

**UK Extreme Poverty Written Submission from the Reclaiming Our Futures Alliance**

1. Introduction

1.1 The Reclaiming Our Futures Alliance (ROFA) is a network of grassroots Disabled People’s Organisations (DPOs)[[1]](#footnote-1) and campaign groups across England. We came together in 2013 with the launch of a collaborative manifesto “UK Disabled People’s Manifesto: Reclaiming Our Futures”. Since then we have held annual conferences, produced a shadow report for the routine examination of the UK Government under the UN Convention on the Rights of person with Disabilities and sent two delegations to Geneva to give evidence to the UN disability committee.

1.2 An estimated 19% of working-age adults, and 22% of all people in the UK have a disability, as defined by the Equality Act.[[2]](#footnote-2) Disability is strongly linked to poverty. Once account is taken of the higher costs faced by those who are disabled, half of people living in poverty are either themselves disabled or are living with a disabled person in their household.[[3]](#footnote-3) There are 4.2 million Disabled people living in poverty, which is 29% of all people living in poverty. Of these 2.8 million are working age adults, 1.1 million are pension age and 320,000 are children. After housing costs, the proportion of working age adults living in poverty (28%) is higher than the proportion of non-Disabled working age adults (18%).[[4]](#footnote-4) 30% of people who live in households with disabled members live in poverty compared to 19% of those who do not.[[5]](#footnote-5) Three quarters of households using foodbanks contain someone with a health condition and/or disability and one third contain someone with mental health support needs.[[6]](#footnote-6)

1.4 We would encourage the Special Rapporteur to include meetings with Disabled People’s Organisations in both England and the devolved nations on his visit to the UK in order to gain a picture of the disproportionate impact of austerity measures on Disabled people and the specific adverse impacts of welfare reform measures including the introduction of Universal Credit.

1.5 ROFA would value the opportunity to arrange a testimonial session with the Special Rapporteur to enable him to hear directly from Disabled people from across England who have or are experiencing extreme poverty. This could be arranged in either London or Manchester and we would aim to co-ordinate representation of Disabled people from both urban and rural areas and from both the North and the South of the country in order to cover issues specific to regional variation.

1.6 We include at annexes A, B and C testimonies submitted to us from Disabled people willing to share their experiences of sanctions, conditionality and Universal Credit.

1. Austerity and welfare reform

2.1 Austerity has disproportionately impacted on the most disadvantaged in society and certain groups including Disabled people, women and people from BAME communities. Research conducted by the Centre for Welfare Reform in 2013 found that Disabled people were hit nine times harder than non-Disabled people. For Disabled people with high support needs that figure rose to nineteen times harder.[[7]](#footnote-7)

* 1. A special and unprecedented investigation by the United Nations disability committee into the situation in the UK found that the threshold of evidence had been met for “grave and systematic violations” of Disabled people’s rights due to welfare reform.[[8]](#footnote-8)
	2. The inquiry report recommended that the UK government carry out a cumulative impact assessment into welfare reform measures enacted since 2010. Although the government continues to maintain this is not feasible, the Equality and Human Rights Commission commissioned their own assessment[[9]](#footnote-9) which found that negative impacts are particularly large for households with more disabled members, and individuals with more severe disabilities.[[10]](#footnote-10)
	3. Welfare reform measures enacted through austerity have not resulted in savings[[11]](#footnote-11) while causing considerable harm. Health and social care spending cuts have been linked to 120,000 excess deaths in England[[12]](#footnote-12) while benefit assessments have been linked to adverse trends in mental health including suicides.[[13]](#footnote-13) NHS figures showing the proportion of people claiming the main out-of-work disability benefit who have attempted suicide doubled between 2007 and 2014.[[14]](#footnote-14) The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) was eventually forced by the Information Commissioners Office to publish 49 internal peer reviews where deaths were linked to benefits being stopped.[[15]](#footnote-15) Stories of individual suicides and deaths continue to emerge.[[16]](#footnote-16)
	4. Mitigations to welfare reform measures offer insufficient protections and are often only implemented after a legal challenge[[17]](#footnote-17) or public outcry.[[18]](#footnote-18) As one MP recently commented in Parliament, “Having to be part of national and local campaigns just to get basic human dignity…is outrageous.”[[19]](#footnote-19) Despite repeated government reviews of both the Work Capability Assessment and the assessment process for Personal Independence Payments, the rate of decisions over-turned at appeal continues to rise with latest tribunal figures showing 71% for both benefits. The Work and Pensions Committee investigation into ESA and PIP assessments produced more online evidence from the public than any other investigation ever held by a House of Commons select committee.[[20]](#footnote-20) This led the Committee to publish alongside their main report a separate report summarizing the many individual testimonies of hardship they had been sent.
	5. Disabled people’s human rights have been particularly affected by cuts to social care support as a result of dramatic cuts to local authority grants from central government[[21]](#footnote-21) and the closure of the Independent Living Fund on 30 June 2015.[[22]](#footnote-22) Increasingly social care support will only over basic personal care, leaving Disabled people trapped in their own homes with no access to food, water or the toilet for hours on end and isolated form the community. A lack of support is also a barrier to employment and leaves many Disabled people unable to navigate the benefits system.

**Recommendations:**

* **Section 1 of the Equality Act 2010 to be implemented bringing into force a socio-economic duty.[[23]](#footnote-23)**
* **UK government to carry out a cumulative impact assessment of welfare and tax reform and public spending cuts since 2010.**
1. Universal Credit

3.1 Large numbers of households containing Disabled members are financially worse off under Universal Credit. The Holes in the Safety Net report[[24]](#footnote-24) estimated 450,000 households including 100,000 households with Disabled children as well as Disabled adults affected by the removal of the Severe and Enhanced Disability Premiums. Following a legal challenge[[25]](#footnote-25) brought against the Department for Work and Pensions transitional protections will be extended to cover more existing claimants, however the removal of the premiums still applies for new claimants.

3.2 The online application process for Universal Credit is inaccessible to many Deaf and Disabled people.[[26]](#footnote-26) Research by the Government Digital Service (GDS), which develops Verify, showed that 30% cannot set up a Verify account online.[[27]](#footnote-27) Although there are options now available such as face to face visits for claimants unable to apply online, we are deeply concerned that no data modelling has been conducted to ascertain the level of need for this special assistance. Meanwhile closures of Jobcentres and staff redundancies have been made on the basis that a digital by default service will require less staffing and physical premises.

3.3 There is a lack of accessible information and support for Deaf and Disabled people to understand the process. Universal credit has been promoted on the basis that it simplifies the benefits system, however there are complications such as the fact that income-based but not contributions Employment and Support Allowance is included. Specialist Deaf and Disabled People’s Organisations providing information, advice and support in accessible and appropriate ways are increasingly closing due to funding cutbacks.

3.4 Deaf and Disabled people are also affected by the same issues that are having widely reported adverse impacts on all Universal Credit claimants including:

o Payment delays due to the time taken to process applications with interim hardship loans then having to be paid back.[[28]](#footnote-28)

o Monthly rather than weekly payments paid direct to the claimant (instead of housing benefit elements being paid direct to landlords), leading to arrears.[[29]](#footnote-29)

o Payments by household rather than by individual, potentially trapping Disabled people and women in abusive relationships due to financial dependence.

These issues can have greater negative impacts on Deaf and Disabled people – for example Disabled people may not be able to physically get to their local foodbank when affected by payment delays, on average Disabled people face greater monthly unavoidable expenditure[[30]](#footnote-30) and are more likely to be in debt.[[31]](#footnote-31)

3.5 Conditionality and job search requirements are being applied without reasonable adjustments, leading to discriminatory sanctioning of benefits. Since 2010, over 110,000 Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) sanctions and 900,000 Jobseekers’ Allowance (JSA) sanctions of Disabled people have been applied with a further 140,000 ESA and 160,000 JSA sanctions of Disabled people applied but later cancelled. Disabled people on JSA are 26 – 53% more likely to be sanctioned that non-Disabled JSA claimants.[[32]](#footnote-32) Deaf and Disabled people are reporting experiences of bullying by work coaches pressuring them to undertake work related activity that they are not able to do due to their disability, for example people with learning disabilities who cannot read and write without support having their benefits stopped for not filling in forms. (See Annex B for examples). The fact that over two thirds of Work Capability Assessment decisions are over-turned at appeal indicates that there are large numbers of Disabled people who have been found fit for work related activity when they aren’t. They are then at risk of having their benefits stopped altogether for not being able to do the work related activity that work coaches are prescribing.

* 1. There is a lack of credible evidence base to show that welfare conditionality is meeting its policy objectives[[33]](#footnote-33), while mounting evidence suggests that it is counter-productive for Disabled people, moving them further from the labour market.[[34]](#footnote-34) The decision to reduce the rate of benefit payments given to Disabled people in the ESA WRAG down to the level paid to JSA claimants was justified by the government on the basis it would incentivise claimants to find work. There was a lack of evidence base to this claim and lack of consideration about the impacts of poverty in pushing individuals further from employment. A survey carried out by the Disability Benefits Consortium before the £30 per week cut took place[[35]](#footnote-35) found that 60% of 1,755 respondents said the amount of ESA they received was not enough to live on. When asked about the consequences of this, 62% said they struggled to stay healthy, 49% said they could not pay bills, 36% could not afford taxis to medical appointments, and 32% said they could not afford to eat.[[36]](#footnote-36)
	2. Welfare conditionality is predicated on the idea that benefit claimants are work resistant and need to have their behaviour changed under threat of punishment. It denies the material reality of the barriers that Disabled people face to earning a living through employment and is not consistent with a human rights approach to disability.
	3. Design of a social security system that is fit for purpose must be based on an analysis of need rather than myths and assumptions about levels of benefit fraud and employment resistant personalities.

**Recommendations:**

* **UK Government to urgently stop the roll out of Universal Credit.**
* **UK Government to use the data that now exists within the Department for Work and Pensions to analyse the impacts of conditionality and sanctions.**
1. Brexit
	1. Disabled people’s rights protections are enshrined domestically in the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act and in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Withdrawal from the EU does not mean withdrawal from the ECHR. However, Disabled people are very concerned about proposals for a British bill of rights which it is feared will water-down existing rights protections and additionally fear that there may be an attempt to withdraw from the ECHR in the future.

