

1 Publications

1.1 Introduction and summary

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is currently reviewing the way they keep Local Authorities (LAs) up-to-date about Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) matters with the aim of streamlining the publications they produce and the way they deliver them. We therefore started the questionnaire with a series of questions about the publications used and LAs' views of them.

The key findings based on all LAs answering are summarised in this section. These are followed by the main findings which include charts plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences. It should be noted that on the subject of publications, LAs have fairly similar views and therefore there are only a few sub-group differences described below.

LAs were clearly very reliant on the internet for the information they received from DWP; more than nine in ten mentioned emails from DWP and the DWP website and a further seven in ten mentioned the Directgov website. On the other hand, nearly three-quarters still accessed information from DWP via mail and 64 per cent said that they contacted DWP themselves by email, phone or had a meeting.

1.1.1 Circulars

All LAs used the Adjudication and Operations (A) and Subsidy (S) Circulars, while all except two per cent of LAs said they used the Fraud (F) Circulars. More than eight in ten of the LAs that used each of the circulars found them very useful, in particular the S Circulars (86 per cent). LAs also generally thought that they were issued with about the right amount of frequency, although 17 per cent thought that the A Circular was issued too frequently and three per cent said that the Fraud circulars were not issued frequently enough.

By far the most popular way to have received circulars was via email (93 per cent said that this was their preferred method). A quarter was also keen that the circulars could be found on the DWP website.

1.1.2 Guides and manuals

More than nine in ten LAs used the HB/CTB Guidance Manual, HB/CTB Overpayments Guide and Subsidy Guidance Manual. Slightly fewer used the March 2008 Local Housing Allowance (LHA) Guide (86 per cent) and the HB/CTB Good Practice Guide (81 per cent). Manuals and guides were perceived by the LAs that used them as not being overall quite as useful as circulars. However, more than half described the Subsidy Guidance Manual as very useful (56 per cent) and around two in five said that the HB/CTB Guidance Manual and HB/CTB Overpayment Guide were very useful (44 per cent and 43 per cent respectively). Large majorities of LAs that used manuals and guides regarded the frequency with which they were revised or updated as about right. However, one in five LAs said that the HB/CTB Guidance Manual, the March 2008 LHA Guide and the HB/CTB Overpayments Guide were not revised or updated frequently enough.

Although two in five of all LAs said that they would like to have received manuals and guides via email, the most popular way of accessing them was on the DWP website – mentioned by around three in five LAs.

1.1.3 Bulletins

Ninety five per cent of LAs said that they used Urgent Bulletins and 87 per cent said that they used the fortnightly General Information Bulletin. All of the LAs that used the Urgent Bulletins described

them as useful and 93 per cent of those that used the fortnightly General Information Bulletin described it as useful. The majority of LAs that used bulletins said that they were issued with about the right amount of frequency, however, 13 per cent said that the fortnightly General Information Bulletin was issued too frequently.

A clear majority of all LAs would prefer to have received the bulletins via email, however, around one in four said that they would like to have accessed them via the DWP website.

1.1.4 Newsletters

Almost all LAs used HB Direct, while considerably fewer used moredirect (44 per cent) and Touchbase (36 per cent). HB Direct was seen as being the most useful newsletter (56 per cent described it as very useful), however one in three said that both moredirect and Touchbase were not useful. Views on the frequency with which newsletters were issued ranged from 94 per cent ‘about right’ for HB Direct to seven in ten for Touchbase and moredirect.

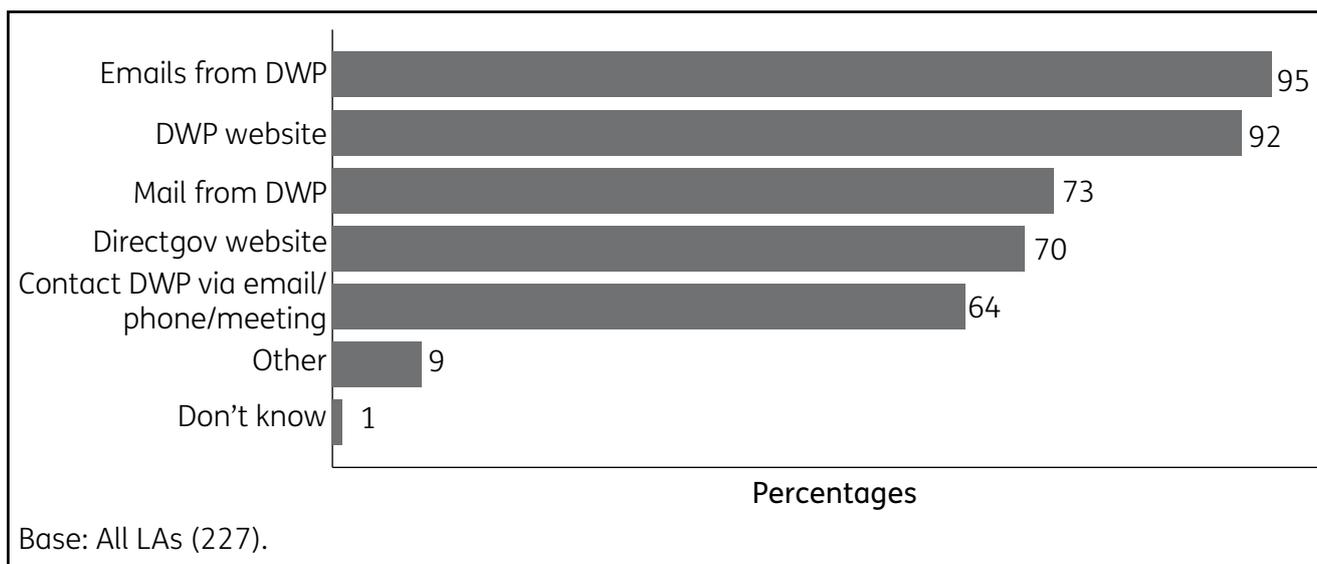
Email was the most preferred way of receiving DWP newsletters. However, in each case, around one in four said that they would like to have accessed them via the DWP website.

Although very few LAs were currently using the RSS feed (14 per cent), more than nine in ten said that they would find a regular e-mail alerting them to new updates on the DWP or Directgov websites useful.

1.2 Main findings

The following details the main findings and includes charts for all questions plus commentary highlighting the key sub-group differences.

Figure 1.1 How does your LA (either you personally or members of your team) currently access information from DWP (including Jobcentre Plus and PDCS) about HB/CTB?

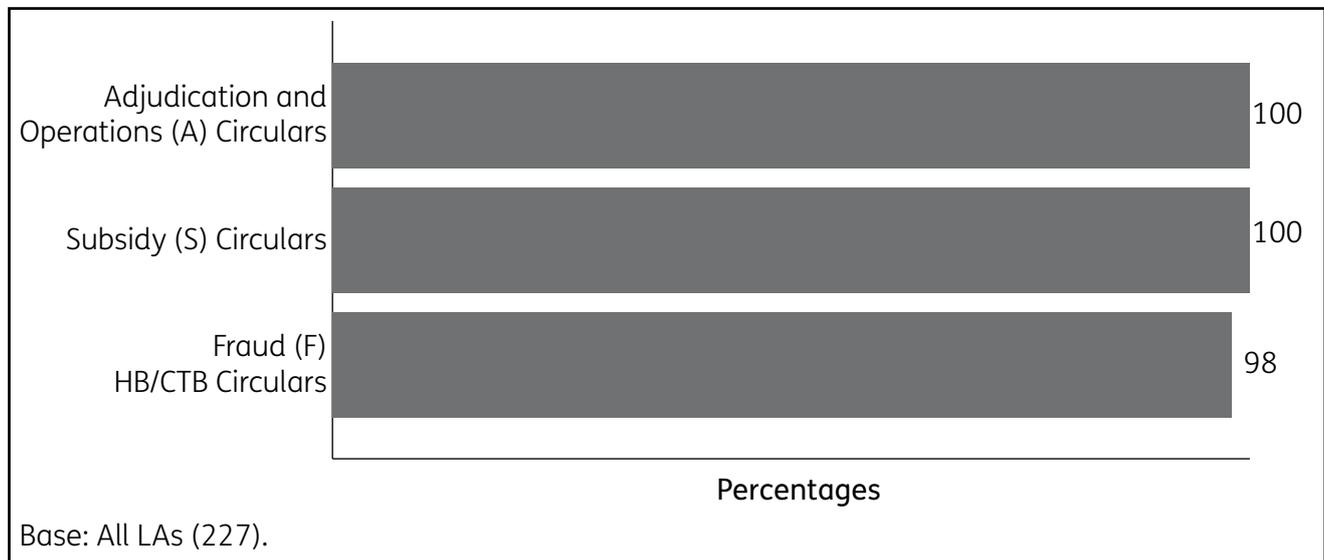


LAs were clearly very reliant on the internet for the information they received from DWP. More than nine in ten mentioned emails from DWP and the DWP website (95 per cent and 92 per cent respectively). A further 70 per cent mentioned the Directgov website.

