

DWP Central Freedom of Information Team

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

Our Ref: FOI2019/12504

23 April 2019

Dear Frank Zola,

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (Fol) request received on 26 March. You asked:

Thanks for your help and the info disclosed . However, can you advise whether a claimant's own UC Journal entries can be deleted by DWP staff such as a 'Coach'? And whether deleted text entries can be recovered and disclosed under a Data Protection Act Subject Access Request. or whether any of your DWP staff can view deleted entries say for audit or anti fraud purposes and how long deleted entries are retained?

Please provide a copy of your guidance, policy and training material for UC journal use by Work 'Coaches' and whether a claimant can choose not to consent to being notified of new entries via email or sms/text and how a claimant should notify the DWP they no longer consent?

Please also disclose a copy of your policy and guidance with regards using the Journal to formally notify claimants to attend mandatory Jobcentre or other appointments or face sanctions and how use of the Journal can be included in a Claimant Commitment.

DWP Response:

It may be helpful if I explain the role of the Freedom of Information Act. The Act provides a right of access to recorded information held by a public authority like DWP (subject to certain exemptions). The Act does not provide that a public authority must create new information to answer questions; nor does it provide that a public authority give advice, opinion or explanation in relation to issues/policies under question.

In cases where a customer does ask a question, rather than request recorded information, we do our utmost to provide the recorded information that best answers the question. Once the public authority has provided the recorded information, it has met its obligations under the Act; interpretation of the information provided is left to the requestor.

The information we hold that best explains / answers your questions:

'However, can you advise whether a claimant's own UC Journal entries can be deleted by DWP staff such as a 'Coach'? And whether deleted text entries can be recovered and disclosed under a Data Protection Act Subject Access Request. or whether any of your DWP staff can view deleted entries say for audit or anti fraud purposes and how long deleted entries are retained?'

DWP Work Coaches cannot delete journal messages from claimants.

Please find the attached information about the '*Deleting journal entries*' and '*Right of Access Request*'.

Deleted text entries can be recovered within the life of the claim and for up to 14 months following claim closure. Only DWP staff with specific privileges can view and recover deleted entries. Deleted entries are retained in line with the whole data set. Universal Credit (UC) retains data for 14 months post claim closure.

'Please provide a copy of your guidance, policy and training material for UC journal use by Work 'Coaches' and whether a claimant can choose not to consent to being notified of new entries via email or sms/text and how a claimant should notify the DWP they no longer consent?'

Please find the attached information about the UC claimant journal.

The service has been designed to ensure notifications reach the claimant when they are required to take action or review their claim. With this in mind it is not optional if we ask the claimant to do something and not sending a reminder would not fit with the design of UC. This is a deliberate design decision and we have no plans to change this.

'Please also disclose a copy of your policy and guidance with regards using the Journal to formally notify claimants to attend mandatory Jobcentre or other appointments or face sanctions and how use of the Journal can be included in a Claimant Commitment.'

Section 21 of the Freedom of Information Act allows us to direct you to information that is reasonably accessible to you, as it is already in the public domain.

Universal Credit guidance is published in the House of Commons library and can be accessed through the link below: Deposit ref. DEP2019-0465, in the Deposit ref. column click "Show all files". For sanctions see: Deposit papers: '*Sanctions – V7.0*':

https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/business-papers/commons/deposited-papers/?fd=2019-03-28&td=2019-03-28&search_term=Department+for+Work+and+Pensions&itemId=119004#toggle-465

For information, Universal Credit guidance is periodically added to the House of Commons library.

Please also see the attached information about the 'UC claimant journal'.

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