Dear Frank,

Thank you for your follow-up letter dated 18 July 2018 which outlined a number of questions to support the Select Committee's inquiry into benefit sanctions.

I have responded to your points below.

During the oral evidence session I also promised to follow up on a number of other requests. I have written separately addressing these points.

Question 1.
During its evidence session on Wednesday 27 June, the Committee raised several policy changes that have been suggested in much of the evidence received. You kindly agreed to give them some thought. Could you therefore please consider, and confirm your views on:

a. Exempting people who are sick or disabled from any form of conditionality and sanctions.

Where it has been determined that a claimant has a serious health condition or disability which prevents them from working or preparing for work, they will not be required to undertake any work-related requirements and their Claimant Commitment will reflect this. As such, they will not be subject to sanctions for these purposes. This includes those who have been found to have a Limited Capability for Work and Work Related Activity following their Work Capability Assessment (WCA), and those claimants defined in schedule 9 to the Universal Credit Regulations 2013 covering claimants with specified conditions or undergoing certain treatments, including those who are terminally ill; receiving treatment for cancer by way of chemotherapy or radiotherapy; or pregnant where there is a serious risk of damage to their health or that of the unborn child. In ESA this is called the Support Group.

The current ESA caseload gives an indication of the size of the groups in Universal Credit. Latest data (February 2018) for ESA claimants shows that 69% were in the support group and had no conditionality requirements.

10% were still in the assessment phase which is not subject to conditionality in ESA, except for attendance at a Health and Work Conversation where appropriate. Under
Universal Credit, these claimants could still be subject to conditionality whilst awaiting their assessment, however Work Coaches have discretion to reduce commitments where they deem it necessary for the claimant.

18% were in the work-related activity group. They have reduced conditionality and can only be asked to attend work focused interviews and take-up work preparation to help them move closer to work.

Evidence shows that when provision or support is voluntary the take up is extremely low and has had limited success. For example, the ESA Support Group has no mandatory conditionality and less than 1% move off the benefit and into work every month.\(^1\)

As such, we believe that to impose a blanket policy which exempts all disabled people from any form of conditionality would be doing this group a great disservice. We will continue to apply existing easements and tailoring, and continue to build work coach capability to ensure that current legislation is implemented effectively.

Sanctions are used in a minority of cases and only when someone has failed to meet requirements without good reason. If a referral for a sanction is made, we give people every opportunity to explain why they have not met their requirements and a decision maker will take all the individual circumstances of the case into account before making a decision.

The Department is currently examining ways to estimate the number of easements that are applied to the various groups of vulnerable claimants, including the reasons why the easement was put in place. This work is in its very preliminary stages, but we shall endeavour to keep the Committee updated as this work progresses through our responses to previous PAC recommendations that touch on this issue.

\textbf{b. Removing conditionality requirements for claimants awaiting a Work Capability Assessment.}

Universal Credit Regulations 2013 already enable Work Coaches to tailor conditionality, apply easements, set ‘voluntary’ work related requirements (where there is no risk of a sanction) and ‘switch off’ work related requirements altogether where this is most appropriate for the individual, in light of their health condition or disability.

Many claimants with health conditions and disabilities are willing and able to engage with work related support, to ensure that their transition back to work is smoother when they are well enough to return, and as such we do not think it would be appropriate to introduce a blanket policy to remove conditionality requirements for all claimants awaiting a WCA. We will continue to apply existing easements and tailoring, and continue to build Work Coach capability to ensure that current legislation is implemented effectively.

Officials are currently looking to develop official statistics on numbers of UC claimants who go through a Work Capability Assessment (WCA) and outcomes. As part of this release we are looking at whether it is possible to include numbers of

claimants who are awaiting a WCA. The intention is to publish an official statistics regular release in line with what the Department currently produces for those going through the ESA-WCA process. When we have decided the information is robust and accurate to publish as official statistics we will preannounce via the gov.uk release calendar: https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements

c. Extending easements to include:

i. those recovering from mental health conditions

Claimants recovering from mental illness may already be covered by a mandatory easement in schedule 8 of the regulations, if they are undergoing medical or other treatment as a patient in a hospital or similar institution; or recovering from such treatment in circumstances in which we are satisfied that the claimant should be treated as having limited capability for work.

We have improved the learning for Work Coaches, committed to offer additional mental health training, and increased the number of Disability Employment Advisers who can provide additional support.

There is a strong evidence base\(^2\) showing that work is generally good for physical and mental health and well-being, and that worklessness is associated with poorer physical and mental health and well-being.

It would, therefore, be inappropriate to apply a blanket policy of mandatory easement for all claimants recovering from a mental health condition, as this may not be in their best interests, and would not allow for personalisation to their individual circumstances.

ii. those at risk of homelessness.

Current regulations and policy provide for an easement to be applied to the work related requirements for claimants who are homeless. Current guidance was strengthened in August to extend the easement to cover those who are at risk of becoming homeless. This enables their Claimant Commitment to be reviewed and revised to ensure it remains reasonable and relevant to their circumstances.

d. Introducing markers for disability and care leaver status within Universal Credit.

Universal Credit already enables staff to record relevant details about an individual’s needs. As I mentioned to the Committee in my evidence, we will be introducing a function to ‘pin’ key profile notes so they are instantly visible to all staff helping a claimant. In August we started trialling this functionality in 13 jobcentres, all linked to one service centre, and we are looking to introduce it more widely in the autumn.

We are also beginning work to explore ways in which we collect and use information recorded on the claimants account by our staff by using data mining techniques in order to help us to monitor support for people with complex needs.


https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/is-work-good-for-your-health-and-well-being
Question 2.
When asked what evaluation had been done of the current conditionality and sanctions regime, you referred to research on JSA and ESA that found, respectively, 70% and 60% of claimants said sanctions made them more likely to look for work3. Please could you confirm:

a. how far this research was based on the sanctions regime introduced by the Welfare Reform Act 2012

The evaluation covered a two-year period, following the introduction of the Jobcentre Plus (JCP) Offer in April 2011. As the new sanctions regime was introduced in October 2012, the research relates predominantly to the old regime.

b. what further evaluation has been done of the regime introduced by the 2012 Act, in particular regarding the impact and effectiveness of more severe sanctions. If none, please could you confirm when the Department expects to conduct such an evaluation?

The Department is building its understanding of how sanctions help to underpin our conditionality regime, in particular how the impact of Universal Credit has changed our engagement with claimants, the effect of sanctions on customer behaviour and how this varies for different customer groups, as well as how we can make the sanctions regime more effective. This work is on-going, especially as we analyse the new data available on Universal Credit systems. As part of this work, we will explore the use of analytical techniques that attempt to isolate the impact of sanctions on transitions into work and of earnings when in work. Whilst this will not provide evidence of the effectiveness of the 2012 Act, compared to the previous system, it may provide insight into the effectiveness of the current sanctions system in supporting conditionality.

Question 3.
As you explained, the evaluation of the early warnings trial in Scotland found “a very limited number”4 of claimants took advantage of the extra time to provide evidence that a sanctions referral was not appropriate. Please could you confirm what analysis was conducted of why people might not have engaged? For example, how did the Department assess claimants’ levels of understanding of the early notification letter?

