

Housing Benefit Recoveries and Fraud National Statistics - Great Britain statistics for 2014/2015

This Statistical First Release contains statistics produced by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on Housing Benefit Recoveries and Fraud (HBRF). The Housing Benefit Recovery and Fraud statistics are [National Statistics](#).



Department
for Work &
Pensions



Main findings (based on imputed statistics at March 2015)

Total value of HB overpayments outstanding at the beginning of Q4
£1.59 billion



Up £203 million (15%)
since beginning of Q4 of
2013/14



Total value of HB overpayments identified during 2014/15
£984 million



Up £179 million (22%)
compared with same
period of 2013/14



Total value of HB overpayments recovered during 2014/15
£589 million



Up £57 million (11%)
compared with same
period of 2013/14



Total value of HB overpayments written off during 2014/15
£94 million



Up £20 million (26%)
compared with same
period of 2013/14



Note: The main findings are based on imputed statistics, which estimate the effect of missing data values.

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Introduction

This release contains the latest Department for Work and Pensions National Statistics for Housing Benefit Recoveries and Fraud (HBRF).

In this document

The latest National Statistics on HBRF data produced by the Department for Work and Pensions were released on 9th September 2015 according to the arrangements approved by the UK Statistics Authority.

This release contains statistics relating to Housing Benefit fraud volumes and amounts of incorrectly overpaid benefit. It is aggregate level data received on a quarterly basis from each Local Authority, but published bi-annually each March and September.

These statistics provide the Department with an overview of overpayment and fraud data relating to all benefits for which it is responsible for - not just for those benefits administered by DWP. They are used to measure levels of fraud activity and to capture information on the amounts of benefit that are overpaid to claimants.

These statistics are released on a six-monthly cycle. This publication in September covers finalised data for all four quarters of 2014/15. ***Note, due to the phased roll out of the Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS), this publication includes only partial fraud data (See [Known Issues, Changes and Revisions](#) for further information).***

The UK Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

Designation can be broadly interpreted to mean that the statistics:

- meet identified user needs;
- are well explained and readily accessible;
- are produced according to sound methods; and
- are managed impartially and objectively in the public interest.

Once statistics have been designated as National Statistics it is a statutory requirement that the Code of Practice shall continue to be observed.

Some Authorities do not send forms every quarter, or cannot answer all the questions on the form. This produces missing data in the returns which, in turn, affects the reported Great Britain totals. Statisticians can fill the gap created by missing data though imputing or estimating what the missing value might have been. Our methodology for this can be found [here](#).

Future Releases

The next release will be in March 2016. This will contain overpayments for the period April 2015 to September 2015 (quarters 1 and 2) and will be the second release following presentational changes.

Supplementary statistics

Tables containing the data that underlies the charts and figures featured in this statistical summary are [available](#).

These include information by local authority on outstanding, identified, recovered and written-off overpayments at the start of each quarter.

A range of fraud specific measures, including the number of full time fraud investigators, the number of fraud cases referred/closed, number of cautions offered and accepted, number of administrative penalties offered and accepted, number of cases accepted for prosecution (including guilty outcomes) is available for each LA. Further breakdowns into cases with a DWP interest are also featured.

Users and Uses

Housing Benefit Recoveries and Fraud is aggregate level data received on a quarterly basis from each Local Authority (LA). This data is used to produce established statistics on measures of activity to detect fraud and to capture information on the amounts of benefit that are overpaid to claimants. They also provide a means of comparing and contrasting information between Local Authorities.

The data will also be used to feed into a range of briefings for Ministers and other senior officials on fraud and error issues and will be used to answer Parliamentary Questions. It will also be used for other policy functions including monitoring and informing changes to related policies.



