

Freedom of Information request 3893/2014

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Information request

1. How many hours do Ministers have to work a week?
2. How much communication (letter/email/etc) do Ministers get? (this can be an average over a month.)
 - a. From Constituents
 - b. From Non Constituents
3. Are there any subjects a Minister can't help with?
4. Is there a complaint system for Ministers who don't reply?

DWP response

Taking each of your questions in turn:-

1. Ministers do not work conditioned hours.
2. The DWP does not hold this information. The DWP's Ministers receive in excess of 50,000 pieces of correspondence per year, but information on whether each correspondent is a constituent or not is not held.
3. Due to the volume of correspondence received, Ministers are unable to reply personally on every occasion. Generally, for correspondence from members of public, Ministers ask a suitable official to reply on their behalf.

Each Minister has a portfolio of policies for which they are responsible. Generally, correspondence is allocated and dealt with in line with those Ministerial portfolios.

However, neither Ministers, nor officials on their behalf, can intervene in individual cases. This is because the laws governing the social security system are set by Parliament. Decision makers, who determine entitlement to social security benefits on behalf of the Secretary of State, are therefore bound by the provisions of the Acts and Regulations as approved by Parliament and any subsequent

case law. It is essential for the maintenance of the system's integrity that it is allowed to operate without direct interference from members of the Government. Nevertheless, there are well-established review and appeal procedures to which people may look for redress on individual cases.

4. There is no formal complaints procedure specifically for instances of a Minister not replying personally to correspondence. Where an individual believes that the Department has not properly dealt with a complaint on a Minister's behalf, they can ask the Independent Case Examiner (ICE) to investigate. The ICE offers an impartial complaint review service for complaints about DWP maladministration. They cannot consider complaints about legislation or policy.