

# Mo Stewart

Fellow, Centre for Welfare Reform  
Research Lead, Preventable Harm Project

---

Phone:

Email:

Date: 6th December, 2022

[The Preventable Harm Project](#)

The Rt Hon Mel Stride MP  
Secretary of State  
Department for Work and Pensions  
Caxton House  
Tothill Street  
London  
SW1H 9DA

Private and Confidential

Sent via email:

Dear Secretary of State

Re: The public health crisis created by UK social policy reforms  
[Justice, Power and Resistance](#)<sup>1</sup>

Belated congratulations on your appointment as the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

I write in my capacity as the research lead for the Preventable Harm Project,<sup>2</sup> to alert the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to an identified public health crisis,<sup>1,3,4</sup> which is directly linked to social policy reforms which adopted a '*non-medical functional assessment*' to limit access to disability benefit.<sup>5</sup> All clinical need was disregarded by the adoption of the flawed Work Capability Assessment (WCA), which is and always was a very dangerous precedent to set, and was adopted due to the introduction of a fiscal priority whilst disregarding health and wellbeing.<sup>3</sup>

It is a growing concern that this identified public health crisis directly linked to social policy reforms<sup>5,6,7</sup> has been routinely disregarded by the DWP, making any progress needed to stop this ongoing and unnecessary identified state sanctioned preventable harm difficult to achieve. Certainly, your recent evidence to the Work and Pensions Committee<sup>8</sup> (the Committee) did not suggest that you were familiar with the volumes of published evidence demonstrating the preventable harm created by the

---

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

2 [The Preventable Harm Project](#)

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

4 [The Adoption of Psycho-Coercion to Manipulate the UK Disabled Community: the Creation of the Politics of Fear](#)

5 [State Crime by Proxy: Corporate influence on state sanctioned social harm. Journal of Critical Psychology, Counselling and Psychotherapy.](#)

6 [Dismantling the social safety net: social security reforms, disability and mental health conditions. BJPsych Bulletin, Volume 44, Issue 5, October 2020, pp. 208-212](#)

7 [Burden and benefits-related suicides: "misconception" or state crafted reality? Journal of Public Mental Health, 21\(1\), pp. 46-56](#)

8 [Parliamentlive.tv - Work and Pensions Committee](#)

use of the fatally flawed WCA by the DWP <sup>9</sup>:

“The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) makes various unsubstantiated claims in the Green Paper,<sup>1</sup> including a claim by the Minister for Disabled People that “*the majority of people are satisfied with the (disability) assessment process*” (p4), seemingly based on the small numbers who appeal DWP benefit decisions; whilst disregarding the numerous obstacles the DWP intentionally created to restrict access to the appeal system.<sup>2</sup> In fact, other than DWP rhetoric, there is no independent substantiated evidence that identifies that “*the majority*” of disabled people are “*satisfied*” with the disability assessment process. However, in contrast, there is a significant amount of published academic research that identifies the public mental health crisis created by austerity, by Universal Credit (UC), and by the DWP disability assessment process; including vast numbers of deaths and suicides directly linked to the fatally flawed work capability assessment (WCA) (p2)...

“What is constantly overlooked is the fact that the disabled community’s experience of this DWP “*help and support*” is via the politics of fear using the WCA. The assessment is conducted by an unaccountable American corporate giant, with the fatally flawed WCA using a discredited BPS model which failed all academic scrutiny. Every clinical lead in the UK demanded that the WCA should be abolished, including the Royal College of Psychiatrists, the Royal College of General Practitioners, the British Medical Association, and the British Psychological Society, who all identified the WCA as being unfit for purpose. They were all disregarded by the DWP, as is the growing mental health crisis directly linked to the fear of the next WCA, and the constant DWP threat of sanctions. To date, the DWP have disregarded all published, independent academic research which identifies the ongoing and inevitable public health crisis created by social policies adopted since 2010.”(p7)<sup>9</sup>

Given the significant and often disturbing findings from the Preventable Harm Project,<sup>2</sup> it was with more than a little surprise to hear you advise the Committee that you felt that the DWP was working at “*8 out of 10*”.<sup>8</sup> I must respectfully advise you, Secretary of State, that given the identified fear created by the DWP for those in greatest need,<sup>1</sup> who are ill and whose health is deteriorating due to the relentless demands of the DWP, there is no evidence from service-users that the DWP should be awarded a success rate of “*8 out of 10*.” Furthermore, the reference to “*fraud*”, and the thinly veiled suggestion that there is a vast amount of it by claimants is not substantiated and never has been. Figures demonstrate that disability benefit fraud is very, very small,<sup>1</sup> with DWP errors costing a great deal more, and yet the DWP are planning excessive powers to cause more preventable harm based on little more than a suspicion that disability benefit claimants may be committing fraud, whilst disregarding that any DWP increased powers will, invariably, cause more preventable harm to many.<sup>10</sup>

“For many years now I’ve assisted claimants in supposed benefit fraud meetings, the majority of which showed no evidence of fraud being committed...

