

Email to NatCen

Sent Thursday 15 December. Not acknowledged.

To whom it may concern

I wish to make a complaint about repeated unsolicited contact from you regarding the Student Income and Expenditure Study.

I have already complained to my university about this matter. I am still waiting for a response from them.

The first time I heard from NatCen was last week, when you sent three identical emails - one to my personal address, and two to my university address - inviting me to take part in the Student Income and Expenditure survey. I chose not to participate and deleted the emails.

At 3.08pm on Tuesday afternoon, my mobile phone rang. The caller's ID was blocked, so I chose not to answer the call. One minute later at 3.09pm, my phone rang again. Again, the caller's ID was blocked. Concerned as to who may be contacting me twice in quick succession, I answered the call.

Before introducing herself, the caller addressed me as 'Emily'. In this type of situation, 'Miss Lawty' would have been preferable. When I confirmed my identity, the caller identified herself as a researcher from NatCen. She asked if I had received an email regarding the income and expenditure survey. I did not remember the email initially, and told her I either hadn't received it or had deleted it. She told me that the survey was on behalf of the Department for Education (which conflicts with the emails you have sent which claim the survey is on behalf of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills) and asked whether I wanted to "do it on the phone now, or online."

As I was on my way to a lecture at the time I said I would prefer to complete the survey online. In truth I was simply keen to end the call, and had no intention whatsoever of taking part in the survey. The caller asked me to write down a web address and gave me a unique password. She then went on to explain that the survey consisted of two parts. As you know, the first part of the survey consists of a bog-standard series of questions. For the second part of the survey, you are asking students to keep a diary of their income and spending for seven days. On hearing this I told the caller that I was not at all happy to keep a record of my spending for research purposes, and under no circumstances would I be taking part in the survey, especially as I receive no funding whatsoever from any government body. I ended the call.

On returning home that evening I found a letter from NatCen, again inviting me to take part in the survey and offering a £20 Amazon gift voucher for my time. At this point I must stress that I do not live in student accommodation but instead commute to university. The letter was sent to my family home.

I am concerned because:

- The caller did not make it clear that the survey was optional
- The caller/email stated that the survey was on behalf of the Department for Education/ BIS. Other students may feel that participation in the survey is compulsory. The caller certainly gave me this impression.

- Neither the email or phone calls I received from NatCen explicitly stated from where NatCen had gleaned my personal contact details: how is a student to know whether they are disclosing their personal details to an official, recognised body or not (especially when they are cold-called)?

My complaint to my university is chiefly concerned with the release of my personal email address, mobile phone number and home address to NatCen without my express permission.

I would like to complain to NatCen because of the repeated unsolicited contact they have made with me with regards to this survey. Though a freephone number is provided for students "with any questions" I do not understand why students should be expected to call NatCen to opt out of a survey they did not volunteer to take part in.

To resolve my complaint, I would like:

- A full explanation of how NatCen came to receive my contact details from my university, York St John
 - Was it a written request, from whom? Who specifically was the request addressed to?
 - Who from York St John responded to the request?
 - In what format were my personal contact details received by NatCen? An electronic file, or paper? Was it emailed, mailed or sent by memory stick? If it was sent electronically, was the data encrypted?
 - Was there any question of student consent or of opting in or out of the survey?
- An explanation of why NatCen felt it appropriate to send numerous emails to me, when one would have sufficed
- An explanation of why NatCen felt it appropriate to write to me at my home address when I did not respond to their email
- An explanation of why NatCen felt it appropriate to telephone me when I did not respond to their email or their letter
- An apology from NatCen for calling my mobile phone number twice in as many minutes, leading me to believe that there was some sort of emergency
- An explanation of why NatCen's telephone number is 'blocked' (if you are so happy to use my personal contact details so enthusiastically, I believe I should have access to yours, too)
- An apology from NatCen for contacting me through my personal email address, which is not connected to the university in any way, without my consent
- An apology from NatCen for contacting me through my personal mobile phone number, which is not connected to the university in any way, without my consent
- An apology from NatCen for contacting me at my home address, which is not connected to the university in any way, without my consent
- An assurance from NatCen that my data will be removed from whatever database, manual or electronic, on which it is currently held
- An assurance from NatCen that I will not be contacted regarding this or any future surveys

As you are so fond of sharing information with my university I have included a copy of my complaint to them below for your information.

Please could you tell me:

- Who will be dealing with and/or responding to my complaint
- When I can expect to receive a response to my complaint

I am currently considering taking this matter to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and would be grateful if you could respond as quickly as possible.

You may contact me by email only, to [university email address]. I would greatly prefer it if you addressed me as 'Miss Lawty' and not by my first name as you have in your letter, emails and telephone calls.

Regards

Miss Emily Lawty