On the other hand, nearly three in four (73 per cent) said that they accessed information from DWP via mail and 64 per cent said that they contacted DWP themselves by email, phone or had a meeting.

1.2.1 Circulars

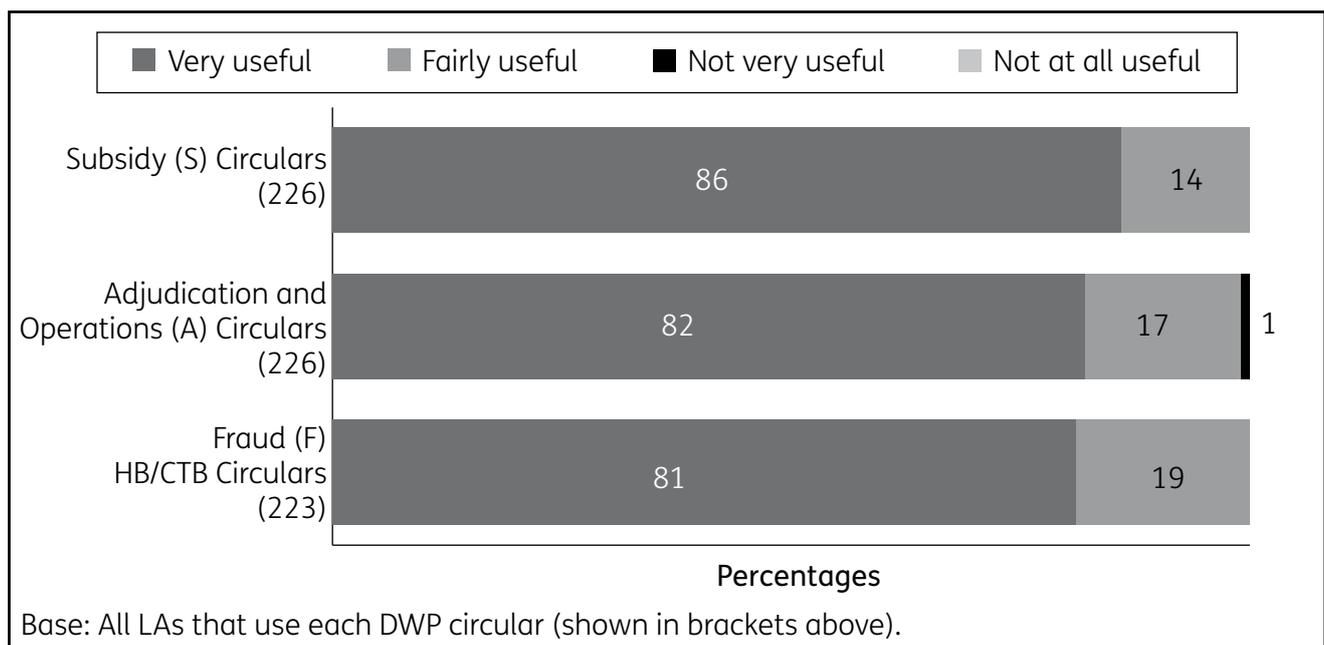
Figure 1.2 Which of DWP’s HB/CTB circulars does your LA use?



The questionnaire then went on to ask about the circulars, manuals/guides, bulletins and newsletters that LAs used. Each of these will be looked at separately in the following pages, starting with circulars.

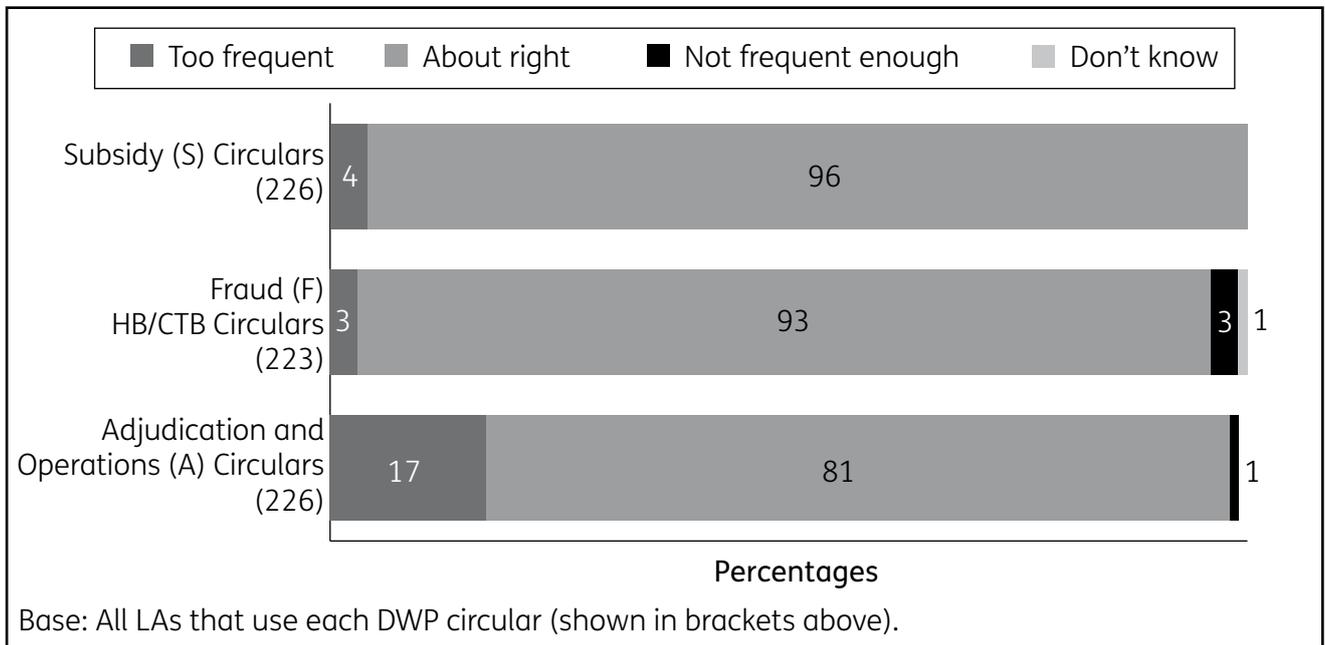
All LAs used the Adjudication and Operations (A) and Subsidy (S) Circulars, while all except two per cent of LAs said they used the Fraud (F) Circulars.

Figure 1.3 How useful have you found this/these publication/s to date?



More than eight in ten of the LAs that used each of the circulars found them very useful, in particular the Subsidy Circulars (86 per cent). Just one per cent of LAs that used the Adjudication and Operations Circulars gave a negative comment about them and said that they were not very useful.

Figure 1.4 How would you describe the frequency with which these publications are issued?

