

Freedom of Information request 1771/2013

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Information request

I would like to know, please, how many Winter Fuel Payments were made for the 2012/13 winter (i.e. the winter just gone). If payments are made for different amounts, please tell me how many payments of each amount were made. Also, please tell me how many payments were made broken down by country of residence of the recipient, and how much was given in Winter Fuel Payments to individuals in each country.

Can you tell me whether (a) it is possible to register as someone not wanting to receive the payment (e.g. because you feel you do not need it), and (b) if so, how many people have registered as such and how much that saved in the last winter? How many people in this last winter returned their payment to you; is there a process for doing this, and, if so, what is it and where is it explained to recipients?

Finally, have you carried out any research into how many people would be willing to forgo the WFP and how much this would save?

DWP response

You have asked about Winter Fuel Payments for 2012/13

The information requested is not available. Claims for Winter Fuel Payments for 2012/13 may be made by 31 March 2013. Claims are still being processed by DWP for winter 2012/13.

It is not therefore possible at this stage to confirm how many claims have been received and the outcome of those claims, as statistics are not collated and published until the end of the yearly cycle. It may be helpful if I explain how the Winter Fuel Payment decision process works.

Decisions on eligibility are taken by processing staff but the notifications and payments are sent out by the Winter Fuel Payment Computer system. Both the decisions and payments are sent out in batches. The majority of the payments (that is all automatic payments and claims received by end of the September qualifying week) are sent out in batches from the end of November to end of December. Claims received after that date until the end

of March will be processed and sent out in batches between January and early June.

Once the last payment batch is complete, statistics on numbers and amounts of payments are collated, quality assured and published. This happens on an annual basis around September, to coincide with the Department's quarterly statistical release. WFP statistics are broken down by country of payment to show payments within the UK and to the EEA. Numbers and amounts of payments to customers living in EEA countries are broken down by relevant country.

The following link provides details of the latest published statistics for previous winters. <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?page=wfp> . We do not expect winter 2012/13 figures to be significantly different to the previous winter

Unwanted Winter Fuel Payments

The majority of Winter Fuel Payments are sent out automatically. However, people may ask not to receive a Winter Fuel Payment. As at winter 2012/13, 170 people had asked not to receive their Winter Fuel Payment. Of these 128 people (some had died) had entitlement and did not receive a payment. These payments combined would have had a value of £21,100, for winter 2012/13.

A further 40 people have asked not to receive a Winter Fuel Payment since the 2012/13 Winter Fuel Payment exercise.

We ask people who want to return their payment to do so by post so that it can be dealt with securely under existing Departmental financial processes and recorded against their Winter Fuel Payment account. We also ask for a covering letter indicating whether or not they wish us to continue to issue payments in future years.

We do not collate and publish data on how many payments are returned each year but we expect the numbers to be low.

We are aware of various campaigns such as the 'surviving winter' campaign, which suggests that older people 'recycle' some or all of their Winter Fuel Payment to help vulnerable people struggling with their energy bills. We have no plans to commission any research in this area.