast 5% sample data for Incapacity Benefit captures every case which has been live during a quarter (See Section 2.3) but misses some claims because of retrospection.

Other

In August 2004, around 12 thousand claimants appear only on the 5% sample data for none of the reasons identified above. These are mainly claims that have incorrectly been classified as live in the past e.g. claimants who are in hospital or prison, or those who have been disqualified from IB due to their pension exceeding the allowed amount. These cases have been removed from the WPLS. There are a similar number of people that appear only in the WLPS. These are mostly claims which have been considered by the appeals process and had the decision to refuse payment upheld. Such cases are removed from the 5% data, but some incorrectly remain on the WPLS.

Conclusions, Incapacity Benefit and the WPLS

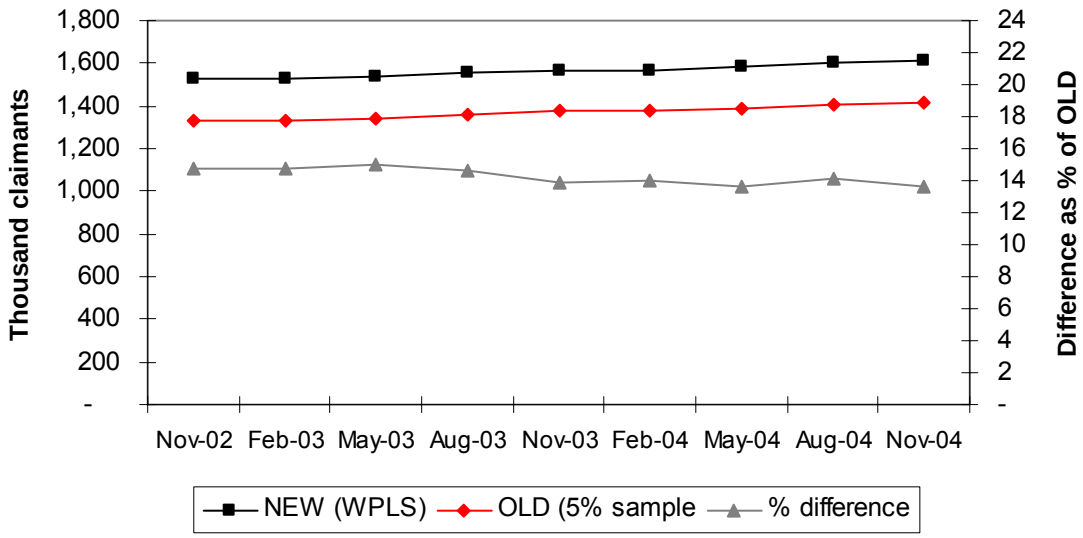
WPLS data enables an extra 51,000 cases (at August 2004) to be identified compared to 5% data because of late claims and the inclusion of claimants approaching State Pension age, but misses a small number of short claims.

DWP are investigating the possibility of obtaining new data sources that would shed light on the outstanding coverage issues.

3.4 Attendance Allowance

Data for AA (and also DLA and SP) only became available from the WPLS in August 2002. As shown in Figure 3.4, the time series available for analysis is thus considerably shorter for these benefits compared to many others. On average, totals for AA claimants obtained from WPLS data are higher than 5% sample figures by approximately 14% (190,000 cases).

