

Dear Susan Jones,

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on 15/11/2015 in which you ask:

I refer to The Government Communication Service guide to communications and behaviour change - <https://gcn.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/GCSBehaviourChangeGuideJune14Web.pdf>.

In particular, firstly, I refer to page 5: "Behavioural theory is a powerful tool for the government communicator, but you don't need to be an experienced social scientist to apply it successfully to your work."

I should like to ask what ethical guidelines are in place regarding the use of behavioural theory on claimants. What guidelines are in place to protect claimants from any potential adverse effects of trials and experiments using methods aimed at changing behaviours of claimants? And what method of gaining claimant consent (to be used as a subject in trials and experiments) is used by the Department and by job centres?

Secondly, I refer to page 19, specifically:

"Behavioural principles

A Jobcentre work coach letter was re-designed to include a range of behavioural insights. The letter appealed to social norms by including the message that 7 out of 10 people found the training course had helped them with their job search. A verbal and written commitment that they will attend (I will attend this course on x day/time) was required to "lock" respondents into the event. The letter also emphasised that places were limited, highlighting the value of the event.

What was the impact?

Applying behavioural principles to the letter increased the attendance of young people at jobcentre interviews by 30% over a six week period, compared to the control group. The extrapolated return is estimated at £25,000 over a 12 month period."

Firstly, I should like to ask if the claim used "to appeal to social norms" - that "7 out of 10 people found the training course had helped them with their job search" - is actually true, or is it used only as an illustration, or an example of "applying behavioural principles" as an incentive? If it is true, is there evidence of the claim that 7 out of 10 people found the training course helped them?

Secondly, I should like to ask if there is any evidence that behaviour principles, behaviour change and positive employment outcomes are correlated. How does the DWP discern between compliance with conditionality rules, off-flow and employment?

Finally, I should like to ask what "The extrapolated return is estimated at £25,000 over a 12 month period" means. In what sense is it a "return" and how was the figure arrived at?

Response:

I can confirm that we hold information falling within the description specified in your request. However, we estimate that the cost of complying with your request would **exceed the appropriate limit for central Government, set by regulations 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 it.

Under section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act the Department is not **therefore** obliged to comply with your request and we will not be processing it further.

Under section 16 of the Act we should assist you in helping you narrow your request so that it may fall beneath the cost limit. It may help to reduce the number of questions by refocusing it to only a few elements of the presently broad request.

We will consider a fresh any revised request however we cannot guarantee that any revised request will fall within the cost limit.

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

Yours sincerely,

DWP Central Fol Team

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@dwp.gsi.gov.uk or by writing to DWP, Central Fol Team, 4th Floor, Caxton House, Tothill Street, London 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.gov.uk