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Introduction

This publication presents data from the Income Support (IS) Quarterly Statistical Enquiry (QSE), which covers claimants in Northern Ireland. Its main purpose is to:

- Give summary analyses which show the key features of the IS population and how they compare with claimants in earlier periods.
- Provide a basic summary of the main features of IS and how they affect numbers of recipients and amounts of benefit in payment.
- Provide a menu of the types of analysis, which can be produced from the QSE data set (additional analysis can be obtained from the contact point on this page).

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; working under 16 hours per week (and/or with a partner working under 24 hours per week); not required to be available for full-time employment; and in receipt of insufficient income to meet prescribed needs. The main types of people who receive it are lone parents, the long and short-term sick, people with disabilities and other special groups. Full details can be found in Annex 3.

The amount of IS that a claimant can receive depends mainly on their age; whether they have a partner and dependant children; whether they have special needs such as a disability or caring responsibilities; and whether they have liabilities for certain types of housing costs such as mortgage interest payments. The maximum amount that a claimant can receive is normally reduced by income from other types of benefits or other sources. See Annex 3 and relevant sections for further details.



Unemployed IS Claimants

Prior to October 1996, unemployed people or those on a government training scheme could also claim IS. On 7 October 1996 Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) was introduced to replace Unemployment Benefit and IS for unemployed people. It is intended for people who are available for and actively seeking employment, including those in remunerative work for less than 16 hours per week on average, and by people on a government-training scheme. See Annex 1 for further details.

IS Quarterly Statistical Enquiry

The IS QSE is a 5% sample of all IS claimants which is conducted in the last weekend in February, May, August and November of each year.



Glossary of Terms and Conventions

Glossary of Terms

Capital

Claimants and/or partners capital assets e.g. savings, investments, or property other than their home.

Couple

Two persons either married or living together as husband and wife.

Dependant

A person who is not a partner and whose resources and requirements are included with those of the claimant

Family Type

Whether *single* or *couple*, with or without *dependants*

Hospital Case

A person whose normal requirements are modified to the IS rate payable for a *single* hospital in-patient.

Length of Time on IS

Duration of current period in receipt of Supplementary Benefit/IS (breaks of less than one week are ignored).

Lone Parent

A *single* parent, aged under 60 and not in the disabled group.

No Fixed Abode/ Persons Without Accommodation

Persons who have no permanent accommodation or who are homeless.

Part III Accommodation

Accommodation provided by the Local Authority under Part III of the National Assistance Act 1948.

Partner

One of a married or unmarried *couple* living together

Region

Government Office Region

Single

A claimant who is not living as a member of a *couple*.

Single Parent

A claimant without a *partner*, but with one or more *dependants*

Statistical Group

The main groups of claimants

Supplementary Benefit

The predecessor to IS, which ceased in April 1988.



Tariff Income

The amount of weekly income assumed on capital between £3000-£16,000. See notes in section 4 of Annex 3 on rules for claimants in residential care and nursing homes.

Inflow

Cases, which have come onto, IS since the previous extract and are live at the end of the quarter.

Outflow

Cases, which were live at the end of the previous quarter, but have since left IS.

Conventions

IS	Income Support
JSA	Jobseeker's Allowance
£pw	Pounds per week
GOR	Government Office Region
0	Nil
-	Not applicable
*	Numbers less than 100 are not displayed due to DSD Confidentiality Policy
**	Percentages based on numbers less than 100 are not displayed due to DSD Confidentiality Policy
***	Amounts based on numbers less than 100 are not displayed due to DSD Confidentiality Policy
..	Not available
#	Negligible

Annex 1: Technical Details

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry

The Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry (QSE) is a sample survey that collects information on the number and characteristics of claimants receiving Income Support in Northern Ireland. The QSE includes all people who are recorded as having entitlement to receive benefit on the enquiry date. This is based on claims held on the Income Support Computer System on that day. It therefore misses claims where entitlement had not been established, but is subsequently backdated.

The QSE is based on a sample of approximately 5% of the IS population (1 in every 20 IS claimants). The data in each table has been rated up by a factor of 20 to give estimates for the population of IS claimants in Northern Ireland.

The data collected from the QSE is used to provide information to monitor and evaluate IS, answer Parliamentary Questions and queries from the public, academics and researchers.

Impact of Jobseeker's Allowance

Prior to the introduction of Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) in October 1996 the following groups could claim IS:

- Unemployed claimants who had to be available for work as a condition of entitlement.
- Claimants on Government Training Schemes.
- Claimants who were exempt from having to be available for employment but who chose to register for it (e.g. some males aged 60 to 64, lone parents, etc.)
- Other claimants who were exempt from having to be available for employment.

