



## Content warning

**please read this before reading the timeline**

We are creating and building this work while doing it and being in it. Everything about the project is distressing and so we've spent a lot of time creating processes for supporting people to engage – co-designed and informed by the expertise of people with lived experience.

- The content of the timeline is devastating and enraging.
- The timeline is triggering for different people in different ways, especially depending on how folks are positioned in relation to the welfare system, their experiences of cumulative harm, trauma, and distress.
- The timeline contains a lot of information about welfare reform related deaths, including suicides.
- It does not contain any specific details about the methods of people's suicides.
- We understand welfare reform deaths and suicides by talking about them in the context of injustice and harm in which they take place.

- We are still learning about how to talk about the brutalities of the system, without reproducing these harms.
- We recognise that resistance against welfare reform and campaigning for justice for those who have died takes many different forms, and we honour these differences.
- We recognise there is a balance in working with compassion and care and also not undermining or infantilising people who live the realities that our work documents and tries to transform.
- We want to honour the legitimacy of your self-knowledge (that you know yourself best) while also understanding how the violence of the system shows up in so many ways (in our bodies, and our emotions) both every day and sometimes unexpectedly. We would like you to engage with the timeline in a way that honours how you're feeling and that prioritises care. Please do what's right for you at this time.

Please find some resources available here – we know these are not perfect and creating relevant and useful resources is a key part of how we imagine this work:

[HJL aftercare menu](#)

[The GEN Grief toolkit](#)

[HJL's events including monthly grief circle, weekly breath circle and restorative yoga](#)

# About the timeline

[Healing Justice London's \*Deaths by Welfare Project\*](#) investigates the links between welfare reform and people's deaths, including suicides.

An important part of this investigation is a timeline of evidence from the 1970s onwards, documenting cumulative harm and slow bureaucratic violence. The timeline includes political speeches dehumanizing people who claim benefits, key pieces of legislation and research, findings from multiple Freedom of Information requests, early warning signs of the harm to come, and names just some of the multiple people whose deaths have been caused by and linked to the welfare system. The timeline also shows the expertise, knowledge, and leadership of people with lived experience of welfare, including disabled people and bereaved families, fighting fatal reforms, and visioning justice both within and beyond the state.

Our aims and hopes:

- The timeline creates a counter history to the official narrative on welfare reform and aims to help people understand how policies designed in the name of 'welfare' can create the conditions for people's deaths.
- We hope the timeline will be useful as a tool for disability justice movement organising, to get public attention on this overlooked area, and to build cross movement solidarity and coalition for a people's assembly on benefits-related deaths and distress (in 2023).

# What is the timeline and who has created it?

The timeline is a living document – its creation is an ongoing process and we know there will never be a version that feels final or completely finished – there will always be something missing.

The timeline has been co-created by China Mills ([Healing Justice London](#) and [City, University of London](#)) and John Pring ([Disability News Service](#)), with essential input from Ellen Clifford ([Disabled People Against Cuts](#) [DPAC], and author of the [War on Disabled People](#)), Dolly Sen (artist and activist working on [section136](#)), Rick Burgess ([Co-founder of the WOW petition](#)), and Nick Dilworth (welfare rights expert).

The timeline is one output of a wider project, guided by the following research questions:

1. How does the UK Government, and particularly the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) talk about, frame and respond to deaths said to be linked to welfare policy (i.e benefits-related deaths).
2. How do those who have publicly emphasized the political nature of, and linked Government policy to, benefits-related deaths (including coroners, researchers, professionals, bereaved families and disability justice activists) talk about and frame the relationship between welfare policy and related deaths?

We are working with [Access Power Visibility \(APV\)](#) (a collective addressing issues of Disability Justice and radical accessibility) to make the timeline accessible and available online (launching later this year, in 2022). Before this launch, we wanted to reach out to wider community for feedback on and input into the timeline.

The timeline will also always reflect those who have made it, and those who make it will always have unequal power to define, include, and exclude. To acknowledge and be accountable to this power, we have a) involved and paid people with lived experience in helping to create the timeline, and b) decided to make this early draft available for public consultation.

## Timeline remit

What we have included so far:

- Key policy and legislation
- Political speeches and media coverage key in crafting the dehumanisation and stigmatisation of (disabled) welfare claimants
- Key reports and investigations (National Audit Office, United Nations etc)
- Parliamentary debates
- Evidence hearings
- Key Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and DWP responses

- Findings from inquests
- Prevention of Future Deaths (PFD) reports and responses
- DWP reports, briefings, and internal guidelines etc
- Key research publications and reports that speak directly to benefits-related distress and deaths

### **Why we have included some but not all people's deaths**

In the timeline, we have included details about a number of people's deaths (though no detailed accounts of methods of suicide). Our main worry with the timeline – the thing we keep returning to and talking to each other about – is that many of you will read this and not see the name of your friend/s, family member/s, loved one/s, even though you know their death is linked to welfare policy (we also know that maybe you'd rather their name wasn't listed, and we understand this too). By including some and not others, we recognise that many people's deaths are missing from the timeline. This does not mean to imply that anyone's life or death mattered more than others.

We want to know as many people's names as we can, and we hope this timeline is a useful tool in tracing the processes used by Government to deny the links between policy and people's deaths.

As part of our ongoing project, we are keen to create a memorial of welfare-related deaths, to honour those who have died, while recognising that we may never know the true extent of people harmed by this brutal system. As well as asking for feedback on our timeline, we'd really welcome your ideas about how the project can create a lasting memorial.

We name some people's deaths because for various reasons they have led to prevention of future deaths reports, inquests, and/or large scale campaigns. Currently the timeline entries about people's deaths are much longer than the other entries as a mark of respect.

## How you can help us

In making this draft of the timeline public, we are extending an invitation for you to join us on the journey of building an evidence-base and a counter history.

We're asking for your input. We're particularly keen to make sure our timeline doesn't (re)produce a white history of welfare reform, and is attuned to the way welfare reform has had a disproportionately negative impact on people of colour.

To be honest and transparent about our capacity as a small team, and accountable to those with whom we collaborate, it's important that you know that we are a tiny team – not able to work full-time on this project (although we wish we could). Due to limited resources, we are, for now, focusing only on links between the welfare system and reform and people's deaths, including suicides. We are not including entries that chart the wider violence of austerity and anti-austerity resistance— even though we recognise that this is part of the context for the events on the timeline.

**What we're asking for:**

- What you think is missing, including information pre-1970s (which we know is important but haven't yet had capacity to explore).
- If any current entries aren't quite right.
- Beyond adding entries or editing existing entries, if you feel something more fundamental about the timeline isn't quite right etc then please do tell us.
- How would you use the timeline, and any ideas you have for making it more accessible and usable for different groups.
- We'd really welcome your ideas about how the project can create a lasting memorial to those who have died.

### **When we'd like to hear from you:**

We plan to launch our timeline online in September 2022. We'd like to receive any suggested changes from you by **August 31st 2022** at 5pm GMT.

### **You can contribute in 3 main ways:**

- If you want to suggest a new or revised entry for the timeline please complete this google form <https://forms.gle/dVkl1i85JGhhC5AK8>
- Please send more general feedback and suggestions to [deathsbywelfare@healingjusticeldn.org](mailto:deathsbywelfare@healingjusticeldn.org) with the subject line 'Timeline Consultation'. Please note that we enormously appreciate your input but are only able to check this account once a week, and so it may take us a little while to respond.
- We'd also love to know how you might use the timeline and what impact you think it could have. Please send this to [deathsbywelfare@healingjusticeldn.org](mailto:deathsbywelfare@healingjusticeldn.org)

**What will happen after you send us feedback:**

All the feedback will be collected together by China Mills and John Pring. This will then be shared with the wider team at Healing Justice Ldn, to make collective decisions about what to include. We recognise there is a lot of power in deciding what is included, and our hope is to share accountability for the timeline in this process. The timeline will then be shared with Access Power Visibility collective, to make it accessible and online in late 2022. The timeline is a living document, and the online version will be ongoing – with other opportunities to input into the work.

# Deaths by Welfare (Short Timeline)

## **1 September 1971**

Introduction of Invalidity Benefit for people who had to leave their trade or occupation after sustaining an injury or developing a long-term illness.

## **31 March 1979**

First figures showing the number of people on Invalidity and Sickness Benefit.

## **28 November 1983**

Invalidity Benefit regulations introduced requiring a doctor's certificate.

## **Autumn 1992**

Peter Lilley (secretary of state for social security) talks about "closing down the something for nothing society" and tightening up on "scroungers" and "bogus asylum seekers".

## **6 April 1992**

Introduction of disability living allowance, enabling more disabled people able to claim support for some of their extra impairment-related costs.

### **10 June 1993**

Leaked Whitehall documents reveal plans to cut Invalidity Benefit.

### **15 June 1993**

John Major says it “beggars belief that so many more people have suddenly become invalids”, laying the foundations for the upcoming Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Bill.

### **1994**

US insurance company Unum’s advise the UK government on ‘welfare reform’ to reduce the number of claimants of long-term sickness benefits.

### **20 January 1994**

The Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Bill and research paper published, discussing role of GPs in determining access to benefits

### **5 July 1994**

Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Act 1994 receives royal assent.

### **13 April 1995**

Key measures from the Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Act 1994 come into force, including replacing Invalidity Benefit with Incapacity Benefit, and introducing the points-based All Work Test, as well as regulation 27 – providing a ‘safety net’ for those who

faced a 'substantial risk' of harm if they were found capable of work.

### **July 1995**

Professor Wikeley publishes paper highlighting the risks of The Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Act 1994, saying that it reaffirms idea of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, begins the move away from GP-led benefits assessments, and is designed to encourage people to take up private insurance, leaving marginalised groups with inadequate protection. Points-based systems had previously been rejected as 'humiliating' and 'intrusive' (Wikeley, 1995, p. 51).

### **August 1995**

Article (co-written by US insurance company Unum Vice President), suggests removing GPs from assessing fitness to work.

### **November 1995**

Ministers approve decision to outsource medical assessments for benefits.

### **28 October 1996**

The Department of Social Security (DSS) (now DWP) tells the Social Security Advisory Committee that intended policy changes to remove the 'substantial risk' rules (regulation 27(b) ) (which provide vital safeguarding) would have no detrimental effect.

## **28 October 1996**

Child Poverty Acton Group (CPAG) writes to the Social Security Advisory Committee about removal of regulation 27(b) without parliamentary scrutiny.

## **6 November 1996**

Department of Social Security says removing 'significant risk' regulation is 'neutral' despite providing a 'safety net' for those facing a 'significant risk' of harm if found capable of work. This means the committee does not see a formal referral and the regulation is approved by parliament (the removal will later be found to be unlawful).

## **6 November 1996**

Clinicians appointed by the DSS/DWP the removal of regulation 27, which provides vital safeguarding to those whose mental and/or physical health is 'substantial risk' if found fit to work.

## **1997**

Leaked document outlines plans for changes to sickness and disability related benefits based on budget savings.

## **6 January 1997**

Regulation 27 'substantial risk' - a key safety net for claimants at risk of serious harm if they are found fit for work - is removed from regulations.

## **December 1997**

Child Poverty Action group raises concerns over removal of “significant risk” clause – finding that the Social Security Advisory Committee had been ‘misled’ by the DSS.

## **23 December 1997**

Disabled activists protest over welfare cuts outside Downing Street.

## **26 March 1998**

Publication of new social security green paper “New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare”, setting out the principles of welfare reform based on the idea of “welfare dependency”.

## **2000**

The death of Timothy Finn. A coroner at his inquest found that neglect by what was then the Benefits Agency had contributed to his death.

## **2000**

The All Work Test is reformed and renamed the Personal Capability Assessment, and is outsourced to SEMA, which would be taken over by Atos.

## **2001**

DWP research report on claimant experiences of Personal Capability Assessment shows it is “intrinsically stressful”, especially for those who experience anxiety and depression.

### **2001**

DWP research report on claimant experiences of the Personal Capability Assessment finds it is “intrinsically stressful”, showing early warning of risks of the assessment, especially for people’s mental health.

### **2001**

Insurance company Unum launches lobbying group, including some disability charities, to increase its influence.

### **9 March 2001**

National Audit Office report finds “serious problems” with medical assessment of Incapacity and disability benefits.

### **November 2001**

Woodstock conference on “malingering and illness deception”, partly funded by Unum and DWP, will play a key role in justifying welfare reform.

### **13 October 2002 and 17 November 2002**

News programmes expose claims denial practices in the USA at Unum (who are currently advising the UK government on welfare reform).

### **8th November 2002**

The Court of Appeal finds (in the case *Howker v Secretary of State*) that the social security advisory committee had been misled by the DSS (now DWP) and that removing the “substantial risk” clause was unlawful.

### **2003**

UnumProvident acquires UK group insurance business - building its insurance presence in the UK while influencing welfare reform at governmental level.

### **18 February 2003**

Ministers try again to remove the “substantial risk” clause from regulation 27, reversing the effect of the Court of Appeal ruling

### **13 May 2003**

The Social Security Advisory Committee recommends that no change be made to regulation 27, and then withdraws its proposal to remove the safety net.

### **17 October 2003**

National Audit Office report finds backlog of assessment cases and early signs of DWP’s failure to seek medical evidence early in the assessment process.

### **10 December 2003**

DWP's chief medical adviser, Mansel Aylward, gives evidence to the Commons Public Accounts Committee over accusations that health care professionals, carrying out assessments on behalf of DWP, are treating claimants like "lumps of meat".

### **July 2004**

Unum opens new Centre for Psychosocial and Disability Research at Cardiff University, which has close links to DWP.

### **November 2004**

DWP-commissioned research finds Incapacity Benefit Personal Advisers are concerned about working with clients who are suicidal, and about a target driven sanctioning culture.

### **18 November 2004**

UnumProvident settles multi-state federal examination of claim handling practices in USA, identifying Unum's use of in-house medical staff to deny benefits.

### **2005**

DWP publishes second research report on Incapacity Benefit reforms and Personal advisers, finding unmanageable workloads affect their ability to identify risk and provide support to people in distress.

### **2005**

US insurance giant UnumProvident says it is driving government thinking on Incapacity Benefit reform.

### **1 January 2005**

Research published into how DWP and Atos secure further medical evidence from claimants.

### **3 October 2005**

California insurance regulators fine insurance company Unum \$8 million, including for using wrong legal definition of disability to deny claims, requiring the company to reopen as many as 26,000 California cases.

### **11 October 2005**

DWP publishes book arguing for welfare reforms backed by the insurance industry that lay the framework for 2006 Welfare Reform Bill.

### **1 January 2006**

Publication of “Is Work Good for Health and Well-being?”, claims to provide evidence that work is good for health, which will be used by government to justify pressuring disabled people into work.

### **January 2006**

Government publishes A New Deal for Welfare green paper, introducing the new employment and support allowance, which will

replace incapacity benefit and include conditionality for most claimants.

### **25 January 2006**

Tony Blair supports welfare shake-up, warning that unemployed people, single parents and those on incapacity benefit that they could no longer expect “a lifetime” on benefit.

### **March 2006**

Alison Ravetz criticises government’s New Deal for Welfare, warning of incalculable stress for those forced into work, and predicting future harms.

### **September 2006**

DWP publishes progress report on developing the work capability assessment.

### **2007**

Investment banker David Freud publishes report on “reducing dependency” in the welfare system, including recommending outsourcing running of work programmes and pushing those on Incapacity Benefits into work.

### **3 May 2007**

Welfare Reform Act 2007 receives royal assent, introducing changes that will impact millions of disabled people, including the

new employment and support allowance (ESA) and the work capability assessment (WCA).

### **3 July 2007**

“Doctor” is changed to “healthcare professional” in amendments to the social security regulations, related to medical opinion required to determine fitness to work.

### **November 2007**

Labour’s work and pensions secretary Peter Hain vows to “rip up sicknote Britain”.

### **19 November 2007**

Labour announces the new work capability assessment for claiming employment and support allowance, with DWP claiming that “Fifty per cent of those who take the assessment will not pass it”.

### **15 January 2008**

Bid to regulate health care professionals carrying out work capability assessments fails.

### **2 February 2008**

David Freud suggests that less than a third of those claiming incapacity benefit are legitimate claimants.

### **17 March 2008**

Publication of DWP report on health, work and well-being emphasises cost to the British economy of health-related absence from work.

### **1 April 2008**

Work and pensions secretary announces plans to get tough on “scroungers” by retesting everyone on Incapacity Benefit through the new Work Capability Assessment.

### **27 October 2008**

Introduction of Employment and Support Allowance and the Work Capability Assessment – key elements of Labour’s welfare reform which aims to use conditionality to cut spending on out-of-work benefits.

### **10 December 2008**

White Paper ‘Raising Expectations and Increasing Support: Reforming Welfare for the Future’, which claims that “everyone on incapacity benefit” will be moved to ESA, and supports use of conditionality and sanctions, is discussed in House of Lords.

### **2009**

Launch of Centre for Welfare Reform.

### **14 October 2009**

The Express publishes misleading and inaccurate benefit fraud story about incapacity benefit claimants “faking their illnesses”.

## **October 2009**

DWP publishes internal review of work capability assessment.

## **1 January 2010**

The death of Stephen Carré after finding that DWP had confirmed its decision to find him ineligible for ESA.

## **30 March 2010**

Prevention of future deaths (PFD) report finds that the rejection of his appeal that he was not fit for work was a 'trigger' in Stephen Carré's death (this report would only come to be publically known about later).

## **4 May 2010**

Coroner Tom Osborne receives initial response to the Stephen Carré PFD from DWP permanent secretary Sir Leigh Lewis.

## **6 May 2010**

Labour government voted out in general election, leading to formation of coalition between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats.

## **12 May 2010**

Coroner Tom Osborne replies to Sir Leigh Lewis, saying that DWP does not need to investigate the circumstances surrounding

Stephen Carré's death but does need to investigate use of medical evidence.

### **10 June 2010**

The death of Paul Reekie.

### **Summer/autumn 2010**

Formation of Black Triangle Campaign to “galvanise opposition to the current vicious attack on the fundamental human rights of disabled people by the Government”, and in memory of Paul Reekie.

### **Summer/autumn 2010**

Formation of The Mental Health Resistance Network set up “by people who live with mental distress in order to defend ourselves from the assault on us by a cruel government”.

### **22 June 2010**

Budget reveals plans to slash spending on disability living allowance through a new assessment process.

### **28 June 2010**

Iain Duncan Smith suggests disabled people are to blame for planned cuts to Disability Living Allowance.

### **September 2010**

DWP fails in its legal duty to respond to the Stephen Carré prevention of future deaths report.

### **October 2010**

Mad Pride protest against the coalition government's "savage" welfare cuts.

### **3 October 2010**

Launch of Disabled People Against Cuts.

### **6 October 2010**

Prime minister adds to "benefit scrounger" rhetoric aimed at claimants of incapacity benefit

### **6 October 2010**

Coroner Tom Osborne writes to the father of Stephen Carré, saying he has received no "substantive response" to his prevention of future deaths report.

### **23 November 2010**

Professor Malcolm Harrington publishes his first independent review of the Work Capability Assessment, finding that the system is "impersonal" but not "broken" (later evidence would emerge that he had not been informed by DWP of the coroner's report for Stephen Carré.)

### **1 Dec 2010**

The Sun publishes interview with Iain Duncan Smith on “Benefits Britain”.

## **2011**

Calum’s List website is created as a memorial page to remember “welfare reform deaths”.

### **January 2011**

Daily Mail article wrongly claims that 400,000 disabled benefit claimants were “trying it on”, and that 94 per cent of new claimants are able to work.

### **June 2011**

Publication of “Getting In, Staying In and Getting On: Disability Employment Support Fit for the Future” recommending end to government subsidies for Remploy factories and producing disagreement within the disabled people’s movement.

### **15 June 2011**

David Cameron says the work capability assessment is necessary to stop “bad behaviour”.

### **25 September 2011**

Labour’s shadow secretary of state for Work and Pensions claims Labour lost the 2010 election because it was not seen as tough enough on welfare.

### **3 October 2011**

Iain Duncan Smith tells Conservative party conference that incapacity benefit is abused and open to fraud.

### **October 2011**

Insurance provider Unum denies it will profit from incapacity benefit reform.

### **27 October 2011**

BBC broadcasts *The Future State of Welfare*, which mirrors government rhetoric, and uses faulty data, about the work capability assessment system.

### **October 2011**

Research shows a 'significant increase' in the number of negative stories about disabled people in national newspapers over the last six years.

### **October 2011**

Pat's Petition, asking the DWP to stop changes to benefits, is submitted on the UK Government's website.

### **November 2011**

Evidence emerges of Unum's influence on UK welfare reform.

### **November 2011**

Professor Harrington publishes his second review of the WCA.

## **31 December 2011**

The death of Ms DE (Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland later launches an investigation into her death).

## **2012**

Research report evidences “influence of politicians’ rhetoric” in increasing stigma against benefit claimants.

## **9 January 2012**

Report finds government misled parliament over opposition to disability living allowance reform, and Spartacus Network is launched.

## **28 January 2012**

Disabled activists and allies stage direct action protest at the government’s welfare reform bill.

## **1 February 2012**

DWP begins to collect peer reviews (the secret reports it carries out into the deaths of benefit claimants) centrally for the first time.

## **1 February 2012**

Commons invokes financial privilege to pass the Welfare Reform Act 2012, quashing Lords amendments to soften changes to the benefits system.

## **1 March 2012**

MPs and peers warn of cumulative impact of Disability Living Allowance and Personal Independence payments (DLA/PIP) reforms on disabled people.

## **8 March 2012**

Welfare Reform Act, which introduces changes that will profoundly impact disabled people and contribute to multiple deaths, receives royal assent.

## **2 April 2012**

Mind chief executive resigns from Work Capability Assessment (WCA) review scrutiny panel, arguing that the assessment process “isn’t working”.

## **1 May 2012**

Scottish GP tells Scottish parliament that the death of Paul Reekie was caused by the UK government’s welfare reforms.

## **June 2012**

Doctors vote to end the work capability assessment (WCA), thanks to lobbying from disabled activists.

## **8 June 2012**

The death of Karen Sherlock, 2 weeks after she was told she would be eligible once again to receive employment and support allowance (ESA).

## **20 June 2012**

Email leaked from Jobcentre managers to staff after a claimant attempts suicide after being told his sickness benefit would be cut off.

## **26 July 2012**

High court grants permission for two disabled people (backed by the Mental Health Resistance Network) to bring a judicial review claim, about the work capability assessment (WCA), against the work and pensions secretary.

## **30 July 2012**

Two investigative documentaries about Atos and the work capability assessment (WCA) are broadcast on the same night, showing evidence of target driven assessment culture.

## **August 2012**

Disabled activists target Atos at London 2012 Paralympics, including delivering a coffin to Atos's headquarters to represent those who have died after being found "fit to work".

## **August 2012**

Survey finds negative press coverage of disabled people, supported by government in order to justify cuts, is increasing, contributing to disability hate crime.

### **13 September 2012**

MP raises concerns over the death of Colin Traynor, whose family say they “hold the Government...personally responsible”.

### **25 September 2012**

The death of Edward Jacques, a week after his Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) was stopped, which his family say was a major “trigger”. The coroner raises issues with the assessment process, specifically the failure to get medical evidence.

### **27 September 2012**

The death of Brian McArdle, the day after he was deemed “fit to work” following a work capability assessment (WCA).

### **8 October 2012**

George Osborne refers to welfare claimants as “sleeping off a life on benefits” in speech to Conservative party conference.

### **November 2012**

WOW Petition Campaign, created by disabled people and building on Pat’s Petition, calls for a cumulative impact assessment of welfare reforms

### **19 November 2012**

DWP suggests that providing further medical evidence would be too heavy a burden on GPs.

### **15 November 2012**

The Spartacus Network publishes the People's Review of the Work Capability Assessment, documenting links between being found "fit for work" and people's deaths.

### **20 November 2012**

Professor Harrington publishes his third review of the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) (he is still unaware of DWP peer reviews into people's deaths and of the Stephen Carré prevention of future deaths report.)

### **22 November 2012**

Iain Duncan Smith questioned over benefit-related deaths on BBC Question Time.

### **26 November 2012**

Joseph Rowntree Foundation publishes report on the impact of welfare reform on poverty and exclusion, criticising DWP for failing to assess the overall impact of its welfare reforms.

### **30 November 2012**

House of Commons Library sums up concerns about the Work Capability Assessment (WCA) in a briefing document

## **2013**

Linda Wootton dies nine days after DWP upholds its decision to declare her “fit for work”. Her death is one of the first to be linked publicly to the Work Capability Assessment (WCA).

### **17 January 2013**

Commons debate on work capability assessment (WCA) and Atos, including mention that the DWP has been asked to record the number of cases of suicide connected with the WCA but has refused. Many MPs share examples of harm caused to their own constituents.

### **23 February 2013**

Research by DPAC activist exposes how DWP under-estimated how many people should be found not fit for work.

### **April 2013**

Thinktank Demos show that disabled people will be hit by up to 13 different cuts and risk losing a total of £28.3 billion in income support by 2018.

### **April 2013**

Launch of new personal independence payment (PIP).

### **April 2013**

DWP introduces mandatory reconsiderations – a new internal appeal stage for benefits.

## **April 2013**

The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO) comes into effect, introducing funding cuts to legal aid.

## **6 April 2013**

David Cameron tells The Sun that the welfare system has “lost its way” and become a “lifestyle choice for some”.

## **4 May 2013**

The death of Stephanie Bottrill - her suicide note blames the government’s “bedroom tax”

## **16 May 2013**

Former Atos assessor blows the whistle on unfair practices, saying the DWP is the “real culprit”.

## **22 May 2013**

Judgement on work capability assessment court case brought by the Mental Health Resistance Network.

## **20 July 2013**

The death of David Clapson, three weeks after having his jobseeker’s allowance sanctioned.

## **9 August 2013**

The death of Mark Wood after being found ineligible for Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

### **23 August 2013**

The death of David Barr, a month after the confirmation of the decision to find him fit for work, which his Father says was the trigger leading to his suicide.

### **11 September 2013**

“Shocking” bedroom tax should be axed, says UN investigator, who reported that the most vulnerable were being affected, with some talking about suicide.

### **24 September 2013**

The death of Michael O’Sullivan after being found fit for work.

### **25 September 2013**

The death of Tim Salter after being found fit for work. A coroner later ruled that a major factor in his death was the reduction in his benefits.

### **28 September 2013**

10,000 Cuts and Counting event in Parliament Square to remember the thousands of disabled people who have died shortly after a Work Capability Assessment (WCA).

### **October 2013**

Peter Lilley, security secretary in John Major's government and one of the architects of the Work Capability Assessment, says he has "no regrets" and denies insurance industry influence.

### **11 October 2013**

DPAC co-founders persuade the UN disability committee to carry out an investigation into the UK under the optional protocol of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

### **12 October 2013**

Rachel Reeves, the new shadow secretary of state for work and pensions, says Labour would be tougher on welfare than the coalition.

### **5 November 2013**

The UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights condemns "intrusive" Work Capability Assessment and the demonization of poor people as undeserving.

### **December 2013**

The Spartacus Network leads the Second People's Review of the Work Capability Assessment, including accounts of deaths linked to being found fit for work.

### **December 2013**

Publication of fourth independent review of the Work Capability Assessment – with no mention of deaths or suicides.

#### **4 December 2013**

Court of Appeal upholds ruling that the Work Capability Assessment discriminates against some disabled people.

#### **4 December 2013**

Despite Court of Appeal ruling that the Work Capability Assessment discriminates against people with mental health conditions, the DWP tells senior civil servants it is “business as usual”.

#### **7 January 2014**

Inquest into the death of Michael O’Sullivan, where the Coroner concludes that the trigger for Michael O’Sullivan’s suicide was his assessment as being fit for work, and writes a prevention of future deaths report to DWP, saying that “there is a risk that future deaths will occur unless action is taken”.

#### **30 January 2014**

Managing editor of the Sun appointed director of communications at DWP.

