

Family Resources Survey: Release strategy

Introduction

This release strategy acts as the formal notice of changes to future releases of the Family Resources Survey (FRS) publication.

The strategy highlights the confirmed changes to the 2022 to 2023 questionnaire and dataset, describes the potential release of new statistics within the publication and announces any other developments, for both 2022 to 2023 and 2023 to 2024.

The FRS Release Strategy is not a static document; it will be updated as plans develop, to provide users with details of latest developments.

The development of these statistics follows the [Department for Work and Pension's Statistical Work Programme](#).

Publications based on the FRS

The FRS is the basis for several statistical publications and the changes outlined here will be reflected as necessary in these publications in the future:

Households Below Average Income (HBAI):

This publication uses household disposable incomes, adjusted for household size and composition, as a proxy for material living standards or, more precisely, for the level of consumption of goods and services that people could attain given the disposable income of the household in which they live.

Pensioners' Incomes Series:

The HBAI dataset is used in the Pensioners' Incomes Series, the Department's analysis of trends in components and levels of pensioners' incomes.

Income-Related Benefits: Estimates of Take-Up:

Figures are based on a combination of administrative and survey data. The FRS provides information about people's circumstances, which is used to estimate numbers of people who are not claiming benefits to which they may be entitled.

Separated Families Statistics

Experimental statistics relating to separated families and their child maintenance arrangements.

Other government departments

The **Department for Communities Northern Ireland** uses the FRS to [produce similar reports](#) to those from DWP, which are focused on Northern Ireland.

In-depth analysis of FRS-based HBAI data for Scotland can be found in the **Scottish Government** report on [Poverty and income inequality statistics](#) in Scotland.

In-depth analysis of relative income poverty in Wales, based on HBAI data, can be found on the [Relative income poverty page](#) of the **Welsh Government** website, which also has links to [material deprivation](#) analysis.

User engagement

The FRS Project team within DWP engages with FRS users in the following ways:

- Questionnaire Consultation
- Data and Publication Quality Assurance Groups
- Expert Advisory Group consultations
- Family Finance Survey Users conference
 - in association with the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and UK Data Service (UKDS)
- Team Email in-box for general enquiries: team.frs@dwp.gov.uk
- Responses to Parliamentary Questions and Freedom of Information requests

User consultation

Analysts, both within DWP and other government departments such as His Majesty's Treasury (HMT) and His Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC); and the devolved administrations are part of our quality assurance group. These expert users have been consulted on changes to the FRS questionnaire, via a well-established Questionnaire Consultation procedure. An assessment of the quality of data that is derived from the survey questionnaire is then conducted with this quality assurance group of subject matter experts.

DWP has established an Expert Advisory Group on Survey-based Income Statistics to support its development work. The purpose of the Group is to provide advice to DWP's Chief Statistician on plans to implement the integration of administrative data into the FRS and related outputs as well as other technical issues as they arise. Members of the Group include key users of the FRS and related outputs, including: academic experts, users from third-sector organisations and methodology input from the Office for National Statistics.

Changes coming to FRS statistics

Developments in survey year 2022 to 2023

Developments to data collected in survey year 2022 to 2023 are expected to be published in March 2024.

Family Resources Survey (FRS) boost

DWP had previously announced plans for a significant boost to the FRS sample size, with the aim to increase the achieved sample to 45,000 households annually, from April 2022.

During 2022 to 2023 the FRS has sought to return to pre-pandemic fieldwork practices. Interviews in 2022 to 2023 have been a mix of face-to-face and telephone interviews, but with face-to-face being the preference wherever possible.

However, it remains the case that gaining household response, in view of the expanded issued sample, has continued to be challenging. The primary challenge comes from recruiting and retaining sufficient interviewers; this has proven difficult. Consequently, we expect to have a final achieved sample in the region of 25,000 households for the year, rather than the 45,000 households we had originally intended.

Questionnaire changes agreed from questionnaire consultation

Eight changes on specific topics were implemented in the FRS 2022 to 2023 questionnaire, following the annual questionnaire consultation exercise. These focus on specific topics to improve the understanding of respondents' circumstances, improve data quality through better informed data processing decisions, and to collect information to support future policy analysis.

Whilst the resulting variables will be released in the FRS 2022 to 2023 dataset, there is not currently an intention to add them to the main FRS publication on GOV.UK; nor to the set of FRS tables available from the Department's Stat Xplore. A brief description of the new questions is given below:

- A new question on Inheritance has been added to confirm how those who own their property outright acquired it
- The question Shelter has been changed to ask whether the accommodation is 'supported' housing (as well as asking whether it is 'sheltered' accommodation)
- New questions have been added to ask whether the respondent has been absent from work, due to illness or an accident in the last 6 months and how many times they were absent. These questions are followed by further new questions about sickness absence
- Changes have been made to expand on the descriptions of professional care providers and to distinguish between care paid for privately, care paid for by the Local Authority or where care is paid for by a combination of both Local Authority and private funds
- Additional questions to reflect new disability benefits in Scotland, such as Adult and Child Disability Payment (ADP and CDP)

- New questions relating to ownership of Child Trust Funds have been added to identify families that have this fund and also whether it is their only savings account. These have been added due to increased interest in child savings
- Several changes have been implemented in the Rented Accommodation questions, to improve the quality of the data upon which housing analysis is conducted
- New questions have been added asking respondents if they have made any plans to leave their current accommodation, due to falling behind with their rent or mortgage; if relevant, further details of these plans are asked

Inclusion of additional Government support in FRS income-based variables

During 2022 to 2023 the Government announced and implemented additional support to families with [several cost-of-living support schemes](#), depending on peoples' circumstances. The FRS will include these payments within the relevant income variables on the FRS dataset. Therefore, any derived variables used within the calculation of benefit unit and household income will include these amounts as appropriate. These variables will then be used in other FRS-based publications so the additional payments will be reflected in their analysis for 2022 to 2023 published in March 2024.

