

Julie Haslett  
By email

Dear Ms Haslett,

**Freedom of Information Act – Request for Information**  
**Our Reference: FOIs 773**

Thank you for your Freedom of Information requests received on 25 February 2017. You asked:

*“I should like the following information:*

*Exact number of detachment of Earnings Orders in place to recover debt Percentage of those that are for debts over 6 years old Percentage of those where full evidence of the debt with contact and payment history can be provided Percentage of those that are currently in the complaints process DWP policy & guidance notes for issuing Detachment of earnings”*

For ease of identification, I have numbered your questions.

1. *Exact number of detachment of Earnings Orders in place to recover debt.*

As at 1 March 2017, DWP had 179,490 customers with a Direct Earnings Attachment (DEA) in place.

2. *Percentage of those that are for debts over 6 years old.*

56% of customers with a DEA have a debt over 6 years old. Note that this is not necessarily the debt being recovered.

3. *Percentage of those where full evidence of the debt with contact and payment history can be provided*

Unfortunately, the information requested cannot be provided, as it would require interrogation of individual cases. This exceeds the cost limit for compiling information. .

The cost limit for complying with a request or a linked series of requests from the same person or group is set at £600 for central government, Parliament and the armed forces and £450 for all other public authorities. This provision can be found at section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/36/section/12>

4. *Percentage of those that are currently in the complaints process.*

DWP's Debt Management is currently dealing with 92 outstanding complaints of which 8 relate to DEA (9%)

5. *DWP policy & guidance notes for issuing Detachment of earnings"*

If a customer is not in receipt of benefit, a repayment letter will be sent asking the customer to make a voluntary agreement to repay and noting that failure to do so may result in further recovery options being pursued. These include the Direct Earnings Attachment (DEA), civil litigation action or the overpayment being sent to one of the Department's private sector partners to make recovery.

If no response is received to the repayment request letter, and the case is suitable for a DEA to be made from the customer's earnings, then a further letter will be sent to the customer offering a final opportunity to make a voluntary agreement to repay the overpayment. If no offer to repay voluntarily is made within 21 days a letter will be sent directly to the employer to make the deductions.

The Social Security (Overpayments and Recovery) Regulations 2013. Statutory Instrument No. 384 of 2013 enables DWP to make deductions via Direct Earnings Attachments. I have provided more information in the attached annex.

You can find more information about the employer's responsibility by using the link below.

[Direct Earnings Attachments: an employers' guide - GOV.UK](#)

Yours sincerely

**Fraud, Error and Debt Strategy and Policy 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@dwpgsi.gov.uk](mailto:freedom-of-information-request@dwpgsi.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  
[www.ico.gov.uk](http://www.ico.gov.uk)