#### **19 February 2014**

Activists deliver letter to British Medical Association about its members’ opposition to the work capability assessment.

#### **27 February 2014**

War on Welfare (WOW) petition secures debate in House of Commons.

### **March 2014**

The Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland publishes a report into the death of Ms DE, finding that the process and denial of Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) were a major factor in her suicide.

### **March 2014**

Atos pull out of contract with the DWP to deliver the work capability assessment due to reputational and profitability issues.

### **July 2014**

Launch of New Approach campaign and release of work capability assessment report – finding the process “abusive” and “inhumane”.

### **7 July 2014**

Labour peer highlights “devastating” impact of legal aid changes, which remove access to justice for the poorest and most vulnerable.

### **13 August 2014**

DWP data shows increase in use of sanctions against Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants.

### **22 August 2014**

DWP questioned about what records they keep of deaths linked to the benefits system.

### **30 September 2014**

Welfare rights expert and campaigner Nick Dilworth tells newspaper about the “toxic” Work Capability Assessment, and links to deaths.

### **Late September 2014**

The new Conservative minister for disabled people insists DWP is right to ignore reports of deaths linked to benefits.

### **Early October 2014**

Liberal Democrat Pensions minister contradicts his Tory colleague over records kept on deaths linked to benefits.

### **13 October 2014**

DWP admits for the first time that it carries out investigations into some deaths of claimants.

### **13 October 2014**

First freedom of information request into DWP reviews into deaths of benefit claimants.

### **7 November 2014**

Faiza Ahmed (known to her family as Sophie) dies by suicide, hours after telling a jobcentre work coach that she was suicidal. Her brother would later talk about sanctions as “horrific” and racist.

### **10 November 2014**

DWP questioned over how many coroner’s letters about benefits-related deaths it has received in past 10 years.

### **10 November 2014**

DWP admits in a Freedom of Information response that it has carried out 60 peer reviews into deaths of benefits claimants.

### **November 2014**

Paul Litchfield publishes fifth and final independent review of the work capability assessment, with no mention of the DWP’s own reviews into deaths of claimants.

### **27 November 2014**

Employment minister says there is no formal policy to liaise with agencies after a sanction.

### **12 December 2014**

DWP delays responding to freedom of information request on peer reviews into deaths of benefits claimants.

### **January 2015**

Labour MP speaks of “core visits” procedures, which are supposed to be followed when a “vulnerable” person is sanctioned.

## **2 February 2015**

A man (name kept anonymous) dies by suicide after being rejected for both Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).

## **19 February 2015**

DWP refuses to release the peer reviews it has carried out in relation to deaths of benefits claimants.

## **19 February 2015**

DWP admits that 40 of the 49 peer reviews into the deaths of benefit claimants it has carried out were in response to suicides.

## **2 March 2015**

Channel 4 reports that most peer reviews included recommendations for improvements.

## **March 2015**

The death of Sheila Holt, following a work capability assessment.

## **March 2015**

Psychologists Against Austerity say austerity policies are causing mental health problems.

## **2 March 2015**

Maximus takes over from Atos as provider of work capability assessments, sparking protests.

## **12 March 2015**

Dismissal of further medical evidence case on the work capability assessment and discrimination, but upper tribunal administrative appeals chamber criticises minister.

## **17 March 2015**

Rachel Reeves, Labour's shadow secretary of state for work and pensions, says: "We are not the party of people on benefits."

## **18 March 2015**

The Commons work and pensions select committee calls for new independent body to investigate deaths of benefit claimants.

## **April 2015**

DWP examines its flawed peer review process, finding deep flaws.

## **16 April 2015**

Changes to incapacity benefits described "as the biggest single social policy failure of the last 15 years".

## **7 May 2015**

Conservatives win overall majority at general election.

## **8 May 2015**

DWP admits that 10 of the 49 claimants whose deaths were examined by peer reviews had had their benefits sanctioned.

## **19 May 2015**

DWP raises issues with sanctions and safeguarding of vulnerable claimants by the companies delivering its Work Programme.

## **29 May 2015**

Title: The death of Luke Alexander Loy, three months after being found fit for work and sanctioned. His sister said “he died as a result of Tory cuts”.

## **2 June 2015**

Freedom of information request reveals that 22 of the 49 peer reviews into deaths of claimants involved someone claiming employment and support allowance (ESA).

## **26 June 2015**

DWP says coroners’ letters expressing concern about the deaths of benefit claimants are not handled by a specific official, revealing no centralised process for accountability.

## **10 July 2015**

Information Commissioner rejects complaint about DWP refusal to release peer reviews, supporting DWP’s’ response that this would breach data protection.

## **20 July 2015**

John McDonnell voices strong opposition to welfare reform and work bill.

## **22 July 2015**

Survey shows that “benefit scrounger rhetoric” is causing disability hate crime.

## **August 2015**

The death of Moira Drury, after the removal of her employment and support allowance (ESA).

## **10 August 2015**

The death of Frances McCormack. She left a note linking her hardship to the “bedroom tax”.

## **27 August 2015**

DWP publish statistics on how many people died while claiming out-of-work benefits.

## **29 August 2015**

The death of Alan McArdle, an hour after being told that DWP was threatening to sanction him - stopping his employment and support allowance (ESA).

## **18 September 2015**

First coroner's report to link work capability assessment (WCA) with the death of a person claiming benefits - Michael O'Sullivan.

### **6 October 2015**

Iain Duncan Smith tells claimants to "work your way out of poverty".

### **13 October 2015**

Priti Patel denies causality between sanctions and suicides.

### **14 October 2015**

Mother of Mark Wood (who died after being found ineligible for employment and support allowance (ESA)) gives evidence to UN committee.

### **15 October 2015**

Disability News Service appeals to the First-Tier Tribunal over the information commissioner's decision to reject its peer review complaint (allowing reviews to remain unpublished).

### **21 October 2015**

Prime minister David Cameron is asked about the death of Michael O'Sullivan.

### **23 October 2015**

Ministry of Justice releases Stephen Carré prevention of future deaths (PFD) report.

## **28 October 2015**

David Cameron asked about peer reviews into deaths of people claiming benefits.

## **28 October 2015**

New Welfare reform and work bill has its first reading in parliament.

## **November 2015**

The death of Paul Donnachie, after his employment and support allowance (ESA) is removed.

## **12 November 2015**

Professor Harrington (who carried out the first three independent reviews of the WCA for DWP) says he was not shown Stephen Carré prevention of future deaths (PFD) report.

## **16 November 2015**

Research (initiated by disabled activists and allies) shows links between Work Capability Assessments and suicides.

## **December 2015**

DWP, in guidance to healthcare professionals working for Maximus, changes suicide from a “definitive” “substantial risk” if forced into work, to something that should be weighed against ‘benefits of employment’.

### **11 December 2015**

Mental health experts describe how “ruthless” DWP forced through Work Capability Assessments despite knowing of harm.

### **8 January 2016**

National Audit Office (NAO) publishes report on disability assessments and private contractors.

### **20 January 2016**

Coroner publishes prevention of future deaths (PFD) report into death of Sophie/Faiza, calling for DWP to take action to prevent further deaths.

### **28 January 2016**

Title: Ministry of Justice refuses to investigate DWP’s failure to respond to Stephen Carré prevention of future deaths (PFD) report.

### **16 March 2016**

Welfare Reform and Work Act receives royal assent.

### **3 March 2016**

Information Rights Tribunal hears Disability news Service case against the information commissioner over its finding that DWP did not need to release peer reviews into the deaths of benefit claimants.

### **17 March 2016**

Labour former work and pensions secretary says she “never saw” Stephen Carré PFD report.

### **20 March 2016**

Iain Duncan Smith accuses government of deliberately attacking disabled people through “indefensible” cuts because “they don’t vote for us”.

### **23 March 2016**

Disabled activists ask Scottish police to investigate ministers over work capability assessment (WCA) deaths.

### **April 2016**

DWP sends out reminder to staff about six-point suicide prevention plan.

### **April 2016**

Capita faces fresh calls to be stripped of personal independence payment (PIP) contracts after release of Channel 4 undercover footage.

### **11 April 2016**

The Information Rights Tribunal rules DWP must release redacted versions of peer reviews.

### **12 May 2016**

DWP releases redacted versions of 49 peer reviews, showing that ministers were repeatedly warned that policies were putting the lives of “vulnerable” claimants at risk.

### **18 May 2016**

Scottish National Party (SNP) MP Deidre Brock backs calls to prosecute Iain Duncan Smith and Chris Grayling for their failure to make the work capability assessment (WCA) safe.

### **19 May 2016**

The death of Susan Roberts, after being told she had lost a benefit appeal.

### **19 May 2016**

John McDonnell supports calls to prosecute Iain Duncan Smith.

### **22 May 2016**

The film “I, Daniel Blake” (about the unfairness of the work capability assessment) wins the Cannes Palme d’Or.

### **June 2016**

Recovery in The Bin runs Benefits Defence workshops – upskilling disabled people to defend themselves from the welfare system.

### **5 June 2016**

DWP figures shows that of the 49 peer reviews into deaths of people claiming benefits, 18 of the people who had died by suicide had been claiming employment and support allowance (ESA).

#### **4 August 2016**

Jobcentre Plus (JCP) worker caught making racist comments on the phone.

#### **30 August 2016**

New reviews into deaths of people claiming benefits show DWP staff keep failing to follow suicide guidelines.

#### **September 2016**

Changes to DWP guidance (including regulation 35) on safety and risk lead to sharp fall in claimants placed in employment and support allowance (ESA) support group, and increase in number of people found 'fit for work'.

#### **13 September 2016**

Freedom of information battle with DWP finds Maximus memo on suicide guidance and medical evidence was sent a few days after the existence of the Michael O'Sullivan prevention of future deaths report was first revealed.

#### **October 2016**

Iain Duncan Smith denies responsibility for work capability assessment (WCA) deaths.

## **October 2016**

DWP publishes Improving Lives: The Work, Health and Disability Green Paper.

## **November 2016**

Disabled activists declare ‘war’ on Mind after links exposed to DWP.

### **6 November 2016**

Government leaks UN committee on the rights of persons with disabilities report to Mail on Sunday in attempt to discredit its findings.

### **7 November 2016**

UN report concludes DWP is guilty of “grave” and “systematic” violations of disabled people.

### **30 November 2016**

The National Audit Office says DWP is not doing enough to understand how sanctions affect people on benefits.

### **30 November 2016**

Psychotherapy organisations express concern about the impact of sanctions on mental health.

## **December 2016**

Scottish criminal justice agencies reject request to launch criminal investigation into links between DWP and the death of David Barr.

**16 December 2016**

DWP admits it carried out seven peer reviews while Harrington was investigating the work capability assessment (WCA).

**19 December 2016**

Professor Harrington believes he was never shown work capability assessment (WCA) related peer reviews into claimants' deaths.

**12 January 2017**

The death of Lawrence Bond, hours after visiting jobcentre.

**February 2017**

Green party sends dossier of 50 deaths of benefit claimants to DWP, calling for an inquiry.

**February 2017**

Report by Mental Health and Unemployment in Scotland finds that the work capability assessment (WCA) has a negative impact on mental health.

**21 February 2017**

The death of Jodey Whiting, after being found fit for work, despite telling the DWP about her suicidal thoughts.

## **21 February 2017**

Public accounts committee report urges DWP to review the use of sanctions.

## **22 February 2017**

DWP tells the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) that it does not keep track of peer review recommendations.

## **14 March 2017**

DPAC and Inclusion London respond to UN report, raising the connection between benefit changes, people's deaths and Government failures.

## **20 April 2017**

DWP admits peer review process lacked "robust governance".

## **21 April 2017**

The death of Diane Hullah, linked to anxiety caused by the personal independence payment (PIP) application process.

## **10 May 2017**

DWP "has gone back on promise" to address work capability assessment (WCA) further medical evidence flaw.

## **24 May 2017**

Inquest into the death of Jodey Whiting fails to investigate DWP's potential role in her death.

## **26 July 2017**

The death of Mark Barber, shortly after learning his disability benefits would be cut. Coroner mentions stress linked to reassessment for disability benefits.

## **August 2017**

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities committee says government cuts caused “human catastrophe”.

## **August 2017**

Title: DWP data shows some groups are at substantially higher risk of experiencing a jobseekers allowance (JSA) sanction.

## **3 August 2017**

Disability News Service investigates allegations of professionals’ dishonesty in benefits assessments outsourced to Capita and Atos.

## **31 August 2017**

UN demands UK government provide an annual UK progress report on correcting “grave and systematic violations”.

## **31 August 2017**

Portraying UK disabled people as “parasites” could lead to “violence and killings”, says UN chair.

## **October 2017**

Work and pensions secretary David Gauke admits sanctions can harm claimants with mental health issues.

### **12 October 2017**

Government downplays UN disability committee concerns about the UK.

### **10 November 2017**

WinVisible submits evidence to the Commons work and pensions select committee about how assessment regime causes disabled women “terrifying insecurity”, including links to suicides and deaths.

### **16 November 2017**

Government inquiry into benefits assessment processes receives unprecedented number of submissions.

### **December 2017**

Mental health charity Rethink publishes report on how the work capability assessment (WCA) discriminates against people with mental illness.

### **14 December 2017**

Department of Health’s national suicide prevention strategy fails to warn NHS of the suicide risk associated with employment and support allowance (ESA).

### **14 December 2017**

NHS statistics on the link between employment and support allowance and suicide prompt calls for inquiry and prosecution of ministers.

### **20 December 2017**

MPs refuse to question minister for disabled people over statistics showing link between employment and support allowance and suicide.

### **21 December 2017**

The high court rules that changes to personal independence payment (PIP) regulations were unlawful and discriminate against disabled people.

### **14 March 2018**

The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) research shows cumulative impact of tax and welfare reforms on disabled people.

### **25 January 2018**

DWP decides not to trial softer sanctions regime, despite this being recommended by the Commons public accounts committee.

### **14 February 2018**

The Commons work and pensions committee finds assessment system is undermined by “pervasive culture of mistrust”.

## **20 February 2018**

Research shows that benefit sanctions regime discriminates against disabled people claiming jobseeker's allowance (JSA).

## **16 April 2018**

Pensions secretary Esther McVey heckled over death of Jodey Whiting.

## **18 April 2018**

Government responds to work and pensions committee's report on assessments process.

## **21 May 2018**

DWP "has no record" of whether it showed documents about deaths related to work capability assessments to reviewer.

## **June 2018**

Research published from five-year study into welfare conditionality, findings include link between sanctions and deaths, including suicide.

## **20 June 2018**

The death of Errol Graham, months after DWP wrongly stopped his employment and support allowance (ESA), and failed to seek further medical evidence.

## **19 July 2018**

Four opposition parties demand DWP answers over work capability assessment deaths “cover-up”.

## **September 2018**

Production of A Very Queer Nazi Faust by disabled artist Vince Laws, highlights deaths linked to disability benefits cuts.

## **17 September 2018**

Number of DWP investigations (internal process reviews) into deaths of people claiming benefits double in two years.

## **26 September 2018**

Scottish government sets out plans to bring benefit assessments in-house.

## **27 September 2018**

Joy Dove, Jodey Whiting’s mother, vows to fight on for Justice for Jodey.

## **October 2018**

Research shows that sanctions system has a “significantly detrimental” effect on mental health.

## **October 2018**

Citizens Advice signs £51 million contract with DWP.

## **18 October 2018**

The new “minister for suicide prevention” evades questions on statistics showing links between employment and support allowance (ESA) and suicide.

## **25 October 2018**

Disabled people’s organisations (DPOs) submit report to UN, finding government failings in upholding the rights of disabled people.

## **November 2018**

The sister of a man with learning difficulties says his death was caused by his move onto the government’s “chaotic” universal credit system.

## **6 November 2018**

Commons work and pensions committee calls for an end to sanctioning disabled people.

## **16 November 2018**

UN rapporteur says government has ‘inflicted great misery’ on disabled people.

## **18 November 2018**

The death of Roy Curtis, six days after being asked to attend a face-to-face work capability assessment (WCA).

## **19 December 2018**

Second backbench WOW campaign debate hears of “hostile” and “dehumanising” benefits assessment system.

## **15 January 2019**

Watchdog report shows introduction of personal independence payment (PIP) led to spending rise rather than intended fall.

## **22 January 2019**

Ministers fail to include DWP in cross-government suicide prevention plan, despite evidence linking suicides with disability benefits assessment system.

## **1 February 2019**

DWP figures show thousands died after having personal independence payment (PIP) claims rejected.

## **21 February 2019**

DWP failed five times to follow safeguarding rules before Jodey Whiting’s suicide.

## **March 2019**

Work and pensions secretary Amber Rudd launches Health Transformation Programme – to reform assessment processes.

## **11 March 2019**

DWP figures suggest deaths linked to the work capability assessment (WCA) may have fallen.

**8 March 2019**

NHS call for government action on link between mental distress and benefit cuts.

**13 March 2019**

Prime minister Theresa May questioned about death of Jodey Whiting.

**15 March 2019**

Six families back petition to MPs calling for inquiry into DWP benefit deaths.

**21 March 2019**

DWP admits it keeps no record of complaints linked to deaths submitted to the Independent Case Examiner.

**25 March 2019**

DWP withholds documents on benefits-related deaths from work capability assessment (WCA) review team.

**28 March 2019**

Secret recording of face-to-face benefits assessment shows Capita assessor lying about woman's thoughts of suicide.

## **April 2019**

The death of James Oliver, a few months after DWP's refusal to grant him personal independence payment (PIP).

### **4 April 2019**

DWP admits destroying report on safety failures in jobcentres.

### **8 April 2019**

DWP responds to Justice for Jodey Whiting petition, saying it has "no plans" to hold an independent inquiry into deaths linked to its actions.

### **15 April 2019**

The death of Stephen Smith, following an 18-month battle with DWP over being found fit for work.

## **May 2019**

DPAC report on severe impact of universal credit, including links to suicide.

### **2 May 2019**

Responses to freedom of information requests show DWP and assessors fail to refer claimants at risk of harm to social services.

### **6 June 2019**

MP Debbie Abrahams asks the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to investigate why evidence about deaths

linked to the work capability assessment (WCA) was withheld from independent reviews.

### **10 May 2019**

Senior judges rule to lower the standard of proof in determining suicide.

### **4 July 2019**

Minister questioned over failure to pass evidence about deaths linked to the work capability assessment (WCA) to independent reviewer.

### **22 July 2019**

Mother of Jodey Whiting takes part in protest about benefits-related deaths outside DWP with Dolly Sen.

### **September 2019 (to November 2019)**

Art and Protest exhibition includes works about benefit cuts and deaths.

### **4 September 2019**

DWP secures funding to set up an independent panel to examine cases where its own failings have led to the deaths of benefit claimants.

### **12 September 2019**

Independent Case Examiner raises concerns about DWP not following safeguarding procedures aimed at protecting “vulnerable” claimants.

### **22 September 2019**

Mother of Jodey Whiting receives standing ovation at Labour fringe event.

### **24 October 2019**

Police admit officers have no guidance about passing on information about protesters to DWP (after two police forces admitted passing information and video footage to DWP about disabled people taking part in protests).

### **16 October 2019**

The death of Philippa Day, after she had been told she would need to attend an assessment centre for a face-to-face appointment to decide her claim for personal independence payment (PIP).

### **Late November 2019**

The death of Christian Wilcox, a few days before he is due to attend an appeal tribunal into DWP’s decision to remove his personal independence payment (PIP).

### **14 November 2019**

Statistics show most disability benefit fraud allegations are false.

## **2 December 2019**

Disability News Service publishes five-year investigation into deaths linked to the work capability assessment (WCA).

## **5 December 2019**

A doctor employed by Atos says DWP put “immense pressure” on Atos to find claimants fit for work.

## **23 January 2020**

The death of Errol Graham receives first publicity (he died in 2018).

## **23 January 2020**

The case of Errol Graham’s death is referred to DWP’s new serious case panel.

## **27 January 2020**

The deaths of Jodey Whiting and Errol Graham mentioned in the Commons.

## **28 January 2020**

DWP admits the serious case panel will not be independent.

## **5 February 2020**

Prime minister Boris Johnson questioned about death of Errol Graham.

## **7 February 2020**

Report by the National Audit Office (NAO) shows DWP misled two watchdogs over deaths and safeguarding.

### **20 February 2020**

The coroner for Errol Graham says she will push DWP on promised safeguarding review (which persuaded her not to submit a prevention of future deaths (PFD) report).

### **20 February 2020**

DWP misled Errol Graham coroner over safeguarding review.

### **21 February 2020**

DWP admits destroying pre-2015 peer reviews into suicides and other deaths of benefit claimants.

### **5 March 2020**

Chair of the work and pensions committee asks work and pensions secretary questions about NAO report.

### **20 March 2020**

Work and pensions secretary responds to questions from Chair of the work and pensions committee, telling him about DWP's new "Service Excellence Directorate", including funding for safeguarding and clarifying purpose of internal process reviews (IPRs).

### **25 June 2020**

The Equality and Human Rights Commission says it will not carry out inquiry into links between DWP and the deaths of disabled claimants.

### **16 July 2020**

Coroner's prevention of future deaths report into death of Faiza Ahmed is made public, showing jobcentre's failings contributed to her death.

### **16 July 2020**

Family of Errol Graham win right to court challenge on DWP safeguarding.

### **22 July 2020**

Work and pensions secretary speaks about serious case panel and safeguarding.

### **22 July 2020**

DWP permanent secretary gives evidence to work and pensions committee on safeguarding and internal process reviews (IPRs).

### **30 July 2020**

Chair of the work and pensions committee writes to work and pensions secretary asking for further information about DWP plans to improve safeguarding.

### **September 2020**

Work and pensions secretary denies DWP has duty of care or statutory safeguarding responsibilities for people claiming benefits.

### **8 September 2020**

New DWP figures show that, in just two years, 1,700 disabled people died within three months of having their claim for personal independence payment (PIP) rejected.

### **23 September 2020**

Dolly Sen “sections” DWP for being “a danger to benefit claimants” - driving many claimants to their deaths.

### **29 September 2020**

Work and pensions secretary outlines DWP’s revised guidance on home visits procedures, while again saying the department has no duty of care.

### **30 September 2020**

Work and pensions secretary again tells the Commons work and pensions select committee that DWP has no duty of care.

### **11 November 2020**

The family of Jodey Whiting are granted permission to ask the high court to order a second inquest into Jodey’s death.

### **27 November 2020**

Former work and pensions secretary admits harsh benefit cuts were responsible for rising poverty.

### **30 November 2020**

DWP refuses to release recommendations made by its internal process reviews (from between April 2019 and November 2020) into the deaths of benefit claimants.

### **30 November 2020**

Newly-released internal process reviews show that a number of suicides between 2014 and 2019 were linked to DWP staff's failure to follow suicide guidance.

### **4 December 2020**

Coroner Tom Osborne files a Prevention of Future Deaths report on the death of Roy Curtis, but the DWP is not mentioned.

### **10 December 2020**

Coroner's silence over why DWP did not give evidence at Roy Curtis inquest.

### **17 December 2020**

New analysis of figures suggests DWP is failing to investigate hundreds of suicides of benefits claimants.

### **21 December 2020**

High court is asked to order second inquest into death of Jodey Whiting.

### **13 January 2021**

High court hears evidence from family of Errol Graham in judicial review hearing.

### **14 January 2021**

Disability News Service wins ground-breaking legal fight with DWP, over the draft internal process review that was drawn up by DWP following the death of Philippa Day.

### **27 January 2021**

Coroner at Philippa Day's inquest finds flawed personal independence payment (PIP) system led to her death.

### **3 February 2021**

Work and pensions secretary avoids questions on Philippa Day death.

### **26 December 2020**

The death of Philip Pakree, after distress caused by an upcoming work capability assessment (WCA).

### **11 February 2021**

Secret report (from 2014) casts doubt on DWP's claim that it has no duty of care.

## **22 February 2021**

Report from the all-party parliamentary group on health in all policies, says 2016 welfare reforms had devastating impact on disabled people, and calls for inquiry into deaths of benefit claimants.

## **2021**

Release of The Right to Record – artwork and political campaign on recording personal independence payment (PIP) assessments.

## **3 March 2021**

Errol Graham’s family lose judicial review claim, with the high court rejecting claim that DWP acted unlawfully by not making further enquiries about Errol Graham’s mental health before it cut off his employment and support allowance (ESA).

## **9 March 2021**

Minister for welfare delivery admits “deficit” in tracking “vulnerable claimants” through the universal credit (UC) system.

## **26 March 2021**

Research shows testimony from DWP staff admitting inflicting “psychological harm” on claimants to meet unofficial sanctioning targets during coalition years.

## **21 April 2021**

House of Commons briefing paper on suicide prevention mentions benefits-related deaths.

### **May 2021**

Publication of The Brown Envelope Book, evidencing the brutal welfare system from those with lived experience.

### **20 May 2021**

Pre-2016 internal guidance for DWP staff suggests DWP have duty of care to benefits claimants.

### **June 2021**

Publication of DWP and Capita responses to Philippa Day prevention of future death (PFD) report.

### **22 and 23 June 2021**

High court hears bid for second inquest into death of Jodey Whiting.

### **July 2021**

Bereaved families write to work and pensions secretary to demand a public inquiry into benefits-related deaths.

### **1 July 2021**

The mother of Ker Featherstone describes how he took his own life, just weeks after DWP cut his personal independence payment (PIP).

## **20 July 2021**

DWP publishes Shaping Future Support - health and disability green paper - failing to mention the internal process reviews carried out by the DWP following deaths of claimants.

## **12 August 2021**

DWP figures reveal sharp rise in internal process reviews into the deaths of benefit claimants.

## **16 September 2021**

The Equality and Human Rights Commission says government has made no progress on improving the way its social security system protects the rights of disabled people, and that disability benefits assessment system have led to “the deaths of a number of benefit claimants”.

## **17 September 2021**

Judges reject attempt by Joy Dove, the mother of Jodey Whiting, to secure a second inquest into her daughter’s death, saying that individual mistakes, not systemic failings, led to death.

## **3 October 2021**

Work and pensions secretary signals new bid to try to push more disabled people with high support needs into work.

## **4 October 2021**

The new minister for disabled people says addressing DWP's legacy of distrust and distress "is a big priority".

### **7 October 2021**

Mother of Jodey Whiting fights on for justice with appeal against a court's ruling that there should not be a second inquest into her daughter's death.

### **8 October 2021**

Bereaved families meet at launch of benefit deaths digital exhibition The Museum of Austerity.

### **November 2021**

Capita agrees to compensate Philippa Day's family for failings leading to her death.

### **4 November 2021**

Jodey Whiting legal fight continues with fresh request for permission to appeal against a high court ruling that there was no need for a second inquest.

### **11 November 2021**

Families outraged after government hands award to DWP safeguarding team for "outstanding contribution".

*The timeline stops here only for now. We welcome entries after this date, and our aim is for the timeline to be ongoing.*



# Deaths by Welfare (Full Timeline)

## **1 September 1971**

Title: Introduction of Invalidity Benefit for people who had to leave their trade or occupation after sustaining an injury or developing a long-term illness

What: Keith Joseph, then Secretary of State at the Department of Health and Social Security of Edward Heath's Government, introduced Invalidity Benefit in the National Insurance Act 1971. It was paid to people who had been invalidated out of their trade or occupation after sustaining an injury or developing a long-term illness. (It would be replaced by Incapacity Benefit in 1995).

Why significant: First move in paying claimants on the principle of being forced to leave trade or occupation due to injury or long term illness.

Links:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Invalidity\\_Benefit#:~:text=Invalidity%20Benefit%20was%20a%20benefit,developing%20a%20long%20term%20illness](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Invalidity_Benefit#:~:text=Invalidity%20Benefit%20was%20a%20benefit,developing%20a%20long%20term%20illness)

## **31 March 1979**

Title: First figures showing number of people on Invalidity and Sickness Benefit

What: Government releases first figures for total number of people on Invalidity and Sickness Benefit - calculated at 586,000 claimants (some of them only receive national insurance credits).  
Why significant: These figures are released annually after 1979. By 31 March 1995, the number of claimants on Invalidity Benefit will rise to 2,142,000.