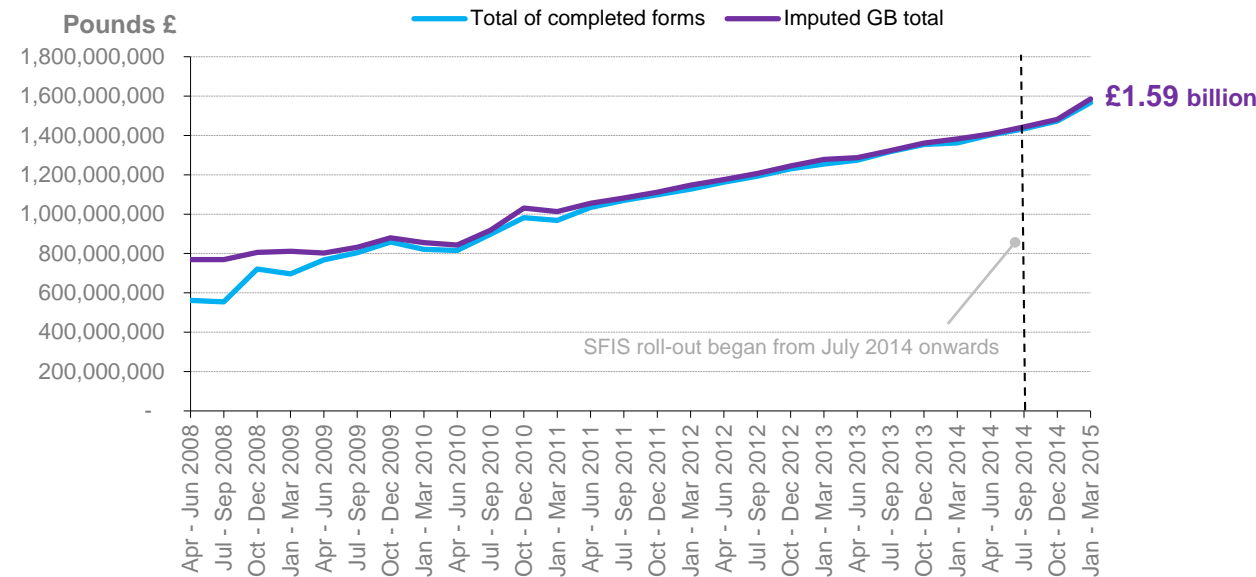
1. HB overpayments outstanding at the start of the quarter

The chart below shows the cumulative amount of outstanding Housing Benefit overpayments (based on current prices) in Great Britain since April 2008.

The total value of HB outstanding overpayments in Great Britain is steadily increasing

Total value of Housing Benefit overpayments outstanding at the start of the quarter

Date	£		Percentage difference
	Total of completed forms	Imputed GB total	
Apr - Jun 2013	1,273,949,000	1,287,402,000	1%
Jul - Sep 2013	1,317,765,000	1,323,055,000	0%
Oct - Dec 2013	1,353,521,000	1,361,528,000	1%
Jan - Mar 2014	1,362,261,000	1,382,205,000	1%
Apr - Jun 2014	1,403,016,000	1,407,680,000	0%
Jul - Sep 2014	1,433,239,000	1,442,870,000	1%
Oct - Dec 2014	1,473,271,000	1,481,323,000	1%
Jan - Mar 2015	1,566,572,000	1,585,430,000	1%



Main Messages

The total value of outstanding overpayments continues to follow an increasing trend.

At January 2015 (i.e. the beginning of Q4), GB outstanding overpayments (imputed) stood at almost **£1.59 billion**, an increase of 15% when compared with the equivalent value for the previous year.

Of this:

- **89%** of current outstanding overpayments are based in England.
- **3%** of current outstanding overpayments are based in Wales and
- **8%** of current outstanding overpayments are based in Scotland.

Note: As you can see from the differences in the two time series, imputed values and non-imputed values have been much closer aligned in recent times – indicating that there has been less missing data within recent [LA returns](#).

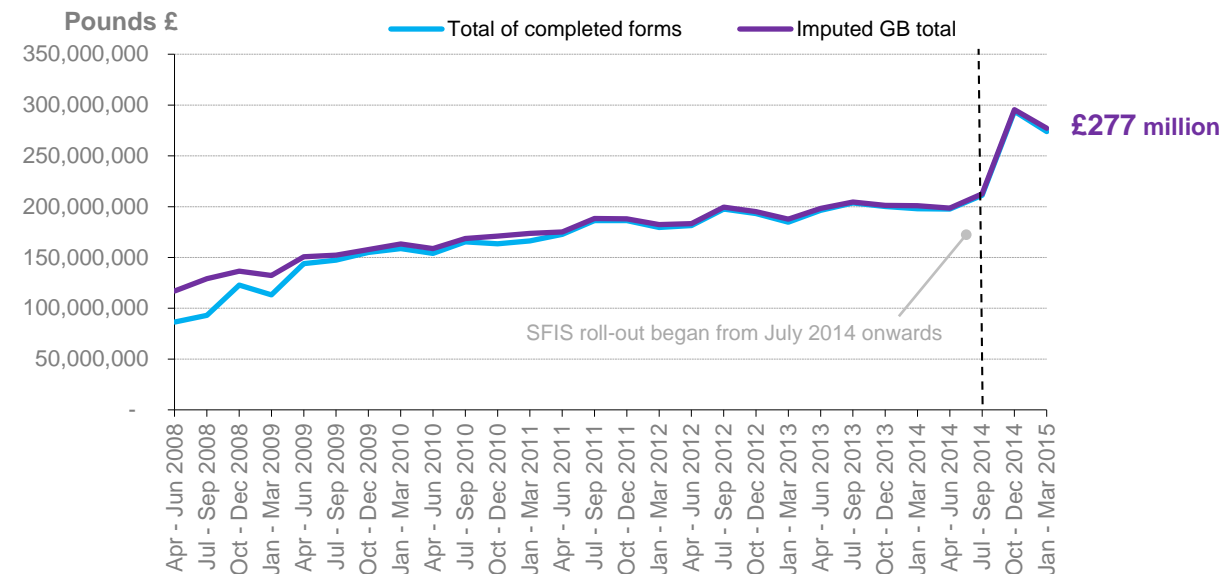
2. HB overpayments identified during the quarter