* 1. A particular concern for Disabled people is the impact of Brexit on the social care workforce and ability to recruit Personal Assistants due to restrictions on freedom of movement. Given the crisis in social care and existing difficulties recruiting due to the low pay, this could have a disastrous impact on Disabled peoples living standards and rights under the UNCRPD.

**Recommendation:**

* **UNCRPD to be enshrined in domestic legislation.**

End of submission

Word count: 2012

**Annex A** Universal Credit testimonies

**Case 1**

The Work Capability Assessment took place on 2nd May 2018, following over a year of appointments cancelled by the Assessment centre. Its a 24 mile bus journey.

My questions about lacking a recent ESA50 ; written health questionnaire, were dismissed. Questioning the assessing medic about no recent ESA50, he claimed an MRI report from 'my previous' 2015 assessment was all he needed.  In fact, the scan report is dated 2016 and was used in my application for PIP,( successful outcome).

The Decision -Maker awarded zero points, with evidence based on the Medics conclusions and my 2013 ESA50. This meant that the last 2 /3 years of my medical history has been completely ignored.

It was claimed that following shoulder surgery in 2015 I had been discharged from consultant care and no other treatment was required.  The Medic appeared to only have one of 3 pages of the MRI report, obviously not the page where the radiology consultant concluded in highlighting impingement of cervical spine nerves to my arm and recommending a neuro/orthopaedics referral. The MRI was initially requested due to my continued post surgery pain. The scan also identified bursitis in my degenerative shoulder joint. My shoulder, and so my arm, increasingly painful and difficult to use.

I sent in a Mandatory Reconsideration on 4th June 18, the soonest I could set out my challenge– but it has never been acknowledged or responded to. The only remaining option was to apply for Universal Credit, recently rolled out in Dorset. (seems to be a dash to switch claimants to UC, regardless of details).

**Case 2**

When I first tried to start a claim online in April 2016, I was unable to verify myself online through any of the channels provided.

I wasn't told how much I was to receive until I was paid my first payment. I tried asking how much I was due from my online case worker several times but just got answers stating that I would get whatever I was entitled to without giving me any figures. I didn't know if my living costs & bills would be covered causing me massive amounts of stress and anxiety.

I waited seven weeks for my first payment (£605). A wait that nearly saw me ending up losing the house that I was renting. It was a miracle that I survived this period without any money. I lost two kilos in weight due to having to eat every other day while waiting for my initial payment.

Several months later I had a deduction from my UC monthly payments to cover an overpayment from the previous year on Working Tax Credits from HMRC. I had too much deducted (an extra month’s worth) and when I tried to contact my online case worker through Universal Credit's website, to rectify this three times, I was ignored each time to the point that even my Work Coach at Great Yarmouth Job Centre tried to contact him but to no avail. This left me without enough funds to eat every day and cover my living costs, bills etc. It was eventually sorted out after I contacted my local MP Brandon Lewis concerning this.

When I first signed up for Universal Credit in 2016, the website kept throwing me out while I was writing out journal entries, even though I clicked the option to stay on the website. This problem has been sorted out now.

I first claimed this benefit from April 2016 until August 2017 when I found full time work. I've been claiming Universal Credit again from January 2018 after being made redundant at the beginning of this year, through to present day.

**Case 3**

I first claimed in May 2016 (quick bit of background - I was off sick from 2003-2013 with ME/CFS, went into remission in 2012 and came up with a plan to revive my career. With a friend, I sold my house and bought a B&B which we ran for 2 successful years. Then my landlord decided to increase our rent from £750pcm to £2000pcm, unsustainable for the business so we had to sell. Spent a couple of months trying to find another way to earn, but eventually conceded that we needed to sign on, whereupon we were amongst the first in Great Yarmouth, one of the trial areas, to claim UC).

The first difficulty in making a claim was that I have no driving license or passport[[37]](#footnote-37), so in order to verify my identity I had to attend a meeting at the jobcentre to answer some specific questions. I was not told what they would be about and hence couldn't prepare in any way. It transpired the questions were about previous benefit claims. I hadn't claimed anything but tax credits for 4 years and had to answer questions like "Which day of the week was your DLA paid?" and "How much was your ESA payment?" which I could have known for certain had I been told what to expect and had chance to refer to my records. As it was, I had to guess the answers to my 3 questions, and wait nervously to see if I had a least 2 answers correct. What would have happened if I had the answers wrong? And it just rankled all the worse when I had taken a folder full of identity proving documents which the advisor flatly refused to look at.

The next difficulty was the 7 week wait[[38]](#footnote-38), statutory 6 weeks plus one week 'waiting time' (whatever that is). We had left it to the last possible minute to claim, not wanting to if there was any other way, so waiting 7 weeks was a terrible strain on resources. To compound the situation, at no point were we told the actual sum we would be entitled to, and our queries as to this matter were met with the response 'whatever you're entitled to will be in your account on the date specified'. And then we were offered budgeting advice. We are both in our 40s and have run our own households for years; I found the offer objectionably patronising and also ridiculous. How can anyone budget for an unspecified amount of income? We were scared the amount wouldn't cover our bills.

In the interim, we were made aware that we could have an advance payment, but at the time that would have constituted 100% of my first payment, to be repaid in full one month later[[39]](#footnote-39). I know this situation has now been amended but at the time it was no earthly use to man nor beast.

I personally also find it difficult to manage my monthly bills as I have always run my accounts from the 1st to the end of the month, but my payment date is the 18th - and cannot be moved.

Around this time the full horror sank in of how UC is set up to control every penny in the possession of claimants. I was told when claiming council tax benefit that I had to declare EVERY bank account in my name. I didn't, because I was still in JSA mode, so I only told them about the account I wish to be paid into and the joint account my housemate and I use to pay our shared bills. I have subsequently been very scared about what would happen if they noticed my savings account (1p balance) or my spare current account (10p balance). I understand they can even 'see' the balance a person has in the bookies. If betting wins are considered as 'income', why are winnings tax free? It seems UC is the ultimate tool to crush the poor. I'm even supposed to declare a £10 note in my birthday card?

In August 2016, I started work on a 5 month contract. As I started on the 8th (during my assessment period) I received no UC payment for Jul-Aug, again stretching my resources too thin. I was asked to attend an appointment at the jobcentre to close my claim at 8.30am one weekday morning shortly thereafter. I was not told that this appointment is expected to last for an hour, so I was not able to inform my new employer that I would be late, or by how long. As this was a self-employed role, I was also expected to declare my earnings each month on the then-premium phone line. I made an error in invoicing my employer in month 2, so month 3 was a larger invoice, at which point my claim was summarily closed. These declarations also had to be made on the premium rate phone number.

On completion of my contract, I reopened my claim but once again my status had changed during my assessment period, so I was awarded a derisory sum once I had waited the obligatory 7 weeks once again. Consequently, I now know that a 5 month contract will leave me out of pocket, will in effect cost me money to do, so I no longer apply for fixed term contracts. In addition, the DWP chose this reduced payment month (of all months) to dock me the overpayments they had made on my tax credits payments. The amount they took was also non-negotiable.

I also have a big problem with the 35 hour a week job search. Mine has been reduced to 30 hours in light of my condition, but nonetheless I find it a huge burden and complete waste of time. It takes only a couple of hours a day to see the available jobs and apply for them - this is a sop to those who think the unemployed live a life of reilly. What it actually achieves for me is to deprive me of time I need to seek out cheap groceries, and the time it takes to prepare cheap meals from scratch.

I am quite IT literate and I've had problems - what of those who aren't? I do not believe UC is fit for purpose but merely constitutes a means by which the state can ensure claimants do not have enough to live on. Even when payments are regular, as now, my household has a £300 pcm shortfall which is not sustainable long term. I also greatly fear a recurrence of my illness as the disabled are getting the very worst of these welfare changes. I truly believe that the long wait for payments constitutes democide and a determination to punish rather than assist those who are without work - even though we are not the ones who tanked the economy.

**Case 4**

For me it was a disaster. I was receiving around £600 per month tax credits but as my partner moved in had to re-apply. Incomes were the same as she was not working. I had moved into a UC area so could not re apply for tax credits, but under the new system was entitled to nothing.  Same household income but had to manage with £600 less per month immediately.

**Case 5**

In response to your request I had to claim Universal Credit last year after moving from Lambeth after 11 & half years, I suffer from very severe Depression & Anxiexty & find these things very daunting, I was previously in receipt of Income Related ESA prior to having to claim Universal Credit & as such I was entitled to the extra Top up of SDP & Enhanced Disability Premiums.

Once I claimed Universal Credit the SDP & EHD stopped without any warning & I was moved over to Contribution Based ESA @ a reduced rate of £219.50 every 2 weeks & was not advised of this when I first claimed Universal Credit & because I moved addresses I was not offered any Transitional Protection so lost my SDP which works out about £180.00 a month also I had big problems when I initially claimed Universal Credit I moved to my new Property on 25th July 2017 & sort advice on 27th July from both Croydon Council & Universal Credit on what I should do as you can imagine I was passed from department to department to eventually be told by Universal Credit that all I needed to do was a change of address on my ESA & DLA which I did & claim Housing Benefit from Croydon which I then tried to do in mid-August the reason for the delay was that I was told so many conflicting things that due to my mental state I found all this very overwhelming to deal with by the time I got round  to claiming Universal Credit it was now the 13th August through no fault of my own had I of been notified correctly I would have been able to claim earlier after  making the Universal Credit claim on 13th August I then had trouble being able to verify online & had to wait for the 1st available appointment to become available @ the Job Centre which was the 17th August some 4 days later after claiming, the person verifying me had no clue what they were doing.

Also as a result of not being able to claim Universal Credit earlier due to all the misleading information they would only accept my claim from 13th August which meant there was a shortfall of my rent between 25th July - 12th August, I then asked for this to be backdated to the 25th July giving the following reasons that I had been mis-informed & put this request in only to be told on 31st August that my Housing Couldn't be considered to  be backdated to the 25th July as I hadn't shown good reason for claiming earlier, I then logged a Mandatory Reconsideration on 12th September with the help of my Job Coach @ Thornton Heath Jobcentre on the 26th September I received a response to my Mandatory Reconsideration & that the original decision was being upheld & couldn't be changed after receiving this I then logged an Appeal with all the evidence that I had regarding my Mental health & how I was impacted, this appeal was accepted & a Tribunal Notification was issued, however on 30th November I received a notification on my Journal saying that the Appeal had been lapsed & the original decision not to award me the Housing Element from 25th July had now been changed as it had been decided that due to my mental health issues no way could I have been expected to claim earlier.