Link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/benefit-expenditure-and-caseload-tables-2020>

## **28<sup>th</sup> November 1983**

Title: Invalidity Benefit regulations introduced requiring a doctor's certificate

What: New regulations allow for a claimant to receive invalidity benefit and 'abstain from work' if certified by a doctor 'for precautionary or convalescent reasons' caused by 'disease or disablement'

Why significant: Shows GPs' key role in the invalidity benefit process

Link:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1983/1598/regulation/3/made>

## **Autumn 1992**

Title: Peter Lilley (secretary of state for social security) talks about "closing down the something for nothing society" and tightening up on "scroungers" and "bogus asylum seekers"

What: Peter Lilley (secretary of state for social security in John Major's Conservative government between 1992 and 1997) addresses the Conservative Party conference, saying he's "closing down the something for nothing society". He goes on to say "we are not in the business of subsidising scroungers", and talks about "tightening up on bogus asylum seekers".

Why significant: This shows that as [early as the autumn of 1992](#) ministers were looking at ways to cut Invalidity benefit. Peter Lilley will go on to work with the private insurance industry [see 1994 'Unum's influence'] to reduce claimant numbers. The language of 'scroungers' would become key in the future dehumanisation of welfare claimants.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FOx8q3eGq3g> and mentioned in footnote 32 of

[https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1468-2230.1995.tb02028.x#:~:text=The%20Social%20Security%20\(Incapacity%20for%20Work\)%20Act%201994%20is%20the,less%20generous%20benefit%2C%20incapacity%20benefit](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1468-2230.1995.tb02028.x#:~:text=The%20Social%20Security%20(Incapacity%20for%20Work)%20Act%201994%20is%20the,less%20generous%20benefit%2C%20incapacity%20benefit)

## **6 April 1992**

Title: Introduction of disability living allowance, enabling more disabled people able to claim support for some of their extra impairment-related costs

What: The introduction of Disability Living Allowance recognises the limitations of the existing disability benefits - attendance allowance and mobility allowance - for some groups of disabled people. The new benefit is not taxed, not means-tested, and is

only for those who first become disabled before they reach the age of 65.

Why significant: The new benefit will see significantly more disabled people able to claim support for some of their extra impairment-related costs.

Link:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1991/2890/introduction/made>

and

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199798/cmselect/cmsocsec/641/64104.htm>

## **10 June 1993**

Title: Leaked Whitehall documents reveal plans to cut Invalidity Benefit

What: A leaked draft letter to the Prime Minister from Peter Lilley (Secretary of State for Social Security) that was accidentally faxed to the Press Association, reveals proposals to make Invalidity Benefit (IVB) [“less generous and make it taxable”](#). The document says a new assessment process will probably “exclude between 10 per cent and 20 per cent of people who would qualify for IVB under existing rules. This would amount to between 30,000 and 60,000 people.”

Why significant: Further evidence of government plans to cut spending on out-of-work disability benefits.

Link:

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/disabled-to-suffer-under-ben>

[efit-cuts-leaked-government-proposals-will-stop-payments-for-60-000-and-tax-the-rest-1490818.html](http://www.bbc.com/news/health-1490818) and [https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1468-2230.1995.tb02028.x#:~:text=The%20Social%20Security%20\(Incapacity%20for%20Work\)%20Act%201994%20is%20the,less%20generous%20benefit%2C%20incapacity%20benefit.](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1468-2230.1995.tb02028.x#:~:text=The%20Social%20Security%20(Incapacity%20for%20Work)%20Act%201994%20is%20the,less%20generous%20benefit%2C%20incapacity%20benefit.)

### **15 June 1993**

Title: John Major says it “beggars belief that so many more people have suddenly become invalids”, laying the foundations for the upcoming Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Bill

What: Then Prime Minister John Major tells the Commons that spending on invalidity benefit has risen from £1.5 billion to more than £6 billion in 10 years. He says: “No responsible Government could ignore an increase of that order. We have a duty to consider whether all that taxpayers’ money is being wisely spent.. ...

Frankly, it beggars belief that so many more people have suddenly become invalids, especially at a time when the health of the population has improved. I make no apologies for looking at this area of expenditure.”

Why significant: This sets the scene for the upcoming Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Bill [see 20<sup>th</sup> January 1994].

Links:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199293/cmhansrd/1993-06-15/Orals-2.html>

### **1994**

Title: US insurance company Unum's advise the UK government on 'welfare reform' to reduce the number of claimants of long-term sickness benefits.

What: Peter Lilley, secretary of state for social security in John Major's Conservative government between 1992 and 1997, hires John LoCascio, a senior executive of US insurance company Unum, to advise the UK government on how to reduce the number of claimants of long-term sickness benefits.

Why significant: Seen by many to be a key step in the development of the UK's approach to 'welfare reform'.

Link:

<https://beastrabban.wordpress.com/2015/04/13/private-eye-from-1995-on-unum-and-peter-lilley-in-the-tory-government/> and

Rutherford 2007

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263217809\\_New\\_Labour\\_the\\_market](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263217809_New_Labour_the_market)

## **20 January 1994**

Title: The Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Bill and research paper published, discussing role of GPs in determining access to benefits

What: The Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Bill and an accompanying research paper are published. The research paper examines the reasons for rising IVB claims. The role of GPs is mentioned numerous times, for example: "Reducing the role of GPs has been a measure designed to assist in restricting access to benefit." But it also suggests that the main cause of increasing

numbers on the benefit is the longer duration of claims. The research paper understates the actual number of disabled people on IVB as it fails to include those who only receive National Insurance credits but do not receive IVB payments.

Why significant: Understating of claimant numbers suggests that the government was not aware of exactly how many disabled people were on IVB. It also shows early discussions about reducing the role of GPs in deciding disabled people's access to benefits (a practice that will be found to be harmful with the later introduction of the Work Capability Assessment).

Links:

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/rp94-13/>

## **5 July 1994**

Title: Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Act 1994 receives royal assent

What: The act is to come into force fully on 13 April 1995.

Why significant: According to barrister, law lecturer and social security tribunal judge Nick Wikeley, the act "[is the most radical piece of social security legislation since the Social Security Act 1986](#)".

Links:

[https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1468-2230.1995.tb02028.x#:~:text=The%20Social%20Security%20\(Incapacity%20for%20Work\)%20Act%201994%20is%20the,less%20generous%20benefit%2C%20incapacity%20benefit](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1468-2230.1995.tb02028.x#:~:text=The%20Social%20Security%20(Incapacity%20for%20Work)%20Act%201994%20is%20the,less%20generous%20benefit%2C%20incapacity%20benefit)

### **13 April 1995**

Title: Key measures from the Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Act 1994 come into force, including replacing Invalidity Benefit with Incapacity Benefit, and introducing the points-based All Work Test, as well as regulation 27 – providing a ‘safety net’ for those who faced a ‘substantial risk’ of harm if they were found capable of work.

What: The act replaces Invalidity Benefit with Incapacity Benefit, and introduces the points-based All Work Test - a significant move towards so-called [Disability Assessment Medicine](#). Its scoring system treats impairments in isolation with no reference to the environment, and [assessment remains subjective while being focused on narrower criteria](#), says social security expert Nick Wikeley. Only a few years previously, in 1991, the government had rejected using a points-based system for assessing entitlement to Disability Living Allowance and largely removed medical assessments, which were seen as ‘humiliating’ and ‘intrusive’, (according to Nick Wikeley). But new regulations did introduce regulation 27, which provided a ‘safety net’ for those who faced a ‘substantial risk’ of harm if they were found capable of work because they do not score enough points on the test. This would be decided by a doctor.

Why significant: The existence of regulation 27 shows government awareness of the substantial risk to mental or physical health in finding some people ‘capable of work’.

Links:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Invalidity\\_Benefit#:~:text=Invalidity%20Benefit%20was%20a%20benefit,developing%20a%20long%20Term%20illness](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Invalidity_Benefit#:~:text=Invalidity%20Benefit%20was%20a%20benefit,developing%20a%20long%20Term%20illness) and

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1995/311/contents/made#mdiv16> and

[https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1468-2230.1995.tb02028.x#:~:text=The%20Social%20Security%20\(Incapacity%20for%20Work\)%20Act%201994%20is%20the,less%20generous%20benefit%20C%20incapacity%20benefit](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1468-2230.1995.tb02028.x#:~:text=The%20Social%20Security%20(Incapacity%20for%20Work)%20Act%201994%20is%20the,less%20generous%20benefit%20C%20incapacity%20benefit)

## **July 1995**

Title: Professor Wikeley publishes paper highlighting the risks of The Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Act 1994, saying that it reaffirms idea of the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor, begins the move away from GP-led benefits assessments, and is designed to encourage people to take up private insurance, leaving marginalised groups with inadequate protection.

What: Nick Wikeley (Professor of Law Southampton University and Upper Tribunal Judge - from 2008 onward) publishes a paper analysing The Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Act 1994, which he says is “[is the most radical piece of social security legislation since the Social Security Act 1986](#)”. He provides a commentary on the legislative changes from Invalidity Benefit to Incapacity Benefit, saying that this ‘represents a significant reduction in the scope of national insurance benefits for long-term sick and disabled people’ (p. 532), and the shift has ‘symbolic importance’ by “reaffirming the division between the ‘deserving’

and the ‘undeserving’ poor” (p. 533). Wikeley shows a shift from 1991, where the government rejected using a points-based system for assessing entitlement to Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and largely removed medical assessments, which were seen as ‘humiliating’ and ‘intrusive’ (Wikeley, 1995, p. 51), to the introduction of the All Work Test in 1994. Here we start to see a move away from GP-led benefits assessments and a rise in the role of ‘disability analyst’, with the government also rejecting suggestions that incapacity benefit appeals should go before the existing medical appeal tribunals (MATs) or disability appeal tribunals (DATs) (Wikeley, 1995, p. 531). He also charts the pre-history of the Act, showing the “the essential framework for the abolition of IVB” was politically crafted (p. 527).

Why significant: Wikeley highlights that the government’s policy is clearly to encourage people to take up private insurance instead of relying on social security and raises concerns that the “withdrawal of State benefits, combined with the problem of adverse selection in the private insurance market, will leave marginal groups with inadequate protection against risks” as they will not be able to “obtain affordable private insurance cover against the risk of serious long-term illness.” Wikeley also shows how the scene is set for the shift away from GP involvement in benefits assessments, as argued later in the same year by Mansel Aylward and John LoCascio (August 1995).

Link: Wikeley, N. (1994). The Social Security (Incapacity for Work) Act 1994. *Modern Law Review*, 58(4): 523-533

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1468-2230.1995.tb>

[02028.x#:~:text=The%20Social%20Security%20\(Incapacity%20for%20Work\)%20Act%201994%20is%20the,less%20generous%20benefit%2C%20incapacity%20benefit.](#)

## **August 1995**

Title: Paper (co-written by US insurance company Unum Vice President, suggests removing GPs from assessing fitness to work.

What: The paper, written by Mansel Aylward and John LoCascio, argues that GPs are not needed when determining people's fitness to work. From 1996 to April 2005 Aylward would be Chief Medical Adviser, Medical Director and Chief Scientist of the [Department for Work and Pensions](#) and its predecessor department, the Department of Social Security, and is on the board of the Benefits Agency Medical Service in the 1990s. John LoCascio is a Vice President and Medical Director of US insurance company Unum.

Why significant: Calls for the creation of a new profession of 'disability analysts' - supposedly highly-trained specialists to assess disabled people's fitness for work.

Link: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/002239999500037J>

and

[https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1468-2230.1995.tb02028.x#:~:text=The%20Social%20Security%20\(Incapacity%20fo](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/j.1468-2230.1995.tb02028.x#:~:text=The%20Social%20Security%20(Incapacity%20fo)

[r%20Work\)%20Act%201994I%20is%20the,less%20generous%20benefit%2C%20incapacity%20benefit](#)

## **November 1995**

Title: Ministers approve decision to outsource medical assessments for benefits

What: Ministers approve a recommendation to outsource the medical assessment of benefits, claiming this would improve performance and value for money

Why significant: Outsourcing has been key to the dehumanisation of benefit claimants (in favour of profit) but also key to governmental denial of policy responsibility in benefit-related deaths. Harm reduction is outsourced, which, in the later words of Lewis Elward, allows 'the State to distance themselves from potential ramifications'.

Link:

<https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2001/03/0001280.pdf>

[[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311683866\\_Corporate\\_Welfare\\_Crime\\_Two\\_Case\\_Studies\\_in\\_State-Corporate\\_Harm](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311683866_Corporate_Welfare_Crime_Two_Case_Studies_in_State-Corporate_Harm)

## **28 October 1996**

Title: The Department of Social Security (now DWP) tells the Social Security Advisory Committee that intended policy changes to remove the 'substantial risk' rules (which provide vital safeguarding) would have no detrimental effect.

What: The DWP told the Social Security Advisory Committee that intended policy changes to remove the 'substantial risk' rules were neutral (i.e. were of no effect).

Why significant: The 'substantial risk' rules highlight high risk 'cases' where points-based assessment doesn't work and where clinical risk assessment is required and were adopted by the DWP upon introduction of the All Work Test in 1995.

Link: [Decision of Social Security and Child Support Commissioner | \[2005\] UKSSCSC CSIB\\_148\\_2005 | UK Social Security and Child Support Commissioner | Judgment | Law | CaseMine](#)

## **28 October 1996**

Title: Child Poverty Acton Group (CPAG) writes to the Social Security Advisory Committee

What: Child Poverty Acton Group (CPAG) writes to the Social Security Advisory Committee about removal of regulation 27(b) without parliamentary scrutiny

Why significant: This was followed by extensive legal action leading up to the Howker case. The Howker case effectively declared the DWP's attempt to amend regulation to be unlawful and as a result the substantial risk clause was reinstated back in to regulation (27) providing the necessary 'safety net'.

Link: [Decision of Social Security and Child Support Commissioner | \[2005\] UKSSCSC CSIB\\_148\\_2005 | UK Social Security and Child Support Commissioner | Judgment | Law | CaseMine](#)

## **6 November 1996**

Title: Department of Social Security says removing 'significant risk' regulation is 'neutral' despite providing a 'safety net' for those facing a 'significant risk' of harm if found capable of work. This means the committee does not see a formal referral and the regulation is approved by parliament (the removal will later be found to be unlawful).

What: During a meeting with its Social Security Advisory Committee, DSS suggests removing regulation 27, which provides a 'safety net' for those facing a 'significant risk' of harm if they are found capable of work because they do not score enough points on the fitness for work test. The DSS says this change will be "neutral" – despite the committee querying this – because of other protections within the All Work Test. By naming the change as "neutral", the committee does not see a formal referral and the regulation is approved by parliament.

Why significant: The categorisation of the clause as 'neutral' and its removal will later be found to be misleading and unlawful.

Links:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/323338/quinquennial\\_review\\_6189.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/323338/quinquennial_review_6189.pdf) and <https://www.bmj.com/content/318/7186/S2-7186>

## **6 November 1996**

Clinicians appointed by the DSS/DWP the removal of regulation 27, which provides vital safeguarding to those whose mental and/or physical health is 'substantial risk' if found fit to work.

What: In November 1996 Dr Sawney added weight to the removal of vital safeguarding for claimants at risk (to their mental/physical health) if required to undertake work as a result of not scoring sufficient 'point in the scoring of the functional part of the 'All Work Tests') from 1995 onwards.

Why significant: It shows clinicians were complicit in trying to neutralise the need for exceptions to be made where a claimant scores insufficient points on the functional assessment but are deemed to be at 'substantial risk' (to mental or physical health) if subjected to work. Under the All Work Test/Personal Capability Assessment the exceptions were less commonly applied because the 'points threshold' was a more accurate assessment of a claimant's personal capability. Importantly, this came from the views of clinicians who have a duty of care to those wrongly put at risk.

Link: [Decision of Social Security and Child Support Commissioner | \[2005\] UKSSCSC CSIB\\_148\\_2005 | UK Social Security and Child Support Commissioner | Judgment | Law | CaseMine](#) and [Howker v. Secretary of State for Work and Pensions \[2002\] UKSSCSC CIB\\_4563\\_1998 \(08 November 2002\) \(bailii.org\)](#)

## **1997**

Title: Leaked document outlines plans for changes to sickness and disability related benefits based on budget savings

What: The document, obtained by Channel 4 News, states that “it is likely that a high proportion of the necessary savings will have to come from benefits paid to sick and disabled people”.

Why significant: Indicates that budget savings are the motivation for welfare reform and suggests that the impact on claimants was not being considered.

Link:

[https://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/id/eprint/28222/1/Retrenching\\_Incapacity\\_Benefit.pdf](https://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/id/eprint/28222/1/Retrenching_Incapacity_Benefit.pdf)

## **6 January 1997**

Title: Regulation 27 ‘substantial risk’ - a key safety net for claimants at risk of serious harm if they are found fit for work - is removed from regulations.

What: In amendments made to regulations, changes are made to section 27 of The Social Security (Incapacity for Work and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations on ‘exceptional circumstances’, removing the clause on “substantial risk to the mental or physical health of any person if he were found capable of work”.

Why significant: This is the government removing a key safety net for claimants at risk of serious harm if they are found fit for work.

Links:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/1996/3207/regulation/2/made>

## **December 1997**

Title: Child Poverty Action group raises concerns over removal of “significant risk” clause – finding that the Social Security Advisory Committee had been ‘misled’ by the DSS.

What: The Child Poverty Action Group writes to the social security advisory committee asking why it had agreed to remove the “significant risk” clause. They cite a benefit appeal in which it was found that the committee had been “materially misled” by what they had been told by the DSS official, although not deliberately.

Why significant: Evidences staff misrepresenting the significance and risk of the change.

Link:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/323338/quinquennial\\_review\\_6189.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/323338/quinquennial_review_6189.pdf)

## **23 December 1997**

Title: Disabled activists protest over welfare cuts outside Downing Street

What: Members of the Disabled People’s Direct Action Network (DAN) throw red paint over the Downing Street gates to protest against proposed welfare reforms and cuts to disability benefits.

Why significant: Researchers would later argue that the protest showed New Labour that it would need to undermine public support for the social security system if it wanted to justify large-scale cuts – leading to “several high profile anti-fraud advertising campaigns” (Piggott and Grover, 2009).

Link: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/41746.stm> and [https://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/id/eprint/28222/1/Retrenching\\_Incapacity\\_Benefit.pdf](https://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/id/eprint/28222/1/Retrenching_Incapacity_Benefit.pdf)

## **26 March 1998**

Title: Publication of new social security green paper “New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare”, setting out the principles of welfare reform based on the idea of “welfare dependency”.

What: New Ambitions for our Country: A New Contract for Welfare says that the current system contains disincentives to work and that fraud is taking money out of the system and away from “genuine claimants”. The green paper proposes to “reduce spending on Incapacity Benefit” by “fundamentally” reforming the benefit . The paper sets out the principles of welfare reform, claiming that the “system as it stands promotes fraud and deception, not honesty and hard work. It has led to growing poverty and dependence, not independence. It has fuelled social division and exclusion, not helped in the creation of a decent society.”

Why significant: Shows the charge of “welfare dependency”, which the previous Conservative governments had primarily levelled at unemployed people, was now also applied to people on incapacity benefits.

Link:

<https://www.scie-socialcareonline.org.uk/new-ambitions-for-our-country-a-new-contract-for-welfare-presented-to-parliament-by-the-s>

ecretary-of-state-for-social-security-and-the-minister-for-welfare-reform-by-command-of-her-majesty-march-1998/r/a11G000000182EFIAY and

<https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1998/mar/26/welfare-green-paper>

## **2000**

Title: The death of Timothy Finn.

What: Timothy was found starved to death at his home in Batley. His benefits had been stopped automatically after he failed to respond to letters posted to him by the Benefits Agency, asking him to comply with certain conditions.

Why significant: A coroner at his inquest found that neglect by what was then the Benefits Agency had contributed to his death. As a result of the case, the DSS introduced new rules which civil servants were supposed to follow when a “vulnerable” person was about to have their benefits sanctioned.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/ministers-change-story-yet-benefit-related-deaths/>

## **2000**

Title: The All Work Test is reformed and renamed the Personal Capability Assessment, and is outsourced to SEMA, which would be taken over by Atos.

What: The task of running the PCA was contracted out to SEMA, which would be bought out by Schlumberger in 2001.

SchlumbergerSema would then be taken over by the French corporation Atos Origin in 2004. This process would make Atos the sole provider of the government's assessment contracts. In 2005, Atos would win a £500 million contract to carry out the assessments for the next five years (it would win a further three-year extension in 2010 and then another extension that would take it to 2015).

Why significant: Shows the rise of Atos as the government's assessment provider of choice. As for the PCA, Professor Jonathan Rutherford would say later: 'The emphasis would no longer be on benefit entitlement but on what a person was able to do and the action needed to support them in work.'

Link:

<https://www.mostewartresearch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/New-Labour-market-state-end-welfare-Jonathan-Rutherford.pdf>

and

[https://atos.net/en/2003/press-release/financial-information-press-releases\\_2003\\_09\\_22/pr-2003\\_09\\_22\\_01](https://atos.net/en/2003/press-release/financial-information-press-releases_2003_09_22/pr-2003_09_22_01) and

<http://www.whywaitforever.com/dwpatosbusiness.html>

<https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/10296-001-Delivery-of-public-services-HC-8101.pdf>

## **2001**

Title: DWP research report on claimant experiences of the Personal Capability Assessment finds it is "intrinsically stressful",

showing early warnings of risks, especially for people's mental health.

What: A DWP report relates claimants experiences of the Personal Capability Assessment. Some claimants talked about finding the process "troubling", especially those already experiencing anxiety or depressive conditions. There are frequent references to the Medical Services' doctors (who carry out the assessments) being cold, hostile and not mindful of the "emotionally-loaded circumstances of the test". The report describes how one claimant who was "in a state of serious clinical depression which had left her unable to face the world said she was asked by the PCA doctor whether she had contemplated suicide, and if so how she would carry it out." She explained that "she had been disturbed not only by the question but by the manner and context in which it was posed, and that it had made her "feel even more depressed". The authors note that the "tone" of the letters sent to claimants telling them of the disallowance of their IB "sometimes seemed very blunt and cold. This can reinforce the shock, particularly where the news comes as a surprise".

Why significant: This shows early warnings of the risks associated with such assessments, especially for people's mental health.

Link:

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20091222172300/http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrs-index.asp>

## **2001**

Title: Insurance company Unum launches lobbying group, including some disability charities, to increase its influence.

What: UnumProvident launches its New Beginnings lobbying group, which will include charities Disability Alliance and The Shaw Trust, the Disability Rights Commission, as well as businesses such as Barclays, Scottish Power and HSBC.

Why Significant: Evidence of Unum building its influence.

Link:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmworkp/en/401/401ap27.htm> and

<https://www.mostewartresearch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/New-Labour-market-state-end-welfare-Jonathan-Rutherford.pdf>

## **9 March 2001**

Title: National Audit Office report finds “serious problems” with medical assessment of Incapacity and disability benefits

What: The National Audit Office says there are “serious problems” with the quality of the assessment work carried out by contractors Sema, and that this “has been a cause for concern since before outsourcing.”

Why significant: Shows concerns about the outsourcing of the assessment process.

Link:

<https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2001/03/0001280es.pdf>

## **November 2001**

Title: Woodstock conference on “malingering and illness deception”, partly funded by Unum and DWP, will play a key role in justifying welfare reform

What: Mansel Aylward (by now DWP’s chief medical officer) and John LoCascio (Unum’s second vice-president and medical director) contribute to conference held at Woodstock, near Oxford, which examines so-called “malingering and illness deception”, arguing that “malingering” is a lifestyle choice for many claimants of long-term sickness benefits. Many of the presentations will be published in 2003, by Oxford University Press, in *Malingering and Illness Deception*, by Peter Halligan and Christopher Bass. The conference is partly funded by Unum and DWP, and its purpose has been summed up by Jonathan Rutherford as none other than “the transformation of the welfare system”.

Why significant: The conference would be key in transforming the welfare system, shifting the cultural meaning of illness (Rutherford, 2018), and helping to justify the “future demolition of the welfare state” (Stewart, 2016).

Links:

Stewart, Mo. (2016). ‘Cash not Care: the planned demolition of the welfare state’. New Generation Publishing

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263217809\\_New\\_Labour\\_the\\_market\\_state\\_and\\_the\\_end\\_of\\_welfare](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263217809_New_Labour_the_market_state_and_the_end_of_welfare)

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.729.2487&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

### **13 October 2002 and 17 November 2002**

Title: News programmes expose claims denial practices in the USA at Unum (who are currently advising the UK government on welfare reform)

What: Unum claims-processing employees speak out to NBC's Dateline7 and CBS's 60 Minutes news programmes over measures that pressured them to deny valid claims in order to meet budget goals. One worker said bonuses were awarded to some managers who closed especially large claims. It is reported that in the last five years, UnumProvident has been sued almost 3,000 times over closed claims.

Why significant: Provides evidence that knowledge of Unum's bad faith practices was in the public domain while the UK government was seeking its advice on welfare reform.

Link:

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/did-insurer-cheat-disabled-clients-14-11-2002/> and

[https://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1483&context=fss\\_papers](https://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1483&context=fss_papers) and

<https://www.pillsburycoleman.com/successes/unum-provident-story-behind-the-claims/>

## 8th November 2002

Title: The Court of Appeal finds (in the case *Howker v Secretary of State*) that the social security advisory committee had been misled by the DSS (now DWP) and that removing the “substantial risk” clause was unlawful.

What: The Court of Appeal finds that the social security advisory committee had been misled by the DSS (now DWP), and that [“this is the case whether or not officials from the Department acted innocently”](#). The ruling concerns the decision to remove the “substantial risk” clause. It concludes that the changes were unlawful. As a result the “significant risk” clause of regulation 27 reverts to the previous version, allowing people to be treated as incapable of work if there is a significant risk to the health of any person if they are found capable of work.

Why significant: Evidence of the DSS/DWP misleading the Social Security Advisory Committee and acting unlawfully. The claimant, Mr Howker, won the case, and the DWP was ordered to pay costs,. The regulations were re-instated and the substantial risk safety net was once again recognised.

Links:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/323338/quinquennial\\_review\\_6189.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/323338/quinquennial_review_6189.pdf) and

<https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/howker-v-secretary-state-social-security> and

[https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/CPAG\\_response\\_legalaidreform\\_0211.pdf](https://cpag.org.uk/sites/default/files/CPAG_response_legalaidreform_0211.pdf)

## **2003**

Title: UnumProvident acquires UK group insurance business - building its insurance presence in the UK while influencing welfare reform at governmental level.

What: UnumProvident acquires Sun Life Financial of Canada's UK group income protection (IP) business,

Why significant: Shows UnumProvident building its insurance presence in the UK while influencing welfare reform at governmental level.

Link:

<https://www.covermagazine.co.uk/news/2147891/unum-buys-business-slfoc>

## **18th February 2003**

Title: Ministers try again to remove the “substantial risk” clause from regulation 27, reversing the effect of the Court of Appeal ruling

What: Labour ministers introduce a new amendment to regulations that would reverse the effect of the Court of Appeal ruling on the “substantial risk” safety net.

Why significant: The government tries again to remove this vital safety net.

Links:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/251107/6491.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/251107/6491.pdf)

### **13 May 2003**

Title: The Social Security Advisory Committee recommends that no change be made to regulation 27, and then withdraws its proposal to remove the safety net.

What: The Social Security Advisory Committee recommends that no change be made to regulation 27 and that the “significant risk” clause would remain “for the present but that the Government should monitor the situation”. The committee says it has “seen no evidence of any inappropriate broadening of the criteria leading to benefits being paid in ‘undeserving’ cases”. It says the clause is crucial in ensuring that the income of a number of vulnerable and disadvantaged customers is not disrupted and their lives destabilised. The Committee says the clause provides a necessary safety net for people who do not get a correct Personal Capability Assessment. The Government withdraws its proposal to remove the safety net.

