

DWP Central Freedom of Information Team

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

Our Ref: 2015-343

18 February 2015

Dear M. Boyce,

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on 27 January 2015.

You asked:

“Number of people sanctioned for failing to attend just a single Jobcentre Plus appointment. In the press release of 20 February 2014: Benefits sanctions figures It states that from October 2012 to February 2014 JSA payments to claimants have been suspended (sanctioned) 818,000 times because claimants haven’t stuck to the rules. The Work and Pensions Secretary Iain Duncan Smith is quoted in the above press release as stating: ‘However, sanctions are used as a LAST resort’. In the same press release the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is quoted as saying claimants have been sanctioned for failing to attend Jobcentre Plus appointments.

(1) How many of those 818,000 sanctions of ‘last resort’ were for a claimant missing just a single adviser interview? (2) If DWP don’t have this number, then how can Iain Duncan Smith possibly know, or be believed, that JSA benefit sanctions for failure to attend an adviser interview were only applied as a last resort? If the sanctions regime is to be seen as fair then people must have the confidence that sanctions, which often leave people destitute and reliant on food banks, are only EVER applied as a LAST resort, and not a FIRST resort.”

Please note that intention of the sanctions regime is to encourage people to engage with the support being offered by Jobcentres by making it clearer to claimants what they are expected to do in return for their benefits. Please refer to the following guidance called “Jobseeker’s Allowance sanctions: how to keep your benefit payment” for further details:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/jobseekers-allowance-sanctions-leaflet>

In response to your request, we can confirm that the Department does hold some information on the reasons for applying a Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) sanction however we estimate that the cost of complying with your request would exceed the appropriate limit of £600.

The appropriate limit has been specified in regulations and for central Government it is set 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 the information. Under section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) the

Department is not obliged to comply with your request and we will not be processing your request further.

Under section 16 of the FOIA we are obliged to assist you in providing options to narrow your request, by reforming or refocusing it, so that it will fall beneath the cost limit. In this case our advice would be to narrow your question so that it asks for sanction numbers by reason for sanction decision. In that case Section 21 of the Freedom of Information Act would allow us to direct you to information which is already reasonably accessible to you.

The Department publishes Official Statistics on JSA sanction decisions and information on these statistics can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/jobseekers-allowance-sanctions>

The latest set of Official Statistics was released on 18 February 2015 and a summary of this data can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/jobseekers-allowance-and-employment-and-support-allowance-sanctions-decisions-made-to-september-2014>

In particular Table 1.5 shows the monthly number of sanctions applied broken down by reason which includes '*Failure to attend or failure to participate in an Adviser interview without good reason*'.

If you have any queries about this letter please contact us 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, 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, Wycliff House, Water Lane, Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5AF www.ico.gov.uk