

Background Quality Report: Child Support Agency Quarterly Summary of Statistics (QSS)

Introduction

The Child Support Agency QSS brings together key National Statistics on the Child Support Agency caseload operating under the two existing statutory child maintenance schemes introduced in 1993 and 2003 respectively.

The majority of tables included within the QSS are calculated from databases derived from the main Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission administrative systems – CS2, CSCS as well as a Clerical Case Database (CCD).

Relevance

The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs in both coverage and content.

The Child Support Agency (CSA) Quarterly Summary of Statistics (QSS) presents a high level picture of performance across key target areas. On 5th June 2009 an external consultation was held where users provided feedback on a proposed new look QSS. Overall feedback was very positive, welcoming the new design and layout. Feedback also highlighted the need for additional information in particular on enforcement, following the introduction of new powers, and appeals.

Once research was conducted and discussions held with external Departmental colleagues experimental tables were introduced to present new information and invite further feedback.

The 2009 CSA QSS consultation is available on the [National Archive](#).

The response to the consultation includes some unmet requirements which are detailed further in the Uses and Users of the QSS document.

Accuracy

The proximity between an estimate and the unknown true value.

All CS2 computer system datasets and the clerical case database are based on a complete 100% extract of all cases administered, whilst CSCS computer system datasets are based on a 5% sample with the exception of arrears distribution where 100% CSCS computer system data is used.

Due to technical issues on the CS2 computer system (on which the 2003 scheme is operated) a number of cases have to be processed off system. A regular data feed of cases processed off system is received and included in the QSS figures, to maintain accuracy of performance. As at September 2012 this represents approximately 9% of the live caseload.

The 1993 scheme is mainly operated on the CSCS computer system. Numbers derived from the 5% CSCS sample dataset are subject to sampling error and are actually estimates of the true population value. By chance, an estimate of the population value, obtained from the 5% sample data, may be slightly lower or slightly higher than the true population value.

The CSCS caseload is reducing over time thus increasing the chance of sampling error.

However, as at September 2012 the CSCS caseload still accounted for 14% of the 1.11m caseload.

Although the figures are estimates, it is possible to say with confidence that the true value, corresponding to any particular number in the tables, lies within a certain range - the confidence interval.

The following table gives the 95% confidence intervals for the true value in the population, based on the estimated value from the 5% live and assessed CSCS sample. This table considers the changing CSCS caseload over the past 5 years.

	Lower 5% Confidence Interval	CSCS Sample Live and Assessed Estimate	Upper 5% Confidence Interval
Mar-08	417,576	418,020	418,464
Mar-09	363,479	363,900	364,321
Mar-10	256,241	258,260	260,279
Mar-11	211,512	213,620	215,728
Mar-12	172,924	175,080	177,236

Figures relating to the CSCS caseload are not presented separately within the QSS, but are reported within figures relating to the 1993 scheme. 1993 scheme figures also include cases that have been migrated onto the CS2 computer system, but are still administered under 1993 scheme rules.

All of the datasets are subject to a degree of non-sampling error. The largest of these are retrospection and late notifications.

Retrospection arises from changes that occur on individual cases which are not entered onto the administrative systems until after the time when the data is extracted (the reference date).

Many of the actions recorded on the administrative systems are conducted by automatic batch runs overnight e.g. payment of maintenance. Management information will therefore capture the payments once they occur and so negligible retrospection occurs.

The level of retrospection varies between different measures with most measures not affected by retrospection at all. Intake, clearances and uncleared work are the measures most affected. In most months retrospection has minimal impact with certain measures being impacted typically by less than 50 cases in previous months.

Accuracy performance figures are derived from the CSA Quality and Assurance team sampling a number of cases each month where a new assessment calculation has taken place. There were around 451,800 new calculations on the CS2 computer system throughout 2011/12 with around 7,500 of these sampled. This represents around 1.66% of the population. From this, we can be 95% confident that the results obtained from the accuracy sample are within approximately + / - 1.3 percentage points of the real value.

Any one off issues that affect the accuracy of any performance tables within the QSS are reported directly in both the First Release and the QSS itself.

Policy changes and system changes may at times result in certain measures not being comparable over time. Such instances are documented in the QSS itself, such as the introduction of off system cases and the repeal of Section 6 which resulted in a large fall in the level of applications received.

Timeliness and Punctuality

The CSA's full National Statistics are produced on a quarterly basis – March, June, September and December.

Publications are released approximately 6 weeks after the reference date. Exact dates are announced four weeks in advance on the [UKSA Publication Hub](#). No figures are released or published externally until then.

On the very rare occurrence of non-punctual releases the reasons for this are explained in a clear update.

Accessibility and Clarity

Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data, also reflecting the format in which the data is available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of the metadata, illustrations and accompanying advice.

The CSA QSS contains graphs, tables and breakdowns across CSA computer systems and schemes including those cases managed off system.

The CSA QSS is available in PDF format or to download into Microsoft Excel.

The QSS reports aggregate information at Agency level. From December 2010, and in response to stakeholder feedback new Regional Briefing tables were introduced reporting performance by local authority across key performance areas. These tables are available in excel on this website, and produced 6 monthly.

Figures within the QSS are rounded to the nearest 100 with figures in the Enforcement table rounded to the nearest 5 for disclosure control reasons. Footnotes are included and support each table. A Quality and Accessibility document is available as well as a more detailed technical note for those wishing to understand the methodology in more depth.

Assessment of User Needs and Perceptions

The processes for finding out about users and uses, and their views on the statistical products.

We recognise that our customers will have different needs and we use a range of different methods to contact them. We consult with both internal and external users of the CSA QSS on a regular basis to help us understand how they use our statistics and what their needs are. We have made use of Experimental tables to include additional information and invite further feedback.

Performance, Cost and Respondent Burden

The effectiveness, efficiency and economy of the statistical output.

Producing the statistics require resources from DWP's Information, Governance and Security Directorate as well as people within the Management Information and Performance reporting team, for Child Maintenance. Information, Governance and Security Directorate have responsibility for producing the datasets and ensuring they are accurate and robust prior to release.

The Management Information and Performance reporting team, for Child Maintenance have responsibility for producing the QSS, assuring the data and quality assuring all information. Across both teams the production of the QSS requires approximately 20 staff days per quarter across junior and senior people.

Confidentiality, Transparency and Security

The standard DWP data security and confidentiality policies have been applied in the production of CSA statistics.