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Rt Hon George Howarth MP

Our ref: MC2019/15765

Dear George,

30th April 2019

Thank you for your email of 17 April on behalf of constituents who contacted you regarding changes to the form ESA65B.

The ESA65B letter is sent to GPs when an Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimant has been found fit for work following a Work Capability Assessment (WCA). The letter is designed to inform the claimant's GP about the outcome of the WCA and advise them that fit notes are no longer required for ESA purposes.

I note your concern that the current wording of the ESA65B letter no longer advised GPs that they may have to provide fit notes where an ESA claimant is appealing against a fit for work decision. The revised version of the letter that is referred to by your constituents was introduced in August 2017. The wording was amended to make the letter simpler and clearer, to emphasise the benefits of work for disabled people and those with health conditions, and to ask GPs to encourage their patients in their efforts to find, or return to, some form of work.

The change was made because we know that being in the right work is good for health and that being out of work can have a detrimental effect on health. We want to work with healthcare professionals to make sure that systems are working well together and that individuals can get the support they need, at the right time, to return to work. For health and care professionals, supporting an individual to be in the right work is central to delivering effective, personalised care and addressing a key social determinant of health.

I can reassure your constituents that we are committed to ensuring that our communications products are clear, understandable, and fit for purpose. We have a rolling programme of continuous improvement in place. As part of this, we are currently considering amendments to the current ESA65B letter and I will ask officials to take account of the concerns that your constituents have raised.

Best wishes,

Rt Hon Amber Rudd MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WORK AND PENSIONS