Integration of administrative data into the FRS and related outputs

The department is committed to transforming its surveys by linking administrative data from the full range of available sources (for example, from other government departments). The FRS Administrative Data Transformation Project was established to investigate the potential of all administrative data sources and realise a range of financial, data quality, respondent and user benefits through the integration of administrative data into the survey.

This is in the wider context of DWP Digital's Data Strategy [Developing a data strategy and delivering it - Data in government \(blog.gov.uk\)](#) for optimising use and re-use of administrative data, the UK Statistics Authority's Strategy for data linking [Joining Up Data for Better Statistics – Office for Statistics Regulation \(statisticsauthority.gov.uk\)](#) and the Office for National Statistics move by ONS towards an 'admin data first' approach to meeting Government information needs [Data collection transformation - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#).

The introduction of GDPR in 2018 provided an alternative to consent as the legal basis for linking. We can now link all respondents on the basis that the processing is necessary for the department to carry out its functions as a public body (GDPR

Article 6(1)(e)). This change, together with improvements in our linking methodology, means that we can now link at least 95% of FRS respondents to their administrative records.

Several recommendations in the [Office for Statistical Regulation \(OSR\) review of Income-based poverty statistics \(published in 2021\)](#) related to data gaps and improving the evidence base for small groups. To address the strategic recommendation that there are opportunities to innovate and improve data quality to allow our statistics to deliver their full potential and serve the public good, we continue to explore the use of administrative data and its integration with social surveys, developing our processes for data linkage.

The first step was to develop a robust data linking approach that delivers a high rate of good quality matches, which is repeatable for future implementation into routine processing. We are currently aiming to publish initial illustrative data to demonstrate the value of linking to DWP benefits administrative data in March 2024. Other development work will continue alongside. We will update users on our plans as they develop.

Developments in survey year 2023 to 2024

Developments to data collected in survey year 2023 to 2024 are expected to be published in March 2025.

Family Resources Survey (FRS) boost

The boost to the FRS sample is under review, so we are proceeding from April 2023, on the basis of a return to a fieldwork target of achieving 20,000 households.

Questionnaire changes approved in questionnaire consultation

Four changes on specific topics were approved and implemented in the FRS 2023 to 2024 questionnaire following the annual questionnaire consultation exercise. These focus on specific topics to improve the understanding of respondents' circumstances, improve data quality through better informed data processing decisions, and to collect information to support future policy analysis.

These questions are expected to produce useful data that can be delivered to users through additional variables on the FRS 2023 to 2024 dataset immediately after publication in March 2025. New variables are subject to rigorous quality assurance processes before being released. A brief description of the new questions is given below:

- **Ex-Armed Forces**

A new question to capture whether an individual has previously served in the UK Armed Forces, either as part of the Regular or Reserve forces. This question will not be asked to those living in Northern Ireland.

- **Care Leavers**

New questions to capture whether an individual, now aged 16 to 25, spent time in children's residential care, as part of their adolescence (between 14 and 17 years of age). The question will distinguish from being away from home for other reasons, such as being fostered, living with another family, or being away at a boarding school.

- **Food – is anyone else feeding you**

New questions to capture whether the family is routinely receiving food from any person or organisation (other than a food bank); which therefore complements the existing question on whether they are using a food bank.

- **Time spent self-employed**

A new question to ask how long an individual has spent in self employment.

Inclusion of Cost-of-Living payments in FRS income-based variables

In November 2022, the Government announced additional support to families with several [cost-of-living support schemes](#), from Spring 2023, depending on family circumstances. The FRS will include these payments within the relevant income variables on the FRS dataset. Therefore, any derived variables used within the calculation of benefit unit and household income will include these amounts as appropriate. These variables will then be used in other FRS-based publications, so the additional payments will also be reflected in their analysis for 2023 to 2024 for publication in March 2025.

Review of material deprivation measures

DWP, in partnership with researchers at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), has conducted a review of the material deprivation measures and the associated questions in the FRS. This review aimed to keep the material deprivation measures as relevant as possible, and be consistent with the principles of public value, quality and trustworthiness, as set out in the Code of Practice for Statistics.

Specifically, this review explored:

- which material deprivation items for families with children, families with working-age adults and families with pensioners should be included in the FRS

- what are the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches for determining who is materially deprived?
- what are the advantages and disadvantages of developing a “core” set of questions for the whole population alongside measures aimed at specific family types?
- do the advantages of changing the material deprivation items and methodology/methodologies outweigh the disadvantages, for example a break in the time series

Following the pilot of a suite of potential new questions the Material Deprivation Review Steering Group for the project agreed to new questions being introduced to the FRS in 2023 to 2024. To support the presentation of analysis in the transition from the old suite of measures to a new one, it has been agreed that for 2023 to 2024, 75% of the FRS sample will be asked the new questions and the remaining 25% the old questions.

The [work of the review](#) continues, and we will provide an update on publication plans for material deprivation measures in HBAI as they develop. The first results based on the new questions are expected to be published in HBAI in March 2025.

Feedback

We welcome feedback.

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