

1st February 2016

Dear Constituents,

Thank you for contacting me about Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

I believe we need a welfare system that supports the most vulnerable and helps those who can work into suitable employment. That is why the Government wants to increase employment among people who have health challenges but are capable of taking steps back into work. Thanks to efforts over the last five years, the number of people with disabilities who are unemployed has already fallen, with 339,000 disabled people moving into work in the last two years.

ESA provides support for those who cannot work because of a health condition or disability. People who can do some work-related activity are placed in the 'Work-Related Activity Group' (WRAG) where they take steps to prepare themselves for employment.

At the moment, these people get higher payments than people on Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA) in recognition of the fact they may have specific needs depending on what health challenges they face. However, simply paying a higher benefit to individuals may not be the best way to help claimants overcome these additional barriers to work they may face. In addition, the disparity in payments could discourage claimants from making the most of opportunities to help them move closer to work.

That is why the Government is aligning ESA WRAG payments with JSA and putting the monies to better use by investing in services tailored towards helping WRAG claimants into work. 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. This means the money will be targeted much more effectively. This change will also only apply to new claims after April 2017, meaning nobody will see their entitlement fall in cash terms.

I also recognise that disabled people face extra costs of living, which is why the Personal Independence Payment will continue to provide for these extra costs of living. Alongside this, the additional ESA Support Group rate will continue to be paid to those with the most severe work-limiting conditions and disabilities.

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

Yours sincerely,



Alok Sharma MP