

DWP and your personal information

Why we collect personal information

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) collects information for the purposes of social security (including Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit), child support, vaccine damage, employment and training, the Financial Assistance Scheme, promoting financial planning for retirement, and policy relating to occupational and personal pension schemes. The information we collect about you depends on the reason for your business with us, but we may use the information for any of these purposes. We may also use information about you to carry out research about how effective our services are.

The information we have about you

The information we keep can include:

- forms you have completed and given to us
- claims you have made over the phone
- letters you have sent to us
- details of any checks we make to make sure information we have is right, and
- computer records to do with your business with the Department.

Information we get from or give to other organisations

As well as checking the information provided with any information we already have, we may get information about you from other people and other organisations, as the law allows.

We may also give information to certain other organisations. This can be because:

- the law (including the Data Protection Act) allows us to, or says we have to
- a Court Order says it is necessary, or
- you have given your permission.

The organisations we may give information to, or receive it from, include other government departments and their agencies, in particular Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC); local authorities; banks, building societies and other financial bodies; BBC TV licensing; credit reference agencies; utility providers; educational and academic bodies; the Learning and Skills Council; research organisations; health service providers; law enforcement agencies including the Police and the Serious Organised Crime Agency; the Assets Recovery Agency; and overseas social security organisations.

We give information to, or receive it from, such organisations to:

- check the accuracy of information
- prevent or detect crime
- protect public funds in other ways, and

- use for research or statistical purposes. (We may provide information about you to organisations to enable them to carry out research on our behalf – please see next paragraph. We may also provide other organisations with information to use for their own research purposes, but we will not give them any information which can identify you personally unless we have your express permission to do so.)

We may give information about you to partners or agents legally authorised to carry out any of our functions on our behalf; for example training providers, job brokers and research organisations. We will only give these organisations and individuals the information they need for the functions we have authorised them to carry out, and they cannot use the information for any other purposes.

The Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study

The Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study (WPLS) is a computer database which combines information held by DWP on its customers with records from HMRC. WPLS is used for a range of statistical and research purposes to help DWP to evaluate the effectiveness of its services. It is also used for a limited number of operational purposes.

Further information about the purpose and uses of WPLS, and the safeguards which are in place to protect the information it contains, can be found on our website:

http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/longitudinal_study/ic_longitudinal_study.asp

Data Matching

Data matching is where information held on one computer system is compared electronically with information from one or more other computer systems. DWP may compare the information on its systems in bulk with that on systems used by other organisations, including HMRC; the Home Office (including Immigration and Nationality Directorate, and the Prison Service), the Ministry of Defence (including the Veterans Agency), Local Authorities, the Learning and Skills Council, Royal Mail and credit reference agencies. This helps DWP to improve the accuracy of the information it holds and to reduce benefit fraud and error.

For example, information held on DWP systems about income-related benefits such as Jobseekers Allowance and Income Support can be matched with income-related information held on HMRC systems. Any inconsistencies between the information held on the two organisations' systems may lead to further investigation by either party.

In some cases information is obtained from the other organisation and compared with information held by DWP, but the results are not seen by the other organisation. For example, DWP receives lists of prisoners from The Prison Service, which we match against our records of people who are in receipt of benefits and allowances. This allows us, where appropriate, to stop payments to people in prison, but does not involve giving The Prison Service any benefit information.

More information on data matching, including our Data Matching Code of Practice, is available via the [DWP Information Finder](#).

Sharing information with the Police and other law enforcement agencies

DWP may provide your personal information to police forces and other law enforcement bodies, to assist in the prevention and detection of crime and the apprehension and prosecution of offenders. Information will only be disclosed where it can be shown that not doing so would prejudice these purposes.

Sharing information with Local Authorities

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit are social security benefits that are administered by Local Authorities. The law allows DWP to share information about its customers with Local Authorities for housing benefit or council tax benefit purposes so that they can calculate the correct amount of benefit to pay customers. Local Authority staff with responsibility for administering Housing benefit and Council Tax Benefit have electronic access to the DWP information they need for this purpose. The law also allows DWP to collect information for the purposes of Housing Benefit and Council Tax on behalf of Local Authorities and to pass it to them.