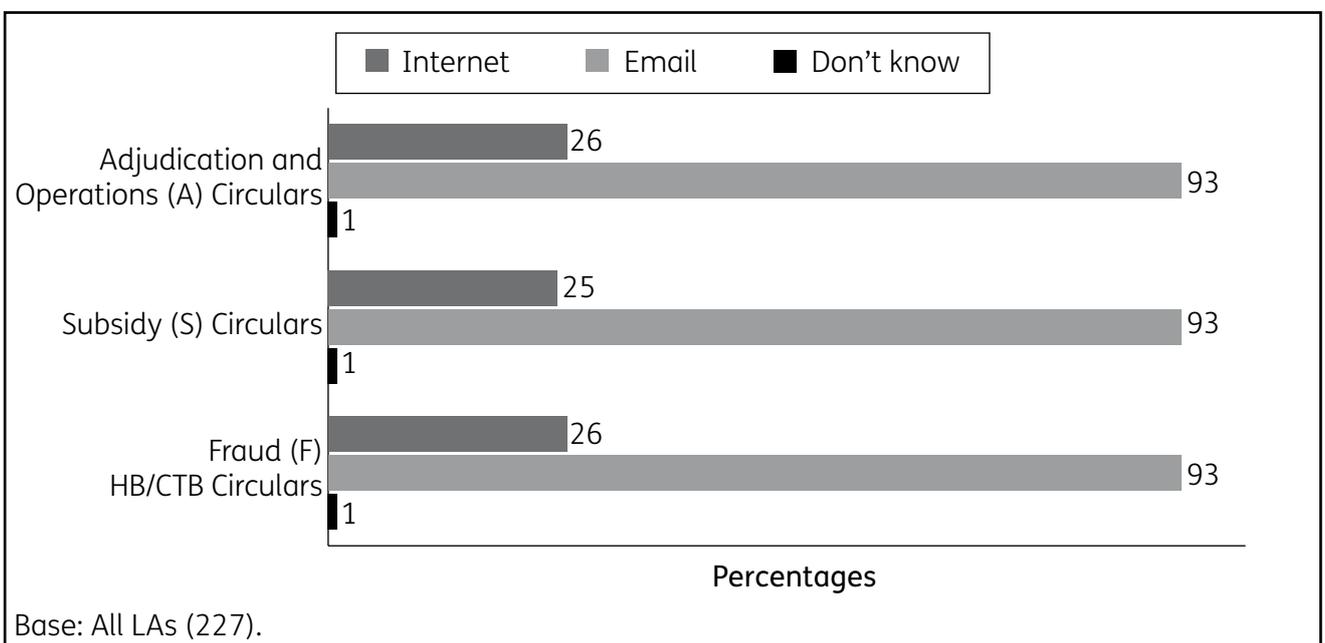


LAs that used the circulars generally thought that they were issued with about the right amount of frequency. They were most happy with the frequency of Subsidy Circulars (96 per cent said ‘about right’).

Seventeen per cent of LAs thought that the Adjudication and Operations Circular was issued too frequently, while three per cent said that the Fraud circulars were not issued frequently enough.

It is interesting to note that a significantly high 38 per cent of London Boroughs said that Adjudication and Operations Circulars were issued too frequently.

Figure 1.5 How would you prefer to receive or access each of these publications?



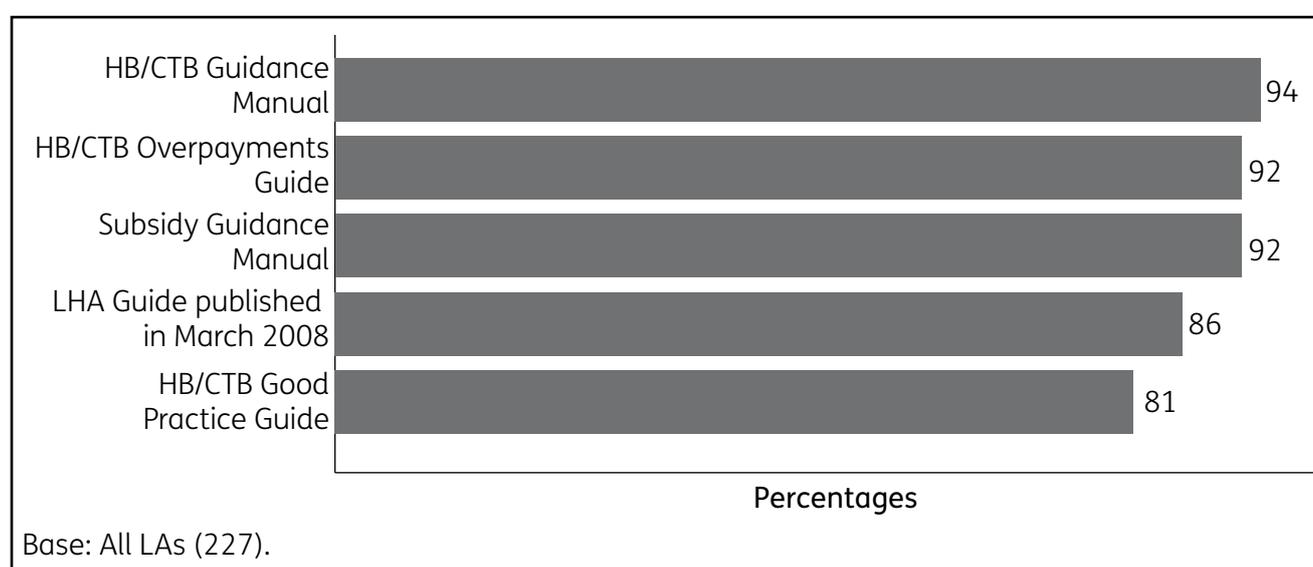
All LAs, rather than just those currently using circulars, were asked how they would prefer to have received or accessed them.

By far the most popular way to have received circulars was via email (93 per cent said that this was their preferred method). A quarter was also keen that the circulars could be found on the DWP website.

High caseload LAs were significantly more likely than low caseload LAs to have said that they preferred to access circulars via the internet and significantly fewer said that they preferred email.

1.2.2 Manuals and guides

Figure 1.6 Which of DWP's HB/CTB manuals and guides does your LA use?

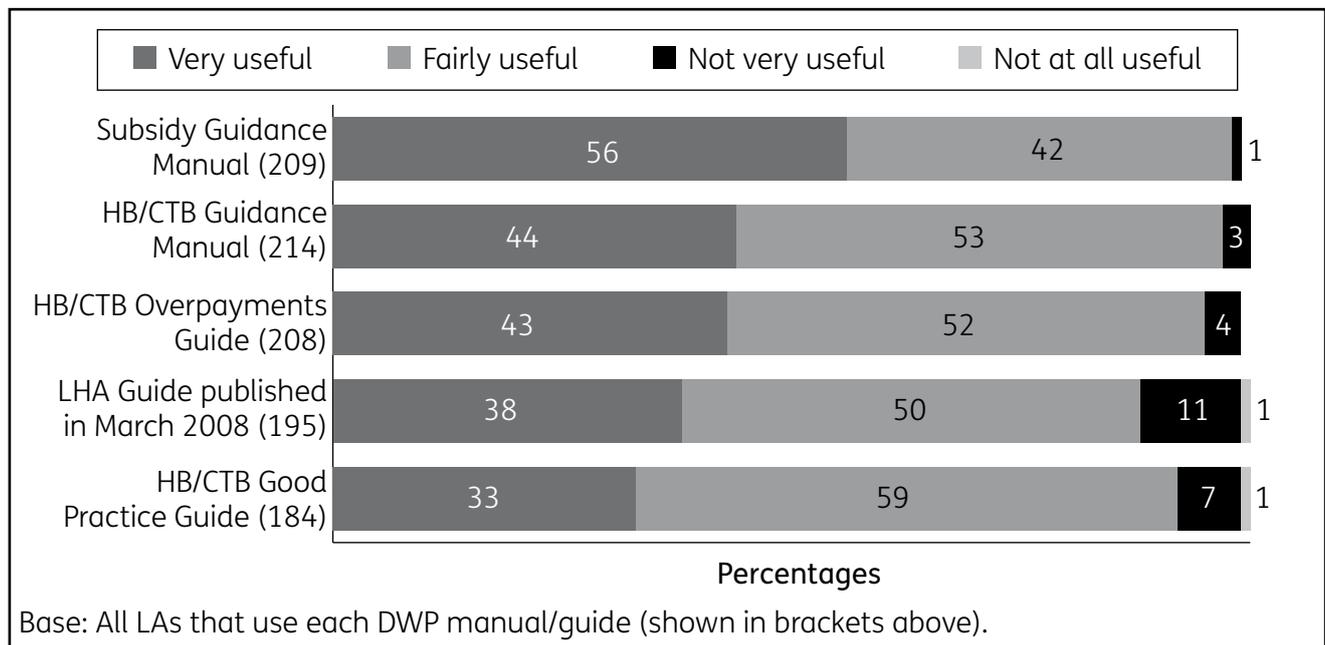


More than nine in ten LAs used the HB/CTB Guidance Manual (94 per cent), HB/CTB Overpayments Guide (93 per cent) and Subsidy Guidance Manual (92 per cent).