I had to go through all this & endure extra stress which could have been avoided from day 1 had they of applied the rules correctly.

In my opinion the whole Universal Credit system isn't fit for purpose & serious changes need to be made, I have now been informed by various people that due to new legislation my SDP should be reinstated & that I receive Transitional Protection.

I was put through so much un-nessary stress with this.

**Case 6**

The Work Capability Assessment took place on 2nd May 2018, following over a year of appointments cancelled by the Assessment centre. It’s a 24 mile bus journey.

My questions about lacking a recent ESA50; written health questionnaire, were dismissed. Questioning the assessing medic about no recent ESA50, he claimed an MRI report from 'my previous' 2015 assessment was all he needed.  In fact, the scan report is dated 2016 and was used in my application for PIP,( successful outcome).

The Decision -Maker awarded zero points, with evidence based on the Medics conclusions and my 2013 ESA50. This meant that the last 2 /3 years of my medical history has been completely ignored.

It was claimed that following shoulder surgery in 2015 I had been discharged from consultant care and no other treatment was required.  The Medic appeared to only have one of 3 pages of the MRI report, obviously not the page where the radiology consultant concluded in highlighting impingement of cervical spine nerves to my arm and recommending a neuro/orthopaedics referral. The MRI was initially requested due to my continued post surgery pain. The scan also identified bursitis in my degenerative shoulder joint. My shoulder, and so my arm, increasingly painful and difficult to use.

I sent in a Mandatory Reconsideration on 4th June 18, the soonest I could set out my challenge– but it has never been acknowledged or responded to. The only remaining option was to apply for Universal Credit, recently rolled out in Dorset. (seems to be a dash to switch claimants to UC, regardless of details).

The UC online application form is complicated and confusing.  I’ve worked with computers but failed to negotiate the process successfully. With no photo ID the online ID verification was also a fail. I tried other means of online verification, but stopped when my bank details were requested....? (remember my claim is just transferring from ESA to UC).  Now I had to make another call to the DWP advice line, (average 40/45 minutes’ response time, arms & hands barely functioning by then). A very pleasant advisor arranged my ID verification interview, which could only be held at Weymouth (24 mile bus journey). My heart sank when advised I'd have to return for a second interview; to set up my UC account. The tele-advisor kindly added a note advising Weymouth Job centre that my ID check and Initial UC interview could be held together. She reeled off a list of paperwork I'd need to take, to cover both interviews, the usual ID papers and evidence of the extra income (tiny NHS pension) I'd declared on my application form. It was all taken in a single poly wallet, and hasn't been moved since.

Travelling to Weymouth demands full pain relief (Co-Codamol, Ibuprofen and Beta blockers to help keep my muscles relaxed). I was exhausted on arrival but continued with the interview, handed over all my paperwork & answered the questions. Despite feeling very hungry, thirsty (told no water available) and in pain the lengthy ID check and UC claim was processed without incident, as far as I knew. I have to add that I was not a bundle of joy throughout, just making my way through the never ending process. (journey began 11am that day, I arrived home at 6.15pm). The JCP staff member went through my paperwork, asked security questions on what I received in monthly PIP and NHS pension, the paperwork was in her hands!

A few days afterwards I received an extremely upsetting letter from the DWP, claiming an 'incident of abusing a staff member' occurred and warned that further offences will lead to 'Civil Action'.

The letter horrified and mortified me, I have never behaved abusively in my life and there was certainly no indication an incident had even taken place. I responded to the address provided, PO Box in writing, it reached the JCP Manager, who immediately phoned me. He seemed confused, claimed the letter by-passed him and eventually wrote to retract the allegation – copies of letters available. Details of this 'abusive incident' have never been shared with me. What was it? Is it usual practice to allege an abusive incident without providing details?

There was worse to follow. The Managers response also added that my £6.50 travel costs should have been refunded (originally refused as not issued for ID checks – mistaken...?) and suggested taking my bus receipt to my July 13th (the date lived up to its name) interview with my new work coach. The ticket had been discarded by then.

On 13th July I arrived at my first interview with my work coach, held at the local job centre, a staff member was unable to find my name on the list. And then, horror, it was discovered my interview didn't exist – because my claim had been completely cancelled – deleted! (Probably also the reason I couldn't log into my UC account.) The member of staff was very kind and informed me that I failed to show evidence of other income, and didn't respond to emails from the work coach who requested I declare the evidence.

Please believe that I did not receive any emails from the Jobcentre, or the work coach. All the required paperwork was handed over to the advisor for the ID and initial account set up.  Also, I would never have attended an interview at my local Jobcentre , if I'd had the slightest inkling my claim had been cancelled. Excluding PIP and pension, I haven't received any benefit support since mid May.

This includes rent payments, of course, and I've only just repaid rent arrears from my 3 months without funds in 2014. It all feels pretty hopeless now, and although advised I have to re-claim...I just can't make myself endure a repeat of that experience. And even so, I did not behave abusively and I handed over the paperwork requested. I wrote to the job centre manager again, asking how my claim could have been cancelled, when I was already in contact with him!  No reply.  Seems that whichever way a claimant behaves is open to interpretation by DWP staff - and a claimant interpreted as a problem is ‘marked’ for evermore.

The Jobcentre emails were unanswered so claimants get 'life support' switched off? They don't try a landline or mobile phone; to check emails have been received? They don't use other methods of contact, even though the claimant may be seriously injured/sick, and terminating his/her claim will harm dependents? They don't even write to inform claimants they’ve been terminated!

I was struggling to keep up with Jobcentre interviews, seeking a GP sickness certificate, chasing hospital appointments, setting out my Mandatory Reconsideration, maintaining the UC online diary, honouring the Housing Association requests for payment (nothing to pay it with now), struggling to pay bills and buy groceries. Plus the added stress of losing vital financial support (excluding monthly PIP and NHS pension payments). Rent payments alone have reduced the chance of remaining in my home, which was my aim until treatment is concluded (spinal consultant was considering multi-level cervical spine surgery – but that's another story) is concluded. I have just made my final barely affordable' rent payment. Will bailiffs come banging on my door at day break? I have no other means of support.

If evidence of claims or further information is needed, please let me know.

The End.

**Case 7**

I’m currently unemployed due to a depressive work related episode which resulted in me being hospitalised earlier this year due to a suicide attempt.

I wanted to claim contribution based benefits to at least get my N.I. paid as I’ve worked pretty much without break for the last 35 years and have obviously paid a large amount of tax and NI during this time.

I was initially told even though I asked at a course I attended that I would have to apply for UC as it was the only benefit work now available.

I duly went through the application process, long form to fill in, my husband also had to fill in a form despite the fact he is working... when I went for interview I was then advised that I was not eligible for this benefit as it is, as I had worked out, means tested. When I queried the apparent lack of contributions based benefits my DWP adviser told me that in fact contributions based JSA and ESA do still exist though plainly this is not something they are encouraged to tell claimants.

She gave me a number to ring for ESA saying that I should be able to claim without interview due to my recent medical history. The first number I rang diverted me to another number, when I rang this one the lady I spoke to asked me my postcode and then informed me that I would have to claim UC...When I told her that I was not eligible and had been advised by Job Centre that I needed to claim contributions based ESA she put me on hold, spoke to a supervisor then transferred me to another number which was a robot voice which asked for my postcode...which then told me as I was an MK postcode I would have to apply for UC...

I worked for 8 years in a public library and I know my rights, I don’t regard benefits as a handout so at this point I didn’t give up as presumably I was supposed to but emailed my JC adviser and copied my MP into the email...I was then emailed back and my IC adviser filled in the form and sorted the ESA out for me. Luckily I’m not dependant on the money from this benefit as my husband works...if not I would have been in a very bad position.

I can’t believe I’m in the minority as a person who is temporarily unemployed and wants to benefit from my years of contributions but it seems very much to me that JC staff are at best badly informed or at worst being actively encouraged not to inform people about benefits they can claim.

Hope this is of use.

**Annex B** Conditionality and sanctions testimonies

**Case 1**

I have not experienced sanctions to myself, but have experienced them, with regard to my son, who is currently 21 years old.

We live in South Wales, and jobs here are scarce. My son did not do very well in school, as he struggles with certain things (autistic spectrum). He is however a good person, and does not want to be a burden, either to his family or to the state, and a very deep thinker, very ethical and conscious of what is right and what is not. Both of his brothers have got good jobs, but my middle son has tried to find work, and not managed to so far.

He claimed benefit when he was first out of work, after he left school, but he was sanctioned, for forgetting to attend an interview, and told he could not claim any more money for a period of months, then he claimed again after this time, as he had still not found any work, and was sanctioned again, for a longer period, this time, for not filling out all of the forms he was supposed to, about looking for work. He can read and write just fine, but the forms are very complicated for him, and I feel they are inappropriate, as they are really only suitable for a person looking for white collar work, and he is neither suited to, nor looking for, white collar work. He felt this sanction as a personal blow, to both his dignity and his right to claim any money at all.

I am afraid this email is probably not going to be of much use to you, as I do not have exact figures and times, but I hope you may find something useful from my experiences. My son is a good man, he wants to work, he feels guilty that he cannot find a job, and though it pains me to speak of it, he tried to commit suicide, after the blow of being sanctioned a second time. I thank all our lucky stars, that we found him in time, and he is still with us.

Obviously after this, he could not claim benefits a third time, and none of his family could press him to, under the circumstances, and he tried to do all he could to help me at home instead. He is looking for work again now, and has looked into working online as an artist, and tried to get work at a local stables, although neither opportunity came through for him. But recently I was faced with having a reduction in my housing benefit. The housing benefit office told me, that if he was not in receipt of benefit, then they would assume that he was getting money from somewhere, and therefore would asses him as earning £26,000 a year, which would affect my housing benefit greatly, I would get none at all.

