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[Mo Stewart Research | Cash Not Care](#)

Will Quince MP
Minister of State
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street, London SW1H 0EU

Private and Confidential

By email

Dear Minister

Re: The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms
Justice, Power and Resistance ¹

I am writing in my capacity as the research lead for the Preventable Harm Project,² that I led for ten years (2009-2019), to alert the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to an identified public health crisis which is directly linked to social policy reforms and austerity measures introduced since 2010.

As a former healthcare professional, it is cause for serious concern to identify the '*institutional violence*'³ adopted within the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), which reflects a culture of '*disability denial*'⁴ in their attitude towards disability benefit claimants who are unfit to work. This culture was adopted following the introduction of austerity measures, and was engineered to limit access to benefit, with the increased use of punitive sanctions together with extremes of social policy reforms which guaranteed that many of those in greatest need were destined to suffer when unfit to work.^{5,6} Thousands would perish.⁷

History

It was the Blair administration who argued that access to disability benefit should be made as difficult as possible to access, and he commissioned research to justify social policy reforms. It was the Brown administration that adopted the fatally flawed Work Capability Assessment

¹ [The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms in: Justice, Power and Resistance - Ahead of print \(bristoluniversitypressdigital.com\)](#)

² [Mo Stewart Research | Cash Not Care](#)

³ [Violent bureaucracy: A critical analysis of the British public employment service \(mostewartresearch.co.uk\)](#)

⁴ [The Work Capability Assessment is the adoption of disability denial – BJGP Life](#)

⁵ ['First, do no harm': are disability assessments associated with adverse trends in mental health? A longitudinal ecological study | Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health \(bmj.com\)](#)

⁶ [Psychological tyranny prescribed by the DWP: preventable harm is government policy | British Journal of General Practice \(bjgp.org\)](#)

⁷ [The Department for Work and Pensions: Deaths, cover-up, and a toxic 30-year legacy – Disability News Service](#)

(WCA) in 2008 to guarantee this political ambition would be introduced to limit access to the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) long-term disability benefit, which replaced Incapacity Benefit. The commissioned research used to justify the adoption of the WCA was presented in a 2005 report,⁸ which recommended the use of the totally discredited Waddell-Aylward biopsychosocial (BPS) model of assessment, which is very dangerous as it disregards all clinical need. The research was funded with £1.6million by corporate America⁹ as UnumProvident Insurance has influenced UK social policy reforms since 1992, and the company recommended the adoption of the BPS '*non-medical functional assessment*' model to limit access to the ESA, which guaranteed the creation of the '*politics of fear*'.¹⁰ I believe that the DHSC should be alerted to this DWP induced preventable harm.

Consequences

Disregarding clinical need by the use of the dangerous and discredited WCA guaranteed that many of those in greatest need would be incorrectly identified by the DWP as being '*fit for work*'. Deaths were inevitable, and a mental health crisis was created as those in greatest need now live in fear of the next enforced assessment.¹⁰ By disregarding diagnosis, prognosis and prescribed medicines, which denote the clinical need of any patient, disability benefit claimants were placed in jeopardy with a callous disregard for need and an ideologically motivated offensive, which identifies the chronically ill and disabled community as '*customers*' of the DWP. There is a catastrophic number of suicides directly linked to the WCA, with one NHS report which identified that almost 50% of ESA claimants had attempted suicide at some point, which should have been a warning.¹¹ There is also a growing catalogue of those in greatest need who have been starved to death by the DWP, whose excessive use of sanctions means that chronically ill claimants can be, quite literally, starved to death by the State when all funding is withdrawn for weeks as punishment for being too ill to attend an assessment.¹² **This is a national scandal which is totally disregarded by the DWP.

The welfare budget is by far the largest cost for the DWP, and political ideology has justified the long-held ambition to eventually replace disability benefits with healthcare insurance for the majority of the population,¹³ which generated a fierce attack on disability benefit claimants by the coalition administration in 2010 as they justified the need for austerity measures following the 2008 banking crash, which left the UK government cash poor. Austerity was always destined to be unpopular, so the coalition administration offered the British public someone else to blame, as political rhetoric attacking claimants of disability benefit became the norm. Subsequently, disability hate crimes, including murder, increased by 213% during the coalition administration's term in office when aided by the tabloid press.¹⁴

⁸ [The Scientific and Conceptual Basis of Incapacity Benefits: Gordon Waddell and Mansel Aylward \(tsoshop.co.uk\)](#)

⁹ [UnumProvident teams up with Cardiff University \(covermagazine.co.uk\)](#)

¹⁰ [The-Adoption-Of-Psycho-Coercion-to-Manipulate-the-British-Disabled-Public-Preventable-Harm-Project-UK.pdf \(mostewartresearch.co.uk\)](#)

¹¹ ['Shocking' NHS stats show nearly half ESA claimants have attempted suicide – Disability News Service](#)

¹² [Disabled man starved to death after DWP stopped his benefits | Disability | The Guardian](#)

¹³ [Cash Not Care – Reviewed | Guest Blog | Independent Living](#)