The chart below shows the value of Housing Benefit overpayments identified in each quarter going back to April 2008.

The total value of HB overpayments identified in Great Britain has risen sharply during 2014/15

Total value of Housing Benefit overpayments identified during the quarter

Date	£		Percentage difference
	Total of completed forms	Imputed GB total	
Apr - Jun 2013	196,354,000	198,211,000	1%
Jul - Sep 2013	203,703,000	204,521,000	0%
Oct - Dec 2013	200,167,000	201,351,000	1%
Jan - Mar 2014	198,000,000	200,899,000	1%
Apr - Jun 2014	197,663,000	198,564,000	0%
Jul - Sep 2014	211,212,000	212,631,000	1%
Oct - Dec 2014	293,862,000	295,468,000	1%
Jan - Mar 2015	273,833,000	277,129,000	1%



Main Messages

The total value of HB overpayments identified has risen sharply in 2014/15. However, the figure has dipped in the most recent quarter from £295 million at December 2014 (Q3) to just over **£277 million** at March 2015 (Q4).

Generally, an upward trend is seen in the total value of overpayments identified with generally more overpayments being identified in the middle of each year.

For 2014/15 the greatest value of overpayments (58%) were identified in the second half of the year.

In the latest quarter:

- **91%** of overpayments identified are based in England.
- **3%** of overpayments identified are based in Wales and
- **6%** of overpayments identified are based in Scotland.

Note: As you can see from the differences in the two time series, imputed values and non-imputed values have been much closer aligned in recent times – indicating that there has been less missing data within recent [LA returns](#).

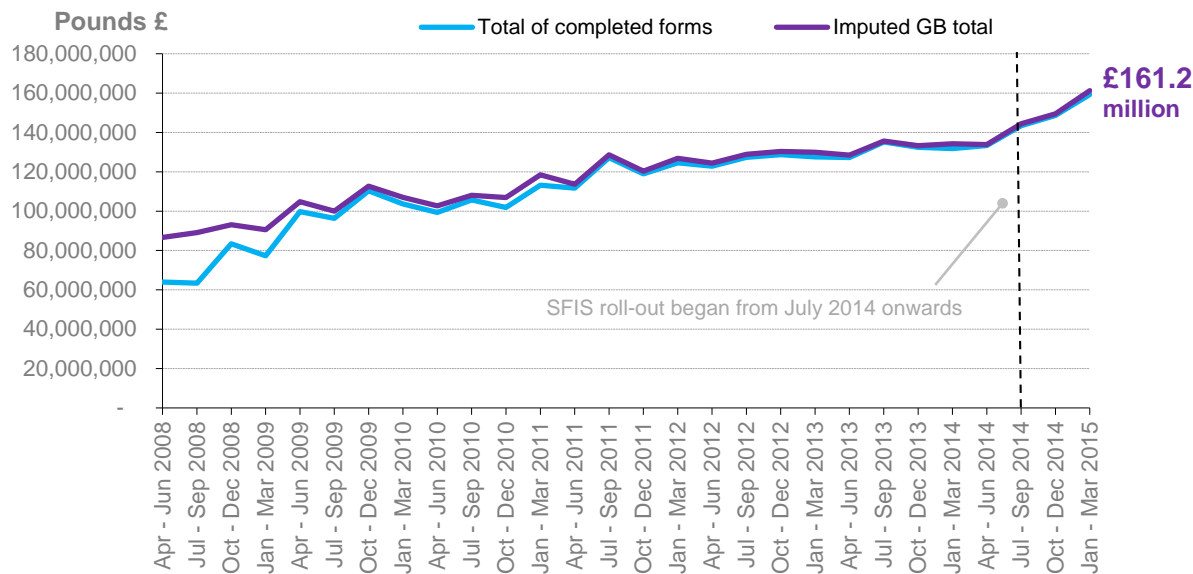
3. HB overpayments recovered during the quarter

The chart below shows the total value of Housing Benefit overpayments recovered each quarter since April 2008.