Figure 3.4: Attendance Allowance



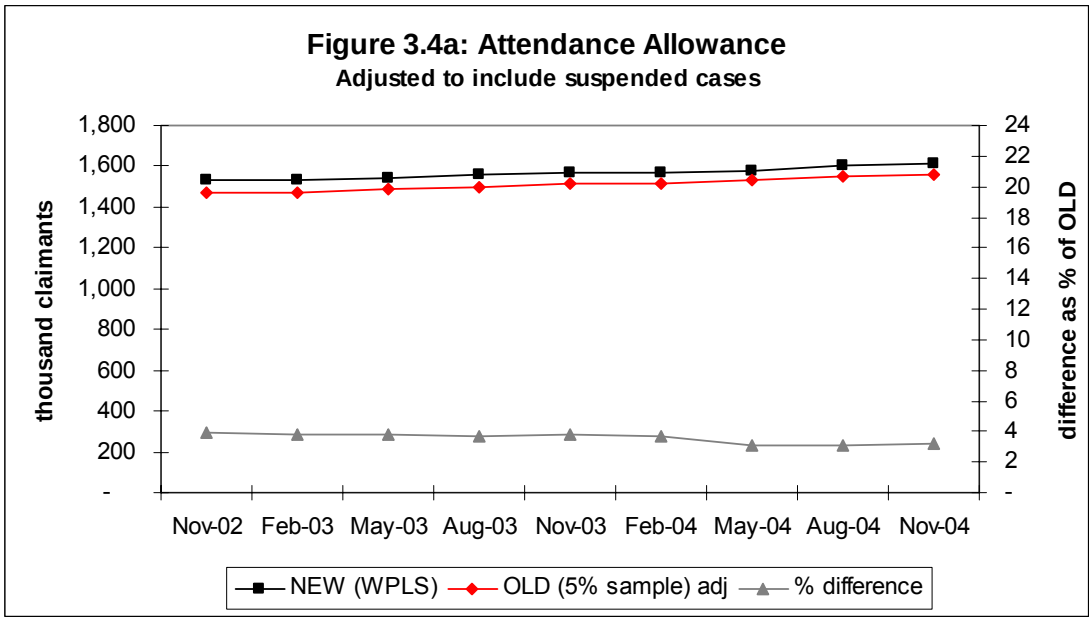
A detailed investigation of August 2004 revealed a net difference of 196,000. The main causes of these differences are identified in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Attendance Allowance August 2004 – differences in caseload.

Cause of difference	Impact
Retrospection	36,000 extra cases in WPLS data
Specification	150,000 extra cases in WPLS data
Claim ends due to claimant death	18,000 extra cases in WPLS data
Other	8,000 extra cases in 5% data

Specification – suspended cases

Payment of AA claims may sometimes be suspended, usually because a claimant has gone into hospital or residential care. Whereas WPLS data include cases where payment has been suspended, the 5% sample data do not. Figure 3.4a illustrates the effect of adjusting the 5% sample data to incorporate suspended cases. When suspended cases are added in to 5% sample data, the caseload increases by approximately 140,000. For Attendance Allowance, Disability Living Allowance and Carer's Allowance, statistics relating to both the number of cases in payment and the number of suspended cases will be available.



Date of claimant death

The 100 per cent data reflects more accurately when an AA claimant leaves benefit due to death compared to the 5% sample data. This is because the

known date of death is utilised in the WPLS data, and where appropriate the estimated claim end date is superseded. It is estimated that the 5% sample data are undercounting the caseload by approximately 19,000 due to incorrect capturing of off-flows due to claimant death.

Conclusions, Attendance Allowance and the WPLS

Once suspended cases have been accounted for, the WPLS detects approximately 51,000 (net) extra cases, by adding data retrospectively, and by incorporating date of claimant death to pinpoint the claim end date.

3.5 New Deal

The New Deal programmes are welfare-to-work schemes which assist long term claimants of benefits to obtain employment. In the present context, New Deal is an unusual case in that 100% data are already utilised in producing statistics for publication.

The outcome for each New Deal programme participant, particularly whether employment is obtained on completion of the programme, is a critical indicator of success. Currently information is published concerning participants' benefit/employment status two weeks after leaving the programme, known as the 'immediate destination'. Immediate destination information is published for three programmes: New Deal for Young People (NDYP), New Deal for Long-term Unemployed People aged 25+ (ND25plus), and New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP). Possible destinations are recorded as employment, other benefit, other known destinations or 'unknown'. Tables 3.4 and 3.5 reveal that according to the current measure a substantial proportion of claimants appear in the 'unknown' category.

Information currently available is obtained from a number of administrative systems[4] and also from information supplied by programme participants.

[4] For NDLP, destinations information comes solely from the Labour Market System (LMS), used for inputting client records in jobcentres. For NDYP and ND25plus, destinations are obtained from LMS, the ONS system for producing JSA claimant count data, with other information being obtained from the system used for paying subsidies to employers who offer subsidised employment opportunities, forms obtained from providers of other training opportunities within the programme, and forms filled in by leavers from Jobseeker's Allowance.

However, some of the administrative systems are unable to incorporate 'late' information which will be missed if it is not recorded within the two week period after leaving the ND Programme. To an extent such deficits are filled by information provided by participants as they leave a programme. However participants are not obliged to inform the DWP of their subsequent status and some gaps remain.

Use of the WPLS will overcome many gaps. Employment data from the WPLS (provided by HMRC) will capture job entries that are not identified in the current sources. The WPLS will provide more comprehensive coverage of participants who claim benefits upon leaving the programme, and also allows a breakdown by the type of benefit claimed. 'Retrospection' enables 'late' information, some of which is missed by current sources, to be incorporated.

