

Freedom of Information request 4921/2014

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Information request

I formally request under the Freedom of Information ACT 2000, a list of companies and charities who are signed up to the Mandatory Work Activity program, also called workfare by some.

DWP response

In response to your request, I think it would be helpful for me to clarify that the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) does not have a workfare programme. All of the Department's employment programmes are supportive initiatives, designed to help unemployed people gain skills and help them into work.

Mandatory Work Activity which was introduced in May 2011, allows extra support to be given to those jobseekers that would benefit from a short period of work based activity to help them gain valuable work-related disciplines. Since its introduction, many thousands of jobseekers have benefited by participating in the scheme. All Mandatory Work Activity must be of community benefit. You can find information about the support we provide through the back to work schemes at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/312777/jsabws1-v3-may2014.pdf

The information you seek about the names of the companies and charities which are involved in the Mandatory Work Activity is exempt from disclosure under sections 29(1)(a), 29(1)(b), 36(2)(c) and 43(2) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("the Act").

Section 36(2)(c) of the Act protects information which, in the reasonable opinion of a Minister of the Crown, would be likely to damage the effective conduct of public affairs if disclosed.

The Minister of State for Employment is satisfied that the exemption applies in this case. This is because disclosing the details of placement hosts runs the risk of campaign groups targeting placement hosts and as a result the hosts withdraw from the scheme. This risk, if realised, would be prejudicial to a policy which is designed to help move jobseekers into sustainable work.

Section 29(1)(a) is engaged if disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the economic interests of the United Kingdom or of any part of the

United Kingdom. Section 29(1)(b) is engaged if disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the financial interests of any administration in the United Kingdom, as defined by section 28(2). Section 43(2) of the Act is engaged if disclosure would, or would be likely to, prejudice the commercial interests of any person, including the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

DWP considers that disclosure of the information you have requested would, or would be likely to result in such prejudice in a number of different ways:

- Should placement hosts withdraw because of campaign activity, Prime Providers and subcontractors could lose some or all the money they had invested in sourcing those hosts. This could mean that they would have to invest still more in finding replacements. Hosts may also seek new or additional payment for providing work placements. Any increased costs to contractors would be likely to be passed on to DWP resulting in higher costs for contracting the same service.
- Should Providers fail to recruit sufficient placement hosts and the scheme failed, DWP would have to spend more on benefits and have less to spend on commercial activities, e.g. contracts to assist jobseekers back to work. Increased benefit spend would lessen the extent to which Government is able to exercise proper control over the economy in order to maintain sound public finances and deliver the Governments economic policy.

Where sections 29, 36 and 43 of the Act are engaged, the exemptions in those sections have effect where, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemptions outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information (see section 2(2) of the Act).

In looking at whether it is in the public interest to withhold the information encompassed by your requests, DWP has considered a number of factors including in particular the following. If this information is disclosed:

- campaigns may seek to undermine the goodwill of organisations who offer opportunities to unemployed people; they may also seek to the reputation and standing of those organisations.
- and; if placement hosts withdraw, claimants will have fewer opportunities to access the support that will get them closer to the labour market. It is clearly in the public interest to reduce unemployment.

On balance, DWP is satisfied that the public interest in maintaining the exemptions referred to above outweighs the public interest in disclosure.