As part of the evaluation of the JSA Sanctions Early Warning Trial, the Department commissioned Learning & Work Institute to carry out qualitative research with claimants and staff. This research was published in May 20185. Attached in Annex A are Chapters 4 and 5 which address your question and explore the claimant responses to the trial and views on communications (including the Sanctions Warning Letter).

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3 The Jobcentre Plus Offer: Final Evaluation Report
4 Q238

4
Question 4.
Please could you provide further information about the quality assurance processes that are in place to avoid inappropriate sanction referrals, described in response to Q269?

The Department operates an operational level of process error and payment error assurance activity. The Department has a clear approach to understanding the quality of the service provided to claimants. This includes two types of independent and objective assurance which are used to understand the standard of quality and emerging risks. Where emerging risks are observed these are reviewed with risks mitigated through an improvement strategy.

These assurance approaches are known as –

- Tier 1 – this involves operational colleagues assuring, reviewing and then coaching improvements against a Quality Assurance Framework.

- Tier 2 – Involves assuring a statistically valid volume of cases per month in order to provide a reliable view of the standard of quality. Cases are randomly selected.

- Tier 3 – Performance Measurement (PM) gathers data on the level of incorrectness across a range of DWP Benefits. The information is used at operational level to develop strategies to reduce losses and is used by the Department within the annual report and accounts.

Annex B contains more detail.

Team leaders are responsible for making sure work coaches deliver high quality customer service. This involves making sure work coaches are:

- setting reasonable Claimant Commitments, taking into account individual circumstances;
- applying easements and restrictions fairly and consistently, e.g. switching off conditionality requirements in appropriate circumstances;
- explaining things clearly to claimants, making sure they understand what they are required to do, how and when that will be followed-up and the potential consequences of not complying;
- referring cases to a decision maker only where appropriate, e.g. where it is clear the claimant has no good reason for failing to attend an appointment.

This is underpinned by a quality standards framework, which reinforces foundation Work Coach Learning and Accreditation. Team Leaders observe each of their work coaches at least once a month using the quality standards framework, (more frequently for new or inexperienced work coaches) and provide structured feedback during performance reviews.

The Quality Assurance Framework for Work Coaches covers:

- Interviewing skills and claimant engagement
- Claimant commitment and setting requirements
- Reviewing requirements and follow up activity
- Specialist support
- Claimant understanding
Information, advice and guidance
Claimants with complex needs

Work Coach Team Leaders coach, lead and develop their teams to ensure the quality of personalised interventions. They achieve this by effective leadership of teams through a coaching culture, spending 80% of their time with work coaches.

Team leaders oversee caseload management, regularly reviewing work coach caseloads to ensure they are providing the right level of support to claimants. Team leaders engage in individual cases through case conferencing, involving the Disability Employment Adviser where necessary to help support claimants with complex needs.

It is not prescribed how many checks team leaders should undertake. Cases selected for Tier 1 assurance must be selected from the high risk areas identified by Tier 2 assurance or from local intelligence, but team leaders will use a risk based approach to decide how many to check. It will depend entirely on the potential size/impact of the risk of failure/error.

Setting reasonable requirements, tailoring and applying easements appropriately for claimants with complex needs are all built into the department’s local checking regime, which enables better monitoring and targeted improvement activities. Local leaders are responsible for monitoring these checks and addressing any areas for improvement identified. These checks do not break down application of individual easements, but rather ask whether an easement was considered and applied appropriately.

Following on from this point, you asked that I provide the raw data that we have relating to the quality assurance process. I have attached this at Annex B.

In addition, I thought it might be helpful to provide some detail related to our Work Coach learning and development. The ‘Work Coach Accreditation Routeway’ was launched in August 2016 with the aim to help develop a highly skilled workforce that is internally and externally recognised for the role Work Coaches fulfil. The accreditation provides a City and Guilds Level 3 Apprenticeship for new recruits and newly promoted Work Coaches. We currently have over 2,000 Work Coaches working towards their apprenticeship, who will then progress onto a Level 4 Certificate qualification. I have included details of the Work Coach learning journey at Annex C.

**Question 5.**
In response to Q312, you referred to the controlled trials for in-work progression that are currently underway. Please could you confirm how these trials will evaluate the specific effect of conditionality and sanctions for in-work claimants, separate from support?

The In Work Progression Randomised Control Trial ended on 31 March 2018. A full evaluation of the trial will be published in Autumn 2018, which will look at the impact of applying different frequencies of work coach intervention as part of a combined package of conditionality and support, rather than individual elements. It will also update and include further sanctions analysis in line with our March 2017 publication; which can be found at:
Question 6.
Does the Department make any commitment to claimants about how long it will take for a sanction decision, and mandatory reconsideration or appeal of that decision?

We aim to process sanction decisions and mandatory reconsiderations or appeals of that decision efficiently but we do not make any specific commitments to claimants about how long it will take.

Internal data can be used to give an indication as to the length of time taken to process sanction decisions in UC.

From June 2018 we have implemented a new delivery model for Fail to Attend (FTA) complex cases in UC Full Service. We have developed a network of fully trained decision makers in Jobcentres within Area Director accountability to process decisions rather than cases being sent to a virtual national team of Decision Makers based in service centres across the country. We have analysed a very small sample of these cases in July and have seen an improvement in timeliness of decision.

In UC, timeliness is considered in the context of monthly pay cycles and we aim to get decisions in place within the assessment period wherever possible.

Question 7.
When will the data linking sanctions and earnings be made publicly available?
   a. Will the DWP’s destination statistics distinguish between sanctioned claimants who have found employment and those that have simply left the benefit system?

The Department currently publishes statistics on the proportion of people who had periods off benefit in the 180 days following a sanction within the Benefit Sanction Statistics.

The Department has completed the work to improve data systems and link benefits claimants to earnings data; following this the Department further plans to publish destination statistics during the first quarter of calendar year 2019 of people who have earnings in a specified period following a sanction, regardless of whether benefit has continued in payment. As these measures are derived from different data sources they will be reported separately.

Question 8.
By Jobcentre, the average time taken for initial claims and subsequent meetings, and the breakdown of those meetings into the following bands. Those that last:
   a. 1 to 10 minutes,
   b. 11 to 20 minutes,
   c. 21 to 30 minutes, and
   d. 31 minutes or more.

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A response to this question is provided in Annexes E (for First Commitment meetings and Work Search reviews) and F (for other appointments).

**Question 9.**
For as many Jobcentres as is feasible, but at least one selected at random, an analysis of how frequently claimants have met their named Work Coach:

a. over the course of their claim (specifying how long that claim lasted), and

b. over the last twelve months, distinguishing cases where there has been a change of named Work Coach during that period.

We started a study on 13th August 2018 which will last 6 months and have selected two Jobcentres from within the Universal Credit Full Service cohort with comparable demographics in Greater Manchester – Stretford and Newton Heath.