Why significant: The Government again tries to remove the “significant risk” clause from Regulation 27 – a clause which the Social Security Advisory Committee sees as providing an important ‘safety net’ to protect ‘disadvantaged customers’. Yet [‘the door is left open for future amendments to regulation 27’](#).

Links:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/251107/6491.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/251107/6491.pdf) and <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/howker-v-secretary-state-social-security>

## **17 October 2003**

Title: National Audit Office report finds backlog of assessment cases and early signs of DWP's failure to seek medical evidence early in the assessment process.

What: A report by the National Audit Office on 'improving the medical assessment of incapacity and disability benefits' criticises the backlog of cases subject to assessment. The report says the assessment backlog reached 368,000 in 2001. The report also says that 59 per cent of successful tribunal cases are due to new medical evidence coming to light at the Tribunal which "was not available to the decision-maker".

Why significant: It is often stated that incapacity benefit claimants were rarely or ever assessed but this report shows that not to be true. The tribunal evidence also appears to be an early sign of DWP's failure to seek the necessary medical evidence early in the assessment process, which will have such a significant role in the deaths of claimants post-2010. It also suggests a lack of awareness by GPs of the "substantial risk" rules.

Link:

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20170207052351/https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2003/10/02031141.pdf>

## **10 December 2003**

Title: DWP's chief medical adviser, Mansel Aylward, gives evidence to the Commons Public Accounts Committee over accusations that health care professionals, carrying out assessments on behalf of DWP, are treating claimants like "lumps of meat"

What: Mansel Aylward, DWP's chief medical adviser, gives evidence to the Commons Public Accounts Committee over accusations that private health care professionals – who carry out assessments on behalf of DWP – are treating claimants like "lumps of meat". The Commons Public Accounts Committee says it is concerned by the fact that 51% of appeals against IB and DLA decisions are being won by claimants. But Aylward defends the private Health Care Professionals. He says he has fed his concerns in at the "highest level" with HM Courts and Tribunal Service and defends the assessment professionals working for SchlumbergerSema and criticises the tribunals' findings.

Why significant: These high numbers of successful appeals will persist for the next two decades.

Link: <https://www.benefitsandwork.co.uk/benefits-news/story/188>

## **July 2004**

Title: Unum opens new Centre for Psychosocial and Disability Research at Cardiff University, which has close links to DWP.

What: Unum opens its £1.6m Unum Centre for Psychosocial and Disability Research at Cardiff University. The launch event is

attended by Archie Kirkwood, chair of the Commons Work and Pensions Committee, while work and pensions minister Malcolm Wicks gives a speech. Mansel Aylward is later appointed as its director after retiring from his position as DWP's chief medical officer.

Why significant: Shows continuing close links between politicians, DWP civil servants and Unum.

Link:

<https://www.mostewartresearch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/New-Labour-market-state-end-welfare-Jonathan-Rutherford.pdf>

## **November 2004**

Title: DWP-commissioned research finds Incapacity Benefit Personal Advisers are concerned about working with clients who are suicidal, and about a target driven sanctioning culture.

What: Incapacity Benefit Personal Advisers talk about their role being emotionally draining, and some feel they are being asked to work beyond their expertise, especially when working with 'customers' with mental health issues and who are experiencing suicidality. There are concerns that sanctioning could exacerbate people's health conditions and jeopardize their relationship with the 'customer'; that potential use of targets would also prevent staff building rapport with clients; and that staff action and/or inaction could worsen people's mental health. Suicide is mentioned 3 times in the report: The advisers talk about the extra responsibility they feel for, and the "emotional burden" of working with, clients who are suicidal.

Why significant: Shows early evidence, commissioned by DWP, of the complex needs of many people claiming IB, concerns about sanctioning (and a target driven culture) being detrimental to people's health, and staff concerns about working with people feeling suicidal.

Link:

<https://westminsterresearch.westminster.ac.uk/download/d1e2ffe452408fbefc2382acbec6a3a53d6d82b51fbba50b64d8ba22f6b5e83/1449183/report212.pdf>

## **18 November 2004**

Title: UnumProvident settles multi-state federal examination of claim handling practices in USA, identifying Unum's use of in-house medical staff to deny benefits.

What: The multistate market conduct examination (the means by which regulators examine the practices, policies, and behaviors of an insurer in the marketplace) identifies several claims handling practices of concern to the state insurance regulators, including: excessive reliance on in-house medical staff to support the denial, termination, or reduction of benefits; unfair evaluation and interpretation of attending physician or independent medical examiner reports; failure to evaluate the totality of the claimant's medical condition; and an inappropriate burden placed on claimants to justify eligibility for benefits. Maine Superintendent Iuppa said: "This action is one of the most significant multistate insurance regulatory actions in history."

Why significant: Shows UnumProvident's bad faith claims handling practices and the impact on disabled people were well publicised in the US at the time they were working to build influence in the UK.

Link:

<https://www.mass.gov/service-details/november-18-2004-multi-state-federal-settlement-addresses-concerns-regarding-unum>

## **2005**

Title: DWP publishes second research report on Incapacity Benefit reforms and Personal advisers, finding unmanageable workloads affect their ability to identify risk and provide support to people in distress.

What: The research found continued concerns, with Personal advisers finding the role being emotionally draining; tension between the "compulsion" element of the role i.e. using sanctions, and the "enabler" role to support people in finding work; and concerns that job entry targets could influence advisers to "prioritise customers likely to give a 'quick win', above those needing longer term support to return to work" and that referral targets might lead to referrals being made that are not in the client's best interest. Advisers also talk about unmanageable workloads, which leads to 'compassion fatigue', affecting "their ability to demonstrate empathy and pick up on signals". They also report feeling "out of their depth" and "an acute sense of responsibility" when working with clients who are suicidal or have complex mental health issues. Yet they also experience a lack of

training and support in dealing with the emotional pressures of the role.

Why significant: Shows continued concerns from advisers about their capacity to support clients experiencing mental health issues and suicidality, and the risk that increased workload is likely to lead them to miss important signals in supporting people in distress.

Link:

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20091222172300/http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/rrs-index.asp> and <https://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/library/ravetz-Green-Paper-IB-critique.pdf>

## **2005**

Title: US insurance giant UnumProvident says it is driving government thinking on Incapacity Benefit reform

What: UnumProvident says it is driving government policy in a document was written by Michael O'Donnell, then the company's chief medical officer, who later moved to the same role at Atos Healthcare, which would carry out work capability assessments (WCAs) on behalf of the government.

Why significant: Unum were set to huge profits from incapacity benefit reform – as the largest provider of “income protection insurance” (IPI) in the UK, and tougher welfare rules – including replacing incapacity benefit with employment and support allowance – were likely to persuade more people to take out IPI.

Link: Copy of the document (UNUM 2005) to be made available on website

### **1 January 2005**

Title: Research published into how DWP and Atos secure further medical evidence from claimants

What: Research commissioned from Liverpool University by DWP looks at the forms used by DWP and Atos to obtain further medical evidence. GPs stressed the need to check records, as some colleagues used memory alone to complete the forms.

Why significant: Further evidence of how concerns about securing further medical evidence were being considered pre-2010.

Link:

[https://www.academia.edu/48683140/Engaging\\_physicians\\_benefiting\\_patients\\_a\\_qualitative\\_study](https://www.academia.edu/48683140/Engaging_physicians_benefiting_patients_a_qualitative_study)

### **3 October 2005**

Title: California insurance regulators fine Unum \$8 million, including for using wrong legal definition of disability to deny claims, requiring the company to reopen as many as 26,000 California cases

What: California regulators charged UnumProvident with more than 25 violations of state law, allegations that the company avoided responding to by settling the case. Among the charges: that the company knowingly applied the wrong legal definition of disability in denying claims or ruling claimants were able to go

back to work. California Insurance Commissioner John Garamendi said: “UnumProvident is an outlaw company. It is a company that for years has operated in an illegal fashion.”

Why significant: Further evidence of UnumProvident’s unlawful practices in the US while it was advising the UK government

Link:

<https://www.latimes.com/world/la-fi-disability3oct03-story.html>

## **11 October 2005**

Title: DWP publishes book arguing for welfare reforms backed by the insurance industry that lay the framework for 2006 Welfare Reform Bill.

What: DWP publishes *The Scientific and Conceptual Basis of Incapacity Benefits*, by Gordon Waddell and Mansel Aylward (both from the UnumProvident Centre for Psychosocial and Disability Research). In the book, they argue for the application of a biopsychosocial model of disability, which disabled activists will argue in future years has been created by the insurance industry to put much of the blame for disability on the disabled person, rather than on the barriers they face in society, and to make it easier to reject claims (for both insurance and benefits) (Rutherford, 2007).

Why significant: The book provides the unacknowledged intellectual framework for the 2006 Welfare Reform Bill, which will introduce the work capability assessment and employment and support allowance.

Link:

<https://www.tsoshop.co.uk/bookstore.asp?FO=1279028&DI=607598> and

<https://www.mostewartresearch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/New-Labour-market-state-end-welfare-Jonathan-Rutherford.pdf>

and

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0261018316649120> (behind a paywall) And

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/biopsychosocial-basis-for-benefit-cuts-is-cavalier-unevidenced-and-misleading/>

## **1 January 2006**

Title: Publication of “Is Work Good for Health and Well-being?”, claims to provide evidence that work is good for health, which will be used by government to justify pressuring disabled people into work.

What: The paper, by Gordon Waddell and Kim Burton, is based on the argument that work is good for your physical and mental health.

Why significant: Provides ‘evidence’ for present and future governments to justify pushing disabled people into work.

Link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/is-work-good-for-your-health-and-well-being> and

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/209510/hwwb-is-work-good-for-you-exec-summ.pdf#:~:text=There%20is%20a%20strong%20evide](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/209510/hwwb-is-work-good-for-you-exec-summ.pdf#:~:text=There%20is%20a%20strong%20evide)

[nce%20base%20showing%20that,nature%20and%20quality%20of%20work%20and%20its%20social](#)

## **January 2006**

Title: Government publishes “A New Deal for Welfare” green paper, introducing the new employment and support allowance, which will replace incapacity benefit and include conditionality for most claimants.

What: “A New Deal for Welfare: Empowering people to work” sets out the Labour government’s direction for welfare reform, which introduces what will be the new employment and support allowance, to replace incapacity benefit. The green paper describes the number of claimants on incapacity benefit as “a national problem”, and says that a third of new claimants cite mental health conditions as the primary cause of their incapacity, compared with one fifth in the mid-1990s. It also says there will be conditionality for “most people” on ESA, saying: “It will be paid to most people in return for undertaking work-related interviews, agreeing an action plan and, as resources allow, participating in some form of work-related activity. If benefit claimants do not fulfil these agreed responsibilities, the new benefit will be reduced in a series of slices.”

Why significant: This provides the basis for the new out-of-work benefit that will be introduced from 2008.

Link:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/272235/6730.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/272235/6730.pdf)

## **25 January 2006**

Title: Tony Blair supports welfare shake-up, warning that unemployed people, single parents and those on incapacity benefit that they could no longer expect “a lifetime” on benefit.

What: The prime minister warns unemployed people, single parents and those on incapacity benefit that they could no longer expect “a lifetime” on benefit.

Why significant: Shows evidence of the scrounger/malingerer rhetoric coming from the very top of the Labour government.

Link:

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1508705/Work-is-good-for-you-says-Blair-in-benefits-shake-up.html> [behind a paywall]

## **March 2006**

Title: Alison Ravetz criticises government’s New Deal for Welfare warning of incalculable stress for those forced into work and predicting future harms.

What: In her paper, Alison Ravetz highlights the lack of supporting evidence for claims made in the green paper (and related DWP research reports) and the disconnect between its proposals and the reality of disabled people’s lives. Ravetz concludes that:

“what might be expected is a slowly accumulating number of bad decisions and blatantly scandalous cases, eventually giving rise to a groundswell of unease... In the long run, this reform will

stand or fall by the correctness of its belief that two thirds of all claimants are well enough to compete as jobseekers in the labour market. If this is wrong, the cost to society of a system that forces people into jobs they cannot sustain, on threat of penury, might well outweigh any financial savings; while the cost, in stress, to those people and their families will be incalculable”

Why significant: Through looking in detail at DWP research reports, Ravetz predicts the harm that will be caused by welfare reform.

Link:

<https://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/library/ravetz-Green-Paper-IB-critique.pdf>

## **September 2006**

Title: DWP publishes progress report on developing the work capability assessment

What: A report by DWP’s physical function and mental health technical working groups on “transforming the personal capability assessment” from an “incapacity-based tool for determining entitlement to Incapacity Benefit, to a more positive assessment incorporating assessment of capability” and including an “extensively revised mental function assessment”. The report “proposes a revised assessment which we anticipate will represent a fairer, more accurate, and more robust assessment of the level of a person’s functional ability in relation to capability for work”.

Why significant: A progress report on developing what will become the work capability assessment.

Link: <http://www.whywaitforever.com/dwpatos-tpca.pdf>

## **2007**

Title: Investment banker David Freud publishes report on “reducing dependency” in the welfare system, including recommending outsourcing running of work programmes and pushing those on Incapacity Benefits into work.

What: Investment banker David Freud publishes report on Reducing Dependency, Increasing Opportunity for DWP. He advises outsourcing work programmes to the private and voluntary sectors; and reducing the number of people on Incapacity Benefits (from 2.68 million to 1.68 million) by pushing them into work –helping to set the tone of welfare reform for the next decade.

Why significant: Freud would become a Conservative peer after the 2010 election and would be given responsibility for welfare reform under Iain Duncan Smith.

Link:

<https://www.base-uk.org/sites/default/files/%5Buser-raw%5D/11-07/welfarereview.pdf>

## **3 May 2007**

Title: Welfare Reform Act 2007 receives royal assent, introducing changes that will impact millions of disabled people, including the

new employment and support allowance (ESA) and the work capability assessment (WCA)

What: The new Welfare Reform Act 2007 introduces the new employment and support allowance (ESA) and work capability assessment (WCA) to replace incapacity benefit and the personal capability assessment. The new act will introduce three new categories for those who have been assessed: those who are fit for work, those seen as having limited capability for work, and those who have limited capability for work and work-related activity (the so-called support group). It also includes a requirement for five annual independent reviews of the new WCA. Why significant: The legislation introduces hugely significant changes that will impact millions of disabled people over the next decade and cause untold harm to many of them.

Link:

<https://cpag.org.uk/welfare-rights/resources/article/welfare-reform-act-2007> and

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/5/contents>

### **3 July 2007**

Title: “Doctor” is changed to “healthcare professional” in amendments to the social security regulations, related to medical opinion in determining fitness to work.

What: Ministers introduce changes to replace “Doctor” with “healthcare professional” in amendments to the social security regulations.

Why significant: Shows further evidence of the downgrading of medical opinion in determining people's fitness to work

Links:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2007/1626/contents/made>

## **November 2007**

Title: Labour's work and pensions secretary Peter Hain vows to "rip up sicknote Britain"

What: Peter Hain says that Incapacity Benefits have "embedded the sick-note into the British economy. We must rip up sick-note Britain."

Why significant: Rhetoric like this was to become increasingly common over the next few years, under both the Labour and coalition governments, in building consent for punitive policies.

Link:

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/incapacity-benefit-set-for-axe-518511>

## **19 November 2007**

Title: Labour announces the new work capability assessment for claiming employment and support allowance, with DWP claiming that "Fifty per cent of those who take the assessment will not pass it".

What: Work and pensions secretary Peter Hain announces a new assessment process for claiming employment and support allowance – the work capability assessment. DWP claims that "Fifty per cent of those who take the assessment will not pass it".

The press release states that the 2.64 million working age people claiming incapacity benefits “cost the country nearly twelve and a half billion pounds in 2006/7”.

Why significant: Builds the narrative that many of those currently claiming incapacity benefits are doing so fraudulently.

Link:

<https://www.wired-gov.net/wg/wg-news-1.nsf/0/73933DF6ABAF730F802573980039FD60?OpenDocument>

## **15 January 2008**

Title: Bid to regulate health care professionals carrying out work capability assessments fails.

What: An attempt fails to introduce an amendment under the health and social care bill that would have ensured the new Care Quality Commission regulator would be responsible for regulating health care professionals carrying out work capability assessments. The amendment was withdrawn after a minister assured MPs that an existing clause would cover such work.

Why significant: An opportunity lost to secure proper regulatory control over the role of the health care professional in carrying out work capability assessments.

Link:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmpublic/health/080115/pm/80115s01.htm>

## **2 February 2008**

Title: David Freud suggests that less than a third of those claiming incapacity benefit are legitimate claimants.

What: Freud, an investment banker who was working at the time as a government welfare adviser, claims in an interview with the Daily Telegraph that fewer than a third of the 2.7 million people claiming incapacity benefit were legitimate claimants.

Why significant: Adds to the rhetoric that disabled recipients of benefits are “scroungers” and “frauds”. Purnell (work and pensions secretary from 2008-2009) later admits that the figure of one million incapacity benefit claimants fit for work was plucked out of the air, and research has shown that the health data that was available at the time did not support this figure.

Link: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/7223687.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7223687.stm)

(Telegraph link to the full interview is behind a paywall:

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/1577313/Welfare-is-a-mess-says-adviser-David-Freud.html>)

## **17 March 2008**

Title: Publication of DWP report on health, work and well-being emphasises cost to the British economy of health-related absence from work.

What: Dame Carol Black's review for DWP , “Working for a Healthier Tomorrow: work and health in Britain”, identifies challenges and sets out recommendations for reform on health, work and wellbeing, calculating that the annual cost to the British economy of health-related absence from work is £100billion, only around £15 billion less than the entire budget of the NHS.

Why significant: Further evidence of the emphasis on cutting the costs of sickness absence.

Link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-for-a-healthier-tomorrow-work-and-health-in-britain>

### **1 April 2008**

Title: Work and pensions secretary announces plans to get tough on “scroungers” by retesting everyone on Incapacity Benefit through the new Work Capability Assessment.

What: James Purnell, Peter Hain’s successor as work and pensions secretary, tells the Liverpool Echo: “People who scrounge from the system take money away from legitimate [IB] claimants. Clearly we want to stop that.”

Why significant: Purnell was talking here about eventually retesting everyone on Incapacity Benefit through the new Work Capability Assessment - to be introduced for new claimants in October 2008. A further high-profile example of so-called benefit scrounger rhetoric from the highest levels of government.

Link:

<https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/get-tough-tests-face-sick-benefit-3488200>

### **27 October 2008**

Title: Introduction of Employment and Support Allowance and the Work Capability Assessment – key elements of Labour’s welfare

reform which aims to use conditionality to cut spending on out-of-work benefits.

What: Employment and Support Allowance is introduced as the benefit for new claimants of out-of-work sickness and disability benefits, replacing Incapacity Benefit, severe disablement allowance and the incapacity element of Income Support. The new Work Capability Assessment is introduced to test eligibility for ESA.

Why significant: The introduction of ESA was a key element of the Labour government's welfare reform agenda, which was introduced with the intention of cutting spending on out-of-work benefits through a stricter conditionality regime (Purnell, Work and Pensions Secretary). Steve Griffiths would later say that the health data did not support the government's target figures for getting people off incapacity benefits and into paid employment: "One explanation for the immense stress and error imposed by the introduction of ESA is that there has been a major policy misdiagnosis based on selective attention to evidence."

Link:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2008-10-27/debates/0810275000012/EmploymentAndSupportAllowance> and

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/676605/WelfareTrends2018cm9562.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/676605/WelfareTrends2018cm9562.pdf) and

<https://cpag.org.uk/welfare-rights/resources/article/work-capability-assessment> and

<http://www.compassonline.org.uk/publications/dark-times-for-those-that-cannot-work/>

## **10 December 2008**

Title: White Paper 'Raising Expectations and Increasing Support: Reforming Welfare for the Future', which claims that "everyone on incapacity benefit" will be moved to ESA, and supports use of conditionality and sanctions, is discussed in House of Lords.

What: In the House of Lords, Lord McKenzie (Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Work and Pensions) says the White Paper 'Raising Expectations and Increasing Support: Reforming Welfare for the Future' will implement the Freud report in full. It is also informed by an [independent review Professor Paul Gregg](#) ("Realising Potential: A Vision for Personalised Conditionality and Support", on 2 December 2008), which says that 'conditionality backed with a regime of sanctions improves outcomes' (although sanctions should be a 'last resort'). He says the White Paper aims to get almost all claimants either preparing for work or looking for work, and claims that "We will migrate everyone on incapacity benefit on to ESA."

Why significant: Over the years following this statement, DWP statistics will show a different story, with an increase between October 2008 to June 2015 (by 41%) in the number of people deemed to be at substantial risk. This seems to be because the points system of the WCA had made it harder to qualify (for example, for mental health the qualifying threshold increased from 10 points to 15). Because the points threshold had become so

high bar, more exceptions needed to be made because large numbers of claimants simply weren't scoring enough points to qualify.

Link:

<https://www.theyworkforyou.com/lords/?id=2008-12-10a.384.2>

and Gregg review

<https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.184.2159&rep=rep1&type=pdf> and DWP data [ESA: outcomes of Work Capability Assessments: claims made to Jun 2015 and appeals to Dec 2015 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#).

## **2009**

Title: Launch of Centre for Welfare Reform

What: The Centre for Welfare Reform, a creative thinktank says it aims to create a world of equal citizenship where everyone matters.

Why significant: The thinktank will play a key role in speaking out about and publishing resources highlighting the impact of welfare reform on disabled people.

Link: <https://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/>

## **14 October 2009**

Title: The Express publishes misleading and inaccurate benefit fraud story about incapacity benefit claimants "faking their illnesses".

What: The tabloid claims that 75% of those on sick benefits are “faking” and that “Labour’s failure to crack down on scroungers has let three-quarters of incapacity benefit claimants get away with faking their illnesses”. The newspaper runs the story, even though at this point not a single incapacity benefit claimant has been assessed under the new WCA. The figures the article references instead relate to the number of new claimants put through the WCA, and the journalist – who would later become a special advisor to Boris Johnson – also admits that actually only 36 per cent of those assessed had been found “fit for work”.

Why significant: One of the most significant tabloid articles that would lay the groundwork for the Conservative-led coalition to secure public support for an even harsher and more dangerous regime of welfare reforms and cuts under Iain Duncan Smith.

Link:

<https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/133880/75-on-sick-benefits-are-faking>

## **October 2009**

Title: DWP publishes internal review of work capability assessment

What: A review of the work capability assessment, in response to representation from disability groups that some of the internal review recommendations had not adequately addressed their concerns, finds that “the current WCA is accurately identifying individuals’ capability for work”, but recommends further “refinements”.

Why significant: The first review of the WCA, and the need for a further technical review suggests that, even at this early stage, there was resistance within DWP to making the test fairer and safer.

Link:

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130125094211/http://dwp.gov.uk/docs/work-capability-assessment-review.pdf> and <https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130125094213/http://dwp.gov.uk/docs/work-capability-assessment-review-addendum.pdf>

## **1 January 2010**

Title: The death of Stephen Carré after finding that DWP had confirmed its decision to find him ineligible for ESA.

What: Stephen Carré takes his own life after finding that DWP had confirmed its decision to find him ineligible for ESA, following a work capability assessment. He had not worked since the summer of 2007, after becoming severely ill with depression and anxiety.

Why significant: The coroner at his inquest would later rule that his death was linked to flaws in the WCA system (see 30 March 2010).

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/wca-death-scandal-dwp-and-atos-killed-my-son/>

### **30 March 2010**

Title: Prevention of future deaths (PFD) report finds that the rejection of his appeal that he was not fit for work was a 'trigger' in Stephen Carré's death.

What: Coroner Tom Osborne sends a PFD report (known at the time as a Rule 43 letter) regarding the death of Stephen Carré to the Department for Work and Pensions. In the letter, Osborne says the "trigger" that led Stephen to his decision to take his own life had been "the rejection of his appeal that he was not fit for work", and he adds: "I feel the decision not to seek medical advice from the claimant's own GP or psychiatrist if they are suffering a mental illness should be reviewed."

Why significant: Although there was no publicity at the time, the existence of the PFD warning would emerge later, and would show that ministers had been warned that changes to the WCA system needed to be made to prevent further deaths, but that those changes had never been made. The reference to the failure to seek further medical evidence would prove hugely important in future years. At this stage WCA outcomes were in their early stages and up to this point 64% had been found fit for work – suggesting a strict testing regime.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/wca-death-scandal-dwp-and-atos-killed-my-son/> and [ESA: outcomes of Work Capability Assessments April 2013 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) (using the April 2013 XL data table, see table 2 'new claims by month of assessment').

## **4 May 2010**

Title: Coroner Tom Osborne receives initial response to the Stephen Carré PFD from DWP permanent secretary Sir Leigh Lewis.

What: Sir Leigh (who was appointed DWP permanent secretary in 2005 and would retire from the Civil Service in 2010) outlines departmental procedures on the WCA, provides brief details from Stephen Carré's assessment, and asks the coroner for medical information about the case so DWP can "complete our investigation and review our existing procedures, as you have asked, to determine the need for any changes to our current medical evidence gathering process".

Why significant: Recognition by DWP of the concerns around the WCA raised by Tom Osborne.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/wca-death-scandal-dwp-and-atos-killed-my-son/> and

<https://www.civilserviceworld.com/in-depth/article/interview-sir-leigh-lewis> and

<https://www.apm.org.uk/news/sir-leigh-lewis-and-nao-director-gain-honorary-fellowship/>

## **6 May 2010**

Title: Labour government voted out in general election, leading to formation of coalition between the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats.

What: Labour loses the election, which leads to the formation of a coalition by the Conservatives and Liberal Democrat partners.

Why significant: The coalition's aggressive welfare reform agenda (foreshadowed in the Conservative's election manifesto) will play a significant part in the government's programme over the next five years.

Link: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/election2010/results/>

## **12 May 2010**

Title: Coroner Tom Osborne replies to Sir Leigh Lewis, saying that DWP does not need to investigate the circumstances surrounding Stephen Carré's death but does need to investigate use of medical evidence.

What: Osborne says DWP does not need to investigate the circumstances surrounding Stephen Carré's death, as that has already taken place at the inquest, and that DWP needs instead to look at the "use of medical evidence when determining entitlement of benefit of those patients who are suffering from a psychiatric illness". He offers to send Sir Leigh a transcript of the inquest evidence.

Why significant: Further clarification of the coroner's concerns about the WCA.

Link:

<https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/100654/response/2912>

[98/attach/2/ESA%20Filework%20Guidelines%20V6%20Final.pdf?cookie\\_passthrough=1](http://98/attach/2/ESA%20Filework%20Guidelines%20V6%20Final.pdf?cookie_passthrough=1)

## **10 June 2010**

Title: The death of Paul Reekie

What: Paul Reekie, who took his own life, left no suicide note but had laid out two letters from the Department for Work and Pensions that had notified him that his housing benefit and incapacity benefit were being stopped.

Why significant: His death was one of the first to spark concerns from disabled activists about the harm being caused by the WCA and the move to ESA, and it led to the formation of the influential grassroots campaign of disabled activists, the Black Triangle campaign.

Link: <https://peterross.scot/articles/the-lost-genius-of-paul-reekie/> and

<https://blacktrianglecampaign.org/2012/05/02/claim-welfare-reforms-drove-writer-paul-reekie-to-suicide/#:~:text=Mr%20Reekie%20%E2%80%93%20a%20contemporary%20of%20Trainspotting%20author,set%20up%20to%20fight%20the%20Government%E2%80%99s%20welfare%20reforms.>

## **Summer/autumn 2010**

Title: Formation of Black Triangle Campaign to “galvanise opposition to the current vicious attack on the fundamental human

rights of disabled people by the Government”, and in memory of Paul Reekie.

