

Disabled woman's benefits stopped for 10 months after missing interview DWP had CANCELLED

Pevolvepolitics.com/disabled-womans-benefits-stopped-ten-months-failed-attend-interview-cancelled-dwp/

Andrea Needham

11/4/2017



Teresa Geale (Metro), disability protest (Prospect magazine)

A 63 year old woman with several serious medical conditions [had her benefits stopped for ten months](#) after she failed to turn up for an assessment which she had been told was cancelled.

Teresa Geale, from Kent, was already on the bus to the assessment when she received a voicemail message telling her that the assessment centre was running late and her appointment would have to be rescheduled.

She went home, but a few days later received a letter from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) demanding to know why she hadn't attended the appointment.

Despite explaining that her appointment had been cancelled, she was told that because she had missed the appointment 'without good reason'.

As a consequence, her Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) was being stopped.

ESA is the primary benefit for people who are unable to work due to illness or disability.

Teresa Geale was receiving ESA due to suffering from a number of medical conditions including osteoarthritis, curvature of the spine and ocular migraines which cause her temporary blindness.

After Ms Geale's ESA was stopped, she was forced to sign on for Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA) instead, receiving only half the amount she had received under ESA.

She said:

I had to deny myself things, make food last longer, and so on. The stress of it also made my illness worse.

Mrs Geale took her case to a tribunal, which ruled that the appointment could not have been cancelled – despite her showing the tribunal her bus ticket and screenshots of calls she had made to the assessment centre at the time.

Mrs Geale later said:

It's ridiculous the way they've carried on...they were calling me a liar the whole time.

Her case was later taken on by the University of Kent's law clinic, and an appeal made to a second tribunal. This time, the judge took just five minutes to rule against the DWP, saying that:

I find it extraordinary that her evidence was not accepted and it has taken this long to overturn the original decision....I trust that the Respondent [the DWP] will reimburse her for her aborted bus fare.

Ms Geale's case is shocking, but far from isolated. [41,000 ESA claimants were sanctioned](#) between 2012 and 2016.

Claimants – including those on Job Seekers' Allowance – have been sanctioned for [utterly preposterous reasons](#) including missing an appointment because they were in hospital after a heart attack; [selling poppies](#); and missing an appointment because they were at a job interview.

ESA claimants who are sanctioned must first go through the DWP's 'mandatory reconsideration' process before being allowed to take their case to a tribunal.

A recent [Freedom of Information request](#) showed that the DWP's target for these 'reconsiderations' is that 80% of the decisions to sanction should be upheld. It's clear that if the decision makers are working not on the basis of what is right, but on the need to hit their target of denying four out of five cases, justice is not going to be high on their agenda.

There is evidence that the use of sanctions against ESA claimants is leading to a mental health crisis, with a recent [open letter](#) to the government from leading mental health specialists claiming that sanctions are linked to 'destitution, disempowerment and increased rates of mental health problems'.

They go on to say that:

Vulnerable people with multiple and complex needs, in particular, are disproportionately affected by the increased use of sanctions.

The DWP of course says that these sanctions are justified in order to ensure that people meet their obligations. The real reason, however, is clear: it is to save money. Cuts to ESA are expected to [save the Treasury £1bn by 2020/21](#) and the frequent application of sanctions is a key part of this.

The [rate of ESA](#) for new claimants is a miserly £73.10 a week if you're considered capable of some 'work-related activity', £109.65 if you're not. The work-related activity payment was cut last year by £30 a week for new claimants.

Tory MPs who earn almost £75k a year [lined up to vote through a measure](#) which would leave new claimants with less than £10.50 a day to live on. It's an insulting amount, but for many sick and disabled people, it's all they've got. Sanctioning people like Teresa Geale simply adds even more cruelty to an already unspeakably

cruel system.

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Birchington woman Teresa Geale denied benefits for 10 months

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By Lowri Chant lchant@thekmggroup.co.uk

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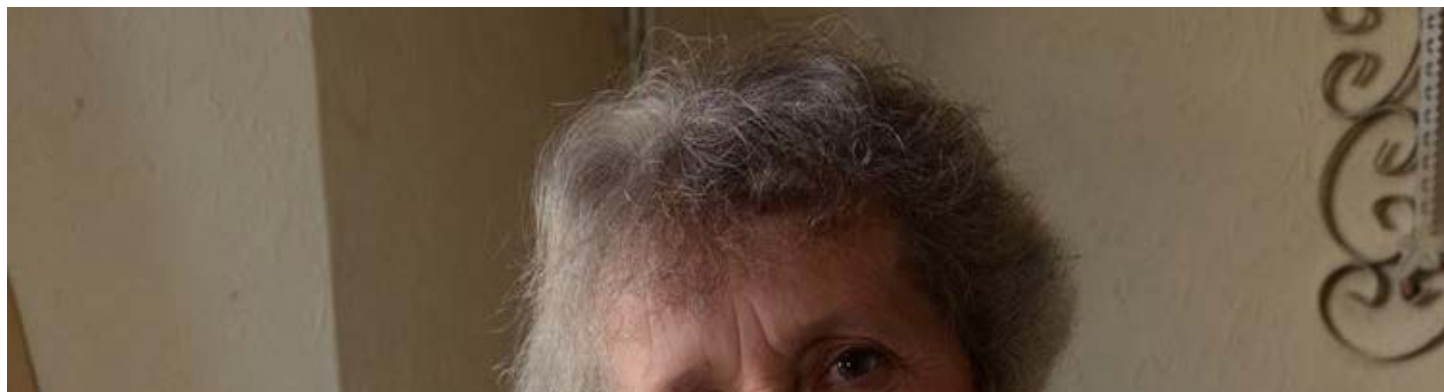
Published: 00:01, 02 November 2017 | **Updated:** 07:37, 02 November 2017



A disabled woman was denied vital benefits for 10 months after health assessors cancelled her appointment – and then penalised her for failing to turn up.

Teresa Geale, who has several serious conditions which prevent her from working, was on a bus five minutes away from the work capability assessment session in Canterbury when she received a voicemail telling her staff were running behind and it would have to be re-arranged.

But a few days later, the 63-year-old received a letter asking why she did not attend.





Teresa Geale

Despite explaining the situation and providing proof, she was told by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) that because she had failed to show without good reason, her entitlement to Employment Support Allowance (ESA) had ended.

The former pub manager's income was slashed as a result, forcing her to make cutbacks and sign on at the JobCentre – despite doctors deeming her unfit to work.

Speaking from her home in Eppe Bay Road, Birchington, she said: "Financially, I was getting half of what I was before.

"I had to deny myself things, make food last longer, and so on. The stress of it also made my illness worse."

Almost a year on, Mrs Geale has now won a legal battle to have her benefits reinstated after a tribunal judge took less than five minutes to find in her favour.

She said: "It's ridiculous the way they've carried on. They were calling me a liar the whole time.

"I don't know if it was down to utter incompetence or utter arrogance.

"It's ridiculous the way they've carried on... they were calling me a liar the whole time" - Teresa Geale

"I've worked hard all my life, but I'm no longer able to.

"I had to sign on for Jobseekers' Allowance, but my doctor said I wasn't fit to work.

"Plus, who's going to employ someone with health issues who's two years away from receiving their state pension?

"It was a very stressful time."

Mrs Geale's case was taken on by the University of Kent's Law Clinic after an earlier tribunal wrongly ruled the appointment could not have been cancelled.

This was despite Mrs Geale providing her bus ticket to the appointment as evidence, as well as screenshots showing calls to the assessment centre in response to a voicemail cancelling the session.

At the appeal hearing, at the Ashford Tribunal Centre in August, Judge Timothy Peter Fagg said: "I find it extraordinary that her evidence was not accepted and it has taken this long to overturn the original decision.

"I trust that the Respondent (the DWP) will reimburse her for her aborted bus fare."

Describing her relief, Mrs Geale said: "We were in with the judge for less than five minutes, when the whole saga had taken nearly a year.

"I would have loved to have seen my face when the judge said I'd won.

"It was always in the back of my mind that I wouldn't."





Mrs Geale was denied benefits for 10 months

Mrs Geale managed pubs including The Rodney in Garlinge before her health deteriorated in 2007, when she started claiming the benefit.

She suffers from osteo-arthritis which prevents her from walking properly on one of her feet, low bone density called osteopenia and curvature of the spine caused by spondylosis.

She also experiences occular migraines which cause temporary blindness without warning. They can be brought on by stress, and have become more frequent since her benefits ordeal began.

The Kent Law Clinic team says it ensured Mrs Geale was reimbursed for the 10 months of benefits owed to her, as well as the £6.40 bus ticket.

Mrs Geale has also asked the clinic to make a formal complaint about her case to the regional chairman of the Social Entitlement Chamber, which oversees the social security appeals service.

A Department for Work and Pensions spokesman said: "Following Ms Geale's appeal, her benefit payments were reinstated at the higher rate and all her backdated payments were made."





Benefit law expert Graham Tegg

Solicitor Graham Tegg, a benefits law expert from the Kent Law Clinic, says Mrs Geale's case is typical of the DWP's dealings with many welfare claimants.

"We decided to take the case on because it's an example all too frequent of the everyday injustices that local people experience at the hands of the DWP," he said.

"Mrs Geale had gone through the tribunal justice system and they had found against her, against all of the legal principles.

"The reason the judgement is very welcome is because it shows that individuals' own common sense and their notion of what is right and proper is vindicated and shown to be correct.

"If you persist in the end, you succeed. But it shouldn't take a solicitor with 20-plus years of social security law to point out that the principle that was decided over 40 years ago is correct."

The principle in social security law is the claimant is to be believed unless the authority makes a decision the person is either not telling the truth or what they say is inherently improbable.

"The DWP making an administrative error is not inherently improbable – sadly it is an everyday fact.

"This is perhaps the worst example, but we are frequently asked to advise people with physical or mental health problems unable to attend DWP or disability service appointments.

"Very often they are either not believed or, worse, they think they won't be believed."



