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Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP
Chair
Work and Pensions Select Committee
House of Commons
London
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25 October 2021

Dear Stephen,

Thank you for your warm wishes and I look forward to working with you and the whole Committee going forward. Please see below the responses to the questions raised in your letter of 4 October 2021. I will answer questions 2 to 4 together.

Health Model Offices

1) Where are the 11 health model offices situated?

a) How will success be measured, and when would you expect to start rolling out successful approaches more widely?

The 11 Health Model Offices (HMO's) are situated as follows: Aberdare, Croydon, Fraserburgh, Gosport, Grantham, Leeds Eastgate, Paisley, Slough, Stourbridge, Sunderland, Wigan.

The HMO group of initiatives are being evaluated using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research. The evaluation will establish the initiatives that improve employment support and employment outcomes and identify the improvements that will be rolled out nationally.

Mandatory vs voluntary arrangements

2) For how many disabled people have work coaches opted for voluntary arrangements over mandatory arrangements?

a) How many people who would be eligible for the new approach are still subject to mandatory arrangements?

We do not collect data which identifies how many claimants are in receipt of voluntary as opposed to mandatory commitments.

Tailoring Up is applied to everyone on the health journey providing medical evidence before their WCA, and for those found to have Limited Capability to Work following their WCA, on both New Style ESA and Universal Credit.

Tailoring Up is a new way to deliver our existing conditionality policy for people with health conditions. The approach focuses on what a claimant can do, rather than what they can't, and commitments are built up and tailored to the individual's situation. Tailoring Up encourages a voluntary first approach to allow a claimant to test out employment support activities without risk of a sanction while they are still building their knowledge and understanding of the impacts of their health condition.

The Tailoring Up approach does not remove the option to apply mandatory conditionality. The approach is tailored to each individual dependent on their personal circumstances. Many people will have a blend of commitments, some voluntary and some mandatory, and we retain the mandatory requirement for claimants to attend any interviews set.

All commitments are agreed in advance with the claimant and Tailoring Up reduces the likelihood of any sanction referrals by applying a voluntary first approach where applicable. However, claimants may still be set mandatory commitments if the work coach feels it is appropriate; and should the claimants fail to comply without a good cause, they could be subject to a sanction.

Should someone fail to meet a mandatory activity they are given an opportunity to explain why they failed to meet their agreed conditionality. A Decision Maker will take into account the claimant's circumstances and reasons for the failure when deciding whether a sanction should be applied.

3) What proportion of people eligible for the new approach who could have been subject to sanctions are instead under voluntary arrangements?

a) What are the proportions and numbers for each of the three groups of claimants eligible for the new approach—that is, people claiming ESA in the WRAG, people claiming UC who have been found to have LCW, and people waiting for a WCA?

Answered in response to question 2.

4) By how much has the number of people subject to mandatory arrangements reduced since work coaches could apply voluntary arrangements?

a) What were the numbers of people in groups eligible for the new approach under mandatory arrangements before September 2019, compared with today?

Answered in response to question 2.

Engagement with disabled people

5) Does the Department plan to introduce a protocol for engagement, as recommended by SSAC?

a) Does the Department intend to respond formally to SSAC's report? If so, when?

We intend to respond formally to the report's recommendations shortly.

Disability Confident Scheme

6) When will the review of Levels 2 and 3 of the Disability Confident Scheme be concluded?

a) Are you planning to publish the review?

b) Who is carrying out the review? For example, is it internal, or have you commissioned external reviewers?

c) How are you engaging with disabled people on this review?

The review of the Disability Confident Scheme has commenced, and it is due to be concluded by the end of the financial year. Following the review, we will publish updated guidance, resources and employer packs on Gov.uk.

The review is being overseen by the DWP Disability Confident Policy and Analysis Team, who are seeking the views, experiences and comments through an initial questionnaire and a series of workshops and feedback sessions, which have included representation from members of the Disability Confident scheme, Business Leaders Group, the Professional Advisers Group, Disability Charities and representative organisations, Disabled People's User Led Organisations and disabled people. The review has also considered the previous recommendations of the WPSC and Centre for Social Justice report 'Now is the Time'.

Employment Support Allowance backlog

7) How many claimants are still waiting for an assessment to be booked?

a) How many people have had an appointment booked but not yet had their assessment?

b) What is the latest date for which an appointment has been booked?

c) By when do you expect all of the outstanding assessments to have been completed?