I am self-employed, I don't want to take a job here, as the youngsters have few enough, so I work for a company in California, online, but am on a low income, and have a younger daughter too. If it was not for my daughter, I would happily go and live in a trailer somewhere, and live on my meager income, and I will do this, as soon as she is able to take care of herself. But for her, I maintain a better home, which I cannot afford. I am grateful for this help, and do all that I can to try and deserve it, and give her a good life, so she might have a good future. But I simply cannot afford to live in this house without the housing benefit.

And so, to return to my son's situation, I have had to persuade him to sign on again. He was not happy to do this, and I was not happy to ask him to, as I know that the interviews are humiliating and abusive, and do nothing at all to help him to get into work. And I was worried that the pressure of it may cause him to give up hope on life again. He does not want the money, although they have awarded him £46 a week (roughly). All they have offered him in terms of help to get back to work, was a loan, which of course would be insanity for him to take out, as he has no employment. The only other 'help' they give, is to insist that he spends 34 hours a week applying for jobs that he will not get, which is terribly demoralising for him. There are thousands of applicants for even the most menial jobs in this area, and he is not going to be at the top of the list, with no employment experience and no qualifications.

I am sure that you are trying to help people, like my son, to find real support, that will actually help him. However, I can say, on my son's behalf, and on my own, that we do not ask for it. All that we ask is that we can be left alone, not pushed onto schemes that will not help, and actually have adverse effects. That we can just take care of each other, without threats of losing our home. This system is not only unhelpful, it is actively destructive.

He has been told, that if he fails to comply with the requirements this time, he will be sanctioned for 3 years. I have told him that he need not comply with it, as I will gladly support him until he can find a job. And I do not want him to attend any of the interviews, for ferar that this will demoralise him, and put back the months of work I have done, encouraging him to have confidence in himself again. But I do worry for those young people who do not have family. And I am angry that the system has forced us into this situation again.

I have been told, that I should seek help for my son, in the system, and have him statemented for being sick, so that he will get money and help. However I feel this is absolutely the worst idea. We do not want to claim more money. And I do not want him labelled for the rest of his life as sick or disabled, and treated with the contempt, that seems to be the current political correctness, from the leaders of our country. It is most important that he is given more confidence, not less. And having read and seen first-hand, from the experiences of friends, how the sick are treated, it would literally kill him. I think that this is a terrible state of affairs that our country has fallen into. Instead of imparting strength and support to those who need it, we demoralise them, and label them as malfunctioning burdens. So I will not be seeking any help for him of this nature, and I will actively discourage him from doing so himself.

My family believed in this country, my parents paid into this system, and I have done so too, for many years, when I had a managerial position, (I am nearly 50 now), and yet, when it comes to my children benefiting from it, as we all presumed... Well it is a disgrace.

As to the question, value for money? Cost effective? No, it is not. It would be vastly more cost effective, for the state, if we had not been forced, by the housing benefit office, to claim money that we did not want.

The 'help' we have experienced is certainly counterproductive to getting people into employment. What my son needs, is respect, confidence, encouragement. That may help him to find work. But more than that, there need to be jobs. It is ridiculous to assume that 100% employment can be forced upon people, when there are not jobs available for them to take.

Thank you for taking the time to read my story, and I hope it may help you in your quest to find a better future for us all. Thank you also, for the hard work you are putting in, on behalf of those who are unable to fight this battle for themselves.

**Case 2**

I have had sanction and it was not pleasant at all. I have lived to tell the tale and if you are going to use my email please do hide my name and just use BB for the name.

 If you do know a good and brave lawyer, whom does not afraid to take the DWP to court of law , please do let me know, as I do believe, if lots of disable people take DWP to court, they will stop this brutal technics,  at the very end, we all under the contract with DWP and they are effectively our employers, our benefit subjected to income tax, and somehow DWP is breaking their health and safety employments contract  as they are forcing their employees in to hazardous environments with their sanctions .

Aug 2013, I had complete left knee replacement in Cambridge (Addenbrooke Hospital), I could not walk or do anything for a long period of time , and even after recoveries, I still had to use walking aids to get about, my lady at the time was studying her master in Anglia Ruskin University in Cambridge ,she  left her education to look after me ( she was from Iran and applied for political asylum as she was raped mentally and psychologically by current Iranian regime as she was active and fighting for women right ),because she applied for refugee , she was without any status and was not entitled to any benefits or income ( never received any payment from DWP while she was looking after me, and she was psychologically very disturbed ).

2013, the government applied new cuts nationwide to NHS and benefits, as a result I was effected , hence:  I did not receive my physiotherapies on time (suppose to start the physiotherapies day after my operation 1st of Aug 2013)  and 3 months later started my therapies but unfortunately it was too late, and up to date I’m still suffering because of it.

I was awarded Work Related Activities later on that year (2013) which was not enough to live on for both of us, due for being sick  and unemployed, the only available place was out of town of Ramsey / Huntingdon in a small village called St Mary’s, in a shared house (only one room with single bed) and also very limited bus service due to location ( had to use mown transport  for attending physiotherapies and shopping etc, I did applied for PIP but after a long wait and inspection by ATOS representative, they denied my PIP and they rejected my appeals as well . Both ATOS and DWP were aware of my partner refugee status, and knowing she was looking after me as I was totally disable even to do even small tasks.

13th of March 2014 I was sanctioned (weekly pay out dropped only to £25.00 per week) for not attending job related interview, the letter was supposed to be send to me in Mid February , the day we had flooding as a result of river break its banks and for few days surrounding roads were closed due to flooding. I had to see my coach every 2 weeks and report about looking for employments even I was under physiotherapy, I did  complain to my work coach and expressed to my coach that he saw me the week before the interview, he could have email me or phone me, txt me as they had all corresponding contact informations , why no information send to me via all available channels for such a important issue, their reply was, they are not allowed to, only Royal mail, I have expressed I never received the letter , but they did not want to know, after 2nd week of sanction, we end up in CAB and the only help we had from Huntingdon CAB office was food vouchers. I was still using the walking aid and had to drive car in order to pick up the food from food bank.

I did appeal against DWP sanction by letter and expressed, they have created a life threatening situation not only for me but for my helpless partner as well and ask them to reconsider, and twice they rejected me and the appeal turned down.

I was forced even with my disabled condition to look for a job as it was no way we could have survived on £25.00 per week as was not even enough to pay for heating for the house in farming field of harsh and cold winter, I was accepted and start working as vacuum cleaner call out engineer( I had to lie about my condition), which I end up collapsing after few days of work in doctor surgery , and finally my GP had to write to DWP and explain the situation as my partner committed suicide and I became very ill. Unfortunately it was too late by the time DWP accepted the appeal, my lady had total mental breakdown and she left me and I end up with psychological breakdown (suicidal behaviour) and became very sick.

DWP and their wrongful decisions created the irreversible damages to health, the appeal acceptance came too late. My physiotherapies stopped due to lack of financial supports, and even though I was referred by my GP to mental health team, I had letter from NHS mental team, that they could not see me due to overvaluing request and they have referred me to charities in the same time, section 21 was issued to me to leave the premises. With the advice of charity I started work to occupy my mind in local newsagent as cashier but once again I did not notify DWP on time (due to Good Friday and Monday bank Holiday, they did not get my paper work on time and I could not phone them as I had problem with the mobile receptions in the area and cost of the calls), the DWP refused to take into account it was long holidays and application came late.

During all these events, my health deteriorated. I have developed lots of health problems, my eye sites changed prescriptions 4 times in less than 6 weeks’ period, Ulcer, some kind of digestive problem, and total mental breakdowns.

My problem did not end there, accidentally very old Christian friend of family came to rescue me by offering me a room to refugee in her house and with help of another friend, I found a job in Hampshire and left  Huntingdon/ Cambridgeshire and all unhappy problems created by DWP behind and start a new chapter in my life, but unfortunately I end up losing my job due to health and mental problems after 7 months of working as manager, with large bank over draft created by relocation and high rental and living standard down in south. I became unemployed and due to new digestive problem (Diverticular disease) I was placed once again in work related activities but only £73.10 per week benefits (Had to stay 2 years before contract ends) , and also had to report not only to local job centre (in another  town and no help with travelling expenses)  but also to my previous work coach in Huntingdon via emails and telephone calls interview  every 2 weeks and showing I was searching for employment even I was sick.  I was forced once again to find a job while I was still sick , even my previous GP refused to signed me on sick leave ( my medical files was not transfer from Cambridge to Hampshire even after 7 months) , and interest of borrowed money from the bank for  relocation was getting out of hand, I started a job as surveyor which I end driving for an average of 900 miles per week but  thriving Rheumatoid and Osteo Arthritis as well as few other health issued which created by unbalanced walking (lack of Physiotherapies for replacement knee and living in a private rental accommodation which finally declared by local council officer as No: 1 for Cold and No: 2 for damp) I became unemployed with even deeper mental and health issues as well as higher financial problems.

I had total breakdown when I was issued section 21 by my previous private land lord (Romans being the agency) for sending council reports and my complaint about cold and damp and ask for help with large electricity bill caused by cold and damp.

In Feb 2016 after moving to new place of residence whit the help of the council, the local job centre and DWP forced me to change from ESA to JSA even they had all the medical reports and hospital treatments and investigations were given to them, (Diverticular Disease,eye site problems,  Osteo and Rheumatoid Arthritis which effected my hips, neck, hand, knee , spine , Ulcer, Hiatal Hernia and unbalanced mental behaviour). In September 2016 in the court of law I was awarded the Work Related Activities and back dated it to March 2016 and also place under job centre coach (WRAG). I have applied for PIP once again recently as I live alone and could not deal normally with normal day to day activities due to my disabilities as well as I’m very worried due to lack of local  public transport,  I have to use my own Automatic car and could not afford to pay for road tax, petrol, insurance, services( one year without any service ) and repairs, but I do need the car to even go shopping and visit hospitals and doctors which they are located in another towns and no direct bus route available and very difficult to almost impossible to catch buses with my current  disabilities.

There are lot more that not mentioned in here, the hardship and destruction of love and friendship by DWP is something that need to be spread world-wide, this is against any normal human behaviour.

In case need more information please feel free to contact me and please be aware, it is no easy for me to type and much rather to talk if at all possible.

Thanking you.

**Case 3**

Just came across this page now – too late to include our story? My disabled partner suffered a 2nd major stroke last august and as we had paid for him to retrain and go back to work despite his disabilities his body, emotional and mental state could not cope.

