



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Ministerial
Correspondence
Caxton House
Tothill Street
LONDON
SW1H 9DA

www.dwp.gov.uk

ministers@dwp.gov.uk

Ms Mo Stewart
mozzas01@gmail.com

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Dear Ms Stewart

Thank you for your further email of 27 March to the Secretary of State and the Minister of State for Disabled People, Health and Work, about the Health and Disability White Paper. Government Ministers receive a large volume of correspondence and they are unable to reply personally on every occasion. I have been asked to respond.

Our vision in this White Paper is to help more disabled people and people with health conditions to start, stay and succeed in work.

With more than a million job vacancies and a rise in remote working triggered by the pandemic, today's labour market offers disabled people new working opportunities. We are focused on ensuring more people are supported into the workforce so that they can enjoy the positive impacts of work, and so that employers can access the skills they need to grow their businesses. This will help grow the economy, creating better-paid jobs and opportunity right across the country.

We set out our case for reform in 2021 in *Shaping Future Support: The Health and Disability Green Paper*. During the consultation, we heard the views of more than 4,500 people and organisations and discussed our proposals at over 40 public events. From the responses we know that many disabled people want to work and could work, with the right support.

The White Paper sets out ambitious and extensive reforms to ensure that disabled people have the right support, opportunities and incentives to move into and remain in work.

We will:

- Transform the benefits system for the future so that it focuses on what people can do rather than what they cannot.

- Step up our employment support for disabled people and people with health conditions.
- Ensure people can access the right support at the right time and have a better overall experience when applying for and receiving health and disability benefits.

We know that the health and disability benefits system can itself be a barrier to employment because it focuses on what people cannot do, instead of what they can. Through our consultation and ongoing engagement, people have told us that the current assessment approach encourages them to see themselves as being unable to work or puts them off trying work or seeking employment support for fear of losing benefits.

We will legislate to remove the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) so that in the future, there is only one health and disability assessment - the PIP assessment. This will mean that there will be no need to be found to have limited capability for work and limited capability to prepare for work to get additional income-related support for a disability or health condition.

The degree of change in our proposals will require primary legislation, which we will aim to take early in a new Parliament, when Parliamentary time allows. These reforms will then be rolled out to new claims only on a staged, geographical basis from 2026/27. We expect the new claims roll out to be completed by 2029, when we will then move the existing caseload onto the new system.

Removing the WCA will reduce the number of assessments people need to take to access their benefits and enable us to provide more personalised levels of support in a new system. We want to introduce a more tailored approach, to allow Work coaches to build a relationship with an individual and determine what, if any, work-related activities an individual can participate in.

These reforms will ensure that those who are able to can progress in or towards work, without the worry of being re-assessed and losing their benefits. They will give people confidence that they will receive support, for as long as it is needed, regardless of whether they are working. The changes that we are proposing will help us transform support, so more disabled people can start, stay and succeed in work, and help set the country on the path to long-term success.

We will continue to work with disabled people, people with health conditions and their representatives to reach the important goals set out in this White Paper.

Our ambition is for a society in which disabled people and people with health conditions can fulfil their potential and, where they are able, to start, stay and succeed in work.

We are investing in employment support for disabled people and people with health conditions: stepping up our Work coach support across the country, extending the Work and Health Programme to September 2024 and rolling-out our new In-Work

Progression Offer to help people in work on Universal Credit, including disabled people, to increase their earnings and move into better-paid jobs.

We will also explore how we can go further in local councils through the £2.6 billion UK Shared Prosperity Fund, commissioning employment and skills provision for disabled people in communities. A sharpened focus on increasing access to occupational health will encourage employers to support their staff to remain and thrive in their jobs.

We have delivered the first phase of our new Access to Work enhanced package of support for people who need more support than the existing scheme can provide, and support for employers who are willing to adapt workplaces and/or shape job roles. We are reflecting on early insights from this initial phase to inform further testing, which we aim to start later this year.

While most people claiming health and disability benefits have a positive experience, we also want to improve the overall experience of, and trust in, the benefits system for disabled people. We are doing this by testing new initiatives to make it easier to apply for and receive health and disability benefits:

- Employment and Health Discussions, which are led by a healthcare professional and focus on how we can help people to overcome their barriers to moving towards work.
- The Enhanced Support Service, which will identify people who are most in need of additional help to navigate the benefits system and provide them with tailored support.
- The Severe Disability Group, for those with the most severe health conditions, so they do not need to complete a detailed application form or go through an assessment.
- Developing the skills of our assessors and matching people's primary health condition to a specialist assessor.

We will make it easier to communicate and engage with us by improving the accessibility of our services and buildings.

We will transform the PIP service, from finding out about benefits through to decisions, eligibility, and payments, delivering a new, more user-friendly service built around people's needs.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Naomi Agius".

Naomi Agius
Acting Head of the Ministerial Correspondence Team