



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

# Income Support Lone Parents Regime: Official Statistics

Quarterly official statistics bulletin

13<sup>th</sup> August 2014

## Executive Summary

This is the official statistics publication of statistics relating to the Income Support Lone Parent (ISLP) Regime. It contains figures on Lone Parent Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) and ISLP sanctions up to March 2014.

### **The headline figures are:**

- In the year up to and including March 2014, 588,500 WFIs were conducted with ISLPs.
- In the year up to and including March 2014, 42,900 sanctions were imposed on ISLP customers. These sanctions were imposed upon 39,600 individual claims. This represents 5.6% of the ISLP client base in that 12 month period.

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# 1 ISLP Work Focused Interviews (WFIs)

## 1.1 Summary

This summary contains figures on ISLP WFIs from April 2004 up to and including **March 2014**. Section 2 provides more detailed breakdowns.

## 1.2 Background

### 1.2.1 Income Support

Income Support (IS) is intended to help people on low incomes who do not have to be available for employment. It can normally be claimed by people who are:

- aged 16 or over;
- not working or working under 16 hours per week (and/or with a partner working under 24 hours);
- not required to be available for full-time employment; *and*
- in receipt of insufficient income to meet prescribed needs.

The main customer group who receive IS are lone parents.

More information on IS can be found at the link below:

[http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/On\\_a\\_low\\_income/DG\\_10018708](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/On_a_low_income/DG_10018708)

Detailed information regarding the ISLP caseload can be found on the Department for Work & Pensions' Tabulation tool:

<http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?page=tabtool>

### 1.2.2. Work Focused Interviews

Lone Parent Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) were introduced nationally on 30<sup>th</sup> April 2001 and were rolled out gradually depending on the age of youngest child. Full roll-out was completed in April 2004

for both stock and flow<sup>1</sup> customers. In addition, since April 2002, review<sup>2</sup> WFIs have been rolled out again dependent on the age of the claimant's youngest child. See Annex A for further details.

Prior to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2011, customers making a claim to Income Support (IS) as a Lone Parent (LP) had to attend an initial WFI at the point of claim, except where:

- a) they were not subject to the mandatory regime<sup>3</sup>; *or*
- b) their WFI was deferred or waived.

From 31<sup>st</sup> October 2011, LPs claiming IS solely on the grounds of being a LP, regardless of the age of their youngest child, have not been required to attend an initial WFI as a condition of entitlement to IS. Provided they meet the relevant conditions of entitlement, IS will be put into payment before the first WFI is organised.

ISLPs must then attend regular review WFIs at least every 6 months. However, from 31<sup>st</sup> October 2011, LPs with a youngest child under 1 do not have to attend *any* WFIs until their youngest child reaches 1.

In November 2008, changes were made to the IS eligibility criterion for LPs such that once their youngest child turned 12, ISLPs were no longer entitled to claim IS solely on the basis of their LP status. This age limit was subsequently lowered to 10 on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2009; 7 on 25<sup>th</sup> October 2010; and 5 from 21st May 2012. More information on these changes can be found at the link below:

[http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/On\\_a\\_low\\_income/DG\\_175842](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/On_a_low_income/DG_175842)

To support this change, from November 2008, Final Year Quarterly Work Focused Interviews (FYQWFIs) were introduced for LPs in the last year before their child reaches the relevant age where they may lose eligibility to IS.

From 31<sup>st</sup> October 2011, lone parents were no longer required to attend a WFI as part of the claims making process. At the same time, review WFIs were abolished for lone parents with a child aged under 1.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Stock' claimants are defined as those whose claim started prior to 30<sup>th</sup> April 2001. 'Flow' claimants are defined as those whose claim started from 30<sup>th</sup> April 2001 onwards.

<sup>2</sup> By 'review' we mean second and subsequent.

<sup>3</sup> ISLPs are not subject to the WFI regime if they are aged under 18; if they are over the age at which they can claim Pension Credit; if they are also in receipt of Incapacity Benefit; or if they are on an active caseload other than the New Deal for Lone Parents.

### **1.3 Methodology**

When a Lone Parent attends a mandatory WFI this is recorded under specific appointment types on the Labour Market System (LMS) by Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers.

This information is merged to information on ISLP claimants to verify whether attended WFIs are initial or review meetings.

## 2 ISLP Attended WFIs

These figures are for all WFIs attended by ISLP claimants since April 2004.

### 2.1 ISLP Attended WFIs: Headline Statistics

- Between April 2004 and March 2014 inclusive 9,928,600 WFIs have been attended by ISLP claimants.
- In the year up to and including March 2014, 588,500 ISLPs WFIs were conducted.

### 2.2 ISLP Attended WFIs: Tables

Table 1 summarises the total number of ISLP WFIs attended by operational year<sup>4</sup>.

