



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Minister for Disabled People,
Health and Work
4th Floor
Caxton House
Tothill Street
LONDON
SW1H 9DA

www.dwp.gov.uk

Frank Field MP
Chair of the Work and Pensions Select Committee

31 October 2018

Dear Frank,

Thank you for your letter addressing some of the Committee's concerns and queries regarding our response to the inquiry into employment support for carers. I regret that you were underwhelmed by our response, and its subsequent recommendations, and would like to reassure you that the Government absolutely shares your commitment to improve the lives of the millions of people who provide care to their family and friends.

Carer's Allowance

The Government is keen to support carers to undertake some work where they can, although it is appreciated that due to the level of their caring responsibilities, not all carers can do so. Many Carer's Allowance (CA) claimants do manage to combine their caring duties with some employment, whether that be as an employee or as a self-employed person. Therefore, I think it is reasonable for the department to conclude that the "CA earnings limit is generally working well for many claimants". However, I can assure you that this is an area that we review regularly and this is clearly shown by the fact that over the last few years we have increased the CA earnings limit by a higher percentage rate than the average earnings growth.

It may also be helpful if I say a bit more about why introducing a taper would significantly complicate the current CA scheme. Introducing a taper would require a fundamental change to our current IT systems and operational process which are all geared around a cut-off (the earnings limit). We would need to put arrangements in place to collect details of weekly earnings and adjust CA awards accordingly. It is likely that we would need to get this information directly from claimants and make changes manually as Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) real-time earnings information is unlikely to provide earnings information in the form required for CA purposes. This would also have knock-on effects for Universal Credit (UC) as UC awards would need to be adjusted to take account of varying payments of CA; this is not currently the case as CA is paid at a flat rate.

With regards to the level of detail held on the Gov.UK pages about allowable expenses, we have, as you are aware, added further detail. However, the information held on Gov.UK is monitored and changes are made by the Government Digital Service (GDS) when a user need has been identified as not being met. These needs are established through extensive user research from anonymous user feedback. No issues have been identified with this section as it stands. We will, nevertheless, work with GDS to continue to ensure the pages meet user needs.

Information and guidance

I recognise that improving the information and guidance available to carers is a vital step in supporting carers to remain in, or re-enter, work. Internally in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) we are addressing this need through the Carers Employment Digital Discovery Project. Due to the complexity of the issues being considered we have adopted a flexible and multi-phased approach, using the learning from each phase of the work to inform and shape the subsequent phases. This approach enables us to get the most insightful and ultimately useful results possible. We envisage the bulk of the activity being completed during 2018-19 but cannot be more precise at this stage as the work and approach continues to evolve in light of our analysis.

We are also engaging with the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) to address information provision for carers in GP surgeries and hospitals. DHSC have worked in partnership with Carers UK to develop

the Carers Passport. This tool provides information and resources to hospitals, mental health trusts and community schemes outlining the support that they can offer carers who come to them. The passport includes leaflets for hospitals to give to carers and posters advertising the scheme. The Carers Action Plan, published in 2018, also outlines the work taking place to monitor and quality assure the support offered to carers in GP surgeries, raise awareness of challenges faced by carers amongst social workers and a project to promote best practice for carers for local authorities and clinical commissioning groups.

Jobcentre Plus support

As the committee noted in their report, Jobcentre Plus (JCP) has the potential to act as a useful point of contact and support for carers. In cases where a carer identifies themselves to JCP, and wishes to combine paid work with their caring responsibilities, or where a carer wishes to prepare for work when their caring responsibility ends, they may be offered access to a package of work preparation support. This could include an appointment with a JCP Work Coach; however, this support cannot be proactively offered as a JCP member of staff would not necessarily be aware whether the claimant was a carer.

Alongside this appointment, a carer could also be offered the following support:

- One-to-one personalised support from a Work Coach trained in carer issues (for example, care options);
- A realistic action plan, detailing steps to be taken to assist the carer to find or increase their work commitment;
- Advice on in-work benefits;
- Advice on self-help job search channels, online work search sites and benefits adviser services on gov.uk;
- Advice on employment options, including flexible working;
- Help for carers to overcome financial barriers when looking for work or starting full time employment; and
- Advice on replacement care options if they do choose to enter full-time employment.

Through the Work and Health Programme (WHP), carers and ex-carers can undertake voluntary work and receive personal support to identify employment opportunities and bespoke training. Examples of the type of support include regular face to face contact with a personal key worker, mentoring, access to specialist support networks, peer support, and support from dedicated employer experts with knowledge of the labour market and local job opportunities. So far, the programme has proven successful in enabling a number of carers to develop their skills and progress to paid employment.

And, more generally, we are continuing to look for opportunities to increase awareness of the support we can provide to carers.

In the UC learning journey there is mandatory carers training which will have to be undertaken by all Work Coaches and Case Managers before starting to deliver UC to customers. In addition, there are two optional products incorporated in the CA learning for Work Coaches in order to enhance their existing skills and knowledge. The two optional modules mentioned in our initial response are included alongside this letter.


We do not routinely collect the data on specific training undertaken by our staff that you have requested. Nevertheless, I am confident that DWP staff have access to the information they need to provide support to carers. But we are not complacent in reviewing and improving the information we make available to our staff, and the comprehensive UC learning offering will mean that, going forward, all carers receiving UC will be able to talk to a Work Coach who is trained to identify their specific needs and offer tailored support.

Employment support

Since the Government initially responded to your Committee's report, we have made an important and very relevant announcement – which I am sure you will be aware of. In October we said that we would consider creating a duty for employers to consider whether a job can be done flexibly, and make that clear when advertising. That work is in its early stages and we will be drawing on the expertise and experience of the Flexible Working Taskforce to help work the issues through.

You also asked whether our work on dedicated employment rights for carers will include paid leave. We are at an early stage of developing our thinking but can confirm that it is one of a number of options that is under consideration.

Once again, I assure you that the Government remains committed to doing all we can to support carers, and fully recognises the dedicated and vital service they provide.

Yours sincerely,


Sarah Newton MP
Minister for Disabled People, Health & Work