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Kentish Finest wrote:

02/11/2017 23:11:54

Let's hope this never repeats itself as it is always the genuine people who fall through the net & the rogue who fraudulently claim left, right & centre! There are many people who take the preverbial out of the system which makes it harder for the likes of lady in question & it should all be reviewed as an individual case every year!

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maltheman wrote:

02/11/2017 18:38:02

Whilst I realise benefit abuse is rife, it is obvious it is not the case in this situation , so why was a decision taken to suspend benefit under the circumstances, even the law states innocent until proved guilty, but a faceless and nameless nobody in power can with a stroke of their pen cause extreme hardship without recourse or explanation, well done the judge in this case who saw through the **** immediately

Has the DWP employed contractors to advise them, we know what that leads to don't we, a contract has to be proved to save money regardless of the harm caused

I too have disabilities and having had suffered severe penalties in the past for enquiring am now afraid to ask if I have an entitlement for more help

In the past it has lead to suspension of all benefits, and I have had to pay rent and council tax from my pension thus leaving me with nothing to live on as I was being re- accessed , oh yes three or four months down the line I get re-aligned but you never catch up when you have been in debt and paid out through borrowing

I'm not a sponger, 71 now I have worked and paid in all my life, does the DWP think I want this pain and immobility, you could keep your money if only I had my mobility back again

I open this for a response to others who have suffered

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2 Replies



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OLD SCHOOL TOP DOG wrote:

02/11/2017 18:33:49

SOME PEOPLE WHO CLAIM BENEFITS HAVE GOT HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS IN THE BANK YET THEY CONTINUE TO CLAIM AS THEY THINK IT IS THERE RIGHT TO DO SO. MAKES MY BLOOD BOIL.

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-31

Le Saq Magique wrote:

02/11/2017 13:50:33

Brilliant! Well done to her. Thanks to those who helped her along the way, as I'm sure this must have been tough for all.

The problem you will now face is when you switch to the Universal Credit. They too will want you to do these pathetic capability assessments. You will have no choice whether you are switched or not. Hopefully, they will see through this but it may not be down to your previous claim.

Well done!

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Ann Andrews wrote:

02/11/2017 12:46:39

marco928 You ought to get up to speed with what's happening. Under the new pension scheme we are all responsible for earning our own pensions - including mothers and grandmothers. Who then is free to look after the older generation? For that matter, who is free to look after the children of working mothers? Grandmothers, too, must work into their late 60s so they're not available for either child or elder care as they used to be. Irony of irony, Government ministers have recently criticised families for not taking care of their elders, when they are the ones who created this situation!

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Ninkasi wrote:

02/11/2017 10:41:04

It's always the genuine claimants that have a hard time, whilst the scroungers carry on for years without questions or problems. The entire system needs a major overhaul.

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3 Replies 



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marco928 wrote:

02/11/2017 08:48:23

I feel compassion for people who truly have special needs and don't get proper help from the

government, the mentally disabled suffer terribly when all the money runs out, and any sane individual wouldn't deny these folks some kind of assistance in their hour of need. But these days everyone is reaching and grabbing for what they can get from the taxpayer and it's putting a tremendous strain on public services.

Years ago, most families had a stay-at-home Mum who was the chief of the home and could accommodate taking care of the in-laws if they got sick or needed assistance. An elderly relative would move in next door, and the mother would visit frequently to take care of her mother or father.

However, these days everyone works and the attitude is to push all the responsibility onto the public services, shove the grandmother or grandfather into an expensive care home and let them rot while the taxpayer picks up the tab of caring for everyone's family members and the total bill is hideously expensive.

At the moment, single mother's get the red carpet treatment, unemployment benefits are paid to young people even when they haven't worked a day in their life, and the list goes on and on. The current benefit system has created a culture of dependency where folks expect money to be there for them regardless of who has to pay the bill.

So the next time you see a pothole that seems to take forever to be repaired, or wonder why there is not enough money for the NHS, or more police on the street, you'll know where all the money is going.

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libbysasha67 wrote:

02/11/2017 07:14:35

DWP - left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing .

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Alt-J77 wrote:

02/11/2017 06:58:46

These people are a nightmare to deal with...my mum was in hospital last year when she was supposed to have an assessment and trying to cancel it took days!! Everytime I spoke to someone I had to repeat all the information over & over, there a law unto themselves I'm afraid!

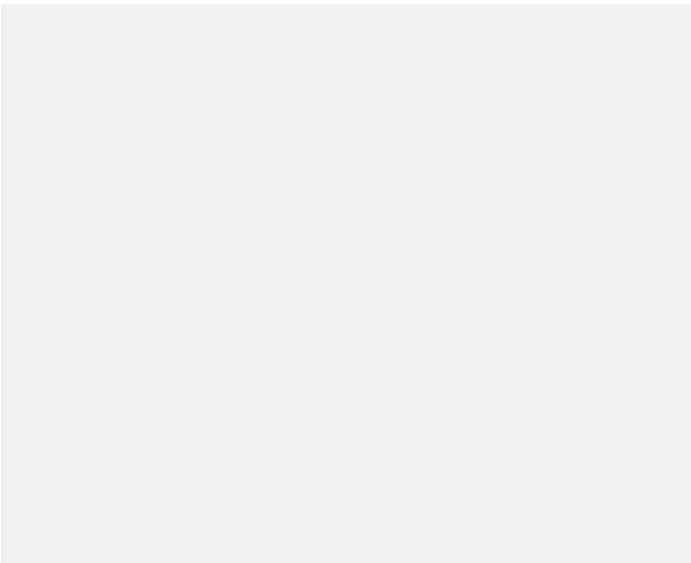
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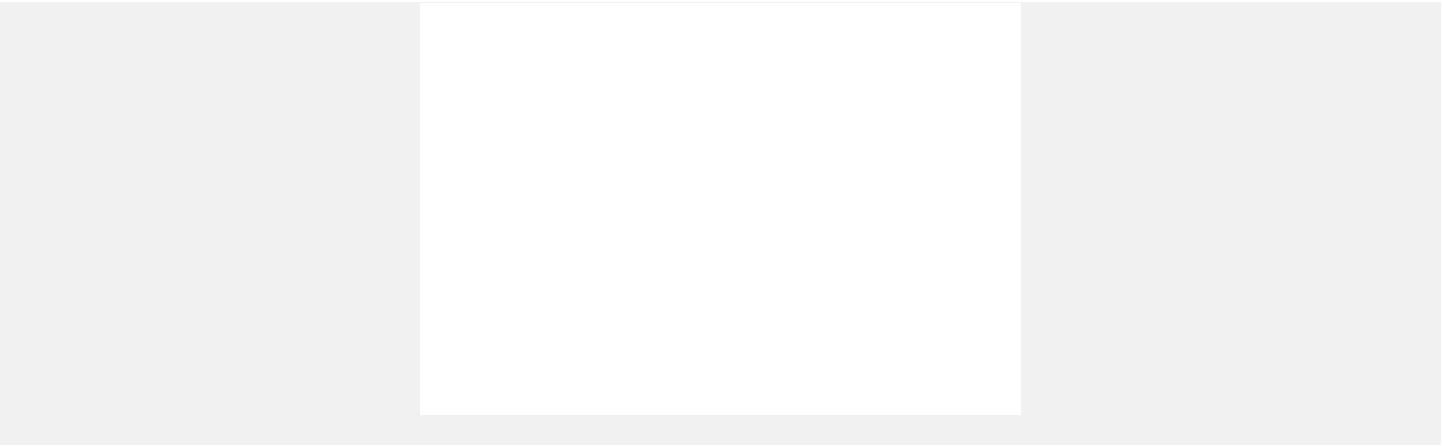


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More than 40,000 disabled people have had their benefits docked since 2012

New figures lead campaigners to call on the Government to treat disabled people ‘with a bit of human decency’

[Ashley Cowburn](#) Political Correspondent | [@ashcowburn](#) | Thursday 16 February 2017 16:00 GMT | [45 comments](#)

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85,112 sanctions were issued to those on ESA benefits between December 2012 and September 2016 *Getty Images*

More than 40,000 disabled people receiving Employment Support Allowance (ESA) have had their

benefits docked since 2012, new data released by the Department for Work and Pensions reveals.

The figures, released quarterly, come as the Government prepares to cut ESA benefits for new disabled claimants from April by £29 a week in the work-related activity group (Wrag). It is estimated to affect around half a million new claimants and has been criticised by campaigners for making it harder for disabled people to find work.

The new statistics show that, in total, 85,112 people on ESA benefits between December 2012 and September 2016 had their income docked after being “sanctioned” for failing to meet Government guidelines. Of these, 71,366 cases represent disabled people. But the DWP insists this accounts for 41,000 disabled individuals – meaning that some people had their income slashed more than once.

Benefits can be reduced for up to four weeks and these punishments can be applied for reasons including “failing to attend a mandatory interview” and “failing to participate in work related activity”. It has led some campaigners to call on the welfare department to treat disabled people “with a bit of human decency” rather than pushing those who are struggling into poverty.

Debbie Abrahams, the shadow Work and Pensions Secretary, told *The Independent* that it is “shocking to see that the Government have issued over 71,000 sanctions to disabled people on Employment Support Allowance that have been sanctioned since the Tories ramped up the regime in 2012”.

“This problem only seems to be getting increasingly worse, with nearly twice as many people being sanctioned on a monthly basis now than at the start of this year,” she added.



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“Taken with the cuts to Employment and Support Allowance, this worrying trend goes to show how the Tories have waged seven years of failed austerity on the backs of disabled people.

Despite a gradual fall in the number of people facing benefit sanctions towards the end of 2015, there appeared to be a significant spike the following year. In September 2015 the DWP decided to cut ESA benefits as a punishment 988 times; this rose to 1,545 times in the same month of 2016 – a 56 per cent increase.

Baroness Cathy Bakewell, the welfare spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats, added that “penalising sick and disabled people won’t make them any better”. Ms Bakewell said the new statistics provided evidence that the sanction system is failing.