The extra information obtained from the WPLS has enabled a new measure of immediate destination to be developed. A comparison of immediate destinations for participants on NDYP and the re-engineered ND25plus[5], obtained from the current and new sources, appears in Table 3.4. The most striking feature is the reduction in the proportion of cases of unknown destination, and the identification of more cases moving to employment and/or obtaining benefit. Furthermore the new measure can indicate more than one destination. It can therefore show the number of people with evidence of both employment and benefit claims, possibly indicating people obtaining part time employment.

[5] The ND25plus programme was re-engineered in April 2001.

Table 3.4: Immediate destinations of participants leaving NDYP and the re-engineered ND25plus up to July 2004

New (WPLS) measure			Current measure		
	*% programme leavers**			*% programme leavers**	
Destination	**NDYP**	**ND25plus**	**Destination**	**NDYP**	**ND25plus**
Employment	42	28	Employment	38	26
Employment & Benefit	3	4			
Returned to JSA	13	30	Returned to JSA	13	29
Other Benefits	13	20	Other Benefits	11	16
Of which					
IS	2	2			
IB	2	3			
IB and IS	7	13			
Other Known	7	8	Other Known	7	8
Unknown	22	11	Unknown	30	21

* Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding

Table 3.5 presents similar information for NDLP. Again a reduction in unknown destinations and increase in the proportion of cases gaining employment or receiving benefit are shown.

Table 3.5: Immediate destinations of participants leaving NDLP up to July 2004

New (WPLS) measure	*% of programme leavers**	**Current measure**	*% of programme leavers**
Employment	45	Employment	50
Employment & Benefit	11		
Other Benefits	1	Transfer to Other Benefits	1
Return to Income Support	37	Withdrawn for Other Reasons	32
Off Benefits/Unknown	6	Ineligible	1
		Unknown destination	16

* Totals may not add to 100% due to rounding

Conclusions, New Deals and the WPLS

The use of WPLS will greatly improve information on immediate destinations from the New Deal programmes. However, to allow for this improved destination information to be compiled, data on leavers from New Deal and their immediate destinations will not be as timely as is currently the case, with these statistics planned to be published approximately five months after the reference period to allow for all relevant information to be included. Statistics on the number of starters and the number of people gaining a job through New Deal will continue to be published approximately two months after the reference period. It is hoped that WPLS can be harnessed to improve the reporting of other New Deal programmes. We also plan other work to explore the possibility of developing a longer term measure of destination as an indicator of the sustainability of programme outcomes.

Section 4 Statistical Groups

4.1 A modernised typology

The Department for Work and Pensions currently publishes two types of benefit statistics: information about each benefit the Department administers, and a 'Client Group' approach which focuses on how the client interacts with the Department. The Client Group format splits the Department's clients into groups by age under the 3 broad headings of Working Age, Over State Pension Age and Children. Data about the 'key' benefits for each group are then merged together to provide information about whether a client is on more than one benefit.

The DWP is introducing a new typology which will exist alongside the current Client Group classification and will define Statistical Groups. The aim of the Statistical Group typology is to present each person by the main reason they are in contact with the Department. Like the client group classification each client is classified just once, permitting the estimation of the total number of people claiming one or more benefits[6]. The typology, illustrated in Table 4.2, is particularly suited to capture the structure of the claimant population of working age. Additional breakdowns have been created which better capture the characteristics of those over State Pension age and are shown in Tables 4.5 to 4.7.

The development of the Statistical Group typology has been made possible because the WPLS has expanded the range of key benefits which are available for merging, giving a fuller picture of the types of clients the Department deals with, and allowing a larger number of groups to be distinguished. The key benefits for which information is currently available from the WPLS are Attendance Allowance, Bereavement Benefit, Carer's Allowance, Disability Living Allowance, Incapacity Benefit/Severe Disablement Allowance, Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Pension Credit, State

[6] Summing individual benefit caseloads will overestimate the number of individuals claiming benefit due to double-counting of people claiming more than one benefit.

Pension and Widow's Benefit.[7] The Statistical Group typology, which is independent of client age, will also help reflect the DWP's emerging policy agenda of extended working lives[8].

