

Uses and Users of the DWP Fraud and Error in the Benefits System Statistics

Introduction

The DWP Fraud and Error in the Benefits System statistics provide estimates of fraud and error for benefits administered by the DWP and Local Authorities.

The Fraud and Error in the Benefits System report is published twice a year (usually May and November): <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fraud-and-error-in-the-benefit-system>

The estimates published in May also feed into the DWP Annual Report and Accounts.

Alongside the report, there are a number of tables published which provide the user with detailed estimates, giving a breakdown of overpayments and underpayments into the different types of fraud and error.

Known Uses of DWP Fraud and Error in the Benefits System Statistics

The Statistics (and underlying datasets) are used by DWP to evaluate, develop and support fraud and error policy, strategy and operational decisions, initiatives/options and business plans through understanding the causes of fraud and error.

We work very closely with policy and strategy colleagues to explain the statistics and guide their use and interpretation.

Internal user engagement is also important during the collection of data and the production of the statistics. This engagement may concern aspects of methodology, classifications, definitions, coverage, timing and so on. These detailed issues can be very important to our users – an apparently small change in a definition underpinning a statistic may be important in the context of certain uses. Internal users have also been involved in shaping the dissemination and communication of statistics.

Particular DWP uses of our statistics include:

- Business plans – for example, for Jobcentre Plus and the Pension Service
- Assurance on the impact of anti-Fraud and Error activity across the businesses
- A consistent time series for assessing fraud and error trends over time
- Data to assess current DWP fraud and error policy and evaluating recent changes to these or business processes
- Policy development and evaluation by fraud and error policy stakeholders and local authorities
- The evidence base for assessing the potential effect of future fraud and error policy options and programmes
- Informing press office statements on fraud and error
- Understanding the full breakdown of causes of fraud and error
- Monitoring how the fraud and error got into the system (e.g. at claim start or in-claim)
- Monitoring the effect of the economic cycle on fraud and error
- Robust data to inform future measurement options

We include commentary within our 'Fraud and Error in the Benefit System' publication and supporting documents, which is compiled with the assistance of our internal users, which highlights to users what might be driving changes in the fraud and error estimates over time (including DWP fraud and error initiatives, changes to benefit rules, economic factors, methodology changes etc...). This commentary adds context to the statistics and should help inform all users (both internal and external to DWP) of how our statistics can be used. We also include a section called 'Interpretation of the results' within the Background and Methodology document that accompanies the publication which should aid the users' understanding of how the statistics can be used. Please see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fraud-and-error-in-the-benefit-system>

Outside DWP the Fraud and Error in the Benefits System statistics are used externally in the following ways:

- Providing general information on the levels of fraud and error in Great Britain
- The fraud and error statistics, published in May each year, feed into the DWP Accounts. The preliminary 2017/18 estimates published on 17th May 2018 fed into the 2017/18 DWP Annual Report and Accounts which were published in June 2018:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dwp-annual-report-and-accounts-2017-to-2018>
- The fraud and error estimates are used to inform objective 5 of the DWP single departmental plan: Transform the way we deliver our services to improve quality and reduce costs. The latest plan at the time of publication of this document is here:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/department-for-work-and-pensions-single-departmental-plan/department-for-work-and-pensions-single-departmental-plan-2018>
- The statistics feed into the annual HM Revenue and Customs National Insurance Fund accounts, available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-insurance-fund-accounts>
- The fraud and error estimates are used to answer Parliamentary Questions and Freedom of Information requests. Please note that we are unable to answer questions about individual fraud and error cases or provide regional estimates of fraud and error as we do not break the statistics down to this level. This is because the sample sizes for the current survey exercises are chosen to report fraud and error at the Great Britain level only, therefore reporting at a lower country/regional level could lead to unrepresentative and misleading conclusions.

Due to the nature of our statistics, we do not have extensive engagement with external user groups and organisations, aside from those detailed above. We are trying to address this and are seeking external users to provide feedback on how and why they use our statistics – please see 'How to Comment and Get Involved' below for more details.

Valid Uses of DWP Fraud and Error in the Benefits System Statistics

The Fraud and Error in the Benefits System Statistics can be used for:

- Obtaining an estimate for the total amount over/under paid, and broken down into fraud, claimant error and official error, across all benefits administered by the DWP and Local Authorities.
- Obtaining an estimate for the amount over/under paid by benefit, and broken down into fraud, customer error and official error, across all benefits administered by the DWP and Local Authorities.

- Obtaining estimates for the amount overpaid by benefit, broken down into the causes of fraud, customer error and official error, across Employment and Support Allowance, Jobseeker's Allowance, Pension Credit, Housing Benefit, Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payment.

Areas of Unmet Need

Customers (both within DWP and externally) sometimes request the following:

- More timely release of statistics. National Statistics are released around eight months after the reference period. This is to allow for claim reviews and processing time, and the subsequent analytical processes.
- Local area estimates. Our current statistics cover the whole of Great Britain and geographic breakdowns are not provided. Due to our statistics being based on a sample, the sample sizes are currently too small to allow statistically valid geographic breakdowns.

How to Comment and Get Involved

We recognise that our customers will have different needs and we use a range of different methods to contact them. We frequently meet internal DWP customers to discuss their needs and requirements. As for external stakeholders, we often contact the National Audit Office and we occasionally contact HM Revenue and Customs and Cabinet Office.

Engagement with other external users is usually through the statistical pages of the DWP website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions/about/statistics>

Where:

- we invite users to share their comments or views about our National statistics, or to simply advise us how they use our statistics.
- we advise users of updates and changes to our statistics through the Future statistics release calendars and our 'Fraud and Error in the Benefit System' landing page: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/fraud-and-error-in-the-benefit-system>
- where appropriate, we will consult with customers on developments and changes to our statistics methodologies, publications or publication processes. We carried out a consultation in Summer 2018. Further details can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-the-fraud-and-error-statistics>
- If you would like to contact us, please use this email address: caxtonhouse.femaenquiries@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

In order to improve and share the understanding of the use made of our statistics, and hence the value of the statistics, we would like external users to engage with us through one of the above routes. This will enable us to identify how and why our statistics are being used externally and address any unmet needs. We would also like to look to establish user and email groups for our external users and offer road shows to explain how our statistics can be used.

Until we have a better understanding of external use of our statistics we are making the following assumptions of how our statistics are used by external bodies;

- To inform people about the state of the economy, society and the environment – in support of democratic accountability;

- To inform people about the performance of government and public bodies, i.e. informing the citizen's monitoring of government policy and operational effectiveness;
- Informing public campaigns to tackle fraud and error;
- Supporting third sector activity – e.g. Lobbying - statistics are used to support the interests of lobby groups wanting to influence the policy-making of government;
- Facilitating academic research, dissertations, articles/reports and teaching;
- Informing media/press article on fraud and error.