



Department for

**Social
Development**

www.dsdni.gov.uk

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Our reference: DSD 2016-0082

Dear Mr Donnelly

Date: 09-05-2016

I am writing to advise you that the Department has now completed its search for the information which you requested on 11.4.16.

In response to your questions about the number of Decision Makers employed by the Department for Social Development and their locations; I can advise that there are 51 Decision Makers with responsibility for Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) and 88 Decision Makers who deal with Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). The JSA Decision Makers are based at Andersonstown, Holywood Road, Ballymena, Magherafelt, Foyle, Dungannon, Newry and Armagh Jobs & Benefits offices. ESA Decision Makers are based in James House, Belfast.

I can also advise that there is no specific job description for a Decision Maker; this post is graded as an Executive Officer 2 and the job holder receives specialist training from Decision Making Services and Benefit Training Services as well as desk training. Competencies are agreed individually between the jobholder and their line manager and are taken from the NICS Competency Framework on which the Department's Performance Management process is based.

Decision Makers are required to apply the relevant legislation to the specific circumstances of each individual case. Their judgement must be reasonable and made with unbiased discretion. However, should the resulting decision have the potential to cause hardship the claimant can apply for a hardship payment. Both

Decision Making Services and Benefit Guidance Centre provide guidance to staff to assist in the assessment of hardship applications.

Regarding your request for details of all third party providers who are funded to contribute to the decision making process; I can advise that ATOS Healthcare has responsibility for conducting medical assessments which contribute to the decision making process for ESA. A formal contract exists between ATOS Healthcare and the Department.

If you feel that the information we have provided does not fully meet your request, please contact us at the above address in the first instance. You have the right to request a formal review by the Department within two calendar months of the date of this letter. If you wish to do so, please write to:

The FOI Team, Records Management Branch, Department for Social Development, First Floor, Lighthouse Building, 1 Cromac Place, Gasworks Business Park, Ormeau Rd, Belfast BT7 2JB.

If, after such an internal review you are still dissatisfied with the response, you have the right to appeal to the Information Commissioner at Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 5AF, who will undertake an independent review.

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact me. Please remember to quote the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours faithfully

Helen McCann