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Rt Hon Sir George Howarth MP
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4 December 2020

Dear George,

Thank you for your email of 1 October to the Secretary of State on behalf of a number of your constituents regarding a recent briefing published by Scope. I am replying as the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work and I apologise for the delay.

The Department and I very much value Scope's work and meet with them regularly.

Since 2013, the earliest comparable year, up to the start of the current pandemic the general trend in disability employment has been positive. We have seen strong growth in the number and rate of working age disabled people in employment and a narrowing of the gap between the rate of disabled and non-disabled people in employment.

However, the effects of COVID19 mean we are living in unprecedented times. The Cabinet Office Disability Unit works with disability stakeholders and across Government Departments to ensure the needs of disabled people are considered in our response to the pandemic. Consideration of equality impacts is integral in all key policy decisions.

We remain committed to ensuring disabled people can play a full role in society, with a manifesto commitment to publish a National Strategy for Disabled People. As we rebuild the UK's economy and society in response to the COVID19 pandemic, the importance of this strategy will be even greater. It will take into account the impact of the pandemic on disabled people, and will focus on the issues that disabled people have told us affect them the most across all aspects and phases of life.

We will also be bringing forward a Green Paper on health and disability support, which will focus on how the welfare system can better meet the needs of people with disabilities and health conditions. The Green Paper will be strongly influenced by the views of disabled people and representatives from disability organisations, drawing on the significant engagement we have conducted so far and from future events.

While developing these forward-looking plans and policies, we continue to offer a range of employment-related support to disabled people through nationally contracted programmes, such as the Intensive Personalised Employment Support and the Work and Health Programme, which support people with a wide range of disabilities and health conditions to enter and stay in work. Providers are making use of digital channels to offer one-to-one support, including regular health and wellbeing conversations with our most vulnerable claimants. New, lighter touch initiatives like the Job Entry: Targeted Support and Job Finding Support will complement the support offered by existing programmes, helping participants to re-engage effectively with the labour market and focus their job search activity.

Furthermore, as part of the Plan for Jobs, the Kickstart Scheme has been launched to create paid, quality six-month work placements for over 250,000 young people on Universal Credit deemed to be at risk of long term unemployment. Kickstart is available to anyone who qualifies and we encourage disabled young jobseekers to speak with their Work Coach to see if they can apply.

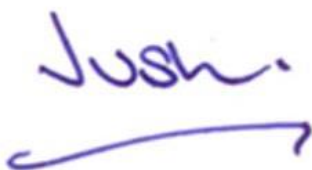
Disabled people who are already working, or who are about to start work, can apply to Access to Work for a discretionary grant of up to £60,700 per year towards the costs of employment-related support above the level of statutory reasonable adjustments. The most recent figures showed over 43,000 people, the highest ever number, receiving tailored and flexible support through this scheme. Access to Work has also introduced a new, flexible package, which complements the support provided by employers and can be adapted to enable disabled people to work in the workplace, at home or a combination of both.

Disability Confident continues to work with employers in support of our commitment to seeing one million more disabled people in work. I know that Scope is closely involved with Disability Confident, for which I am very grateful.

Thank you again for contacting me about the Scope campaign and for your interest in this important matter. I share your concern about ensuring disabled people and their families do not feel forgotten through this crisis and hope this letter reassures you of our continued focus on supporting disabled people. I shall look forward to reading Scope's response to the Green Paper and working constructively with them to improve the lives of disabled people.

I hope your constituents will find this reply helpful.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Justin". Below the signature is a long, horizontal, slightly curved flourish.

Justin Tomlinson MP
Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work