**Table 1: ISLP WFIs Attended<sup>5</sup>**

| <b>Year WFI attended</b> | <b>Volume of ISLP WFIs</b> |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 2004-05                  | 703,300                    |
| 2005-06                  | 907,000                    |
| 2006-07                  | 955,900                    |
| 2007-08                  | 1,107,200                  |
| 2008-09                  | 1,339,500                  |
| 2009-10                  | 1,351,800                  |
| 2010-11                  | 1,292,000                  |
| 2011-12                  | 1,015,000                  |
| 2012-13                  | 668,400                    |
| 2013-14                  | 588,500                    |

2.2.1. Data included is for the period up to and including March 2014.

2.2.2. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.

<sup>4</sup> Discontinuities in year on year volumes are due to WFI roll-out and increased conditionality over time.

<sup>5</sup> A methodological issue within the database production process has resulted in a marginal undercount of work focused interview volumes from November 2011 onwards. As the undercount is small, DWP have published the statistics as normal. Investigations are ongoing and will be reported at the earliest opportunity. Depending on investigations, statistics for the post 2011 period may be revised.

## 3 ISLP Sanctions

### 3.1 Summary

This summary contains figures on ISLP Sanctions from April 2004 up to and including **March 2014**. Section 4 provides more detailed breakdowns.

### 3.2 Background

As noted above, failure to attend or participate in mandatory review ISLP WFIs without good cause may result in a sanction being applied to the claimant's benefit, *i.e. a reduction in the amount of IS the customer receives by an amount equal to 20% of the Income Support personal allowance*. The benefit sanctions remains in place until the lone parent attends and participates in a WFI.

#### 3.2.1. Process

Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers (PAs) make the decisions as to whether a customer has failed to attend/participate in a mandatory interview.

Once a customer fails to attend/participate the PA raises a doubt on the Labour Market System (LMS) and then gives the customer the opportunity to discuss that failure and/or to show good cause. If it is established that a customer has not shown good cause the adviser records their decision on LMS; issues formal notification to the customer; and informs the relevant benefit processing team of their decision by sending them a paper based form. They then set a workflow to check and confirm that a sanction has been applied.

Following receipt of the form the benefit processing team arrange for the customer's benefit to be sanctioned.

If a lone parent does not agree with the PA's decision they can request a detailed explanation (written or verbal) of the reasons why the decision was made. If they dispute or appeal against the decision within a set time limit then the PA must look at the decision again and this may lead to the decision being changed.



If a customer subsequently attends a WFI following sanction activity, the sanction will be removed. A sanction will also be lifted when the claimant ceases to be a LP or attains the age at which they can get Pension Credit.

The DWP also publishes data for JSA sanctions. Decision on JSA sanctions are made off-site by Sector Decision Makers and are recorded on the Decision Making and Appeals System (DMAS). The DWP's JSA sanction statistics merge DMAS data to information on the JSA client base in order to measure JSA sanctions. Therefore, the process and data sources for JSA sanctions differ markedly to the method used for the IS LP sanctions presented within this document, which draws upon the Income Support Computer System<sup>6</sup> (ISCS) data.

### **3.2.2. Amount**

The sanction is a reduction in the lone parent's benefit equivalent to 20% of the IS personal allowance rate for a single person over the age of 25. Income Support should be reduced from the first day of the benefit week following the date that the decision was made.

The sanction will increase in line with the annual up rating of benefits. For example, the adult IS personal allowance rate in 2012/13 was £71.00; a 20% sanction was £14.20. When the personal allowance rate increased in April 2013 to £71.70 a sanction of £14.34 was applied from the benefit week the personal allowance rate increased.

It may not always be possible to immediately reduce a customer's benefit by the full amount of the sanction. This is the case where, for example, the amount of IS paid to the lone parent is less than the sanction rate. In these instances a sanction is still imposed but the amount of the sanction is calculated to leave the lone parent with a minimum of 10p benefit still in payment. The sanction cannot be taken from any benefit other than IS.

### **3.3 Methodology**

Whilst ISLP referral and sanction activity is recorded on the LMS we identify sanctions directly from payment data on the ISCS. However, where the LMS indicated that a sanction was overturned upon appeal we discounted that sanction from our data. We will publish our data several months in arrears to allow for appeals. However, because we will not be applying retrospective adjustments to our statistics the data will not capture successful appeals that took more than a few months to adjudicate.

To identify when sanctions have been applied we compare consecutive weekly IS scans taken from ISCS, and reductions in amounts of benefit which are equal to known sanction amounts, are obtained. This sanctions information is then merged with information on all ISLP claimants to verify that the sanctions data does relate to a Lone Parent in receipt of Income Support. Sanctions are only matched where the sanction date occurs on or after the ISLP start date and before the ISLP end date (if the claim has ended), though we do allow a small tolerance on the match to allow for uncertainties in the end dates<sup>7</sup>. This matching process also allows the proportion of claims which are sanctioned to be calculated.