The DWP felt he could still return to work. They disregarded medical notes and constant calling for more & more forms which I filled in, they said they had not received. They sanctioned his benefits and dragged him off to a work capability assessment. We were without monies to attend to his neurology/cardiology and other medical appointments. We got 2 eviction notices – one 3 days before Christmas when my partner had a lung infection and shingles. I had to get our MP to intervene. I could rattle on the consequences – suffice to say will keep it brief but I have everything recorded.

Kindest regards

More information (from 2nd email):

My disabled partner who has sciatica, short term memory loss and a stroke whilst having a heart vitral repair back in 2007 chose to retrain, using his disability allowance, to become of Driving Instructor. He is passionate about driving and wanted to get back to work.

However the fatigue and migraines he was experiencing, slowed him down and he had to cut his working hours. At the end of May this year whilst on a driving lesson he had a migraine and was unable to talk. His learner got home safely and he managed to get home, only to collapse and call for an ambulance where he hospitalised for 2 days. He returned to work although suffered further headaches and exhaustion.

On August 24th 2015 he had a severe stroke and was blue lighted to hospital. And then, it just spiralled downwards from there…..

There were a number of issues at play here, that in effect contributed to making this 'nightmare' scenario far worse than it should have been.  I could rattle on of the consequences of the Tax credit office getting our figures incorrect which had a horrendous ripple effect, but I would first like to focus on the 'system' that needs attention:

If you are employed, are sick due to a disability and not paid, then that organisation/company is breaking the law.

In this instance, not only is X battling with pre-existing disability conditions - which they have on record -  he has had this stroke and has been legitimately booked off work. YET, it is DECIDED BY A ‘DECISON MAKER’ THAT HE IS CAPABLE TO WORK 18 DAYS BEFORE HIS 1st SICK NOTE RUNS OUT! Surely this too, is breaking the law?!

1.            The governments definition of ESA is for people who are unable to work due to illness of disability

2.           X is classified as disabled and self-employed when he had this 2nd stroke and therefore, needed to claim ESA as he would not be eligible for Statutory Sick Pay

3.            He was booked off with a sick note for an initial 2months - from the 24/08/15 to 24/10/15

4.            YET - We received a 'Capability for Work Questionnaire' 08/09/15 - 5 DAYS AFTER ESA CLAIM! This was time-framed to be returned on 9th October 2015.

5.            WHY? He had a sick note for 2 months? If you look at their handbook - the 'statement of fitness for work', says that IF there is a GAP in your sick note notify them or you MAY LOSE money.  The JC+ were notified of a delay for the 2nd note certificate, as the doctor could only write up the sick note after our Stroke Assessment Visit at Swindon Hospital on 21/10/15.  The new sick note valid from 23/10/15 - 23/12/15 was posted on Monday 26/10/15 to JC+ YET the original sick note was still valid at the time of the Health Assessment.

6.            The Health Assessment (of which we have copies) was posted on the 07/10/15 and was due on the 09/10/15. However, the letter received from the council states that they had been informed that our ESA ended on 08/10/2015!!

7.            We received on the same day, a letter from the DWP that our health assessment was not received and although we have a sick note from our doctor, THAT a DECISION MAKER has decided that X is capable of work from 09/10/2015!!!!!! Seriously! Oh and we are no longer entitled to ESA or NI credits

8.            When we called JC+ the chap got the health assessment centre to call us which they did. They did not want our copies of the completed form but said they would look into the decision been reversed, which takes - wait for it - 14 working days!! I would like to know how a decision can be reversed based on what evidence? They supposedly had not received our assessment form?

9.            On calling the JC+ in disbelief when we got our next batch of letters the following day, we now found ourselves now minus ESA, Tax Credits (which- they want to claim back from us). We also received a printout from HMRC that the ESA we were supposedly given this past 2 months, is tax deductible (I thought Income related ESA is not tax deductible) Council notifying us that our Housing Benefit account is now suspended. I called the JC+-  I was told that there are procedures in place when I asked why does the Doctors sick note not count (They should read their own handbook!) and why is there is no safety net in place? Extremely exasperated she said that she can make an appointment for us to drop of copies of our Health Assessment form to JC+ AND wait for it - Apply for Job seekers allowance.  Is that not illegal considering his sick note for a CVA from a Doctor has booked him off until 23/12/15?

X has now regressed in his recovery as we have spent more time chasing, phoning and in shock of the relentless battering and bullying of demanding this and that almost daily.   All this extreme pressure, uncertainty and trauma has been devastating on his overall wellbeing! Bad dose of flu – sleeping for 18hr stretches. His headaches/migraines have escalated.  His bp has dipped to dangerous levels (71/43) and I’ve had to call out the paramedics in the early hours. He has had a 72 ECG monitor, Dr appointments and visits by the amazing Community Based Neuro Rehab Team +++

He is also having to deal and come to terms with the fact that with his mobility issues, short term memory loss and speech aphasia, that the neurologist has suggested that he retrains or finds other employment on recovery.  What recovery at this rate?!

We find ourselves with no income, housing benefit suspended? How do we access his medication as we are no longer on ESA how do we pay for trips to doctors, specialists, hospital appointments, physio if we have no income? The loan we arranged from the bank will cease to be shortly if they see no income.

Enough – this is surely a breach of basic human rights of those that are ill, vulnerable and at risk?

Government needs to “ look the human being behind the claim.”

Oh and the tone of letters are too horrendous for words. These certainly need addressing. I'm sure they must have devastating consequences on some people, particularly those with mental illness and those that are vulnerable. X’s low bp with one letter, shot up this week to 166/118 with a pulse of 117. It was fortunate that the stroke specialist nurse walked in an hour later to make a home visit calmed him down and monitored him over the next few hours.

However, we live to fight another day even though I am left wondering how, in the seemingly near future, I will be able to access resources from a 2 seater car – watch this space!

**Case 4**

Hello i dont know if i am emailing the kind of of problems you want to hear about, i am on universal credit and am due to get paid on the 17th of November, i got a letter from them last week telling me that i am being sanctioned £10.40 per day for 86 days due to a appointment i missed on the 25th of may. I will get nothing until the 17th of January 2017 how can they get away with deciding to sanction me now just before xmas, its taken them 5 and a half months to decide to sanction me. I have been so ill with stress and i have put sick notes in to cover me from the 17th of September 16 to the 27th of October 16 and i have one to cover me from the 27th of Oct to the 29th of Dec 16 the sick note is for essential hypertension anxiety and dizziness, i feel like i cant cope anymore, for about a year i was only getting £190 on the 17th of every month which caused me to get in huge debt and rent arrears, now i have been served with a eviction notice saying i have to be out of my council house by 12pm on the 6th of Dec 16 i just dont know what to do anymore. Thank you for reading my email and i hope to hear from you soon

**Case 5**

Just had a recent Atos assessment at North Manchester & yep got sanctioned.

I am 55yrs old, had a serious RTA in 1979, hips, ribs, hand, internal injuries etc, spent 3 months in hospital 9 weeks on intensive care critical list.

Due to the severity of the injuries I have always had problems being the bowel, bladder, wrist & now on my 3rd hip replacement done in 2009, plus other problems.

I was sanctioned several years ago but got that overturned as the health professional had not correctly done their job & was proved so.

In 2013 I had another assessment & the health professional listened & mostly copied what I said although a few mistakes but was succesfull in my mobility claim.

I was recently sent a form to fill out & only tick if SAME / WORSE / BETTER & if a change to describe why. I did & sent the form back as some things had worsened & it stated not to send old documentation from the previous but any new which I did.

I then received a letter to atend North Manchester General Hospital for an assessment via Atos on the 03/11/16 at 12.10pm.

I got to the hospital about 11.40am & like many other people could not find anywhere to park & spent 20mins doing so but it was at the other end of the hospital some way from the Atos clinic.

I got to the desk just in time & the lady on the desk said: Dont tell me had to park along way havent you, & that was a yes, she was being nice & said she knows all about it & lots of people have the same problem each time.

I went to the toilet then sat down, I have a problem sitting for sometime & constantly have to move & stand up, I do use a walking stick but this is also due to my knee/ankle just giving way & thats on my left hip replacement side I do get pain in the right hip as this was broke in my accident too but not as serious as my left, which has had a complex 3rd replacement.

At around 12.35 I went to the reception desk & mentioned that I had only put a couple of hours in parking & asked if that would be a problem if I run over time, they said should be ok. I an not fully sure time I was called in after that as I thought it was closer to 1pm but the start time on the sheet shows: 12.46 but I dont think this is correct? also doesnt show an end time.

During the meeting we discussed several different things & at one point I asked if she minded if I stood up as I could feel my leg going numb which it constantly does & back ache. I also had to go to the toilet as this is another problem as both needs are urgent, came back & carried on, the assessment was over by around 2pm I think & as I left a gentleman on the desk said that if there was a problem when I got back to the car that they had to phone the reception desk, luckily I found a shorter route back to where I had parked.

I received a letter around the 26th stating that I was unable to now get mobility from the 24th November 2016 & that I would receive a letter soon to return my mobility car.

I phoned & asked why & also asked for the assement form which I received. I was told is what was what on the form & the assessment carried out by the health professional, I explained their wasn`t an examination carried out only questions, the lady on the other end of the phone said so there was no examination I said no, she said she would pass that on to the assessors & the consultaion would be sent out to me.

Well I have received them & honest im flabbergasted.

Most of what was said was not put down or if put down meant totally the opposit ie: I do my own cooking(microwave meals due to hand injury & able to stand) . I was asked do I do the house work, I stated no I rent a room in a house so dont do the housework. On the form it states: does his own cooking & housework.

I stated I have back problems had MRI scans confirm some disc bulge possible nerve damage & supplied a letter with the previous stating that I might benefit from a referral to a Neurosurgeon from my hip consultant, letter sent to my doctors but as I explained my doctor wont refer me as they dont think it will change anything, I explained this to Atos in the original questionair, this was mentioned to the assessor on the day.

On her notes she states going to be referred to a Neurosurgeon.

Notes also mention Bowel/Bladder which we discussed but she describes the bladder problem but the bowel urgency is as equal & stops me from useing public transport for obvious reason: No toilet on them.

