

Dear M Boyce,

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request of 3 July 2017. You asked:

New Claimants for Universal Credit have to wait a MINIMUM of 6 weeks to receive any benefit. Most claimants have to wait much much much longer, usually a minimum of 10- 16 weeks.

- (1) How many people have died since 2014 whilst waiting and waiting and waiting for any UC*
(a) through suicide?
(b) through starvation?
(c) through old age?

I was told to ring the following number to ask for a credit advance: 2716117. Unfortunately it just goes to voice mail and you have to leave a message. I left dozens of messages and no one bothered to get back to me.

- (2) How much money does the DWP make through people making phone calls to a line that is just a voice mail message that never replies?*

(3) I also repeatedly tried the UC 'helpline' (actually it would be much better titled the extreme frustration line) number of 0345 600 0723. My average wait time on the phone was 40 minutes each call. When I did finally get through no one could speak proper English and no one knew anything about UC. How much money did the DWP make from this phone line 'service' in the last year?

DWP Response

In answer to your questions 1a, 1b and 1c we do not hold this information.

In answer to your questions 2 & 3, the Department uses 0345 numbers for Universal Credit enquiry helplines and does not make any revenue from calls to these numbers. Any charges that apply to these calls will be set by the customer's telephone or mobile operator and vary depending on call plan type and the time of day at which the call is made. There is an option to ask for a call back if the claimant requests it. We also provide controlled access to telephones for customers in jobcentres who require one to help with their job search or benefit enquiry.

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

Yours sincerely,

DWP Strategy 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, 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