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Dear Sir

Thank you for your letter of 9 January to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. Government Ministers receive a large volume of correspondence and they are unable to reply personally on every occasion. I have been asked to respond and I apologise for the delay that has occurred.

I would like to begin by thanking you for taking the time to write in. This Department does value all comments and suggestions received from members of the public.

However, as I am sure you will appreciate, the determination of any policy is not a straightforward matter and so officials are constantly evaluating a wide variety of propositions for their effectiveness. Many factors need to be taken into account and possible long-term effects carefully considered before any single measure is implemented.

Turning to the issue of sanctions, these are an important part of a fair and effective welfare system as they encourage claimants to comply with reasonable requirements which in turn help them move into/prepare for work.

Sanctions are used in a minority of cases and only when someone has failed to meet the requirements without good reason. A Decision Maker will take into account all the claimant’s individual circumstances, including any health conditions or disabilities, and any evidence of good cause, before deciding whether a sanction is warranted.

If the claimant disagrees with a decision, they are entitled to ask for the decision to be reconsidered and, if they still not agree with the decision, can subsequently appeal against the decision to an independent tribunal.

If a claimant cannot meet their immediate and most essential needs, including accommodation, heating, food and hygiene, as a result of their sanction, they can apply for hardship payments to help them cover these needs.

I should also explain that there are differences between sanctions policy in Universal Credit and other benefits. For instance, under Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) if a claimant fails to attend a Work Coach meeting, after five days without making contact they would have their claim terminated. Under Universal Credit these claimants are sanctioned, but they continue to receive an award for other elements of Universal Credit that a claimant might be receiving, such as housing, children, or disability, which remain in payment subject to earnings and other essential deductions. Therefore, even though the regime is designed to be more supportive, we would expect the number of claimants sanctioned in Universal Credit to be higher.

I can advise that the Department publishes Official Statistics on JSA, Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Income Support and Universal Credit live service sanction decisions and information on these statistics can be found on the Government website at: [www.gov.uk/government/collections/jobseekers-allowance-sanctions](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/jobseekers-allowance-sanctions). The latest set of Official Statistics at time of request was released on 21 February 2018 and covers sanction decisions made to October 2017.

These statistics cover both:

* total decisions made (that is, if an individual has had multiple sanctions decisions made, all of those sanction decisions made will be included in the tables), and
* individuals who have had a sanction decision made (that is, will only 'count' one individual in a table defined and produced).

Further breakdowns of these statistics can be extracted from Stat-Xplore at:

<https://stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/>. The breakdown options include Jobcentre Plus office, sanction decision outcome and, for ESA sanction decisions only, medical condition broken down by the summary International Classification of Diseases, 10th Revision, published by the World Health Organisation.

Guidance on how to extract the information required from Stat-Xplore can be found at: <https://sw.stat-xplore.dwp.gov.uk/webapi/online-help/Getting-Started.html>

Yours sincerely

H Payne

Ministerial Correspondence Team

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