Asked about hobbies & social activities: Answer errm, well I dont like reading books, like to watch TV sometimes same with music & use to like Pool but every now and then go & watch my friends play but only for a short while as I dont drink, dont smoke & struggle to be out for sometime & cant go to clubs or walk to other pubs not on any social media sites. Asked do I have a mobile phone & have internet access, Answer Yes but use the internet ocassionally.

Form states: Sees his family every now and then, watches tv, socialises with his friends, does his housework & shopping, Has a mobile & on his computer alot ( No I`m not & no dont do the housework, although I do keep things tidy that I have used & wash my things up including my own clothes).

It also states I drove to the centre in a automatic car, parked more than 300mts away stopped 2/3 times. ( I mentioned couldnt park any closer & nearly missed my appointment time due to driving around & needing the toilet)

" Please Note Henrietta my walking & other functions vary not on a daily basis but throughout the day which I explained on my forms & to the lady in the interview. I mentioned i get some good points in the day & some bad ones this is on a daily basis not different days on the week. I had to walk from the other end of the hospital as no place to park, but I explained sometimes I could walk maybe 200mts but most times it could be 1 mt / 20mts sometimes I just stay in bed and rest, this is stated in all forms sent & by the previous health professional.

Part of the form states Variability: Has no variability has good moments in day. he does not sleep well 3-4 hrs per night ( this is true I dont sleep & its not normally a full 3/4hrs its broken sleep. There is a point in the form were she states doesnt look tired! she having a laugh i`m goosed. ( This is stated on page 5 as page 4 is not with the papers sent)

States: Able to read understnd word/symbols etc then it states: He wears glasses for this activity he does not enjoy this ( not sure what I dont enjoy although I do suffer from dry eyes as stated & in prescription list for visco tears ).

States on same page as above Moving Around: He is able to walk 200mts with his stick some days but not able to do this regulary. his ability to walk longer periods vary. ( I have stated struggle to walk at all sometimes & distance is normally far less & use my stick to make sure im safer but not stated)

I will scan page 8 & 9 and attach them: But states basically that I coped well throughout the interview. I moved side to side constantly due to numbness in my leg, back ache plus other things, I asked if I could stand up which I did for a short while I also had to leave to use the toilet, yet none of this is documented. I find some of the comments strange things like: Average build ( I`m 5.3ish , about 9st 6ish, bags under my eyes, just wondering what average build is?

This part I find extreamly serious Page 8/9: Claiment Consent- The claiment consents to a physical examination: gives appearance & other discriptors then goes in to the physical examination: THIS EXAMINATION NEVER HAPPENED, THERE WAS`NT ONE & I really cant believe that this has been documented as done.

Surely this comes under fraud doesnt it, does she not have a legal obligation to tell the truth & report the truth, if so what action could be taken if the health assessor has lied.

I will send the pages I mentioned for you to look at please let me know if I can send anything else & anything you need please dont hesitate to ask.

**Case 6**

We have been asked by Inclusion London, for some case studies of members, who have been sanctioned or threatened with this by Job Centre staff for not using Universal Job Match. Here are just a few:

Ms A: Member has a learning disability. Reason for sanctioning was failure to attend an advisor interview. She stated that this appointment was not written down for her on her green card, therefore she was unaware that she had to attend the job centre on this day. It was her understanding that anything that is written on her green card she must attend, as this was not the case she did not attend. Due to her learning difficulties, communication must be completely clear with added written confIrmation. She was very upset as she did not know what she had done wrong.

Ms B: This client suffers from bi-polar disorder. Reason for sanctioning - not uploading her CV to Universal Job Match, she made it clear that she has no computer skills at all and although the job centre made provisions for her to initially set up her universal Jobmatch account with JCP staff and create a CV he did not upload it to the site for her. She explained that it was not possible for her to do this herself as she did not know how to. This caused her deep upset and she felt demoralised as well as causing her financial difficulties where she had to borrow money from family members and is still struggling to pay back. This has had a negative affect on her mental health.

Ms C: Client has a learning disability and suffers from epilepsy and anxiety. Reason for sanctioning failure to log into Universal Jobmatch. The system would not let her log in I tried myself but with no success. This caused client to become very tearful and distressed and was talking about ending her life as she could not cope with the demands of the job centre coupled with the strains of her daily life where she cares for her elderly, infirm mother who suffers from dementia and is currently trying to manage her mental health.

Mr D: Has a learning disability and suffers from depression. Reason for threat of sanctioning failure to log into Universal Jobmatch, he has explained many times that he struggles to use computers and has no confidence in this area. The Job Centre sent him on a basic computer course but he is still unable to use it. This is making him very agitated; he feels intimidated by the staff and is causing his depression to deteriorate.

Mr E suffers from depression and PTSD (has very poor English). Was sanctioned for not using UJM – cannot use computer at all. Has to get teenage son to help him.

Ms F suffers from paranoid schizophrenia and has bee quite unwell recently. She was sanctioned as she was not mentally well enough to cope with UJM.

G – As he was on JSA he was told numerous of times what would happen if he didn’t upload he CV and apply to 5 jobs a day using the UJM. This created stress, anxiety and he started to feel quite low and a little paranoid because he was always worrying that they’ll stop his benefits. Both another worker and I spoke to his advisor. A colleague went to the jobcentre with him to discuss his physical health issues, his learning difficulties and the fact that he was doing a literacy course to help him to read. It seems his advisor ignored everything my colleague had to say as weeks later he continued to harass RT to the point that I had to phone the advisor and re-iterate what my colleague had told him previously. However, the advisor tried to deny that he’d been harassing him and blatantly told me that RT was lying! He was very rude and abrupt but thankfully G is now off JSA and is claiming ESA.

H – Was also on JSA and was told to create an UJM and start applying to jobs. He was told that if he doesn’t show that he is using UJM to apply to jobs regularly there would be a possibility of a sanction. This compounded ON’s stress levels and made him become overly anxious fearful that his benefits would be stopped. His moods became low and started feeling quite depressed and stressed over the whole thing. I rang his advisor to explain ON’s situation to stress that we do job search together and I was his employability support worker. They were fine with it but of course every time ON went to sign on the threat was still there. Fortunately, now he is off JSA and is back on ESA.

J – Was also told that he must create an account on UJM and upload his CV. He was told what the repercussions would be if he didn’t do so and show evidence of applying to vacancies. They didn’t apply pressure but they did stress the importance of using UJM and reminded him of the sanction rules. PM was quite stressed with this and his anxiety shot through the roof! He had suicidal ideations already from his mental health issues and the jobcentre just compounded it. He is now claiming ESA

K – Was told that he had to register an account with UJM and that he must upload his CV with a covering letter otherwise he may get sanctioned. He too found it very difficult to cope with the demands of the jobcentre continually stressing him about using the UJM. What makes it worse is that he was assessed and is diagnosed with dyslexia. He showed me the assessment outcome letter which he showed the jobcentre…. you’d think they’d take that into consideration, but of course they didn’t. He finally got back on ESA. Unfortunately, he has had to re-claim JSA as whilst he was waiting for DWP to make a decision on his ESA claim, he was receiving any money and his HB and CT had stopped and the bills were piling up around him. He fears that now back on JSA the whole UJM issue will come back and his stress levels will rise again.

L – Has been extremely stressed out and anxious with being told that he must use UJM and that if he didn’t comply with the riles he too would face a possible sanction. This man is a recovering alcoholic where some days are harder than others. The stress of the threat that his benefits could be stopped if he didn’t actively show that he was using UJM every week, broke him down and he started to drink again (or was having serious thoughts about drinking). However, the has stayed sober for months now and has a part time job as a cleaner but because it’s not full time he still has to use UJM or they’ll sanction him.

M - Again, this is a man who hasn’t been in paid employment for over 10yrs, has chronic depression, stress and anxiety due to a lot of issues from the past. Although not directly by JCP he was told by Maximus (he was referred to the work programme whilst still claiming ESA) that he had to create a UJM account, upload his CV and covering letter as if he didn’t he would face possibly being sanctioned. This raised his stress levels, lowered his mood and increased his anxiety. He had discussed how Maximus was stressing him out with his clinical psychologist and myself. His therapist and I discussed contacting Maximus to help them understand that although he presents well, inside his head and how he feels is a totally different matter. Thankfully though, Maximus are working with him and have backed off so that has helped a lot with de-creasing his anxiety.!

**Case 7**

Not benefit sanctions – but dire situation. I have 4 disabilities including epilepsy, Ehlers Danlos and severe depression from chronic pain.

In late August, I became even more ill than usual (I could not walk from dislocating joints). Whilst my PIP application was processed, and I laid on the floor (in too much pain to use a bed or chair) and sobbed. I was not well enough to do accounts or post the letter required to respond to an August request for accounts info from the Working Tax Credit office. I live alone and have no-one to help me gather financial information or post a letter when I am bedridden.

(By the way, this request came barely 1 month after filling in my annual Tax Credit accounts and declaration as usual).

Because I was too ill to do or post the reply, in October, my Disabled Tax Credit was cancelled with no warning.

Because my Disabled Tax Credit was cancelled with no warning, my Housing Benefit was also cancelled. Also with no warning.

Then HM Revenue & Customs sent me a £350 bill for NI class 2 contributions (I am exempt) and informed me that 'now' debt collectors would be coming to my house.

The letter had no telephone number to contact them and the letter gave no indication of why I had been billed and threatened (as I have been exempt due to low self employment earnings since 2009).

Then the Working Tax Credit office sent me a bill for £3,000, billing me for Tax Credits back to April, even though they had not asked for information until the end of August, so even if being seriously ill does not exempt someone for Tax Credit sanctions (and indeed, it is) then I would be only billed back to August. Not April! Imagine what it is like to be severely depressed, having daily seizures, awful joint dislocations, chronic pain, to have your benefits stopped and then to receive a bill for £3,000.

Then I was awarded PIP at the top rate. But although I applied for PIP in early August, and have four disabilities now (my DLA was only for one) my PIP will start not in August but it starts today, on 30 November. Because DLA claimants don't get PIP from the day they applied for it. This means that although I applied for PIP in early August, I will not receive any PIP money until 23 Dec. It will probably not clear until after Christmas.

My Tax Credit and Housing Benefit are still stopped. They were stopped on 29 October. I am late with the rent due on 22 Nov, and my landlord has indicated that if I do not find the money by December 9th, I cannot stay in my home -which has been adapted for disabled-access with a ramp and a specially widened gate.

