



Department
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Pensions

Income Support Lone Parents Regime: Official Statistics

Quarterly official statistics bulletin

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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 2016.

From April 2016, Income Support sanction decisions go through the same system as ESA and JSA sanctions decisions allowing standardisation across the benefits. This will enable data on IS sanctions to be presented in a similar way to that for JSA and ESA in the future.

The headline figures are:

- In the year up to and including March 2016, 636,800 WFIs were conducted with ISLPs.
- In the year up to and including March 2016, 37,000 sanctions were imposed on ISLP customers. These sanctions were imposed upon 32,800 individual claims. This represents 5.4% of the total ISLP claims 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 2016**. 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 with a partner working less than 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: <https://www.gov.uk/income-support>

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

A Work Focused Interview is an interview with a person conducted to assess the person's prospects for existing or future employment; assisting or encouraging that person to improve their prospects of such employment and identifying activities which that person may undertake to strengthen their existing or future prospects for employment.

Lone Parent Work Focused Interviews (WFIs) were introduced nationally on 30th 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 flow¹ customers. In addition, since April 2002, review² WFIs have been rolled out again dependent on the age of the claimant's youngest child. See Annex A for further details.

Prior to 31st 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 regime³; *or*
- b) their WFI was deferred or waived.

From 31st 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 31st 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 26th October 2009; 7 on 25th October 2010; and 5 from 21st May 2012. More information on these changes can be found at the link below:

http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20121015000000/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.

Since 31st October 2011, lone parents are no longer required to attend a WFI as part of the claims making process. Additional changes were made to Lone Parent Conditionality from 28th April 2014. From this point, lone parents who are in receipt of Income Support solely on the basis of being a lone parent with a youngest child aged one to four are:

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

² By 'review' we mean second and subsequent.

³ 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.

- required to attend WFIs at a frequency and duration determined by their Work Coach, enabling support to be more tailored to meet the needs of the lone parent. Benchmarks are in place to ensure that lone parents with a youngest child aged one to three attend a minimum of two WFIs a year, and those with a youngest child aged four attend a minimum of four WFIs a year; and
- required to undertake Work Related Activity if they have a youngest child aged three or four. Activities will be flexible, tailored to the individual, and must be reasonable taking into account the parent's circumstances.

Where a lone parent does not attend their Work Focused Interview or undertake the agreed Work Related Activity, and no good cause is demonstrated, a benefit sanction, which can lead to a reduction of personal Income Support entitlement, may be imposed.

Lone parents on Income Support with a youngest child under 1 are not subject to any conditionality and therefore should not be sanctioned.

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 Work Coaches.

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

- In the year up to and including March 2016, 636,800 ISLP WFIs were conducted.
- Between April 2004 and March 2016 inclusive 11,217,900 WFIs have been attended by ISLP claimants.

2.2 ISLP Attended WFIs: Tables

Table 1 summarises the total number of ISLP WFIs attended by operational year. The changes in year on year volumes reflect the changes in conditionality over time as set out in 1.2.2 above.

Table 1: ISLP WFIs Attended

Year WFI attended	Volume of ISLP WFIs
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
2014-15	652,400
2015-16	636,800

2.2.1. Data included is for the period up to and including March 2016.

2.2.2. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.

3 ISLP Sanctions

3.1 Summary

This summary contains figures on ISLP Sanctions from April 2004 up to and including **March 2016**. 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. From 28th April 2014, claimants with a youngest child aged three or four can be required to undertake work related activity if appropriate in their circumstances. Failure to comply with such a requirement may result in a sanction.

3.2.1. Process

Jobcentre Plus Work Coaches (WCs) 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 WC 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 work coach 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. A check is put in place to 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 WC'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 WC 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.

Where a sanction has been applied after 28th April 2014, it is not possible to identify whether the sanction arose from failure to attend a WFI or failure to undertake work related activity.

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 ISLP sanctions presented within this document, which draws upon the Income Support Computer System⁴ (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 2014/15 was £72.40; a 20% sanction was £14.48. When the personal allowance rate increased in April 2015 to £73.10; a sanction of £14.62 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 dates⁵. This matching process also allows the proportion of claims which are sanctioned to be calculated.

⁴ The ISCS is the payment system that DWP use to administer IS payments.

⁵ 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 December 2015 inclusive.

4.1 ISLP Sanctions Applied: Headline Statistics

In the year up to and including December 2015 there were 40,300 sanctions imposed on ISLP customers. Some ISLP claims were sanctioned more than once, such that 35,700 individual ISLP claims incurred a sanction in this 12 month period. This represents 5.7% of the ISLP client base in that 12 month period⁶.

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%
2014-15	43,800	39,600	6.0%
2015-16	37,000	32,800	5.4%

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.

⁶ 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 30th April 2001. The following table shows the key ISLP WFI implementation dates by eligibility:

Table A1: ISLP WFI implementation

WFI roll-out date	Stock ⁷	New/Repeat ⁸
30 th April 2001	AYC 13-15 & 9 months	AYC 5 yrs & 3 months+
1 st April 2002	AYC 9-12	AYC 3+
1 st April 2003	AYC 5.25-8	All
1 st 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 **31st 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

⁷ "Stock" claimants defined as those starting their claim prior to 30th April 2001.

⁸ "New/Repeat" claimants defined as those starting their claim from 30th April 2001 onwards.

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

In **April 2014**, changes were introduced which allow work coaches to arrange flexible WFIs with Income Support lone parents with a youngest child aged 1 – 4. The frequency and duration of these is decided by the work coach, taking account of individual circumstances. Also from this point onwards, lone parents with a youngest child aged 3 - 4 can be mandated to undertake Work Related Activity.