“Perhaps instead of pushing those who are struggling into poverty the Government should be treating them with a bit of human decency,” she added. “Rather than cutting benefits for those who are too sick to work they could invest in the NHS, to help those who will be able to work in the future, or ensure their road to recovery isn’t made harder by not being able to buy decent food or heat their homes.”

Phil Reynolds, the co-chair of the Disability Benefits Consortium, told *The Independent* there was no

clear evidence that cutting disabled people's benefit "will do anything to improve their chances of returning to work".

He added: "In fact, it's likely to cause unnecessary stress and anxiety that could make their condition worse, and push them further from the workplace.

"It's vital that the Department for Work and Pensions stops sanctioning disabled people, and instead works supportively with them, to help them recover and be able to think about working again in the future."

James Taylor, head of policy and public affairs at disability charity Scope, said the statistics "are yet another reminder of the negative impact sanctions can have on disabled people".

He added: "There's no clear evidence that cutting disabled people's benefits will do anything to improve their chances of returning to work. In fact, it's likely to cause unnecessary stress and anxiety that could make their condition worse, and push them further from the workplace.

"It's vital that the Department for Work and Pensions stops sanctioning disabled people, and instead works supportively with them, to help them recover and be able to think about working again in the future."

A spokesperson for the DWP responded: "The fact is the number of sanctions has more than halved in recent years. They are only used in a very small percentage of cases and as a last resort when people don't fulfil their commitment to find work." ●

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shipwright

17457258 days ago

You ain't seen nothing yet ,wait until the Tories are free of Europe ,some nasty plans in the pipeline

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MrHappy102

17457256 days ago

Yup, this is why the Tories wanted to get rid of the bill of rights in

the first place. Brexit kind of backfired for them though, didn't it.

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pete

17457258 days ago

Incredibly a high percentage of disabled people voted Brexit. Apparently it is the EU's fault not the Tories

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MrHappy102

17457256 days ago

Unfortunately some truth there, vulnerable people are easily misled, I think/hope though, a lot of people voted Brexit to vote against the tories, without realising the serious impact Brexit would have

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astar1

17457258 days ago

Can't express enough disgust at this heartless government. Hope they all become disabled and unemployed.

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MrHappy102

17457256 days ago

and the people who voted for them, and keep voting for them, those people deserve to become disabled and unemployed, see how they manage.

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griffg6

17457258 days ago

Ridiculous administrators should not be doing medical assessments.

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djanni

17457259 days ago

This rotten, heartless, corrupt government needs to go!

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mac82

17457259 days ago

The only reason this stinking, corrupt government imposes sanctions to anyone on benefits is so that they can cut the taxes to their rich friends. Austerity loaded onto the poor, the sick, the disabled and the unemployed.....not a whiff of austerity for the rich.

Too bad we no longer have a labour party....I would have voted for them.

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djanni

17457259 days ago

You do have a Labour Party. And if you don't vote for them you are part of this.

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griffg6

17457258 days ago

There is no labour party with Corbyn .

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Blossom60

17457258 days ago

Pure deflection. The aggressors against the sick and disabled here are the Tories. Failings within the Opposition, of which there are many, do not change the fact that the government are attacking and sometimes killing our own sick and disabled citizens and the majority of the British public don't care. The evidence is overwhelming.

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MrHappy102

17457256 days ago

and so that they can misspend the money they save on stupid things, like high court challenge, or all that government wastage.

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Gullible

17457259 days ago

David and Samantha Cameron have always despised the disabled it took away some of there glory in this world oh how sad that the old of this nation joined them and supported them in.their quest

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Kooljeff

17457258 days ago



It must be pointed out that David and Samantha Cameron had a severely disabled child. However, as millionaires they were claiming DLA (now PIP) for their son. It is objectionable that after poor Ivan died then the attacks on disabled benefits started in earnest. Especially as Cameron pretended to be on the side of families with disabled family members, saying that he understood and was on their side.

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MrHappy102

17457256 days ago

They used their severely disabled son as political capital, long before their son died they were already targeting disabled people.

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MrHappy102

17457256 days ago

their

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4 replies



djanni

17457259 days ago

Just a really nasty and ignorant comment.

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griffg6

17457258 days ago

Moron

Reply · Share

+3 likes

Kooljeff

17457258 days ago



Please share your medical and scientific proof that Fibromyalgia does not exist.

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Blossom60

17457258 days ago

You are an incredibly ignorant person. We only have to look at the name you post under to see the pure prejudice you exhibit. Fibro is a diagnosed condition, as are heart disease, autism, cancer, mental illness and on and on. All frequently invisible.

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0 likes



wanderingone56

17457259 days ago

I have no doubt that at least some of these 'sanctions' were wrong, mistakes, or petty and spiteful. They're applied by humans and those are human failings.

But this article seems to want to present all of them, unquestioningly, as somehow unjust and a punishment on the disabled.

Is there no room at all for a balanced look at news like this or isn't that something the media does nowadays?

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-11 likes



starla

17457259 days ago

You mean how like the tabloids have been calling them all scroungers who deserve to be left destitute? How can you possibly say that taking money away from the sick and disabled is justifiable in any way?

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wanderingone56

17457259 days ago

In answer to your first question, yes I do mean that equally as much as I mean it on the other side of the argument.

In answer to your second, it's simple. In order to get money you must do A, B and C. If you fail to do those without a reason then money is withheld.

Or are you one of those who believe that all who claim to be disabled are angels and never, ever lie or refuse to do what's required of them?

That's an interesting effect of disability that deserves some research.

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-9 likes



andromache

17457259 days ago

People in the work-related activity group have already been found unfit for work, but capable of taking steps to return to work at some point in the future.

The problem with sanctioning people in this category (whether they are lovely people or complete arseholes) is that cutting the income they rely on for food/travel/heating is almost inevitably going to push them further away from being capable for work as their conditions are likely to be exacerbated - thus defeating the entire point of the work-related activity group in the first place.

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wanderingone56

17457259 days ago

No doubt, andromache - but I'm not disagreeing with you.

I'm talking about how these things are reported. I see, as starla pointed out, one side saying, "They're all scroungers!". while the other side says, "They're all angels being victimised!"

Neither, I suspect, is wholly true and I would like to see just one media outlet acknowledge that.

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Blossom60

17457258 days ago

Don't make me laugh. The evidence is absolutely overwhelming and the government have NO evidence to back their nasty little schemes up so they refuse to debate it. Ask yourself why the UN ruling against the British government, that they are in 'grave and sustematic violation of the rights of the disabled' has not even been debated in Parliament? This is where you come in and say that the UN are corrupt just to deflect from the real situation. I have heard it all before numerous times! The report is based on 3,000 pieces of documentary evidence. There are coroners reports that have been hidden and ignored. Disabled people are queuing at Foodbanks to survive and many have committed suicide with DWP letters stopping their benefits scattered around them. People with horrendous disabilities have had their cars taken away meaning they have lost the jobs they were managing to hold down, and others and many are trapped in their homes. Coma patients being declared fit for work as they didnt attend their assessment. People have lost their benefits because they have had the audacity to have heart attacks or strokes in the middle of assessments! Could it be more obvious? If you think there is a case to be made for the government then start calling for them to show their evidence and start debating the issue instead of hiding it under a big dark rock!

Reply · Share

+2 likes



fathomie

17457257 days ago

I take it you have, before inflicting your, frankly twisted views on us, actually checked what is happening to disabled people at the hands of ATOS/Maximus? That even the govt is admitting that 9,000 plus people have died as a direct result of the WCA? Despite earlier denial of a causal link? That they have now admitted this

after coroners have done their work for them and stated this as the reason for death? You know that there is a 70% National failure rate for the govt in the WCA appeals process (some 65% higher than any other Tribunal and 60% higher than govt predicted) due to the outright lies told by ATOS/Maximus? That govt employed both companies, despite ATOS having had, in France, a record 17 of it's actual doctors struck off for malpractice? Or that Maximus was given the contract despite warnings from the US over their poor record there, including several court cases going against them due to negligence and poor quality service? Or that ATOS staff have been caught, consistently lying over WCA assessments? It is NOT, even according to our lying govt (and having been censored for doing so by the ONS please don't argue) a case of a few thousand 'bad cases' due to 'negligence', but a systematic attempt to take money from those who can least afford it. A fact confirmed by the exhaustive UN report, which found the govt had failed, singly, to support disabled people, was actively discriminating against them, and needed to change the WCA immediately. The govt ignored every word they said, and are currently working to force even the most severely disabled, those who cannot leave home, need 24 hour care, to attend 'advisory sessions' at their local job centre or lose benefits. All of this can be fact checked. But I doubt you will give a toss about anything I've said, or the misery inflicted, deliberately, by the govt on disabled people, because to do otherwise would be to admit, selfish, blinkered, right wing people like you are wrong. And that can never be..

Reply · Share 

+2 likes  



MrHappy102

17457256 days ago

The Tories use companies, so they can keep their hands clean, the nature of that should be the first clue.

While you appreciate your thinking that you can apply a balance approach to this, I would encourage you to stop and take a day in the life of a disabled person.

Reply · Share 

+1 likes  



Albert Tatlock

17457259 days ago

71,000 "last resorts" eh?

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+9 likes  

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Benefits

Benefit sanctions: the 10 trivial breaches and administrative errors

MPs’ inquiry heard copious evidence of claimants being docked hundreds of pounds and pitched into financial crisis for often absurd reasons



More than 1 million jobseekers had their unemployment benefits stopped last year. Photograph: David Sillitoe/Guardian

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This article is 2 years old

Patrick Butler Social policy editor

Tuesday 24 March 2015
01.44 GMT

The coalition's benefit sanctions regime, under which more than 1 million jobseekers had their unemployment benefits stopped last year, has spawned hundreds of documentary accounts of claimants being penalised for capricious, cruel and often absurd reasons.

Independent review of benefit sanctions regime urgently needed, say MPs

Read more

The recent [MPs' inquiry into sanctions](#) heard copious evidence of claimants being docked hundreds of pounds and pitched into financial crisis for often absurdly trivial breaches of benefit conditions, or for administrative errors beyond their control.

