



Department for
Work & Pensions

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

Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9DA

Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP
Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee

19 November 2021

Dear Stephen,

Thank you for your further correspondence dated 8th November on the publication of research on health and disability benefits.

I do not intend to share this research with the Committee under “reading room” conditions. As you suggest, this would be an atypical arrangement, and as set out in my previous response, it is important to protect the private space within which Ministers and their policy advisers can develop policies.

Yours sincerely,



Work and Pensions Committee

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

Tel 020 7219 8976 Email workpencom@parliament.uk

Rt Hon Dr Thérèse Coffey MP

Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

8 November 2021

Dear Thérèse

Thank you for your reply to my letter about the publication of research on disability benefits and the Department's interpretation of the Government's Social Research protocol.

In your letter, and in previous responses, you have said that the Department takes account of a wide range of research and data when considering its policy decisions, and that a private space for discussion of policy options is essential. I agree. While the GSR protocol suggests that this report should be published, I am also aware that there are exceptions to the protocol that may mean the Department feels it is not advisable to publish the report.

It would be helpful, given this, to get a better understanding of the basis of your decision not to publish the research findings. Select committees have, on occasion, been permitted to view sensitive or confidential material on a "reading room" basis, where members are provided with access to a hard copy that they cannot take away with them. I should note that this Committee has never breached confidentiality when the Department and its public bodies have shared material with us in the past.

Would you be prepared to give the Committee sight of the report under "reading room" conditions?

I would be grateful for a reply by **Wednesday 17 November**.

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP

Chair, Work and Pensions Committee

Rt. Hon Stephen Timms MP
Chair, Work and Pensions Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

16 November 2021

Dear Mr Timms,

Thank you for your letter dated 8 November 2021.

In response to your questions, please find below our response:

1. Whether publication or other dissemination plans were discussed in the interview schedules or consent forms for this research, and what participants were told otherwise about how their contribution would be used?

The interview schedule for this research explained that the findings would be written into a report. Publication or other dissemination plans were not discussed in the interview schedule or when seeking consent. In the advance letters sent out to inform potential participants of this upcoming research, an accompanying leaflet included a signpost to the website where the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) publishes its research findings. In this leaflet, potential participants were advised that the DWP wanted to know ways it can better support people on health and disability benefits.

2. Whether DWP or NatCen has taken any steps since the research was completed to help ensure participants are kept up to date on progress?

On completion of the research, a thank you letter, reviewed by DWP, was sent from NatCen to participants, as part of our normal process. It provided a gift voucher in recognition of their contribution. Within this letter it stated that the study would be published by DWP on their website.

Yours sincerely,



Guy Goodwin
Chief Executive



Work and Pensions Committee

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA
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Guy Goodwin
Chief Executive
NatCen
35 Northampton Square
EC1V 0AX

8 November 2021

Dear Guy,

You might be aware that the Work and Pensions Committee has been corresponding with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions about the publication of NatCen research, commissioned by DWP, on the uses of disability benefits. We understand that DWP officials received NatCen's final report on this topic on 16 September 2020. DWP has not published the findings, however, and the Secretary of State has told us that there is no plan to publish in future.¹

Given our ongoing interest in how the Department engages disabled people in policymaking, we wanted to understand how the Department had sought to communicate its decision not to publish to people who took part in the research. It is my understanding that the participants would have been informed about publication and dissemination plans before agreeing to take part in the research. We asked the Secretary of State what steps had been taken to ensure people who had participated in the research were kept informed of how their contribution were being used. The Secretary of State told us that "there was no mention of publication in the interview schedules used with the participants of this research", implying that no such steps were taken.

I would be grateful if you would please tell us:

- 1. Whether publication or other dissemination plans were discussed in the interview schedules or consent forms for this research, and what participants were told otherwise about how their contribution would be used; and**
- 2. Whether DWP or NatCen has taken any steps since the research was completed to help ensure participants are kept up to date on progress?**

I would appreciate a response by Wednesday 17 November so that we can continue with our inquiries.

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP

Chair, Work and Pensions Committee

¹ The full series of letters is available at:
<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/7438/documents/77752/default/>



Department for
Work & Pensions

Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP
Secretary of State for Work and
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Caxton House
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Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP
Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee

25 October 2021

Dear Stephen,

Thank you for your further correspondence dated 28th September on the publication of research on health and disability benefits. In your letter, you raised a number of specific questions which I have answered below.

I have reflected on the decision not to publish the research undertaken by NatCen at present and I remain of the view that this is the right approach. My Department is currently considering a range of policy options, drawing on wide evidence, research and analysis, and protecting a private space for policy development is important.

I will now turn to your specific questions in turn.

Q1. DWP officials received the report on 16 September 2020. I don't know why the previous Minister did not provide the date.

Q2. Will you share a copy of the report with the select committee? If not, on what grounds?

As I have previously confirmed, I have no intention to publish this research at present. It is important to protect the private space within which Ministers and their policy advisers can develop policies without the risk of premature disclosure.

Q3. 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?

Publication decisions are always taken upon completion of research.

Q4. Why did you decide to take a different approach from that envisaged when the project was commissioned?

Publication decisions are always taken upon completion of research.

Q5. 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?

There was no mention of publication in the interview schedules used with the participants of this research.

Q6. 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"? 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?

The DWP Green Paper reflects a wide range of issues that were shaped by engagement with disabled people, representative organisations and charities, with relevant research and analysis playing a role in supporting the content which was presented.

Q7. 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?

I am aware that the former Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work understood there to be a link between this research and the work of the Extra Costs Taskforce. I am not aware that this is the case.

Q8. Do you have any plans to publish the research when the Extra Costs Taskforce reports?

No.

Q9. 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?

The Chief Social Researcher and Head of Profession at DWP is the appointed person in relation to this. Their view is that this research met the quality threshold for publication and so does fall within the scope of the GSR protocol.

Q10. Do you yourself consider that the research is within the scope of the protocol? If not, on what grounds?

I have not considered this matter though I received advice which I accept.

Q11. Can you explain to us why DWP's position on the publication of commissioned research is different from the Government's own protocol?

It is important that Ministers consider research and its publication on a case by case basis and in the best interests of Government policy formation.

Yours sincerely,





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



Department
for Work &
Pensions

THE RT HON THERESE COFFEY MP
Secretary of State for Work &
Pensions

Caxton House
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Stephen Timms
Chair, Work and Pensions Committee
House of Commons
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21 September 2021

Dear Stephen,

I write in response to your letter regarding the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) report which was commissioned by the previous Secretary of State.

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.

Yours sincerely,



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From the Chair

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

23 August 2021

Dear Thérèse,

I have been made aware of a research project led by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) called The Uses of Health and Disability Benefits, which interviewed benefit recipients about their experiences of receiving PIP, ESA and Universal Credit.

As I understand it, the Department received the final report of this research last year, but it has not been published and there appear to be no plans to do so. There is no reference to the research findings in the Green Paper entitled *Shaping future support*, which was published on 20 July.

Please could you explain:

- a) why this report has not been published and whether you plan to publish it at any point; and
- b) what use the Department made of the research findings in preparing the Green Paper and the National Disability Strategy.

Please could you also send us a copy of the report?

I would be grateful for a response by **Friday 3 September**.

Yours sincerely,

Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP
Chair, Work and Pensions Committee