The study is undertaking an assessment of the number of meetings between a Work Coach and their Universal Credit Full Service claimants during the course of the claim and will encompass:

- a retrospective analysis of existing DWP administrative data; and
- a forward look using information from two Jobcentres to establish the reasons for a change in work coach and determine the extent to which meetings are held with different work coaches.

The retrospective analysis will be done by using DWP administrative data across all sites to determine the extent to which meetings are held with different work coaches.

The forward look will collect data of every work coach meeting held, each day, in two sites, Stretford and Newton Heath. This will also provide us with the main reasons as to why a change of work coach occurs.

The study will include and provide an analysis on:

- The number of different work coaches encountered by each individual claimant in the study;
- The number of meetings attended by individual claimants;
- The type of meeting attended by claimants with work coaches;
- An account of the reasons for any change in work coach continuity, this list is not exhaustive, but some examples are:
  - Annual Leave
  - Staff training
  - Sickness absence
  - Specialist support
  - Claimants who move from Universal Credit Live Service to Universal Credit Full Service (as part of the natural transition process, these claimants are likely to be assigned to a new work coach. This transition process will be taking place throughout the study)
  - Relocation, promotion, reasonable adjustments, change in job role

We will write to you again with the full findings at the end of the 6 month period.
Question 10.
Any evaluation relating to pilots co-locating third party support services with Jobcentres.

Currently a total of 90 Jobcentres (rising to 91 from 17 September 2018) have been outwardly co-located in 87 partner organisations’ sites, a further outward co-location of a Jobcentre is due to go-live on Monday 17 September (Peterborough). We have various types of co-location and they are evaluated and reviewed locally. There is no national evaluation.

For example inward co-locations are developed by local agreement on a non-commercial basis, and may be through a national agreement where DWP policies are supported by those of the partner organisation. Examples include National Careers Service, Local Authorities and HMRC. These arrangements are subject to ongoing review by local management and partners.

Each outward co-location is based on a detailed business case and Ministerial contract to budgeting and digital support for those who need assistance to manage their claim online and/or help with budgeting in order to manage their monthly payments and prioritise essential bills such as rent and utilities. A number of local authorities and partner organisations are currently delivering Personal Budgeting and Assisted Digital support within Jobcentre sites.

Question 11.
An assessment of departmental savings resulting from the repayment of hardship payments.

Officials are currently considering the feasibility of providing this information for legacy and UC. I will write to you again once we have a clearer understanding of what could be delivered.

Question 12.
To date, DWP has published no statistics on hardship payments within UC. For JSA and ESA, the Department has published only a single ad hoc statistical release, covering April 2012 to June 2015, on 18 November 2015.URT Please could you update this release, including data on UC?

The Department will look to update the previous ad hoc release for the number of hardship applications and awards for legacy benefits. However, more work will be needed to replicate this for Universal Credit, and this be assessed within the feasibility considerations mentioned above.

Question 13.
During our evidence session on Wednesday 16 May, Tony Wilson drew our attention to research conducted by Ben Baumberg Geiger.8 He said:

- His analysis suggests that disabled claimants of jobseeker’s allowance are more likely to be sanctioned than non-disabled claimants.

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7 JSA and ESA hardship applications and awards: Management information data for the period April 2012 to June 2015:

8 B. B. Geiger, Benefits conditionality for disabled people: stylised facts from a review of international evidence and practice, 2017
That is a hugely worrying finding and I have every reason to believe that that is accurate.  

Web Appendix 1 to Mr Geiger’s research states:

- The proportion of unemployment benefit (JSA) claimants that are disabled is given in Freedom of Information request (DWP, 2015) for May in each year 2010-2014. Outside of this FOI request there are no data on the share of JSA claimants that report a disability.  

a. Could you please provide more recent information on the proportion of JSA claimants who report a disability, at the least, by updating the information presented in FOI 2015-447 with the proportion of JSA claimants who reported a disability in May each year, from 2015 to 2018 inclusive?

The roll out of UC means that the JSA caseload is not representative of the claimant count. The claimant count is made up of those on UC and JSA with JSA making up an ever decreasing portion of the total. At July 2018 the claimant count stood at 876k of which 399k were on JSA. Most people making a new claim would go onto UC, so the JSA caseload is increasingly made up of those with claims of longer durations. Disabled people tend to be over represented among longer term claimants and are therefore likely to be increasingly over represented on the JSA caseload.

Below is a table showing Jobseeker’s Allowance claimants by self-declared disability status, May 2010 – May 2017 Great Britain:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Disabled</th>
<th>Not Disabled</th>
<th>Unknown/Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 2010</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2011</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2012</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2013</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2014</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2015</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2016</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2017</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DWP Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study (WPLS) and Labour Market System (LMS)

Notes:
- Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.
- The data is a snapshot of JSA customers with a computerised claim as at the end of May in each of the last eight years; and those who have indicated that they have a disability in the preceding year.
- The data is for claimants who have self-reported as being disabled. This is a subjective assessment by the customer and may not meet the criteria as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005.
- Data is up to May 2017 which is the latest data available at the time of request.

9 Q28
b. Will you commit to making this information—both historic and future—available through Stat-Xplore?

There are no plans to publish the number of claimants who report a disability because this is a ‘self reported’ field in our data and is therefore subjective to whether the claimant a) wants to declare it, and also b) whether they think they have a disability or not.

The statistics we publish for JSA are National Statistics and therefore go through rigorous quality assurance and accuracy checking to ensure a high degree of trust in the statistics. Because the disability indicator is a self-reported field in our administrative data we do not know the accuracy of this field and therefore have never published it as part of our regular Stat-Xplore release.

Question 14.
As introduced by the 2012 Act, under UC, JSA and ESA, longer sanctions are imposed if the claimant has had a similar ‘failure’ within the previous 12 months — this being measured as the time between the dates of the ‘failures’, not the time between sanction decisions. Currently, DWP does not publish any information on how many sanctions there are of each duration. The Department explained in a FOI response (2015-IR 77, 13 August 2015) that it does not record the date of the ‘failure’ for which the claimant is sanctioned. Consequently, it is not possible to identify claimants who suffer the longer sanctions for second, or successive ‘failures’ within 12 months.
Dr David Webster told us that this gap in the statistics was “very strange indeed”.

Please could you confirm:

a. How the Department expects to evaluate the policy of increased sanction lengths without knowing how many of each length have been imposed?

There is existing academic literature that shows the impact of different levels of sanctions on work search behaviour. We are considering how we might apply some of this to our UC data, to look at sanction durations, but this is complicated as sanction duration is currently identified on our analytical systems using drops in payment amounts, rather than purely identifying individual sanctions at different durations.

b. That under UC, the date of the failure, and hence numbers of each length of sanction, is recorded?

Under UC, whilst the date of failure is available (though not published), we still do not hold the start and end dates for a sanction and thus we do not hold the length of the sanction either. Based on payment data, it would be possible to infer the length of sanctions an individual should have received given dates of failure, but this would take considerable time to extract and analyse.

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12 Q8
Please could you provide figures for the lengths of sanctions as imposed (not the already published ‘duration’ figures) for JSA, ESA and UC, for each calendar year as far back as data is available?