These problems may therefore make me homeless.

I have done nothing wrong apart from being too ill to complete and post my accounts, and be awarded PIP.

For these 'crimes' I was sanctioned with 2 stopped benefits.

Both the Council and the Tax Credit office say it will be weeks before my benefits are restored. I have just 8 days. This is too slow to stop me becoming homeless.

No-one has apologised for stopping my benefits.

I have applied for a Discretionary Housing Payment but unless they restart my housing benefit claim, no small 'top-up' will help me keep my home.

In the meantime, I have had 15 social housing applications/bids for disabled friendly accommodation rejected because I am 'too young' to be disabled.

I am 45 and all the disabled-friendly accommodation is reserved for the over-50s.

(Former journalist turned epilepsy writer)

**Annex C** Extracts from research findings[[40]](#footnote-40) on impacts of conditionality on Disabled people subject to conditionality and sanctions in the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) Work Related Activity Group (WRAG)

\*No real names have been used to protect identities

**Theme: insecurity and dependence for survival on changing and arbitrary rules**

“Your whole time, everything you’re doing revolves around the Job Centre and what they require from you… So, you’re constantly adapting to them rather than them adapting to your needs” (Charlie, 366-367 & 374).

“But cause I’m on this course now he’s got to sign me over to somebody else. Now this somebody else, they don’t know me, they haven’t been seeing me for weeks on end. So now they’re going to get me to do the same things he’s been trying to get me to do. I’m going to try and have to explain things, no not this, not that. They’re going to try and put me on new courses, you’ve got to do this and that. It’s going round in circles all the time.” (Hannah, 158-162).

“The sense that you’re always being watched. That sense of um, unpredictability…”(Ben, 89-90 & 205-207).

“They can sign on to your account to see what you’ve been up to. It’s like they’re constantly watching you. They’re waiting for you to make a mistake to say no that’s it.” (Hannah, 260-262

“If they don’t see that you’re doing enough on job searches and that, they can sanction you when they feel like it. There’s no ifs or buts, its black and white, this way or that’s it. There’s no leniency with anybody. So, if they decide this universal match thing, that I ain’t done enough, that’s it, I’m getting sanctioned and there’s nothing nobody, I can’t say I was in hospital, I was under anaesthetic, they don’t care about that.” (Hannah, 262-263, 284-288 & 324-328).

**Theme: demoralising/disempowering work related activity**

“well I think the first tactic here is make the looney imagine that he can be self-employed. So, my first counsellor sent me upstairs to a self-employment specialist… I think this is a tactic to make people who clearly can’t support themselves by being self-employed, making them self-employed. I think it’s a tactic to simply get people off the books. (Greg, 261-262 & 276-283).

“They don’t give you the jobs that you want to apply for, they give you the jobs that are local, in supermarkets and things like that… So, then you get an interview for one of those rubbish jobs you’ve applied for and you don’t want it because you’ve applied for it just to fill the quota. And that made me feel even worse… The sort of jobs they were asking me to apply for were just admin roles or working in customer care centres and I was like if I wanted to do that job I wouldn’t have needed to go to university.... So, for me I wanted to get graduate type jobs and that’s not what the Job Centre wanted.” (Charlie, 147-148, 177-179, 291-293 & 296-297).

“They also tell people to leave off their qualifications on CVs and things… so we don’t look overqualified for the jobs they’re sending us for” (Ben, 171-173).

“So when the Job Centre says to you, you should remove your degree from your CV because they don’t want you to be over qualified when you apply for the jobs they give… The impact on your feeling of self-worth… They told me to remove it and if I didn’t I would be punished and would be sanctioned…Now I can see the sense of having different CVs but removing my degree, that was a painful thing. It’s just, when you’ve put all that effort, all that time into things. I think if you decide to do it yourself then that’s fine, it’s when you’re told to do it… This is the way that the Job Centre chip away at your confidence and all those sorts of things. (Charlie, 145-147, 150-152 & 154-162).

**Theme: mental/traumatic impacts of sanctioning and the experience of conditionality**

“So finally, when new year had ended and I had to go back and sign with that same woman who had sanctioned me. She said that being sanctioned had shown her that I didn’t have a work ethic. Now I’d been working pretty much solidly since I was 16 and it was only out of redundancy that I was out of work…I now have a problem going into the Job Centre because I literally start shaking because of the damage that the benefit sanction did to me... So yeah that was part, the sanction was one of the reasons that triggered the mental health and problems I’m having now… it was awful and I ended up trying to commit suicide… to me that was the last straw and I went home and I just emptied the drawer of tablets or whatever and I ended up in A&E for a couple of days after they’d pumped my stomach out. (Charlie, 103-109, 31-36, 39 & 112-114).

“the thing is emotionally inside it sort of drains me. I feel like someone’s put a knife through my stomach. I feel emotionally depressed and not happy. …Very horrible experience, I would never want anybody to go there”. (Dipesh, 26-27 & 184).

“I tend to, when I get backed in a corner, or when I feel threatened, is to start screaming and shouting. So, I start panicking, like am I going to be like that at work, am I going to carry on being like that at work… It’s like every single day we’re battling with our own selves and then we’ve got to battle with the world and battle with the government and battle with everything. It’s really hard.” (Hannah, 188-190, 316-318 & 360-361).

“I can’t sleep without the sleeping pills. I never took sleeping pills in my life. Simply because it goes round and round in your head and you can’t plan for the future cause you don’t know what’s going to happen, and you think of the worst scenarios, what the hell, that’s the temptation…These are the stories I’m hearing, horror stories. I just hope I can hang on the two years I’ve got till my pensions and at least I’ll have a roof over my head.” (Greg, 102-107 & 356-359).

Liam was the only participant who described a different response to those above when he had his benefits stopped following a Work Capability Assessment (WCA) and experienced a freedom from conditionality: “The funny thing is the 2 months they stopped my money, I felt free for the first time in a long time. Regardless of the money, that didn’t matter, I felt free”. (Liam, 336-338).

**Theme: infantilising treatment**

“They treat you like, you feel like you’re in infant school, like you’ve been called up in front of the school nurse or head mistress.” (Alice, 97-102).

“I went the wrong day, I don’t know how, I had the date written down and I went the day after. I had a young girl who was really rude to me. She said you know I can suspend you cause you came the wrong day. They’re really horrible. I said look I’m sorry I made a mistake. But to be spoken to when you’re in your mid-60’s, nearly 64 by a young girl like I was a naughty little schoolgirl is really hard to take. Cause you have to keep your mouth closed. You can’t say excuse me don’t speak to me like that.” (Imogen, 257-262).

**Theme: disincentive to find work following the cut to the rate of ESA WRAG for new claimants**

“The new payments for ESA from this year are £73 a week as opposed to £102. Well if you’re on £102 a week because you’ve been on it for longer than 6 or 12 months and you know if you go back to work and it turns out you’re not well enough to carry on then you’re coming back at the new rate of £73 per week. That’s going make you more cautious and its counter-productive and it increases the stress.” (Daniel, 249-254).

“After 13 weeks I have to go and put a new claim in. After 13 weeks if the job doesn’t last, or if I get made redundant, or if I get terminated or the contract stops, I then have to go into starting all over again. Reassessment etc. So, I’m worse off.” (Dipesh, 67-69).

**Theme: stigma of being on benefits**

“Because I told you I’m not greedy. I’m not a greedy person. I’m quite happy what I get”. (Jenny, 295).

“If someone is constantly telling, you should try harder. Have you done this, and this. Honestly, you’ve got to put yourself out there, you’ve got to apply for more jobs, they make you feel unvalued, like there’s something wrong with you actually… They don’t make you feel better, they actually make you feel worse.” (Dipesh, 166-169).

“The thing is it’s getting the wages…But you feel good cause you spend it cause you earned it…Which it gets me at the moment… It’s the money I collect from the ESA. You don’t feel proud to spend it cause you know you’re sitting indoors. But I know I can’t do nothing about it”. (Kevin, 78-81 & 85-86).

Meg spoke about having a panic attack in the street one day when her payments were stopped for a short period. She described how she felt that the stigma of being on benefits had built up and at this point she could not cope any longer:

“You’re getting a payment every 2 weeks, and yeah it feels wrong, it’s like shameful, that’s it… cause you want to be better than that, you don’t want to ask (crying)... Wishing I never had to ask…The mind is so powerful and things can, like that panic attack I had, you could never have told me I was, I would have a panic attack I didn’t feel panicky. Yeah sure I’ve always in the back of my mind, the things I explained earlier, about being on the dole, not having a job, not being good enough in life, but panic, no. I sort of, it just presented itself in such a way that was so frightening to me, so totally unexpected.” (Meg, 213-214, 216, 220 & 257-262).

1. An organisation is a DPO if: – their Management Committee or Board has at least 75% of representation from Deaf and Disabled people and; at least 50% of their paid staff team are Deaf or Disabled people with representation at all levels of the organization; and: - they provide services for or work on behalf of Deaf and Disabled people; - they follow an equality and human rights approach in their work.

