

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)
Central Freedom of Information Team

freedom-of-information-request@dwp.gov.uk

Our reference: IR2020/29377

Date: 20 July 2020

Dear Mark Abraham

Thank you for your Freedom of Information review request received on 15 June. You asked:

I'd be grateful to know if the decision to treat multiple complaints as just one complaint was devised before or after the National Audit Office report on complaints in 2008. For ease of reference, the page link is currently:
<https://www.nao.org.uk/report/department-for-work-and-pensions-handling-customer-complaints/>

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What you seem to be suggesting from your response is a decision has been made to treat each contact with the DWP as one complaint. Thus is no likelihood of an accurate measure of how many parts of any communication to the DWP are complaints, arising are being made individually. Therefore by this method, the DWP will certainly "... miss early warnings of poor service, systematic errors, or problems with their processes."

I'd like a review to confirm what your suggesting to the complainant here as I understand it, i.e.:

the complainant that they should contact the DWP separately, on each and every occasion to accurately record statistics, if they would like to have accurate statistics recorded, to properly ensure each complaints made is recorded.

I would also like to limit my request under FOI to one area, in order to meet to come as you say, within the "appropriate limit for central Government, set by regulations at £600. This represents the estimated cost of one person spending 3½ working days in determining whether the Department holds the information, and locating, retrieving and extracting it."

This could easily be done by tracking the 'complaints' made by myself to the DWP in the period September 2018 to June 2020. This would be by phone, in person, via the complaints online procedure, and by UC journal, and post and email. I'm aware there's a debatable question of whether contact should be regarded as a complaint, or an 'expression of dissatisfaction'. Even so, I'm interested in getting the statistics on this review request please.

DWP Response:

I am of a senior grade to the person who dealt with your request, I was not involved previously, and can confirm that I have carried out an internal review. I am now in a position to respond to you.

I am content that your original request was dealt with correctly. However, in your recent Freedom of Information review, you requested additional information, which I shall provide below.

You have asked if the decision to treat multiple complaints as just one complaint was devised before or after the National Audit Office report on complaints in 2008.

The NAO report did not change how we recorded complaints, as we have always recorded each complaint separately. We need to be clear on the difference between multiple complaints and multiple issues. In your previous FOI request (our ref FOI2020/18769) you were asking about multiple complaints and multiple issues and received an appropriate response.

If the Department receives multiple complaints from one customer, each complaint is recorded separately, for example 10 complaints received, 10 complaints recorded.

However, a customer may raise multiple issues within one complaint, and it is these multiple issues that are considered as one complaint, for example 10 issues raised, 1 complaint recorded noting 10 issues.

The Department records the total number of complaints received not the number of issues contained within those complaints.

You have requested statistical data relating to the complaints you have made to the Department during the period September 2018 to June 2020.

The request for personal information, is a separate process and does not fall within the remit of a Freedom of Information request. Therefore, this information is being withheld as it falls under the exemption in Section 40(1) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000; this exemption covers personal information.

It may help if I explain that the Freedom of Information Act provides a right of access to recorded general information held by a public authority.

The General Data Protection Regulations provide a right of access to an individual's personal data held. Should you wish to track the complaints you have submitted to the Department, you can request a Right of Access Request.

A request can be made by completing an electronic form on GOV.UK at www.gov.uk/guidance/request-your-personal-information-from-the-department-for-work-and-pensions (link is external). However, customers

may choose to make a request by letter, email, telephone, face to face or by Universal Credit journal entry.

I hope this is helpful but 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 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

Web: ico.org.uk/Global/contact_us or telephone 0303 123 1113 or 01625 545745