



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

Ministerial  
Correspondence  
Caxton House  
Tothill Street  
LONDON  
SW1H 9DA

0207 340 4000

[www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

[ministers@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ministers@dwp.gsi.gov.uk)

Rebekah Canning  
Project Officer  
London Assembly  
City Hall, 110 The Queen's Walk  
London  
SE1 2AA

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15<sup>th</sup> March 2016

*Dear Ms Canning*

Thank you for your emails of 15 December 2015 and 5 February 2016 concerning the Economy Committee's report, 'A Helping Hand', which was published in October 2015. I am sorry for the delay in replying.

I am grateful to you for sending me a copy of the report, which I read with great interest. Being disabled should not be a barrier to work and so I want to work in partnership with the broadest cross-section of people and organisations to ensure that all disabled people get the help they need to overcome the barriers they often face on a daily basis that prevent them from enjoying full and equal participation in society.

For example, through the Disability Confident campaign, we are working with employers to remove barriers, increase understanding, and ensure that disabled people have the opportunities to realise their full potential just like anybody else.

Furthermore, we have given more responsibility to Jobcentre Plus work coaches and managers at a local level. Work coaches have the authority to judge which work search interviews will best meet the needs of the individual and deliver these to encourage a return to employment. Local managers have used their increased responsibility to develop a number of employment initiatives such as the Flexible Support Fund grants specifically aimed at helping people to increase motivation, confidence, and soft skills.

Work coaches offer claimants a comprehensive menu of support options including: Work Experience; New Enterprise Allowance; Sector Based Work Academies; Work Clubs; Work Together; and Enterprise Clubs, as well as provision funded through the European Social Fund.

The current Work Programme is designed to help people who are at risk of becoming long-term unemployed. From 2017, funding to support the very long term unemployed and people with health and disability issues will be devolved – in England and Wales a new Work and Health Programme is being developed for these groups.


This Department has provided additional support, over and above the standard Jobcentre Plus offer, to all young people including:

- extra work coach time to improve job search skills
- work experience placements
- referral to a Sector Based Work Academy place
- apprenticeships and skills training

From April 2017, we are introducing a new Youth Obligation to support every young person aged 18-21 who finds themselves out of work. We want to ensure that young people are given the support, skills and experience to motivate them to move into work, fulfil their potential and make a contribution to their community without slipping into a life on benefits. The new Youth Obligation will help young people develop skills and experience to get on in work.

From day one of their claim, young people will participate in an intensive period of support, learning job search and interview techniques and doing structured work preparation.

If I can be of further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

*With care and support*  


**Rt Hon Priti Patel MP**  
**Minister for Employment**