Under the term “Disabled person” we include people who: - have mobility impairment; - have sensory impairment; - have learning difficulties/disabilities; - are neurodiverse; - live with mental distress; - live with long-term health conditions. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/family-resources-survey-financial-year-201617> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/monitoring-poverty-and-social-exclusion-2016> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/households-below-average-income-199495-to-201516> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2017> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/06/OU_Report_final_01_08_online.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. https://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/by-az/a-fair-society1.html [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/TBSearch.aspx?Lang=en&TreatyID=4&DocTypeCategoryID=7 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The Greater London Assembly is also currently undertaking their own cumulative impact assessment of welfare and tax reforms since 2010 on Londoners. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/cumulative-impact-assessment-report.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The National Audit Office (NAO) concluded that the cost of running Universal Credit compared to the benefits it replaces is not value for money now, and that its future value for money is unproven. <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/rolling-out-universal-credit/> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. http://blogs.bmj.com/bmjopen/2017/11/15/health-and-social-care-spending-cuts-linked-to-120000-excess-deaths-in-england/ [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Researchers at Oxford and Liverpool universities found evidence to link the introduction of the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) with adverse mental health trends: each additional 10 000 people reassessed in each area was associated with an additional 6 suicides, 2700 cases of reported mental health problems, and the prescribing of an additional 7020 antidepressant items. The most significant increases took place in the most deprived local authority areas of England. Across England as a whole, the reassessment process from 2010 to 2013 was “associated with” an extra 590 suicides, 279,000 additional cases of self-reported mental health problems, and the prescribing of a further 725,000 anti-depressants. http://jech.bmj.com/content/70/4/339 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/staggering-esa-suicide-figures-prompt-calls-for-inquiry-and-prosecution-of-ministers/ [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/information-commissioner-questions-dwps-highly-unusual-failure-on-benefit-deaths/ [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Mark Barber https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/austerity-disability-mark-barber\_uk\_5b88f4ace4b0511db3d6b768

Michael O’Sullivan https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/sep/21/fit-for-work-assessment-was-trigger-for-suicide-coroner-says

Moira Drury https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/aug/27/my-mothers-death-was-hastened-by-long-delay-in-processing-her-benefits

Stephanie Bottrill https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/stephanie-bottrill-who-blamed-the-bedroom-tax-for-her-suicide-had-history-of-depression-inquest-9664921.html

David Clapson https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/09/david-clapson-benefit-sanctions-death-government-policies

Mark and Helen Mullins http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2059238/Army-veteran-Mark-Mullins-wife-Helen-driven-suicide-poverty.html

Sheila Holt https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/ros-wynne-jones-sheila-hounded-death-5353202

Cecilia Burns https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-19433535

Margaret Blenman http://www.theargus.co.uk/news/16080427.Woman\_found\_in\_sea\_off\_Brighton\_was\_evicted\_from\_home\_after\_bedroom\_tax\_caused\_spiralling\_debts/?ref=rss [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. For example, the below mentioned challenge against the removal of disability premiums under Universal Credit and the successful challenge brought against changes to the Personal Independence Payment regulations found in the high court to be “blatantly discriminatory” against Disabled people who experience psychological distress. <https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/campaigns-and-policy/act-now/big-legal-victory-disabled-people-dwps-changes-pip-regulations-declared-unlawful-today/> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. For example, the helpline for Universal Credit only became a Freephone number after considerable public pressure: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/oct/12/pressure-grows-to-make-universal-credit-helpline-free-of-charge> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-06-20/debates/67B003C3-EE0D-4394-A7F9-D46DBBCC557D/UNConventionOnTheRightsOfPersonsWithDisabilities> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The online forum received more than 2,800 submissions (compared to the usual 50 to 100 posts) and the committee also received 450 pieces of written evidence (compared to the usual 100 or so). <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/work-and-pensions-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/pip-esa-assessments-17-19/> [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Currently 1.2 million older and disabled people are unable to get the care they need, almost double the number since 2010 (Age UK, February 2017, Briefing: Health and Care of Older People in England 2017). Despite more adults needing care, the number of receiving it has fallen by at least a quarter between 2009/10 and 2013/14 alone (The Health Foundation ‘Briefing: The social care funding gap,’ 2017). A £2.5 billion funding gap is estimated by 2019/20: <https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/autumn-budget-2017>

On 8 March 2018, the National Audit Office (NAO) released a report which showed that government funding for local authorities has dropped by 49 per cent in real-terms since 2010, resulting in a 29 per cent drop in spending power: <https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Financial-sustainabilty-of-local-authorites-2018.pdf>

In July 2018 the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) warned that government-imposed budget cuts over the last seven years have left a number of councils under “enormous pressure” and “in a worrying financial position” and raised concern about the lack of government plans to secure councils' financial future.

By enforcing a section 114 notice, Northamptonshire County Council has become the first local authority in over 20 years to effectively declare itself bankrupt, banning all new expenditure in order to hit its legally required balanced budget. Other local authorities are likely to follow suit, with for example Somerset warned by auditors it could go bust. The NAO revealed that one in 10 local authorities could run out of reserves within the next three years, after dipping into their reserves to cover spending. The Bureau of Investigative Journalism also found that 22 councils had reduced these reserves by more than 50 per cent in the last five years.

<https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2018-03-08/councils-in-crisis-three-more-named-as-showing-signs-of-financial-distress>

<https://www.citymetric.com/politics/will-northamptonshire-be-last-council-go-bankrupt-we-ve-crunched-numbers-3773>

The Children’s Commissioner for England has warned that “vulnerable children” face 'catastrophe' over crisis-hit councils: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-northamptonshire-45069057> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Evaluations of the closure of the Independent Living Fund carried out by both the government and the Disabled People’s Organisation reveal the impact of cuts to social care support. The government commissioned evaluation found that those with a heavily reduced package of care experienced multiple changes as a result, including: loss of paid care and support; an increased reliance on unpaid care; changes and restrictions to daily activities, including less support for engaging in leisure activities. Heavy reductions in care affected some people’s physical and health. Participants on reduced arrangements reported lower trust in the social care system. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/584417/independent-living-fund-post-closure-review.pdf>

<https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/campaigns-and-policy/facts-and-information/independent-living-social-care-and-health/ilf-one-year-on/> [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/1 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/Migrated_Documents/corporate/holes-in-the-safety-net-final-copy.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. The challenge was brought by two severely disabled men, TP and AR, who both saw their benefits dramatically reduced when they moved Local Authority and were required to claim Universal Credit. TP is a former Cambridge graduate who worked in the financial sector in the City and around the world. In 2016 he was diagnosed with a terminal illness; Non-Hodgkins Lymphoma and Castleman’s disease. In October 2016 when he became sick he moved temporarily from London to his parents’ in Dorset but after a few months he returned to Hammersmith and Fulham, a Universal Credit full service area, on the advice of his treating clinicians in order to access specialist healthcare. AR is 36 and suffers from severe mental health issues. In 2017, he moved from Middlesbrough to Hartlepool, a Universal Credit full service area, as he could no longer afford the property he was living in due to the imposition of the bedroom tax. Prior to moving, both TP and AR were in receipt of the Severe Disability Premium (SDP) and Enhanced Disability Premium (EDP), which were specifically aimed at meeting the additional care needs of severely disabled people living alone with no carer.

Recently released figures from the DWP suggest that 500,000 individuals are in receipt of the SDP. <https://www.leighday.co.uk/News/News-2018/June-2018/First-legal-challenge-against-Universal-Credit-fin> [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. In 2011 61% of disabled people lived in households with internet access compared to 86% of non-disabled people while according to 2018 figures from the ONS, 20% of Disable people have never used the internet. https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/itandinternetindustry/bulletins/internetusers/2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. https://www.computerweekly.com/news/252434188/Thousands-of-Universal-Credit-claimants-unable-to-use-Govuk-Verify-to-apply-for-benefits [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. In areas of full UC rollout for a year or more there was an average increase of 52% in foodbank usage, 12 months after the full rollout date. This compares to 13% increase areas without full UC rollout or areas where full rollout had been in place for up to 3 months. <https://www.trusselltrust.org/what-we-do/research-advocacy/universal-credit-and-foodbank-use/>

Nearly 2 in 5 people using foodbanks were awaiting a benefit payment, with most of these waiting up to 6 weeks, though a fifth were waiting 7 weeks or more.

 <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2017/07/OU_Report_final_01_08_online2.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. The survey of English housing associations found that tenants on UC are more than twice as likely to be in debt compared to all other tenants. Nearly three quarters (73%) of Universal Credit tenants are in debt, compared to less than a third (29%) of all other tenants.

<https://www.housing.org.uk/press/press-releases/flawed-universal-credit-causing-debt-hardship-families-in-social-housing/> [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. The charity Scope found that on average, disabled people face extra costs of £570 a month related to their impairment or condition. <https://www.scope.org.uk/campaigns/extra-costs> [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Disabled people are twice as likely as non-Disabled people to have insecured debt totalling more than half of their income. <https://blog.scope.org.uk/2014/04/15/priced-out-ending-the-financial-penalty-of-disability-by-2020/> [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. https://www.demos.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/2018\_A\_Better\_WCA\_is\_possible\_FULL-4.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. In its November 2016 report, the National Audit Office recommended that the government use its own data to evaluate the impact of sanctions in the UK. The report states “The Department has limited evidence on how people respond to the possibility of receiving a sanction, or how large this deterrent effect is in practice” and “To show that its use of sanctions represents value for money the Department needs to build a strong evidence base about the effects of sanctions and the trade-offs involved”. As the NAO pointed out, the DWP has administrative data on individual benefit histories, sanctions and employment, and data on local sanction rates and performance which could be used. To date this recommendation has not been met.

<https://www.nao.org.uk/report/benefit-sanctions/>

 The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) found in 2017 that there were ‘significant gaps in the Department's understanding of sanctions’ and urged it ‘to make and report progress in improving data systems, including on linking earnings outcomes to sanctions data’. Meg Hillier MP, Chair of the PAC said “It is an article of faith for the Department for Work & Pensions that sanctions encourage people into work. The reality is far more complex and the potential consequences severe……Suspending people’s benefit payments can lead them into debt, rent arrears and homelessness, which can undermine their efforts to find work.” <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-accounts-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/benefit-sanctions-16-17/> [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Academic Ben Baumberg-Geiger writes, “that sanctioning may have zero or even negative impacts on job-related outcomes”. <http://www.benbgeiger.co.uk/files/Benefits%20conditionality%20for%20disabled%20people%202017%2002%2007.pdf>

This is also one of the conclusions drawn from soon to be published qualitative research from the University of Essex carried out through interviews with Disabled claimants in the Employment and Support Allowance Work Related Activity Group. Extracts from those interviews can be found at Annex C. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. The cut was only brought in for new claimants and not existing claimants. However, this acts as further disincentive find work in that if a Disabled person moves off ESA from the WRAG but the job does not work out, they will now go back onto ESA at the lower rate. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. https://disabilitybenefitsconsortium.wordpress.com/2015/10/27/almost-70-of-disabled-people-say-cuts-to-esa-will-cause-their-health-to-suffer-and-half-may-return-to-work-later/ [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Adult passports cost £75.50 to apply for online or £85 at a Post Office. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. This has now been reduced to 5 weeks as a result of intensive lobbying and campaigning. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. The repayment deadline has now been removed so repayment deductions can be spread across future Universal Credit payments. However, the deductions still cause financial problems. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. From unpublished research by the University of Essex due to be launched in October 2018 [↑](#footnote-ref-40)