From the Chair

22 February 2019

Peter Schofield
Permanent Secretary
Department for Work and Pensions

Dear Peter,

**ESA Underpayments**

I am writing following the Written Ministerial Statement on underpayments of ESA made on 21 February. I note that the number of staff in your Department working on underpayments has increased from 400 to 1,200, and that the number of cases being reviewed has increased by 30,000. We welcome the thoroughness with which the Department is approaching this task, though it is regrettable that you are having to expend precious resources on correcting such extensive errors.

Might you please let us have:

1. An estimate of the total administrative cost (i.e. excluding arrears) of reviewing and correcting the underpayments?

2. An explanation of how the Department has made these resources available—in particular, what work have you had to stop or deprioritise in order to deploy 1,200 staff to this exercise?

In your letter of 2 February, you said that you intended to finalise your 2019-20 plans and budgets in February, in light of your reduced DEL funding for this year. As the end of February approaches, might you please provide us with an update?

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

Rt Hon Frank Field MP
Chair