All but 27 of the claimants that were unable to be assessed remotely have now been assessed. These 27 claimants had an appointment booked but their initial assessment did not go ahead for a variety of reasons. One claimant is yet to be provided with an appointment for an initial assessment.

Nine of the claimants whose initial appointment did not go ahead have had their appointments re-scheduled with assessments due to take place by the 29 October 2021. The delay with the remaining cases is largely attributable to difficulties in matching customer availability with the appropriate Assessment Provider Health Care Professional resource required for the specific case and the availability of interpreters for some less common languages. In a very small number of cases where claimants

are unable to be assessed at assessment centres the availability of suitable assessment locations has caused delay. We are prioritising solutions for these cases as a matter of urgency.

In addition to the claimants that were unable to be assessed remotely, there are claimants for whom a second telephone assessment is required and we are providing them with this.

Supported Employment Trailblazer

8) What outcomes do you expect to see as a result of the Supported Employment Trailblazer?

a) How will success be measured, and the scheme be evaluated?

We will be exploring how we can work with Local Authorities to improve the employment outcomes for people with autism and or learning difficulties through the use of a standardised model for Local Supported Employment. If successful, it could provide a template for rolling out the approach more widely.

We are developing an evaluation strategy that will allow us to understand the enablers for successful delivery of Locally Supported Employment and to understand the outcomes associated with the provision.

Access to Work

9) Why have the number of people supported by Access to Work, and the number of applications approved for Access to Work, fallen in 2020/21?

a) What do you expect will happen to these numbers in 2021/22?

b) What is the average wait for a decision in 2020/21, and how does this compare to previous years?

The number of people who had an approval or received a payment decreased for most Access to Work elements in the past year. Travel to Work was the element with the greatest decrease in the number of people who had an approval or received a payment, decreasing by 2,530 and 2,380 respectively.

This decrease is likely due to the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on the UK labour market, with the introduction of lockdowns and travel restrictions in the past year leading to an increase in the number of people working from home, shielding, self-isolating or on furlough.

We also saw an initial rise in job losses and unemployment levels as a result of the disruption to the labour market.

While there was an overall drop in demand for Access to Work during 2020/21, a number of adjustments and enhancements were made to support those who still needed help or needed help to work in a different way. For example:

- Accepting e mail claim forms from customers who request this as a reasonable adjustment;

- Accepting employer and support worker signatures via email;
- Extending Support Worker awards that are coming to an end by 6 months (this measure is no longer in operation);
- Extending the timeframe customers have to submit payment claim forms to 9 months;
- Adapting the way our assessments are undertaken to support customers who don't know what support they need and/or where coping strategies are required as part of the Mental Health Support Service;
- Flexing support and supporting the moving of special aids and equipment from the workplace to home, and providing new equipment for employees working from home where necessary;
- Prioritising new applications from key workers (the key worker prioritisation is no longer in operation) and those with jobs starting within the next 4 weeks.

The majority of these measures are still live, making it easier for disabled people to move into and retain employment.

Recognising the challenges Covid-19 has presented for disabled people and to enable disabled people to return to and move into employment, we developed a new, more flexible Access to Work offer, "the Blended Offer". The Blended Offer complements support provided by employers and contains a mix of support that can be adapted to meet the needs of hybrid working arrangements. The offer includes:

- support to work from more than one location;
- a package of home working support which can be blended with workplace support; and
- mental health wellbeing support for people returning to work after a period of furlough or shielding.

Analysis of the Access to Work Management Information data for 2020/21 showed that across most elements there had been a drop in the number of people who had an approval or received a payment during the first lockdown (April-May 2020) but numbers began to recover afterwards.

Access to Work average approval times do not form part of the official statistical data and are not published. But from the management information collected by Access to Work the average approval times for 2019/20 and 2020/21 were as follows:

- 2019/20= 25.5 days
- 2020/21 = 28.4 days

Average approval times for applications to Access to Work saw a slight increase in 2020/21; rising by just under 3 days when compared to the previous year. This was largely due to the impacts of the pandemic on staffing resource in the first half of the year.

Yours ever,





Work and Pensions Committee

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Chloe Smith
Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work
Department for Work and Pensions

From the Chair

4 October 2021

Dear Chloe

Follow up to the oral evidence session on the Work of the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work on 15 September 2021

Many congratulations on your appointment as minister for Disabled People, Health and Work. On behalf of the whole Committee, I would like to welcome you to your new role.

The Committee has asked me to write to you following up on oral evidence from your predecessor Justin Tomlinson MP, Hannah Rignell and James Wolfe on 15 September. Mr Tomlinson planned to write to the Committee on the following questions set out below. I would be very grateful for your answer to these questions.

