

DWP Central Freedom of Information Team

e-mail: freedom-of-information-request@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

Our Ref: Fol 4646

6 November 2013

Dear Mr Woods,

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on 30 September 2013 regarding the Flexible Support Fund.

Firstly it may be helpful if I explain that all Jobcentre Plus District Managers have a limited amount of discretionary funding, known as the Flexible Support Fund, that they can use to supplement mainstream services and to tailor support to the needs of individuals and the local area.

To support claimants in their search for work, Jobcentre Plus Personal Advisers can use their discretion to make awards from the local fund, which could include helping with the cost of training. In exercising that discretion, advisers consider the appropriateness of an award, taking into account national and local guidelines, individual circumstances and value for money in terms of enhancing employment prospects and reducing the time spent on benefit. It is important to note that claimants have no automatic entitlement to this funding.

In your request you asked for:-

1. The total budget for Hounslow Flexible Support Fund (FSF) each year since 2011 till 2013.

Individual Jobcentres do not have FSF budgets. The budget is held at District level.

2. The training courses paid for at Hounslow Job Centre using the FSF including the course provider, course cost, and course duration each year since 2011 till 2013. (If the duration of the course is not available then just the providers name, course name and course cost is acceptable).

See Annex 1 attached.

Where there are omissions it is because the information is not recorded.

3. The number of training courses paid for at Hounslow using non-contracted training provision providers including the providers name, course name, course cost and duration since 2011 till 2013. (If the provider name, course name, course cost and duration are not available then the

total spent on non-contracted training provision providers for Hounslow Job Centre is acceptable)

Jobcentre Plus does not pay for non-contracted training provision. Such provision is funded by other organisations through alternative funding streams. Jobcentre Plus operate as a referral source, with training providers contacting Jobcentre Plus to make us aware that the provision is available and for the Jobcentre to arrange for suitable Jobcentre customers to be referred to the provision.

4. The number of business cases (FSF funding requests by advisors i.e. the number of people who have applied for training funding) that have been accepted and the number that have been rejected for funding at the Hounslow Job Centre.

As detailed in Annex 1, there were seventeen (17) cases processed and accepted in the last 18 months. We do not keep a record of the number of cases that were rejected.

5. The definition according to DWP of a specific job offer? i.e. job interview offer or guarantee job offer (what evidence is accepted as supporting a specific job offer?). Please provide any reference material i.e. rules, guidance, policy's and procedures which uses the term "specific job offer" relating to the FSF.

DWP does not define a specific job offer and the national Flexible Support Fund (FSF) guidance does not use this term anywhere.

I can confirm that the FSF 'Travel expenses for job interviews' adviser guidance does contain information about confirming job interview details with employers, which we have provided below:

Employer checks

8. Advisers are required, under DWP standards, to ensure public funds are properly safeguarded and not used inappropriately.

9. With regard to job interview travel costs, discharging this duty will, inevitably, mean checking the validity of claims with the employer; it is for advisory teams to determine the timing and nature of the check(s) undertaken.

10. Contacting the employer in advance of the interview is recommended as this will not only provide reassurance that the claimant actually has an interview arranged, it will also help identify cases where the employer reimburses an interviewees expenses.

6. The Hounslow Job Centre Managers name and contact details.

The Customer Service Operations Manager at Hounslow Jobcentre is Sarah Bishop and her email address is Sarah.Bishop@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

7. Any local or area rules specific to Hounslow effecting the FSF and its use.

There are no local or area rules specific to Hounslow effecting the FSF and its use. All individual needs are considered on a case by case basis.

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

Yours sincerely,

DWP Central Fol 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@dwpgsi.gov.uk or by writing to DWP, Central Fol Team, Caxton House, 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