The following principals have guided the development of new client based information:

- to produce a definition which will be resilient in the long-term. Nevertheless, if major changes to the benefit system reduced the relevance of these groups, we would seek to change them. However, in the event of such changes occurring we will endeavour to produce a comparable time series;
- to be, as far as possible, consistent with existing definitions and highlight any remaining differences;
- to table separately those who participate on a welfare-to-work scheme but do not receive benefit;
- to produce a breakdown for working age claimants that can be used to investigate flows into retirement;
- finally, to include in statistics claimants of benefit who do not receive a payment but are receiving National Insurance Credits only, have a payment suspended or are being paid benefit via another system.

4.2 Typology description

The resulting Statistical Group typology is shown in Table 4.2. In this, benefits are arranged hierarchically and claimants are assigned to the topmost benefit which they receive. Thus a person who is a lone parent and receives Incapacity Benefit would be classified as 'Incapacity benefits', whereas someone receiving both Bereavement Benefit and Disability Living Allowance would be classified as 'Disabled'. For this reason the group 'Lone Parent', for example will not contain all lone parents claiming Income Support. Some will be included in the 'Incapacity benefits' group instead.

[7] At present Housing Benefit (HB), Council Tax Benefit (CTB) and Industrial Injuries Benefits are not included in WPLS. HB and CTB are expected to be added during 2006.
[8] This agenda is set out in two recent DWP policy documents: *Department for Work and Pensions Strategy* (2005) and *Principles for reform - the national pensions debate* (2005).

Table 4.2: The Statistical Group typology

Benefit being claimed	Title of group
Jobseeker's Allowance	Jobseekers
Incapacity Benefit or Severe Disablement Allowance	Incapacity benefits
Income Support with a child under 16 and no partner	Lone Parent
Carer's Allowance	Carer
Other Income Support (including IS Disability Premium) or Pension Credit	Other on Income Related Benefit
Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance or Industrial Injuries benefits	Disabled
Widow's Benefit, Bereavement Benefit or Industrial Death Benefit	Bereaved
Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit	Housing related
State Pension and no other benefit	Claiming State Pension only

The names of these groups are provisional. Comments on suitable names are welcome.

An initial estimated time series for WPLS data encompassing the statistical group typology is contained in Table 4.3 below. It includes claimants of all ages (including some children receiving DLA) and also a small number of Incapacity Benefit/ Severe Disablement Allowance and State Pension recipients who live overseas. Table 4.3a relates to working age claimants only. A comparison of figures drawn from the WPLS and the 5% sample data appears as Annex B.

Table 4.3: Time series of all claimants by statistical group

Thousands

	Total	Job Seeker	Incapacity benefits	Lone Parent	Carer	Other on Income Related Benefit	Disabled *	Bereaved	Claiming State Pension only
Nov 2002	**17,185.8**	894.6	2,828.2	852.7	455.6	1,680.9	1,986.2	215.5	8,272.2
Feb 2003	**17,289.0**	990.2	2,829.9	844.8	471.2	1,671.5	1,999.5	208.4	8,273.5
May 2003	**17,280.6**	930.7	2,826.6	852.1	487.3	1,683.6	2,023.3	203.2	8,273.7
Aug 2003	**17,297.5**	895.9	2,828.8	847.8	506.4	1,704.7	2,045.4	198.1	8,270.4
Nov 2003	**17,265.8**	848.8	2,834.6	827.7	526.3	1,988.2	1,993.8	192.7	8,053.7
Feb 2004	**17,349.2**	918.3	2,830.4	826.2	547.9	2,172.4	1,944.6	186.5	7,922.9
May 2004	**17,315.8**	824.9	2,826.2	818.5	571.4	2,360.0	1,888.7	181.6	7,844.6
Aug 2004	**17,356.0**	814.1	2,824.7	812.2	586.3	2,452.6	1,881.1	176.8	7,808.3
Nov 2004	**17,346.3**	788.6	2,818.1	791.0	596.8	2,482.3	1,885.3	172.3	7,811.7

* Information on Industrial Injuries benefits data is currently unavailable from WPLS.
Missing information on Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit are currently unavailable on the WPLS, though are expected to be added during 2006.