A typical example is the following anonymised list of [sanctions reported by food bank clients](#) to the

Trussell trust charity:

- 1 Man who missed appointment due to being at hospital with his partner, who had just had a stillborn child.
- 2 Man sanctioned for missing an appointment at the jobcentre on the day of his brother's unexpected death. He had tried to phone Jobcentre Plus to explain, but could not get through and left a message which was consequently not relayed to the appropriate person.
- 3 Man who carried out 60 job searches but missed one which matched his profile.
- 4 Man had an appointment at the jobcentre on the Tuesday, was taken to hospital with a suspected heart attack that day, missed the appointment and was sanctioned for nine weeks.
- 5 Man who secured employment and was due to start in three weeks. He was sanctioned in the interim period because JCP told him he was still duty bound to send his CV to other companies.
- 6 Young couple who had not received any letters regarding an appointment that was thus subsequently missed. Their address at the Department for Work and Pensions was

wrongly recorded. They were left with no money for over a month.

7 One case where the claimant's wife went into premature labour and had to go to hospital. This caused the claimant to miss an appointment. No leeway given.

8 One man sanctioned for attending a job interview instead of Jobcentre Plus – he got the job so did not pursue grievance against the JCP.

9 Man who requested permission to attend the funeral of his best friend; permission declined; sanctioned when he went anyway.

10 A diabetic sanctioned and unable to buy food was sent to hospital by GP as a consequence.

Sometimes sanctions have a bizarre, nightmarish quality, such as this one, reported by Highbridge and Burnham-on-Sea food bank and cited in [a recent Church Action on Poverty report](#):

We had a number of customers who had been sanctioned including one guy who had been sanctioned for being late for his appointment at the jobcentre because the queue was so long it took him to past his appointment time to be seen. He was sanctioned even though he had arrived at the jobcentre in plenty of time.

Or this one, cited on the [A Selection Of Especially Stupid Benefit Sanctions](#) tumblr website (and taken from a [local newspaper report](#))

You apply for three jobs one week and three jobs the following Sunday and Monday. Because the jobcentre week starts on a Tuesday it treats this as applying for six jobs in one week and none the following week. You are sanctioned for 13 weeks for failing to apply for three jobs each week.

The consequences, however can be severe. One claimant, Glenn McDougall, recalled his experience of being sanctioned three times in [written evidence](#) to the work and pensions committee inquiry:

On the first occasion I cancelled a jobcentre appointment to go to a job interview. It was short notice however I phoned the jobcentre to inform them and was assured on the phone that it was ok. I was sanctioned two weeks JSA. I appealed this and was found to be in the right and the money was paid to me, which was great, but in the interim I had to go two weeks without a penny to my name. I missed other job interviews because I had no money for transport and went without food, electric and heating for some of that time. It was a cruel punishment issued arbitrarily, had a negative impact on my jobseeking and diminished my respect for the benefit system massively.

The committee heard that claimants with learning difficulties, were especially vulnerable to sanctioning. Here's an example provided by the charity Mencap:

AP has a learning disability and was given 30 job searching actions every week after he applied for JSA. These actions included accessing UJM [universal job match] every week. However, he did not have the IT skills necessary to do this and was not given support by JCP [Jobcentre Plus] to do this. He had, however, still been pro-active in applying for jobs. He showed the JCP several pages of handwritten job notes. They would not accept these as they were handwritten and not using UJM. He was then sanctioned. Given his lack of IT skills and the lack of IT support by JCP, Mencap argues that handwritten notes are a reasonable adjustment. He had already been sanctioned by JCP several times.

Claimants with mental illness are also at high risk of being sanctioned, with serious health consequences. Here's Jessica's story, cited in [research](#) by Durham University academics Kayleigh Garthwaite and Claire Bambra:

Jessica is a 23-year-old woman, who was 22 weeks pregnant when she came to the foodbank. She had walked over two miles to get here as she cannot afford the bus fare from her flat. Jessica explained that she was receiving ESA [employment support allowance] for mental health problems following the stillborn birth of her first child eight months ago. Jessica was sanctioned for not attending a work-focused interview appointment – her mental health problems prevented her from leaving the house on that particular day. She received a foodbank referral from the Citizens Advice Bureau after seeking help for her mounting debts following her sanction. Jessica had not eaten a proper cooked meal for two weeks, and was instead relying on her sister's children's leftovers. Jessica explained: "I haven't had my fridge or cooker switched on for three weeks, I can't afford the electric. I sold the telly last week – there was no point in keeping it 'cos I couldn't afford to use it anyway." As Jessica is 22 weeks pregnant, she knows she needs to eat healthily for herself and her unborn child, but currently cannot afford to adequately heat her home or feed herself.

The cross-party group of MPs on the committee has called for an independent review of sanctions. According to committee chair Anne Begg:

We agree that benefit conditionality is necessary but it is essential that policy is based on clear evidence of what works in terms of encouraging people to take up the support which is available to help them get back into work. The policy must then be applied fairly and proportionately. The system must also be capable of identifying and protecting vulnerable people, including those with mental health problems and

learning disabilities. And it should avoid causing severe financial hardship. The system as currently applied does not always achieve this.

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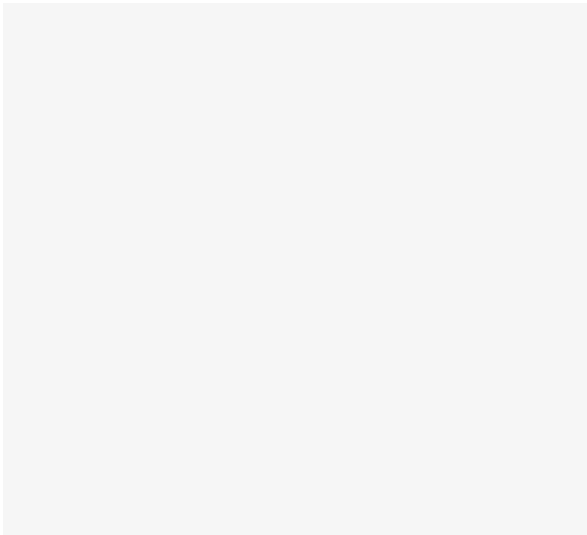
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This is an HTML version of an attachment to the Freedom of Information request '[KPIs for reconsiderations and disputes](#)'.



Department
for Work &
Pensions

DWP Central Freedom of Information Team

e-mail: xx@xxx.xxx.xxx.xx

Our Ref : 1740

DATE: 15 May 2017

Annex A

Dear Brian Tanning,

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request received on 20 April 2017. You asked for:-

Please provide any Key Performance Indicators which apply to DWP around the handling of mandatory reconsiderations of benefit decisions, especially turnaround time.

Please also provide historic performance against these indicators.

DWP Response

The key measures which are used by the Department for Work and Pensions to monitor Mandatory Reconsideration (MR) performance are:

- a) 90% to be cleared within target.
- b) 80% of the original decisions are to be upheld.

The performance measures for April 2016 - March 2017 are:

% MR Cleared within target = 70.2%

% MR Original Decision Upheld = 87.5%

Notes:

Upheld - percentage of MRs where the decisions have either been unfavourable to the claimant or where the previous decision has been maintained.

Sources:

RDA/RAA 60209 & 60205 reports for DLA/AA,
Pensions computer system for Pension Age,
SAS Business Analytics software for CMG,
Decision Making and Appeals Case Recorder (DMACR) for Working Age benefits.

The above data sources are Departmental performance management, data capture and reporting tools. This type of internal management information does not form part of the official statistics outputs that are released by the Department in accordance with the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice.

If you have any queries about this letter please contact me quoting the reference number above.

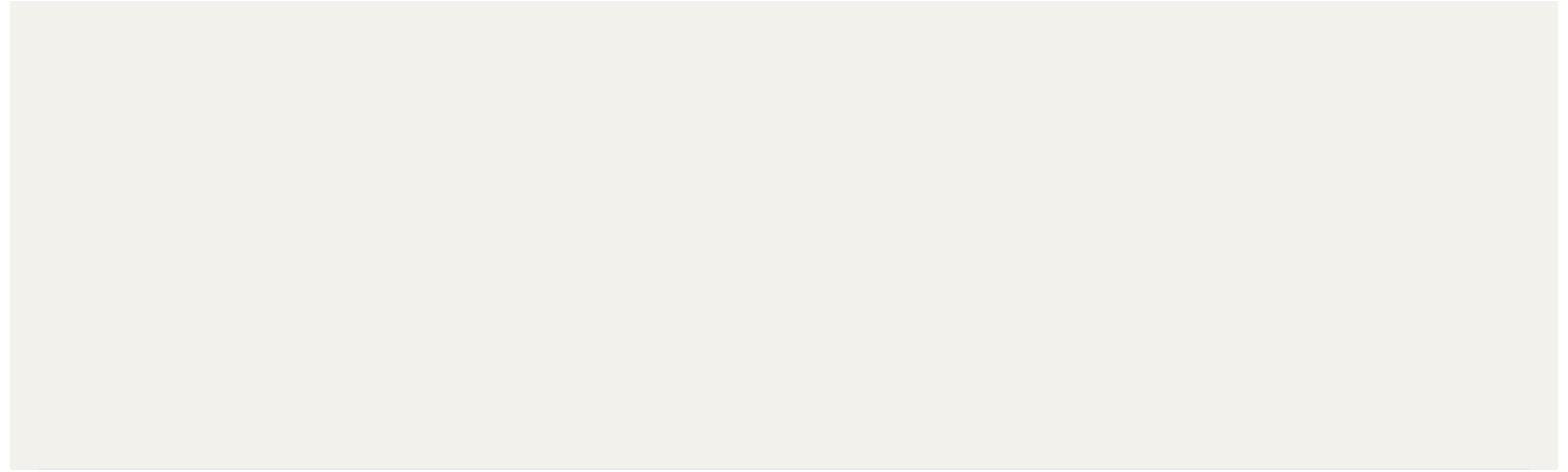
Yours sincerely,

DWP Central FoI Team

Your right to complain under the Freedom of Information Act

If you are not happy with this response you may request an internal review by e-mailing freedom-of-information-xxxxxxx@xxx.xxx.xxx.xx or by writing to DWP, Central FoI Team, 5th Floor The Adelphi, 1-11, John Adam Street, London WC2N 6HT. Any review request should be submitted within two months of the date of this letter.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner's Office for a decision. Generally the Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted our own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5AF www.ico.gov.uk



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A Selection of Especially Stupid Benefit Sanctions

Cruel, arbitrary and ridiculous reasons why people have their benefits stopped

You're a 60-year-old army veteran who volunteers to sell poppies for the Royal British Legion in memory of fallen comrades. You've applied for dozens of jobs – including the supermarket where you sold the poppies – but without success. You are sanctioned for four weeks.

