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Rt Hon Fiona Mactaggart MP

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Dear Fiona

Thank you for your email of 11 December on behalf of several of your constituents, regarding the recent report into changes to Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) for new claimants in the Work Related Activity Group (WRAG).

We need a welfare system which supports vulnerable and disabled people, and ensures they are able to play a full part in society. In the last two years the number of disabled people in work has increased by 339,000, but the Government recognises that the gap between the employment rates of disabled people and non-disabled people remains too large. That is why we are committed to halving it. Changes to ESA are a crucial part of achieving this.

When the WRAG was created, the original estimates were that far more claimants would move into work than has turned out to be the case. People in the WRAG currently receive higher payments than Jobseeker's Allowance, but are often not getting enough appropriate support helping them move into the workplace.

This disparity in financial payments could discourage claimants with potential to work from making the most of opportunities to help them move closer to the labour market. We therefore want to remove these disincentives while at the same time providing additional practical support to such claimants to help them move closer to employment.

The report calls for more support tailored towards people's individual needs and conditions. The Government has committed £100 million of additional funding per year by 2020/21 specifically to help meet the needs of people with limited capability to work. It also calls for engagement with employers to increase awareness of disability issues. I am pleased to say that the Government's Disability Confident campaign is about doing precisely that.

The written submissions to the review, including the Disability Benefits Consortium (DBC) data which support the report, reflect important views, but the methodology by which the data was collected mean they are not representative and cannot be generalised to the whole WRAG population.

I recognise that some people may have additional costs as a result of their condition, and that is the purpose of the Personal Independence Payment. The Access to Work scheme is also available to help people overcome barriers to work. Thousands of people with learning disabilities are supported by Access to Work, and the Government is expanding those services to make even more specialist support available.

I hope this provides some reassurance. Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'P. Patel', written in a cursive style.

**Rt Hon Priti Patel MP**  
**Minister for Employment**