

# Freedom of Information request 2185/2011

Received 26 July 2011  
Published 23 September 2011

## Information request

I am writing to obtain the total amount paid in additional benefits for additional spouses in polygamous marriages in the last five financial years: 2006-07, 2007-08 and 2008-09, 2009-10, 2010-11.

## DWP response

No one can contract a polygamous marriage in the UK, but marriage legislation recognises the validity of polygamous marriages entered into in a country where polygamy was legal when the parties concerned were domiciled there. Social security legislation adopts a similar approach to avoid anomalous results (such as treating polygamous households more favourably than monogamous ones).

The information that you have sought is not held on the Department's computer systems used for analysis and the production of statistics. However, we believe that the number of polygamous households claiming benefits is small and declining because since the Immigration Act 1988 it has not been possible for people polygamously married overseas to bring second wives to the UK. Following a search of our records I have identified that certain operational systems<sup>1</sup> hold an indicator detailing relationship type. This includes [D]aughter, [S]on, [O]ther e.g. grandchild and [P]olygamous partner. To count all cases holding the [P] indicator would require the commissioning of a bespoke scan from the operational system.

We estimate that the cost of doing so would greatly exceed the appropriate limit of £600 set down for Freedom of Information requests. 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

---

<sup>1</sup> Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance payment systems (Income Support Computer System (ISCS) and Jobseeker's Allowance Payment System (JSAPS))

Freedom of Information Act, the Department is not obliged to comply with your request and we will not be processing your request further.

I have also considered whether information could be obtained by analysing weekly benefit award amounts held on the analytical data. However, as benefit award amounts are made up of different components, some of which are not set amounts, this is not possible. Further information on the benefit system, the range of benefits available, the rates in payment and eligibility conditions are available on the [Directgov](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/On_a_low_income/DG_185670) website. For example the following link provides further information on Income Support:

[http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/On\\_a\\_low\\_income/DG\\_185670](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/On_a_low_income/DG_185670)

You will also see from this website that for a number of benefits that there are two different payment types, Contributory and Income-related benefits. For example, see information on Jobseeker's Allowance "How it works" of the Directgov website at:

[http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/Employedorlookingforwork/DG\\_10018757](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/MoneyTaxAndBenefits/BenefitsTaxCreditsAndOtherSupport/Employedorlookingforwork/DG_10018757)

Contributory benefits make no provision for polygamous marriages. If a man dies leaving two widows, for example, neither gets bereavement benefit. There is an exception where the marriage is in practice monogamous – in the above example, if one of the man's wives died before him, he would leave a single widow and she could qualify for bereavement benefit.

Income-related benefits provide for polygamous marriages only where the marriage was contracted in a country where polygamy was legal when the parties concerned were domiciled there. Provision is at the lowest level consonant with our human rights obligations. For working age benefits the husband and the first wife are paid the ordinary couple rate (currently £105.95 a week); second and subsequent wives only receive an additional £38.45 a week. That is a saving of £29.05 per week on the £67.50 they would be entitled to receive if they were treated as individuals claiming benefit in their own right. These rules have been in place since the introduction of Income Support in 1988. Income-related benefits are not payable for wives who do not reside in Great Britain. So what we can be certain of is that no additional benefit expenditure is occurring because of polygamous marriage provisions.

Should a member of a polygamous marriage choose to claim the higher benefit rate of a contributory or non-contributory social security benefit as a single adult in their own right, they would need to satisfy the relevant conditions of entitlement.

The Government has decided that the new Universal Credit, to be introduced from 2013, which will replace means tested benefits and tax credits for working age people, will not recognise polygamous marriages. Instead, the husband and one wife will claim as a couple in the same way as any other couple; and any other adults living in the household will have to claim as

single people on the basis of their own circumstances. This process already happens where a polygamous marriage is not recognised in UK law.

You may be interested in viewing a briefing paper on Polygamy on the UK Parliament website which provides further related information:

[www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN05051.pdf](http://www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN05051.pdf) .

You may also be interested to be aware that the Department regularly publishes National Statistics on its website at <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?page=tabtool> and on NOMIS, the Office for National Statistics official website of labour market statistics [www.nomisweb.co.uk](http://www.nomisweb.co.uk). Both websites allow you to construct tables to your own requirements.

For example, to produce statistics on how many people are in receipt of Income Support with a partner, go to <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?page=tabtool> , scroll down and select **Benefit Caseloads National Statistics (WPLS) data** in the **Benefit Data** section then under **Benefit/Scheme**, select **Income Support** and make your table selection.

Finally, benefit expenditure tables are available from the DWP website at the following link:

<http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd4/index.php?page=expenditure> .