

**Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)**  
**Central Freedom of Information Team**

xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx@xxx.xxx.gov.uk

**Our reference: VTR FO1 1748**

**Date:** 20 May 2015

Dear Anita Bellows

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on 27 April 2015.  
You asked for

*“the information used by East Anglia District in relation to how people in the Support Group (SG) are selected to attend interviews, letter templates (or telephone aids) used for the invitations, aids for employees that carry out the interviews and how they encourage people to access the support.*

*Given that people in the SG will have serious and often life threatening illnesses is medical advice sought prior to issuing any invitation to attend the interview?"*

Claimants placed in the SG have undertaken an assessment by the Health Assessment Advisory Service against a set of functional descriptors, and DWP Decision Makers have decided that, due to their health condition, it is unreasonable to require them to engage in work related activity. Some claimants in the SG will claim under special rules for ESA: Special Rules claims are defined as someone who is terminally ill and not expected to live for more than six months. This is notified to DWP when the claim to ESA is made and claimants receive the SG rate of ESA from day 1 of the claim.

In East Anglia, Work Coaches contacting ESA claimants, to inform them of the help and support available, work to National DWP Guidance The majority of claimants who are contacted to discuss whether they would like to engage with the Work Coach on a voluntary basis, are those who have not yet gone through a Work Capability Assessment (WCA) so it hasn't yet been determined whether they should be placed in the SG or the work related activity group (WRAG).

For all claimants that Work Coaches are looking to make contact with on a voluntary basis, in East Anglia, the same process applies. Each case is reviewed and appropriate action is determined based on the requests of the claimant.

Before making contact with any claimant, Work Coaches review the claimant's benefit record, to determine whether they have taken part in a Work Capability Assessment (WCA), the outcome of the WCA, e.g. whether they were placed in the SG or the WRAG, and whether ESA is currently in payment. Work Coaches also have access to the claimant's medical conditions, as detailed on the Statement of Fitness for Work and other details which may be available

through conversation screens, for example, if we have previously contacted the claimant and they did not wish to take part in the voluntary process.

Work Coaches should offer support to any and all of our claimants, unless they come into one of the excluded categories listed below.

. Reasons for excluding claimants from being contacted are:

- Cancer and terminal illness
- Claimants with Appointees
- Pregnancy Related illness
- ESA Not in Payment
- Customers already enrolled in the Work Programme
- Lone Parents with children under 1
- Full Time Carers
- Customers of Pension Credit Age

In East Anglia, the Work Coach first makes contact with the claimant by telephone to advise them of the support that is available to them should the claimant wish to take part. For claimants placed in SG, this is a purely voluntary action on their part.

If we are not able to make contact with the claimant, the Work Coach sends out an introductory letter, (See Appendix 1 attached to this email) with details of the support that is available, when the claimant feels it is appropriate to take it up. It also provides contact details, so they can telephone the Work Coach, to discuss whether the interview is appropriate.

During these telephone calls or at the initial appointment, it may become clear that the intervention would be of no benefit to the claimant at this time or not appropriate in the claimant's current circumstances. In these instances, the details are recorded on the claimant's record, to prevent any further contact with regards to voluntary engagement, for a period of time and a review date is agreed, before the interview or telephone call is ended.

If a claimant in the assessment phase of ESA or the SG declines the offer to speak to a Work Coach or fails to attend an interview, there is no sanction imposed on their benefits. Work Coaches encourage claimants to contact them to discuss any concerns they may have and, as such, the level of support offered to ESA SG claimants is based on their requirements, This can range from telephone contact once per month, for example, to work experience and permitted work. DWP Work Psychologists are also able to help any of our claimants who have a health condition or disability or who are disadvantaged through lack of opportunity to find and keep work. They apply psychology to enhance people's employment opportunities, helping them to get a job and keep it.

Work Coaches do not seek medical advice before making contact with claimants, other than having an insight into the nature of their health condition by the methods described above, as they focus on the effects of a health condition and what the claimant can do, rather than the nature of the health

condition itself. Work Coaches can use an Assessment Checklist (Appendix 2) and a guidance sheet for Addressing Barriers (Appendix 3)

If you have any queries about this letter please contact me quoting the reference number above.

Yours sincerely,

DWP Central Fol Team

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#### **Your right to complain under the Freedom of Information Act**

If you are not happy with this response you may request an internal review by e-mailing [freedom-of-information-request@dpw.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:freedom-of-information-request@dpw.gsi.gov.uk) or by writing to: DWP, Central Fol Team, Caxton House, Tothill Street, SW1H 9NA. Any review request should be submitted within two months of the date of this letter.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner's Office for a decision. Generally the Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted our own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5AF  
[www.ico.org.uk/Global/contact\\_us](http://www.ico.org.uk/Global/contact_us) or telephone 0303 123 1113 or 01625 545745