What: The grassroots Black Triangle Campaign is formed to “galvanise opposition to the current vicious attack on the fundamental human rights of disabled people by the Government of the United Kingdom utilising ‘work capability assessments’ (as administered by ‘AtoS Healthcare Ltd’ on behalf of the Department of Work and Pensions ‘DWP’) to re-classify sick and disabled individuals as “fit for work” – in flagrant violation of all accepted medical, and human, ethical standards.” The website is dedicated to the memory of Paul Reekie.

Why significant: Black Triangle Campaign will play a key part in campaigning against welfare reform, and in highlighting the link between welfare reform and the deaths of disabled people.

Link: <https://blacktrianglecampaign.org/>

## **Summer/autumn 2010**

Title: Formation of The Mental Health Resistance Network set up “by people who live with mental distress in order to defend ourselves from the assault on us by a cruel government”.

What: The Mental Health Resistance Network was set up “by people who live with mental distress in order to defend ourselves from the assault on us by a cruel government”.

Why significant: Like Black Triangle, the group will play a key part in campaigning against welfare reform, particularly around benefit-related deaths. The grassroots group will play an important part in bringing a judicial review claim against Iain

Duncan Smith over the harm caused by the WCA and the failure to seek further medical evidence (see July 2012, and 22 May 2013).

Link: <https://www.facebook.com/MHResist/>

## **22 June 2010**

Title: Budget reveals plans to slash spending on disability living allowance through a new assessment process.

What: In his emergency budget, chancellor George Osborne announces plans to clamp down spending on disability living allowance, the benefit which contributes towards the extra costs faced by disabled people, through a new assessment process, which will be applied to new and existing claimants.

Why significant: This is the coalition's first step towards the introduction of personal independence payment, which – like the ESA reforms – will have a huge impact on disabled people's well-being through an assessment process that proves to be harmful.

Link:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2010-06-22/debates/1006224500001/FinancialStatement>

[https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130102201048/http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/junebudget\\_costings.pdf](https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130102201048/http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/junebudget_costings.pdf)

## **28 June 2010**

Title: Iain Duncan Smith suggests disabled people are to blame for planned cuts to Disability Living Allowance.

What: Duncan Smith, who has been appointed as the coalition's work and pensions secretary, tells MPs that spending on DLA has, in the previous decade, "spiralled out of control, and the system has been vulnerable to error, abuse and, in some cases, outright fraud" and that "we need to make sure, for the taxpayer, that the money is paid to those who desperately need it".

Why significant: Ministers would repeatedly stress that they would always protect "the most vulnerable", framing assessment as key to determining who is truly needy and therefore providing cover for aggressive cuts.

Link:

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2010-06-28/debates/10062812000003/CapitalGainsTax\(Rates\)#contribution-1006281200076](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2010-06-28/debates/10062812000003/CapitalGainsTax(Rates)#contribution-1006281200076)

## **September 2010**

Title: DWP fails in its legal duty to respond to the Stephen Carré prevention of future deaths report

What: DWP produces a draft final response to send to Tom Osborne. But in later years it was unable to prove that this document was sent and it almost certainly wasn't sent until February 2016.

Why significant: Demonstrates DWP's consistent reluctance to take action to prevent further deaths connected with the WCA.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-dismissed-coroners-concerns-over-wca-suicide-link-document-reveals/>

## **October 2010**

Title: Mad Pride protest against the coalition government's "savage" welfare cuts.

What: The grassroots mental health group Mad Pride – which is closely linked to the new Mental Health Resistance Network – takes over Hyde Park Corner to burn a two-faced effigy of David Cameron and George Osborne and protest against the coalition government's "savage" welfare cuts. One activist says government plans to force mental health service-users into work and cut their disability benefits are like "throwing a hand grenade into people's lives".

Why significant: One of the first protests about benefit cuts by Mad activists.

Link: <https://dotmaster.co.uk/you-d-have-to-be-mad-not-to-protest/> and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/terrified-survivors-burn-osborne-effigy-in-cuts-protest/>

## **3 October 2010**

Title: Launch of Disabled People Against Cuts

What: Disabled people who take part in a march against government cuts at the beginning of the Conservative party

conference in Birmingham launch a new grassroots organisation, Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC).

Why significant: DPAC will play a huge part in the anti-austerity movement over the next decade.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/spending-cuts-protest-spar-ks-birth-of-new-campaign/> and DPAC website <https://dpac.uk.net/>

## **6 October 2010**

Title: Prime minister adds to “benefit scrounger” rhetoric aimed at claimants of incapacity benefit

What: David Cameron tells the Tory party conference: “If you really cannot work, we will always look after you. But if you can work, and refuse to work, we will not let you live off the hard work of others.”

Why significant: The government continuing to craft public acceptance for impending cuts and reforms.

Link: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-11485397>

## **6 October 2010**

Title: Coroner Tom Osborne writes to the father of Stephen Carré, saying he has received no “substantive response” to his prevention of future deaths report.

What: The coroner, Tom Osborne, tells Peter Carré (father of Stephen Carré) that he has yet to receive a “substantive response” to his prevention of future deaths report (known at the time as a Rule 43 letter), and promises to contact him if he does.

(Peter Carré does not hear from the coroner again until November 2015, more than five years later.)

Why significant: Demonstrates the government's repeated refusal to act on the concerns raised by the coroner after the death of Stephen Carré

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/new-evidence-suggests-dwp-covered-up-coroners-wca-warning/>

### **23 November 2010**

Professor Malcolm Harrington publishes his first independent review of the Work Capability Assessment, finding that the system is “impersonal” but not “broken” (later evidence would emerge that he had not been informed by DWP of the coroner's report for Stephen Carré.)

What: Harrington, appointed in June 2010 to lead the first independent review of the WCA (he would also carry out the next two), concludes in his report that “there is a lot that could be done at each stage of the process to make the WCA fairer and more effective”, and finds “strong evidence that the system can be impersonal and mechanistic”, but does not find the system “broken or beyond repair”. He makes 25 recommendations.

Why significant: Professor Harrington had been commissioned by the government to carry out the review, so his conclusions carry weight. Further evidence would later emerge that he had not been informed by DWP of the coroner's report for Stephen Carré.

Link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/work-capability-assessment-independent-review-year-1>

## **1 Dec 2010**

Title: The Sun publishes interview with Iain Duncan Smith on “Benefits Britain”.

What: The Sun publishes an article on “BRITAIN'S shirkers' paradise”, quoting work and pensions secretary Iain Duncan Smith as saying that a large proportion of incapacity benefit claimants are cheats, and that Sun readers are right to be “upset and angry” when they see neighbours who do not work.

Why significant: Duncan Smith draws a direct link between the budget deficit and a so-called culture of worklessness said to be created by incapacity benefits – key messaging in the crafting of the “benefit scrounger” narrative. In later years, ministers are careful not to use this kind of rhetoric publicly.

Link: 1.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20110526055620/http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/3254131/We-are-living-in-a-shirkers-paradise-in-the-UK.html> and 2.

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/anger-after-duncan-smith-blames-ib-claimants-for-budget-deficit/>

## **2011**

Title: Calum's List website is created as a memorial page to remember "welfare reform deaths"

What: The Calum's List website is created by disabled campaigners as a memorial to those who have died because of welfare reform. Over 60 deaths (including suicides) linked to welfare reform have been added to the site since it was created, with links to media coverage of each death.

Why significant: An important early resource in evidencing the extent of harm caused by welfare reform.

Link: <http://calumslist.org/>

## **January 2011**

Title: Daily Mail article wrongly claims that 400,000 disabled benefit claimants were "trying it on", and that 94 per cent of new claimants are able to work.

What: A Daily Mail article wrongly claims that 400,000 disabled people "were trying it on" after applying for the new ESA in its first two years. The article claims the DWP figures show that 94 per cent of new claimants are able to work.

Why significant: This was one of the most high-profile and discredited articles published by the mainstream media, with backing from DWP. An analysis by the fact-checking website Full Fact will later show how inaccurate the story and headline were.

Link:

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1350359/400-000-sicknes-benefits-cheats-94-incapacity-claimants-CAN-work.html> and <https://fullfact.org/news/incapacity-benefit-can-94-claimants-work/>

and

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1350692/Sickness-benefits-400-000-benefits-cheats-scale-workshy-Britain.html>

## **June 2011**

Title: Publication of “Getting In, Staying In and Getting On: Disability Employment Support Fit for the Future” recommending end to government subsidies for Remploy factories and producing disagreement within the disabled people’s movement.

What: Publication of “Getting In, Staying In and Getting On: Disability Employment Support Fit for the Future”, a review to government by Liz Sayce (at the time the chief executive of the disabled people’s organisation RADAR). The review recommends an end to government subsidies for loss-making, sheltered Remploy factories and greater investment in the Access to Work scheme, which provides disability support within the workplace.

Why significant: The review split the disabled people’s movement, with many disabled campaigners arguing that segregated employment should be phased out, while others were furious that the plans would lead to as many as 2,000 disabled people losing their jobs. They later argued that the review provided political cover for the government to present its welfare reform agenda as progressive in the early years of the coalition government, while causing significant harm to disabled people.

Link:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/49779/sayce-report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/49779/sayce-report.pdf) and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/sayce-employment-support-review-support-must-focus-on-the-individual/> and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/sayce-employment-support-review-police-called-as-unions-erupt-over-remploy/>

## **15 June 2011**

Title: David Cameron says the work capability assessment is necessary to stop “bad behaviour”

What: The prime minister justifies cuts to employment and support allowance by arguing that disabled people are being tested so as not to reward “bad behaviour”.

Why significant: The debate with Labour leader Ed Miliband takes place in the context of the government’s hugely-controversial welfare reform bill, which would finally receive royal assent the following year.

Link:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm110615/debtext/110615-0001.htm#11061543000002> and

<https://services.parliament.uk/Bills/2010-12/welfarereform/stages.html>

## **25 September 2011**

Title: Labour’s shadow secretary of state for Work and Pensions claims Labour lost the 2010 election because it was not seen as tough enough on welfare

What: In his 2011 party conference speech, Liam Byrne says: “Let’s face the tough truth – that many people on the doorstep at the last election felt that too often we were for shirkers, not workers.”

Why significant: The main opposition party recites the same rhetoric demonising benefit claimants as used by the government to justify welfare reform.

Link:

<https://www.ukpol.co.uk/liam-byrne-2011-speech-to-labour-party-conference/>

### **3 October 2011**

Title: Iain Duncan Smith tells Conservative party conference that incapacity benefit is abused and open to fraud.

What: Ian Duncan Smith tells the Conservative party conference that incapacity benefit is “too often abused as an excuse for avoiding work”, saying that the “work capability assessment will review 1.5 million people on incapacity benefit”.

Why significant: This was at a time when Duncan Smith was already aware of the potentially fatal impact of the WCA on claimants, particularly those in mental distress, following the prevention of future deaths report that followed the suicide of Stephen Carré.

Link:

<https://www.politics.co.uk/comment-analysis/2011/10/03/iain-duncan-smith-speech-in-full/>

## **October 2011**

Title: Insurance provider Unum denies it will profit from incapacity benefit reform.

What: The UK's largest provider of "income protection insurance" denies that it stands to gain financially from incapacity benefit reforms that campaigners believe it helped to influence. Although Unum denies it had "significant influence" on government policy over the last decade, two of its executives were involved in "technical working groups" set up under the Labour government, which reported in 2006. Unum's chief executive admits that the "tightening" of eligibility for out-of-work disability benefits is encouraging people to take up income protection, but he also says he does not "necessarily accept that the fear [of welfare reforms] is acting to increase our profit". (Evidence of its influence will be found in November 2011).

Why significant: Highlights the potential profit to be made by insurance companies, such as Unum, from incapacity benefit reform.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/insurance-giant-denies-welfare-reform-will-boost-its-profits/>

## **27 October 2011**

Title: BBC broadcasts The Future State of Welfare, which mirrors government rhetoric, and uses faulty data, about the work capability assessment system.

What: The Future State of Welfare, presented by BBC journalist John Humphrys, uses faulty data about the WCA system and fails to point out the extensive criticisms of the severity, inaccuracy and inflexibility of the assessment process. Humphrys tells viewers that “more stringent” tests have been brought in to “try to flush out people who are claiming on health grounds when they should not be”, mirroring a lot of the government’s rhetoric on incapacity benefit reforms.

Why significant: Demonstrates the role of mainstream media, alongside government, in crafting public consent for the introduction of welfare reforms and cuts.

Link: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b016ltsh> and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/anger-and-shock-over-bbcs-offensive-welfare-documentary/>

## **October 2011**

Title: Research shows a ‘significant increase’ in the number of negative stories about disabled people in national newspapers over the last six years.

What: The Bad News for Disabled People report shows an increase (from 2004-05 and 2010-11) in media stories about benefit fraud – portraying disabled people as “scroungers”, and about disabled people as economic burdens.

Why significant: The report concludes that much reporting replicates the government's position on disability and helps "lay the groundwork" for removal of support structures.

Link:

<https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/bad-news-for-disabled-people-pdf.pdf>

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20120106221523/http://statistics.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd2/fem/nsfr-final-120711.pdf> and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/more-news-is-bad-news-says-report/>

## **October 2011**

Title: Pat's Petition, asking the DWP to stop changes to benefits, is submitted on the UK Government's website.

What: E-petition asking the Department for Work and Pensions to 'stop and review the changes to benefits and services which are falling disproportionately on disabled people, their carers and families', is submitted on UK Government website. The petition was started by Pat Onions and a small group formed of volunteers, all with firsthand experience of the issue as disabled people and/or carers, who had no previous experience as a group or in reaching out online to a wider community for petition signatures.

Why significant: The petition reached over 62,600 signatures and ended on November 1st 2012. At the time, it was the 12th most successful petition out of the 10,294 closed petitions.

Link: <https://petition.parliament.uk/archived/petitions/20968> and <https://journals.whitingbirch.net/index.php/GPWK/article/view/774/841>

## **November 2011**

Title: Evidence emerges of Unum's influence on UK welfare reform

What: Despite earlier denials that it had attempted to influence government policy on welfare reform, evidence emerges of a memo insurance giant Unum had submitted to the Commons work and pensions committee in 2002 in which it calls for fundamental reform of the welfare system, and says the government "must ensure both that work always pays more than benefits".

Why significant: Further evidence of the influence of the insurance industry on welfare reform.

Link:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200203/cmselect/cmworkp/401/3021203.htm>

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/new-evidence-of-corporate-giants-influence-on-welfare-reform/>

## **November 2011**

Title: Professor Harrington publishes his second review of the WCA

What: Harrington still claims that the WCA “is the right concept” and that “the process of improvement is happening, but is not yet in evidence everywhere”.

Why significant: At this stage, the government’s independent reviewer appears satisfied that the WCA is not fundamentally flawed, but evidence to emerge later will show that DWP failed to show him crucial evidence linking the assessment with the deaths of claimants.

Link:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/228703/9780108511103.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/228703/9780108511103.pdf)

### **31 December 2011**

Title: The death of Ms DE (Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland later launches an investigation into her death).

What: A Scottish woman is found dead at her home after taking her own life. On 9 December DWP had sent her a letter telling her she had been found ineligible for ESA. On 21 December, she had submitted an appeal to DWP. Ten days later she was found dead.

Why significant: Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland later launches an investigation into her death, which takes more than two years to report but will produce significant findings. [See March 2014, publication of Who Benefits?]

Link:

[https://www.mwcscot.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-06/who\\_benefits\\_final.pdf](https://www.mwcscot.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-06/who_benefits_final.pdf)

## **2012**

Title: Research report evidences “influence of politicians’ rhetoric” in increasing stigma against benefit claimants

What: Report commissioned by Turn2Us refers to how “Labour’s emphasis on conditionality and tackling fraud seems to have led to higher levels of stigma (particularly among Labour sympathisers), convincing people that fraud is much more widespread than it actually is. The report quotes one academic as saying that “by framing policies to appease real or imagined resentments, the underlying sense of grievance is strengthened rather than mollified”.

Why significant: Report provides further evidence of the role played by politicians in building harmful disability benefits stigma.

Link:

<https://www.turn2us.org.uk/T2UWebsite/media/Documents/Benefits-Stigma-in-Britain.pdf>

## **9 January 2012**

Title: Report finds government misled parliament over opposition to disability living allowance reform, and Spartacus Network is launched

What: Research by disabled campaigners finds that there was “overwhelming opposition in the consultation responses to nearly all of the government’s proposals for DLA reform” and that the government had used inaccurate figures to exaggerate the rise in

DLA claimants. Writing this report led to the creation of the Spartacus Network – a group of disabled and chronically ill people across the country who research issues relating to disability and social security.

Why significant: The government would repeatedly claim that its DLA/PIP reforms were aided and supported by disability organisations and that it was “working closely” with disabled people on its reforms. The concerns about the new assessment would prove to be well founded.

Link:

<https://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/library/responsible-reform.html> <https://spartacusnetwork.wordpress.com/about/>

## **28 January 2012**

Title: Disabled activists and allies stage direct action protest at the government’s welfare reform bill.

What: About 20 wheelchair-users lock themselves to a chain across Regent Street, in a protest organised by Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC), the Disabled People’s Direct Action Network (DAN), and UK Uncut.

Why significant: The protest shows the level of concern and anger about the welfare reform bill.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/oxford-circus-protest-camp-aigners-warn-government-of-more-direct-action/>

## **1 February 2012**

Title: DWP begins to collect peer reviews (the secret reports it carries out into the deaths of benefit claimants) centrally for the first time.

What: DWP previously had no centralised collection of so-called peer reviews (the secret reports it carries out into the deaths of benefit claimants, particularly suicides, as well as “other serious incidents” linked to benefit claims). One of the tasks of a new peer review support team is to arrange, monitor and co-ordinate any requests for peer reviews.

Why significant: The importance of the peer reviews would only become clear in October 2014 [see 13 October 2014], but in 2012 no-one outside DWP appeared to be aware of their existence.

Link: FOI 5012, Feb 2015 [make available on website]

## **1 February 2012**

Title: Commons invokes financial privilege to pass the Welfare Reform Act 2012, quashing Lords amendments to soften changes to the benefits system.

What: The government overturns seven key Lords amendments that had been passed to try to soften welfare reforms, and takes the rare step of telling peers they have no constitutional right to challenge the Commons’ decisions further.

Why significant: Shows the government determination to quash opposition to changes to the benefit system.

Link:

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2012/feb/01/coalition-overtur-ns-welfare-reform-amendments>

## **1 March 2012**

Title: MPs and peers warn of cumulative impact of Disability Living Allowance and Personal Independence payments (DLA/PIP) reforms on disabled people.

What: The joint committee on human rights, in a report on the implementation of the right of disabled people to independent living in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, finds that replacing DLA with PIP – along with restrictions in local authority eligibility criteria for social care support, closing the Independent Living Fund and changes to housing benefit – risked “interacting in a particularly harmful way for disabled people”.

Why significant: The government has previously refused to conduct an assessment of the cumulative impact of its reforms on disabled people so this is important parliamentary recognition of the likely cumulative harm of cuts and reforms.

Link:

<https://old.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/joint-select/human-rights-committee/news/independent-living-report/>

## **8 March 2012**

Title: Welfare Reform Act, which introduces universal credit and introduces the “bedroom tax”, receives royal assent.

What: Among the act’s measures, it provides for the introduction of the new universal credit, and the replacement of DLA with PIP,

as well as limiting contributory ESA to 12 months (for those placed in the work-related activity group), and introducing the bedroom tax (“spare room subsidy”).

Why significant: This was the legislation that introduced a string of hugely-controversial measures that would profoundly impact disabled people over the next decade and be linked to multiple deaths. (See 4 May 2013 for one of the first known deaths to be linked to the bedroom tax).

Link:

<https://services.parliament.uk/bills/2010-11/welfarereform.html>

## **2 April 2012**

Title: Mind chief executive resigns from Work Capability Assessment (WCA) review scrutiny panel, arguing that the assessment process “isn’t working”.

What: Paul Farmer, chief executive of mental health charity Mind resigns from the Harrington review’s scrutiny panel, arguing that the WCA process “isn’t working” and that there is “insufficient recognition of the need to change the approach”. In a joint response

to the Harrington review in September, leading mental health organisations say that they

do not believe that reforms have gone far enough, that people with mental distress

continue to report “poor experiences” of the WCA, and that further substantial reforms are still needed.

Why significant: Early recognition of flaws in the WCA system and DWP's failure to take the necessary steps to make it safe.

Link:

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN05850/SN05850.pdf>

## **1 May 2012**

Title: Scottish GP tells Scottish parliament that the death of Paul Reekie was caused by the UK government's welfare reforms.

What: Dr Stephen Carty, a Leith GP and member of Black Triangle, tells the Scottish parliament's welfare reform committee that Paul Reekie had been driven to suicide by the UK government's welfare reforms. He says that letters informing Reekie that his incapacity and housing benefits would be stopped were used as a suicide note.

Why significant: Shows members of the Scottish parliament being alerted to the risks and harm created by the UK government's welfare reforms, particularly the incapacity benefit reassessment process.

Link:

<https://blacktrianglecampaign.org/2012/05/02/claim-welfare-reforms-drove-writer-paul-reekie-to-suicide/>

## **June 2012**

Title: Doctors vote to end the work capability assessment (WCA), thanks to lobbying from disabled activists.

What: Britain's doctors vote at the British Medical Association's (BMA) annual representative meeting to end the WCA immediately.

Why significant: Although this was a huge lobbying success for disabled activists, there would be future criticism of the BMA for failing to follow its members' demand to lobby for an end to the assessment and for failing to take action itself to make the assessment safer.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/doctors-demand-end-to-fitness-for-work-test/>

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/doctors-union-is-complicit-in-continuing-fitness-for-work-deaths/>

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/doctors-leaders-could-face-protests-over-fitness-for-work-campaign-snub/>

## **8 June 2012**

Title: The death of Karen Sherlock, 2 weeks after she was told she would be eligible once again to receive Employment support Allowance (ESA).

What: Karen Sherlock dies just a fortnight after she was told she would be eligible once again to receive ESA. She was one of the tens of thousands of disabled people whose contributory form of ESA was stopped from 30<sup>th</sup> April this year, because of the new one-year time-limit introduced under the Welfare Reform Act.

Why significant: Disabled activists say her death is further evidence that the WCA is unfit for purpose and is causing

thousands of disabled people anxiety and hardship, exacerbating their ill-health and contributing to deaths.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/activists-death-highlights-cruelty-of-fitness-for-work-rules/>

## **20 June 2012**

Title: Email leaked from Jobcentre managers to staff after a claimant attempts suicide after being told his sickness benefit would be cut off.

What: The Guardian reports on a leaked email sent by three senior DWP civil servants to jobcentre staff, warning them of the risk of suicides as the government's welfare reforms and cuts roll out. The email says: "Very sadly, only last week a customer of DWP [Department for Work and Pensions] attempted suicide", which is "said to be the result of receiving a letter" informing him that his sickness benefit would be cut off.

Why significant: One of the earliest media reports linking coalition benefit cuts to suicide.

Link:

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2012/jun/20/jobcentre-supervisors-suicide-risk-benefit-claimants>

## **26 July 2012**

Title: High court grants permission for two disabled people (backed by the Mental Health Resistance Network) to bring a

judicial review claim against the work and pensions secretary and related to the work capability assessment (WCA).

What: The high court grants permission to two disabled people (MM and DM) to bring a judicial review claim against the work and pensions secretary (at this point Iain Duncan Smith) in connection with the WCA. The claim is backed by the Mental Health Resistance Network [see 2010 entry]. Many of its members have themselves had relapses, episodes of self-harm and suicide attempts, and needed higher levels of medication and hospitalisation, as a result of the reassessment process.

Why significant: MM and DM argue that the WCA fails to make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act for people with mental health conditions and those with learning difficulties, and call on DWP and Atos to seek further medical evidence at the beginning of such claims.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/victory-in-first-stage-of-fitness-for-work-court-case/>

### **30 July 2012**

Title: Two investigative documentaries about Atos and the work capability assessment (WCA) are broadcast on the same night, showing evidence of target driven assessment culture.

What: Channel 4's Dispatches and BBC's Panorama both raise serious concerns about the processes and standards that have been adopted by Atos when carrying out WCAs. The Panorama interviews several disabled people who had been found "fit for

work” following WCAs carried out by Atos, despite serious health conditions. Among those interviewed are the family of a man with a heart condition who was found fit for work, successfully appealed against that decision, but was then called in for another assessment. On learning he had been found fit for work a second time, he had decided Atos must be right and had vacuumed his car, before collapsing and dying minutes later. The Dispatches programme follows a GP as he trains to become an assessor for Atos. His Atos trainer is shown admitting the WCA is “toxic” and “very, very tough”, before warning the GP that any assessor who allows too many disabled people to join the ESA support group will be told this rate is “too high”.

One trainer says that “as long as you’ve got one finger, and you can press a button” a claimant will be found fit for work.

Why significant: Throughout the last decade, no-one has produced written proof of targets or bonuses for assessors to find ESA claimants fit for work, but the Dispatches documentary provides some of the strongest evidence to show how much pressure assessors are placed under.

Links:

<http://www.channel4.com/programmes/dispatches/episode-guide/series-117/episode-1> and

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2012/jul/27/disability-benefit-assessors-film>

<http://shura.shu.ac.uk/28060/>

and <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01lldrc> and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/mps-suggest-minister-ignored-fitness-for-work-re-test-concerns/>

## **August 2012**

Title: Disabled activists target Atos at London 2012 Paralympics, including delivering a coffin to Atos's headquarters to represent those who have died after being found "fit to work".

What: Atos (contracted to carry out the WCA) is a major sponsor of the London 2012 Paralympics. Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC) hold a week of protests titled The Atos Games, which includes delivering a coffin full of messages to Atos's headquarters in central London, aiming to draw attention to the estimated 1,100 people who died within six months of being found "fit for work" by an Atos "healthcare professional", over just an eight-month period. (The figure of 1,100 deaths is most closely linked to 2015 mortality statistics on ESA, IB and SDA (severe disablement allowance), see Table 2.5 of link below).

Why significant: Again, activists draw attention to the WCA, outsourcing and people's deaths.

Link:

[https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/08/29/atos-paralympic-sponsors-under-fire-disabled-attitude\\_n\\_1838614.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/08/29/atos-paralympic-sponsors-under-fire-disabled-attitude_n_1838614.html) and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/london-2012-campaigners-refuse-to-target-blameless-athletes-over-atos-2/> and [Mortality statistics: Employment and Support Allowance, Incapacity Benefit](#)

[or Severe Disablement Allowance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](http://publishing.service.gov.uk)  
(see Table 2.5).

## **August 2012**

Title: Survey finds negative press coverage of disabled people, supported by government in order to justify cuts, is increasing, contributing to disability hate crime.

What: A survey by Disability Rights UK finds that disabled people increasingly feel the press is discriminating against them, contributing to disability hate crime and abuse, and that the government is behind negative portrayals of disabled people in order to justify cuts. The survey was carried out due to issues raised by disabled people. The newspapers most frequently cited for negative coverage were The Sun and the Daily Mail. Asked what they believed has caused the negative coverage, the top five answers were: 'government', 'welfare', 'reform', 'DWP' and 'cuts'.  
Why significant: As the report says: 'Many respondents clearly felt the press took their lead from Government and held them responsible for the negative reporting of welfare issues.'

Link:

<https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/sites/default/files/pdf/disabilitypresscoverage.pdf>

## **13 September 2012**

Title: MP raises concerns over the death of Colin Traynor, whose family say they "hold the Government...personally responsible".

What: Colin Traynor, who had epilepsy, was found fit for work following a WCA, but died less than four months later. His case is raised in the Commons by Labour MP Michael Meacher. He had undergone a WCA on 4 November 2011. He previously claimed incapacity benefit because of the severity of his epilepsy. Following the DWP decision to cut his benefits by £70 a week, he experienced stress and anxiety about whether he would lose his home, be able to pay his bills, and be able to afford to eat properly. He appealed, and following the provision of further medical evidence, he was awarded ESA but placed in the work-related activity group. His health deteriorated, his seizures increased due to the stress and he lost a lot of weight. On 3 April 2012 the stress and anxiety led to a massive seizure. He died at home at the age of 29. After being informed of his death, DWP overturned the decision. In a letter to Meacher, his mother, father and sister said they “hold the Government, David Cameron, Iain Duncan Smith personally responsible for the death of our son... and brother”. DWP minister Mark Hoban said that a review had found the department ‘correctly applied the procedures for incapacity benefit reassessment in this case’ and suggested it was Colin Traynor’s fault for not providing the necessary medical evidence earlier in the process.