Slightly fewer used the March 2008 LHA Guide (86 per cent) and the HB/CTB Good Practice Guide (81 per cent).

LAs that contracted out their HB/CTB were significantly less likely than LAs that did not contract out to have used the HB/CTB Guidance Manual (85 per cent and 96 per cent respectively). In addition, low and medium caseload LAs were significantly more likely to have used the HB/CTB Overpayments Guide than high caseload LAs (94 per cent, 95 per cent and 84 per cent respectively).

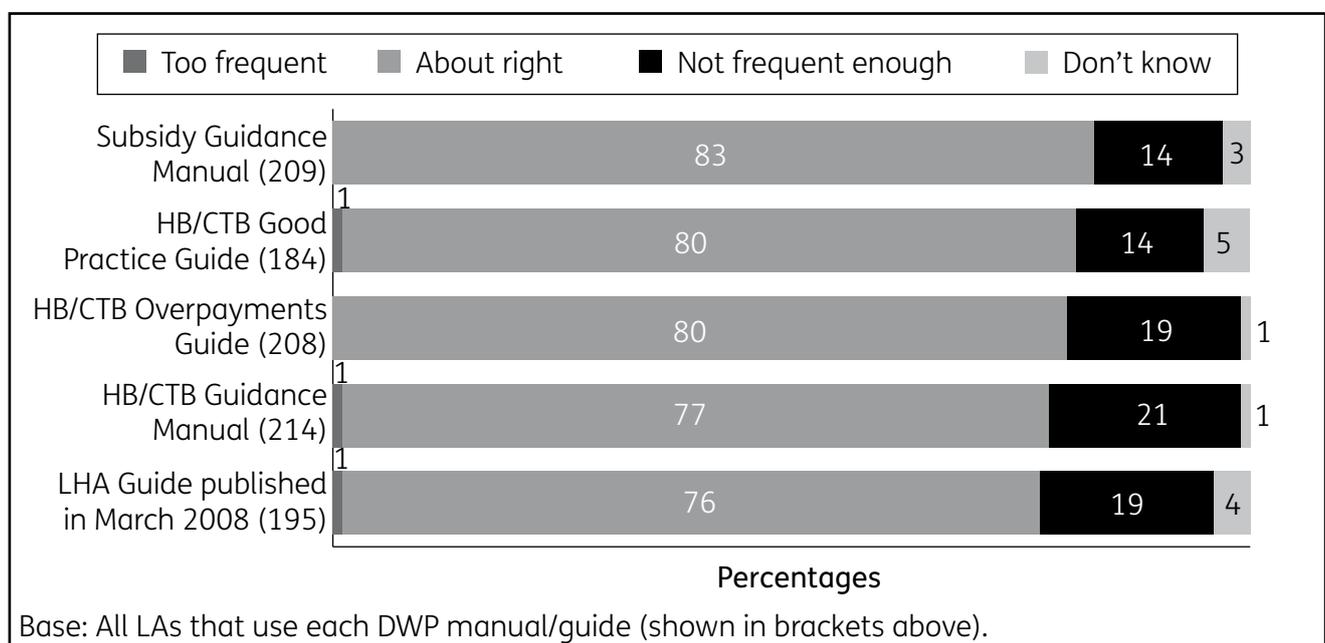
Figure 1.7 How useful have you found this/these publication/s to date?



Manuals and guides were perceived by the LAs that used them as not being overall quite as useful as circulars. However, more than half described the Subsidy Guidance Manual as very useful (56 per cent) and around two in five said that the HB/CTB Guidance Manual and HB/CTB Overpayment Guide were very useful (44 per cent and 43 per cent respectively).

It is worth noting that very few LAs described any of the manuals and guides as ‘not useful’. The highest level of negative comments concerned the March 2008 LHA Guide and the HB/CTB Good Practice Guide; 12 per cent described the LHA Guide, and seven per cent described the HB/CTB Good Practice Guide, as ‘not very’ or ‘not at all useful’.

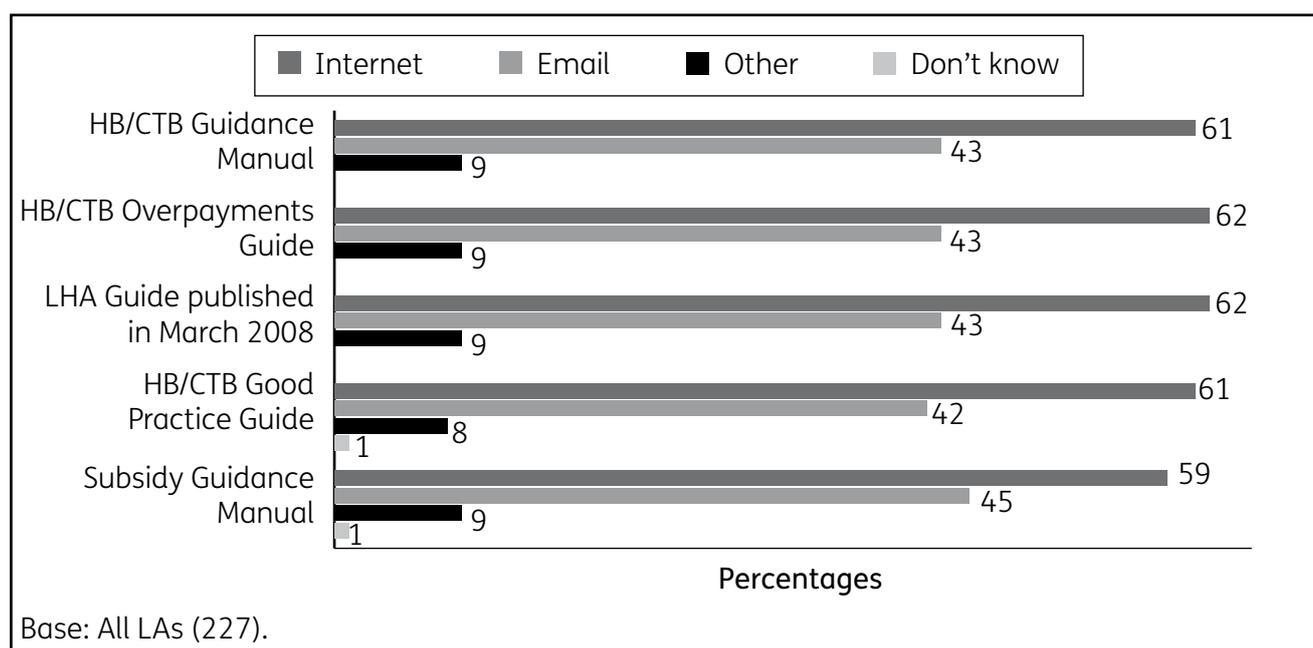
Figure 1.8 How would you describe the frequency with which these publications are revised or updated?



Large majorities of LAs that used manuals and guides regarded the frequency with which they were revised or updated as about right. Just one per cent of LAs described the HB/CTB Good Practice Guide, the HB/CTB Guidance Manual and the March 2008 LHA Guide as too frequent.

On the other hand, one in five LAs said that the HB/CTB Guidance Manual, the March 2008 LHA Guide and the HB/CTB Overpayments Guide were not revised or updated frequently enough (21 per cent, 19 per cent and 19 per cent respectively). One in seven also said that the HB/CTB Good Practice Guide and Subsidy Guidance Manual were not revised or updated frequently enough (both 14 per cent).

Figure 1.9 How would you prefer to receive or access each of these publications?



