Dear Daphne

Thank you for your email dated 19 July 2018.

I highly value the strong working relationship that exists between our two organisations and I am grateful for the support that you and colleagues across Welfare Rights Organisations provide.

As you know, we are in the middle of transforming the welfare system. There is no doubt that a new system like this requires bedding in and we continue working hard to ensure that is it understood and accessible to everyone who is required to use it and, indeed, deliver it.

I appreciate that you have concerns about how the system operates, especially for vulnerable claimants who are greater risk of finding it confusing. I share the desire that systems work well and claimants get their full entitlement.

I am disappointed to hear about the difficulties encountered by some claimants through the initial claim process for new style Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).
I would like to take this opportunity to explain what the Department has been doing to familiarise our staff with the new process. We have provided our staff with comprehensive guidance to support delivery of new style ESA. These products highlight to staff that new style ESA isnot a component of Universal Credit and claimants can choose to claim only new style ESA, irrespective of whether or not they satisfy the conditions of entitlement for Universal Credit. I have enclosed a copy of our guidance on this topic, which I hope you will find useful.
In addition, our staff have access to Spotlight products which highlight and focus on a particular area. A new style ESA Spotlight product has been cascaded nationally to all Jobcentre, Service Centre and telephony staff. The Spotlight product:

- Clarifies that eligible customers can claim both new style ESA and Universal Credit
- Details the action taken when a new style ESA claimant calls the Universal Credit line.
- Makes sure claimants are aware of which benefits they can claim, including:
  o new style ESA on its own, without having to claim Universal Credit
    o both Universal Credit and new style ESA together; as a dual claim
    o Universal Credit on its own.

We have also taken a number of other actions to make claiming New Style ESA easier. There has been a lot of work done across the Department to simplify the process for claimants as much as possible and to provide clear, concise information

on Gov.UK ([https://www.gov.uk/guidance/new-style-employment-and-support-allowance](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/new-style-employment-and-support-allowance)). The process is constantly under review and further planned improvements, such as looking into the possibility making the claim form accessible on line could make the process easier for claimants.

Although our call centre staff know the importance of following guidance correctly, it is evident that we failed on the occasions you refer to. If we can improve matters, we will. So to help me with this, would you kindly send me the details of the claimants affected and I will ask my officials to look into the individual cases concerned?

I have looked into how we communicate with individuals who have unsuccessfully claimed ESA in UC Full Service areas. The letter you have provided as an example is not representative of how we want to engage with our claimants. I can confirm that this letter has been produced locally and I have spoken with the relevant team who will discontinue issuing these letters. I apologise if there has been any confusion for claimants and I hope that the issues have now been resolved.

I really appreciate you taking the time to share your experiences and concerns with me. I hope this note has gone some way to reassuring you that this is an important area for us and I look forward to building even stronger ways of working together.


Regards

Neil