Claimants in the first 3 groups now claim JSA instead of IS. They are therefore no longer included in the IS QSE, but instead appear in the JSA QSE.

Data sources and validation

Information in the Northern Ireland QSE is taken directly from the Income Support Computer System, which is used to administer the benefit.

Validation procedures are carried out both by Information and Analysis Directorate and Social Welfare Statistics and Consultancy Branch (Department for Social Development) on the data collected. Amendments are made where it is obvious that some of the information recorded for individual cases is inconsistent (e.g. where the recorded statistical group does not match the appropriate premium). The number and proportion of claims with short durations will be undercounted. This is because a small number (compared to the overall numbers) of new awards had not been added to the IS computer system by the date of data extraction.

Impact of the introduction of New Tax Credits

Figures in this and future publications are affected by the introduction of the Child Tax Credit (CTC) in April 2003. The main changes are:

Child Dependency increases paid with non-income related benefits are abolished for new claims to State Pension, Bereavement Benefit, Incapacity Benefit, and Carer's Allowance from April 2003. CTC will replace the child elements of Income Support and Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA (IB)). This will happen from April 2004 onwards.

Dates when there may be particular changes in the figures are:

April 2003, when Child Dependency increases paid with non-income related benefits are abolished for new claims.

October 2003, when it is planned that families on Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) with children will have child elements migrated to CTC.

Financial Year 2004/05, when families on Income Support and Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance will have child elements migrated to CTC.

A small number of IS/JSA (IB) recipients will no longer be eligible once CTC is in payment. This is because the CTC payments will raise total income above the IS/JSA (IB) threshold, or other income exceeds the threshold once child allowances are removed.

We therefore advise caution when performing year on year comparisons, or when comparing with the previous quarter.

New rules regarding Child Tax Credit were introduced in April 2004. The impact of the new rules was to reduce the number of lone parents on IS as the child allowances on IS were replaced by children's tax credit.

Impact of the Introduction of Pension Credit

Pension Credit replaced the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG), Income Support for persons aged 60 or over on 6 October 2003, adding a Savings Credit element to the Guarantee element already present under MIG. Claimants receiving MIG on 6 October 2003 were automatically transferred onto Pension Credit. There are still a small number of MIG cases on the publication, which will in time transfer across to Pension Credit.

Annex 2: Sampling Errors

The analyses in the Income Support (IS) Quarterly Statistical Enquiry are subject to 'sampling error'. That is, there is a chance that the number of cases in the sample with certain characteristics (e.g. with children) may produce rated up population estimates that are in fact higher or lower than the true value in the population. The effects of these sampling errors are indicated below in the table of confidence intervals. The figures in this report are the best estimate based on the sample data. The true number will lie in a range around the estimate. The 95% confidence interval means that there is only a 1 in 20 chance that the actual value lies outside this range. Usually this interval is approximately symmetric so, for example, an estimate of 10,000 is really showing that the true value lies in the range of 9,146 to 10,854.

The figures in the table below give the 95% confidence intervals for the true value in the population, based on the estimated value from the 5% sample. This method applies only to estimates of numbers of claimants and not to other characteristics, e.g. amounts of benefits.

Estimated Value	95% Confidence Interval	Confidence interval as a % of the estimate
100	+/-86	+/-86%
200	+/-121	+/-61%
300	+/-148	+/-49%
400	+/-171	+/-43%
500	+/-191	+/-38%
600	+/-209	+/-35%
700	+/-226	+/-32%
800	+/-242	+/-30%
900	+/-256	+/-28%
1,000	+/-270	+/-27%
2,000	+/-382	+/-19%
3,000	+/-468	+/-16%
4,000	+/-540	+/-14%
5,000	+/-604	+/-12%
6,000	+/-662	+/-11%
7,000	+/-715	+/-10%
8,000	+/-764	+/-10%
9,000	+/-811	+/-9%
10,000	+/-854	+/-9%
20,000	+/-1,208	+/-6%
30,000	+/-1,480	+/-5%
40,000	+/-1,709	+/-4%
50,000	+/-1,910	+/-4%
100,000	+/-2,702	+/-3%
200,000	+/-3,821	+/-2%
300,000	+/-4,679	+/-2%

Warning: Figures 600 or less should be used with caution.

Annex 3: Description of the Income Support Scheme

1. Introduction

Income Support (IS) replaced Supplementary Benefit from April 1988. Up until 7 October 1996, all people who worked for less than 16 hours per week could claim it. Since then, those who are required to be available for employment now have to claim Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA). This section briefly describes the main conditions that a claimant must satisfy to receive IS and other key features of the scheme.