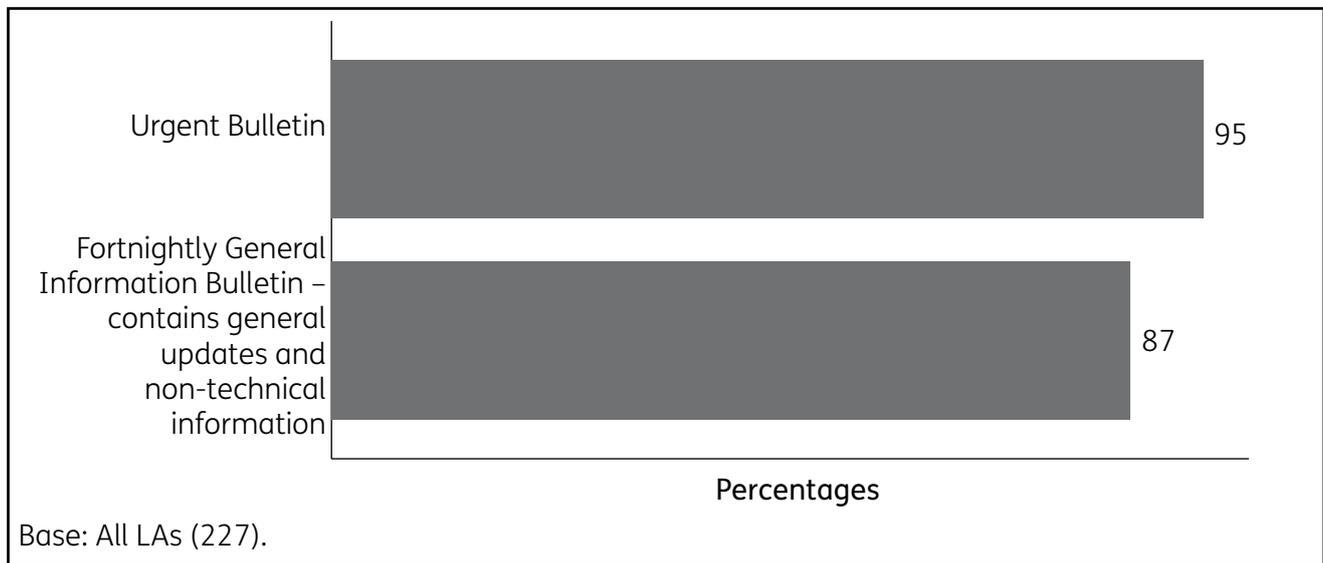
Although two in five of all LAs said that they would like to have received manuals and guides via email, the most popular way of accessing them was on the DWP website – mentioned by around three in five LAs.

It is interesting to note that around nine per cent of LAs said that they would like to have received manuals and guides in some other way. From development work conducted with LAs on an early version of the questionnaire, we found that some LAs still preferred to have actual hard copies of manuals and guides and would therefore assume that this is the other way referred to by around one in eleven LAs.

High caseload LAs were significantly more likely than low caseload LAs to have said that they preferred to access manuals and guides via the internet.

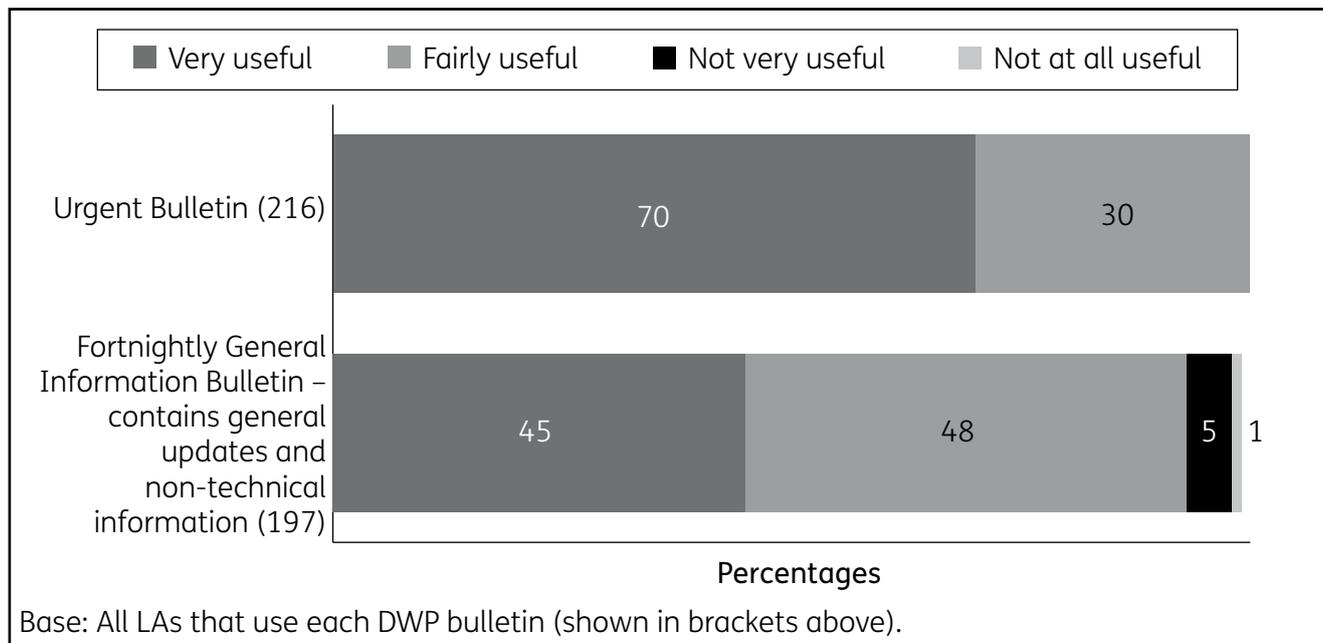
1.2.3 Bulletins

Figure 1.10 Which of DWP’s HB/CTB bulletins does your LA use?



Ninety five per cent of LAs said that they used Urgent Bulletins and 87 per cent said that they used the fortnightly General Information Bulletin containing general updates and non-technical information.

Figure 1.11 How useful have you found this/these publication/s to date?

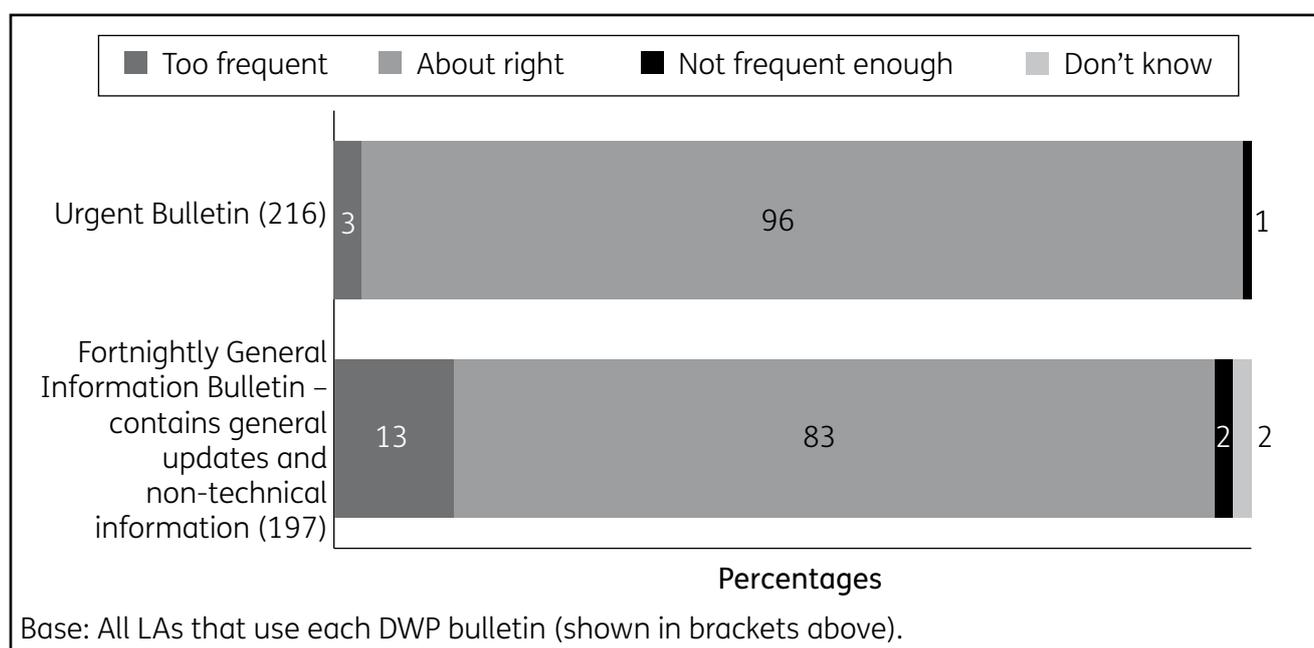


The Urgent Bulletins were regarded by those that used them as considerably more useful than the fortnightly General Information Bulletin. All of the LAs that used Urgent Bulletins described them as useful, with 70 per cent saying that they were very useful. This compares with 45 per cent of LAs that used the Fortnightly General Information Bulletin that described it as very useful and 48 per cent that described it as fairly useful.

