Trussell Trust Mid-Year Foodbank Statistics 2018

The facts behind the figures

The Trussell Trust's foodbank network provided 658,048 emergency supplies to people in crisis between April and September 2018, a 13% increase on the same period in 2017.

What does this data measure?

Everyone who comes to a foodbank in The Trussell Trust's network is referred by an agency or professional – such as a health visitor or housing association - using a foodbank voucher. The majority of referrals are made using a paper voucher issued to referral agencies and given by them to people in need of emergency help. On this foodbank voucher, information about the size of the household and also the reason for referral is given by the person or organisations referring them.

People referred to foodbanks present this voucher at the foodbank. Foodbanks in The Trussell Trust network record the client data on this voucher in a specialist data system, from which The Trussell Trust is able to analyse aggregated information. These are the numbers we release every six months – our half-year figures (April to September), and our full financial year figures (April to April). This is a measure of volume rather than individual users, as households may need a foodbank's help more than once. Data from our system shows that people over the last 6 months were referred on average 1.7 times.

Each voucher also has a 'crisis cause' marked – the top-line trigger for a person's referral to a foodbank. There are 9 categories on a Trussell Trust foodbank voucher, and the three most common reasons for referral are consistently 'low income', 'benefit change', and 'benefit delay'. Between April and September 2018, 'low income' accounted for 31% of all referrals, up from 27% in the same period the year before.

How can you assess the impact of Universal Credit on foodbank use?

Using the voucher data that foodbanks input into the data system, we can look at trends across the UK. From this data, we can see that when Universal Credit goes live in an area, there is a demonstrable and sustained increase in demand in local Trussell Trust foodbanks. On average, 12 months after rollout, foodbanks see a 52% increase in demand, compared to 13% in areas with Universal Credit for 3 months or less. This increase cannot be attributed to randomness and exists even after accounting for seasonal and other variations. More information on this analysis can be found in our report, ['The next stage of Universal Credit'](#).

What other data do foodbanks gather?

Increasingly, foodbanks in the network are using electronic foodbank referrals. Electronic referrals are completed by referral agencies online rather than on paper, and can gather more detailed information about the reason behind the top-line referral reasons. For example, under 'benefit change', referral agencies can state whether this was due to a sanction, a change to a different benefit, a reduction of the value of the benefit, or a deduction due to a loan.

Each of these subcategories has further sub-categories, like the benefit the claimant was sanctioned for, and the length of a sanction. Not every referral to a foodbank in the network is made using an

electronic referral, but the sample sizes are significant and provide a good indication of the trends underlying foodbank use.

Figure 1 outlines the different household income streams for e-referrals of people whose key trigger was 'low income'. Figure 1 clearly shows that the key group who were referred for 'low income' (the fastest growing referral reason), were receiving benefits and not earning. This suggests that low income is more likely to be due to benefit levels being insufficient rather than low pay. Each value represents the aggregate e-referral data for each sub-category of 'low income', expressed as a proportion of the total available e-referral data for 6 months of the financial year.
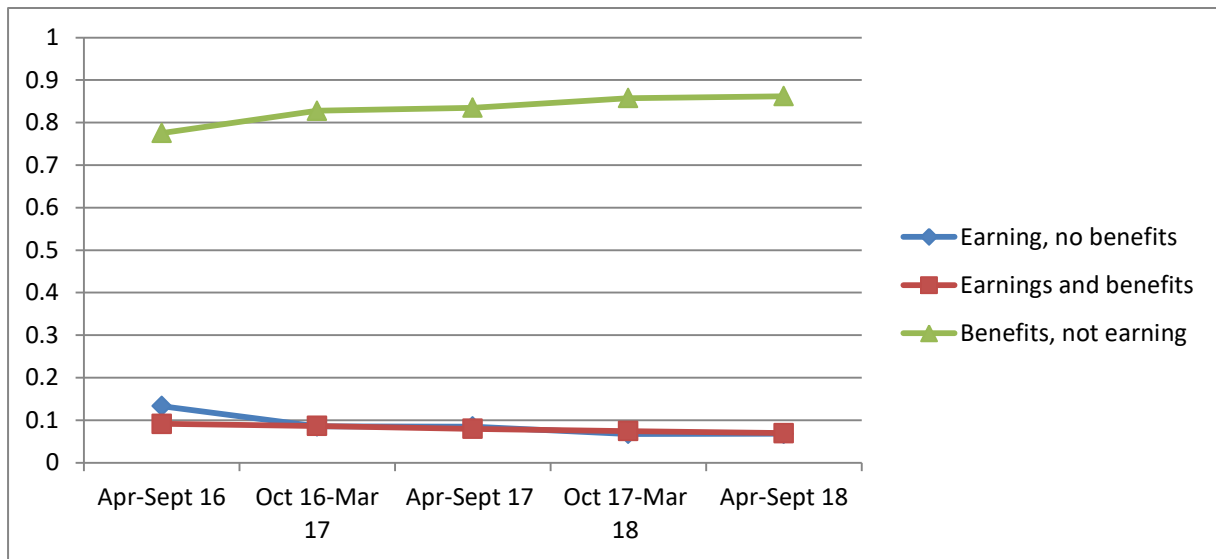

