Justin Tomlinson MP  
Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work  
Department for Work and Pensions  

29 July 2019

Dear Justin,

It has come to my attention that the Department has changed the content of the letters it sends to Universal Credit claimants who have undertaken Work Capability Assessments (WCAs).¹

Under the legacy system, claimants who were found “fit for work” by the Department (i.e. not entitled to ESA) received a letter containing that decision. The letter also set out the reasons for that decision, via a breakdown of where the claimant had scored “points” on the WCA. Claimants must get over a certain number of points to be entitled to ESA, or its Universal Credit equivalents.

The Committee has previously concluded that claimant trust in the WCA is in desperately short supply.² We recommended the Department provide all claimants with a copy of their full assessment report, alongside the decision and points breakdown, to improve trust, transparency and understanding of the Department’s decisions. The Department rejected this recommendation, but said it recognised our concerns. Alarmingly, the Department now appears to have taken a step backwards in respect of transparency.

The letter sent to Universal Credit claimants who have been through the WCA does not contain this information. It contains either a decision (for successful claims: including those who are only eligible to receive the ESA-WRAG equivalent), or a decision and a tick list of activities considered (for unsuccessful claims). Claimants who want to understand the basis of that decision have to request a breakdown of points (and possibly their assessment report). This eats into the time that they have to register an MR, which must be requested within one month of the decision. Claimants also have one, concurrent, month, in which to request a breakdown.

I am sure I do not need to explain to you the additional stress that this can cause claimants, during what can already be an enormously stressful process. It could also

² PIP and ESA Assessments and PIP and ESA Assessments: Claimant experiences
affect the Department's operations. If claimants understand—and agree with—the basis for a decision, they are unlikely to go to MR. Conversely, claimants who have no way of understanding why their claim has been rejected, or why they have been placed in the equivalent of the WRAG rather than the Support Group, may be more likely to request an MR. This will add to the Department's workload.

Might you please, therefore, agree to reinstate the provision of a breakdown of points in decision letters for all Universal Credit claimants who undergo a WCA?

With very best wishes and I look forward to hearing from you,

Rt Hon Frank Field MP
Chair, Work and Pensions Committee