On the other hand, there was very little negative opinion. Just six per cent said that the fortnightly General Information Bulletin was ‘not very,’ or ‘not at all useful’.

London Boroughs and English Unitary authorities were significantly less likely than other LAs to have described fortnightly General Information Bulletins as useful (84 per cent and 85 per cent respectively). In fact a significantly higher proportion of high caseload authorities said that fortnightly bulletins were not useful (eleven per cent compared with five per cent of low caseload LAs and two per cent of medium caseload LAs).

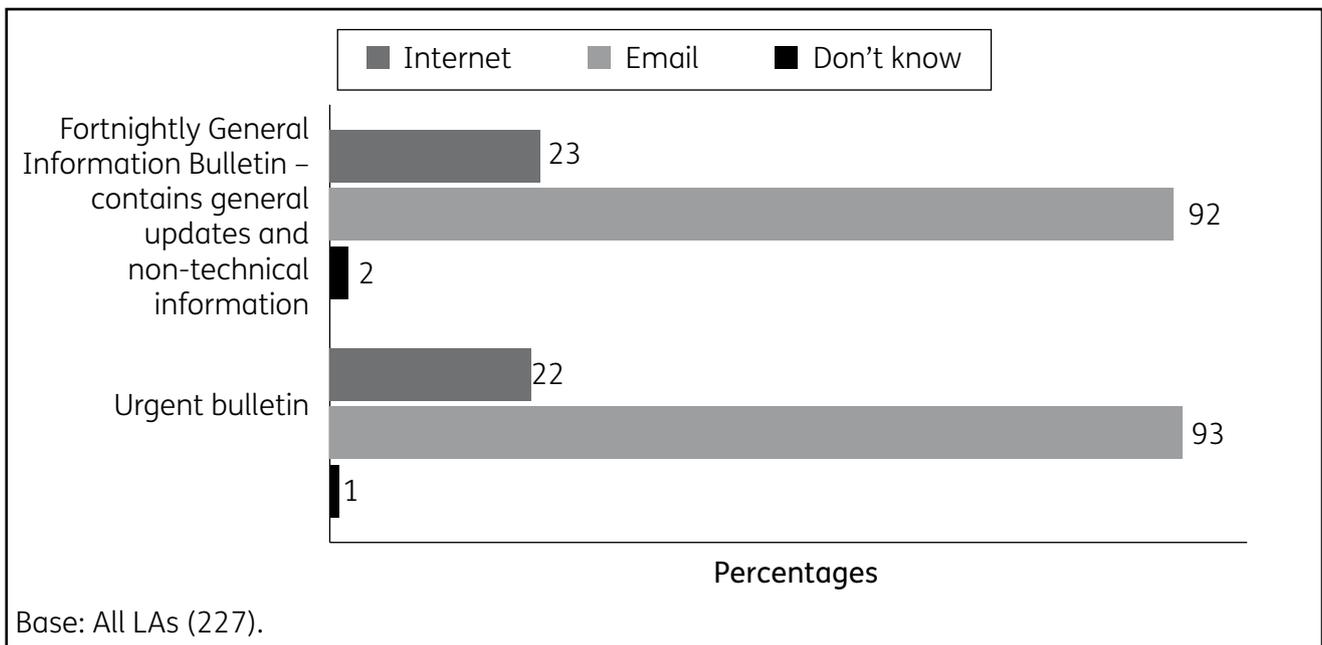
Figure 1.12 How would you describe the frequency with which these publications are issued?



The majority of LAs that used bulletins said that they were issued with about the right amount of frequency (96 per cent for Urgent bulletins and 83 per cent for fortnightly General Information bulletins). However, 13 per cent said that the fortnightly General Information Bulletin was issued too frequently and two per cent said that it was not issued frequently enough.

It is interesting to note that a significantly high 27 per cent of English Unitary authorities said that Adjudication and Operations Circulars were issued too frequently.

Figure 1.13 How would you prefer to receive or access each of these publications?

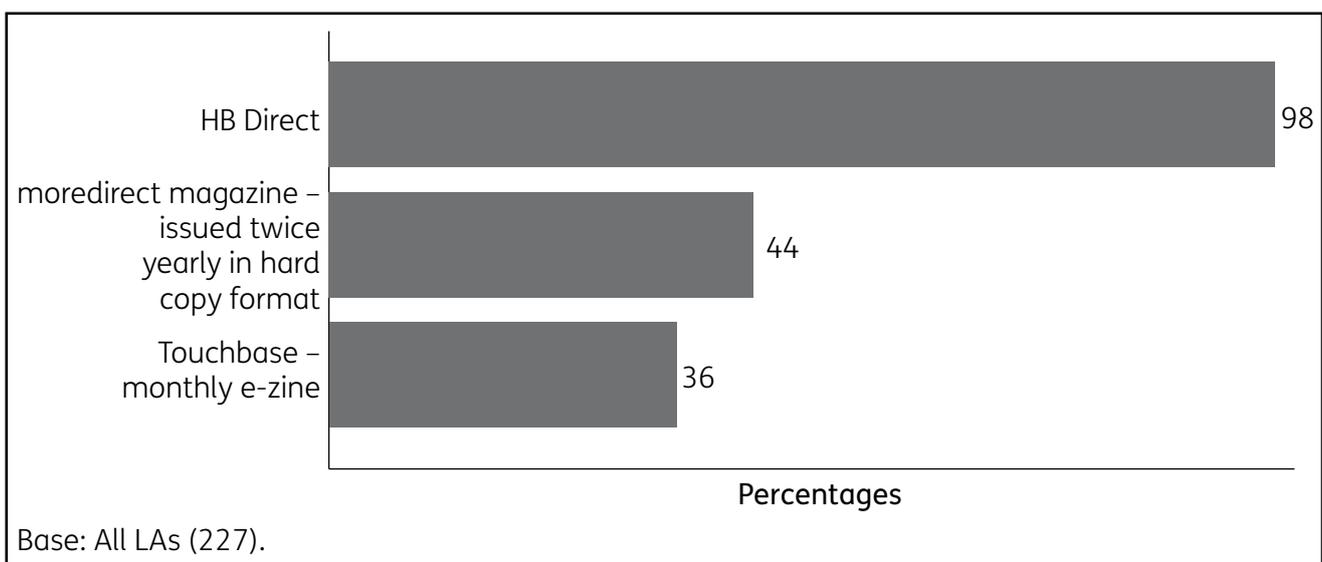


A clear majority of all LAs would prefer to have received the Bulletins via email (93 per cent for Urgent Bulletins and 92 per cent for the Fortnightly General Information Bulletin). However, around one in four said that they would like to have accessed them via the DWP website.

High caseload LAs were significantly more likely than low and medium caseload LAs to have said that they preferred to access fortnightly General Information Bulletins via the internet (36 per cent, 17 per cent and 20 per cent respectively) and significantly fewer said that they preferred email (83 per cent, 94 per cent and 97 per cent respectively). The pattern was similar for Urgent Bulletins, although high caseload LAs were only significantly more likely than low caseload LAs to have preferred the internet (31 per cent and 17 per cent respectively), while significantly less likely than both low and medium caseload LAs to have preferred email (86 per cent, 95 per cent and 98 per cent respectively).