Table 4.3a: Time series of all working age claimants by statistical group

	Total	Job Seeker	Incapacity benefits	Lone Parent	Carer	Other on Income Related Benefit	Disabled *	Bereaved
Nov 2002	**5,488.7**	894.6	2,785.2	852.7	339.0	159.2	265.7	192.4
Feb 2003	**5,573.9**	990.2	2,786.8	844.8	341.2	153.7	269.8	187.4
May 2003	**5,520.0**	930.7	2,783.2	852.1	343.1	153.8	275.2	181.9
Aug 2003	**5,487.6**	895.9	2,785.7	847.8	346.0	154.1	281.0	177.2
Nov 2003	**5,428.3**	848.8	2,791.5	827.7	348.7	152.2	287.7	171.8
Feb 2004	**5,495.2**	918.3	2,787.5	826.2	351.3	153.0	292.7	166.3
May 2004	**5,396.1**	824.9	2,782.9	818.5	355.5	153.2	299.6	161.6
Aug 2004	**5,383.7**	814.1	2,781.1	812.2	356.2	157.6	305.7	156.9
Nov 2004	**5,333.4**	788.6	2,774.8	791.0	356.6	157.5	311.8	153.0

* Information on Industrial Injuries benefits data is currently unavailable from WPLS.
Missing information on Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit are currently unavailable on the WPLS, though are expected to be added during 2006.

DWP headline statistics will include totals for working age claimants, as illustrated in Table 4.3a (though not totals for all claimants as appear in Table 4.3). In addition a separate, more relevant, breakdown for people over State

Pension age will be used. For claimants over State Pension Age, the breakdowns shown in Tables 4.5 to 4.7 more clearly represents a client's status with respect to the Department. Therefore these breakdowns will appear in our Press Notices to provide a picture of the total Departmental benefit caseload.

Tables 4.3a to 4.7 represent work in progress following substantial quality assurance. However, the figures published in October may differ slightly from those presented here as more such work is planned for the intervening months.

Table 4.5: State Pension and Pension Credit caseloads, November 2004

Thousands

	Total	Not on a Disability Benefit	On a Disability Benefit
Total on State Pension	11,507.2	9,185.8	2,321.4
Total on Pension Credit *	2,635.6	1,460.9	1,174.7
Over State Pension Age	2,433.4	1,329.8	1,103.5
Under State Pension Age	202.2	131.1	71.2

* Includes men aged between 60 and 64 who are not over State Pension age but can claim Pension Credit.

Table 4.6: Over State Pension Age claimants by benefit status, November 2004

Thousands

	Total	Not on a Disability Benefit	On a Disability Benefit
All claimants over State Pension Age	**11,721.0**	**9,284.4**	**2,436.6**
State Pension and Pension Credit	2,284.0	1,256.1	1,028.0
State Pension only	9,223.2	7,929.7	1,293.4
Pension Credit only	149.3	73.8	75.5
Neither State Pension or Pension Credit	64.5	24.9	39.7

Table 4.7 Time series of all claimants over State Pension age by benefit status

Thousands

	Total	State Pension and Pension Credit/MIG	State Pension only	Pension Credit/MIG Only	Neither
Nov-02	**11,427.7**	1,426.7	9,795.3	140.6	65.1
Feb-03	**11,443.9**	1,427.8	9,810.9	140.0	65.1
May-03	**11,485.9**	1,443.8	9,835.6	141.0	65.5
Aug-03	**11,532.6**	1,467.4	9,857.5	142.5	65.1
Nov-03	**11,556.7**	1,764.5	9,584.7	142.4	65.2
Feb-04	**11,570.8**	1,957.9	9,404.9	142.7	65.4
May-04	**11,632.7**	2,156.6	9,267.9	144.1	64.1
Aug-04	**11,682.9**	2,252.0	9,221.2	145.9	63.8
Nov-04	**11,721.0**	2,284.0	9,223.2	149.3	64.5

One drawback of a client group approach is the different basis on which benefits are paid. For example, whilst Incapacity Benefit is generally paid to an individual to support the claimant, Income Support is paid to an individual to support the whole family. This means that some people are supported by benefits but not claiming themselves. These people who are not benefit claimants will be missed from this statistical group approach (for example, a working age couple where the man is claiming Jobseeker's Allowance to support him and his partner; in this case, the tables will show just one claimant even though both members of the couple are being supported by Jobseeker's Allowance.)

These headline statistical group tables will be complemented by the single benefit statistics. Other breakdowns will be possible using the DWP tabulation tool (see section 5.1).

Section 5 Other impacts

5.1 Dissemination - Tabulation tool

A further major forthcoming change is one affecting the principal means by which DWP statistics will be published. Currently statistics are primarily published as Excel tables which may be downloaded from the Internet, though a small number of PDF publications are also produced. In future the principal means of dissemination will be a tabulation tool, accessible from the DWP's website. Users both within and outside the DWP will be able to select variables for cross tabulation, and so produce analyses tailored to their own requirements.