Source: [Daily Mirror](#)

Your gran dies during the night. The next morning your partner calls the job centre and asks if you can come in the following day instead. The centre agrees, and you sign in the next day. Then you get a letter stating that you failed to sign in and would be sanctioned if you don't reply within seven days. You reply, explaining the situation. The job centre gives you a six-week sanction for not replying.

Source: [Mari-claire M at Netmums](#)

You get a job interview. It's at the same time as your job centre appointment, so you reschedule the job centre. You attend your rearranged appointment and then get a letter saying your benefits will be stopped because going to a job interview isn't a good enough reason to

miss an appointment.

*Source: **Daily Mail***

You've signed in on time, been to interviews and applied for work. Your job centre advisor suggests you make a two-line change to your CV, which you do, but fail to give the updated CV to the job centre (you weren't told you had to). You are sanctioned for four weeks.

*Source: **nciaw36 at MoneySavingExpert***

You work for 20 years and then miss a job centre appointment because you haven't had the process clearly explained. You are sanctioned for 3 weeks.

*Source: **Councillor John O'Shea***

You get a job that starts in two weeks time. You don't look for work while you are waiting for the job to start. You're sanctioned.

*Source: **The Guardian***

You are forced to retire due to a heart condition, and you claim Employment and Support Allowance. During your assessment you have a heart attack. You are sanctioned for not completing your assessment.

*Source: **Debbie Abrahams MP***

It's Christmas Day and you don't fill in your job search evidence form to show that you've looked for all the new jobs that are advertised on

Christmas Day. You are sanctioned. Merry Christmas.

Source: *Poverty Alliance*

You are given a training appointment that clashes with your job centre appointment. The job centre is unwilling to rearrange its appointment and tells you to get a letter from the training organisation. The training organisation says it doesn't provide letters.

Source: *Russell Brown MP*

You apply for three jobs one week and three jobs the following Sunday and Monday. Because the job centre week starts on a Tuesday it treats this as applying for six jobs in one week and none the following week. You are sanctioned for 13 weeks for failing to apply for three jobs each week.

Source: *Pontefract and Castleford Express* (via *Benefit Tales*)

You miss your job centre appointment due to the funeral of a close family relative. You are sanctioned.

Source: *Derek Twigg MP*

You've been unemployed for seven months and are forced onto a workfare scheme in a shop miles away, but can't afford to travel. You offer to work in a nearer branch but are refused and get sanctioned for not attending your placement.

Source: *Caroline Lucas MP*

You have a job interview which overruns so you arrive at your job centre

appointment 9 minutes late. You get sanctioned for a month.

Source: jsdk at Consumer Action

You can't afford to travel to look for work so you get sanctioned.

Source: Citizens Advice Bureau

Your job centre advisor suggests a job. When you go online to apply it says the job has "expired" so you don't apply. You are sanctioned for 13 weeks.

Source: Penny at Yahoo! Answers

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Voices › Letters

The DWP must see that a bad job is worse for your mental health than unemployment

Please send your letters to letters@independent.co.uk

Letters | Sunday 26 February 2017 21:24 GMT |  14 comments

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Independent Voices



The Government should rethink the Jobcentre's role from not only increasing employment, but also ensuring the quality of that employment *Getty*

We, the UK's leading bodies representing psychologists, psychotherapists, psychoanalysts, and

counsellors, call on the Government to immediately suspend the benefits sanctions system. It fails to get people back to work and damages their mental health.

Findings from the National Audit Office (NAO) show limited evidence that the sanctions system actually works, or is cost effective.

But, even more worrying, we see evidence from NHS Health Scotland, the Centre for Welfare Conditionality hosted by the University of York, and others, which links sanctions to destitution, disempowerment, and increased rates of mental health problems. This is also emphasised in the recent Public Accounts Committee report, which states that the unexplained variations in the use of benefits sanctions are unacceptable and must be addressed.

Vulnerable people with multiple and complex needs, in particular, are disproportionately affected by the increased use of sanctions.

Therefore, we call on the Government to suspend the benefits sanctions regime and undertake an independent review of its impact on people's mental health and wellbeing.

But suspending the sanctions system alone is not enough. We believe the Government also has to change its focus from making unemployment less attractive, to making employment more attractive – which means a wholesale review of the back to work system.

We want to see a range of policy changes to promote mental health and wellbeing. These include increased mental health awareness training for Jobcentre staff – and reform of the work capability assessment (WCA), which may be psychologically damaging, and lacks clear evidence of reliability or effectiveness.

We urge the Government to rethink the Jobcentre's role from not only increasing employment, but also ensuring the quality of that employment, given that bad jobs can be more damaging to mental health than unemployment.

This should be backed up with the development of statutory support for creating psychologically healthy workplaces.

These policies would begin to take us towards a welfare and employment system that promotes mental health and wellbeing, rather than one that undermines and damages it.

Professor Peter Kinderman, President, British Psychological Society (BPS)

Martin Pollecoff, Chair, UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)

Dr Andrew Reeves, Chair, British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

Helen Morgan, Chair, British Psychoanalytic Council (BPC)

Steve Flatt, Trustee, British Association of Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP)

Speaking plaidly

How sad that nationalists, including an SNP MP, have felt the need to misrepresent what London Mayor Sadiq Khan said on his visit to the Labour conference in Scotland. Khan did not say that nationalism was the same as racism. He did, rightly, say that nationalism is divisive and that we all in Britain would do better to cooperate with each other and pull together.

We could do with plainer speaking of this kind from our pro-union politicians.

Jill Stephenson

Glenlockhart Valley

It's unsurprising that London Mayor and respected politician, Sadiq Khan, is criticised by Nicola Sturgeon for appearing to suggest the SNP's *raison d'être* is bigoted and racist.

The perception of many from other parts of the UK who have made their homes in Scotland, is that the SNP prefer any and every European nationality to the Welsh, Northern Irish and, particularly, the English. And if anyone from these other three nations living here speaks out against nationalism, it's frequently made clear, and especially on social media, they have no right to express a view – and are free to leave.

Sturgeon responds to Khan by emphasising her oft-repeated claim that her party's separatist cause is about “inclusion”. Nonsense. It's about division. The SNP want to divide up the UK, separating us

from our southern neighbours.

To date, the nationalist leader's UK break-up dreams have succeeded in turning one Scot against another. Family member against family member, friend against friend, co-worker against co-worker and neighbour against neighbour. Yet, of course, her intention goes much further.

Rather than tweeting predictable nationalist dogma, Sturgeon would be better advised to reflect on Khan's wise words about the importance of unity in these divisive times.

Martin Redfern

Edinburgh

The Remain Party

If the next election is 2020 then there is time for the creation of a new party, the Remain Party, to present a direct and unambiguous manifesto commitment to keep the UK in the EU. A second referendum may not be achievable under the present regime but the will of the people could be ascertained in a general election.

Electorates are showing a willingness to travel down new paths, not all of them virtuous. Here is an opportunity for boldness to be our friend.

I would both stand as and/or vote for a Remain candidate.

Steve Ford

Haydon Bridge

Just about coping

I think the voters of Copeland have been very clever in electing a Tory MP.

Just watch how the maternity hospital will be miraculously saved by the suddenly caring government.

Suddenly the roads will widen and they would be joined up again to the national rail network etc.
Bunting and frolics all round. Dream on.

Mike Fishler

Northumberland

Before May gets overexcited, I hope she will note that of those who voted in Copeland, when taken in total, most did not vote Conservative.

Ian Turnbull

Cumbria ●

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CBaker

17457243 days ago

95% of our jobs (~3 billion) are not contributing anything to society. They are just wasting resources, causing traffic jams and climate change.

As our monetary system forces us to repay ever increasing amounts of fictional debt to central banks, it does not allow for us to just to relevant things which do not rip out the last chunks of wealth from the Commons. So we had to replace all the relevant jobs which already got automated with #bullshitjobs.

So we got 3 billion tax accountants, cashiers, bankers, lobbyists, real estate brokers, insurance agents, redundant departments in 200-fold redundant companies producing the same product, million of people doing charity and dealing with victims of this insanity instead of fixing the underlying system ...

5% of our jobs are relevant ... which implies one thing: Unemployment would be the better option for 95% of all people. Better for them, our society and planet ...

Even my grandmother knew that automation will cause us to work less and less ... but my grandmother didn't know that we would be stupid enough in order to accept #bullshitjobs as a new lifestyle ... just to repay fictional debt ... just to obtain money which we could just give to every person

without requiring them to generate nothing but traffic jams and chaos.

Reply · Share

0 likes



Olde Janner

17457250 days ago

Any job is better than no job at all, especially for the rest of us taxpaying drones who are rewarded so meagerly!

Reply · Share · 2 replies

-7 likes



anon.

17457249 days ago

Great - give yours up and go work on a 0-hours contract in a distribution centre 2 expensive bus journeys and a long walk away from where you live.

Wrap up warm cos its cold, and don't get ill or be late cos 3 strikes and you're back in the dole queue.

Reply · Share

+10 likes



Emilyisobel

17457249 days ago

It depends on your circumstances and your employer.

