



Department
for Work &
Pensions

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Digital Group - Parliamentary Business

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Sent by e-mail

Dear Mr Slater

Following the the Information Commissioner's Decision Notice dated 25 April, the DWP has been instructed to confirm or deny whether the information you previously requested around datasets is held and either disclose that information or issue a fresh response compliant with section 17 of the FOIA.

DWP response

We confirm that the information requested is held by the DWP.

However, we are relying on the following exemptions to protect this information from disclosure.

Section 24 (1) – National Security.

Providing details of the 'building blocks' of our IT systems may enable someone with criminal intent to attempt to decipher how our IT systems are built and subsequently how they work in terms of the data models. This in turn could aid the design of attack scenarios, or methods of attempting to access systems and data sets remotely, for example using key words linked to the "type of data" held on the particular systems concerned. If a perpetrator was then successful in hacking our IT systems, they may be able to influence the assessment and payment of benefits or the collection of revenue by wider government.

This could in turn ultimately affect the smooth implementation of DWP policies and operations, potentially creating financial instability and/or social disruption. This is why we very carefully protect the nature and specific contents of the relevant datasets, especially where such details might otherwise have wide visibility, while providing reassurance regarding privacy tests and the protection of personal data.

Section 31(1) (a) – Law Enforcement - prevention and detection of crime

Providing the information required may enable a perpetrator to decipher how our IT systems are built and how they work. This in turn may enable someone

to falsify claims and divert payments. Our IT systems are designed specifically to enable the assessment and payment of benefits and work alongside the IT systems of wider government.

The same protective principles apply as are explained in relation to use of Section 24, because we know that the Departments and its technology systems and databases are targeted by particular threat sources on a repeated basis.

Public Interest Test

Whilst there may be a genuine interest from the public that DWP has IT systems in place for the assessment and payment of benefits, it is not in the public interest for the information about the 'building blocks' of our IT systems to be in the public domain as this may enable a perpetrator to attack and attempt to penetrate our IT systems.

Providing details of the datasets that DWP holds about claimants on its standard IT systems may enable a potential perpetrator to try and affect the way that they work, again this not in the public interest. It is also important to not set an unwelcome precedent, by providing what may seem to some as basic information about datasets, but which may then be used either to triangulate information from other sources or as a means of seeking gradually more detailed information; either of which would have the same effect of enabling potential perpetrators to plan and test cyber attacks and prospectively to disrupt the delivery of critical and widely used public services.

Yours sincerely

Digital Group, Parliamentary Business 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 FoI 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 or telephone 0303 123 1113 or 01625 545745