DWP and Local Authorities both work to increase employment and tackle poverty. Many Local Authorities run schemes to help people in their area who are looking for work. DWP will pass the details of customers who tell us that they want to take part in any of these schemes to the appropriate Local Authorities.

Sharing information with the Learning and Skills Council and its providers (England only)

DWP may share information about customers, provided they have given their consent, with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and its providers for employment and training purposes. This helps DWP evaluate the effect that LSC training provision has on its customers and to make accurate training-related payments to eligible customers. **You can find out more information on who we share information with at:**

www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/information-sharing.pdf

Details of other people in the household

Under current legislation, anyone making a claim for an income-related benefit, for example Pension Credit or Jobseeker's Allowance, is required to give information on any children or other adults living with them, as this may affect the amount of benefit that is paid to them. Information about other adults (non-dependants) is required because they are expected to make a financial contribution towards housing costs, depending on their personal circumstances. The law also allows DWP to share information about non-dependants with Local Authorities for Housing Benefit or Council Tax Benefit purposes.

The Data Protection Act 1998

The Data Protection Act (the DPA) sets rules for the way organisations treat personal information about you. It applies to paper and computer records.

The DPA allows you to find out what information is held about you on computer and in some paper records.

How can I find out what information you have about me?

If you want to see the information we have about you, please tell us exactly what information you want to see. This will help us to provide you with a better service. We will send you a copy of the information we have, if any, as soon as possible and at the latest within 40 calendar days.

You must ask for the information in writing and give us information that allows us to be sure of your identity and address.

For example, tell us your:

- full name
- address
- date of birth
- National Insurance (NI) number.

If you have any other reference numbers we use, such as a Child Benefit number, or any other information you think might help us to identify you, please also include this.

Can I see all the information held about me?

Normally you can see all the information we have, but there are some exceptions. These exceptions are mainly to do with:

- the way benefit fraud is detected or prevented
- catching or prosecuting offenders
- assessing or collecting taxes or duty
- making sure our staff are safe.

In some cases your right to see certain health or medical information may be limited. The law requires us to delete or remove any information which, in the opinion of a medical professional, would be likely to cause you serious harm if we disclosed it to you.

Where to send requests for information

If you know which office deals with the information you want, address your request to “the Data Protection Officer” and send it to that office. Otherwise, please address your request to “the Data Protection Officer” and send it to the DWP office nearest to where you live. You can find the address of your nearest office in the phone book or on our website: www.dwp.gov.uk

What should I do if this information is wrong or I wish to complain about how you have handled my information?

You should first contact the office which deals with your case. If you are not satisfied with their response you should then make a complaint. Details about how to complain are available at

<http://www.dwp.gov.uk/contact-us/complaints-and-appeals/>

If after taking this action you are still not satisfied you can make a complaint to the Information Commissioner. Details of their website are in the next section.

Further information

DWP is the Data Controller for the purposes of the Data Protection Act. DWP's registration as a Data Controller is in the Public Register of Data Controllers, which can be found on the Information Commissioner's website: www.ico.gov.uk.

If you want to know more about what information we have about you, or the way we use your information, you can contact any of the Department's offices. You can also ask your local council what information they hold about you.

This leaflet is available in Welsh, in large print, in Braille, on audio tape and on audio CD. For more information, contact the Benefit Enquiry Line. You can phone them on **0800 88 22 00**. There is also a textphone service on **0800 24 33 55** for people with speech and hearing difficulties. You can ring these numbers between 8.30am and 6.30pm Monday to Friday and between 9.00am and 1.00pm on Saturday.

This leaflet is only a general guide and is not a full statement of the law. We have made every effort to make sure that the information in this leaflet is correct at the date shown below.