Why significant: His death was one of the few to be debated in depth by parliament, and highlighted the continuing concerns among disabled activists that many disabled people were dying

shortly after being found fit for work, demonstrating that the WCA system was not fit for purpose.

Link:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2012-09-13/debates/1209133500001/ColinTraynor>

## **25 September 2012**

Title: The death of Edward Jacques, a week after his Employment Support Allowance (ESA) was stopped, which his family say was a major “trigger”. The coroner raises issues with the assessment process, specifically the failure to get medical evidence.

What: Edward Jacques, from Sneinton, Nottingham, had been found fit for work after a WCA lasting just 23 minutes, an inquest would later hear. His ESA was stopped on 18 September and he took his own life a week later. The coroner at his inquest said: “I find the assessment process in Edward’s case did not fully or properly reflect Edward’s physical and mental health at that time. It is conceded by those involved in the [assessment] process that if the information as to Edward’s physical and mental health as shared by his GP had been known at the time of the assessment, the outcome would have been very different. It is desperately sad that such evidence was not available either to the nurse or to the decision maker.” She also branded the WCA a “crude assessment”. His brother and sister said: “We have no doubt that the decision to stop his allowance was a major trigger which led him on to a severe depression and desperate action. We do not

believe that Edward is an isolated case and we think thousands of assessments have been made like this across the country.”

Why significant: Another suicide linked to the failure to secure further medical evidence.

Link: Direct links to the Nottingham Evening Post coverage of the inquest are no longer available, but here is a link to a summary of the coverage:

<https://blacktrianglecampaign.org/2013/10/09/disabled-nottingham-man-killed-himself-after-his-benefits-were-stopped-by-dwp-atos-h-m-coroner/>

## **27 September 2012**

Title: The death of Brian McArdle, the day after he was deemed “fit to work” following a work capability assessment (WCA).

What: Brian McArdle dies the day after he was deemed “fit to work” following a work capability assessment. He had been left paralysed down his left side and blind in one eye after a stroke. His son Kieran tells the Daily Record that the stress of being summoned to undergo a WCA had contributed to his Dad having a stroke days before his appointment.

Why significant: Brian’s death will be mentioned in a Commons early day motion, which calls for a “radical and thorough overhaul” of the WCA system before there is “more senseless loss of life”.

His death will also be mentioned by Owen Jones when questioning Iain Duncan Smith on BBC Question Time [see 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2012].

Links:

<https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/scottish-news/atos-killed-my-dad-says-boy-1411100> and <http://www.edms.org.uk/2012-13/714.htm>

## **8 October 2012**

Title: George Osborne refers to welfare claimants as “sleeping off a life on benefits” in speech to Conservative party conference.

What: Osborne tells the Conservative party conference: “Where is the fairness, we ask, for the shift-worker, leaving home in the dark hours of the early morning, who looks up at the closed blinds of their next door neighbour sleeping off a life on benefits?”

Why significant: The speech became notorious among disabled people for these comments, as many pointed out the good reasons why many disabled people would have their blinds or curtains closed early in the morning, related to both their impairments and the crisis in social care. Adrian Berrill-Cox, a disabled barrister who had stood for the Conservative party at the general election in Islington North, says he is concerned about the “collateral damage” that could be caused by Osborne’s words, that “stigmatisation is something we have to be extremely careful about” and that people might be “incited” to abuse disabled benefits claimants because of a “misunderstanding” of Osborne’s words.

Link:

<https://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/politics/2012/10/george-osbornes-speech-conservative-conference-full-text> and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/conservative-conference-0sbornes-speech-risks-collateral-damage-says-tory/>

## **November 2012**

Title: WOW Petition Campaign, created by disabled people and building on Pat's Petition, calls for a cumulative impact assessment of welfare reforms.

What: A small group of disabled people who met online start the WOW Petition Campaign to advance and expand the demands of a previous campaign, [Pat's Petition](#). They aim to use the government's petition website to secure more than 100,000 signatures on their call for a cumulative impact assessment of all the government's welfare reforms, and to call for the abolition of the WCA. Disabled comedian Francesca Martinez is the public face of the campaign and Labour's John McDonnell MP supports the parliamentary end of the campaign.

Why significant: High-profile activism by disabled campaigners that will draw attention to the cumulative impact on disabled people of the government's programme of cuts and reforms.

Link:

<https://wowpetitiondotcom.wordpress.com>

## **19 November 2012**

Title: DWP suggests that providing further medical evidence would be too heavy a burden on GPs.

What: Dr Bill Gunnyeon, DWP's chief medical adviser, who has overall responsibility for WCA policy, tells the further medical evidence judicial review case that asking GPs to provide medical evidence for ESA applicants with mental health conditions would be burdensome.

Why significant: This was a crucial statement by DWP of its argument for refusing to make the changes suggested by the coroner in the Stephen Carré inquest. Its failure to act on this recommendation is thought to have led to further deaths.

Link: Public Law Project has a copy.

## **15 November 2012**

Title: The Spartacus Network publishes the People's Review of the Work Capability Assessment, documenting links between being found "fit for work" and people's deaths.

What: The report was prepared by members of the Spartacus Network of grassroots disabled campaigners. It details a string of cases involving ESA claimants who killed themselves or otherwise died after being told they were "fit for work", all of them in circumstances in which the WCA appears to have been a factor in their deaths.

Why significant: The first major research report to produce multiple examples of the fatal impact of the WCA on benefit claimants.

Link:

<https://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/uploads/attachment/409/the-peoples-review-of-the-wca.pdf>

## **20 November 2012**

Title: Professor Harrington publishes his third review of the Work Capability Assessment (WCA).

What: Harrington concludes “that significant and lasting improvements are coming” to the WCA. He insists that he still believes the assessment should not be scrapped. But he does say: “Decision-makers should actively consider the need to seek further documentary evidence in every claimant’s case.”

Why significant: Harrington was later to discover that DWP had not made him aware of its own secret peer reviews of deaths linked to the WCA, or of the Stephen Carré prevention of future deaths report.

Link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/work-capability-assessment-independent-review-year-3>

## **22 November 2012**

Title: Iain Duncan Smith questioned over benefit-related deaths on BBC Question Time.

What: Owen Jones questions Iain Duncan Smith about the deaths of Brian McCardle [see 27 September 2012] and Karen Sherlock [see 8 June 2012]. Iain Duncan Smith replies “I didn’t hear you screaming about two and a half million people who were parked, nobody saw them, for over 10 years, not working, no hope, no aspiration. We are changing their lives; I’m proud of doing that. Getting them off-benefit is what we’re going to do.”

Why significant: Evidence of deaths related to benefits being discussed in the public domain.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ec3wJIHtVMM>

## **26 November 2012**

Title: Joseph Rowntree Foundation publishes report on the impact of welfare reform on poverty and exclusion, criticising DWP for failing to assess the overall impact of its welfare reforms.

What: Joseph Rowntree Foundation publishes the report Monitoring poverty and social exclusion (2012), which criticises DWP for failing to assess the overall impact of its welfare reforms.

Why significant: The report shows that “welfare cuts so far are likely to hit low-income households more than once, through changes to both income-related and housing benefits. Changes to disability benefit could mean low-income disabled people being hit even harder.”

Link:

<https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/monitoring-poverty-and-social-exclusion-2012>

## **30 November 2012**

Title: House of Commons Library sums up WCA concerns

What: A briefing document by the Commons library sums up concerns about the WCA, including information on the Dispatches and Panorama documentaries from earlier in the year and some of the concerns raised in parliament.

Why significant: Shows concerns about the WCA being considered, debated and analysed by parliament.

Link:

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN05850/SN05850.pdf>

## **2013**

Title: Linda Wootton dies nine days after DWP upholds its decision to declare her “fit for work”

What: Linda had undergone two heart-and-lung transplants and was left with a weakened immune system caused by the immunosuppressant therapy she was taking to prevent her body rejecting the organs. Neither the assessor, the first decision-maker nor the second official who reviewed her case deemed her to be at substantial risk of harm. Linda had had regular blackouts as well as being on 10 different prescription medications. She was dying on a hospital bed as the decision came through. Her husband told the Sunday Mirror: “I sat there and listened to my wife drown in her own body fluids. It took half an hour for her to die – and that’s a woman who’s ‘fit for work’. The last months of her life were a misery because she worried about her benefits, feeling useless, like a scrounger.”

Why significant: Linda died of the conditions that the WCA had found not to hinder her fitness for work. Linda’s death is one of the early, high-profile deaths that showed how people were dying after DWP had found them fit for work.

Links:

[https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/05/28/linda-wootton-dies-after-being-judged-fit-for-work\\_n\\_3346582.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2013/05/28/linda-wootton-dies-after-being-judged-fit-for-work_n_3346582.html)

and <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-essex-22718700>

## **17 January 2013**

Title: Commons debate on work capability assessment and Ato

What: The debate is secured by Labour MP Michael Meacher, who says he has been sent nearly 300 case histories of people affected by the WCA, and adds: “I cannot begin to do justice to the feelings of distress, indignation, fear, helplessness and indeed widespread anger at the way they have been treated.” His Labour colleague Kevan Jones tells the coalition government that it has “blood on its hands” from the deaths of disabled people caused by the WCA. Jones says DWP has been asked to record the number of cases of suicide connected with the WCA but has refused. He says there have been “a number of well-publicised cases where people have taken their own lives because of this system”.

John McDonnell, later to be shadow chancellor under Jeremy Corbyn, says the system is unreformable and that “we will be to blame for every injury, every harm, every suicide, every death as a result of the system if we do not do something now to scrap it.”

Why significant: This was some of the earliest and most powerful parliamentary criticisms of the WCA, and provided substantial evidence that it was leading to deaths of disabled people, with

many MPs detailing examples of harm caused to their own constituents.

Link:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmhansrd/cm130117/debtext/130117-0002.htm#13011761000001>

## **23 February 2013**

Title: Research by DPAC activist exposes how DWP

under-estimated how many should be found not fit for work

What: DWP claimed its calculations showed that less than 11 per cent of those going through the WCA process should be found not fit for work and placed in the ESA support group (for those with the highest barriers to work). But research, including freedom of information requests by DPAC's Anita Bellows, exposes that DWP had misunderstood its own data. She shows that the figure of 11 per cent had instead been a calculation of what proportion of claimants would be automatically placed in the support group without needing a face-to-face assessment. Ministers had used the erroneous figures to argue that one million fewer people would be on incapacity benefits by 2015. This figure also appeared in the 2016 green paper Improving Lives.

Why significant: DPAC says this provides "[evidence of confusion and incompetence](#) at several levels of the DWP, which goes right to the top of the department. Not only are DWP staff unable to differentiate between assumptions and statistics, but they are also wrongly interpreting their own figures." It also raises

concerns that Atos may have responded to the DWP target by ensuring fewer people were found eligible for the support group.

Links:

<https://depositedpapers.parliament.uk/depositedpaper/2266754/files> (see ESA RPF and Appendix 8) and

<https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/54879/response/141912/attach/html/2/FoI%20Response%203517%2018.01.11.doc.html>

and

[https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/146880/response/362043/attach/2/0391%20Final%20Response.pdf?cookie\\_passthroug](https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/146880/response/362043/attach/2/0391%20Final%20Response.pdf?cookie_passthroug)  
[h=1](#)

and

<https://dpac.uk.net/2013/02/11-was-never-intended-to-be-the-number-of-people-in-the-support-group-dwp-big-blunder-annie-howard/> and

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/564038/work-and-health-green-paper-improving-lives.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/564038/work-and-health-green-paper-improving-lives.pdf)

## **April 2013**

Title: Thinktank Demos show that disabled people will be hit by up to 13 different cuts and risk losing a total of £28.3 billion in income support by 2018.

What: Analysis from thinktank Demos shows that disabled people will be hit by up to 13 different cuts and policy changes implemented by the coalition government.

Why significant: Shows the cumulative impact of cuts for disabled people i.e. that many people experience more than one form of changes to benefits.

Link:

<https://www.poverty.ac.uk/disability-government-cuts-reports/%E2%80%98-billion%E2%80%99-benefit-cuts-disabled-people>

And

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/mar/27/welfare-cuts-disabled-people>

### **April 2013**

Title: Launch of new personal independence payment (PIP)

What: DWP begins its lengthy rollout of PIP, which is replacing working-age disability living allowance (DLA). New claimants in some parts of the north-west and north-east of England were the first to experience PIP instead of DLA.

Why significant: Those being assessed for PIP would in future years experience many of the same problems as those who had been put through the WCA, with allegations of inaccurate and dishonest reports written by assessors working for DWP contractors Atos and Capita.

Link:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2013-03-22/debates/1303226200001/BudgetResolutionsAndEconomicSituationhighlight=personal+independence+payment#contribution-13032262000080>

## **April 2013**

Title: DWP introduces mandatory reconsiderations – a new internal appeal stage for benefits.

What: Ministers introduce the new mandatory reconsideration stage for personal independence payment and universal credit (and then for all other DWP benefits in October 2013). The high rate of benefits assessments decisions overturned at appeals stage created negative publicity for DWP. Mandatory reconsiderations introduce a first stage that claimants must go through before they can appeal a benefit assessment decision at tribunal. [Data shows](#) that between 2013-2018, there were almost one million MRs of PIP and ESA decisions. These comprised of 670,000 PIP MRs, of which 119,000 (18%) resulted in a change of award; and 260,000 ESA MRs, of which 31,000 (11%) resulted in a change of award (p. 34). Claimants who have completed MR can go to appeal if they are still unsatisfied with the Department's decision. Between 2013-2018, there were 170,000 PIP appeals, of which claimants' won in 108,000 cases (63%); and 53,000 ESA appeals, of which claimants won in 32,000 cases (60%) (p. 34).

Why significant: DWP said MRs were introduced to resolve disputes at an earlier stage, allow claimants to provide additional evidence and to reduce the demand on the tribunal service, but disabled campaigners viewed them as a tactic to discourage claimants from challenging benefit assessment decisions and encourage them to drop out of the system.

Link:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmworkpen/302/30209.htm> and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-dismisses-talk-of-fitness-for-work-catch-22/> and

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmworkpen/829/829.pdf>

### **April 2013**

Title: The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO) comes into effect, introducing funding cuts to legal aid.

What: The Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 (LASPO) comes into effect, introducing funding cuts to legal aid, meaning fewer people can access legal advice. LASPO (and the regulations made under it) restricts financial eligibility for legal aid and removes many areas of civil law from its scope, including family, employment and welfare benefits law. A review of the impact of LASPO carried out by The Law Society in 2017 would find that legal aid was no longer available for many who needed it; that those eligible for legal aid found it harder to access; that wide gaps in provision were not being addressed; and that LASPO had a negative impact on the state and society. Why significant: The removal of access to legal support denies victims of austerity and welfare reform recourse to justice.

Links:

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2012/10/contents/enacted>  
and <https://www.lawsociety.org.uk/news/documents/laspo-4-years-on-review/>

## **6 April 2013**

Title: David Cameron tells The Sun that the welfare system has “lost its way” and become a “lifestyle choice for some”

What: David Cameron tells The Sun that “Too often hard-working people have felt that it’s one rule for them and another rule for those on benefits...We are making sure that disability benefit goes to those who genuinely need help, not to those who don’t... This is a Government for hard-working people — and that’s the way it will stay.”

Why significant: It is published just as the government launches its new personal independence payment, with the intention of cutting what was spent on working-age disability living allowance by 20 per cent, and again heightens the stigmatising rhetoric about disabled people as “fakers and frauds”.

Link:

<https://www.thesun.co.uk/archives/politics/649702/crazy-situation-where-you-earn-more-on-benefits-than-you-do-at-work-ends-now/>

## **4 May 2013**

Title: The death of Stephanie Bottrill - her suicide note blames the government’s “bedroom tax”.

What: Stephanie Bottrill dies by suicide. Hours earlier she had told her GP about the stress and anxiety the government's housing policies were causing her. She leaves behind a suicide note in which she blames the bedroom tax – known by the government as the spare room subsidy removal (which was introduced just one month before her death)– and writes that “the only people to blame are the government”. (In 2015, the suicide of Frances McCormack would also be linked to the bedroom tax, see entry 10 August 2015).

Why significant: Ian Jones, one of the founders of the [WOWcampaign](#), later says that her death showed the government failing to “exercise any duty of care towards sick and disabled people when framing their welfare reforms and their continuing refusal to undertake a cumulative impact assessment of these reforms strongly suggests that they were planned as a deliberate crime against humanity”.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/government-accused-over-death-of-stephanie-bottrill/>

## **16 May 2013**

Title: Former Atos assessor blows the whistle on unfair practices, saying the DWP is the “real culprit”.

What: Greg Wood, a GP who worked at Atos as a senior adviser on mental health issues, says that claimants were not assessed in an “even-handed way”, that assessors were trained to award points “begrudgingly” and encouraged to find “reasons not to

award points”, and that medical staff were told to change reports if they were too favourable to claimants. The doctor claims he resigned in disgust at what was going on, saying that many doctors he had spoken to shared his concerns. He says: “I think the Department for Work and Pensions is the real culprit here. It’s the government training that makes Atos assessors do this.”

Why significant: Shows how Atos processes were designed to lead to claimants being unfairly found fit for work.

Link:

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/may/16/atos-doctor-claimants-biased-medical-assessments>

## **22 May 2013**

Title: Judgement on work capability assessment court case brought by the Mental Health Resistance Network.

What: The upper tribunal delivers its judgement on the Mental Health Resistance Network case, finding that DWP breached its duty to make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act by leaving claimants to collect their own medical evidence for their assessments. It orders DWP to investigate how to ensure the necessary medical evidence can be obtained, with the judges set to deliver a final ruling later this year.

Why significant: Judges reaching the same decision about the unfairness of the WCA that had been reached by claimants, activists and politicians. The case is crucial in highlighting DWP’s continuing refusal to make changes to the collection of medical

evidence in the early stages of claims, particularly for those with mental distress. But the judgment also makes clear that the WCA is not purely a “functional” test. One of the problems associated with points - based testing is that there will always be exceptions for claimants who don't fit the ‘right’ boxes. Any concession on ‘exceptions’ is effectively an admission that points-based assessment just does not work for all.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/court-decision-on-wca-vindicates-fears-and-concerns-of-thousands/> and <https://www.bailii.org/uk/cases/UKUT/AAC/2013/259.html>

## **20 July 2013**

Title: The death of David Clapson, three weeks after having his jobseeker's allowance sanctioned.

What: David Clapson, who had diabetes, dies as a result of an acute lack of insulin, three weeks after having his jobseeker's allowance sanctioned. Because he had no money, he couldn't afford to pay for electricity that would have kept the fridge where he kept his insulin working, in the height of summer, and he had also run out of food. But despite the circumstances of his death, and clear links with the sanctions system, no inquest was ever held. An autopsy held after his death found his stomach was empty, there was hardly any food in his flat, and he had just £3.44 in his bank account. In November 2016, Labour leader Jeremy

Corbyn described this and other such cases as “institutionalised barbarity”.

Why significant: One of many deaths of claimants linked to the government’s sanctions regime, it became one of the most high-profile cases because of the campaigning efforts of David’s sister Gill Thompson, and was mentioned several times in parliament.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/sister-hopes-campaign-for-benefit-sanction-inquest-will-prevent-further-deaths/> and <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2016-11-02/debates/F9C59D7A-3767-432C-B31C-C0AC32ABF40E/Engagementshighlight=david+clapson#contribution-F5806894-0563-4A29-BDD8-8F765D8CBFC9>

## **9 August 2013**

Title: The death of Mark Wood after being found ineligible for Employment Support Allowance (ESA).

What: Mark Wood starves to death in 2013 after being found ineligible for ESA, even though he had never been able to cope with the demands of a job and his GP had said he was completely incapable of working. The decision to find him fit for work caused him extreme anxiety and distress and exaggerated his eating disorder. He died four months after his incapacity benefit was stopped. Because of his complex mental health condition and other impairments, including an eating disorder, Asperger’s syndrome and multiple chemical sensitivity, he had not provided

the evidence needed in his ESA application, or at a face-to-face WCA which was carried out in his home because of the severity of his mental distress. His mother said later that neither the Atos assessor nor the DWP decision-maker made any attempt to secure further medical evidence about his mental health from his GP, who would have told them that he was unable to work.

Why significant: Mark Wood's death came three years after ministers had been warned by a coroner – following the death of Stephen Carré in January 2010 – that they needed to review their policy not to seek further medical evidence from the GPs and psychiatrists of ESA claimants with mental health conditions.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/mother-of-fit-for-work-victim-calls-for-ministers-to-face-criminal-charges/>

### **23 August 2013**

Title: The death of David Barr, a month after the confirmation of the decision to find him fit for work, which his Father says was the trigger leading to his suicide.

What: David Barr, from Glenrothes, Fife, was 28 when he took his own life on 23 August 2013, a month after he had learned that the decision to find him fit for work had been confirmed. Despite his history of significant mental distress, David's parents believe the healthcare professional who assessed him – employed by Atos – failed to contact their son's GP or his psychiatrist for further information about his mental health. When questioned afterwards by the Procurator Fiscal's office – which investigates sudden

deaths in Scotland – the assessor claimed he couldn't remember if he had made any phone calls, David's father would say later. The decision that he was not eligible for ESA was confirmed in a letter to David on 17 July 2013. A month later, he took his own life. He was taking strong medication including anti-psychotics and anti-depressants and was experiencing paranoid delusions. His father is certain that the decision to turn down his son's ESA claim was the trigger that led to his decision to kill himself, against a background of continuing financial pressures. Several weeks after he died, two DWP officials visited the family and admitted that David should have been receiving ESA instead of jobseeker's allowance for nearly two years.

Why significant: Another death linked to the flawed WCA process and the failure to seek further medical evidence.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/documents-show-wca-suicide-death-mirrored-2010-tragedy/>

## **11 September 2013**

Title: "Shocking" bedroom tax should be axed, says UN investigator, who reported that the most vulnerable were being affected, with some talking about suicide.

What: UN investigator Raquel Rolnik says the "bedroom tax" could constitute a violation of the human right to adequate housing after hearing "shocking" accounts of how the policy was affecting disabled people during a visit to the UK. In an interview with The Guardian she says she is disturbed by the extent of

unhappiness caused by the bedroom tax and struck by how heavily this policy was affecting “the most vulnerable, the most fragile, the people who are on the fringes of coping with everyday life” and how people were reporting that they would take their own lives.

Why significant: Despite the UN raising concerns about the government’s welfare reforms, ministers dismiss the report, with Conservative chair Grant Shapps condemning her comments as an “absolute disgrace” and threatening to make a complaint to the UN.

Link:

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/sep/11/bedroom-tax-should-be-axed-says-un-investigator> and

[Conservatives protest to UN over 'bedroom tax' report - BBC News](#) and

[https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session25/Documents/A\\_HRC\\_25\\_54\\_Add.2\\_ENG.DOC](https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session25/Documents/A_HRC_25_54_Add.2_ENG.DOC)

## **24 September 2013**

Title: The death of Michael O’Sullivan after being found fit for work.

What: Michael O’Sullivan takes his own life after being found fit for work and ineligible for ESA. He had been claiming incapacity benefit since 2000, due to depression, social anxiety, agoraphobia, and general anxiety disorder that had gradually worsened since he first moved to London from rural Ireland at the age of 19. He had been told in March 2012 he would be

reassessed for ESA. He was assessed in August 2012 by a young physiotherapist, an assessment that lasted just 12 minutes and left him “humiliated, mortified, and feeling like a criminal”. He was declared fit for work, and although he asked DWP to reconsider that decision, that appeal was turned down. He was told to attend a two-week training course but was constantly mocked, harassed and teased by the other, much younger, students. At the end of the first week, he tried to end his own life. He survived, and was deemed “unfit for work” by his GP for six months, but was called for another WCA just four months later. His assessor, a former orthopaedic surgeon who had been working for Atos for 15 years, took just 31 minutes to assess him, and only a further 11 minutes to complete the paperwork. He had made it clear on the pre-assessment ESA50 form that he had suicidal thoughts. He took his own life on 24 September, just hours before he was due to start a four-week job placement. Why significant: The case would receive national attention two years later due to the coroner at his inquest ruling that the trigger for his decision to take his life had been his assessment as fit for work, and issuing a prevention of future deaths report, just as the coroner had in 2010 following the death of Stephen Carré. The PFD would be hugely influential in proving that ministers had failed to make the changes necessary following the death of Stephen Carré in January 2010.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/michael-osullivan-scandal-dwp-twice-pushed-dad-of-two-to-suicide-bids/>

## **25 September 2013**

Title: The death of Tim Salter after being found fit for work. A coroner later ruled that a major factor in his death was the reduction in his benefits.

What: Tim Salter, who had mental health problems, including agoraphobia, had previously attempted to take his own life in 1989, which had left him partially-sighted. He had been claiming incapacity benefit but was found fit for work after being assessed by a physiotherapist. After he took his own life, his sister Linda found there was no food in the house, and he had no money in his bank account. She found a letter in the dustbin from a housing association which was threatening him with eviction. A coroner later ruled that a major factor in his death was that his benefits had been “greatly reduced, leaving him almost destitute”.

Although DWP’s independent case examiner (ICE) concluded there were no flaws in how his case had been dealt with, a later investigation by the parliamentary and health service ombudsman found the assessment should have sought further medical evidence because he had disclosed a previous suicide attempt. ICE later apologised to his sister for its flawed investigation.

Why significant: Another death linked to the flawed WCA process and the failure to seek further medical evidence.

Link: ICE reports are not published but see

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/dec/03/dwp-apologise-linda-cooksey-tim-salter-benefits-cut>

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/benefit-cuts-blind-man-committed-2965375>

## **28 September 2013**

Title: 10,000 Cuts and Counting event in Parliament Square to remember the thousands of disabled people who have died shortly after a Work Capability Assessment (WCA).

What: Disabled actors, performers and activists join faith leaders, mainstream grassroots campaigners and MPs (Jeremy Corbyn, John McDonnell and Michael Meacher) for a memorial event outside parliament to remember the thousands of disabled victims of the government's austerity programme. Part of Parliament Square is covered with white flowers, each one representing a disabled person who had died shortly after a WCA.

Why significant: Shows disabled activists again working with the mainstream anti-cuts movement, and the mounting anger over deaths linked to the WCA. The 10,000 figure relates to the 10,600 people who died within six weeks of their claim ending following a WCA, between January and November 2011. There was disagreement over what the 10,600 figure actually showed, as more than 7,000 of them had been placed in the ESA support group, but some disabled campaigners said it showed that many of the 10,600 people died as a result of being found fit-for-work, while others had died due to the impact of constant reassessment.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/carpet-of-flowers-turns-parl>

[liament-square-into-memorial-to-wca-victims/](#) and <https://centreforwelfarereform.org/news/10000-cuts-a28-september/00116.html> and [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/223050/incap\\_decd\\_recips\\_0712.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/223050/incap_decd_recips_0712.pdf)

### **October 2013**

Title: Peter Lilley, security secretary in John Major's government and one of the architects of the Work Capability Assessment, says he has "no regrets" and denies insurance industry influence.

What: In a brief interview at the Conservative party conference, Peter Lilley, who was social security secretary in John Major's government from 1992 to 1997, says he has "no objection in principle" to the work capability assessment, despite almost universal acceptance that it has caused significant harm to thousands of disabled people. He also denies that parts of the insurance industry have spent two decades lobbying the government to ensure that eligibility for out-of-work disability benefits would be tightened.