Figure 1 Foodbank referrals due to 'low income' – electronic referrals sub-categories

Looking at the breakdowns of 'benefit change' in Figure 2 below, the e-referral data suggests that sanctions, previously a key trigger for a foodbank referral, account for fewer referrals in this category, while 'change to a different benefit' (primarily due to Universal Credit, below) has replaced it.
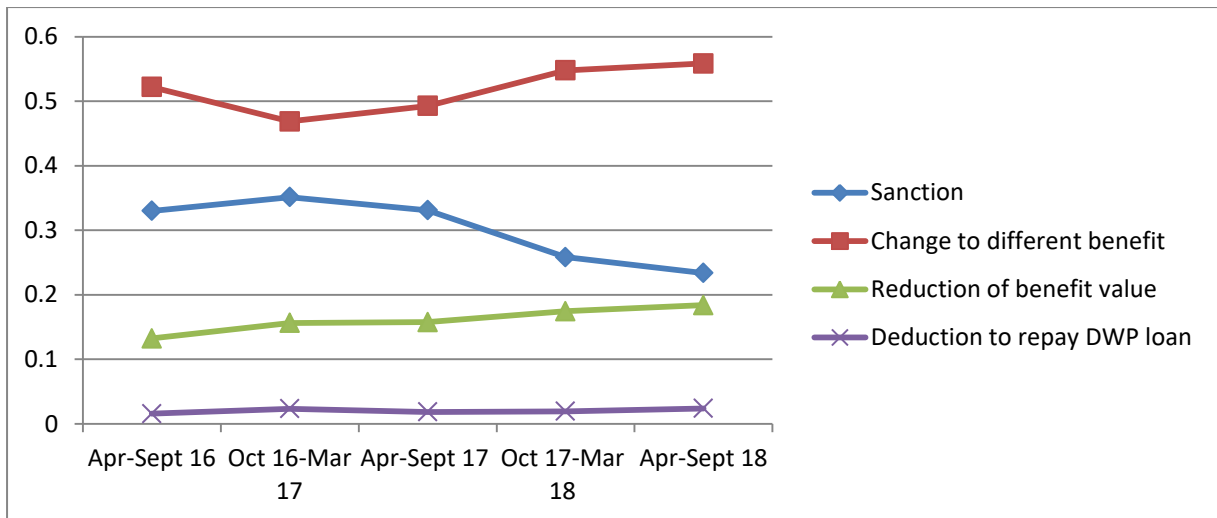
Figure 2 Foodbank referrals due to 'benefit change' - electronic referrals sub-categories

