



Work and Pensions Committee

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

Tel 020 7219 8976 Email workpencom@parliament.uk

Peter Schofield
Permanent Secretary
Department for Work and Pensions

6 December 2021

Dear Peter,

Thank you for giving evidence to the Committee on 24 November. I would be grateful if you could also pass on my thanks, on behalf of the whole Committee, to Neil Couling and Tara Smith.

You undertook to write to the Committee with further information on a number of points.

Tax credit debt

We asked about the proportion of tax credit debt transferred to DWP that relates to years prior to the latest tax year. You said you would investigate what information the Department holds.¹

- 1. What information does the Department hold about the proportion of tax credit debt transferred to DWP that is older than the latest tax year?**

State pension overpayments—tracing next of kin

We asked you about the process by which the Department traces someone's next of kin if they have died before the Department has repaid a state pension underpayment.²

The NAO's report on underpayments noted that the Department's estimates of the amount of underpayments it will need to repay "excludes over 15,000 pensioners where the Department underpaid the pensioner but it does not believe it will be able to trace or pay the pensioner or their next of kin." It recommended that:

"develops a process by which the beneficiary or executors of estates can find out if the LEAP exercise has identified they are due a payment of arrears, to help tackle cases where the Department cannot trace the next of kin of deceased pensioners affected."

- 2. Please could you set out for us in detail the steps the Department takes to trace someone's next of kin in these circumstances?**
 - a. In particular, have you developed the process recommended by the NAO for beneficiaries or executors of estates, and if so what is it?**

Sanctions

You undertook to provide data about the proportion of people who are sanctioned who have limited capability for work.³

¹ Q 30

² Q 56

³ Q 62



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3. What proportion of people sanctioned in each month since June 2021 have been people found by the Department to have limited capability for work?

The Department is using a new approach to conditionality for disabled people, known as “Tailoring Up”, in which Work Coaches are encouraged to apply voluntary conditions to peoples’ claims. The Green Paper published in June said that this approach has been rolled out “nationally subject to ongoing evaluation”. However, the Minister for Disabled People has told us in correspondence that the Department does not know how many disabled claimants are in receipt of voluntary, as opposed to mandatory, commitments.

4. How can you robustly evaluate the impact of the policy without this information?

a. What form is the “ongoing evaluation” of the approach going to take, and will it be publicly available?

b. What did you learn from the Enhanced Support Offer programme that finished in March 2021? Did that inform this approach?

c. The Green Paper says that you started testing this approach in 2019. How did you assure yourself that it was working well before rolling out nationally?

EEA nationals

We asked you about the letters that were wrongly sent to EU and EEA citizens which suggested that they might lose their entitlement to benefits. You undertook to investigate how many such letters had been wrongly sent.

5. Have you been able to establish how many letters were incorrectly sent to EEA nationals?

a. If it has not been possible to establish the exact number, do you have any assessment of the scale of the problem?

b. What steps have been taken to prevent a recurrence?

Health Transformation Programme

We asked you about spending to date on the Health Transformation Programme. You said:

“it is probably premature for me to give a number out because I think this is all covered in the regular publication on the Government’s major projects portfolio, so I think there is due to be a publication on that before too long.”⁴

The annual report of the Infrastructure and Projects Authority on Major Projects was published on 15 July 2021. It does not contain any details of spending on the HTP.

6. When do you expect information about spending on the Health Transformation Programme to be published, and in what form?

Safeguarding

⁴ Q103



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You had the following exchange with Steve McCabe about the information the Department holds about the number of times the Department communicates with other agencies in order to protect a vulnerable person:

Steve McCabe: I am not trying to be difficult but that is why I asked you how it works. If it is business as usual, it could be a casual conversation that may or may not have happened or may not have been spotted. If it is part of a process then there is some way of knowing that there is a process.

Peter Schofield: It would always be clear in our notes and records of conversations that would have been had. It is just: could I then extrapolate that into some sort of national metric, which would answer your question about numbers? I would struggle with that. It may be that we could have a conversation about the process and some examples. I would need to think about that.

Steve McCabe: As I say, I am curious because it is the sort of thing that MPs pick up in their casework with a fair amount of regularity.

Peter Schofield: I want you to feel that you can connect into that as well, so we can link with your experience.⁵

7. **Can you now give us more detail about that process and the information that the Department holds?**
8. **You mentioned the creation of “advanced customer support leads”.⁶ Are those the same roles that you described as Safeguarding Leads in the Secretary of State’s letter to us of 29 September 2020, or are they different roles?**

Workforce—disability discrimination

You told us that Valerie Hughes-D’Aeth was leading a review, supported by Acas, which would report in December.⁷

9. **When you receive the report of that review, will you share a copy of it with the Committee?**

I would be grateful for a reply by Tuesday 4 January.

Yours sincerely,

⁵ Qq 88-89

⁶ Q 85

⁷ Q 95



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Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP

Chair, Work and Pensions Committee