



Work and Pensions Committee

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From the Chair

Rt Hon Dr Thérèse Coffey
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

23 September 2021

Dear Thérèse,

Publication of NatCen research on health and disability benefits

Thank you for your letter of 21 September, which responded to my letter of 23 August.

On 6 September, I tabled a written question which asked on what date your Department received the final report of the NatCen research project entitled *The Uses of Health and Disability Benefits*. The answer to my question did not give a date.

- 1. When did the Department receive NatCen’s final version of the research report?**
 - a. Why was this date not provided in answer to my written question?**
- 2. Will you share a copy of the report with the select committee? If not, on what grounds?**

The “Bid Pack” sent to potential suppliers of the research seeks bids for “the undertaking of qualitative research examining the experiences, spending decisions and spending behaviours of health and disability claimants to understand how their needs are met.”

The pack is clear that required outputs would include “A final report of the research findings for publication” and “a one-page summary of the research for the DWP website”.

- 3. At what point in the project did you decide that the final report should not be published? Was it before, or after, you saw the outputs of the research?**
- 4. Why did you decide to take a different approach from that envisaged when the project was commissioned?**
- 5. The research involved interviews with 120 disabled people, who would have been told that the report to which they had contributed would be published. Have you sought to communicate your decision to the research participants in any way?**

The then Minister for Disabled People told us in evidence on 15 September that the report would be “more relevant to the extra costs taskforce” announced in the National Disability Strategy than it is to the Green Paper. That taskforce is expected to report in summer 2022.

- 6. Why is research about the experiences of people claiming health and disability benefits not relevant to a Green Paper which, in the Government’s own words, “explores how the welfare system can better meet the needs of disabled people and people with health conditions now and in the future”?**
 - a. The Green Paper says that it “has been informed by the experiences of disabled people and people with health conditions who use our services.” Did this research play any part in the development of the Green Paper?**
- 7. At what point did the Department decide that the research was more relevant to the work of the Extra Costs Taskforce than to the Green Paper?**
- 8. Do you have any plans to publish the research when the Extra Costs Taskforce reports?**

The Government itself has a [protocol for the publication of social research](#). The work conducted by NatCen seems, on the face of it, to fall very clearly within the scope of that protocol, which includes “systematic data collection exercises using scientific methods, whether qualitative or quantitative, designed to generate robust information on an issue, policy or group of the population.”

The protocol sets out five principles:

Principle 1. The products of government social research and analysis will be made publicly available.

Principle 2. There will be prompt release of all government social research and analysis.

Principle 3. Government social research and analysis must be released in a way that promotes public trust.

Principle 4. Clear communication plans should be developed for all social research and analysis produced by government

Principle 5. Responsibility for the release of social research and analysis produced by government must be clear.

The protocol also says that:

“The Permanent Secretary should appoint a named person who has both the authority and expertise to make judgements about whether an output falls within the scope of the protocol and who is responsible for ensuring the protocol is adhered to.”

- 9. Was a named person appointed in relation to the NatCen research, and what decision did they reach about whether the research output fell within the scope of this protocol?**

10. Do you yourself consider that the research is within the scope of the protocol? If not, on what grounds?

Your letter says that:

“The Government considers a broad range of analysis and evidence to support the formation of all its policy, including that which is both internally and externally commissioned. It is not necessary to publish all of this material, and the Government does not have plans to publish the NatCen report at this time.”

James Wolfe, Director, Disability and Housing Support, told us on 15 September that the Department published commissioned research “if it is relevant to what we are working on at that particular point. It is not essential that it is published.”

Insofar as it relates to commissioned social research, the Department’s position does not appear to be consistent with the Government’s own protocol. The protocol is clear that “the presumption is that products from government social research will be made publicly available.” It provides for only very limited exceptions from this, described as “rare occasions when publication would threaten national security, destabilise the economy, or would otherwise not be in the public interest.”

11. Can you explain to us why DWP’s position on the publication of commissioned research is different from the Government’s own protocol?

I am copying this letter to the Permanent Secretary and to Jenny Dibden, in her capacity as Head of the Government Social Research profession.

I would be grateful for a reply by **Monday 11 October**.

Yours sincerely,



Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP
Chair, Work and Pensions Committee

Cc: Peter Schofield, Permanent Secretary, DWP
Jenny Dibden, Head of GSR