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Chris Heaton-Harris MP

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Dear Chris

Thank you for your letter of 25 November to the Minister for Disabled People following a meeting of the Learning Disability APPG for people with a learning disability in receipt of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA). I am replying as the Minister responsible for this area of the Department's work.

You ask what assessment has been undertaken to ascertain what the impact will be on people with a learning disability following the proposed reduction in ESA and in particular how this will affect new claimants in the work related activity group as set out in the Welfare Reform and Work Bill.

The Government set out its assessment of the impacts of the policies in the Bill on 20 July. We have considered impacts with regard to all relevant legal obligations when formulating the welfare policies announced in the Bill. The intended impact of these reforms is to ensure the right incentives and support are in place to help those with limited capability for work to take steps to move closer to the labour market, and when they are able, back to work.

From April 2017, new ESA claimants who are placed in the WRAG will receive the same rate of benefit as those claiming Jobseeker's Allowance.

This change only affects new claims made after that date and there will be no cash losers among those who are already in receipt of ESA.

I can also confirm that claimants in the ESA WRAG will not be required to carry out the same job-seeking activities as a Jobseeker's Allowance claimant as a result of this change. However, claimants in the WRAG will continue to be required to undertake work-related activity. There is a great deal of flexibility in the types of work-related activity that claimants may be asked to participate in and activities must be appropriate and reasonable for each individual claimant taking into account their circumstances.

As Mencap's website points out, despite the fact that research shows that 65 per cent of people with a learning disability want to work, and that with the right support they make highly valued employees, only one in ten people with a learning disability known to social services, is currently in paid work. It is a duty of Government to support those who want to work to do so which is why the Autumn statement announced an almost 15 per cent real terms increase in funding for support for those with health conditions and disabilities. This includes new funding for additional practical support for claimants with limited capability for work from April 2017, when the removal of the work-related activity component will come into effect, rising from £60million in 2017/18 to £100million a year in 2020/21.

Finally, you ask what will happen to current claimants in this work related activity group and whether they should take up work after April 2017 and then subsequently lose this work.

We aim to protect existing ESA claimants who temporarily leave the benefit to try out work and then return to ESA and will bring forward draft regulations in due course setting out the detail.

If I can be of further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.



Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Minister for Employment