I had been a teacher at the same school for 13 years when I became disabled. I was determined to keep working and did everything I could. However, as soon as I need adjustments my employer embarked on a campaign of discrimination, bullying and harassment. Knowing that I would struggle to get another job, I fought to stay in work for over two years.

I also collected evidence of the way they were treating me and kept a diary via emails to my union. The emails show that there wasn't a week went by (in term time) where they didn't do something. The evidence fills seven legal document files.

I was eventually driven to a breakdown in both my physical and mental health. My physical condition was worsened dramatically by them not making adjustments (so much so that it may have shortened my life by several years as I have a progressive condition that causes muscle wastage and is exacerbated by overwork) and I now suffer from such severe PTSD that my psychiatrist has said that I cannot return to work as a teacher as I have developed suicidal impulses as a result and cannot tolerate stress without my whole system going into fight or flight overdrive.

I would love to be working still but not for a job that would make me more ill or isn't in a wheelchair accessible building and not for abusive employers. Nobody should be forced into a job that could destroy their physical and mental health.

Reply Share 

+7 likes  



allways writing

17457250 days ago

common sense ? from any government is a paradox. if it was a sledgehammer, they would`nt know it if it hit them over the head. if common sense was applied to everything in our lives, we could do away with half, probably more, of our political administration. no -one wants that. public servants are employed to obfuscate, delay, and misinterpret every piece of legislation they come across. remember basil fawlty and the ministry of funny walks, ? priceless, but true.

Reply · Share 

+5 likes  



yobgol

17457250 days ago

a few years ago, as benefit sanctions on those with health issues began, a woman (with mental health issues; from memory) appeared on TV for an interview, and she tried to explain her position on now being 'helped' back into work despite long-term issues clearly being at play - the latest in a irregular cycle of programmes introduced by succeeding governments to appease the outside observer more than the inside user.

the new definitions of how to adjudge someone to be unfit for work had essentially moved the goalposts, and although both she and her doctor (other health professionals too, potentially) were well aware her health had not changed from their perspective, she faced being defined by another party previously unknown to her (and vice versa) as now healthy enough to work.

she tried to explain that if she was essentially forced to look for work, she would be trying to find something she found particularly of interest, rewarding, applicable, satisfactory to her skills - and was promptly shot down as self-indulgent, naive and unrealistic.

the problem is, however, that if you know you will be ill (and the mostly-inevitable experience will tell you that you're in a long-term ongoing health-based situation that makes work do potentially much more harm than good) and that you're likely to have experienced the effects of work on your health in the past (paid or otherwise) that at least you can hope to find something which stands a chance of outweighing or counter-acting the negative impact on health in some positive way.

employees, which we have mostly been, do tend to overstate their tendency towards portrayal of themselves as somehow heroic for doing what they'll also contrarily describe as duty - often within the same

arguments or discussions surrounding the issues associated with cost cutting exercises described as 'new approaches' - in the very same breath, without the slightest hint of irony or fear of easy contradiction.

unfortunately, job centres have, for many many decades, a distinctly unsophisticated lowest common denominator approach to keeping up appearances when it comes to support and advice, and it's practiced to the extent it's extremely hard to argue something was not offered or discussed - because it all too cynically is, much more often than not, in a way that represents an extremely destructive series of token gestures and box-ticking exercises that leave those truly in need with a sense that there was nowhere else to turn and no benefit from having been expected (or having initially wanted to) go there as though independently deciding this particularly visible entity is the most likely place to offer the best ongoing support system that is there for all employment-related needs .

Reply · Share  +4 likes  



plantmanb 17457250 days ago

Mike Fishler - the last time I looked Copeland was connected to the national rail network.

Reply · Share  +3 likes  



thecentralscrutinize 17457250 days ago

r
Yes I know about stress at work -I am a mental health nurse! !!!!

Reply · Share  +1 likes  

This comment has been deleted

2 replies 



Old Dissenter 17457250 days ago

Years ago the mental asylums did send out some of their long term patients to do menial low paid work.

Reply · Share · 1 reply  +2 likes  



Olde Janner 17457250 days ago

Is the government advocating emptying the psychiatric wards?

All they expect is that those who can work do work, and any old excuse is not constantly used to avoid an honest days

toil!

Share



-6 likes



This comment has been deleted

4 replies



CXXL

17457250 days ago

"Arbeit macht frei"
Oh just wait until the norms are being affected.
Cnuts.

Reply · Share



+10 likes



Old Dissenter

17457250 days ago

Maybe mental health patients should be given more effective
medical treatment.

Reply · Share · 1 reply



+7 likes



Carol McPhee

17457250 days ago

Well they have asked and May has promised... not happened
though.

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Carol McPhee

17457250 days ago

Qualified pyschiatrist are we?

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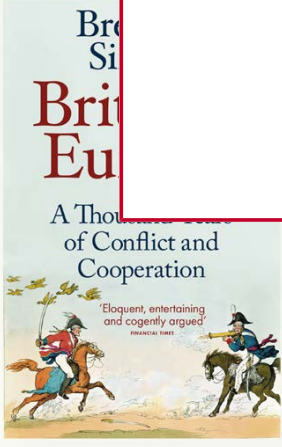


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I wave of inflated benefits. Or so this government would have you believe - and that wave is about to come crashing down, leaving many

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recipients marooned without the support they need.

Cuts to Employment Support Allowance that came into effect on Monday reduced weekly payments from £102.15 to £73.10 (£57.90 if you're 24 or under) - the rate of standard job seeker's allowance, in a bid to encourage more people back into work.

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However, **research** conducted by the Disability Benefits Consortium - a national coalition of over 70 charities - suggests the move will have the opposite effect, with 45 per cent of those surveyed believing the loss of income would likely mean a later return to work.

"The ESA was designed to replace your income when you're too sick to work," says Phil Reynolds, policy co-chairman of the DBC. "But the government feels having a higher rate than job seeker's allowance is a disincentive, and so believe equalising it is the right way to incentivise people to work.

"However, there is no evidence to suggest taking money from disabled people will do anything to get them back into work." A survey of ESA claimants conducted by the DBC found 70 per cent believed the cut could cause their health to suffer, and a third said they were already struggling to put food on the table and heat their homes.

Although those currently eligible for cold weather payments will still receive the same benefits - and there will be no change to payments for existing

recipients of ESA - the figures should already be cause for action before even considering the thousands who, if struck by illness or disability from this week onwards, will suffer further financial hardship.

Two-thirds of those surveyed believe they would struggle to pay their bills and their health would suffer if their payments were cut by £30 per week, while of those who have already had their ESA withdrawn or reduced under the scheme, 24 per cent could no longer afford their weekly food shop.

Why the changes?

The Welfare Reform and Work Act **impact assessment** for the benefit cap, published in August, stated overarching changes would “promote even greater fairness between those on out of work benefits and tax payers [sic] in employment (who largely support the current benefit cap), whilst [sic] providing support to the most vulnerable.”

A Department for Work and Pensions spokesperson said: “Our reforms are ensuring we have a welfare system that offers work for those who can, help for those who could, and care for those who can’t.

“The ESA work-related activity component was originally introduced to incentivise people to find work but is not working – just one per cent of people leave the benefit every month.

“New ESA claimants who are placed in the Work Related Activity Group will instead receive a Personal Support Package with practical help to move closer to the labour market and re-enter the workforce when they are ready.”

However, the Work and Pensions Select Committee, which scrutinised the policy, found that the evidence that lower benefits would encourage people back into work was “ambiguous at best”. It’s easy to see why. The DWP has cited two main studies in its evidence. The first, a 2005 **OECD report**, which states “financial incentives to work can be improved by either cutting welfare benefit levels, or introducing in-work benefits while leaving benefit levels unchanged”, but does not specifically consider those suffering illness or disability.

The second, a 2010 paper by **Barr et al.** does report that “eight out of 11 studies reported that benefit levels had a significant negative association with employment” - the take-away line for government. However, it also states “there was no clear evidence from these countries that changes in the eligibility requirements of disability benefits had a measurable impact on employment”.

Crucially, it concludes "whilst changing benefit levels may affect the employment of some claimants at the margins, the consequences of this, in terms of loss of income, affects all claimants." If benefit cuts leave "more vulnerable groups such as people with mental health problems on reduced benefits, the negative consequences may outweigh the gains made in increasing employment".

Worse off than healthy claimants

The Select Committee’s **report** also noted that given those on ESA are likely to have higher living costs associated with their conditions, they will ultimately be left with less disposable income than JSA claimants, even

though they are also not expected to find work as quickly as their JSA counterparts, and so will require the benefit for longer.

More poignant of course is the impact assessment's following point, that the reform will "further reduce benefit expenditure and continue to help tackle the financial deficit". As highlighted by Julia Rampen earlier this **week**, these latest benefit cuts are largely the brainchild of former chancellor George Osborne, whose commitment to austerity was unwavering during his time in government.

The ESA cuts, which arrive the same week as reductions to child and working tax credits, housing benefit, incapacity benefits, universal credit (that some ESA applicants will now receive) and bereavement support payments, are expected to save the Treasury £1bn by 2020-21, and come into effect at the same time as changes to Personal Independence Payment criteria that are expected to save £3.7bn. Many disabled people rely on both.

A **green paper** published in October put forth a bold ambition by the government to reduce unemployment among those suffering from long-term illness and disability.

It stated:

"For many people, a period of ill health, or a condition that gets worse, can cause huge difficulties. For those in work, but who are just managing, it can lead to them losing their job and then struggling to get back into work. Unable to support themselves and their family, and without the positive psychological and social support that comes from being in work, their wellbeing can decline and their health can worsen.

The impact of this downward spiral is felt not just by each person affected and their families, but also by employers who lose valuable skills and health services that bear additional costs. There is a lack of practical support to help people stay connected to work and get back to work.

“This has to change.”

It has changed. Not for the better.



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FILM

3 NOVEMBER 2017

Why The Lego Ninjago Movie is the perfect Brexit parable

Forget *The Death of Stalin*.

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Some think that Armando Iannucci's *The Death of Stalin* has parallels to the nation's current political predicament – a group of ambitious and abnormal men scheming and swearing while the nation's nominal leader wobbles.

