

Freedom of Information request 2013-3539

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Information request

I request disclosure of the following information relating to the Jobcentre Plus offices covering the Bradford Metropolitan District (BMD) area. I believe these are: Bradford Eastbrook Court, Bradford Westfield House and Keighley, but please correct my assumption if it is wrong.

1) For each period of 3 months, for the BMD area, beginning in October 2009 and ending in June 2013, how many of the following were applied to JSA claimants. I assume these statistics are already held by the DWP, so they should be readily available:

- a) Varied length sanctions
- b) Fixed length sanctions
- c) Disallowances

2) With reference to the total figures in 1) above, please indicate the number of sanctions/disallowances applied to the following claimant groups per quarterly period as in 1) above. Note: these groups are based on the protected characteristic groups in the Equality Act 2010 so, as a public body, I presume the DWP will have these figures readily available:

- a) Sex
- b) Disability
- c) Race
- d) Nationality, inc citizenship
- e) Religion and belief
- f) Age
- g) Sexual orientation

3) With reference to the total figures in 1) above, please give the number of decisions (per quarterly period in 1) above) that were overturned for the following reasons. As these reasons should be recorded by the DWP and ITS, I presume they will be readily available:

- a) Reconsideration by a DWP official
- b) Hearing at an independent appeal tribunal

4) Since the introduction over 6 months ago, in late 2012, of a power to sanction sick and disabled people who receive ESA and who are in the 'work related activity group':

- a) How many ESA WRAG claimants in the BMD have been subject to a sanction?
- b) Please break down this figure for the protected characteristic groups listed in question 2) above

DWP response

In response to parts 1 and 3 your query, information on the number of JSA sanction referrals, reconsiderations and appeals, by quarter and type of sanction can be found in the attached document (FOI 2013-3539 Response.xls). Please note latest data available is to the 21st October 2012 (the last date covered by the old sanctions regime).

The first set of statistics on the new JSA sanctions regime, are due to be published in the summer/autumn of 2013. More information on the new sanctions regime, introduced on the 22nd of October 2012, can be found at: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/adviser/updates/jsa-sanction-changes/>

As the statistics you have requested from 22nd October 2012 are intended for future publication this information is exempt from disclosure under the terms of Section 22 (Information intended for future publication) of the FOIA. This exemption is qualified, and is therefore subject to a public interest test and further information on this can be found in Annex A.

On this occasion, the balance of the public interest test falls in favour of withholding this information. As we have explained above, statistics on this issue will be published in due course.

A proposed publication date will be announced in advance via <https://www.gov.uk/> and <http://www.statsusernet.org.uk/Home/> in the "Welfare and Benefits" community.

You may find it useful to know that the Department has published a range of information on JSA sanctions prior to the 22nd October 2012 via a tabulation tool which allows users to design their own tables. This can be found at: <http://tabulation-tool.dwp.gov.uk/sanction/sanction/LIVE/tabtool.html>

In response to question 2 regarding characteristic groups we can confirm that the Department does hold some information falling within the description specified in your request. However not all of the required characteristics are included in the datasets available for analysis and we estimate that the cost of complying with your full request would exceed the appropriate limit of £600.

The appropriate limit has been specified in regulations and for central Government it is set at £600. This represents the estimated cost of one

person spending 3½ working days in determining whether the Department holds the information, and locating, retrieving and extracting the information. Under section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) the Department is not obliged to comply with your request and we will not be processing this part of your request further.

Under section 16 of the FOIA we are obliged to assist you in providing options to narrow your request, by reforming or refocusing it, so that it will fall beneath the cost limit. In this case our advice is to narrow your question so that it only asks for information on these characteristics:

- a) Sex
- b) Disability
- c) Ethnicity
- d) Age – please specify which age groups you are interested in

In response to question 4 on Employment Support Allowance (ESA) sanctions, we can confirm that the Department does hold some information falling within the description specified in your request. However due to an error found in the methodology used to derive the number of Employment Support Allowance (ESA) claimants who have been sanctioned we estimate that the cost of complying with your full request would exceed the appropriate limit of £600.

The appropriate limit has been specified in regulations and for central Government it is set at £600. This represents the estimated cost of one person spending 3½ working days in determining whether the Department holds the information, and locating, retrieving and extracting the information. Under section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) the Department is not obliged to comply with your request and we will not be processing your request further.

More information on the issue mentioned above can be found at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/departments-for-work-pensions/series/employment-and-support-allowance-sanctions>

Annex A

The public interest test is where the Department considers whether the balance of the public interest falls in favour of withholding or disclosing the information requested.

Arguments in favour of disclosure: There are public interest arguments in favour of disclosure of this information at the present time. Disclosure would for example improve transparency in the operations of the Department.

Arguments against disclosure: There are public interest arguments against disclosure of this information at the present time. These arguments include that it is in the public interest to adhere to the existing publication process for official statistics, which includes time for the data to be collated and properly verified.

It is also in the public interest to ensure that the publication of official information is a properly planned and managed process, to ensure that the data are accurate once placed into the public domain. It is also in the public interest to ensure that the information is available to all members of the public at the same time, and premature publication could undermine the principle of making the information available to all at the same time through the official publication process.