2. Eligibility for Income Support

IS is a non-contributory benefit and the full basis of entitlement is set out in regulations. People in Great Britain and Northern Ireland who are aged 16 or over; not working 16 hours or more a week or with a partner not working 24 hours or more per week; and not required to be available for employment are eligible to claim IS. It is payable if a person's resources are less than their applicable amounts (see below) and they satisfy the qualifying conditions. Provision is made for payment to be made outside the normal rules in certain urgent cases (see section 8).

A person undergoing full-time education of a non-advanced nature is not eligible for IS. The majority of 16 and 17 year olds are also normally unable to claim IS, following a change in the rules made in September 1988. Those still at school whose parents claim IS can be described as a dependant in the calculation of their benefit. There are, however, a limited number of prescribed circumstances under which they can receive it, which mainly applies to those who have dependant children, disabilities or caring responsibilities. Severe hardship provisions which used to allow some 16 and 17 year olds who could not live with their parents to claim IS are now part of JSA.

3. Assessment of benefit

IS claims are made and assessed on a 'benefit unit' basis. A benefit unit consists of the claimant plus any partner and/or dependent children they have. Unmarried couples who are living together as husband and wife are treated in the same way as a married couple. Dependent children are those aged 15 or under plus those aged 16 to 19 who are in non-advanced full-time education. Either partner may claim IS.

The resources (income) of a benefit unit are counted together for the purposes of working out benefit entitlement (see section 4), with the exception of any children's capital, which is taken into account separately.

4. Rate of benefit

The amount of benefit that a claimant can receive is calculated using an 'applicable amount' and takes account of any resources they have. Receipt of IS also automatically entitles the claimant and his/her dependants to certain other welfare benefits.

Applicable Amounts are specified by regulation and are used to calculate the maximum amount of benefit that a claimant can receive. These consist of a personal allowance which depends on the age of the claimant and the presence and age of a partner; additions for any dependants; 'premiums' which provide additional allowances in recognition of special needs such as old age or disability; and certain types of housing costs (see section 5). The actual rates are shown in Annex 5.

Resources of a benefit unit consist of its total income (e.g. from other DSD benefits, earnings from part-time employment, etc.) and assumed income from capital assets.

The Rate of IS payable to a claimant is normally the amount needed to bring the resources of the benefit unit up to their applicable amount (i.e. the applicable amount less the total resources). Some types of resources are subject to a disregard, that is, all or parts of them are ignored when calculating total resources. The main types that are subject to a disregard are:

- Part-Time earnings, where the first £5 each week is disregarded for the claimant and/or their partner. 'Lone Parent' and 'Disabled' claimants qualify for a £20 earnings disregard. The earnings of children are totally disregarded, but if the child has left school some earnings may be taken into account.
- Benefits and Pensions, where the War Disablement Pension and War Widow's Pension are subject to a partial disregard and Mobility Allowance, Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance are normally disregarded in full.
- Other miscellaneous types of income are disregarded such as certain payments received from charities, the annuity paid to a holder of the Victoria Cross, etc.

Capital Assets (e.g. savings, investments or property other than their home)

- Claimants aged under 60 where income of assets under £3,000 is ignored (some assets may also be disregarded e.g. property occupied by an aged relative). Savings between £3,000 and £8,000 are treated as if each £250 or part of £250 brings in an income of £1 per week (Tariff Income). If capital assets total more than £8,000, the claimant is not entitled to IS.
- Claimants aged 60 or over are now allowed up to £6,000 in capital assets before their benefit is affected by tariff income. If capital totals more than £12,000 the claimant is not entitled to IS. This also applies to claimants whose partner is aged 60 or over and does not choose to take up Pension Credit
- Claimants in residential care and nursing homes have their capital treated differently. They are allowed to have up to £16,000 and still be entitled to IS. Up to £10,000 of their assets are also disregarded. However from April 2002 preserved rights were abolished. The higher capital rates remain in place providing there is no break in residency.

5.Housing Costs

Claimants in rented accommodation can receive assistance with most of their housing costs through Housing Benefit. Amounts for certain other types of housing costs can be included in the assessment of a person's applicable amount. These include:

1. Mortgage interest payments (but not capital repayments)
2. Ground Rent
3. Other miscellaneous outgoings, which are not met by Housing Benefit, such as certain service charges.

The amounts for these items may be reduced in certain circumstances to take account of contributions from non-dependants (i.e. other adults in the property who are not part of the benefit unit) and any amount by which the housing costs are excessive. Housing costs in IS do not cover water charges as these are part of the day to day living expenses already covered by the personal allowances and premiums in the applicable amount.