“I found these meetings to be yet another way for the DWP to intimidate and harass claimants and I have no doubt that if I hadn’t been able to represent these claimants they would have falsely been accused of fraud, and would have faced their benefits being stopped or greatly reduced.”<sup>10</sup>

---

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

<sup>2</sup> [The Preventable Harm Project](#)

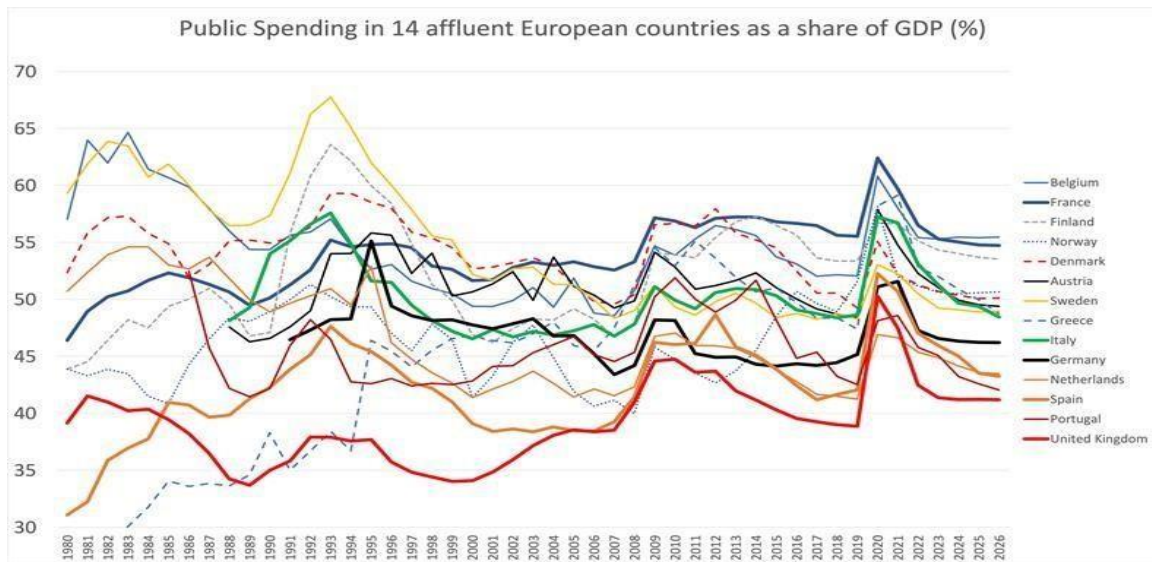
<sup>8</sup> [Parliamentlive.tv - Work and Pensions Committee](http://parliamentlive.tv)

<sup>9</sup> [BRIEFING: Shaping Future Support: The Health and Disability Green Paper, July 2021 \(mostewartresearch.co.uk\)](http://mostewartresearch.co.uk)

<sup>10</sup> [Fears over impact of DWP’s ‘horrific’ and ‘sinister’ anti-fraud plan – Disability News Service](#)

Historically, since 1980 the UK has spent the lowest amount on public spending in comparison with 14 affluent European countries, with the political ambition to continue to reduce public spending over time so that, with the exception of emergencies such as the pandemic, by 2026 it will be limited to the same funding level provided over forty years ago (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Public spending in the UK, and elsewhere in Europe, 1980-2026**



Source: courtesy of Professor Danny Dorling, 2021: [https://www.dannydorling.org/?page\\_id=8349](https://www.dannydorling.org/?page_id=8349)

It would appear that the DWP has no limit to the level of preventable harm they are prepared to create, with no acknowledgement of the public health crisis identified long ago by the brutality of the DWP, whose staff adopted a culture of ‘institutional violence’<sup>11</sup> against those in greatest need. There is now published evidence with DWP staff ‘on the ground’ advising that they were motivated to see how many claimants they could sanction, which DWP Ministers do not acknowledge and may not recognise. Yet, DWP staff have caused a public health crisis, with all evidence of a past moral compass disappearing under the cloud of an authoritarian state -vely impacting on disabled claimants.

Indeed, the DWP disregards the identified public health crisis created by the continued use of the fatally flawed WCA, dismiss the fear created by a system designed to disbelieve claimants, and take no responsibility whatsoever for the many thousands of deaths directly linked to the DWP assessment process with claimants treated with contempt. The evidence of preventable harm created by the DWP is well documented and is overwhelming. I suggest it’s past time for someone to be held to account.

Yours, most sincerely

**Mo Stewart**

Fellow, Centre for Welfare Reform  
 Research Lead, Preventable Harm Project

Copied to Sir Stephen Timms MP: Chair, Work and Pensions Committee

<sup>11</sup> [Violent bureaucracy: A critical analysis of the British public employment service in Critical Social Policy 2022, Vol 42\(2\): 306-326](#)