I am not currently able to provide these figures. We will investigate the ability to complete the requested analysis and, if possible, add to our programme of developments for 2019.

I hope you find this detail useful.

Kind regards,

Alok Sharma MP
Minister of State for Employment
Annex A

Jobseeker’s Allowance: Sanctions Early Warning Trial

Chapter 4

4 Claimant response to Sanction referral

This chapter explores the barriers and support needs of claimants participating in the JSA Sanctions Early Warning Trial research. Analysis allowed claimants to be grouped into typologies based on their barriers and levels of need. Figure 2, below shows the typologies identified through analysis and also indicates ‘cross cutting’ barriers and influencers which may influence their response to being sanctioned.

4.1 Claimant barriers and support needs

Analysis allowed Claimants to be grouped into typologies identified by the research team based on Claimants' barriers and levels of need. Figure 4.1, below shows the typologies as well as several cross cutting barriers (including homelessness, travel barriers, living on limited means, and experiencing family crisis). In particular, homelessness was a distinct cross cutting issue, with it often indicating other vulnerabilities and disadvantages, such as family break down, or problem drug/alcohol use. Homelessness and using temporary addresses also made communications between Jobcentre Plus (JCP) and the Claimants problematic, with letters not being received or only being delivered late.

These barriers could affect Claimants’ faculty to respond to a Sanction referral or articulate good reason for triggering the Sanction where they had one.

Figure 4.1 Typology of Sanctioned Claimants by barrier and level of support needs

4.2.1 Low support need group

Analysis revealed that many of the Claimants interviewed had fairly low-level support needs. Some were educated professionals with qualifications, skills and substantial employment histories. They generally had no health conditions, debts, or personal issues at that time which might impact on their abilities to meet their Claimant Commitment (CC) obligations and to communicate effectively with JCP.

These low-support needs Claimants were usually well engaged with JCP, and most felt it was their responsibility to understand the CC. Their education and professional backgrounds meant that they had been able to easily grasp its requirements and they often recalled receiving and reading specific paperwork from JCP.

They generally had short periods of unemployment, and were typically proactive about seeking employment opportunities.

Other Claimants in this group simply had no significant barriers they needed support with in order to manage their Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) claim, or to respond to a potential Sanction.
They were not necessarily highly skilled, nor did they previously work in professional or technical jobs, but most were engaged with JCP and had a similar drive to find employment. They tended to be young with a fairly limited work history, including short-term and temporary jobs with periods on JSA in between.

Notably, these Claimants tended to live with family, or had family close by. Despite their relative lack of skills and experience, they could draw on the resources and support of family and friends, and were easily able to turn to them for help when faced with being Sanctioned.

### 4.2.2 Moderate support need group

A number of participants displayed moderate support needs. They possessed few or no qualifications, but had no major communication issues such as difficulties in reading or writing. Some had worked in the same job for many years while others had quite patchy employment histories. The group included a number of younger men in their teens and twenties.

Some reported having multiple Sanctions previously. It was not uncommon that previous or existing Sanctions had been challenged, with varying degrees of success. Being unable to overturn a previous Sanction decision contributed to the group’s general mistrust of JCP and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and impacted on their subsequent willingness to engage with the system in a meaningful way.

> ‘The feeling was I was getting Sanctioned anyway, the more you try to prove [it] they will Sanction you anyway, what is the use of proving this, I have never been in bother in my life for anything like that.’

(Male Claimant, 50, No longer claiming JSA)

As such, Claimants in this group were often disenchanted with the process for providing good cause, irrespective of additional opportunity to submit evidence introduced by the Trial.

### 4.2.3 High support need group

Those assessed as having high level needs had additional vulnerabilities, such as mental health conditions, having English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) needs, and learning difficulties or other severe communication difficulties.

Claimants who disclosed having mental health conditions when interviewed were affected by differing degrees and in different ways. Several Claimants spoke of their debilitating anxiety, and how it made it difficult to do everyday tasks, such as catching a bus. Typically Claimants had a sparse or sporadic work history, and a few reported having had difficulties with their employers. A number of these Claimants reported cycling between JSA and Employment Support Allowance (ESA) claims over the last few years.

Some had been proactive in engaging with JCP, but due to their health issues, lacked the capacity or resilience to do this consistently. Others had given up on engaging with DWP at all by the time of the research interview.

These Claimants often lived in social isolation; they lacked support from family and friends close by, or they had family members who were unwell. Claimants who were refugees and/or had ESOL requirements also often fell into the high needs group. They were socially isolated with little family support locally. Despite having some friends in the area, this group could not rely on friends to support them through difficult times.
For most, ESOL needs prevented easy understanding of communications from JCP. They usually preferred to receive these by letter so that they could take time to read them, attempt translation, and sometimes to ask friends for help with this.

Having learning difficulties and severe literacy issues was an indicator of high level needs. Such clients had a patchy, if any work history.

Literacy and communication was usually the main barrier for these Claimants. They were often able to read and write, but it was challenging and they needed time to do this, though in one instance the Claimant was unable to read or write at all, and was solely reliant on verbal explanations. Claimants’ communication method preferences varied; some preferred telephone calls, others preferred letters as they were otherwise likely to forget times and dates of appointments. However, most felt they needed notice and time to deal with official communications effectively.

Family and friends provided vital support to some in this group, as did disability charities and local services. Others, however, had not had access to support, and had not sought it out from JCP or elsewhere.

Several of these Claimants had been Sanctioned just once, but a few had been Sanctioned multiple times.

### 4.3 Customer journey and response

The extent to which Claimants were aware of participating in the Trial varied as few Claimants interviewed for this research recalled having received the JSA Sanctions Warning Letter (SWL). Two Claimants also reported receiving the Trial letter too late for it to be useful to them, due to address changes as a result of being homeless. It should be noted that the research took place some four to five months after the Sanction decision pertaining to the Trial, which may have affected some Claimants' recall.

#### 4.3.1 Response to the Trial

Claimants who engaged with the Trial (or in the absence of receiving the SWL, communicated with JCP about the Sanction anyway) fell into two main groups; those with the motivation and capacity to do so fairly easily, and those who were motivated by a strong sense of injustice. Those with the capacity and skills to engage in discussion and communication with JCP, without becoming too upset or emotional were often more successful in demonstrating good reason at SEWT stage or at formal appeals stage. They tended towards being in the low, or moderate support needs groups.

Notably, of those interviewed as part of this research, only one Claimant with high level support needs averted being Sanctioned through engaging with the Trial. This Claimant had good reason and was highly supported to articulate this; they did not independently engage in communication with JCP.

#### 4.3.2 Engaged and not Sanctioned

Some Claimants actively engaged with the SWL to provide evidence of their good reason, either filling in the attached form and posting it back to JCP, or by telephoning the number on the Trial letter, and were not Sanctioned as a result. One had resigned from their job due to very difficult circumstances. The respondent was well educated and proactive, and therefore well equipped to explain why the Sanction should not be applied in a calm and persuasive manner.
Another Claimant had received the Trial letter and had sent back their reasons in writing using the form. Soon afterwards the respondent received a similar letter, at which point they rang the number to find out what was happening and spoke to a Labour Market Decision Maker (LMDM). The respondent recalled remaining calm and polite throughout the conversation which appeared to strengthen their case.