IS entitles the claimant to maximum Housing Benefit which can be up to 100 per cent of the claimant's eligible rent, subject to any deductions in respect to non-dependants.

6.Disability Premiums

The disability premium is awarded to those claimants who are long-term sick or disabled. This has always been linked to the payment of disability benefits (Attendance Allowance or Disability Living Allowance) or claims for long-term incapacity benefits (now primarily Incapacity Benefit-IB). These benefits can be in payment to the claimant and/or their partner. Under IB, long-term incapacity is defined as 365 days or more. People who have claimed IB for this length of time therefore become entitled to the disability premium. Prior to the introduction of IB on 13 April 1995, claimants could qualify for the disability premium after 26 weeks of incapacity. This was linked to claims for Invalidity Benefit, which was replaced by IB

7.Lone Parent premiums

Most cases with dependants receive the family premium. Prior to April 1998 single parents, aged under 60 and not in the disabled group, received the higher rate known as the family premium (lone parent). This higher rate premium was abolished from April 1998, although those in receipt at the time continue to receive it until a relevant change of circumstance. The 'Lone Parent' figure contains a small number of cases where the youngest child is aged 16 or over. Technically such claimants should no longer be classed as 'Lone Parents' if the youngest child is aged 16 or over.

8. Special Groups

There are special rules which cover entitlement to and the assessment of benefit for certain groups of IS claimants. The main ones include:

People in private residential care and nursing homes receive help with their fees either wholly or partly through IS, depending on when they entered care.

People in a local authority home have an applicable amount equal to the total amount prescribed for the minimum charge for the accommodation and personal requirements.

People in a hospital for more than 6 weeks receive special rates of IS. For the first 6 weeks IS is normally paid in full, except for the severe disability premium (SDP) that is withdrawn from a single person or reduced when one member of a couple is admitted. After 6 weeks: single people receive only a hospital allowance rate plus appropriate housing costs; For couples, when one partner enters hospital, the couple rate personal allowance is reduced but premiums (except for SDP) and housing costs are unchanged. After 52 weeks in hospital: single people have their IS reduced further and assistance with any housing costs is withdrawn; both members of a couple are treated as single people and are required to make separate claims.

Asylum seekers and other types of persons from abroad could claim IS prior to 3 April 2000 under certain circumstances. Their personal allowance was reduced by 10%. Changes to the benefit rules were introduced in February 1996. Only those asylum seekers who had made an application for asylum when they first arrived in the UK, or whose countries had been declared an upheaval country were able to claim IS or Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance. Entitlement ceased in the event of an initial negative decision from the Home Office on the asylum seeker's asylum application, and benefit was no longer payable during the asylum appeal process. Asylum seekers in receipt of benefit when the changes were introduced were covered by transitional protection up until the next negative Home Office decision on their application. The Home Office have been funding IS payments to asylum seekers since April 1999, however from 3 April 2000 persons claiming asylum will be excluded from claiming social security benefits. Instead they will receive support depending on their circumstances, either from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) that has been set up by the Home Office to manage such claims, or Local Authorities. Asylum seekers who claimed IS prior to 3 April 2000 will be entitled to IS at the 'urgent cases' payment rate. Transitional protection for these cases will continue until there is a relative change of circumstances.



9. Deductions from benefit

Amounts can be deducted from IS and paid to a third party where the claimant is in debt or has difficulty in meeting the cost of a basic amenity, such as water or electricity, and it is necessary to safeguard the continued supply of that amenity. Deductions from IS can also be made to enable the recovery of statutory and other liabilities, for example rent arrears and child maintenance payments, as well as enabling the recovery of overpayments of departmental benefit and Social Fund loans. The main conditions for making a deduction are:

- The claimants must have a debt (arrears) before they can be considered for the scheme
- Normally each deduction for arrears is set at 5% of the adult personal allowance.
- The maximum aggregate deduction for arrears is 15% of the adult personal allowance.
- A priority order is used where more than three deductions can be taken.
- Deductions can exceed the 5 or 15% maximum where they are to cover liabilities for current consumption as well as arrears.

10. Back to Work Bonus (*analyses not yet available*)

The Back to Work Bonus was introduced on 7 October 1996. It enables people who receive IS or JSA (and their partners, if they are claiming for one) to build up a lump sum based on earnings from part-time work. Following completion of a 3-month qualifying period, an amount equivalent to half of any earnings above the appropriate earnings disregard will count towards the accrued bonus amount. The minimum bonus payable is £5 and the maximum is £1,000.