Initially, in summer 2005, a tabulation tool based on 5% data will be available and will replace the Excel tables currently produced. From October 2005, aggregate figures from the WPLS will also be available from the tabulation tool. Release on the tabulation tool will be accompanied by a press release that describes the basic trends for all three client groups, individual benefits and welfare-to-work schemes.

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

5.2 5% sample and WPLS data as complements

There are many advantages to employing WPLS data. However, one drawback is that at present the number of variables available is considerably smaller than is obtainable from the current data sources, although a number of extra variables will become available once quality assurance work has been satisfactorily completed. For these reasons, to obtain certain statistics it will be necessary to employ the 5% sample data. Thus in the medium term the

Department will be publishing statistics from both 5% sample and WPLS data. Preference will be given to using WPLS data to provide information, with 5% sample data being used to fill any gaps.

Data users will find that totals produced from 5% data will not match those obtained from WPLS data. Furthermore underlying differences in the populations captured in the two databases will affect some frequency distributions. For this reason - because the two databases represent slightly different populations - it will not be possible to apply proportions calculated from the 5% sample data to the WPLS total. Further work is in progress to decide on the clearest method for presenting 5% sample and WPLS data together.

Figures from the WPLS are available for AA, DLA and SP back to 2002, and back to 1999 for most other benefits. As a result, further work is in hand to establish comparable back series commencing before these dates. These will provide contextual information to assist the interpretation of WPLS outputs and will be available, for key benefits, by October 2005.

5.3 Updating the WPLS, and scheduled revisions

Section 2.5 explained that, in the WPLS, it is possible to update the data held for any reference date with information received late. Over succeeding months and years these data will be incrementally updated as further new information will be received with respect to any reference date. Although the ability to incorporate ‘late’ information is one of the great strengths of the WPLS, it also raises an important issue, specifically that the statistics obtained in relation to a particular date will be different if they are obtained at different times.

To deal with this issue, the DWP, in its public consultation of mid-2004, proposed that the WPLS dataset – including the underlying tabulation tool – should be revised at every publication date, thus ensuring the most accurate and up-to-date information would always be available. However such an approach raises important practical problems. Confusion will inevitably result if

different versions of what are nominally the same statistics are in circulation. It would also be impossible to reproduce the results obtained from a previous version of the dataset. Furthermore, year-on-year comparisons of the most recent quarter's data with that from earlier years' data would be problematic, because recent data will have a smaller degree of retrospection applied to it. Finally there are the very real issues arising from the need to completely revise the data underlying the tabulation tool every three months.

To overcome these difficulties an alternative approach will be adopted. Data with respect to a particular date will be published including 3 months 'retrospection' and will not be revised thereafter. That is, it will be 'frozen', and any new information received subsequently will be ignored. Consequently there will thus be one version of the data for each date. Year-on-year comparisons will be possible because data for every date will include an equal period of retrospection (3 months). This frozen WPLS dataset will support the tabulation tool and be used to answer the majority of requests for ad hoc analysis, including Parliamentary Questions.

At the same time a separate 'live' version of the WPLS will be maintained which is continually updated and incorporates all new information received both up to and beyond the three month period after the reference date. It is envisaged that a small number of very specific requests for ad hoc analysis (including Parliamentary Questions) and some analysis conducted by DWP analysts (e.g. for forecasting and modelling) will require the use of the most recent version of the WPLS. These outputs will be subject to the apparent inconsistencies described earlier and consequently, where used or released outside the Department, will carry a footnote to explain the difference from the published figures obtained from the 'frozen' data.

5.4 Timing of releases

Currently statistics from 5% sample data are published at 3-monthly intervals, approximately 4 months after the data extraction date. The intervening time is used for various stages of processing (loading, cleaning) and output

production. For WPLS data, the interval between the reference date and publication date will be longer to allow for the 3 month wait for the effects of retrospection before processing can begin. Consequently, release of statistics will occur approximately 6 weeks later than at present. Thus May's data (both 5% sample statistics and WPLS statistics) will be published in October rather than September, as is the present situation. For Welfare to Work schemes, data on the number of leavers and their immediate destinations published in October will refer to data to May, however, data on the number of starts and number of people gaining a job will refer to data to August. Publication thereafter aims to be at 3 monthly intervals. Table 5.1 shows the anticipated schedule for subsequent publications.