‘If you are just like calm, and nice, because a lot of people probably phone up and start swearing and shouting at them, and get aggressive, and like I am not getting Sanctioned, and abusive, but I just kind of ask, like why, and like explain, like my name is and I have got a letter, it says I am Sanctioned and then I give them my details and like I was off sick or whatever was wrong and why I didn’t go, and usually they understand.’

(Female Claimant, 20, not Sanctioned)

This experience and sentiment was echoed by others who had successfully demonstrated good reason following a referral for a Sanction decision, who were equally articulate and motivated by a sense of unfairness or injustice. They also had more positive relationships and perceptions of JCP staff.

In an instance where the relationship with the Work Coach (WC) and JCP in general was ‘very difficult’, one Claimant sought support from Citizens Advice Bureaux (CAB) after being notified of a possible Sanction. The Claimant tended towards the higher need group of Claimants, as they had limited capacity to respond due to their mental health condition. Without the support of the CAB, the Claimant felt they would not have been able to effectively demonstrate good reason to prevent a potential Sanction.

**4.3.3 Engaged but Sanctioned**

There were, of course, some Claimants who received the SWL and engaged with the process and were ultimately Sanctioned. Some reported engaging with communications at first, for example they had telephoned the number on the Trial letter and had spoken to a LMDM, but often gave up when they felt that they were not making progress. One Claimant said they attempted to engage and provide evidence but lost motivation quickly as a result of their previous experience of failing to appeal a Sanction and their history of Sanctions.

In general, Claimants appeared to have lower capacity to communicate and respond effectively with JCP than Claimants who had been successful in preventing their Sanctions. Some had particular vulnerabilities which presented barriers to effective communication, for example, recent/current homelessness, a history of care, learning difficulties, and/or mental health conditions.

One Claimant recalled contacting JCP to start with but said that after this they felt ‘beaten’ with little point trying to fight the Sanction as they felt no-one would listen.

It is unclear whether Claimants interviewed had good reason to prevent a Sanction, however, many felt anger at being referred for a Sanction. This in turn influenced how they would respond to the SWL, shifting the tone of their response. The negative outcome experienced by some Claimants despite their attempt to engage with the process led some to lose faith in JCP, and were sceptical that challenging a Sanction would ever make any difference.

**4.3.4 Non-response to being referred for a Sanction**

Despite receiving the SWL some Claimants chose not to engage with it. Common reasons for non-engagement included:
Claimants appreciating they did not have a good enough reason to challenge the decision.

suspicion of JCP and DWP.
being too angry to engage after being referred for a Sanction.
being afraid to communicate with JCP or challenge a Sanction.
being despondent and feeling the Sanction was inevitable.

There was also evidence that Claimants would rather focus on accessing hardship payments rather than challenge a Sanction despite being able to do both in parallel. In such instances Claimants made pragmatic decisions based on previous experience of both the Sanctions process and applying for hardship, with the perception that the latter was a more reliable and quicker course of action.

'I think I'd probably just stick to hardship because I don't know how long it would take to get back [a Sanction decision], but hardship only takes like a couple of weeks.'

(Female Claimant, 25, Sanctioned)

Others felt the Trial letter was not relevant to them as they were in the process of getting a job, were soon due to move into work, or were preparing for self-employment.

A number of Claimants explicitly reported not receiving the Trial letter. All of these Claimants lived in isolated conditions. Several of the Claimants had multiple barriers, including being homeless, having health and mobility issues, and having literacy issues. It is impossible to know whether the Trial letter would have made any difference had they recalled receiving it, although two suggested they would have reacted had they received the Trial letter. Others indicated that they would not have responded.

'When he phoned me I was shocked, I felt, 'There's nothing you can say, there's nothing I can do, their decision is made and they're not going to change it'. I'm just sort of at the point where I just think, 'What's the point?' Sort of demoralised with it all.'

(Female Claimant, 53, Sanctioned)

A few Claimants had experienced multiple back-to-back Sanctions, but did not engage with LMDMs during the course of the Trial. Their circumstances ranged from those who were living with family and could afford to ignore the Sanction without it greatly impacting on their standard of living, through to those living in deprivation and difficult circumstances. It is not possible from the data collected as part of this research to fully understand why this latter group experience multiple Sanctions and chose not to respond on this occasion or provide evidence of good reason if they had one.

38 A number of Claimants explicitly reported not receiving the Trial letter. All of these Claimants lived in isolated conditions. Several of the Claimants had multiple barriers, including being homeless, having health and mobility issues, and having literacy issues. It is impossible to know whether the Trial letter would have made any difference had they recalled receiving it, although two suggested they would have reacted had they received the Trial letter. Others indicated that they would not have responded.

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the data collected as part of this research to fully understand why this latter group experience multiple Sanctions and chose not to respond on this occasion or provide evidence of good reason if they had one.

4.4 Chapter summary

The 45 Claimants interviewed varied widely in terms of education, skills, work history, health, and in the support available to them from family and friends. All of these factors impacted on how they responded to a Sanctions referral.

Claimants could be segmented into three groups depending upon their relative support needs: low, medium and high-level needs. When combined with some identified cross cutting needs, which included homelessness, travel barriers, low household income and family issues, the segments provide an indication of Claimants’ ability to respond. Recall about receiving the SWL was low and though research had taken place a number of months after the Sanction decision, these findings imply that some Claimants in the Trial did not receive the letter, or received it and simply did not register it.

If a Claimant decided to engage with the Trial, those in the low and moderate support needs groups appeared more able to articulate good reason if they had one. Claimants who were able to successfully prevent a Sanction had the skills, capacity and security to respond effectively and persuasively to the Trial letter (or to learning of a Sanction via another method) and/or they had familial support to help them to do so. Those that engaged, but were still Sanctioned tended towards having lower capacity to communicate and respond effectively with JCP. It is not clear if these Claimants had the necessary good reason to prevent a Sanction.

Some Claimants chose not to engage with it. For some the Sanction was appropriate, and they appreciate the reason for the Sanction could not be challenged. Others were suspicious of JCP, and avoided communication where they could. A few of these Claimants had been on a series of back-to-back Sanctions. This group was split by those living with and being supported by family and those living in deprivation and difficult circumstances.

5 Claimant views of Trial communications and capacity to respond

This chapter considers Claimants’ views of the key features of the Sanctions Early Warning Trial (SEWT). It covers feedback on individual elements of the Trial including the Sanctions Warning Letter (SWL) used for the Trial, the 14 day window to provide evidence and evidence of good reason.

Qualitative interviews with Claimants first explored their unprompted views of the Trial and a timeline of any official communications they recalled. Once a timeline had been established, further probing took place on key elements of the Trial letter, particularly the first line which informed Claimants, ‘We will stop your payments if we don’t hear from you within 14 days’. If they did not recall that part, the Trial letter was then shown to the Claimant. Following this, if a Claimant could not recall the Trial letter, it was given to the Claimant to read in full (with researcher assistance if they could not read).

