

Freedom of Information request 2616/2010

Received: 24/09/2010

Issued: 22/10/2010

Information request

This request relates to the number of investigations carried out by the Department into benefit fraud.

Please disclose under the FOI Act:

1. The number of investigations into benefit fraud initiated in the last financial year (2009/10) (please include open cases).

Of these please detail:

- How many are open/closed?
- Of the closed cases; how many led to a prosecution? How many led to a conviction?
- How many led to money being paid back? Please disclose the total amount repaid from these cases in 2009/10.

2. The number of investigations into benefit fraud initiated since April 2010 (please include open cases).

Of these please detail:

- How many are open/closed?
- Of the closed cases; how many led to a prosecution? How many led to a conviction?
- How many led to money being paid back? Please disclose the total amount repaid from these cases since April 2010.

Please also disclose:

3. The number of DWP staff working in the team that deals with detecting and investigating benefit fraud in the last financial year.

4. The budget for this team in the last financial year.

DWP response

1. & 2. The number of investigations into benefit fraud initiated in the last financial year (2009/10) and since April 2010 (please include open cases).

Of these please detail:

- **How many are open/closed?**

During 2006, the Department introduced a new Customer Compliance approach that deals with lower risk cases where a full criminal investigation is judged unnecessary, enabling the Fraud Investigation Service to focus on higher risk frauds.

The table below details the number of investigations into benefit fraud initiated by the Fraud Investigation Service in the last financial year (2009/10) and since April 2010 for open and closed cases.

Year	Number of Cases Opened*	Number of Cases Closed*
2009/10	175, 508	135, 115
April 2010 to August 2010	72, 891	31, 731

*We have provided the number of cases opened and closed for the periods requested, although the number of closed cases may not necessarily relate to the same year in which they were opened and therefore cannot be directly compared with the number of cases opened.

- **Of the closed cases; how many led to a prosecution? How many led to a conviction?**

The table below details the prosecution and convictions rates for 2009/10 and April 2010 to September 2010.

Year	*Number of Cases Prosecuted	*Number of Cases Convicted
2009/10	8,258	7,133
April 2010 to September	4,134	3,744

*These cases may not relate to the open and closed data above as the investigation may have started prior to the year in which they were prosecuted and therefore can not be directly compared.

The number of cases prosecuted in court may not directly relate to the number of convictions in the same year and therefore the data cannot be directly compared. This is due to the length of time it can take for some cases to conclude which may span more than one tax year.

- **How many led to money being paid back? Please disclose the total amount repaid from these cases in 2009/10 and since April 2010.**

Fraud is defined as being where a customer has been successfully prosecuted, admitted an offence in an interview under caution or accepted an administrative penalty.

The Department cannot provide details of recovery on Fraud debts specific to *prosecuted* cases as not all Fraud debts will have actually been prosecuted (e.g. Administration Penalties or cases which fall below the minimum amount for prosecution).

The total recovered across all categories of outstanding debt for 2009/2010 was £294.3m. Between April and August 2010, £123.9m has been recovered. These include recoveries by the Department of both DWP and Local Authority administered benefits.

3. The number of DWP staff working in the team that deals with detecting and investigating benefit fraud in the last financial year.

The average number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff working in the Fraud Investigation Service (FIS) during the 2009-10 financial year is shown in Table A.

Table A	Total average FTE
Staff	2,777

Source: Department of Work and Pensions Accounting System

The number of Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff includes management and support staff.

4. The budget for this team in the last financial year.

Table B shows the budget for the Fraud Investigation Service (FIS) for the last financial year.

Table B	Total Costs (£m)
---------	------------------

2009-10 Budget	102.6
----------------	-------

Source: Department of Work and Pensions Accounting System

Costs for operating the Fraud Investigation Service include:

- Staffing costs - which relate to salaries and related costs for all its Investigators and Intelligence gathering people.
- Non-staff costs - which include postage, evidence gathering, IT consumables, travel, stationary and office consumables.
- Capital – which cover the cost of developments to Fraud Referral and Intervention Management System (FRAIMS) that captures all fraud and customer compliance cases in the Department for Work and Pensions.

The following costs are charged centrally within the Department for Work and Pensions and cannot be directly attributed to this specific activity:

- IT costs for computers, IT services and installation of telephone equipment.
- Estate running costs.