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<sup>6</sup> The ISCS is the payment system that DWP use to administer IS payments.

<sup>7</sup> This uncertainty comes about because our data is centralised via weekly scans of live IS claims. Therefore we know that a claim has ended when it no longer appears on the scans, but we do not know which day following the previous scan the claim actually ended.

## 4 ISLP Sanctions Applied

These figures are for all sanctions applied to ISLP claimants between April 2004 and March 2014 inclusive.

### 4.1 ISLP Sanctions Applied: Headline Statistics

In the year up to and including March 2014 there were 42,900 sanctions imposed on ISLP customers. Some ISLP claims were sanctioned more than once, such that 39,600 individual ISLP claims incurred a sanction in this 12 month period. This represents 5.6% of the ISLP client base in that 12 month period<sup>8</sup>.

### 4.2 ISLP Sanctions Applied: Tables

Table 2 summarises the total volume of ISLP sanctions applied by operational year.

**Table 2: ISLP Sanctions Applied: Volumes and Rates**

| Year    | Number of sanctions | Number of claims sanctioned | Proportion of claims sanctioned |
|---------|---------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2004-05 | 31,600              | 31,000                      | 2.7%                            |
| 2005-06 | 53,900              | 52,000                      | 4.6%                            |
| 2006-07 | 65,200              | 62,200                      | 5.6%                            |
| 2007-08 | 79,800              | 74,600                      | 6.8%                            |
| 2008-09 | 93,700              | 84,500                      | 7.8%                            |
| 2009-10 | 85,100              | 75,900                      | 7.2%                            |
| 2010-11 | 76,400              | 68,700                      | 7.0%                            |
| 2011-12 | 62,000              | 56,200                      | 6.4%                            |
| 2012-13 | 48,400              | 44,600                      | 5.4%                            |
| 2013-14 | 42,900              | 39,600                      | 5.6%                            |

4.2.1. Volumes are rounded to the nearest hundred and percentages rounded to one decimal place.

4.2.2. Where a claim is subject to more than one sanction in a financial year only one of those sanctions is counted in the sanction rate.

<sup>8</sup> One sanction per benefit spell, expressed as a proportion of the underlying client base, with the underlying client base defined as all ISLP claims that were live at some point during the 12 month period.

4.2.3 The rise in the number of sanctions prior to 2010/11 coincides with a tightening of the sanctioning regime for lone parents and an increase in the frequency of WFIs.

## Annex A: ISLP WFI Timeline

ISLP WFIs were introduced nationally in **April 2001**. They were rolled out gradually depending on the age of the youngest child (AYC) and depending upon whether the claim started before or after 30<sup>th</sup> April 2001. The following table shows the key ISLP WFI implementation dates by eligibility:

**Table A1: ISLP WFI implementation**

| WFI roll-out date           | Stock <sup>9</sup>   | New/Repeat <sup>10</sup> |
|-----------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| 30 <sup>th</sup> April 2001 | AYC 13-15 & 9 months | AYC 5 yrs & 3 months+    |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2002  | AYC 9-12             | AYC 3+                   |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2003  | AYC 5.25-8           | All                      |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> April 2004  | AYC 0-5.25 (all)     | All                      |

Full roll-out was completed in **April 2004** for both stock and new/repeat customers.

From **April 2002**, annual review WFIs were required for both new/repeat and stock customers and six-month reviews were introduced for new/repeat claimants.

From **October 2005**, lone parents who had a youngest child aged 14+ have been required to attend quarterly WFIs.

From **April 2007**, Lone Parents who had a youngest child aged 5-13, and who had been claiming IS for more than 12 months, have been required to attend six monthly WFIs. In addition, Lone Parents with a youngest child aged 11-13 in the New Deal Plus areas have been required to attend quarterly WFIs.

From **April 2008**, six monthly WFIs were introduced for Lone Parents with a youngest child aged 0 to 4.

From **November 2008**, final year quarterly WFIs were introduced for Lone Parents in the last year before their child reaches the age beyond which they are no longer eligible for IS.

From **31<sup>st</sup> October 2011**, Lone Parents with a youngest child under 1 have not had to undertake any mandatory activity, including taking part in a WFI, to continue to be entitled to the full amount of IS. In addition, Lone Parents claiming IS solely on the grounds of being a Lone Parent, regardless of the

<sup>9</sup> "Stock" claimants defined as those starting their claim prior to 30<sup>th</sup> April 2001.

<sup>10</sup> "New/Repeat" claimants defined as those starting their claim from 30<sup>th</sup> April 2001 onwards.

age of their youngest child, have not been required to attend an initial WFI as a condition of entitlement to IS.