

DWP Central Freedom of Information Team

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

Our Ref: IR2020/28682 & FOI2020/24229

03 August 2020

Dear John Slater,

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (Fol) request received on 19 May and your request for an internal review on 10 June chasing a response.

On the 19 May you asked:

'Please disclose the documented formal change management process for IT changes used on the Universal Credit Programme to deliver alterations to Universal Credit's scope or Policy decided by Ministers.'

Based on best practice, I assume that formal written log of such changes is maintained. Therefore, please disclose the written log or confirm that none exists.

I appreciate that the Covid-19 pandemic is causing considerable additional work for the Department. However, given that this request is only for 2 documents I do not believe that my request places an unreasonable burden on the Department and therefore the documents should be disclosed within the statutory FOIA timescales.'

On the 10 June:

I am writing to request an internal review of Department for Work and Pensions's handling of my FOI request 'Universal Credit - Change management process (IT changes).'

I write inn respect of my request for information submitted on 19 May 2020.

I agreed with the Commissioner when she concluded that it is reasonable not to place the Department under undue pressure during these difficult times. However, it is now clear that the Department has had time to adjust to new types of working and is performing well.

Neil Couling has been extremely vocal on Twitter about how well the Department has coped with the massive increase in Universal Credit claims. In addition, a DWP Minister (Will Quince MP) has written an article on the Politics Home website (see URL below) claiming that "Universal Credit is one of the success stories of the coronavirus crisis":

"More than two million claims processed since mid-March. Over 900,000 advance payments made, reaching the accounts of those in most need within days. A peak of 2.2 million calls taken over 48 hours. More than nine in 10 eligible claimants receiving their money in full and on time – up on normal times, reaching a new record."

<https://www.politicshome.com/thehouse/article/universal-credit-is-one-of-the-success-stories-of-the-coronavirus-crisis>

In light of the above I have written to the Commissioner requesting that she restart with her investigations into complaints I have made previous about the DWP responses. I say that that any further failure of the DWP to comply with statutory deadlines and guidance issued by the Commissioner is for the sole purpose of frustrating my requests and is therefore unlawful.

I would be grateful if the Department provided its response without any further delay. Should it fail to do so I will of course ask the Commissioner to intervene.

DWP Response:

Thank you for your Freedom of Information (FOI) request of 19 May and your further request of 10 June for an Internal Review. Your request for an Internal Review is upheld.

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

As a result of this review I can advise that I find the original response was not answered in line with section 10 of the Freedom of Information Act which specifies that a public authority must comply promptly, and no later than 20 working days after the date of receipt of the request.

The DWP does endeavour to respond to FOI requests within 20 working days however, due to the current situation with Covid-19 it has not been possible for us to reply to you in time as available Departmental resources are needed on other high priority areas. Please accept my apologies for this delay.

In response to your request of 19 May:

I can confirm that the information requested is not held.

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