1.2.4 Newsletters

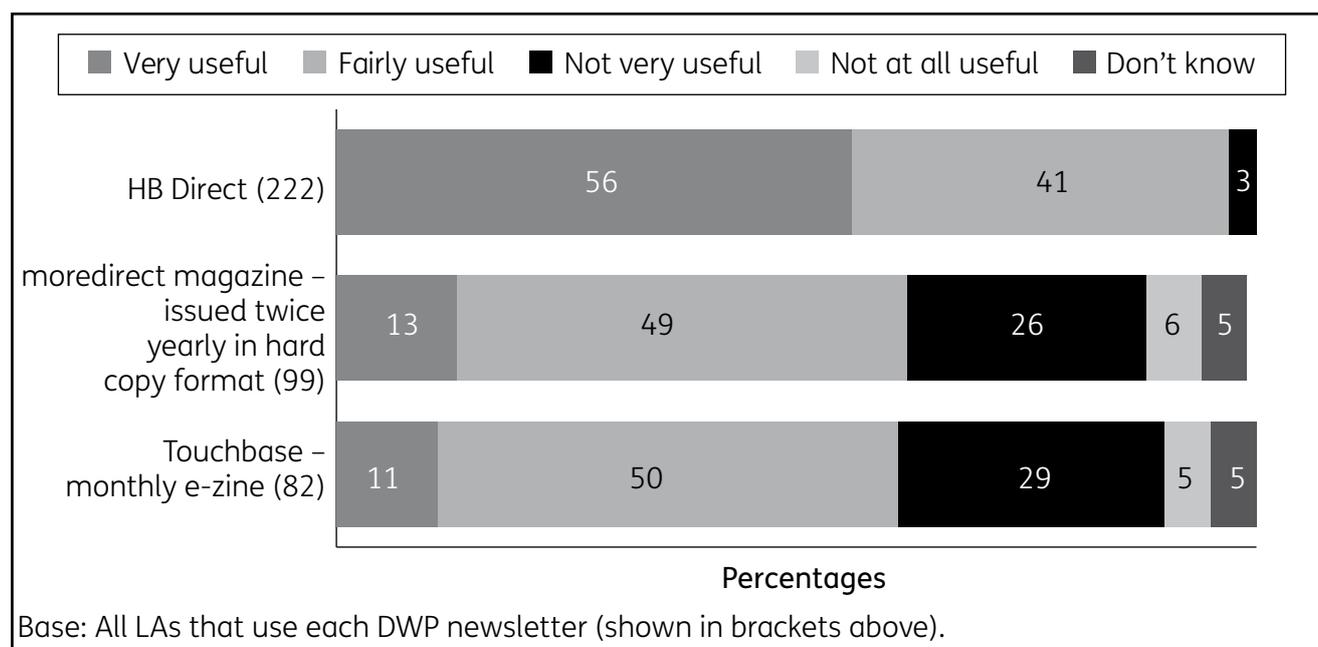
Figure 1.14 Which of DWP’s HB/CTB newsletters does your LA use?



Almost all LAs used HB Direct (98 per cent), while considerably fewer used moredirect (44 per cent) and Touchbase (36 per cent).

LAs that contract out HB/CTB were significantly less likely to have used HB Direct than those that did not contract out (93 per cent and 98 per cent respectively).

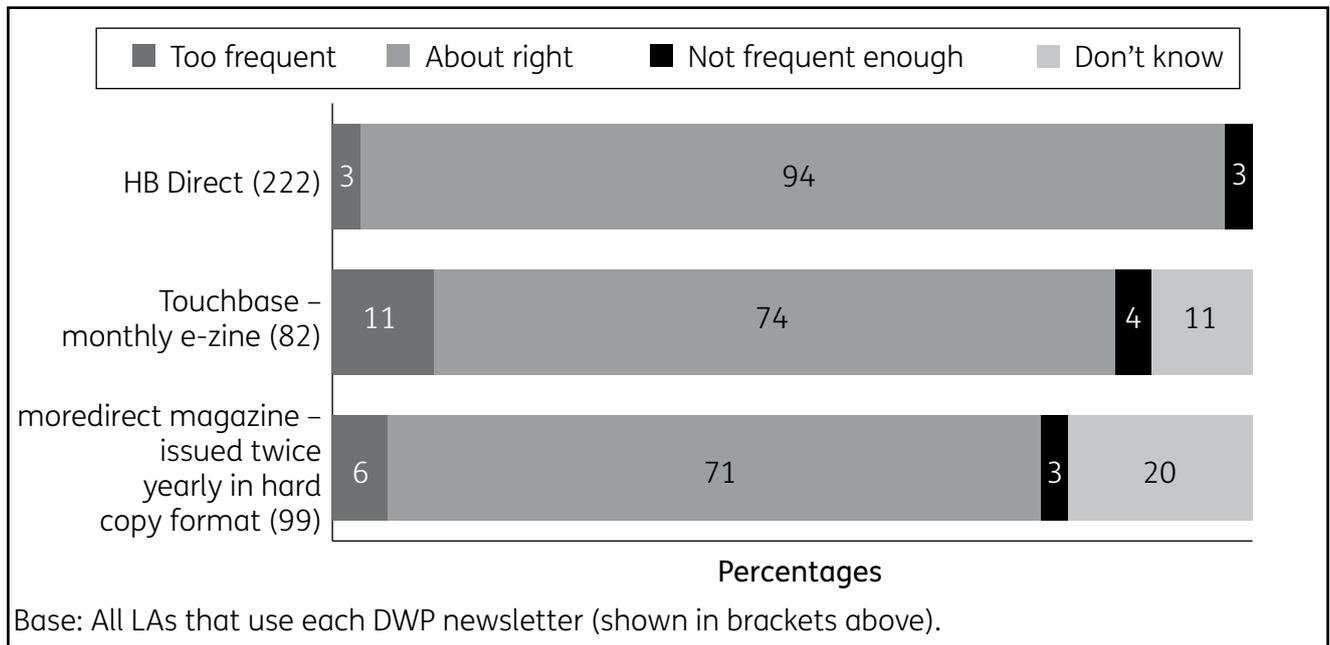
Figure 1.15 How useful have you found this/these publication/s to date?



HB Direct was seen as being the most useful newsletter (56 per cent of those that used it described it as very useful). This is followed by moredirect and then Touchbase (13 per cent and 11 per cent very useful respectively).

Around one in three said that both moredirect and Touchbase were not useful (32 per cent for moredirect and 34 per cent for Touchbase). Interestingly, five per cent of LAs did not even know whether moredirect or Touchbase were useful.

Figure 1.16 How would you describe the frequency with which these publications are issued?

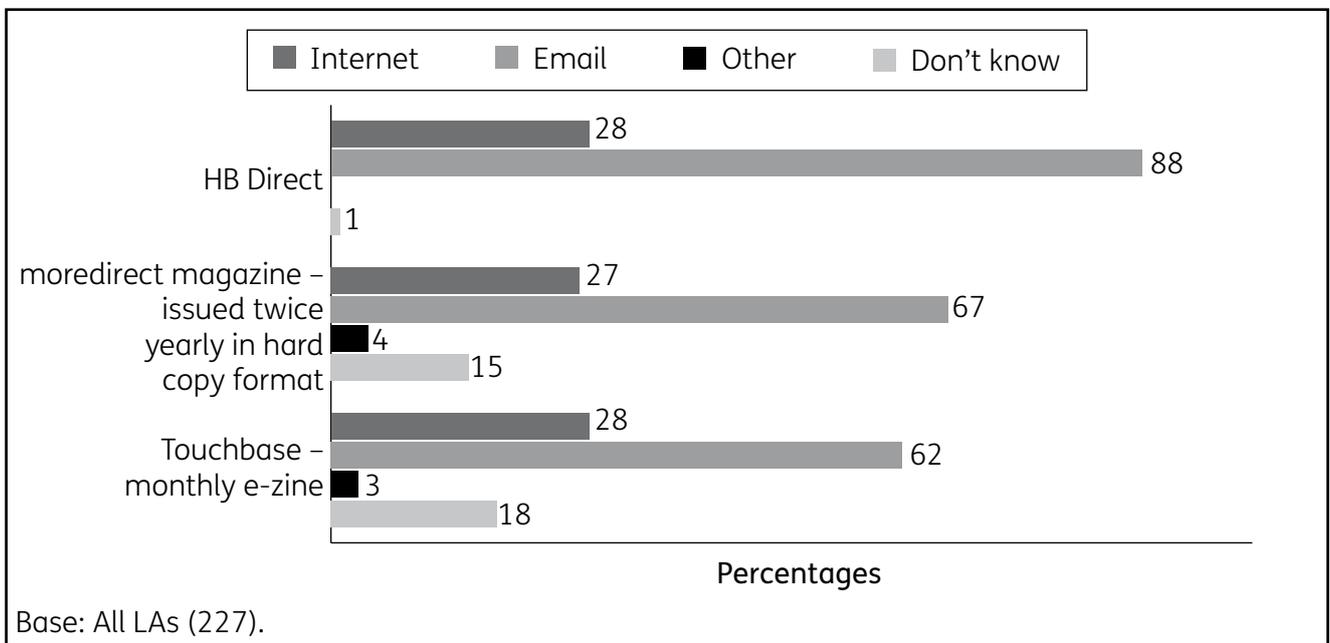


The frequency of HB Direct was viewed by 94 per cent of those using it as about right. Just three per cent said that it was issued too frequently and a further three per cent said that it was not issued frequently enough.

