

Income related benefits estimates of take-up: Understanding the Customers

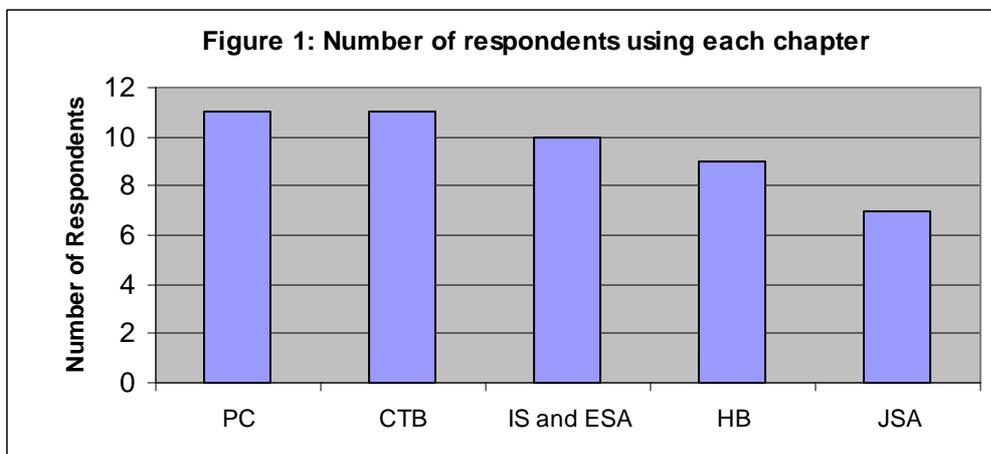
1. In order to help understand the relevance and use of the take-up of income related benefits statistics details were requested via email/post from all known users both internal and external to the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). External users were identified as those who have contacted the take-up team with queries relating to the take-up of income related benefits. This document summarises the responses received from December 2010 to May 2011.
2. This report is necessarily based on information from the 20 users who chose to respond to our exercise so is only an indication of the uses of the statistics and may not cover the views of all users.

Customers of IRB take-up Statistics

3. 50% of responses were from DWP staff and 50% were from a variety of external organisations and government departments. These include:
 - Citizens Advice Bureau
 - Scottish Government
 - Welsh Assembly Government
 - A local authority
 - A private sector advice & social care consultancy firm
 - HMRC
 - Department for Communities and Local Government
 - Carers' Resource Charity
 - A Primary Care Trust

Chapters Used

4. The IRB take-up publication has chapters on each of the main income related benefits; Income Support (IS) & Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Pension Credit (PC), Housing Benefit (HB), Council Tax Benefit (CTB) and Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). Figure 1 below shows the number of respondents that stated use of each chapter.



Main uses of take-up statistics

5. Based on the responses received the key reasons for the use of the statistics are summarised below:
6. Increase awareness/take-up of benefits – the take-up statistics and further analysis tables are often used to help increase the awareness of benefits and target areas with low take-up. They have been used for this purpose by DWP, Scottish Government, Citizens Advice Bureau, Carers' Resource Charity and a local authority.
7. Policy Development – the statistics are used in policy development by a local authority, the Scottish Government, a private sector consultancy, the Department for Communities and Local Government and occasionally by DWP State Pensions Division.
8. Comparing methodology – The take-up methodology and statistics can be used to compare and help assure other methods. HMRC have a common interest in take-up methodology as they estimate the take-up of tax credits. Customer Database and Insight Team within DWP have used the statistics to assure data they use throughout the year in order to ensure management decisions aren't likely to result in perverse outcomes. The methodology is also being used by Model Development Unit within DWP to help assure their methodology and to develop take-up methodology for Universal Credit.
9. Estimating workload – DWP's forecasting division use the take-up statistics to help understand trends in benefit receipt and to validate assumptions used when forecasting benefit caseload and expenditure. The local authority who responded uses the statistics in order to measure the need for their services.
10. Briefings and ad hoc queries –the take-up statistics are used in ad hoc queries such as parliamentary questions and feed in to ministerial briefings. The Department for Communities and Local Government use them for this along with several teams within DWP: Income Support and Cross Benefit team, Housing, Research & Analysis Division, Strategy Directorate and State Pensions Division.
11. Lobbying – the statistics are used for lobbying by external users. For example the Primary Care Trust wanted to use them to investigate whether take-up rates of Pension Credit were lower in rural areas in order to encourage a review of the NHS funding formula which takes into account the number of Pension Credit claimants in the area.

Feedback

12. The main suggestion for improvement coming out of the responses was for the statistics to be provided at a lower level e.g. for Wales and Scotland.

13. A few internal users stated that the statistics were unsuitable for some purposes (e.g. management decisions) due to the timing of the estimates.

Contact Details

Email: irb.takeup@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Postal Address: IRB Take-Up
Incomes Monitoring
Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9NA

Telephone: +44 (0) 113 2327 893