

DP 1310 / 07-11

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Carl Sargeant AC/AM
Y Gweinidog dros Gyfiawnder Cymdeithasol a Llywodraeth
Leol
Minister for Social Justice and Local Government



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

Eich cyf/Your ref
Ein cyf/Our ref - MB/CS/195/10

Bethan Jenkins AM
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1NA

13th May 2010

Dear Bethan

During the Oral Assembly Questions posed to me on the 28 April 2010, you asked if the Welsh Assembly Government had been consulted on the changes to Employment Support Allowance (ESA). You also asked whether the Assembly Government had received correspondence from individuals who were unhappy with the way in which the consultation had been carried out. I have now been able to look into this matter for you.

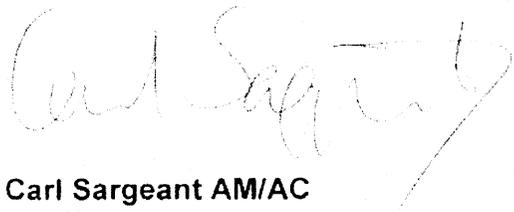
Whilst the administration and delivery of social security benefits is a reserved responsibility for UK Government, the Welsh Assembly Government works closely with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) wherever possible to ensure that its policy development does not disadvantage the citizens of Wales.

From the 27 October 2008 ESA replaced Incapacity Benefit and Income Support paid on incapacity grounds. A range of stakeholders were engaged by DWP during the design phase of the new benefit, including customer representative groups, medical practitioners and the Devolved Administrations. It is not however, DWP's policy to engage directly with individual customers around the development of policy and operational delivery.

Our records do not show any correspondence addressed to the Assembly Government concerning the way in which this consultation was carried out. We have however, received some recent correspondence from the National Autistic Society; who are concerned that ESA and the Work Capability Assessment are not meeting the needs of people with autism.

The Assembly Government has also recently engaged with DWP as part of a review of ESA, in response to a number of issues that have come to light following October 2008. One issue relates to the need to strengthen the employment support for ESA customers and another relates to the effectiveness of the Work Capability Assessment. Consultation has taken place across the groups outlined above and a Command Paper entitled '*Building bridges to work: new approaches to tackling long term worklessness*' was published in March 2010; setting out the DWP's intentions to revise the system of support for people with disabilities.

I hope that this information answers your queries.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Carl Sargeant', with a large, sweeping flourish extending downwards and to the right.

Carl Sargeant AM/AC