But there's another male-dominated movie playing now that speaks more loudly to our present times – *The Lego Ninjago Movie*, and not just because it sometimes seems that the pro-Leave camp cleave to an ideal world in which stuff just logically clicks together.

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It is quite simply a Brexit parable – a simple story that illustrates deeper lessons about where we are now as a nation and where we go next.

The premise is that Ninjago is a land peopled by the sort of well-meaning folks that run Pilates studios or present TV programmes. You might call them a metropolitan liberal elite.

Every so often their world is threatened by people entirely alien to them – one has six arms, some appear to wear jellyfish on their heads. No-one in the film actually calls them “fruitcakes, loonies and closet racists” but it’s clear that there’s no attempt on either side to understand each other. And anyone, like the film’s hero Lloyd, who is connected to these outsiders, is to be shunned. Let slip your family voted Brexit in an East London cereal café and you’ll get an idea of how Lloyd is regarded.

Except one day the weirdos succeed in taking over Ninjago.

OK, so the Brexiteers didn’t use a giant Lego robot to achieve their aim but the result was the same – the people derided and despised by the metropolitan elite were suddenly and unexpectedly in charge.

And here are where the lessons and parallels with Brexit get really interesting.

It’ll come as something of a comfort to youthful audiences that the evil Lord Garmadon, the Nigel Farage of Ninjago, loses by the end of the movie. But

not because the good guys simply take him down and, ahem, take back control of the city. Instead, into this world of bricks and minifigs brought to life by computer generated animation drops a kitten. Not a Lego kitten but an actual cat (the moviemakers are clearly fans of **The Goodies**).

And when real life intervenes, things really start to get chaotic. (Just like, ahem, Brexit.)

Unleashed, Meowthra (a nice nod to Japanese *Godzilla* films but let's not ponder the cultural appropriation in the film too much or we'll get sad) causes chaos. The good guys are forced into the wilderness – imagine Chuka Umunna, Ken Clarke and Anna Soubry, but ninjas – and the bad guys party while everything falls down around them.

Still, there are lessons for the Ninjago latte-drinkers too. For years Garmadon has been firing underperforming underlings out of a volcano and the metropolitan elite were either unaware or uninterested. But ultimately they have to face the anger of a workforce exploited and ignored by the ruling class.

The complicated vehicles or "mechs" that have served to defend the populace of Ninjago are smashed, just like political parties' structures have been buckled by Brexit.

The similarities don't end there. *The Lego Ninjago Movie* is dominated by men, has some serious questions to answer about its lack of diversity, and displays some oddly outdated views.

Unlike Brexit, *The Lego Ninjago Movie* is funny.

But hopefully the parallel can be strung out even further – for the key to a happy ending in the movie, just as in politics, is to understand each other. And even to embrace real life (spoiler alert: everyone ends up adopting the cat).

It's perhaps a sign of the mess Westminster is in just now that it would do well to look up to a kids film for lessons, but there are lessons to be learned.

Understanding your opponents rather than shunning them is a surefire way to avoid serious conflagrations.

Embracing real life, rather than ignoring it, and dealing with the situation put in front of you, rather than hoping dogma will see you home.

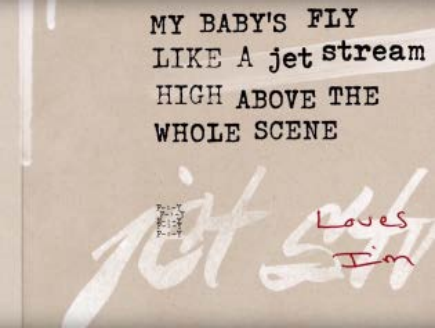
And if both sides in the Brexit debate sat down to watch *The Lego Ninjago Movie*, they'd surely laugh at the same bits.

James Millar is a political journalist and founder of the **Political Yeti's Politics Podcast**. He is co-author of *The Gender Agenda*, which will be published July 21 by Jessica Kingsley Publishing.



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These are all the MPs who voted to force through the ESA disability benefit cut

Peers have been unable to stop the cut to the Work Related-Activity Group (WRAG)

[Jon Stone](#) | [@joncstone](#) | Tuesday 8 March 2016 09:25 GMT | [178 comments](#)

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The cut will reduce ESA WRAG payments by £30 a week *Getty*

The House of Lords has been unable to stop a planned £30-a-week cut to disability benefits forced through by Government MPs.

Charities have warned that the cut to the Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) WRAG would make it more difficult for disabled people to find work and that many struggled to afford food on the benefit at its current level.


The Government however says the cut, which applies to new claimants, will incentivise disabled people to find work.

On 2 March **MPs voted to reject a House of Lords plan for an impact assessment into the cuts.** Peers on Tuesday evening discussed the cuts - but were forced to wave them through because Ministers claimed "financial privilege" - meaning the Lords was not allowed to intervene.

A black error dialog box with white text. The text reads: "An unanticipated problem was encountered, check back soon and try again", "Error Code: MEDIA_ERR_UNKNOWN", and "Session ID: +049813-06-26:58822a4c4f84eb976054ce31 Player ID: brightcove-video-4790891096001". There is a small square icon in the top right corner and an "OK" button in the bottom left corner.

Disabled peer blasts ESA cuts

□ 7 ways the Tories have ‘helped’ disabled people

 **7**
show all

The cuts will now go ahead.

This is a list of all the MPs who voted for the sharp cuts to disability benefits on 2 March, rejecting the call for an impact assessment.

Adams, Nigel

Afryie, Adam

Aldous, Peter

Allan, Lucy

Andrew, Stuart

Ansell, Caroline

Argar, Edward

Atkins, Victoria

Bacon, Mr Richard

Baker, Mr Steve

Baldwin, Harriett

Barclay, Stephen

Baron, Mr John

Barwell, Gavin

Bebb, Guto

Bellingham, Sir Henry

Benyon, Richard

Beresford, Sir Paul

Berry, Jake

Berry, James

Bingham, Andrew

Blackman, Bob

Blackwood, Nicola

Blunt, Crispin

Boles, Nick

Bone, Mr Peter

Borwick, Victoria

Bottomley, Sir Peter

Bradley, Karen

Brady, Mr Graham

Brazier, Mr Julian

Bridgen, Andrew

Brine, Steve

Brokenshire, rh James

Buckland, Robert

Burns, Conor

Burns, rh Sir Simon

Burrowes, Mr David

Burt, rh Alistair

Cairns, Alun

Carmichael, Neil

Cartlidge, James

Cash, Sir William

Caulfield, Maria

Chalk, Alex

Chishti, Rehman

Chope, Mr Christopher

Churchill, Jo

Clark, rh Greg

Cleverly, James

Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey

Coffey, Dr Thérèse

Collins, Damian

Colvile, Oliver

Costa, Alberto

Cox, Mr Geoffrey

Crabb, rh Stephen

Davies, Byron

Davies, Chris

Davies, David T. C.

Davies, Glyn

Davies, Dr James

Davies, Mims

Davies, Philip

Davis, rh Mr David

Dinenage, Caroline

Djanogly, Mr Jonathan

Donelan, Michelle

Dorries, Nadine

Double, Steve

Dowden, Oliver

Drax, Richard

Drummond, Mrs Flick

Duddridge, James

Duncan, rh Sir Alan

Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain

Dunne, Mr Philip

Ellis, Michael

Ellison, Jane

Ellwood, Mr Tobias

Elphicke, Charlie

Eustice, George

Evans, Graham

Evans, Mr Nigel

Evennett, rh Mr David

Fabricant, Michael

Fallon, rh Michael

Fernandes, Suella

Field, rh Mark

Foster, Kevin

Fox, rh Dr Liam

Francois, rh Mr Mark

Frazer, Lucy

Freeman, George

Freer, Mike

Fuller, Richard

Fysh, Marcus

Gale, Sir Roger

Garnier, rh Sir Edward

Garnier, Mark

Gauke, Mr David

Ghani, Nusrat

Gibb, Mr Nick

Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl

Glen, John

Goldsmith, Zac

Goodwill, Mr Robert

Gove, rh Michael

Graham, Richard

Gray, Mr James

Grayling, rh Chris

Green, Chris

Green, rh Damian

Greening, rh Justine

Grieve, rh Mr Dominic

Griffiths, Andrew

Gummer, Ben

Gyimah, Mr Sam

Halfon, rh Robert

Hall, Luke

Hammond, rh Mr Philip

Hammond, Stephen

Hancock, rh Matthew

Hands, rh Greg

Harper, rh Mr Mark

Harrington, Richard

Harris, Rebecca

Hart, Simon

Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan

Hayes, rh Mr John

Heald, Sir Oliver

Heappey, James

Heaton-Harris, Chris

Heaton-Jones, Peter

Henderson, Gordon

Herbert, rh Nick

Hinds, Damian

Hoare, Simon

Hollingbery, George

Hollinrake, Kevin

Hollobone, Mr Philip

Holloway, Mr Adam

Hopkins, Kris

Howarth, Sir Gerald

Howell, John

Howlett, Ben

Huddleston, Nigel

Hunt, rh Mr Jeremy

Hurd, Mr Nick

Jackson, Mr Stewart

James, Margot

Javid, rh Sajid

Jayawardena, Mr Ranil

Jenkin, Mr Bernard

Jenkyns, Andrea

Jenrick, Robert

Johnson, Boris

Johnson, Gareth

Johnson, Joseph

Jones, Andrew

Jones, rh Mr David

Jones, Mr Marcus

Kawczynski, Daniel

Kennedy, Seema

Knight, rh Sir Greg

Knight, Julian

Kwarteng, Kwasi

Lancaster, Mark

Leadsom, Andrea

Lee, Dr Phillip

Leigh, Sir Edward

Leslie, Charlotte

Letwin, rh Mr Oliver

Lewis, Brandon

Lewis, rh Dr Julian

Lidington, rh Mr David

Lilley, rh Mr Peter

Lopresti, Jack

Lord, Jonathan

Loughton, Tim

Lumley, Karen

Mackinlay, Craig

Mackintosh, David

Main, Mrs Anne

Mak, Mr Alan

Malthouse, Kit

Mann, Scott

Mathias, Dr Tania

- Maynard, Paul
- McCartney, Karl
- McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
- Menzies, Mark
- Mercer, Johnny
- Merriman, Huw
- Metcalf, Stephen
- Miller, rh Mrs Maria
- Milling, Amanda
- Mills, Nigel
- Milton, rh Anne
- Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
- Mordaunt, Penny
- Morgan, rh Nicky
- Morris, Anne Marie
- Morris, David
- Morris, James
- Mowat, David
- Mundell, rh David
- Murray, Mrs Sheryll