Table 5.1: Provisional publication dates

Statistical Enquiry Date	Provisional Publication Date	Content
May 2005[9]	Late October 2005	➢ WPLS data: ▪ Benefit statistics; ▪ New Deal immediate destinations. ➢ 5% sample benefit statistics ➢ New Deal starters and jobs gained
August 2005	Late January 2006	➢ WPLS data: ▪ Benefit statistics; ▪ Benefit on and off flows ▪ New Deal immediate destinations. ➢ 5% sample benefit statistics ➢ New Deal starters and jobs gained
November 2005	Late April 2006	➢ WPLS data: ▪ Benefit statistics; ▪ Benefit on and off flows ▪ New Deal immediate destinations. ▪ Working age benefit to employment flows ➢ 5% sample benefit statistics ➢ New Deal starters and jobs

[9] For starts to and people gaining a job from New Deal, data will be to August 2005.

The DWP are planning to investigate the feasibility and potential value of producing early estimates of headline statistics closer to the reference date, although it must be appreciated that accelerating publication will involve a trade-off between timeliness and quality[10]. An essential methodological difference is that the data used to produce the early estimates would be those obtained at the reference date only, without waiting three months for 'retrospection'. The early estimates would consist of the total cases at the reference date adjusted upwards to take account of the predicted effect of retrospection. The earliest date at which the early estimates could be produced is December 2005 to give early estimates for August 2005.

5.5 Disclosure control

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

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

[10] Indeed, responses to the external consultation in Summer 2004 did not identify an absence of early estimates or the longer publication timetable as serious disadvantages.

Section 6 Next steps

6.1 Further quality assurance

As the summaries in Section 3 indicate, further investigations of some benefits are required to identify and quantify remaining unexplained differences between the 5% samples and WPLS. The results of these investigations will be published on the DWP website by October 2005. In particular, further investigation of the JSA caseload compared to the official Claimant Count will be carried out.

6.2 Flows information

By linking together data relating to working age benefits, employment schemes and employment data, the WPLS has an unprecedented capacity to provide information on the origins and destinations of claimants flowing through the benefit system. Better capture of information about starts due to 'retrospection', the absence of sampling error and the consequent superior ability to analyse small groups, will further improve information concerning flows on and off benefit.

Quality assurance work has initially focused on data validation and claimant stocks. However, work is progressing in developing methodology to produce flows information, and in early 2006 such statistics will be made available.

6.3 Geographical coverage

In common with the 5% sample data, the WPLS contains data relating to Great Britain residents (plus Incapacity Benefit/ Severe Disablement Allowance and State Pension claimants living overseas). Discussions will shortly be taking place to investigate the feasibility of adding data for Northern Ireland residents.

Section 7 Conclusion

Starting in summer 2005, some far reaching changes will be made to the DWP's statistical publications. Underlying many of the changes is the availability of a new data source, the Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study. The first phase will see the publication of benefit caseloads from the new data source. By detecting extra cases which are not present in the data sources currently employed, the WPLS will produce more accurate caseload estimates. The second phase will see the publication of information concerning flows of claimants through the benefit system. The WPLS offers huge improvement in reporting flows through its ability to link claimant data between working age benefits, employment scheme and employment.

Because of methodological and definitional differences the new data will deliver slightly different caseload totals compared to the 5% sample data currently used. Careful quality assurance work is in progress to identify and explain such differences. Appropriate guidance will be prepared to assist users in interpreting the new outputs. This will be especially important when WPLS outputs are used in conjunction with outputs obtained from the current data sources. These improvements in quality come at a small cost in timeliness of publication.

At the same time a major change in the means of dissemination employed for DWP's statistics will be introduced. The current Excel tables, downloadable from the Internet, will largely be replaced by a tabulation tool which permits users to select variables which they wish to cross-tabulate. This will be accompanied by a short bulletin containing headline figures for each benefit, client group and employment scheme.

Annex A – Publications within the scope of these changes in October 2005

Bereavement Benefit and Widow's Benefit Statistics (six monthly)

Client Group Analysis: Quarterly Bulletin on Families with Children on Key Benefits

Client Group Analysis: Quarterly Bulletin on the Population of Working Age on Key Benefits

Client Group Analysis: Bulletin on the Population over State Pension age (six monthly)

Disability Living Allowance, Attendance Allowance and Carer's Allowance Statistics (quarterly)

DWP Statistical Summary (quarterly)

Incapacity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance Quarterly Summary of Statistics

Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry

Pension Credit Statistics Quarterly Enquiry

Jobseeker's Allowance Quarterly Statistical Enquiry

New Deal for Lone Parents (quarterly)

New Deal for Young People and Long-term Unemployed People aged 25+ (quarterly)

State Pension Summary of Statistics (six-monthly)

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit publications will also be affected by these changes during 2006.