Health Model Offices

The Committee heard from James Wolfe that there are 11 health model offices across the country in which the Department is “testing new approaches for people with certain health conditions and disabilities” and that the measures that are developed in those offices will get rolled out across the JCP network, if they are successful.

1) Where are the 11 health model offices situated?

- a) How will success be measured, and when would you expect to start rolling out successful approaches more widely?**

Mandatory vs voluntary arrangements

The Green Paper acknowledged that people are ‘nervous’ about engaging with employment support because of the risk of sanctions. It explained that the Department has introduced a new approach which allows work coaches to use their discretion in deciding whether disabled claimants and people with health conditions should be subject to mandatory arrangements (conditionality) or to opt for voluntary arrangements.

We asked the Minister how many people had had voluntary, rather than mandatory, requirements applied under this new approach. He was, however, unable to provide that data at the time.

2) For how many disabled people have work coaches opted for voluntary arrangements over mandatory arrangements?

a) How many people who would be eligible for the new approach are still subject to mandatory arrangements?

3) What proportion of people eligible for the new approach who could have been subject to sanctions are instead under voluntary arrangements?

a) What are the proportions and numbers for each of the three groups of claimants eligible for the new approach—that is, people claiming ESA in the WRAG, people claiming UC who have been found to have LCW, and people waiting for a WCA?

4) By how much has the number of people subject to mandatory arrangements reduced since work coaches could apply voluntary arrangements?

a) What were the numbers of people in groups eligible for the new approach under mandatory arrangements before September 2019, compared with today?

Engagement with disabled people

We asked the Minister about the Department's engagement with disabled people in making policies that affect them, including whether the Department intends to adopt SSAC's recommendation of co-designing with disabled people a protocol for engagement.

He told us that SSAC had produced a "very good and fair report" but did not answer the specific question on the protocol.

5) Does the Department plan to introduce a protocol for engagement, as recommended by SSAC?

a) Does the Department intend to respond formally to SSAC's report? If so, when?

Disability Confident Scheme

The National Disability Strategy says that the Government will be reviewing the Disability Confident scheme, and that this review will look particularly at strengthening levels 2 and 3 of the scheme to ensure that they remain up-to-date, credible and sufficiently challenging and at exploring ways of encouraging employers to progress through the scheme.

We asked the Minister when this review would be completed and its results published. He told us:

I do not know. I do not think we have set that date. Let me have a think and write to you with what our plans are on Disability Confident.

6) When will the review of Levels 2 and 3 of the Disability Confident Scheme be concluded?

- a) Are you planning to publish the review?**
- b) Who is carrying out the review? For example, is it internal, or have you commissioned external reviewers?**
- c) How are you engaging with disabled people on this review?**

Employment Support Allowance backlog

In July this year, the Secretary of State told us that “On ESA claims, we do have a backlog. I think there are about 15,000. We are estimating to get through the backlog by September 2021.”

The Minister told us that the backlog was related to cases that were unable to be assessed remotely. James Wolfe told us that “more than 99% of those people have now had an assessment booked and we are looking to book the last ones this month.”

7) How many claimants are still waiting for an assessment to be booked?

- a) How many people have had an appointment booked but not yet had their assessment?**
- b) What is the latest date for which an appointment has been booked?**
- c) By when do you expect all of the outstanding assessments to have been completed?**

Supported Employment Trailblazer

The Disability Strategy says that the Department will fund a supported employment trailblazer with local authorities, beginning this year. The Minister told us that its aim is to increase support for disabled people, particularly those with autism and learning difficulties, to gain meaningful employment.

8) What outcomes do you expect to see as a result of the Supported Employment Trailblazer?

- a) How will success be measured, and the scheme be evaluated?**

Access to Work

We also discussed Access to Work. Since the evidence session, the Department has published new data on Access to Work. This showed that the number of applications approved had fallen from 38,720 in 2019/20 to 35,990 in 2020/21, and that the number of people in receipt of support had fallen from 43,390 in 2019/20 to 37,170 in 2020/21.

- 9) Why have the number of people supported by Access to Work, and the number of applications approved for Access to Work, fallen in 2020/21?**
- a. What do you expect will happen to these numbers in 2021/22?**
 - b. What is the average wait for a decision in 2020/21, and how does this compare to previous years?**

We would be grateful for a reply by **Monday 18 October**.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephen Timms". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line above the name.

Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP
Chair