

# INQUIRY INTO SAFEGUARDING VULNERABLE CLAIMANTS

Additional evidence submitted by

Mo Stewart  
Research Lead  
Preventable Harm Project

14<sup>th</sup> November 2024

The detailed published [evidence for the original inquiry](#) was provided for the Work and Pensions Committee on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2023. (SVC0025)

This document is additional evidence submitted at the invitation of the Chair for the ongoing inquiry into safeguarding vulnerable claimants, to be continued by the recently appointed Work and Pensions Select Committee (the Committee).

**Please consider:**

1. Since the original evidence provided for the Committee on 9<sup>th</sup> October 2023 this researcher extended the original [Preventable Harm Project](#), which highlighted the identified government induced public health crisis linked to the continued use of the fatally flawed Work Capability Assessment (WCA) by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), which was initially adopted in 2008 to limit access to the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) long-term disability benefit. It is now used for Universal Credit claimants with a health condition.
2. **\*\*It remains cause for serious concern that many MPs still disregard any evidence demonstrating the often fatal human consequences of using the WCA, claiming that there were five DWP commissioned WCA annual reviews, which it seems they have not accessed as Professor Harrington warned that Jobcentre 'Decision Makers' were underqualified and routinely failed to conduct their listed responsibilities which negatively impacted on disability benefit claimants, as identified in his first WCA review (Harrington, 2010):**

“It is important to note that advice from the Atos assessment to the Decision Maker is just advice. It provides evidence collected by a healthcare professional (HCP) as to whether the claimant has or has not met a threshold of capability for work. The Decision Maker should then use this evidence as part of a suite of information, including the original ESA50 [application form] and any other additional evidence provided by the claimant to make an informed judgement. They should, for instance, consider whether the findings of the Atos assessment are consistent with what the claimant has stated on the ESA50, or with any particular representations or case notes from the claimant’s own doctors and HCPs (Harrington 2010: 47). ...

The review has found that many Decision Makers lack the confidence to make a decision that deviates from the Atos advice. In part this appears to be an issue of training and investment in the Decision Maker role, but it also reflects the lack of time Decision Makers are allowed to devote to particular cases. Several people the review spoke to referred to Decision Makers as ‘*decision-stampers*,’ merely ticking through the advice from Atos (Harrington 2010: 49).

It is clear that a culture has developed amongst Decision Makers that sees the advice from Atos as forming the decision, and that they are simply to ratify that decision. This is evident in the language officials use about decisions; many talk about ‘overruling’ the Atos advice rather than making an evidence-based decision, while others reference the difficulty in going against the recommendation of the Atos HCP: *‘It’s difficult. I mean, they’re a doctor. They’ve assessed this person. I don’t know enough about it to overrule what they’re saying.’* Jobcentre Plus Decision Maker” (Harrington 2010: 49).

**3.** There is a tendency when the Committee interview witnesses to invite answers to questions dealing with ongoing events impacting of disability benefit claimants, whilst failing to identify the long history of the identified [government induced public health crisis](#) created by the adoption of social policy reforms, by successive administrations, when using a fiscal priority at the expense of the health and wellbeing of disability benefit claimants.

**4.** It remains cause for serious concern that the DWP claims process totally disregards the fact that many claimants are ill, and some are very ill with a life threatening condition, yet live in fear of the next WCA due to unacceptable hostility publicly promoted by DWP ministers in the recent past. There are various published academic papers and papers in the medical literature demonstrating the negative impact on wellbeing when claiming ESA and, more recently, when claiming Universal Credit online.

**5.** An online talk identifying the government induced public health crisis is available via *You Tube* and may benefit Committee members: [‘What will become of the welfare state?’](#) The talk lasts a total of 41 minutes and was recorded in May 2024 by the CAPPE Interventions into Disability Politics Seminar series at the University of Brighton. \*\* The content of the talk may cause concern to audience members not fully aware of the ongoing government induced public health crisis in the UK.

6. Written by the Editor of the Disability News Service, John Pring, a new book simply called ['The Department'](#) was recently published by Pluto Press and identified the relentless government induced intimidation, with no-one held to account for the deaths directly linked to the DWP persecution of those in greatest need.