

DWP Central Freedom of Information Team

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

Our Ref: FOI2020/03159

18 February 2020

Dear Human Rights Watch

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (Fol) request received on 23 January. You asked:

We are writing to submit the following request under the Freedom of Information Act.

On 29 October 2018, Forbes published an article entitled “How The UK Government Uses Artificial Intelligence To Identify Welfare And State Benefits Fraud.” The article states that:

“Artificial intelligence algorithms are also used [by the Department for Work and Pensions] to scour social media accounts to uncover inconsistencies in the stories people tell on social media and the claims they are making for benefits. Lavish holiday parties are a red flag if you’re claiming unemployment benefits. Going on a cross-country race is not congruent with someone who receives disability benefits. If you claim single status and you post pictures of your wedding or spouse, it’s suspicious to the AI algorithms.

The DWP tested the algorithms extensively and the algorithms can even scan across the benefit system including Universal Credit, Jobseeker’s Allowance and Personal Independent Systems making it even more robust.”

A link to the article is here: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2018/10/29/how-the-uk-government-uses-artificial-intelligence-to-identify-welfare-and-state-benefits-fraud/#11f6087840cb>

In light of the article above, we specifically request copies of the following:

1) All privacy impact assessments, data protection impact assessments, data sharing agreements, or Memoranda of Understanding of or related to programmes or activities that involve the monitoring of social media accounts belonging to claimants of Universal Credit or legacy benefits (i.e. housing benefit, income-related employment and support allowance, income-based jobseeker’s allowance, income support, child tax credit or working tax credit);

2) All training manuals or operational guidance materials provided to DWP staff for the programs or activities outlined in (1), including manuals or materials pertaining to the collection, use, analysis, retention and deletion of claimants’ social media information;

3) All contracts with commercial partners for the programmes or activities outlined in (1); and

4)All tender or procurement documents for the programmes or activities outlined in (1).

DWP Response:

I can confirm that the Department for Work Pensions (DWP) does hold the information that you require.

DWP does not use either Artificial Intelligence or algorithms to scan social media.

Where an investigation is already ongoing, DWP staff can use open source information from social media on a case by case basis to corroborate an allegation.

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