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Rt Hon George Howarth MP

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Thank you for your email of 25 January on behalf of some of your constituents about back to work support for people with mental health problems.

Firstly, I would like to assure your constituents that this Department is absolutely committed to providing back to work support to all claimants, including those with mental health conditions. It is the Department's policy to develop its staff in the broad range of skills required to support claimants based on their individual needs.

Services offered by the Department include access to Disability Employment Advisers and the Work Psychology Service, who have training in the area of mental health and hidden impairments. Work Coaches can also refer claimants to a range of organisations and partners who specialise in providing support to people with mental health conditions.

With reference to the Work Programme, to date around 481,000 individuals have transformed their lives and entered sustained employment through its support. Of these, over 108,000 participants were identified as having a disability and over 16,000 had a primary health condition which was classified as a mental or behavioural disorder.

Since the Work Programme began, the Department has taken considerable steps to deliver the strongest performance possible for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants with actions taken

including; introducing additional ESA focused compliance checks to ensure ESA claimants get the correct support; identifying and sharing best practices across providers and increasing joint working and information sharing between Jobcentre Plus and our partners. I am therefore pleased to note that for the last 12 months providers have exceeded all their contractual performance expectations, including for the Payment Group which supports those claimants who have made a new ESA claim.

This Government believes that previous employment schemes did not do enough for people with mental health conditions. That is why the underlying principle of the Work Programme allows providers the flexibility to design an innovative and personalised approach to help participants back into sustained employment. If a participant volunteers that they have a mental health condition, the provider will develop a plan to help them to achieve their specific job goals. Many providers deliver mental health and well-being support, either in-house or through specialist sub-contractors.

The Work Programme gives two years of tailored support. The length of support on offer gives the provider a real chance to invest in the individual and make a significant difference to their chances of finding employment.

Nonetheless we do recognise that the Work Programme will not be right for everybody. There is a range of specialist employment support for disabled people (including those with mental health conditions), for example:

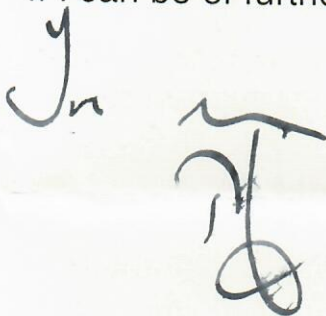
- Work Choice is a specialist disability employment programme. It provides tailored support for disabled people who face the most complex employment barriers to find and stay in work. Since it launched in 2010, a total of 91,760 people have started the programme, and 39,490 (43 per cent) of those have achieved a job outcome. Of the 14,290 starters who declared either a severe or mild to moderate mental health condition as their primary disability, 6,650 (over 46 per cent) achieved a job outcome.
- Access to Work provides practical advice and financial support for the additional costs faced by individuals whose health or disability affects the way they do their job. The Access to Work Mental Health

Support Service was established in December 2011 and is delivered by Remploy Employment Services. It offers support to individuals with a mental health condition who are absent from work or finding work difficult. The service supports those experiencing depression, anxiety, stress or other mental health conditions that are affecting their work. Last year Access to Work supported 1,630 people who declared a mental health condition as their primary medical condition – a 15 per cent increase on 2013/14 and a record number for the scheme.

Whilst we have made considerable progress in terms of the support we offer to people with disabilities, including mental health conditions, we are not complacent. Over the next three years, the Government is investing £43 million in Mental Health and Employment Trials, to develop our evidence base and establish what interventions work for those with mental health conditions. Each of the voluntary trials will test a different approach of combined health and employment support.

Finally, your constituents may be interested to know that the Department is currently developing its future employment support provision. In designing the new provision we are taking on board important lessons from the delivery of existing provision and will be engaging with a wide range of stakeholders and local areas to harness their expertise.

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 over a horizontal line.

Rt Hon Priti Patel MP
Minister for Employment