Why significant: Lilley, who was one of the main architects of the WCA, expresses no regrets about the WCA.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/conservative-conference-no-regrets-for-tory-architect-of-fit-for-work-test/>

## **11 October 2013**

Title: DPAC co-founders persuade the UN disability committee to carry out an investigation into the UK under the optional protocol of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

What: Debbie Jolly and Linda Burnip, with legal support from solicitor Louise Whitfield, meet with Jorge Araya, secretary to the UN committee on the rights of persons with disabilities, at the offices of Inclusion London/

Why significant: The investigation launched by the committee will eventually lead to damning findings about the impact of the government's welfare reforms on disabled people.

Link:

[https://www.academia.edu/37737701/UNCRPD\\_chronology\\_of\\_key\\_dates\\_in\\_the\\_process\\_Final?auto=download](https://www.academia.edu/37737701/UNCRPD_chronology_of_key_dates_in_the_process_Final?auto=download)

## **12 October 2013**

Title: Rachel Reeves, the new shadow secretary of state for work and pensions, says Labour would be tougher on welfare than the coalition.

What: Rachel Reeves, the new shadow secretary of state for work and pensions, vows to cut the welfare bill and force long-term jobless people to take up work offers or lose state support. In her first interview since taking up the position she says: "Nobody should be under any illusions that they are going to be able to live a life on benefits under a Labour government...If you can work you should be working, and under our compulsory jobs guarantee if you refuse that job you forgo your benefits, and that is really

important....It is not an either/or question. We would be tougher [than the Conservatives]. If they don't take it [the offer of a job] they will forfeit their benefit.”

Why significant: The main opposition party recites the same rhetoric demonising benefit claimants as used by the government to justify its welfare reforms.

Link:

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/oct/12/labour-benefits-tories-labour-rachel-reeves-welfare>

## **5 November 2013**

Title: The UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights condemns “intrusive” Work Capability Assessment and the demonization of poor people as undeserving.

What: Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona, the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, says that “the main barrier to reduction of poverty...is the perception of poor people as lazy, irresponsible, dishonest and, fundamentally, undeserving of aid”. This, she says, “is in no small part the impact of a sensationalist media and political class eager to be seen as cracking down on ‘scrounger. She also mentions the UK’s requirement that recipients of disability benefits undergo “intrusive tests of their ability to work”.

Why significant: A UN human rights expert highlighting the adverse effects of stigmatising welfare claimants and the role played by the government and the media in producing this stigmatisation.

Link:

<https://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/stigma-and-exclusion-to-rights-and-dignity-a-human-rights-approach-to-poverty/>

## **December 2013**

Title: The Spartacus Network leads the Second People's Review of the Work Capability Assessment, including accounts of deaths linked to being found fit for work.

What: The second review by the Spartacus Network highlights the "continuing failure" of the WCA, and concludes that the WCA continues to cause "stress, anxiety and far worse", while the accounts of people's experiences included in the report show the "frightening and inhuman treatment" claimants are having to endure as they try to qualify for ESA. It also includes accounts of deaths connected with the WCA and the loss of benefits. It concludes: "The many harrowing accounts in 'The Reality' section of this Review attest to the frightening and inhumane treatment sick and disabled people are having to endure."

Why significant: The review illustrates direct evidence that continues to link the WCA with serious harm and death.

Link:

<https://www.centreforwelfare-reform.org/library/peoples-review-of-wca-further-evidence.html>

## **December 2013**

Title: Publication of fourth independent review of the Work Capability Assessment – with no mention of deaths or suicides.

What: The review by Dr Paul Litchfield, chief medical officer for BT Group, is the fourth since the coalition came to power in 2010. Litchfield concludes in his review that only 34 of the 49 recommendations made by Harrington over his three reviews have so far been implemented in full by the government. Litchfield concludes that the WCA system is still “enormously complex” and marred by “impenetrable” language. He focuses in his review on how claimants are treated, the length and complexity of the process, and the treatment of people with mental health conditions.

Why significant: There is no mention of peer reviews or of the PFD report sent to DWP by a coroner in 2010 following the suicide of Stephen Carré. In fact, the words “death” or “suicide” do not appear in the report.

Link:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/265351/work-capability-assessment-year-4-paul-litchfield.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/265351/work-capability-assessment-year-4-paul-litchfield.pdf)

#### **4 December 2013**

Title: Court of Appeal upholds ruling that the Work Capability Assessment discriminates against some disabled people.

What: The Court of Appeal upholds the decision by the upper tribunal that the WCA discriminates against some disabled people, but it also finds that the tribunal was wrong in law to order DWP to investigate the reasonableness of a recommendation

about seeking further medical evidence. The two claimants are told they will have to return to the upper tribunal so that it can determine how DWP should address the discrimination in the system faced by people with mental distress. The upper tribunal had found a series of ways in which they experienced problems with the WCA system.

Why significant: Further evidence that the WCA is discriminatory.

Link:

<https://www.mind.org.uk/media-a/2115/mm-v-sswp-final-judgment.pdf>

#### **4 December 2013**

Title: Despite Court of Appeal ruling that the Work Capability Assessment discriminates against people with mental health conditions, the DWP tells senior civil servants it is “business as usual”.

What: On the same day that the Court of Appeal ruling is handed down, DWP tells civil servants that it is “business as usual”. The so-called “gatekeeper memo” is issued to relevant staff and senior civil servants across DWP and tells them to continue their existing practices, although without clarifying what these are. The memo, leaked to the website Benefits and Work, says: “Individuals will apply for ESA and undergo the WCA in the normal way. Those currently on Incapacity Benefit will be reassessed as planned.”

Why significant: Ravi Low-Beer, from [the Public Law Project](#), the solicitor for the two mental health service-users who took the case, says the DWP position is “completely wrong”, and adds:

“They have challenged the finding that the process discriminates against people with mental health conditions and they lost. Where a court has made that finding, they cannot just do nothing. They have to consider making reasonable adjustments.” He and his colleagues have argued in court that where ESA applicants have a mental health condition, DWP should obtain medical evidence from their doctor or psychiatric team at every stage of the process, or justify why they had not done so. This links to many of the deaths of claimants, such as those of Stephen Carré, Michael O’Sullivan, David Barr and Mark Wood. DWP’s gatekeeper memo makes it clear that it continues to refuse to make these changes.

Links:

[http://www.benefitsandwork.co.uk/images/wca\\_appeal\\_memo.pdf](http://www.benefitsandwork.co.uk/images/wca_appeal_memo.pdf)

and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-declares-business-as-usual-despite-appeal-court-ruling/>

## **7 January 2014**

Title: Inquest into the death of Michael O’Sullivan, where the Coroner concludes that the trigger for Michael O’Sullivan’s suicide was his assessment as being fit for work, and writes a prevention of future deaths report to DWP, saying that “there is a risk that future deaths will occur unless action is taken”.

What: Coroner Mary Hassell concludes that the trigger for Michael O’Sullivan’s suicide was his assessment as being fit for work. She

writes a prevention of future deaths report to DWP, saying that “there is a risk that future deaths will occur unless action is taken”, and raising matters of concern, including that the assessors did not take into account evidence from Michael’s doctors. The report is dated 13 January 2014. In its response to the PFD, DWP says it will send a reminder to staff about the need to seek further medical evidence in “cases where claimants report suicidal ideation in their claim forms which regrettably was not followed in this case”. It also provides significant background detail about ESA and the WCA, points out that there is an ongoing legal case around the need for further medical evidence (see 4 December 2013), and insists that the WCA is “under continual review and development”. It concludes: “We will also issue a reminder to staff about the guidance related to suicidal ideation that has been described in this report.”

Why significant: This was the second prevention of future deaths (PFD) report to be sent to DWP by a coroner that linked the WCA – and the failure to seek further medical evidence from the healthcare professionals who have treated a claimant with a mental health condition before deciding on their eligibility for ESA – with a claimant’s suicide. But the existence of these two PFD reports would not emerge until the autumn of 2015.

Link:

<https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/O’Sullivan-2014-0012.pdf> and O’Sullivan DWP (PDF)

<https://www.judiciary.uk/publications/michael-osullivan/>

### **30 January 2014**

Title: Managing editor of the Sun appointed director of communications at DWP.

What: Richards Caseby, who had been managing editor of The Sun until the previous August, is appointed as the new director of communications at DWP. The appointment comes as DWP is increasingly under fire over media coverage of deaths linked to DWP policies and practices, particularly the WCA.

Why significant: Shows the close links between The Sun and DWP, which have previously resulted in news stories that stigmatise disabled claimants and support the cuts and reforms being introduced by work and pensions ministers.

Link:

<https://pressgazette.co.uk/former-sun-managing-editor-richard-caseby-lands-top-government-pr-role>

### **19 February 2014**

Title: Activists deliver letter to British Medical Association about its members' opposition to the work capability assessment.

What: A group of activists from Black Triangle, DPAC, WOW, Inclusion London, Pat's Petition and Carer Watch hand-deliver a letter to the British Medical Association (BMA) calling for action in line with its members' opposition to the work capability assessment (WCA).

Why significant: Shows the key role of disability activism in pointing to the harms of the WCA.

Link: No link.

## **27 February 2014**

Title: War on Welfare (WOW) petition secures debate in House of Commons.

What: A parliamentary petition by the War on Welfare (WOW) campaign, calling for the government to carry out a cumulative impact assessment of its cuts on disabled people, secured more than 100,000 signatures. This leads to a debate in the House of Commons, led by Labour's John McDonnell.

Why significant: It is the first time that disabled people have secured a debate in the main chamber of the House of Commons on an issue they had chosen. The government continues to refuse to carry out such an assessment.

Link:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm140227/debtext/140227-0001.htm#14022773000001> and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/wow-petition-debate-government-refusal-is-due-to-fear-of-revolt/>

## **March 2014**

Title: The Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland publishes a report into the death of Ms DE, finding that the process and denial of Employment Support Allowance (ESA) were a major factor in her suicide.

What: The Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland publishes a report following an investigation into the death of Ms DE on 31

December 2011. Ms DE (her name has never been publicly released) had been a recipient of incapacity benefit on and off since May 2007. She was caught up in the government's new reassessment programme of IB claimants. The report concludes: "We were told that based on Ms DE's original Incapacity Benefit claim it was felt that there was little to suggest that she would meet the criteria for ESA, so a decision was made not to request further medical evidence from either the GP or hospital consultant before the Work Capability Assessment." She was found ineligible for ESA. The commission's chief executive later tells Disability News Service: "Unquestionably, the process and the denial of ESA were certainly at least a major factor in her decision to take her own life." Among the report's 12 recommendations for DWP, it says: "We heard that psychiatrists and GPs are not routinely asked to provide medical reports for patients with a mental illness. This is despite the fact that it may be more difficult for some individuals to put in place the necessary arrangements to provide medical evidence supporting their claim... We think that medical reports should be routinely obtained for individuals with a mental illness, learning disability or related condition entering the assessment process.." The commission had carried out a survey of Scottish psychiatrists to ask them how they thought the WCA had impacted on their patients. Of the 56 who replied and had patients who had undergone a WCA, three-quarters said they had not been asked for their opinion at any point in the process by either Atos or DWP, while 96 per cent said their patients had been "distressed" by the WCA process. Two-fifths had at least one

patient who had self-harmed following a WCA – partly as a result of the assessment process or outcome – and 13 per cent stated that at least one patient had attempted to take their own life, partly again as a result of the assessment. More than one-third said that at least one of their patients had been admitted to hospital as a result of the WCA.

Why significant: Another death of a claimant linked to the failure to seek further medical evidence before deciding on ESA eligibility. The commission’s report is the third official report to link this flaw with the suicide of a claimant being put through the WCA, following the PFD reports into the deaths of Stephen Carré and Michael O’Sullivan.

Link: Ms DE PDF [make available on website] and

[https://www.mwscot.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-06/who\\_benefits\\_final.pdf](https://www.mwscot.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-06/who_benefits_final.pdf) and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/woman-killed-herself-after-being-stripped-of-disability-benefit-says-watchdog/> and

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/mar/26/woman-killed-herself-benefits-mental-health-watchdog>

## **March 2014**

Title: Atos pull out of contract with the DWP to deliver the work capability assessment due to reputational and profitability issues.

What: The company announces it is quitting its five-year £400m contract early, paying to escape prematurely with a “substantial financial settlement” to the Department for Work and Pensions. According to journalist Amelia Gentleman, the company had been

advised by a PR firm that it had extremely high brand recognition for all the wrong reasons. The company's senior vice-president told a select committee hearing that Atos would probably not have bid for the contract had it known then what it now knew. She had told the hearing: "I have shareholders and stakeholders who would not let me bid for a contract that would give rise to both the reputational and profitability issues we are facing now."

Why significant: Shows the impact of years of campaigning against the WCA and its outsourcing contractors by disabled activists.

Link:

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/jan/18/after-hated-atos-quits-will-maximus-make-work-assessments-less-arduous>

## **July 2014**

Title: Launch of New Approach campaign and release of work capability assessment report – finding the process “abusive” and “inhumane”.

What: Rick Burgess, Jane Bence and Wayne Blackburn, three disabled people who were formerly part of the WOW petition campaign, and lawyer and benefits expert Nick Dilworth, set up the campaigning organisation New Approach, which is dedicated to scrapping the WCA and developing a replacement. Together with Mark Thomas (as part of his 100 Acts project), they release a report on the results of a survey of 884 people who have been through the WCA (Alexei Sayle voiced the audio version). The

report concludes that the assessment is “abusive”, “disrespectful”, “callous and inhumane”, discriminates against disabled people and appears to promote unprofessional activity on the part of assessors and to cause hardship and poverty.

Why significant: User-led research about the systemic flaws at the heart of the WCA.

Link:

<https://www.centreforwelfarereform.org/uploads/attachment/433/assessing-the-assessors.pdf>

## **7 July 2014**

Title: Labour peer highlights “devastating” impact of legal aid changes, which remove access to justice for the poorest and most vulnerable.

What: Labour peer Lord Bach tells the House of Lords that the removal of legal aid in welfare benefit cases (following the government’s LASPO reforms) has had a “devastating” impact. He says that the government know that the effect on social welfare law advice has been devastating. In the year 2013-14 alone—this is from the government’s own figures—there was an 80 per cent fall in the number of social welfare law cases, including a figure of 45 per cent in housing cases. These cuts affect the poorest and most vulnerable, including many disabled people, in our society. Are the Government to some extent ashamed of the removal of access to justice from hundreds of thousands of our fellow citizens, all caused by deliberate coalition government policy?” Justice minister Lord Faulks replies: “The

noble Lord mentioned housing. In fact, legal aid remains available for eviction and possession cases, housing disrepairs, where there is a serious risk to health or safety, homelessness assistance and all debt matters which may represent a threat to somebody's home. As to the cuts in legal aid, they are concentrated on matters where the government, after careful consideration, have decided that having a lawyer is not always the answer."

Why significant: An opposition peer highlighting the impact of the legal aid cuts on disabled benefit claimants.

Link:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2014-07-07/debates/14070742000335/LegalAidSocialWelfareLaw>

### **13 August 2014**

Title: DWP data shows increase in use of sanctions against Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claimants.

What: DWP publishes figures which show that the number of ESA claimants (those placed in the work-related activity group) having benefits temporarily removed for breaching strict conditions (sanctions) increased by nearly 580 per cent between March 2013 to March 2014.

Why significant: Researchers at the University of Essex, in partnership with the disabled people's organisation Inclusion London, will later conclude that the fear instilled by the threat of benefit sanctions means that many disabled people on out-of-work disability benefits are in a state of "constant anxiety".

Disabled activists will repeatedly highlight the deaths of disabled benefit claimants they believe are linked to the government's sanctions regime, including that of David Clapson [see 20 July 2013].

Link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/jobseekers-allowance-and-employment-and-support-allowance-sanctions-decisions-made-to-march-2014>

<https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/ESA-WRAG-Report.pdf>

## **22 August 2014**

Title: DWP questioned about what records they keep of deaths linked to the benefits system.

What: Disability News Service asks the Department for Work and Pensions what records they keep of deaths linked to withdrawal or non-payment of disability benefits, how they are collected, and how many there are for every year from 2004 to 2013. DWP reply on 22 September – incorrectly – to say: “The specific information requested is not held by the Department.”

Why significant: This is the start of a freedom of information battle that will end two years later with a ruling against DWP by the information rights tribunal.

Link: Deaths 1 PDF [make available on website]

## **30 September 2014**

Title: Welfare rights expert and campaigner Nick Dilworth tells newspaper about the “toxic” Work Capability Assessment, and links to deaths.

What: Welfare rights expert Nick Dilworth is profiled by Guardian’s Mary O’Hara. O’Hara writes: “According to Dilworth, 54, the collective stress and individual tragedies that have piled up since the government began rolling out welfare reforms in 2011, coupled with cuts to grassroots advice services that have [eroded the assistance available](#), amount to a national scandal.” Dilworth highlights the “toxic” WCA.

Why significant: Another high-profile article drawing attention to the tragic impact of the government’s welfare reforms and how that is being challenged by grassroots campaigners.

Link:

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/sep/30/welfare-rights-same-iain-duncan-smith-nick-dilworth-reform>

## **Late September 2014**

Title: The new Conservative minister for disabled people insists DWP is right to ignore reports of deaths linked to benefits.

What: The new Conservative minister for disabled people, Mark Harper, insists that DWP is right to ignore reports of deaths linked to the loss or non-payment of disability benefits. Speaking to Disability News Service at the Conservative party conference in Birmingham, Harper says he does not “accept the premise” that DWP should collect and analyse reports that suggest a disabled

person's death could have been linked to the non-payment or withdrawal of benefits. He says: "If someone has [a] mental health [condition] and then something happens, trying to disaggregate what was the cause, I don't think is as simple as you are trying to suggest."

Why significant: By this stage, there have been two PFD reports, and the report of the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland, yet Harper is still denying DWP responsibility in deaths.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/minister-insists-dwp-is-right-to-ignore-reports-of-deaths-linked-to-benefits/>

## **Early October 2014**

Title: Liberal Democrat DWP minister contradicts his Tory colleague over records kept on deaths linked to benefits.

What: Pensions minister Steve Webb contradicts the previous week's dismissal by his coalition partner Mark Harper that DWP should collate reports of benefit-related deaths. Webb says that there "may not be a systematic approach" within the department, because of the number of inquests that are held, but that "when cases come up, clearly when the department becomes aware of cases through the media, they do get looked at".

Significant: Webb's comments add to pressure on DWP over its 22 August freedom of information response [see 22 August 2014]

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/lib-dem-minister-casts-doubt-on-dwp-response-on-benefits-deaths/>

### **13 October 2014**

Title: DWP admits for the first time that it carries out investigations into some deaths of claimants.

What: DWP's press office admits for the first time that the department carries out investigations into some deaths of claimants. A DWP press officer tells Disability News Service: "Where it is appropriate, we undertake reviews into individual cases but we do not accept the argument of those who seek to politicise people's deaths by linking them inaccurately to welfare policy."

Why significant: DWP finally admits to carrying out reviews into some deaths. It later emerges that these investigations are called peer reviews.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-contradicts-its-own-position-on-benefit-related-deaths-again/>

### **13 October 2014**

Title: First freedom of information request into DWP reviews into deaths of benefit claimants.

What: Disability News Service submits a freedom of information request to the DWP relating to reviews into deaths of benefit claimants, after press office admission that some reviews do take place.

Why significant: DWP's admission that some reviews take place leads to a targeted freedom of information request.

Link: Deaths 3 PDF [make available on website]

## **7 November 2014**

Title: Faiza Ahmed (known to her family as Sophie) dies by suicide, hours after telling a jobcentre work coach that she was suicidal.

What: Sophie takes her own life several hours after telling a jobcentre work coach that she had been “busy trying to kill myself”. The work coach failed to contact the emergency services after discussing her written comment with a manager. Sophie, who had a history of mental distress, had previously been sanctioned by the jobcentre for turning up late and missing appointments, and lived with the constant fear of being sanctioned, and the understanding that DWP did not believe her when she said she had depression.

Why significant: Sophie was claiming jobseeker’s allowance rather than ESA but her brother later spoke of how it showed that DWP’s sanctions regime was “horrific” and was based on “threats and intimidation”. He is certain that racism lay at the heart of the way his sister was treated by DWP, even if it was “indirect” and not immediately obvious. He said the harshness of austerity and DWP’s welfare reforms had a disproportionate impact on people of colour. A prevention of future deaths report will be written about Sophie’s death [see 9 July 2020.]

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-ignored-coroners-call-to-take-action-to-save-claimants-from-suicide/>

## **10 November 2014**

Title: DWP questioned over how many coroner's letters about benefits-related deaths it has received in past 10 years.

What: DWP responds to a freedom of information (FOI) request from Disability News Service which asked how many letters or other communications it had received from coroners in each of the last 10 years, expressing concern that a death may have been linked to or related to the non-payment or withdrawal of a benefit. It responds: "We do not hold central records of such requests from Coroners," saying that to meet the request would exceed the cost of £600 set for answering FOIs, and that letters "are internal documents, produced for internal purposes and not generally released to third parties" because they contain personal information (protected under Section 123 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992).

Why significant: At this point, the PFD reports written to DWP following the deaths of Stephen Carré and Michael O'Sullivan had not emerged publicly. It later emerges that DWP did not set up a single, clear route for coroners to contact the department – the so-called coroner's focal point – until 2016. DWP should have been aware that PFD reports sent by coroners to the department were available publicly on the judiciary's website.

Link: Deaths 6 PDF [make available on website]

## **10 November 2014**

Title: DWP admits in a Freedom of Information response that it has carried out 60 peer reviews into deaths of benefits claimants.  
What: DWP admits in an FoI response that it has carried out “60 peer reviews following the death of a customer” since February 2012 [it later amended this to 49 deaths and another 11 serious incidents]. It also releases three pieces of guidance, one that is used to decide whether a review should be carried out; another on how to carry out a peer review; and the third for authors of peer reviews.

Why significant: First admission from DWP of the existence of “peer reviews”, and how many of them it has carried out, although it says it has only been collecting them nationally since February 2012.

Link: Deaths 4, Deaths 5 and Deaths 7 PDFs [make available on website]

### **November 2014:**

Title: Litchfield publishes fifth and final independent review of the work capability assessment, with no mention of the DWP’s own reviews into deaths of claimants.

What: In his final report for DWP, Dr Paul Litchfield makes 28 recommendations for improvements, plus five targeted just at Northern Ireland. He also calls on the government to investigate “as a matter of urgency” why there has been a substantial increase in the proportion of claimants placed in the ESA support group, for those with the highest support needs, suggesting this might be due to increased use of ESA regulation 35. Regulation

35 states that a claimant should be placed in the ESA support group, rather than the work-related activity group (WRAG), if placing them in the WRAG would pose “a substantial risk” to their “mental or physical health”. Disabled activists, including Black Triangle, had spent months campaigning for wider awareness of regulation 35, which they believed could save lives if used more often. There is a brief mention of the report into the death of Ms DE, saying only that “the issue of correctly identifying individuals at risk of self-harm and suicide was highlighted in the Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland’s investigation report into the death of Ms DE in early 2014”. There is no mention of peer reviews or of the PFD reports that followed the deaths of Stephen Carré and Michael O’Sullivan.

Why significant: Disability News Service would in later years prove that DWP failed to share the PFDs and peer reviews with Litchfield.

Link:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/380027/wca-fifth-independent-review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/380027/wca-fifth-independent-review.pdf)

## **27 November 2014**

Title: Employment minister says there is no formal policy to liaise with agencies after a sanction.

What: Employment minister Esther McVey says there is “no formal policy to liaise with Health and Social Service agencies when a sanction is applied”.

Why significant: From 2010 onwards, there were questions over whether DWP – under successive Conservative-led governments – did or did not have a duty of care to recipients of benefits, and how they ensured their safety, including those who had been sanctioned.

Link:

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2014-11-24/215708>

## **12 December 2014**

Title: DWP delays responding to freedom of information request on peer reviews into deaths of benefits claimants.

What: In responding to a freedom of information request from Disability News Service (DNS), seeking the 60 peer reviews it has already admitted carrying out, DWP suggests again that it could seek an exemption from its duty to release the recorded information it possesses. This is despite DNS only seeking the summaries, conclusions and recommendations of the 60 reviews, minus any information that would identify each claimant, and information on whether each of the recommendations were implemented.

Why significant: Shows DWP's consistent lack of transparency around evidence linking the deaths of claimants with its policies and practices.

Link: Deaths 8 PDF [make available on website]

## **January 2015**

Title: Labour MP speaks of “core visits” procedures, which are supposed to be followed when a “vulnerable” person is sanctioned.

What: Mike Wood, the Labour MP for Batley and Spenningsdale in West Yorkshire, raises concerns about DWP safeguarding and speaks of how he took up the case of his constituent Timothy Finn, who had a mental health condition and starved to death in 2000 [see entry 2000]. A coroner at the subsequent inquest found that neglect by the Benefits Agency [now part of DWP] had contributed to his death. Wood says he visited the then Labour minister for disabled people, Maria Eagle, and persuaded her to introduce the “core visit” procedures, which DWP civil servants were supposed to follow when a “vulnerable” person was about to have their benefits sanctioned, particularly if they have learning difficulties, mental health conditions, or “health conditions which affect cognition”.

Why significant: The core visits procedures will play a significant part in future deaths of benefit claimants.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/ministers-change-story-yet-benefit-related-deaths/>

## **2 February 2015**

Title: A man (name kept anonymous) dies by suicide after being rejected for both Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and Employment Support Allowance (ESA).

What: A man from the West Midlands takes his own life after being told he would not be eligible for either ESA or personal independence payment (PIP). His death only emerges four years later. His twin brother says DWP ignored information they were given about his brother's mental health and suicidal feelings, and sent the two letters, one after the other, telling him he was losing his entitlement to ESA – which he had been granted while he was being assessed – and that he would not be entitled to PIP. About 10 days after receiving the two letters, he took his own life.

Why significant: One of the first known deaths linked to the PIP assessment system, following its introduction in 2013.

Link:

[www.disabilitynewsservice.com/twin-backs-call-for-inquiry-into-dwp-failings-four-years-after-brothers-suicide/](http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/twin-backs-call-for-inquiry-into-dwp-failings-four-years-after-brothers-suicide/)

## **19 February 2015**

Title: DWP refuses to release the peer reviews it has carried out in relation to deaths of benefits claimants.

What: DWP decides that it will not release any of the 60 peer reviews it says it has carried out. It claims the data is exempt under the “effective conduct of public affairs”, and under section 123 of the Social Security Administration Act (SSSA) 1992. These exemptions could be bypassed by securing the permission of the secretary of state to release anonymised versions of the peer reviews, but DWP chooses not to do so.

Why significant: DWP avoids releasing the peer reviews in any form.

Link: Deaths 12 PDF [make available on website]

## **19 February 2015**

Title: DWP admits that 40 of the 49 peer reviews into the deaths of benefit claimants it has carried out were in response to suicides.

What: In a freedom of information response, DWP says that 40 of the 49 peer reviews into the deaths of benefit claimants were carried out following a suicide or an apparent suicide.

Why significant: Many of the benefit-related deaths reported in the media over the previous five years had been suicides. This provides further evidence of links between the government's welfare reforms and the suicides of claimants.

Link: Deaths 14 PDF [make available on website]

## **2 March 2015**

Title: Channel 4 reports that most peer reviews included recommendations for improvements.

What: Channel 4's Dispatches reports that, of the 49 peer reviews, 33 contained recommendations for improvements in procedures at either national or local level within DWP.

Why significant: The freedom of information response by DWP suggests that many of the peer reviews had exposed flaws in the policies or practices of the department.

Link:

<https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/246714/response/620075/attach/3/Reply%2018%20Harris.pdf>

## **March 2015**

Title: The death of Sheila Holt, following a work capability assessment.

What: Sheila Holt had always been unable to work because of her mental health condition, but had been placed in the ESA work-related activity group following a WCA. This led to her being forced onto the government's new Work Programme. She also had to start paying the bedroom tax. She began falling into poverty, became increasingly agitated by the work-related activity she was forced to undergo, and eventually was sectioned. A few days later, in December 2013, at the age of 47, she had a heart attack, which left her in a coma. She died in March 2015.

