



Department
for Work &
Pensions

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[DWP Website](#)

Our Ref: FOI2021/42776

23 June 2021

Dear Martin Williams,

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (FoI) request received on 26 May. You wrote:

"In answer to FOI2021/15615 (available here https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/jcp_retrospective_verification_t), it was stated that:

"I can also confirm that when Universal Credit applications were made in the initial period of the pandemic, customers were advised that their application was being accepted under specific COVID 19 regulations and that the Department would contact them at a later date and ask for evidence to support their application

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We are now re-visiting those cases and are re-applying the verification standards that would have been in place at the time, had it not been for COVID-19. If the evidence does not support the application it will be reviewed and revised to the correct entitlement and, where appropriate, an overpayment calculated and put into recovery."

Please disclose:

1. The "specific COVID 19 regulations" to which you refer- as far as we are aware, this easement on standards of verification was not in fact carried out under any different regulations but was simply a decision on the part of the Department to ease up on what it considered acceptable evidence to verify identity etc. As such we are not aware of any specific COVID 19 regulations.
2. Please also disclose the standard notification that was given to the group of claimants described informing them of such specific COVID 19 regulations and the future verification that would be applied.
3. Your previous response also indicates that "if the evidence does not support the application it will be reviewed and revised to the correct entitlement and, where appropriate, an overpayment calculated and put into recovery". I would be grateful if you could indicate under which regulation such a revision would be carried out and what the ground for revision would be?
4. Please disclose any standard wording used in making requests to reverify information as part of this programme.

5. Finally, please disclose any guidance issued to staff specifically as part of this programme on "closing" or revising awards in the event that a claimant does not respond to such requests for information."

DWP Response

We can confirm that we hold some information relating to your request.

In response to question 1 and 3, we can confirm that the Department holds information that you have asked for. Some of the information is exempt under Section 21 of the FOI Act because it is reasonably accessible to you and is in the public domain. The respective information can be accessed it via the following links:

Question 1: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2020/371/made>

Question 3: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/benefit-overpayment-recovery-staff-guide/benefit-overpayment-recovery-guide>

To be helpful we are providing some additional links, outside our obligations under the FOI Act, that you may also find useful:

<https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/Coronavirus/>

<https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/employment-and-benefits-support/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-review-of-the-covid-19-temporary-measures/a-review-of-the-covid-19-temporary-measures-occasional-paper-24>

For questions 2, 4 and 5, whilst we hold some information relating to your request, this information is exempt under Section 31(1)(a) of the Freedom of Information Act. This exemption covers certain information which, if released, would likely prejudice the prevention and detection of fraud and crime.

As required by the FOI Act, we have considered the public interest test in relation to this exemption. There is a public interest in greater transparency and providing details on how government departments work. However, there is a public interest in protecting and maintain how government departments undertake certain action, that if revealed, would likely expose the Department to signification risk.

DWP introduced a number of tactical solutions for the present COVID situation as it's stands today, and as such if shared externally would give knowledge of our security, fraud, evidence verification, labour market and sensitivity adjustments. By supplying this information, we would leave the Department open to significant fraud. Therefore, on balance, DWP is satisfied that in this instance 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.