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Thank you for your letter dated 8 November highlighting the Committee's further thoughts on the important issue of employment support for carers. I hope this response provides you with greater clarity on the points which you raised.

**1. You explained that a significant barrier to introducing a taper for Carer's Allowance is the "fundamental change" required to current IT systems and operational processes, "which are all geared around a cut-off". It strikes me that this will inevitably be a challenge when introducing any change and, if such issues were never tackled, nothing would ever change. Could you therefore please confirm whether:**

- a. the Department has costed the changes required; and**
- b. if it weren't for the practical challenges, you would consider introducing a taper for Carer's Allowance?**

For your reference, in my letter of 31 October, I set out some of the "operational" challenges of introducing a taper. In our earlier formal response to the report, we highlighted the fact that whilst we support a taper in Universal Credit, that is because it is a means-tested benefit which is specifically designed to ensure that work always pays. Carer's Allowance (CA) is a very different benefit and the earnings rules serve a very different purpose. We have not fully costed the operational changes

that would be necessary to introduce one. More generally we are in the process of an ongoing programme to update our CA “back office” IT systems, which will build on the improvements made to the claiming process over the last few years.

**2. The Gov.uk website still does not include all the deductions carers can make from their earnings before the threshold applies. You explained that such changes are made on the basis of “extensive user research from anonymous user feedback” and “no issues have been identified with this section as it stands”. But is this not because people do not know what should be listed in the first place, so do not, indeed cannot, take issue with omissions? I would also be grateful to know what research has been conducted regarding awareness of the expenses carers can deduct from their earnings before the threshold applies.**

When considering changes to Gov.uk pages, we must rely on advice from the Government Digital Service (GDS) who manage Gov.uk. Based on what we currently know from the extensive user research from anonymous user feedback, no issues have been identified with this section as it stands. Given that changes to the Gov.uk page are made on the basis of user feedback, we would be happy to pass on any evidence that the Committee itself has gathered about customer experience of these pages on Gov.uk to GDS for their consideration.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) itself has not undertaken any relevant research on carers’ detailed understanding of the CA earnings rules, but we are regularly talking to stakeholders who will be obtaining feedback on these sorts of issues from those they represent. When stakeholders raise significant issues with us, we investigate them and take appropriate follow up action.

**3. Someone claiming just Carer’s Allowance is not entitled to an appointment with a work coach to consider their options for staying in or entering employment. Our report recommended that these people should be eligible for an appointment if they want one. The Government’s response explained:**

**“It is already good practice in Jobcentres for carers that wish to seek advice around the support available to remain in or re-enter the labour market are able to have a conversation with a member of staff who will be able to direct them to sources of support and be quickly signposted to any available guidance.”**

**In my letter of 26 July, I asked whether “good practice” meant carers were proactively informed of their ability to ask for advice about employment. You explained that this was not possible because “a JCP member of staff would not necessarily be aware whether the claimant was a carer”. This is surprising, as surely their status of a carer is known through their Carer’s Allowance claim. Would it not therefore be possible simply to inform any claimant of Carer’s Allowance that they can access employment advice from JCP staff should they want it?**

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. JCP staff are unable to target CA claimants because JCP staff do not have access to the IT systems which host the CA details.

Referrals to the Work and Health Programme (WHP) are made via Work Coaches in Jobcentre Plus (JCP). Through this programme, carers and ex-carers can undertake voluntary work and receive personal support to identify employment opportunities and bespoke training. WHP providers work with the resources and successful programmes available within local areas. This will ensure that effective use is made of local funding streams and the expertise of local service suppliers (including Carers organisations) so that participants with multiple barriers to work can receive co-ordinated and holistic support. Individuals, even with similar barriers or characteristics, can respond differently and so require tailored support. So far, the programme has proven successful in enabling a number of carers to develop their skills and progress to paid employment.

Alongside a work coach 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, including tax credits;

- 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.

To elaborate further, it is of course good practice for our Jobcentre Plus (JCP) sites to offer support in seeking employment to all people who ask for it, including carers. To support this good practice we are at the final stages of developing a specific training product which clarifies to front line staff our position and what help we can offer, working with and through work coaches and local carers organisations and other partners.

We are committed to ensuring that carers are signposted to the support that is available to them, by working with and through local carers organisations and other providers. To ensure that carers are aware of JCP support available, we are considering sending a letter to carers detailing JCP support in their annual reward notice.

**4. Several of our inquiries have highlighted work coaches' ever-growing responsibilities, particularly in terms of the need to identify and respond to the many complex circumstances that claimants might be faced with. The Department frequently points to the training modules on offer to reassure the Committee that work coaches are equipped to deal successfully with such situations. It is therefore worrying that the Department does "not routinely collect the data on specific training undertaken by our staff". In light of this, could you please confirm:**

- a. how the Department can be confident work coaches have the skills and capabilities to work with claimants if it does not know how many work coaches have completed necessary training, particularly those relating to vulnerable claimants; and**
- b. whether the Department would start to collect data on work coach training to identify where uptake is low, and therefore gaps in work coach capacity might exist?**

DWP has made a public commitment that all work coaches will be professionally qualified and that by 2021, 11,000 work coaches will have

undertaken or be working towards a level 4 qualification in Managing the Delivery of Services to Customers.

Universal Credit Full Service (UCFS) has an established 4-stage process to learning. Universal Learning is based on a holistic approach and classroom learning is only part of the experience, with the post learning of equal importance. It is difficult to extract the learning products from the actual delivery, instructions and consolidation activity. The classroom and supported learning is evaluated as it is delivered however the consolidation learning in the field, and the continuous learning by each member of staff, is assessed in a more general manner on a day-to-day basis.

Line Managers have a key role in discussing and supporting individual learning needs, and then validating if the learning has been understood and consolidated. UCFS has a quality checking regime in place to assure a tailored claimant journey, feedback is captured and this informs improvement activities. A Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) is in place to ensure that the strategic vision for UCFS is delivered. Work Coach Team Leaders spend 80% of their time focused on coaching work coaches to manage performance to build capability and confidence through 1-2-1 discussions and direct observations of Work Coaches' interactions with claimants. Local records are kept of what training individuals need to do and have done, but we have no means of monitoring or tracking this centrally.

I hope that this response reassures you of Government's commitment to supporting carers who wish to stay in touch with the jobs market, not just for their financial wellbeing, but also to enhance their own lives and the lives of those they care for.

*Yours sincerely,  
Sarah*

**Sarah Newton MP**  
Minister for Disabled People, Health & Work