Dear Finn Keaney,

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (FoI) request received on 19 April. You wrote:

“Your ESA, UC and PIP Core Visits guidance state that when claimants with mental health conditions, learning difficulties, or substance misuse issues fail to reply to correspondence or comply with obligations or conditionality, Core Visits should be scheduled, and/or the claimant's details should be referred back to the Disability Service CES Team and the original referrer for case conferencing and to consult relevant parties such as the GP, Community Psychiatric Nurse, or next of kin of the claimant.

Staff are instructed that they 'must not suspend or stop the claimant's benefit payment until further action has been taken, and further advice given.'

In the time since July 2020, please provide information as to;

1- how many claimants have had their payments stopped or suspended after non-compliance, broken down per benefit if possible

2- how many claimants in receipt of the Enhanced & Severe Disability Premiums have had their payments stopped or suspended after non-compliance

3- how many claimants who have been deemed to have LCW/-RA due to ‘substantial risk’ have had their payments stopped or suspended after non-compliance

4- how many cases in which a claimant would otherwise be facing such a suspension or stoppage of payments have had Core Visits scheduled

5- how many cases in which a claimant would otherwise be facing a suspension or stoppage of payments due to non compliance have instead been referred back to the Disability Service CES Team

Finally, I understand the ‘vulnerability’ field is not automatically triggered at any point and does not carry across from one assessment to the next.

6- Please provide any information or guidance you hold around how staff are to populate this field, how often these fields are reviewed, and any measures that are taken to ensure that this field is not incorrectly or incompletely populated.”
DWP Response

We have numbered each part of your request.

We can confirm that we hold information falling within the description specified in your request. However, we have estimated that the cost of meeting your request would exceed the cost limit of £600 specified in the Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004. This represents the estimated cost of one person spending 3½ working days (equivalent to 24 staff-hours) in determining whether the Department holds the information, and locating, retrieving and extracting it. Under Section 12 of the FoI 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 FoI Act we should help you narrow your request so that it may fall beneath the cost limit. We will consider afresh any revised request however we cannot guarantee that any revised request will fall within the cost limit as each FoI request is judged on its own merits.

For questions 1 to 3 we feel that you should narrow your request to only ask for the number of adverse sanction decisions made (i.e. where a decision has been made to sanction a claimant) - relating to claimants of Universal Credit (UC) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) – in the quarter ending October 2020.

Were you to narrow your request in this way, Section 21 of the Freedom of Information Act allows us to direct you to information which is already reasonably accessible to you.

The Department publishes monthly Official Statistics on Benefit Sanctions every three months, which show various statistics about sanctions for those on Universal Credit (both full and live service), Jobseeker's Allowance, and those in the Employment and Support Allowance Work-Related Activity Group, with the most recent data available to October 2020. Please read the specific notes on the main page about the statistics covering the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic time period.

The Department also publishes more detailed information on ESA sanctions on Stat-Xplore. Once you have logged-in, the relevant datasets are available in the “Sanctions Decisions” folder in the list of datasets on the left-hand side of the screen. The ESA Sanction Decisions datasets include “Disability” and “Medical Condition” variables. If needed, you can access guidance on how to extract the information required from Stat-Xplore. If you have any difficulties extracting the relevant information, please let us know.

Adverse sanction decision statistics relating to claimants on UC “Live Service” are available on Stat-Xplore. Adverse sanction decision statistics relating to claimants on UC “Full Service” are included in Table 1.1. of the Data Tables accompanying the latest published statistics. Information about the difference between UC Live Service and UC Full Service is available here.

For Q4 The DWP Visiting Team started to collate data in relation to visits when a benefit has been suspended, or is at risk of being suspended, from 29 January 2021. We could therefore supply data from this date.

For Q5 Disability Services CES Team have received 1339 cases since July 2020. Each case will take approximately 15 minutes to review and collate the information which would take
approximately 335 hours/45 days. Based on this calculation, we could provide you with information for a smaller amount of cases within a smaller time frame.

For Q6, we currently do not have a ‘vulnerability’ field although we are looking at introducing one in the future which will allow us to take appropriate measures for each customer. Therefore, we do not have any guidance around how it should be populated.

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

Yours sincerely,

DWP Central Freedom of Information Team
Department for Work and Pensions

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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@dwp.gov.uk or by writing to: DWP Central FOI Team, Caxton House, 6-12 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.
Website: ICO Contact Information or telephone 0303 123 1113.