

# Changes to ASTRO-PU and STAR-PU weightings: Questions and Answers

**March 2014**

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## Introduction

In February 2014 revised ASTRO-PU (13) and STAR-PU (13) weightings were introduced into Business Service Authority (BSA) Information Services systems - Information Services Portal and ePACT. This document aims to provide answers to questions that have been raised by users following these changes.

## How are ASTRO-PU and STAR-PU weightings calculated?

The weightings are derived from an anonymised random sample of approximately 800,000 patients registered with about 90 General Practices. They are calculated by extracting and analysing the cost or volume of prescribing by specific age groups and gender.

## Why have the weightings changed?

To ensure the weightings remain relevant to current prescribing, the weightings are periodically recalculated. The weightings were developed and introduced during the 1990's, updated in 2001 and again in 2009.

## Why are the 2013 weightings different to 2009 weightings?

It is to be expected that there will be differences between the 2013 and 2009 weightings. For example whilst the elderly utilise more medicines, the cost of medicines used for most long term conditions has decreased due to patent expiry, cat M etc. Also, diabetes has the greatest spend of all BNF sections but is increasingly more prevalent in a younger age group.

## Why have the 2013 weightings been introduced in February 2014?

There is no ideal time to introduce changes to prescribing information or measures. Recent feedback from the introduction of new or revised QIPP comparators indicated that it is desirable to have updated information before the end of a financial year to allow for planning for the next financial year. However both 2009 and 2013 weightings and values are available via the Business Services Authority (BSA) Information Services Portal (see below).

The introduction of the revised weightings involved a lengthy process. The work to analyse and recalculate the weightings was completed in September 2013. An exercise was then required to revise the titles and terminology used to describe the weightings, and the comparators and indicators that utilise them, as there were inconsistencies and a lack of clarity across information systems (Portal, ePACT) and supporting documents (QIPP comparators, ASTRO-PU/STAR PU weightings).

The introduction of revised values and amendments to titles and descriptions presented a considerable workload for the BSA and this needed to be scheduled into work programmes.

## Why are the COST based ASTRO-PU weightings “standardised”?

COST based ASTRO-PU weightings are ‘standardised’ to a value of 1.0 for males aged 0 to 4 years. ITEM based ASTRO-PU and all STAR-PU weightings are ‘non-standardised’.

COST based ASTRO-PU have historically been ‘standardised’. This was the method originally developed because ASTRO-PU weightings were used for central resource allocation, and for local prescribing budget allocation, along with other population based weightings (e.g. deprivation). The different weightings used for resource allocation needed to be ‘standardised’ to allow them to be used together i.e. a means of comparing ‘like with like’.

The same methodology has been used to calculate the 2013 COST based ASTRO-PU as used for previous weightings. However, following the release of the 2013 values and the feedback received, the HSCIC has reviewed and reconsidered this methodology and the history behind the development of patient weightings.

COST based ASTRO-PU are no longer primarily used for budget allocation (and certainly not part of the formula previously used) but are utilised in monitoring total prescribing spend. Standardising the weightings potentially introduces a source of variation, with all weightings dependent on the factor by which the true (non-standardised) weighting for males aged 0 to 4 is adjusted to reach a weighting value of 1.0. The HSCIC and BSA are currently in discussion about introducing non-standardised COST based ASTRO-PU. It is likely that both standardised and non-standardised ASTRO-PU weightings will be available, for a period of time (to be decided), as cost comparators via the Portal. i.e.

- Total NIC per COST based ASTRO-PU (standardised)
- Total NIC per COST based ASTRO-PU (non-standardised)

An implementation date has not yet been finalised but is likely to be no sooner than Q1 data (2014/15), available August 2014. Standardised COST based ASTRO-PU will continue to be available for a period of time (to be decided) before being phased out of use.

## Why are the ITEM based ASTRO-PU (13) weightings different to the weightings available on the HSCIC website?

The ITEM based ASTRO-PU (13) weightings, only available via ePACT, are incorrect. In error the BSA was provided with standardised weightings (see above) when historically ITEM based ASTRO-PU weightings have been ‘non-standardised’ i.e. real values. Unlike ‘standardised’ weightings, ‘non-standardised weightings’ are real values e.g. the average number of items (or cost) per patient for that specific age group and gender. The correct ‘non standardised’ weightings will be available in ePACT shortly.

NB: An ITEM based ASTRO-PU comparator is not currently available in the Portal i.e. Total items per ITEM based ASTRO-PU. A decision as to whether a comparator will be introduced into the Portal will be taken following a review of the benefit and usefulness of ITEM based ASTRO-PU. User feedback and comments are invited.

## How can 2009 and 2013 weightings be accessed?

Both 2013 and 2009 ASTRO-PU and STAR-PU weightings and values are available in the BSA Information Services Portal where they are utilised in QIPP, cost and volume comparators. There is an option in the Portal to switch between 09 and 13 weightings and values. NB: ePACT does not have this facility. Information is currently available in the Portal for the current quarter and the previous 5 quarters.

<https://apps.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/infosystems/welcome>

All ASTRO-PU and STAR-PU weightings for both 2009 and 2013 are available on the HSCIC website. <http://www.hscic.gov.uk/prescribing/measures>

## How should ASTRO-PU and STAR-PU weightings be applied?

With the exception of ITEM based ASTRO-PUs, all appropriate (and only) applications of the weightings are available in the Portal as QIPP comparators, volume comparators or cost comparators. Subject to review and user comments and feedback (see above), a comparator measuring total items per ITEM based ASTRO-PU may be introduced into the Portal at some stage in the future.

Weightings should only be applied to the specific medicines or group of medicines from which that weighting has been derived. ASTRO-PU weightings are derived from an analysis of all (total) prescribing and should therefore only be applied when measuring total prescribing. Applying ASTRO-PUs to individual medicines, groups of medicines or BNF sections or chapters (i.e. anything other than total prescribing) is not an appropriate use of the weightings and is highly likely to produce spurious information. Similarly, STAR-PUs should only be applied to the specific set of medicines from which they were derived. The Portal provides details of the medicines included in each STAR-PU weighting. The STAR-PU titles have also been revised to provide further clarity. In the absence of an appropriate patient weighting for the medicines being considered, number of patients (i.e. per patient) is probably a more appropriate measure to use.

STAR-PU weightings have been developed (and will continue to be developed) to support prescribing comparators, including the QIPP comparators that are based on Key Therapeutic Topics. A number of ADQ based STAR-PU weightings have already been introduced.

The aim over time is to replace COST based STAR-PU weightings with ADQ based STAR-PU weightings where appropriate and feasible to do so. Whilst COST based weightings are less complex to calculate they do not reflect prescribing as accurately as ADQ based weightings. With the exception of antibiotics, ITEM based STAR-PUs weightings are less meaningful as the quantity of medicine per item can vary considerably and therefore may provide an inaccurate indication of medicine use.



## Need more information on prescribing measures?

The HSCIC website contains information on prescribing indicators and measures, including patient weightings. <http://www.hscic.gov.uk/prescribing/measures>

## Further questions?

If you have any further questions about ASTRO-PU or STAR-PU weightings please contact us via 0845 3006016 or email [enquiries@hscic.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@hscic.gov.uk)