4 February 2019

Dear Frank,

On 25 May 2018, the Department for Work and Pensions submitted written evidence to your Committee’s inquiry into benefit sanctions. I then took part in an oral evidence session on 27 June 2018 during the course of the same inquiry.

Subsequent to this, Dr Webster, who also provided evidence during your inquiry, in communication with the Department, pointed out an inaccuracy in our written evidence. It came in the highlighted sentence of paragraph 22 of the Department’s evidence reproduced below:

“There are differences between sanctions policy in UC and other benefits which means that a comparative assessment cannot be made. For instance, a JSA claimant would have their claim closed if they fail to attend a Work Coach meeting and do not make contact within five days. This does not register as a sanction. Under UC, these same claimants would be referred for a sanction, but to ensure that they continue to receive other elements to which they may be entitled, such as payment for children and housing costs, their claims are not closed. Likewise, in JSA, when a claimant is determined to be ‘not actively seeking work’ this will end their entitlement to benefit and their claim will be closed and this will again not be counted as a sanction. In UC, for the same reasons above, the claim is kept open and this action would be recorded as a sanction.”

The example quoted in this sentence would be recorded as a sanction for statistical purposes. A gap in the fact-checking process during the preparation of the written evidence led to this inaccuracy not being picked up.

This does not materially change the evidence provided as it is still the case that differences between sanctions policies in Jobseeker’s Allowance and Universal Credit mean that sanctions rates should not be compared.
I have asked my officials to check all the evidence provided during the course of the inquiry and I can confirm that there are no other inaccuracies.

I would be happy to arrange a meeting if you would like to discuss this issue further.

Alok Sharma MP
Minister of State for Employment