



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

DWP Central Freedom of  
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[DWP Website](#)

Our Ref: IR2021/47921

13 July 2021

Dear Joe Hannigan,

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (Fol) request received on 14th June. You wrote:

"I am writing to request an internal review of Department for Work and Pensions's handling of my FOI request 'Statistical data for Benefit sanctions'.

I find it hard to believe that it would take 3 days to search computers for information and this is just another tactic the DWP use to obfuscate the facts. It is publicly held knowledge and I refuse to see how or why the public are not meant to see it.

A full history of my FOI request and all correspondence is available on the Internet at this address: [https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/statistical\\_data\\_for\\_benefit\\_san](https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/statistical_data_for_benefit_san)"

## **DWP Response**

In response to your internal review request, we can confirm that the handling of your original request and response has now been appropriately reviewed by someone unconnected with the handling of your original request.

In your Fol request you wrote:

"Could you please send me all statistical data regarding;

1. The total number of sanctions given since April 2020.
2. The total monetary value taken from claimants from these sanctions.
3. The number of these sanctions successfully overturned at appeal
4. The number of these sanctions currently in the appeals process, as of the date of this FIO request."

In our response you were advised that we were unable to provide the information requested within the cost limit and you were given appropriate advice to reduce the scope of your request.

The reason your request exceeded the cost limit was due to several factors:

1. You asked for sanctions information since April 2020 and gave no end date which implies that you required the information to the date of your FOI request, 14 May 2021.

The Department publishes Official Statistics on [sanctions](#) every three months and, at the time of your request, the statistics for adverse sanction decisions for JSA, ESA, IS and UC were only available to October 2020. However, on 18 May 2021 the [statistics to January 2021](#) were published and the information about these statistics was provided in our response to you. The next statistics, to April 2021, will be published in August 2021 and statistics for the period to July 2021 will not be available until November 2021.

2. You asked for the number of sanctions given.

There are two different methods used to measure sanctions:

- a. those who received an adverse sanction decision, and
- b. those who have a sanction applied.

Further details on how these measures are produced are available in the background information and methodology documents for [JSA, ESA and IS](#) and for [Universal Credit](#). In particular, you should note the information given in the “Limitations of the statistics” section. It may also help to read the [sanctions durations and rate background information and methodology](#).

The request for parts 2, 3 and 4 would infer that you required those sanctions measured using method b) however if you read through the methodology documents above you will see that it is not possible to provide the information requested.

3. You asked for appeals which overturned the sanction.

If an adverse sanction decision is overturned at appeal, then the decision is updated and the date of that new decision overwrites the original decision date. For UC only adverse sanction decisions are available in the underlying data, so if that decision is overturned the statistics are updated and the original adverse decision is removed.

4. You asked for outstanding appeals.

The sanction decisions data does not show when an appeal is pending and is only updated once an adverse sanction decision has been reconsidered, at which point the date of that new decision overwrites the original decision date.

As a result of this review we are satisfied that the original response was handled properly and that the outcome of your original request was correct. Your complaint is therefore not upheld and the reason for this is as follows:

It is not possible to provide the information you requested with the cost limit and you were given advice on how to bring your request under cost.

To assist you further we suggest you read through the latest [sanctions publication](#) and all the methodology documents linked above and then refer to the following information which is readily accessible to you.

1. **Monthly number of adverse sanction decisions** made from April 2020 to January 2021 for JSA, ESA, IS and UC. These are published on [Stat-Xplore](#) and in Table 1.1 of the data tables [here](#).
2. **Monthly number of people who have received an adverse sanction decision** from April 2020 to January 2021 for JSA, ESA, IS. These are published on [Stat-Xplore](#).
3. **Monthly number of people with a reduction in their benefit due a sanction** from April 2020 to February 2021 for UC, and from April 2020 to September 2020 for JSA and ESA. These are published in tables 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 of the data tables [here](#). Note: these figures show all people with a reduction in their benefit in that month but it is not possible to provide the amount of reduction.
4. **Monthly number of completed sanctions, by duration of sanction** from April 2020 to September 2020 for JSA and ESA. These are published in tables 3.2 and 3.3 of the data tables [here](#). Note: We are currently unable to provide the information for UC as UC sanction duration and median sanction length statistics have been suspended from this Benefit Sanctions Statistics release. This is because the methodology used to create these statistics is not performing as expected, and further in depth investigations are underway. We aim to revise the complete series for sanction duration and median sanction length statistics on the basis of the improved methodology as soon as possible.

We will consider afresh any revised request however we cannot guarantee that any revised request will fall within the cost limit as each Fol request is judged on its own merits.

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

Yours sincerely,

DWP Central Freedom of Information Team  
Department for Work and Pensions

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### **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 Contact Information](#) or telephone 0303 123 1113 or 01625 545745