¹⁴ [EXCLUSIVE: Hate crimes on disabled rise by 213% | UK | News | Express.co.uk](#)



Daily Express banner headlines, January-April 2011. Source: Courtesy of Mirrorpix. ¹⁴

Institutional violence

It has been very disturbing to witness successive administrations justifying the unjustifiable, with civil servants reproducing government rhetoric¹⁵ as the DWP refuse to accept any published peer reviewed research¹⁶ demonstrating that the WCA is dangerous, and that the BPS model of assessment adopted for the WCA failed all academic scrutiny¹⁷ and clinical credibility.¹⁸ The DWP's justification for the continued use of the WCA is that there were five annual assessments by two Occupational Health experts when the WCA was first introduced. However, recent evidence identifies one of the experts expressing serious concern that he was not advised by the DWP of the numbers of deaths, often by suicide, of disability benefit claimants linked to the WCA and the DWP failed to alert Professor Harrington to Coroners' reports which identified the dangers of the WCA.¹⁹ The continued use of the WCA will generate more deaths, and the only justification for its use is that, in the past, one million people claiming disability benefit were identified as having a mental health problem.⁸ Ever since the government commissioned report identified the need to reduce claimant numbers by one million⁸, every administration has adopted a rhetoric to 'encourage' one million more disabled people to find work, regardless of human consequences which are often fatal as the DWP continue to disregard any presumed duty of care towards the chronically ill and disabled community.²⁰

"The disability benefits system engenders a culture of systemic disbelief towards claimants, creating a hostile environment towards the very people it is supposed to support. Reports of claimants who complete suicide or starve to death as a result of traumatic assessments or benefit sanctions do not appear to have prompted any change in policy or procedure by successive ministers in charge of the DWP".²⁰

⁸ [The Scientific and Conceptual Basis of Incapacity Benefits: Gordon Waddell and Mansel Aylward \(tsoshop.co.uk\)](http://tsoshop.co.uk)

¹⁵ [Reply to DWP Ministerial Correspondence Team](#)

¹⁶ [EMERALD JPMH JPMH631534 224..230 \(mostewartresearch.co.uk\)](http://mostewartresearch.co.uk)

¹⁷ <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261018316649120>

¹⁸ ['Ruthless' DWP 'forced through WCA despite knowing of harm' – Disability News Service](#)

¹⁹ [WCA death scandal: Ministers 'failed to pass 2010 suicide report to Harrington' – Disability News Service](#)

²⁰ [Duty of Care and the DWP - Chronic Illness Inclusion](#)

Minister, there are now volumes of published, peer-reviewed academic papers which identify the public health crisis created by the persecution of the chronically ill and disabled community by the DWP. Many of the research papers are reproduced with permission, in date order, on the Preventable Harm Project website.²¹ What is of particular concern is the DWP's resistance to access to any published peer-reviewed research they did not commission or produce themselves, aided by equally discredited research provided by right-leaning think tanks who claim to influence social policies. The one thing these research papers tend to have in common is the limitation of any references used in their reports, which can and do dismiss all claims of preventable harm given the selective use of references in their DWP published papers to justify this ongoing wrong-doing. Published peer-reviewed research continues to identify the preventable harm and the public health crisis successfully created by the DWP.²²

There is now growing concern as the DWP continue to award themselves more power to harass and intimidate benefit claimants, as successive government ministers continue '*to paint disabled people as benefit cheats.*'^{23, 24} Unless this relentless ideologically motivated attack against those in greatest need is arrested, many more chronically ill and disabled people are destined to be, quite literally, '*killed by the State*'²⁵ with as yet no-one held to account. The DWP are a power unto themselves, and it's time they were officially challenged.

"Polls by national charities taken in 2012 identified a change in public attitude towards the disabled community, with many disabled people reporting public hostility towards them during the coalition government's term in office. Many refused to go outside in fear of the public reaction to them. Again, this level of suffering of the chronically ill and disabled community has been disregarded by most of the national press. Yet, many were very happy to demonise the victims of Duncan Smith's hostile rhetoric, with their dramatic front page banner headlines. National charities such as Scope, Mencap, Leonard Cheshire Disability, the National Autistic Society, the Royal National Institute for the Blind and the Disability Alliance all protested. They insisted that ministers and civil servants, repeatedly highlighting the supposed mass abuse of the disability benefit system, was totally unfounded. Concerned senior police officers made appeals on regional television news, and identified the disturbing increase in disability hate crimes, including murder, which wasn't even reported by the regional press let alone the national press. Coincidentally, prosecuted disability hate crimes increased by 213 per cent when Iain Duncan Smith was Secretary of State at the DWP."²⁵

By definition when all evidence of care, concern, compassion and humanity are removed from any government assessment model, the result is tyranny. When that tyranny is pursued by successive administrations, that is the definition of a government funded atrocity which is

²¹ [Academic - Mo Stewart Research](#)

²² [Work, welfare, and wellbeing: The impacts of welfare conditionality on people with mental health impairments in the UK - Dwyer - 2020 - Social Policy & Administration - Wiley Online Library](#)

²³ [Fears over impact of DWP's 'horrific' and 'sinister' anti-fraud plan – Disability News Service](#)

²⁴ [DWP To Be Given Power To Arrest Universal Credit Claimants – The poor side of life](#)

²⁵ [Killed By The State? Social Policy Abused \(citizen-network.org\)](#)

ongoing in the UK and is negatively impacting on the health, wellbeing and, in many cases, the survival of the chronically ill and disabled community who are unfit to work regardless of the dangerous and extreme ideology identified within the DWP.

