

Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study – Safeguards

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Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study – Background Information

What is it?

Introduced in January 2004, and enhanced in October 2005, the Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study (WPLS) links benefit and programme information held by DWP on its customers, with employment records from Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs (HMRC).

- New data-sharing provisions introduced in the Employment Act 2002 opened the way for DWP to receive further data on employment from HMRC and use the information for more purposes. DWP and HMRC have been working together to enable this data sharing to take place and to develop safeguards for the initiative.
- The Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study has long been discussed within Government and offers DWP the opportunity to significantly improve both the analytical evidence base and operational effectiveness of the Department.
- Its aims are focused around supporting the Department's agenda for Child Poverty, Welfare-to-Work and Retirement Income planning policy, and enabling us to find out more about what works and what does not. This will, therefore, allow us increasingly to target our resources to the appropriate people, in the appropriate way.
- The Pensions Act 2004 provides for the Secretary of State's new functions to promote and facilitate retirement planning.
- To enable the Secretary of State to carry out his function of promoting and facilitating retirement planning the Department has enhanced the WPLS by the addition of Individual Savings Accounts (ISAs), Personal Equity Plans (PEP), Tax Exempt Special Savings Account (TESSA), private pension pots or savings accounts information from HMRC for people aged 60 and over.
- The Department has also enhanced WPLS by the addition of HMRC earnings, and Housing Benefit and Council tax Benefit data for all people who have been a DWP client.

What is it used for?

A written statement to Parliament in December 2003 stated that WPLS would be used to perform a range of statistical and research analyses, and some limited operational purposes, to give the Department further opportunities to evaluate the effectiveness of its businesses, for example:

- provide statistics, management information and research on the success of Jobcentre Plus in helping people into work and keeping them in work;
- help to evaluate individual policies and their impact in the short, medium and long-term;
- determine the family unit for pensioners to establish overall pensioner income from benefits;
- aid in the investigation of fraud; and
- provide us with the opportunity to improve the way we target clients through marketing initiatives.

A further written statement to Parliament in the autumn of 2005 announced DWP's intention to enable the WPLS to capitalise on the additional data provided on Housing/Council Tax Benefit and HMRC to:

- Improve data matching to support Pension Credit take-up campaigns;
- Better understand and research people who work beyond state pension age as part of our research into retirement planning and to assist the development of pensions policy;
- Understand the links between savings held and the benefits system in retirement and how people are using or accumulating savings in retirement

DWP has put in place the following key safeguards to ensure that the Work and pensions Longitudinal Study and the information which it contains remains secure at all times.

Restricting access

PURPOSE OF SAFEGUARD

These safeguards are put in place to ensure that only those with genuine business needs are allowed access to the data. This will ensure access is kept to the minimum level necessary for the purposes of the Department.

DETAILS OF SAFEGUARD

DWP researchers and analysts will be required to submit a business case to a central monitoring team before access is granted to the data. They will be abide by bespoke Data Protection policies and guidance and sign a Data Protection agreement.

Review by Ethics Committee

PURPOSE OF SAFEGUARD

In 2004, the Department established an Ethics Committee. The Committee comprises representatives of DWP, other government departments and six independent members. The Committee scrutinises proposed uses of information and considers ethical issues that may arise and arrangements for ensuring that information is held under suitable conditions of security.

DETAILS OF SAFEGUARD

The DWP Data Protection policy requires all new uses of the database to be assessed by the department's Head of Data Services. The ethics committee views are sought for significant new uses or where the scope of the study is changed.

Monitoring usage of the system to ensure compliance with law

PURPOSE OF SAFEGUARD

The system used to store the data for analytical purposes will be monitored using specialist detection software. Any unauthorised use will result in disciplinary action and a ban on further use for that individual.

DETAILS OF SAFEGUARD

The software will monitor access to and use of the database. Unusual patterns of analysis will be picked up and monitored. Misuse of the data constitutes a breach of the terms and conditions of employment and can result in disciplinary action and ultimately dismissal. Under section 123 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 disclosure of Social Security information without lawful authority is a criminal offence.

Monitoring use of data

PURPOSE OF SAFEGUARD

To ensure the data stored is the minimum necessary for effective use for operational uses (including counter fraud) and analytical purposes.

DETAILS OF SAFEGUARD

In addition to the main database there are two other versions of the database that will be made available for restricted use within DWP

Version 1 – full data retention (or maximum allowed under HRA against the policies for each data feed, no personal identifiers

Version 2 – the data is fully identifiable, short retention,

For all 3 instances we will monitor which records and which data items are being used. At the end of every 12 month period we will review data supply from HM Revenue and Customs and ensure that the minimum number of records and variables necessary are sent.

Data will only be kept for as long as there is a legitimate business use.

Currently the retention periods are:

Data used for research and statistical purposes

For data on Employment outcomes for people who have been DWP customers – 25 years

For data on earnings for people who have been DWP customers – 25 years

For data relating to interest on savings, PEPs, ISAs, TESSAs, on the 60s and over – 5 years

For data on Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit – 25 years

Data used for DWP operational purposes

- One year's worth of data will be used.

A full list of uses for which the database was put will be published every three months

PURPOSE OF SAFEGUARD

To make DWP transparently accountable to the public for all work on the database

DETAILS OF SAFEGUARD

An internet and paper-based version of this document will be published.

http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/longitudinal_study/ic_longitudinal_study.asp

Involvement of the Information Commissioner

PURPOSE OF SAFEGUARD

To ensure we have an open discussion with the Information Commissioner we have consulted with the Commissioner's Office on these proposals.

DETAILS OF SAFEGUARD

Meetings with Information Commissioner held

External audit of data protection systems

The data protection systems for the WPLS were audited by Enterprise Privacy Group. The report was published in February 2005.

While financial details will be held, bank account details will not be held.

While details will be held on the amount of interest gained on savings accounts and the amount held in ISAs, PEPs and TESSAs, DWP has no requirement to hold information on the actual bank account numbers within the WPLS. Thus, only data on financial circumstances will be held.

Contact points for further information:

email WPLS@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Telephone DWP Information Directorate Information Centre 0191 2253839