Figure 3 outlines the breakdown per benefit for the 'benefit change' sub-category 'change to a different benefit'. This is expressed as a proportion of the available e-referral data for 'change to a different benefit'. As made clear in figure 3, the e-referral data suggests Universal Credit has overtaken other common benefits as the most likely reason someone is referred due to this crisis cause.
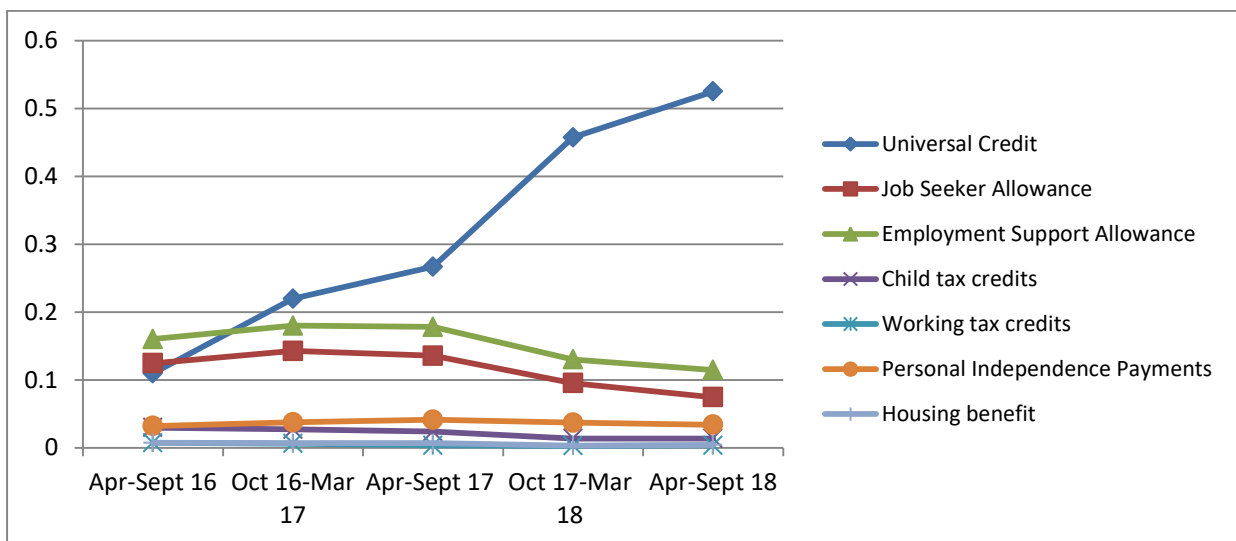

Figure 3 Breakdown of 'change to a different benefit' within 'benefit changes' category, by benefit type

Finally, looking at all the available e-referral data for 'benefit delay' over these periods, and focusing on the impact of Universal Credit, it's possible to see the impact of moving onto Universal Credit on foodbank referrals. Figure 4 below shows the proportion of electronic referrals due to a benefit delay due to waiting for a new payment or award. This data suggests that over the last few years, Universal Credit has surpassed other common benefit types and is now the main reason why someone would be referred to a foodbank because of a wait for a benefit payment.
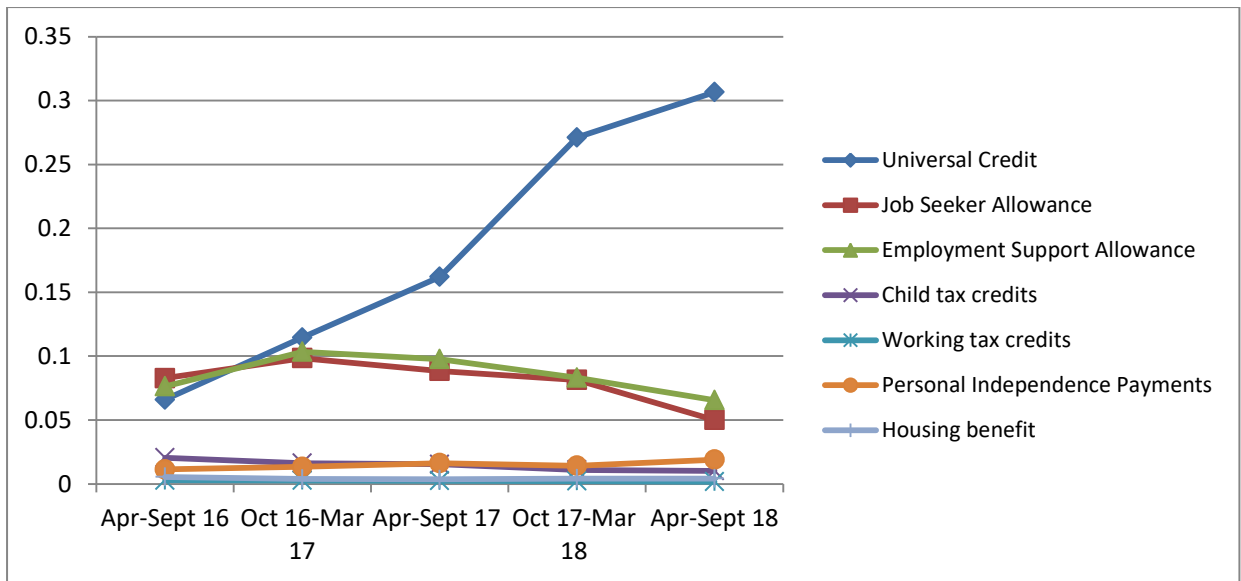
Figure 4 Proportion of electronic referrals due to a benefit delay due to waiting for a new payment or award