As long ago as 2015 the DWP mortality statistics identified that '*nearly 90 people per month were dying after being declared fit for work following a WCA.*'²⁶ Consequently, the DWP refused to publish future mortality totals which identified the numbers of deaths following a WCA of claimants who had been found 'fit for work'. Therefore, the total number of chronically ill claimants who have perished since the 2015 DWP figures were published will never be known. Withholding such significant information is, I strongly suggest, sinister. At the time this DWP imposed demonisation of disability benefit claimants was attracting public attention, the DWP's own published figures were stating the opposite.¹

"In reality, when Iain Duncan Smith was creating a moral panic by claiming that there were excesses of fraud by benefit claimants, the DWP's published figures were stating the opposite. In fact, the "fraud rate for sickness benefits is just 0.5 per cent, meaning that 99.5 per cent of claimants are not fraudulent." His hostile claims about benefit claimants informed public opinion to the detriment of the chronically ill and disabled community, as reproduced by tabloid press banner headlines."¹

Please be advised that when working in healthcare, many of my patients were chronically ill and were living with a life threatening condition. I never felt the need to terrify them. Nor did I feel the need to humiliate them by claiming they were '*customers*' of the NHS. They were patients and they were treated with care, concern and compassion; which is something that's been missing from UK social policies since 2010. When chronically ill, disability benefit claimants have enough on their mind without being persecuted by the DWP, who routinely refuse to accept that many claimants are too ill to work, and often subject them to brutal financial sanctions when too ill to attend an interview at the Jobcentre. This is the culture created by DWP assessments, identified as '*institutional violence.*'³ Possible starvation is now a basis for UK social policies, with no-one asking why this can possibly be justified? All moral code was abandoned with the adoption of neoliberal politics, as social policies were introduced using a fiscal priority whilst disregarding health and wellbeing.^{5,25}

"The stated political ambition was to get 80 per cent of the population into employment, including the disabled community. Those with the most '*complex and demanding problems*' were to be encouraged to find work, using the private sector, regardless of predictable catastrophic human consequences."²⁵

1 [The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms in: Justice, Power and Resistance - Ahead of print \(bristoluniversitypressdigital.com\)](http://bristoluniversitypressdigital.com)

3 [Violent bureaucracy: A critical analysis of the British public employment service \(mostewartresearch.co.uk\)](http://mostewartresearch.co.uk)

5 '[First, do no harm': are disability assessments associated with adverse trends in mental health? A longitudinal ecological study | Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health \(bmj.com\)](http://bmj.com)

25 [Killed By The State? Social Policy Abused \(citizen-network.org\)](http://citizen-network.org)

26 [Thousands have died after being found fit for work, DWP figures show | Benefits | The Guardian](http://TheGuardian.com)

I do fully appreciate that this is a large amount of information to consider, given the content of this letter and the evidence identified within the detailed references. It is hoped that the DHSC will take the necessary time to identify and confirm the human suffering created by the activities of the DWP and will eventually challenge why the WCA continues to be used. Every clinical authority in the UK including the British Medical Association, the Royal College of Psychiatrists, the Royal College of General Practitioners and the British Psychological Society all exposed the WCA as being *'unfit for purpose'* and recommended that it should be abandoned, but were disregarded. This was the creation of preventable harm by the DWP.

I can make no apology for the length of this letter or the details contained within it. Given that you were only recently appointed to the DHSC, I felt it best to offer you some detailed history as to this identified public health crisis created by social policy reforms and the fear generated by the DWP, which is impacting on the health and wellbeing of some of the most vulnerable people in the UK. I should also alert you to the fact that this letter was inspired at the request of some of your backbench colleagues, who follow my research, and who are concerned by the suffering imposed by the DWP on some of their constituents.

I have copied Dr Caroline Johnson into this letter, who I believe has the DHSC portfolio for mental health, and I have copied in Steve Barclay, who is my constituency MP and is a supporter of the research findings. I have also included Professor Ben Barr, whose research findings are identified in this letter.⁵ Ben specialises in Applied Public Health and his published research identified the link between the WCA and an increase in suicides, reported mental health problems and increased prescriptions for antidepressants. Ben recently offered evidence to the Work and Pensions Select Committee for their inquiry regarding health assessments for benefits. The Committee's report is imminent.

Yours, most sincerely



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Copied to:

Stephen Barclay MP

Dr Caroline Johnson MP: DHSC

Professor Ben Barr – Professor in Applied Public Health

[5 'First, do no harm': are disability assessments associated with adverse trends in mental health? A longitudinal ecological study | Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health \(bmj.com\)](#)