



Department
for Work &
Pensions

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[DWP Website](#)

Our Ref: FOI2021/99468

24 February 2022

Dear John Slater,

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (FoI) request received on 4 December 2021. You wrote:

"In the article:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-refuses-to-publish-report-that-found-disabled-claimants-had-unmet-needs/>

about the publication of the report of the NatCen research project titled The Uses of Health and Disability Benefits, the journalist John Pring reported that a whistleblower explained

"After being shown the first draft of the report, DWP told NatCen to reduce the number of references to "unmet needs" and to delete some of its analysis.

The whistleblower, who is close to the team that prepared the report, said: "It was obvious to me that the findings about unmet needs and adequacy of benefits were not what the government wanted to hear."

They said that the final version, which was submitted to DWP in September 2020, had far fewer references to unmet needs."

RFI1: Please disclose the first draft of the NatCen report "The Uses of Health and Disability Benefits" referenced above."

DWP Response

We wrote to you on both 6 January and 3 February 2022 to say that we needed additional time to consider the Public Interest Test regarding the use of qualified exemptions.

We have now been able to complete this work and can confirm that the Department holds the information you have requested but it is being withheld from release under the exemption at Section 36(2)(b) and 36(2)(c) of the FoI Act which states;

- (2) Information to which this section applies is exempt information if, in the reasonable opinion of a qualified person [in this context, a Minister of the Crown], disclosure of the information under this Act
- (b) would, or would be likely to, inhibit –
 - (i) the free and frank provision of advice, or
 - (ii) the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation, or
 - (c) would otherwise prejudice, or would be likely otherwise to prejudice, the effective conduct of public affairs.

This exemption requires the public interest for and against disclosure to be assessed.

We recognise that the publication of the information requested could provide a greater understanding of The Uses of Disability Benefits report.

However, we have to balance this against the fact that the draft versions of the report, are just that and, a work in progress. The information contained includes details that would not be designed, in any shape or form to be released with the final version. Those working on the draft version would also not expect or have in mind that these versions would be released. The Government Social Research protocol states that the agreed final draft is the product for publication. The agreed final draft is the end point of a project at which a final draft/version of the output has been received and accepted. This will be after any internal review/peer review and revisions as a result of these peer review comments.

If we had to always release draft reports, there is a chance that the overall consultation, research and report stages of any such work would become poorer. The reason for this is that people would be less inclined to comment or have their opinions recorded, meaning that the development of these reports would suffer. This would overall lead to worse outcomes that may impact future development of Government policy and how we work with other organisations.

Publication of the draft report would be likely to inhibit candour and be likely to prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs, There is a strong public interest in the Department being able to carry out and use frank assessments, including unrestrained and candid contributions from business areas.

On balance, we are satisfied that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosure

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

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.