The research with Claimants took place four or five months after they would have received the Trial letter, therefore the research team anticipated some issues with Claimant recollection. Eighteen of the 45 respondents reported that they did not receive the Trial letter. While this cannot be assured in all cases, the majority were certain because they recalled the different
The wording of the Trial letter they received or found the Trial letter to be new to them. Some reported that letters were getting lost in the post. In other cases, Claimants experienced different Sanctions processes (potentially the Business As Usual (BAU) process) or had aspects of the Trial missing.

In view of the time elapsed between receiving communications and the depth interviews, all respondents were asked to give their view of what the Trial letter was asking them to do, whether it would prompt them into action and the letter’s tone and communication style.

## 5.1 Views on the Sanctions Warning Letter

This section explores what Claimants thought of the Trial letter itself, including their first impressions of the Trial letter, its tone and contents, and the extent to which Claimants understood its key messages.

### 5.1.1 First impressions

Most Claimants reported that the Trial letter was at first glance quite clear in its key message that money would be stopped after 14 days. The fact that this was in bold and larger print made it stand out, and drew their eye to it.

> 'It did say unless you contact us in 14 days, with the reason why you've missed your appointment, you may not get payment. I do remember reading, it was perfectly clear.'

(Male Claimant, 44, no longer Claimant JSA)

Those who had previously received the standard letter about Sanctions usually said that the SWL was clearer, and that they preferred it. Some said it would have prompted them into action.

> 'If I'd have seen that, I'd have phoned the day I got it and I'd have said to them, 'You're trying to say you'll stop my payment in 14 days.'

(Female Claimant, 19, no longer Claimant JSA)

### 5.1.2 Tone

Claimants’ views on the tone of the Trial letter were more mixed. Some said that it was ‘too impersonal’, ‘dehumanising’, ‘demanding’, or ‘threatening’. However, other Claimants thought that the Trial letter was quite helpful and reasonably friendly in tone – and perceived it to be providing people with an extra chance to prevent a Sanction.

> 'It is basically telling me what to do to avoid the sanction ... That is really helpful. I think that is a really helpful letter; I would have got in touch with them'

(Female Claimant, 47, Sanctioned)

### 5.1.3 The grey box

There was a grey box on the right hand side of the first page of the Trial letter saying ‘Contact us with any additional information. It’s not too late to talk to us about the situation. If you do, your payments might not stop.’
The language and tone was different to the rest of the Trial letter. However, Claimants generally missed this box altogether, and focused on the main body of the Trial letter, reading down and then turning over to the second page.

‘Yes, on the side it’s almost as if it was forgotten to put in or, like, when you’re on Google, [or] you go onto Facebook there’s a little ad[vert]is at the sides, just little ads that someone threw in there for the hell of it whereas if it’s anything you know it is included.’

(Male Claimant, 24, Sanctioned)

When it was pointed out to some, they generally responded positively to its message which was described by a Claimant as giving them ‘hope’, and said that they preferred its tone to that in the rest of the Trial letter. Respondents thought that if Jobcentre Plus (JCP) wanted to be sure that the information it contained would be read, its contents should have been included in the main body of the letter, near the beginning.

‘The most important parts are always at the beginning of the letter, not everyone reads through to the end.’

(Male Claimant, 24, Sanctioned)

### 5.1.4 Understanding of action required

The research also explored Claimants’ understanding of the action required of them, in response to the Trial letter. Most had little difficulty in grasping the main point of the Trial letter, and what they were being asked to do – to get in touch with Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to provide reasons for non-compliance within 14 days from the date of the letter.

One Claimant said that the fact that they were being given more time meant that they would deprioritise dealing with this situation; most Claimants felt that it gave them more of a chance to get in touch. One picked up on the importance of providing evidence to DWP.

‘It is very clear. You know, you need to provide evidence, very simple. You need to show us that you are actually trying to be employed.’

(Female Claimant, 33, Sanctioned)

A smaller proportion of Claimants did not understand what the Trial letter was asking of them. One had seen the bold headings, had realised it was important, and had taken the Trial letter to their Work Coach (WC) for support with this.

Another (who had not received it), said that they would need support to understand it fully. Several other Claimants clearly did not understand the purpose of the Trial letter and/or that evidence was required as a result, and two were unclear as to whether and when a Sanction would be applied.

Some Claimants reported that they had not received the SWL but that they would have taken action if they had.

‘If I’d received that I’d be at them straight away, because it says, ‘We will stop your payments.’ So, I’m, like, ‘Why, and how do I stop this?’ I would most definitely phone up straightaway because of how it starts, ‘We will stop your payments.’ I mean, I wouldn’t even read the rest of the letter, I would just phone up straight away.’

(Female Claimant, 31, Sanctioned)

Several said that they extra time would have given them a chance to act, gather evidence and to explain things to DWP.
5.1.5 Suggested improvements

The main criticism that Claimants had about the Trial letter was that it was too long. Several said that they would only read the first half of the first page before either getting in touch with DWP or deciding not to act at all. The Trial letter was thought to be complex for people with dyslexia or literacy issues.

A number of suggestions were made to overcome the criticisms of the Trial letter. The most commonly-mentioned improvements to the Trial letter was that it could be shortened and made simpler.

'I think there’s too much writing on it, if you know what I mean, there’s too much to go through, I think that’s enough, we will stop your payments if we don’t hear from you within 14 days, please contact us. I think that would be enough.'

(Female Claimant, 31, Sanctioned)

Claimants suggested rephrasing some of the terms to make the Trial letter more accessible and less frightening; for example, rephrasing ‘we will stop your benefits’ to ‘there is a danger…’ in order to better balance threat with support

‘There’s more of that, what’s going to happen to you’ as opposed to how much help there is. I suppose the tone of it’s a bit more threatening than helpful. At the end of the day they want more information, so you know, threatening folks is not generally the way to get that.’

(Male Claimant, 42, No longer Claimant JSA)

Related to this, it was suggested that providing the ‘grey box’ language throughout would make it easier to comply with and encourage engagement. Other style and format recommendations included placing core information at the beginning of the letter, and making the return address for written evidence clearer. One Claimant thought that the Trial letter should provide access to a face to face appointment with a WC, and two others felt that a better explanation of what was meant by evidence was needed.

A number of Claimants felt strongly that a freephone number (for mobiles as well as landlines) should be provided. A number of Claimants reported the lack of a freephone number was a barrier to reacting to the letter.

'The number is not free. So if [you're] someone who's unemployed, who already struggles you know with bills and food and whatever you still need to pay for.'

(Female Claimant, 33, Sanctioned)

5.2 DWP communications and support

This section considers the support Claimants received from JCP WCs and Work Programme (WP) advisers, Labour Market Decision Makers (LMDMs), and the Dispute Resolution Team (DRT).

5.2.1 WC and Work Programme advisers

Overall, there were a mix of views and experiences regarding WCs and the level of support they were willing to share regarding evidence giving.

