



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Secretary of State
4th Floor
Caxton House
Tothill Street
LONDON
SW1H 9DA
0207 340 4000
www.dwp.gov.uk

Barbara Keeley MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Tim Loughton MP
House of Commons
London SW1A 0AA

24 November 2016

Dear Barbara & Tim,

Thank you for coming to see me on 23 November and providing me with the views of the All Party Parliamentary Group on the issue of rising women's state pension age and its impact on women born in the 1950s. You raised, in particular, concerns whether the service provided by DWP for these women is appropriate and you asked for more information about what we are doing to ensure that the support offered through Jobcentre Plus was appropriate for older claimants.

Supporting individuals aged 50 years and over to remain in the labour market, and tackling the barriers to them doing so, remains a key priority for Government. To support this aim, the Government has already abolished the Default Retirement Age, meaning most people can now retire when the time is right for them, and extended the right to request flexible working for all.

Paid employment maximises people's opportunities to build up savings, helps to maintain social networks, and is beneficial to health provided the employment takes into account the person's broader circumstances. That is one reason, for example, why the Government has extended the right to request flexible working, and why job search requirements for those not in employment are adjusted to take account of individual circumstances. Where there are health conditions or disabilities, our current consultation on the Work, Health and Disability Green Paper is looking at ways of better joining up the health, welfare and employment systems.

By retiring at 65 instead of 55, an average earner could have over £200,000 extra income and increase their pension pot by 60 per cent.

When we spoke, we discussed the prospects for older people working longer. On that issue, I think the news is generally positive. There are now just under 10 million people over 50's in work. Over the last year alone the female employment rate has increased from 64.5 per cent to 65.8 percent. In addition, independent research by the Institute of Fiscal Studies has shown that employment rates for women aged 60 and 61 have increased as a direct result of the changes in State Pension age.

In regard to specific support provided by individual jobcentres, it might help if I first say a bit about our Work Coaches, whose role we discussed. JCP Work Coaches have the flexibility to offer all claimants, including older people, a comprehensive menu of help which includes skills provision and job search support. They also have discretion to use the Flexible Support Fund for a wide range of activities to provide the local support that our claimants may need to return to work.

All Work Coaches undertake extensive learning before taking up post. They build up a wide range of skills and in-depth labour market knowledge. There are also additional training modules available for Work Coaches when they deal with older claimants to support them in working more effectively and understanding the barriers and challenges older claimants face. We talked, when we met, about Older Claimant Champions. To give you some background on them, in April 2015 JCP introduced Older Claimant Champions in each of the seven JCP Regional Groups (including Scotland) to tackle the barriers faced by older claimants in getting back to work. The Older Claimant Champions work with JCP Work Coaches and other JCP staff to emphasise the importance of supporting older claimants and share best practices. The Champions play a key role in raising awareness, sharing good news stories on new initiatives and challenging out of date perceptions to support this important group of people.

We are continuing to work to develop our understanding of this cohort. For example, research of JCP claimants indicated that older claimants are less confident than younger cohorts and felt a lack of IT skills and knowledge of modern job search skills was a barrier to them finding jobs. In 2015, DWP carried out a proof of concept (PoC) to test the provision of IT and digital support for older claimants (45+) to see if specific provision would help older claimants. Findings demonstrated there was some merit in providing this provision and claimants' feedback was positive, especially the opportunity to train with peers. IT training for claimants age 50+ is now available in East of England, Essex, North West, Midlands and South West.

To move on from what is already available to some of the newer and more innovative things we are doing in this area, DWP undertook a trial in 2015/16 in four Districts to test whether enhanced central funding could boost the take up of JCP sector-based work academies and work experience provision for older

claimants (aged 45+). There is evidence that both programmes are appropriate for older workers and qualitative research, to be published in January 2017, identified the positive experiences of those that took part. A full impact evaluation of the trials will be published in 2017 which will analyse the impact of the two trials on employment and work outcomes.

Of course, employers are absolutely key to ensuring workplaces are supportive environments for older workers, and the Government is deeply committed to ensuring that employers are aware of the wealth of skills and experience that older workers bring to the workplace. There is also a clear business need; by the mid-2030s the number of individuals aged 50+ will represent over half of the UK adult population. Therefore employers increasingly need to employ and retain the skills and experience of older workers for longer to remain competitive and avoid skills and labour shortages in the future.

On 4th October, the Government announced the appointment of the Business in the Community (BiTC) Age at Work leadership team led by Andy Briggs, CEO of Aviva UK and Ireland Life, as Business Champion for Older Workers. Mr Briggs and the BiTC team of employers will spearhead the Government's work to support employers to retain, retrain and recruit older workers. They will actively promote the benefits of older workers to employers across England – influencing them both strategically and in terms of practical advice. Flexible working patterns can help older workers to stay in the labour market up to State Pension age, and beyond, should they wish. This can be particularly helpful for working carers, the majority of whom, as you probably know, are women.

We have therefore established Carers in Employment pilots in nine Local Authorities to explore how businesses can give employees with caring responsibilities more help, for example by promoting flexible working patterns and setting up carers 'surgeries' to help carers manage their caring responsibilities alongside their paid work. They are also engaging with employers to raise awareness of the support that working carers need from employers.

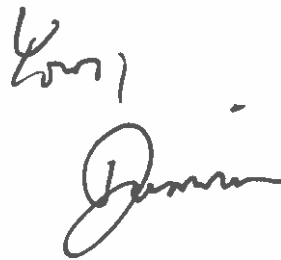
Indeed, DWP remains dedicated to challenging outdated attitudes and perceptions about older workers. A working group of leading employers has been set up to drive tangible change that will improve the retention, retraining and recruitment of people aged 50 and over, to identify areas for change, come up with solutions and drive those solutions through to fruition. DWP intends to publish a new, cross-government employer-led national strategy, which will set out the future direction of the fuller working lives agenda early next year.

As I hope you agree, supporting everybody to be able to work is crucial and we want to make sure that the service we are offering these people is the best it can be. Please do send in your constituents' cases where you believe something is not working as it should and I will see whether anything could be

done. I will need full details of your constituents, including National Insurance numbers, and written consent giving DWP permission to investigate from the individuals concerned.

Thank you for bringing this matter to my attention.

Copies of this letter will also be sent to Tom Elliott MP, Jason McCartney MP and Carolyn Harris MP.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Damian', with a small mark above it.

The Rt Hon Damian Green MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WORK AND PENSIONS