Annex B – Comparison of statistical groups using 5% sample databases

Due to the historical collection of 5% sample data, a comparison between the two data sources is only possible at four points in time.

Although WPLS totals are generally larger than those obtained from 5% sample data, there are a small number of exceptions. 'Other on income related benefits' figures tend to be higher using the 5% sample data because the WPLS correctly assigns some of these people to 'incapacity benefits' by detecting more Incapacity Benefit claimants (see section 3.3). Table B3 shows that total claimants over State Pension Age produced from 5% sample data is larger than the total obtained from the WPLS. This excess consists of a substantial number of claimants who have recently died but whose claim details remain on the administrative system. By utilising date-of-death information, the WPLS is able to assign the claim termination date more accurately than the 5% sample data.

Table B1: Time series comparison of WPLS data and 5% sample data for all claimants by statistical group

Thousands

	WPLS data				5% sample data			
	Feb 2003	Aug 2003	Feb 2004	Aug 2004	Feb 2003	Aug 2003	Feb 2004	Aug 2004
Total	**17,289.0**	**17,297.5**	**17,349.2**	**17,356.0**	**17,214.0**	**17,251.3**	**17,302.9**	**17,289.7**
Jobseekers	990.2	895.9	918.3	814.1	977.7	911.3	923.7	815.5
Incapacity benefits	2,829.9	2,828.8	2,830.4	2,824.7	2,700.7	2,704.5	2,704.6	2,693.8
Lone Parent	844.8	847.8	826.2	812.2	816.9	822.9	795.2	780.3
Carer	471.2	506.4	547.9	586.3	413.7	469.4	523.4	573.0
Other on Income Related Benefit	1,671.5	1,704.7	2,172.4	2,452.6	1,745.5	1,769.9	2,222.2	2,528.3
Disabled	1,999.5	2,045.4	1,944.6	1,881.1	1,984.4	2,019.7	1,929.3	1,852.9
Bereaved	208.4	198.1	186.5	176.8	198.5	186.9	175.7	166.4
Claiming State Pension only	8,273.5	8,270.4	7,922.9	7,808.3	8,376.6	8,366.7	8,028.9	7,879.5

Table B2: Time series comparison of WPLS data and 5% sample data for working age claimants by statistical group

Thousands

	WPLS data				5% sample data			
	Feb 2003	Aug 2003	Feb 2004	Aug 2004	Feb 2003	Aug 2003	Feb 2004	Aug 2004
Total	**5,573.9**	**5,487.6**	**5,495.2**	**5,383.7**	**5,454.1**	**5,402.5**	**5,399.5**	**5,274.8**
Jobseekers	990.2	895.9	918.3	814.1	977.7	911.3	923.7	815.5
Incapacity benefits	2,786.8	2,785.7	2,787.5	2,781.1	2,657.5	2,661.2	2,661.5	2,650.4
Lone Parent	844.8	847.8	826.2	812.2	816.9	822.9	795.2	780.3
Carer	341.2	346.0	351.3	356.2	333.4	340.3	353.1	353.0
Other on Income Related Benefit	153.7	154.1	153.0	157.6	216.8	219.5	219.0	226.2
Disabled	269.8	281.0	292.7	305.7	272.7	279.7	289.6	301.2
Bereaved	187.4	177.2	166.3	156.9	179.1	167.6	157.3	148.1

Table B3: Time series comparison of WPLS data and 5% sample data for claimants over State Pension age by benefit type

Thousands

	WPLS data					5% sample data			
	Feb 2003	Aug 2003	Feb 2004	Aug 2004		Feb 2003	Aug 2003	Feb 2004	Aug 2004
All claimants over State Pension Age	**11,443.9**	**11,532.6**	**11,570.8**	**11,682.9**		**11,504.3**	**11,587.2**	**11,636.1**	**11,742.3**
State Pension and Pension Credit	1,427.8	1,467.4	1,957.9	2,252.0		1,424.2	1,456.4	1,918.3	2,242.5
State Pension only	9,810.9	9,857.5	9,404.9	9,221.2		9,829.7	9,884.5	9,464.7	9,251.6
Pension Credit only	140.0	142.5	142.7	145.9		143.1	145.9	157.0	160.7
Neither State Pension or Pension Credit	65.1	65.1	65.4	63.8		107.3	100.4	96.1	87.4

Annex C – Contact Points

The contact point for further information and comments is:

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