Some Claimants reported largely positive experiences with WCs and advisers. One was positive about the help they had been given by their WC, even though this did not prevent the Sanction from going ahead. They were given support to fill it in with their reasons for missing an appointment.
'The JCP helped me fill [in the form]. They spoke to me about it because I didn't understand it at first and they explained it and stuff and showed me what it meant and what to write. Obviously they filled it in and they sent it away.'

(Male Claimant, 20, Sanctioned)

Another had a very good relationship with their WC. This Claimant had got their appointment date wrong, and acknowledged that it was their error. While disappointed to have been Sanctioned for what they considered to be an 'honest mistake', it was appreciated that these were the current JCP rules. The fact that the WC was always fair and respectful also made the Sanction decision more acceptable.

'No, he was all right. Not his mistake, no, my mistake. I don't know what to call it but just, he said, 'You have to come on Friday, why do you come today?' I told him everything but he said, 'I can't do anything.'

(Male Claimant, 37, Sanctioned)

Other Claimants reported more variable experiences with WCs and advisers, depending on whom they had seen.

Some Claimants reported that on the whole they had had rather negative experiences with their WC and advisers. One had seen lots of different people in a short space of time and had found this difficult in terms of trust and consistency; for others, it had been helpful when they could see the same person regularly. Several Claimants said they would have liked to have received face to face support from a WC, or someone else at JCP but when they went in to ask for this, they were given a number to ring instead. They felt there was no opportunity to discuss their case properly by phone. A customer with English for Speakers of Other Language (ESOL) needs had received little support from their WC on the process of appealing a Sanction, and they had not been given any support to provide evidence.

A number of Claimants mentioned that their WC had been more available to support with a hardship application, than they had been for help with responding to the SWL or filling out an appeal form.

5.2.2 Labour Market Decision Makers

When Claimants rang the number on the Trial letter, they got through to a LMDM. Claimants reported a similarly mixed experience when communicating with the LMDMs, in terms of feeling listened to and supported.

A number of Claimants had a positive experience with LMDMs, and said they had been able to present their evidence to the LMDM in a fairly straightforward manner. They said that the LMDMs had been professional and helpful, and had explained things clearly.

One Claimant needed to ring up several times and repeat their points, before their message was heard. They felt that being able to remain calm throughout this had probably helped their case, but appreciated that many people in a similar situation probably got quite frustrated with the process.

Other Claimants said that their conversations with LMDMs had been more difficult. They felt that the LMDM was not interested in hearing the context to their reason, which made them seem un-empathic.

5.3 Responding to the letter
The SWL said that Claimants had a choice about the various ways they could respond; they could respond in writing, by calling the phone number to speak to a LMDM or by talking to their WC. However the research found that Claimants were not always assisted to engage in the way they wanted to, and that there were inconsistencies in the methods they were told to use. Some Claimants wanted to speak to their WC, but were told to ring the helpline number instead (as discussed above). Some were told to provide their reasons verbally, others were told by LMDMs that although they had provided them verbally, they still needed to submit them in writing. For some this was not too much of an issue, as they had the capacity to easily provide evidence verbally or in writing.

‘No, I’d had to phone them once, because you could either fill in the form and send it back to them, or you could phone them and give your reason over the phone. Yes, I phoned them and that’s when they said just fill it in and send it to us.’

(Male Claimant, 36, not Sanctioned)

However, for several who found reading and writing difficult due to literacy issues or dyslexia, this was problematic. Others viewed this as yet another barrier to avoiding a Sanction, which led them to disengage.

‘When I phoned them up they said I had to write a letter to contest and once they said that I was just so shocked, I just said nae bother and hung up the phone on them. I was so angry.’

(Male Claimant, 32, Sanctioned)

A few Claimants provided written evidence, although they did not know what they needed to provide, even though they found writing very challenging.

There were also some implementation issues and/or administration errors reported by a few Claimants, who said that they had sent evidence in to the LMDMs, but when they followed this up were told that it had been lost or had never been received.

5.4 Claimant views on the 14 day evidence window

Most Claimants were happy with the idea and principle of providing an additional 14 days to provide evidence before the Sanction went ahead. They spoke of it giving them some ‘leeway’ and extra time to explain.

‘Well, personally, I think that’s quite a good idea, because it giving people that time to try and get thing sorted out a little bit, before they’re Sanctioned.’

(Male Claimant, 19, not Sanctioned)

One Claimant felt that the standard five days provided was not enough time to allow for postage delays when providing evidence; they thought that 14 days was a fairer and more realistic amount of time. A few Claimants felt that 14 days might not be sufficient to provide some forms of evidence, particularly written evidence and evidence from third parties such as hospitals, GPs or former employers. One Claimant said that in theory the additional time was good but their experience was that the extra time seemed to have increased the likelihood of JCP losing evidence. They thought that the process needed to be more efficiently managed. Some sceptical Claimants thought that the additional time would not make any difference to the eventual outcome.

5.5 Chapter summary
The research with Claimants took place four or five months after they would have received the Trial letter, and there were some issues with Claimants' recollection. Many respondents reported that they did not receive the Trial letter, and others were unsure whether they did or not.

Claimants reported that the Trial letter was at first glance quite clear in its key message that money would be stopped after 14 days. Those who had previously received the standard letter about Sanctions usually said that the SWL was clearer, and that they preferred it. Claimants' views about the tone of the Trial letter were mixed. Most Claimants had missed the grey box at the side of the first page, with its 'friendlier' language. Most Claimants were able to grasp the main point of the Trial letter, and what they were being asked to do – to get in touch with DWP to provide reasons for non-compliance within 14 days from the date of the Trial letter. A smaller proportion of Claimants did not understand what the Trial letter was asking of them, and would need support to do this. Claimants broadly agreed that the Trial letter was fairly clear and helpful, that it provided information about what to do, and they were glad that it mentioned hardship payments. The main criticism of the Trial letter was that it was too long and that much of the information was unnecessary and could be simplified, and that a freephone number (for mobiles as well as landlines) should be provided.

Claimants reported having had variable experience with WCs, both positive and negative. Their reports also revealed inconsistencies in the ways in which the Trial operated at this level. At LMDM level, there appeared a little more consistency of approach, but again, Claimants' experiences were varied. Notably, some were told that they could provide evidence verbally, while others were told they had to submit this in writing. Only one Claimant interviewed had experience of a DRT member, which they said had been positive. Claimants also reported letters and evidence going missing.

Most Claimants were happy with the idea and principle of providing an additional 14 days to provide evidence before the Sanction went ahead. Some thought that 14 days might not be sufficient to provide some forms of evidence, particularly written evidence and evidence from third parties such as hospitals, GPs or former employers.
Annex B

The Department operates an operational level of process error and payment error assurance activity. The Department has a soundly based approach to understanding the quality of the service provided to its customers. This includes two types of independent and objective assurance which are used to understand the standard of quality and emerging risks. Where emerging risks are observed these are reviewed with risks mitigated through an improvement strategy.

These assurance approaches are known as –

Tier 1 – this involves operational colleagues assuring, reviewing and then coaching improvements against a Quality Assurance Framework.