In the majority of cases, a bonus payment will be made where the claimant or partner moves into work or increases the hours of work or earnings, so the entitlement to IS or JSA ceases. However, any accrued bonus amount is paid automatically when the claimant reaches age 60 in IS or state pensionable age (65 for men and 60 for women) in JSA.

11. Liability to maintain

A husband is liable to maintain his wife and a wife is liable to maintain her husband. Parents are liable to maintain their children. From October 1989 liability for children has been extended to include young people up to their nineteenth birthday where the young person is still treated as a dependant child and IS is in payment in respect of him/her.

From October 1990 legislation allows maintenance to be pursued in divorced or never married lone parent cases to cover not only the benefit being paid for children but also benefit being paid to the person looking after those children, reflecting the cost of such care.



Annex 4: Main changes to benefit rules

- Mortgage interest paid direct to lender for most claimants who receive the full amount (November 1992).
- A new scheme to provide support to claimants in residential care and nursing homes was introduced (April 1993).
- Special rules over the treatment of capital held by claimants in residential care, nursing home (RCNH) were introduced (April 1995).
- On 2nd October 1995 waiting periods were introduced for claimants without a pensioner premium before help is given (8 weeks for those with loans taken out before that date and 9 months for those with loans taken out thereafter). From the same date, most claimants with mortgage interest payments have them calculated using a standard rate based on the average of the largest building societies' basic mortgage rates (October 1995).
- Claimants in RCNH, Part III accommodation are allowed capital of up to £16,000. Tariff income is payable where the savings are over £10,000 (April 1996).
- Changes to the rules for asylum seekers (November 1996).
- Family premium and lone parent premium were combined to form family premium (lone parent), which was paid to all eligible claimants (April 1997).
- One parent benefit was replaced by a new rate of child benefit for lone parents (April 1997).
- Deductions for payment of arrears of mortgage interest abolished (April 1997).
- Family premium (lone parent) was abolished, although those in receipt at that time continue to receive it until a relevant change of circumstances (April 1998).
- The dependants allowance payable for each child under 11 was increased by £2.50 per week (November 1998).
- The Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) was introduced increasing the amount payable to those aged 60 or over, except for special category cases (April 1999).
- Introduction of the new budgeting loan scheme.
- The dependants allowance payable for each child under 11 was increased by a further £4.70 per week (October 1999).
- Working Families Tax Credit and Disabled Persons Tax Credit replaced family Credit and Disability Working Allowance respectively (October 1999).
- The dependants allowance for under 11's was abolished increasing the amount payable for children aged under 11 to match that of the under 16's: There are now two remaining rates for: dependants under 16, and the dependants aged 16 and over (April 2000).
- The MIG was up rated in line with earnings (April 2000).



- Persons claiming asylum on or after 3rd April 2000 and who are awaiting decisions from the Home Office will be excluded from claiming social security benefits. They will receive support from either the National Asylum Support Service (set up by the Home Office) or local authorities (April 2000).
- Further increase (by £4.35) in the amount payable in respect of children aged up to 16 in October 2000.
- Claimants aged 60 or over that are not in residential accommodation are now allowed up to £6,000 in capital assets before their benefit is affected by tariff income. If capital totals more than £12,000 the claimant is not entitled to Income Support (April 2001).
- All pensioner premiums are paid at the same rate i.e. the HPP rate (April 2001).
- The Government introduced a new Disability Income Guarantee (DIG) for severely disabled people and the Enhanced Disability Premium (April 2001).
- Bereavement Premium introduced that becomes payable, subject to qualifying conditions, following the end of the first Bereavement Allowance awards (April 2001).
- Disabled Child Premium increased by £5.50 (April 2001).
- Preserved rights on all existing claims were abolished; these cases became the financial responsibility of the Local Authorities (April 2002).
- Part III/RA was transitionally protected if still in payment on the 8th April 2002 (April 2002).
- From 8th April 2002 claimants on Part III or who are still permanent residents of RCNH had their higher capital limits protected (April 2002).
- Invalid Care Allowance (ICA) is renamed Carer's Allowance (CA) (April 2003).
- Introduction of the Child Tax Credit (CTC) and Working Tax Credit (WTC). WTC will replace the adult support in Working Families' Tax Credit, Disabled Person's Tax Credit and the Employment Credit for people aged 50 or over (April 2003).
- Alignment of the allowance paid to dependant children up to and including age 18, one rate payable (April 2003).
- Pension Credit replaced the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG), Income Support for persons aged 60 or over on 6 October 2003, adding a Savings Credit element to the Guarantee element already present under MIG. Claimants receiving MIG on 6 October 2003 were automatically transferred onto Pension Credit. There are still a small number of MIG cases on the publication, which will in time transfer across to Pension Credit.

