

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) response to the public consultation on the proposal to discontinue the 'Abstract of Statistics for Benefits, National Insurance Contributions and Indices of Prices and Earnings'.

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Response Paper

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) response to the public consultation on the proposal to discontinue the 'Abstract of Statistics for Benefits, National Insurance Contributions and Indices of Prices and Earnings'.

Background

The 'Abstract of Statistics' is an annual publication produced by the Information Directorate of the Department for Work and Pensions.

The purpose of the publication is to provide a reference source for people interested in the main aspects of Benefits, Contributions and Indices of Prices and Earnings. The 'Abstract of Statistics' contains seven sections. Through the use of charts and tables, the publication aims to provide data to answer the following types of questions:

- (a) How do the values of state benefits compare to prices?
- (b) Are state benefits today, worth more or less in terms of Average Earnings than in previous years?
- (c) How does the income of an unemployed person compare with Average Earnings?
- (d) How much is spent on benefits?
- (e) How do the rates of benefits compare to one another?

The latest issue available is at: <http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/abstract.asp>

Competing priorities and the increasing amount of statistical information readily available on the web, has meant that the Information Directorate must critically examine the value and need for all current statistical publications. In particular, within the Abstract, there is scope to cut, as much of the information is published elsewhere.

The decision to propose cessation of the publication was about the reality of justifying the time spent on its continuing production, the associated quality assurance, handling and internal briefings for what the Information Directorate believed were relatively few customers and original tables.

The Consultation

In order to follow National Statistics Code of Practice, DWP committed to hold a public consultation.

A public consultation announcement was published on the Departments central statistics website (<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/statistics.asp>) and Abstract of Statistics webpage (<http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/abstract.asp>) on November 9th 2009.

The consultation asked for views on the DWP proposal to discontinue the Abstract of Statistics. A copy of the consultation document is available here:

http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/abstract/Abstract_of_Statistics_Consultation.pdf

Responses to the Consultation

There were very few responses to the public consultation and only four responses were external to the department itself (see below for summary table). Of these responses, all stressed the importance of continued access to the publication.

| Branch/Division | Organisation |
|--|------------------------------|
| Adult Social Care Research | Derbyshire County Council |
| Department of Information Services | House of Commons |
| Direct Tax and Welfare | Institute for Fiscal Studies |
| Work and Pensions Committee | Parliament |
| Benefit Reform Division | DWP |
| Child Poverty and Analysis Directorate | DWP |
| Forecasting Division | DWP |
| Housing Research and Analysis Division | DWP |
| Pensions Analysis and Incomes Division | DWP |
| Statistical Services | DWP |
| Strategy Directorate | DWP |

Summary Table of Respondents

More specifically, respondents highlighted the efficiency of finding the contents in one place, especially when alternative sources can be 'extremely difficult to use' and 'user-unfriendly'.

One respondent further claimed that the discontinuation of this 'vital source of data' would remove the 'facility to make authoritative and valid comparisons across time'. This opinion was mirrored by another respondent who also claimed that the withdrawal of the Abstract would result in the loss of 'an authoritative source...which ensures a standard which people are reluctant to deviate from'.

Other respondents however were much more positive and suggested that they could 'reproduce the figures' themselves as 'most of the items in the Abstract can be found elsewhere, or can be derived fairly easily from existing resources'.

Department for Work and Pensions Decision

In considering all the responses received and possible options for future issues of the Abstract of Statistics, DWP have decided to continue producing the publication, but as a *slimmed down* version.

The *slimmed down* Abstract of Statistics will continue to include the following;

- Section 2: DWP benefit uprating history
- Section 5: The rates of benefit time series
- Direct links and/or instructions to all previously published elements.

As the following series are available easily from either direct (or semi-direct) internet links or other DWP publications (see appendix A for sources), the Abstract of Statistics will no longer include;

- Section 1: RPI, ROSSI, New ROSSI and CPI time series.
- Section 3.1: The Average Earnings Index time series.
- Section 3.2: The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) time series.
- Section 4: Net Income after Housing Costs for hypothetical family types.
- Section 6: Rates of National Insurance and their rules.
- Section 7: Expenditure on benefits.

The publication will continue to hold a commentary covering the key background information; however this will also be reduced.

In respect of users, all previous publications (2002-2008) will be archived to the DWP website at http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd1/abstract/abstract_arc.asp. This will enable future access to those archived elements, no longer published in the Abstract of Statistics.

(For reference purposes the latest full version of the Abstract of Statistics is available here: <http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/abstract.asp>)

Further Information

For further information on the consultation and the consequent decisions made by the Information Directorate, please contact: stats-consultation@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Appendix A: Direct links/Instructions to alternative sources of information

The following Sections will no longer be published in the Abstract, however they will be available via direct (and semi direct) internet links or other DWP publications. The notes below will also be included within the new *slimmed down* Abstract of Statistics.

- Section 1: The time series of RPI, ROSSI, New ROSSI and CPI are available from the following links and by choosing 'Display Complete Dataset':

RPI:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/tsdataset.asp?vlnk=229&Pos=2&ColRank=1&Rank=192>

CPI:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/tsdataset.asp?vlnk=7174&Pos=1&ColRank=1&Rank=192>

The New Rossi is available from the following link by choosing '2.1: RPI' followed by 'GUMF':

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/tsdtables1.asp?vlnk=mm23>

- Section 3.1: The Average Earnings Index is available on the link below by choosing 'Monthly' and 'LMNN – Not Seasonally Adjusted':

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/tsdataset.asp?vlnk=392&More=Y>

- Section 3.2: The Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) figures are available from the link below by choosing 'Table 1', 'Table 1.1.a' and by using the 'Full Time - All', 'Full Time - Male' and 'Full Time - Female'

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/StatBase/Product.asp?vlnk=15313>

- Section 4: The quoted Net Income after Housing Costs for hypothetical family types can be found by using the latest DWP Tax Benefit Model:

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/tbmt.asp>

- Section 6: Rates of National Insurance and their rules are available from the HMRC website:

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/rates/nic.htm>

- Section 7: Expenditure on benefits will now be available from the departments benefit expenditure tables:

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd4/expenditure.asp>