Tier 2 – Involves assuring a statistically valid volume of cases per month in order to provide a reliable view of the standard of quality. Cases are randomly selected. In the instance of UC Live Service, 121 cases are assured each month. For Full Service (UCFS), 315 cases are assured at New Claims in addition to 260 on-going claims.

Tier 3 – Performance Measurement (PM) gathers data on the level of incorrectness across a range of DWP Benefits. The information is used at operational level to develop strategies to reduce losses and is used by the Department within the annual report and accounts.

Tier 2

In the summer of 2017 we observed from our tier two assurances two emerging risks in relation to failure to attend good cause and claimant commitments. The details of the specific errors are defined below and the following charts plot the data relating to these errors and the improvement can be seen over-time.

Failure to attend good cause – Tier 2 assurance measures whether failed to attend good cause consideration has been given within the Work Coach discretionary decision making authority. Errors are recorded where evidence shows that the customer has failed to attend, but there is no evidence of good cause decision making or referral to specialist decision maker to confirm entitlement remains. Other errors arise from inappropriate failed to attend action being taken. It must be noted that some errors may be administrative errors in that good cause decision making has occurred but has not been recorded correctly and has no direct impact on the service customer receives.
Claimant Commitment – Tier 2 assurance seeks to ensure that a Claimant Commitment is held, and confirms claimant circumstances meet legislative requirements for appropriate work search activity – number of hours available for example. Errors arise where a claimant commitment is not held or appropriate information is not accurately recorded. Administrative errors as described above may also apply.

As a proportion of cases sampled, whilst the increased error rate was not significant, it was recognised that these elements are important to great customer service and an improvement strategy was invoked to mitigate these risks. A feature of the Department’s approach to improving quality is to isolate a particular part of the service which present risks and to award “critical status” which entails weekly reporting on performance, capability builds and use of local controls to support improvement.

Tier 3 – (Latest published results to November 2017)

Results from the MVFE 18/19 Preliminary statistics included 5 Conditionality (sanctionable failure) errors – amounting to £5.1m MVFE from a total of £60m: 4 Overpayments were due
to the sanction decision not being applied and 2 due to sanction decision not imposed at correct time. 1 Underpayment as the sanction should have been removed when it was realised that customer had Limited Capability for Work and there was no obligation to attend Work Programme.

Closing Summary

In relation to tier three (Performance Measurement), the most recent published data is up to November 17, we have reviewed this data and there are no specific concerns in relation to failed to attend activity; this indicates that the Department’s Quality Framework is fulfilling its purpose in providing an 'early warning' sign of this risk, enabling controls be put in place to mitigate the risk with the independent tier 2 assurance tracking and measuring progress. The same approach described above is in development for UCFS and the early emerging results are not indicating any risks.

Annex C – Work Coach Learning Journey
See electronic attachment.
Annex D

First Commitments Meeting
All claimants in the Intensive Work Search Regime have a mandatory 50 minute face to face First Commitments Meeting at the start of their claim. The purpose of this meeting is to develop a good understanding of the claimant’s circumstances and to discuss and agree requirements that are reasonable in the light of experience and the claimant’s circumstances. Nationally in the period 1 April to 30 June, 155,408 claimants in the Intensive Work Search Regime (IWSR) attended a 50 minute First Commitments Meeting.

Work Search Reviews
The First Commitments Meeting is followed by weekly work search reviews for the first 13 weeks of the claim, with 50% of claimants moving to fortnightly work search reviews thereafter. Work search reviews are usually face to face and range from 10 to 50 minutes, depending on individual need.

The majority of attended work search reviews are booked for 20 minute slots

The above data is National Management Information (MI) from 1 April – 30 June showing both UC live and full service and gives the appointment lengths that claimants are booked in to for work search reviews.

The data shows that work coaches provide a tailored service to claimants and do book appointments depending on the claimant’s needs with a range of appointment lengths being utilised. The majority of claimants (55%) are booked into a 20 minute work search review. The graph below is the data for the same period solely for claimants within Birkenhead JCP and reflects the national picture as above.
At Birkenhead JCP, the majority of attended work search reviews are booked for 20 minute slots.

Other appointments

The First Commitments Meeting and the work search reviews are only a few of the available appointment types for claimants in the Intensive Work Search Regime. Below in Annex E is the full list of appointments available to book for Intensive Work Search Regime claimants, including appointment lengths and reasons for use.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Duration</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Review of Claimant Work Search Activities</td>
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<td>Review of Claimant Work Search Activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Habitual Residence Test &amp; Data Gathering Interview</td>
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**First Contact with Claimant**

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<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Capture of NINO/ad hoc verification</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conduct biographical ID check/issue of PSN and NINO</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bio/Evidence</td>
<td>40 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bio/Photographic ID</td>
<td>35 mins</td>
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<td>Standard ID/Evidence</td>
<td>25 mins</td>
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<tr>
<td>Standard ID</td>
<td>20 mins</td>
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<tr>
<td>PSN + PCYA</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Interview to request recoverable hardship payments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Claimant was disabled and has been asked to attend JCP so the details can</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>be verified in a face-to-face environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Visit to健康的Building/Meeting with CLP and pre-learned details</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>interviews to claimants after they have been claiming for 6 months</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gateway interview to support their claim</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer Evidence interview to bring in multiple evidence to support their claim</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Employer Evidence interview to bring in additional evidence to support their claim</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Further Evidence interview to bring in additional evidence to support their claim</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Further Evidence interview to bring in additional evidence to support their claim</td>
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<tr>
<td>Claimant wishes to discuss their enquiry in a face-to-face environment</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other A care leaver is a person who has been in the care environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Care Leave interview and CC</td>
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<tr>
<td>APA Advance Requests</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Advance appointment for Pupil Leavers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Young Person's leaves care and requires an IEL</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Commitments Review</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Claimant commitment review appointment, normally arranged following a</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Duration</td>
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<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Work coach Self-employed claimants in appointment with an enhanced capability</td>
<td>30 mins</td>
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<tr>
<td>To book self-employed claimants</td>
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<tr>
<td>To review progress in the proceeding 13 weeks against the steps previously agreed and agreed new steps for the next 13 weeks</td>
<td>40 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To review progress on commitments and maintain forward impulses once started on the WHP program</td>
<td>60 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work and Health Programme - WHP</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Outcome of Work and Health Programme Referral Interview</td>
<td>40 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work and Health Programme - WHP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Referral Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Month 6 - Youth Obligation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Undertaken following 1AP Workshop 2</td>
<td>20 mins</td>
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<tr>
<td>Air Coaching 2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Undertaken following 1AP Workshop 1</td>
<td>20 mins</td>
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<tr>
<td>Air Coaching 1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Obligation Workshop (technical solution)</td>
<td>90 mins</td>
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<tr>
<td>1AP Workshop 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Youth Obligation Workshop (technical solution)</td>
<td>90 mins</td>
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<tr>
<td>1AP Workshop 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Welsh Language Interview</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Where claimant can be referred to be conducted in Welsh</td>
<td>50 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Re-issuing PSN</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Appointment used to re-confirm the claimants ID in order to re-issue PSN</td>
<td>20 mins</td>
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</tbody>
</table>