The total value of HB overpayments recovered in Great Britain is steadily rising

Total value of Housing Benefit overpayments recovered during the quarter

Date	£		Percentage difference
	Total of completed forms	Imputed GB total	
Apr - Jun 2013	127,251,000	128,455,000	1%
Jul - Sep 2013	135,121,000	135,663,000	0%
Oct - Dec 2013	132,491,000	133,274,000	1%
Jan - Mar 2014	131,808,000	134,212,000	2%
Apr - Jun 2014	133,353,000	133,796,000	0%
Jul - Sep 2014	143,445,000	144,409,000	1%
Oct - Dec 2014	148,658,000	149,471,000	1%
Jan - Mar 2015	159,300,000	161,217,000	1%



Main Messages

The total value of overpayments recovered continues to follow an increasing trend.

Historically, the total value of overpayments recovered has tended to vary seasonally between quarters, however overall it follows an upward trend.

The total value of overpayments recovered in the latest quarter (January to March 2015) at **£161.2 million** is the highest recorded so far.

In the latest quarter:

- **90%** of overpayments recovered are based in England.
- **4%** of overpayments recovered are based in Wales and
- **6%** of overpayments recovered are based in Scotland.

Note: As you can see from the differences in the two time series, imputed values and non-imputed values have been much closer aligned in recent times – indicating that there has been less missing data within recent [LA returns](#).

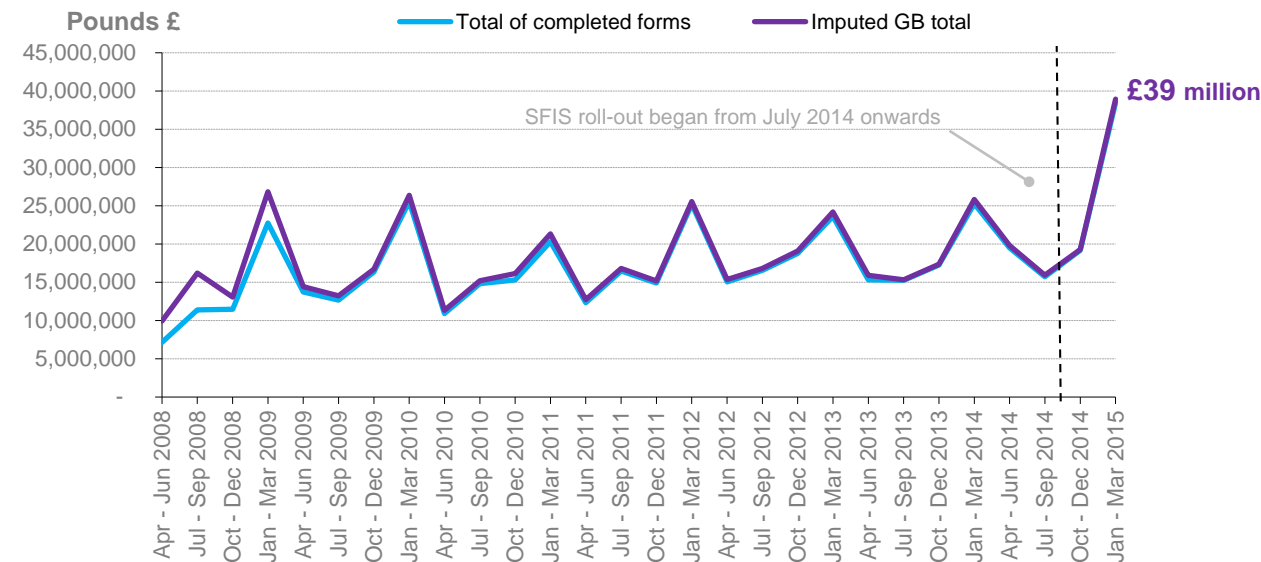
4. HB overpayments written off during the quarter

The chart below shows the value of Housing Benefit overpayments that have been written off each quarter since April 2008.

