

Mo Stewart

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Date: 5th March 2018

<http://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/library/author/stewart.mo>
https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Mo_Stewart/publications

The Rt Hon Sir Ernest Ryder
Senior President of Tribunals
Royal Courts of Justice
Strand
London
WC2A 2LL

Personal attention

Re: Preventable harm knowingly created by social policy reforms

Please excuse this unsolicited contact by an independent disability studies researcher regarding the ongoing impact of social policy reforms, which are negatively impacting on the survival, the wellbeing and the quality of life of many of the most vulnerable people in the United Kingdom (UK).

I am writing to you in my capacity as a former healthcare professional, as well as the lead researcher in the UK regarding the American corporate influence with UK social policies since 1992. Your welcome reported comments, when speaking at the Bar Council last November, have been cited and quoted in the enclosed very detailed reply to Mr John Herron, the Ministerial Correspondence Team Leader for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP); and I should advise that the letter content is more robust than is typical for business letters.

I believe the DWP letter content is self-explanatory. It may alert you to the relentless human consequences created by recent social policy reforms that are negatively impacting on the survival of many chronically ill and disabled people who are dependent upon welfare funding. This includes the fact that access to justice is being eroded, as so few are now able to access Tribunals since the removal of legal aid and other vital community support.

I have in the past corresponded with members of the judiciary, regarding the disturbing negative impact and often fatal human consequences of the ongoing reforms. Whilst being unable to comment in detail about my research evidence for professional reasons, nevertheless my contact has been welcomed as has access to my book '*Cash Not Care: the planned demolition of the UK welfare state*', as published in September 2016 following several years of independent research. Please advise if you would like access to the book, which identifies why UK social policies were altered, when influenced by corporate America, and how the fatally flawed Work Capability Assessment was always destined to create death, despair and preventable harm with one NHS report advising that 50 per cent of claimants of the Employment and Support Allowance had attempted suicide in one year.

Access to some of my years of research is available online, via the websites identified in the letter heading. The research is written for an on behalf of the chronically sick and disabled community and,

therefore, is not restricted by the usual limitations of academic writing, which makes the research accessible by a much wider audience.

With reference to your keynote address to the Annual Bar and Young Bar Conference 2016, I confess I am concerned that your stated ambition to strengthen the rule of law may exclude some of the most vulnerable from accessing the law, who are invariably the poorest and in greatest need. The planned online access to judicial proceedings is no doubt seen as the future, whilst overlooking the fact that as of June 2016 there were still an estimated 12.6 million adults in the UK with no digital skills at all, with access to public support being drastically reduced by government cuts.

This links into the government advising that anyone who wished to vote in the last general election were required to register online. It was presumed that those who had no computer skills could attend a local library, placing an undue burden on libraries that were still available whilst overlooking the number of public libraries that have closed in recent years. The numbers of people inviting assistance had, as always, been underestimated whilst many failed to register and so lost their right to vote, as access to voting was denied to them with the enforced online registration.

“In the tribunals, the jurisdiction which I lead, we have a ground breaking project to create end to end on-line hearings for benefits appeals where we will replace case management hearings with continuous messaging and determinations, with an appropriate mix of online questioning and virtual hearings. The process of on-line dispute resolution will become the norm for much of the less complex work in civil, family and tribunals jurisdictions.” [Annual Bar and Young Bar Conference 2016.]

Whilst your address to the 2016 Conference acknowledged the need to be aware of those who may be the most vulnerable, and so are perhaps unable to engage with these “*virtual hearings*”, nevertheless, the worry is that there will be another underestimation of the numbers involved who need access to justice, but who have been prevented access as they are without the skills needed or the ability to seek help.

Thank you very much for your time.

Yours, most sincerely

Mo Stewart

Disability studies researcher

Author of *‘Cash Not Care: the planned demolition of the UK welfare state’*. New Generation Publishing 2016

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Enclosure:

- Reply to the DWP Ministerial Correspondence Team Leader
- Academic book review: *Cash Not Care: the planned demolition of the UK welfare state*.