The frequency with which Touchbase and moredirect are issued was viewed as about right by around seven in ten LAs. On the other hand, 11 per cent said that Touchbase was issued too frequently and four per cent said that it was not issued frequently enough. This compares to six per cent that said moredirect was issued too frequently and a further three per cent that said it was not issued frequently enough.

Once again, a higher than usual percentage said that they did not have an opinion on the frequency with which moredirect and Touchbase were issued.

Figure 1.17 How would you prefer to receive or access each of these publications?

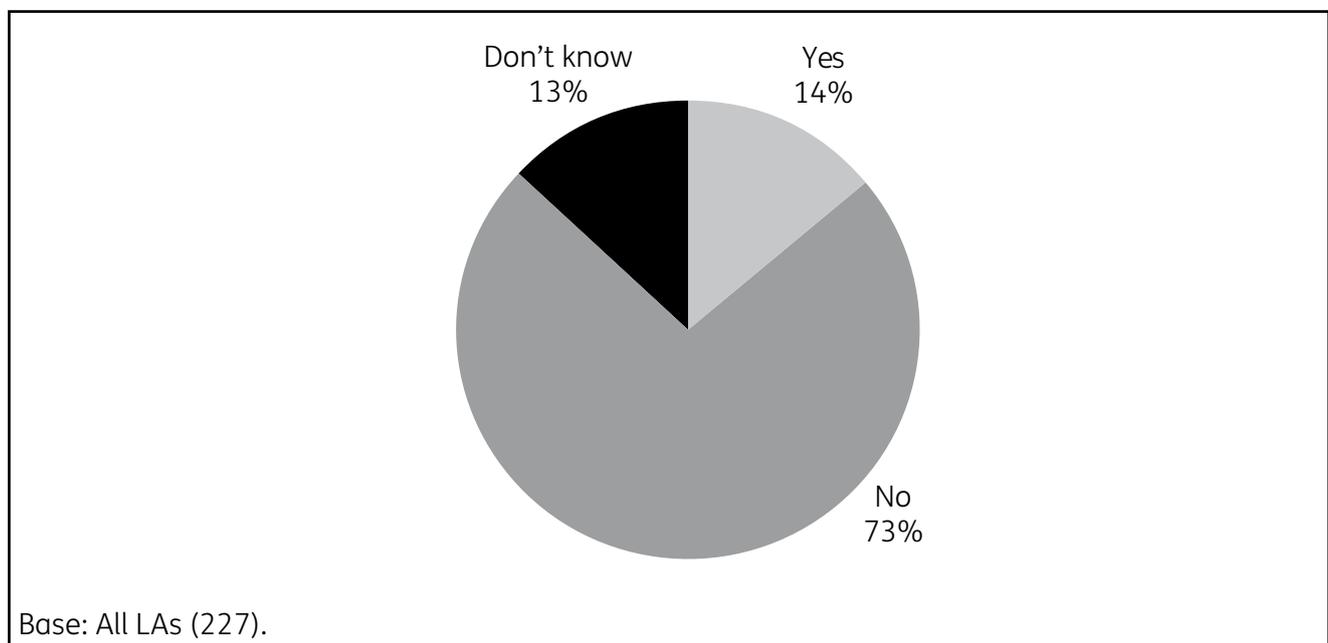


Email was the most preferred way of receiving DWP newsletters. Eighty-eight per cent gave this as their preference for HB Direct, 67 per cent for moredirect and 62 per cent for Touchbase. However, in each case, around one in four said that they would like to be accessed them via the DWP website.

It is worth noting that 15 per cent were unable to give an answer for moredirect and 18 per cent for Touchbase.

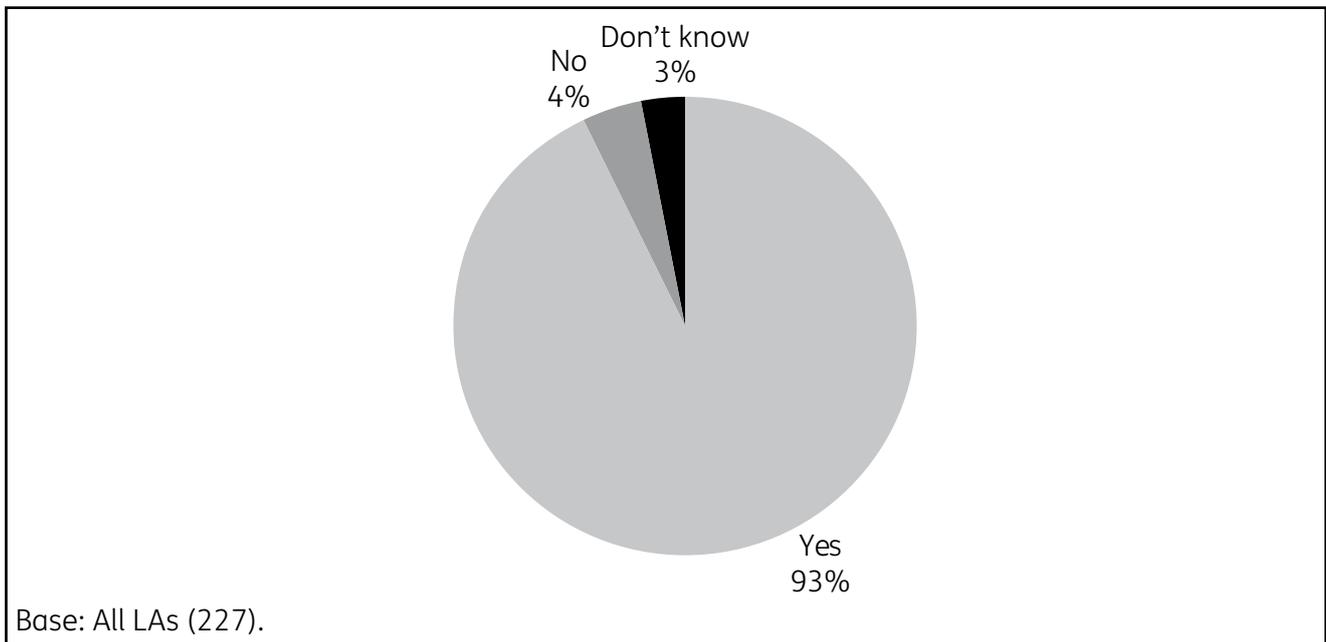
High caseload LAs were significantly more likely than low caseload LAs to have said that they preferred to access newsletters via the internet.

Figure 1.18 Does your LA use the RSS feed to receive information about new updates on the DWP or Directgov websites? An RSS feed lets you know when a website has added something new as soon as it is published – without you having to visit the website.



Just 14 per cent of LAs used the RSS feed to receive information about new updates on the DWP or Directgov websites.

Figure 1.19 Would your LA find a regular e-mail alerting you to new updates on the DWP or Directgov websites useful?



Although very few LAs were currently using the RSS feed, 93 per cent said that they would find a regular e-mail alerting them to new updates on the DWP or Directgov websites useful.