The total value of HB overpayments written off in Great Britain has increased sharply

Total value of Housing Benefit overpayments written off since April 2008

Date	£		Percentage difference
	Total of completed forms	Imputed GB total	
Apr - Jun 2013	15,333,000	15,907,000	4%
Jul - Sep 2013	15,264,000	15,330,000	0%
Oct - Dec 2013	17,246,000	17,348,000	1%
Jan - Mar 2014	25,261,000	25,818,000	2%
Apr - Jun 2014	19,482,000	19,802,000	2%
Jul - Sep 2014	15,728,000	15,923,000	1%
Oct - Dec 2014	19,170,000	19,275,000	1%
Jan - Mar 2015	38,486,000	38,950,000	1%



Main Messages

Historically, the total value of overpayments written off constantly changes throughout the year, however it has increased sharply in the latest quarter of 2014/15. Five LAs have overpayment amounts written off exceeding £1 million in the latest quarter.

The total value of overpayments written off is generally highest in the fourth quarter (March) of each collection year.

In line with this, the latest quarter (Q4) at almost **£39 million** is the highest recorded so far, superseding the previous peak seen at March 2014 (£25.8million).

In the latest quarter:

- **72%** of overpayments written off are based in England.
- **2%** of overpayments written off are based in Wales and
- **26%** of overpayments written off are based in Scotland. Glasgow has written off around **£7million** of overpayments.

Note: As you can see from the differences in the two time series, imputed values and non-imputed values have been much closer aligned in recent times – indicating that there has been less missing data within recent [LA returns](#).

HBRF Data - Collection Processes and Accuracy

Data Collection

The table below details the list of questions asked as part of the data collection process.

Field	Overpayment Questions
1	Total value of HB overpayments outstanding at the start of the quarter
2	Total value of HB overpayments identified during the quarter
3	Total value of HB overpayments recovered during the quarter
4	Total value of HB overpayments written off during the quarter

Average HBRF Data Return Rates

Collection Period	Average LA Return Rate (across all quarters)
2008 – 2009	89.7%
2009 – 2010	99.2%
2010 – 2011	99.5%
2011 – 2012	99.6%
2012 – 2013	99.8%
2013 – 2014	99.7%
2014 – 2015	99.3%

Despite more complete returns, some Authorities cannot complete certain questions. Hence, the question level completion rate is often lower than the values quoted here. Therefore we publish additional estimates, allowing for imputation (at a Great Britain level only) to account for Authorities which could not provide data. These additional figures give a sense of scale of this impact.

Impact of Single Fraud Investigation Service

Statistics at lower geographical levels are available via a set of separate [statistical tables](#). Due to the phased implementation of SFIS, the fraud statistics within this release will become less well populated – Great Britain summary information has been removed from this publication. Further information on this change can be found [here](#).

Known Issues, Changes and Revisions

Our [Methodology](#) and [HBRF Background Information Note](#) provides further information on DWP National and HBRF statistics, including some of the processes involved in developing and releasing these statistics: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/housing-benefit-recoveries-and-fraud-data-methodology-and-definitions>

Further presentational changes have been made to the release. The introduction of a new Single Fraud Investigation Service (SFIS), which has now gone live in over 123 areas, has had a major impact on some of the statistics within this release. As a result of data collection and reporting timescales, **only partial Fraud statistics are available**. DWP is still considering how best to approach the delivery of future fraud statistics (currently produced in separate summary tables) in advance of the next publication and we will inform users of any changes accordingly in line with UKSA guidelines.

Other National and Official Statistics

Details of other National and Official Statistics produced by the Department for Work and Pensions can be found on the DWP website via the following link:

- A schedule of statistical releases over the next 12 months and a list of the most recent releases: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions/about/statistics>
- Detailed background notes and methodology relating to this First Release can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/housing-benefit-recoveries-and-fraud-data-methodology-and-definitions>

Feedback

DWP would like to hear your views on our statistical publications. If you use any of our statistics publications, we would be interested in hearing what you use them for and how well they meet your requirements. Please email DWP at stats-consultation@dpw.gsi.gov.uk

An ongoing questionnaire, enabling DWP to target future consultations at interested users; shaping the future direction of statistics development to address user needs; and helping ensure value for money, whilst giving users a structured way of expressing their views is available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/205190/statistical_summary_questionnaire.doc

Completed questionnaires can be returned by e-mail to stats-consultation@dpw.gsi.gov.uk or by post to the following address:

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Specific HBRF statistics feedback can also be submitted via our [HBRF user questionnaire](#)

Users can also join the “Welfare and Benefit Statistics” community at: <http://www.statsusernet.org.uk> DWP announces items of interest to users via this forum, as well as replying to users’ questions.