Neill, Robert

Newton, Sarah

Nokes, Caroline

Norman, Jesse

Nuttall, Mr David

Offord, Dr Matthew

Opperman, Guy

Osborne, rh Mr George

Parish, Neil

Patel, rh Priti

Paterson, rh Mr Owen

Pawsey, Mark

Penning, rh Mike

Penrose, John

Percy, Andrew

Perry, Claire

Phillips, Stephen

Philp, Chris

Pickles, rh Sir Eric

Pincher, Christopher

Poulter, Dr Daniel

Prentis, Victoria

Prisk, Mr Mark

Pritchard, Mark

Pursglove, Tom

Quin, Jeremy

Quince, Will

Raab, Mr Dominic

Redwood, rh John

Rees-Mogg, Mr Jacob

Robertson, Mr Laurence

Robinson, Mary

Rosindell, Andrew

Rudd, rh Amber

Rutley, David

Sandbach, Antoinette

Scully, Paul

Selous, Andrew

Shapps, rh Grant

Sharma, Alok

Shelbrooke, Alec

Simpson, rh Mr Keith

Skidmore, Chris

Smith, Chloe

Smith, Henry

Smith, Julian

Smith, Royston

Soames, rh Sir Nicholas

Solloway, Amanda

Soubry, rh Anna

Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline

Spencer, Mark

Stephenson, Andrew

Stevenson, John

Stewart, Bob

Stewart, Iain

Stewart, Rory

Stride, Mel

Stuart, Graham

Sturdy, Julian

Sunak, Rishi

Swayne, rh Mr Desmond

Swire, rh Mr Hugo

Syms, Mr Robert

Thomas, Derek

Throup, Maggie

Timpson, Edward

Tolhurst, Kelly

Tomlinson, Justin

Tomlinson, Michael

Tracey, Craig

Tredinnick, David

Trevelyan, Mrs Anne-Marie

Truss, rh Elizabeth

Tugendhat, Tom

Turner, Mr Andrew

Tyrie, rh Mr Andrew

Vaizey, Mr Edward

Vara, Mr Shailesh

Vickers, Martin

Walker, Mr Charles

Walker, Mr Robin

Wallace, Mr Ben

Warburton, David

Warman, Matt

Watkinson, Dame Angela

Wharton, James

Whately, Helen

Wheeler, Heather

White, Chris

Whittaker, Craig

Whittingdale, rh Mr John

Wiggin, Bill

Williams, Craig

Williamson, rh Gavin

Wilson, Mr Rob

Wollaston, Dr Sarah

Wood, Mike

Wragg, William

Wright, rh Jeremy

Zahawi, Nadhim

Simon Kirby

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tibbles

17457021 days ago

The House of Lords, full of people who are paid £300 a day to enjoy subsidised food and drink, provided by the poorest in society, what a system when the rich and privileged can fill their boots and can then accuse the poor crippled and disadvantaged of being scroungers.

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Brian Mcardle

17457367 days ago

Those Lbour MPs who abstained ,you helped the Tory get this through ,well done red Tory

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Arnie Wellah

17457592 days ago



Those 47 MP's should be marched out of the house and straight into the Thames

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Curzone

17457593 days ago

* Terry McGarvey, 48. Dangerously ill from polycytheamia. Terry asked for an ambulance to be called during his Work Capability Assessment. He knew that he wasn't well enough to attend his WCA but feared that his benefits would be stopped if he did not. He died the following day.

* Elaine Lowe, 53. Suffering from COPD and fearful of losing her benefits. In desperation, Elaine chose to commit suicide.

* Mark Wood, 44. Found fit for work by Atos, against his Doctors advice and assertions that he had complex mental health problems. Starved to death after benefits stopped, weighing only 5st 8lb when he died.

* Paul Reekie, 48, the Leith based Poet and Author. Suffered from severe depression. Committed suicide after DWP stopped his benefits due to an Atos 'fit for work' decision.

* Leanne Chambers, 30. Suffered depression for many years which took a turn for the worst when she was called in for a WCA. Leanne committed suicide soon after.

* Karen Sherlock, 44. Multiple health issues. Found fit for work by Atos and denied benefits. Fought a long battle to get placed into the support group of ESA. Karen died the following month of a heart attack.

* Carl Payne, 42. Fears of losing his lifeline benefits due to welfare reform led this Father of two to take his own life.

* Tim Salter, 53. Blind and suffering from Agoraphobia. Tim hanged himself after Atos found him fit for work and stopped his benefits.

* Edward Jacques, 47 years old and suffering from HIV and Hepatitis C. Edward had a history of severe depression and self-harm. He took a fatal overdose after Atos found him fit for work and stopped his benefits.

* Linda Wootton, 49 years old. A double heart and lung transplant patient. Died just nine days after the government found her fit for work, their refusal letter arriving as she lay desperately ill in her hospital bed.

* Steven Cawthra, 55. His benefits stopped by the DWP and with rising debts, he saw suicide as the only way out of a desperate situation.

* Elenore Tatton, 39 years old. Died just weeks after the government found her fit for work.

* John Walker, 57, saddled with debt because of the bedroom tax, John took his own life.

* Brian McArdle, 57 years old. Suffered a fatal heart attack the day after his disability benefits were stopped.

* Stephen Hill, 53. Died of a heart attack one month after being found fit

for work, even though he was waiting for major heart surgery.

* Jacqueline Harris, 53. A former Nurse who could hardly walk was found fit for work by Atos and her benefits withdrawn. in desperation, she took her own life.

* David Barr, 28. Suffering from severe mental difficulties. Threw himself from a bridge after being found fit for work by Atos and failing his appeal.

* David Groves, 56. Died of a heart attack the night before taking his work capability assessment. His widow claimed that it was the stress that killed him.

* Nicholas Peter Barker, 51. Shot himself after being told his benefits were being stopped. He was unable to work after a brain haemorrhage left him paralysed down one side.

* Mark and Helen Mullins, 48 and 59 years old. Forced to live on £57.50 a week and make 12 mile trips each week to get free vegetables to make soup. Mark and Helen both committed suicide.

* Richard Sanderson, 44. Unable to find a job and with his housing benefit cut forcing him to move, but with nowhere to go. Richard committed suicide.

* Martin Rust, 36 years old. A schizophrenic man who killed himself two months after the government found him fit to work.

* Craig Monk, 43. A vulnerable gentleman and a partial amputee who slipped so far into poverty that he hanged himself.

* Colin Traynor, 29, and suffering from epilepsy was stripped of his benefits. He appealed. Five weeks after his death his family found he had won his appeal.

The list goes on:

<https://welfaretales.wordpress.com/2015/04/02/list-of-welfare-related-deaths-of-the-uks-sick-and-disabled/>

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Pam4Tony

17457595 days ago

I just noticed that Maggie Throup our local MP is on this list. I am on DLA

and I will be taking a trip down to her local office to tell her exactly what I think of her.

Reply · Share · 1 reply

+9 likes



Brian Mcardle

17457367 days ago

yes and leave nothing out, but no threats or swearing, you are better than those leeches

Reply · Share

+2 likes



Pam4Tony

17457595 days ago

I am currently on DLA and I am absolutely disgusted at the long list of MPs who have voted this way. I can bet any amount of money that not one of these people have a member of their family who is disabled, or on disability benefit. I hope that they will never be in a position whereby they have to apply for a disability benefit. It is appalling this is even being discussed. These middle class idiots probably never have to scrimp and scrape to be able to live with a disability on the pittance they already receive and are now even being denied that. This is going to cause no end of hardship for people on disability benefit, I for one and my daughter also. Why do these people always target the most vulnerable people in our society, i.e. homeless, disabled and the list goes on. Thank God I did not vote for these heartless, cruel, upper-class idiots who never had a day's hardship, or ever had to have to beg and scrape before their disability is ever recognised, and in some cases be made to feel like second-class citizens.

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Sid whathisname

17457331 days ago

A couple of them do, not forgetting many in the House of Lords are disabled now due to age.

I can think of maybe six.

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0 likes



Leland

17457595 days ago

It's shameful what they're doing - what we need is to change voting so no one government or PM can run country unless they have 51% of the public support - what did Tories get 36% or about that of public support to run our country into the ground, double our debt and the promise on immigration well, that's out the window too, I said people will regret voting for them but they're destroying our country and just blaming everything on

everyone else that not going as planned. Please get some of these out of office next chance you get to vote before there ruined our country

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Jeanette

17457597 days ago

I suppose they are all what is classed as middle class. More money in their pockets as well as substantial rises in pay too. I think they are cowards preying on the most vulnerable in society. Am so pleased my MP is not one of them.

Reply · Share · 2 replies 

+5 likes  



junkyred22

17457597 days ago

Is it - your mp - a tory? Or "other"?

Reply · Share · 1 reply 

+1 likes  



Sid whathisname

17457331 days ago

They are upper middle class many in the Tories and some in labour have out side earning which makes them rather rich. £75,000 makes them upper middle class and all food stuff and anything else needed is paid for through expenses

Share 

0 likes  

John Gorton

17457598 days ago



The relentless brick by brick on the shoulders of the poor and sick by a terminally I'll party of phocopaths

Reply · Share 

+4 likes  



Simon Falla

17457599 days ago

Anyone who thinks a Government, be it Tory or Labour, cares one jot about you..is deluded

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