Why significant: Her treatment had led Mike Penning, then minister for disabled people, to "apologise unreservedly to the family", during the WOW petition debate in February 2014. He told MPs: "In that case, things clearly have gone wrong and the family have every right to be aggrieved."

Link:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm140227/debtext/140227-0003.htm> and

<https://metro.co.uk/2015/03/18/woman-in-coma-who-was-hounded-to-go-back-to-work-has-died-5109777/> and

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

## **March 2015**

Title: Psychologists Against Austerity say austerity policies are causing mental health problems.

What: A report by the group Psychologists Against Austerity links austerity cuts to public services and policies vilifying benefit claimants to “damaging psychological costs”. They say cuts have caused humiliation and shame, fear and distrust, instability and insecurity, isolation and loneliness, and feelings of being trapped and powerless.

Why significant: Shows further evidence of the negative impact of austerity on mental health.

Link:

[http://www.psychchange.org/uploads/9/7/9/7/97971280/paa\\_briefing\\_paper.pdf](http://www.psychchange.org/uploads/9/7/9/7/97971280/paa_briefing_paper.pdf)

## **2 March 2015**

Title: Maximus takes over from Atos as provider of work capability assessments, sparking protests.

What: The Centre for Health and Disability Assessments, a subsidiary of US outsourcing giant Maximus, takes over provision of WCAs from Atos, sparking more than 30 protests across England, Scotland and Wales. After it had emerged the previous year that Maximus was in the running to take over the contract, significant concerns had been raised by UK activist-researchers about the company’s lengthy record of discrimination, incompetence and alleged fraud in the US.

Significance: Atos was closely associated with many of the deaths of claimants linked to the WCA, and although it was no longer

providing WCAs, it continued to provide similar assessments for personal independence payment.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/humiliation-greets-maximus-in-first-week-of-wca-delivery/> and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/incompetence-discrimination-and-fraud-the-us-company-that-could-take-over-from-atos/>

## **12 March 2015**

Title: Dismissal of further medical evidence case on the work capability assessment and discrimination, but upper tribunal administrative appeals chamber criticises minister.

What: The upper tribunal administrative appeals chamber dismisses the claims of the two individuals in the further medical evidence court case, saying they had not proved they personally experienced discrimination from the WCA process, but it says that the test did discriminate against some disabled people. It also concludes: “We have found the early responses of the Secretary of State to the evidence-seeking recommendation and his developing position on what he proposed doing to implement it frustrating. Given his stance and arguments on the merits of these claims it seems to us that he could have formulated his response to that recommendation more clearly and progressed pilots to implement it more quickly as part of his commitment to take account of such recommendations and to make appropriate improvements to the scheme.” It also says: “We express the hope

that the Secretary of State will carry out his proposed pilot as soon as possible. In our view, the evidence it will provide is clearly needed to inform what (if any) reasonable steps should be taken by the Secretary of State in respect of the substantial disadvantage to claimants who suffer from mental health problems that we have found to exist.”

Why significant: Further evidence of DWP frustrating attempts to make the WCA process safer and prevent further deaths.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/activist-felt-violated-after-judge-used-google-to-compile-dossier/>

### **17 March 2015**

Title: Rachel Reeves, Labour’s shadow secretary of state for work and pensions, says: “We are not the party of people on benefits.”

What: Rachel Reeves tells The Guardian: “We don’t want to be seen, and we’re not, the party to represent those who are out of work... Labour are a party of working people, formed for and by working people.”

Why significant: The main opposition party contributes again to the benefit scrounging narrative.

Link:

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/mar/17/labour-vows-to-reduce-reliance-on-food-banks-if-it-comes-to-power>

### **18 March 2015**

Title: The Commons work and pensions select committee calls for new independent body to investigate deaths of benefit claimants.

What: The Commons work and pensions select committee calls on the government to set up a new independent body – modelled on the police complaints watchdog – to investigate the deaths of benefit claimants. The committee says that such a body should conduct reviews “at the request of relatives, or automatically where no living relative remains, in all instances where an individual on an out-of-work working age benefit dies whilst in receipt of that benefit”. The committee also asks DWP to say how many peer review cases involved a claimant who was subject to a sanction at the time of their death, and whether any of them led to policy changes. The government does not accept this recommendation in its response, stating: “There are already a number of routes for review available to relatives or people close to the deceased.”

Why significant: The report shows MPs were now aware of the peer review process and of deaths related to benefits.

Link:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmworkpen/814/814.pdf>

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmselect/cmworkpen/557/557.pdf>

**April 2015**

Title: DWP examines its flawed peer review process, finding deep flaws.

What: DWP carries out a review of its peer review process following a series of freedom of information requests. This leads to peer reviews being renamed internal process reviews. The existence of the review does not emerge for another two years (see 20 April 2017).

Why significant: The review shows that, not only were the benefit assessment policies and processes deeply flawed, but so was the system designed to investigate those flaws and recommend improvements.

Link: See 20 April 2017

## **16 April 2015**

Title: Changes to incapacity benefits described “as the biggest single social policy failure of the last 15 years”.

What: The National Institute of Economic and Social Research publishes blog by Jonathan Portes showing that changes to incapacity benefits, which were supposed to reduce spending by £3.5 billion, have in fact proved “costly and painful for claimants and taxpayers alike” – making them the “the biggest single social policy failure of the last 15 years”.

Why significant: Shows that changes to incapacity benefits have failed to reduce costs

Link:

<https://www.niesr.ac.uk/blog/welfare-savings-and-incapacity-benefits> and

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b04mc1hv>

## **7 May 2015**

Title: Conservatives win overall majority at general election

What: Conservatives elected with a 12-seat majority.

Why significant: The Conservative manifesto for the general election pledged social security cuts of £12 billion, signalling years of further harmful cuts and reforms to come.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/election-2015-conservative-s-confirm-plans-for-12-billion-welfare-cuts/>

## **8 May 2015**

Title: DWP admits that 10 of the 49 claimants whose deaths were examined by peer reviews had had their benefits sanctioned.

What: In a freedom of information response to DPAC activist Anita Bellows, DWP says that 10 of the 49 claimants whose deaths were examined by peer reviews had had their benefits sanctioned at some point in their claim. But the response does not reveal whether the claimants were subject to a sanction at the time they died. In March, the Commons work and pensions select committee had called on DWP, in its report on benefit sanctions, to reveal how many of the 49 reviews concerned benefit recipients who had been subject to a sanction at the time of their death.

Why significant: The figures suggest that claimants who have been sanctioned are far more likely to die as a result of their benefit claim than those who have not been sanctioned.

Links:

<https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/252562/response/650114/attach/2/VTR501%20Bellows.pdf> and

<http://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/one-in-five-benefit-related-deaths-involved-sanctions-admits-dwp/>

### **19 May 2015**

Title: DWP raises issues with sanctions and safeguarding of vulnerable claimants by the companies delivering its Work Programme.

What: DWP accuses companies delivering its Work Programme of an “inconsistent approach” to safeguarding “vulnerable” people who breach strict conditions while claiming ESA. The memo says the providers find the guidance provided by DWP “unclear”.

Why significant: Further evidence of harm caused by DWP’s sanctions regime, and the actions of its contractors.

Link:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/634756/work-programme-memo-191.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/634756/work-programme-memo-191.pdf)

### **29 May 2015**

Title: The death of Luke Alexander Loy, three months after being found fit for work and sanctioned. His sister said “he died as a result of Tory cuts”.

What: Luke Alexander Loy dies just three months after being found fit for work and then having his benefits sanctioned. He had been claiming incapacity benefit for more than 20 years, but was found fit for work following a WCA, despite his doctor explaining that he was not currently well enough to work. He was apparently sanctioned by DWP for failing to attend meetings at Jobcentre Plus and not actively looking for work, and fell further and further into debt. He became withdrawn and scared. After his father discovered what had happened, he helped his son to appeal and eventually – just before he died – DWP reinstated his benefits. But his family believe that by then the damage to his health and wellbeing had been done. A subsequent inquest would record an open verdict. His sister, Natalie Jeffers, later joined activists from Disabled People Against Cuts in a protest outside the Conservative party conference in Manchester to try to “raise awareness of the human costs of these policies” and hold work and pensions secretary Iain Duncan Smith “accountable” for his actions. She told fellow protesters: “He died as a result of Tory cuts. Shame on the Tory party for what they are doing to innocent people who need the support of the state.”

Why significant: Another death linked closely to both the WCA and benefit sanction systems.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/fitness-for-work-test-and-sanctions-helped-kill-my-brother/>

## **2 June 2015**

Title: Freedom of information request reveals that 22 of the 49 peer reviews into deaths of claimants involved someone claiming employment and support allowance (ESA).

What: In response to a freedom of information request from journalist Natalie Leal about the 49 peer review deaths, DWP says that, at the time of death, eight people were claiming jobseeker's allowance, 22 were claiming ESA, one was claiming pension credit and five were not claiming benefit. In the other cases, it was not clear from the peer reviews which benefit was being claimed at the time of death.

Why significant: Further information about the claimants whose deaths were investigated by DWP, showing again how many deaths are linked to the work capability assessment system.

Link: 'Natalie Leal deaths Foi' PDF [make available on website]

## **26 June 2015**

Title: DWP says coroners' letters expressing concern about the deaths of benefit claimants are not handled by a specific official, revealing no centralised process for accountability.

What: DWP is asked how it makes sure that letters from coroners expressing concern about the deaths of benefit claimants are dealt with at a senior level within the department, who is

responsible for dealing with such letters, and how many such letters have been received for every year from 2005 to 2015. DWP responds by saying that it “may” hold this information but that “coroner’s letters are not handled by one specific official in the Department”. It says it would be too expensive to comply with the request as it covers 10 years.

Why significant: Further evidence of lack of processes within DWP for liaising with coroners over deaths that may be linked to its policies or procedures. But it also makes no mention of the two prevention of future deaths reports that were sent to DWP in April 2010 and January 2014, and which at this point had yet to emerge publicly.

Link: Deaths 20 PDF [make available on website]

## **10 July 2015**

Title: Information commissioner rejects complaint about DWP refusal to release peer reviews, supporting DWP’s’ response that this would breach data protection.

What: The information commissioner rejects a complaint from Disability News Service about DWP’s refusal to release copies of the 49 peer reviews. It finds that DWP was right in relying on section 123 of the Social Security Administration Act, which says that DWP staff are not allowed to disclose information about a person which they obtained through their job. It also rejects the possibility of redacting information from the documents that would prevent identification of the claimants.

Why significant: The watchdog's decision – which will later be proved to be wrong in law (see 11 April 2016) – allows DWP to continue to hide all information from its peer reviews.

Link: Deaths 23 Word document [make available on website]

## **20 July 2015**

Title: John McDonnell voices strong opposition to welfare reform and work bill

What: McDonnell says he would “swim through vomit” to vote against it, adding “And listening to some of the nauseating speeches in support of it, I might have to.”

Why significant: He is among 48 Labour MPs who defy acting Labour leader Harriet Harman's order to abstain, choosing instead to stand up for the millions of people who would be hit by the further £12 billion that the legislation was designed to cut.

Link:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2015-07-20/debates/150720600001/WelfareReformAndWorkBill>

## **22 July 2015**

Title: Survey shows that “benefit scrounger rhetoric” is causing disability hate crime.

What: A survey finds that disabled people are being subjected to disability hate crime as a result of benefit scrounger rhetoric. Over one in six of those disabled people who described in detail in the survey how they had been verbally or physically assaulted (11 of

61) said their attackers had called them “scroungers”, told them to get off benefits, or accused them of being too lazy to work. When asked about the motivation for the attacks, one disabled person said: “Most of the abuse is from strangers, who now think that everyone who is disabled is lying about being ill. Because this government are spreading so many lies, regarding us.”

Why significant: More evidence that rhetoric originating from DWP and supportive media is fuelling hate crime.

Link:

<https://katharinequarmby.com/2015/07/22/disability-hate-crime-motivation-survey-results/> and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/fresh-evidence-that-benefit-scrounger-rhetoric-is-causing-hate-crime/>

## **August 2015**

Title: The death of Moira Drury, after the removal of her employment and support allowance (ESA).

What: Moira Drury’s ESA was removed because she had twice been too unwell to attend a WCA. That decision was confirmed within days after she requested a mandatory reconsideration (the first stage in the appeal process). The former nurse had a number of health conditions, and had received a severe head injury through an attack by her abusive husband, but was forced to spend the last six months of her life fighting DWP over its decision. She told her daughter Nichole, before she died, that the stress of dealing with DWP had contributed to her health deteriorating. Her daughter later protested outside the

Conservative party conference because, she said, “the system is cruel and it is unfair and it seems like the weakest and most vulnerable are being targeted by the cuts... People like my mum don’t fight back because they can’t.” She had earlier told the Guardian: “Stress and anxiety lowers your immune system and ability to fight disease. I am absolutely certain that the stress she endured caused her to give up her fight against her illnesses. Without the stress this caused she would have had a little more precious time.”

Why significant: Moira Drury’s death was another linked to DWP’s failure to collect the evidence needed to assess fitness for work properly, but also demonstrates the harshness of the decisions reached by DWP.

Link:

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/aug/27/my-mothers-death-was-hastened-by-long-delay-in-processing-her-benefits> and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/trench-warfare-as-dpac-protesters-shame-tories-outside-their-conference/>

## **10 August 2015**

Title: The death of Frances McCormack. She left a note linking her hardship to the “bedroom tax”.

What: Frances McCormack had been told she must pay the bedroom tax because she had a “spare room” following the suicide of her 16-year-old son, in 2013. An eviction notice arrived at her home on the same day that her body was found. A handwritten note, part of which was addressed to David Cameron

and dated 10 days before her death, was found in her bedroom, mentioning the hardship the bedroom tax was causing her.

Why significant: Another death linked to the bedroom tax [see Stephanie Bottrill, 4 May 2013].

Link:

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/mother-found-hanged-days-after-she-wrote-handwritten-plea-david-cameron-about-hardships-bedroom-tax-a6827816.html>

<https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/grieving-mum-found-hanged-near-7223683>

## **27 August 2015**

Title: DWP publish statistics on how many people died while claiming out-of-work benefits.

What: After nearly three years of delays, DWP finally publishes figures which show how many benefit claimants died while claiming out-of-work benefits. The two sets of data show mortality statistics for out-of-work disability benefit claimants, and death rates for all out-of-work benefit claimants. Activists had been calling on DWP to publish updated statistics since November 2012, in an effort to prove the WCA was so damaging that it was causing deaths. The figures show that, of the two million people who had gone through a WCA and had received an ESA decision between 1 May 2010 and 28 Feb 2013, nearly 41,000 had died within a year of that decision. They also show that, between December 2011 and February 2014, 81,140 people died while

claiming ESA or incapacity benefit (IB). And 2,650 ESA and IB claimants died soon after being found “fit for work” following a WCA. Another 7,200 died after being placed in the ESA work-related activity group (WRAG), for claimants the government had decided were well enough to move back towards work. DWP insists that it is not possible to assume any “causal effect between benefits and mortality” from the “isolated figures” it had published, which “provide limited scope for analysis”. It insists that “nothing can be gained from this publication that would allow the reader to form any judgement as to the effects or impacts of the WCA”.

Why significant: Still not clear today exactly what the figures show. The evidence showing a link between the IB reassessment programme and the deaths of claimants was to come from outside DWP [see 16 November 2015].

Links:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/mortality-statistics-esa-ib-and-sda-claimants> and

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/mortality-statistics-out-of-work-benefit-claimants-march-2003-to-february-2014> and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/long-awaited-deaths-stats-do-not-tell-the-whole-story/>

## **29 August 2015**

Title: The death of Alan McArdle, an hour after being told that DWP was threatening to sanction him - stopping his employment and support allowance (ESA).

What: Alan McArdle dies of a heart attack, just an hour after being told that DWP was threatening to stop paying his ESA. He had previously been homeless but was living in council accommodation in Slough with the support of a charity, and told the friend who had read the DWP letter to him: “They’ve sanctioned my money,” before he collapsed. The government contractor responsible for finding him work, Maximus, had reported him to DWP for failing to attend appointments intended to move him towards work, as part of the Work Programme, despite being told about his severe ill-health. McArdle, who had alcoholism and had been diagnosed with diabetes three years previously, had just come out of hospital following a fall, and had been too unwell to visit the Maximus offices. The impact of the diabetes meant he had no feeling in his arms and legs, and could hardly move. Despite his poor and deteriorating health, he had been placed in the ESA work-related activity group (WRAG) - designed for those found “fit” enough to carry out some work-related activity, but not yet well enough for a job – despite efforts by those supporting him to persuade DWP he should be placed in the support group. Maximus had been told he had not been well enough to attend their appointments, but replied: “He hasn’t come in, so we will get him sanctioned.”

Why significant: Another death linked to both the WCA and the sanction system, as well as the private sector contractors that earn profits from them. Maximus had taken over the WCA contract from Atos.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/disabled-man-died-of-heart-attack-after-being-told-of-esa-sanction-threat/>

## **18 September 2015**

Title: First coroner's report to link work capability assessment (WCA) with the death of a person claiming benefits - Michael O'Sullivan.

What: Disability News Service (DNS) uncovers a report, written by the senior coroner for inner north London, Mary Hassell, on 13 January 2014, which concludes that "the trigger" for the suicide of Michael O'Sullivan [see 7 January 2014] was his being found fit for work by DWP. Hassell sends a prevention of future deaths (PFD) report to DWP. It is the first such report to be uncovered, although DNS would soon unearth the PFD report written in April 2010 following the death of Stephen Carré. In its response to the coroner's report, DWP says: "While the Department is committed to continuously improving processes for this group wherever possible, with such a large numbers [sic] of people involved in this system there will inevitably be instances where processes are not conducted in line with the stated policy... It remains important to retain a balance between the added value of further evidence in any claim for ESA and time demands on GPs and other healthcare professionals."

Why significant: The report proved important both because it led to significant coverage by the mainstream media, but also because it was further evidence linking the failure to seek further

medical evidence with the deaths of claimants. The similarities with Stephen Carré's case were striking. Together, the two PFD reports show systemic failures and a DWP refusal to make the WCA process safe and therefore save lives.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/coroners-ground-breaking-verdict-suicide-was-triggered-by-fit-for-work-test/>

<https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/OSullivan-2014-0012.pdf> 3.

<https://www.orwellfoundation.com/investigative/penny-marshall-and-disability-news-service/>

## **6 October 2015**

Title: Iain Duncan Smith tells claimants to “work your way out of poverty”.

What: In his speech to the Conservative party conference in Manchester, the work and pensions secretary fails to acknowledge that existing policies and reforms may cause harm to disabled people. Speaking less than three weeks after the Michael O’Sullivan PFD emerged, he tells party members: “The evidence of our reforms is that people respond to incentives....With our help, I say to them, you will work your way out of poverty.”

Why significant: Demonstrates the work and pensions secretary’s unwillingness to address concerns over the WCA and other policies, or even to admit that those concerns exist.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/tory-conference-anger-over-ids-work-your-way-out-of-poverty-call/> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tqh28wC9ikI>

### **13 October 2015**

Title: Priti Patel denies causality between sanctions and suicides.

What: During the public bill committee stage of the welfare reform and work bill, DWP minister Priti Patel is asked by Labour's Naz Shah if she believes the number of claimants who have taken their own lives after sanctions have affected their mental health is acceptable. Patel denies any causal link, telling her: "The point is that people should be assessed for what they can do; it should not be about what they cannot do. Where people have particular health conditions, it is right that we as a society support them either to get back to work or to get the treatment that they need. On her latter point, there is no causal effect at all."

Why significant: Part of persistent government narrative that denies a causal link between government legislation, policy and practice, and benefit deaths.

Link:

[https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2015-10-13/debates/17c46917-d892-4c5e-9fc2-0b800a402910/WelfareReformAndWorkBill\(EighthSitting\)#contribution-15101418000085](https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2015-10-13/debates/17c46917-d892-4c5e-9fc2-0b800a402910/WelfareReformAndWorkBill(EighthSitting)#contribution-15101418000085)

### **14 October 2015**

Title: Mother of Mark Wood (who died after being found ineligible for employment and support allowance (ESA)) gives evidence to UN committee.

What: UN staff arrive in UK as part of a high-level inquiry by the UN committee on the rights of persons with disabilities (CRPD). They hear direct evidence from individual disabled people about the impact of government austerity measures. One of the individuals to give evidence is Jill Gant, the mother of Mark Wood, who starved to death in 2013 after being found ineligible for ESA, even though his GP had said he was completely incapable of working. Gant concludes that the operation of DWP's policies and procedures in her son's case "exemplified a major failure" in safeguarding.

Why significant: The UN's decision to investigate the government's alleged breaches of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities was a result of pressure from grassroots groups of disabled activists, particularly DPAC. DPAC worked with the UN disability committee to co-ordinate meetings with a range of people able to speak about the adverse impacts of welfare reform and austerity on disabled people, including disabled people and the families of benefit death victims.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/uk-is-first-country-to-face-un-inquiry-into-disability-rights-violations/> and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/un-investigators-begin-taking-evidence-in-uk-on-rights-violations/>

## **15 October 2015**

Title: Disability News Service appeals to the First-Tier Tribunal over the information commissioner's decision to reject its peer review complaint (allowing reviews to remain unpublished).

What: Disability News Service appeals to the First-Tier Tribunal (Information Rights) over the information commissioner's decision to reject its peer review complaint.

Why significant: Next step in ongoing battle with DWP to secure publication of the 49 peer reviews into deaths of claimants

Link: Pring Grounds of Appeal Word document [make available on website]

## **21 October 2015**

Title: Prime minister David Cameron is asked about the death of Michael O'Sullivan.

What: David Cameron is asked about the Michael O'Sullivan prevention of future deaths report in prime minister's questions by the leader of the SNP in Westminster, Angus Robertson. He is also asked if he will publish the 49 peer reviews. Cameron says it would "not be appropriate" for him to discuss the case. He adds: "Suicide is always a tragic and complex issue. We should take these matters incredibly seriously. I will look very carefully at the specific question he asks about publication. We have changed the work capability assessment to lead to significant improvements, following a number of independent reviews, to make sure that people get the support that they need, and I think that is vitally important." Cameron had earlier dismissed the significance of the

UN investigation, after it was raised by Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, saying that “sometimes when you look at these investigations you find that they are not necessarily all they are originally cracked up to be. There are many disabled people in our world who do not have any of the rights or any of the support that they get here in Britain, and I think we should be proud of what we do as we co-operate with this report.”

Why significant: A rare occasion when David Cameron is called to account for deaths linked to his government’s welfare reforms.

Link:<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2015-10-21/debates/15102145000036/Engagements#contribution-15102145000158>

and

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2015-10-21/debates/15102145000036/Engagements#contribution-15102145000151>

## **23 October 2015**

Title: Ministry of Justice releases Stephen Carré prevention of future deaths (PFD) report.

What: In response to a freedom of information request from Disability News Service, the Ministry of Justice provides copies of pre-25/7/13 PFD reports that were sent to DWP (before that date the department only published six-month summaries of PFDs). One of the three is the PFD report into the death of Stephen Carré, which was sent to DWP in March 2010.

Why significant: The report proves that DWP had already been warned about the safety of the WCA by a coroner – and particularly the need to secure further medical evidence if the

claimant has a mental health condition – four years before it received the Michael O’Sullivan PFD report.

Link: ‘FOI 100484 coroners’ reports’ and ‘Stephen Carré report’ [make available on website]

## **28 October 2015**

Title: David Cameron asked about peer reviews into deaths of people claiming benefits.

What: The prime minister is asked by Angus Robertson, who again mentions the death of Michael O’Sullivan, when he will publish the peer reviews. Cameron appears to misunderstand the question, although this may not have been accidental, and replies: “I will write to the right honourable gentleman about this, but from memory we cannot publish the report because it contains personal and medical data that would not be appropriate for publication. If I have got that wrong, I will write to him, but that is my clear memory of looking into his question after last week.”

Robertson then asks about the death of Tim Salter, and tells him that the coroner ruled in his case: “A major factor in his death was that his state benefits had been greatly reduced leaving him almost destitute.” He says that Tim Salter’s sister had called on DWP to publish the peer reviews. Cameron again appears to misunderstand the question, saying he’s already answered it.

Why significant: Further pressure on the government to publish the peer reviews.

Link:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2015-10-28/debates/15102833000024/Engagements#contribution-15102833000155>

## **28 October 2015**

Title: Welfare reform and work bill has its first reading in parliament.

What: Among other controversial measures, the legislation proposes removing the extra payment given to claimants in the work related activity group of Employment and Support Allowance, a cut of nearly £30 per week. The legislation is passed the following March by the government relying on the Commons' financial privilege, following a rebellion against the government in the House of Lords led by disabled crossbench peers. After a period of "ping pong", the Lords agrees to a motion put forward by Lord Freud that the House of Lords should not insist on its amendments that the Commons had disagreed with.

Why significant: Shows the government quashing opposition to changes to the benefit system.

Link:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldhansrd/text/160307-0001.htm#16030712000789>

## **November 2015**

Title: The death of Paul Donnachie, after his employment and support allowance (ESA) is removed.

What: Paul Donnachie takes his own life after his employment and support allowance (ESA) is removed. His body is found by bailiffs the following January. His sister, Eleanor, believes DWP failed to contact Paul's GP to ask for detailed information about his mental health, and ignored its own guidance by failing to send someone to his flat to talk to him face-to-face about his support needs. He had previously claimed jobseeker's allowance and filed a complaint because of the way he had been treated by his local jobcentre. He was sanctioned several times and fell deeper and deeper into debt. DWP removed his ESA when he failed to attend a WCA on 30 June – the second or third assessment he had missed. His benefits were stopped and the withdrawal of his payments was backdated by four weeks, pushing him even further into debt. DWP also contacted Glasgow City Council, so his housing benefit and council tax benefit were both stopped. Eleanor says that fighting for her own PIP and ESA led her to attempt to take her own life months later.

Why significant: Another death linked to the WCA and further medical evidence.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/fit-for-work-suicide-mans-sister-tried-to-take-her-own-life-after-dwp-ordeal/>

## **12 November 2015**

Title: Professor Harrington (who carried out the first three independent reviews of the WCA for DWP) says he was not shown Stephen Carré PFD report.

What: Professor Malcolm Harrington, who carried out the first three independent reviews of the WCA for DWP, says he believes he was never shown the PFD report in which a coroner linked the WCA with the suicide of Stephen Carré. He says that, if he had been shown the coroner's letter, it would almost certainly have led to him making recommendations far earlier about the need to seek further medical evidence.

Why significant: This is DWP's own independent reviewer of the WCA saying that the department failed to show him a crucial document linking the WCA with the suicide of a claimant.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/wca-death-scandal-ministers-failed-to-pass-2010-suicide-report-to-harrington/>

## **16 November 2015**

Title: Research shows links between Work Capability Assessments and suicides

What: Research concludes that the programme to reassess people on incapacity benefit (IB) through the WCA was linked to 590 suicides in just three years. The research shows that, for every 10,000 IB claimants who were reassessed in England between 2010 and 2013, there were an additional six suicides, 2,700 cases of self-reported mental health problems, and an increase of more than 7,000 in the number of anti-depressants prescribed. 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. The idea for the research came originally from disabled activist Rick Burgess, alongside disabled artist-activist Liz Crow, Jane Bence and Nick Dilworth, who wanted “recognised and respected epidemiologists” to carry out “an academically-rigorous study” into the number of deaths caused by the WCA.

Why significant: Hugely-significant research findings linking the WCA, and particularly its application to claimants of IB, with suicides and mental distress, that will be used by campaigners as crucial evidence for years to come.

Link: <https://jech.bmj.com/content/70/4/339> 2.

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/damning-research-on-wca-deaths-is-timely-reminder-of-governments-shame/>

## **December 2015**

Title: DWP, in guidance to healthcare professionals working for Maximus, changes suicide from a “definitive” “substantial risk” if forced into work, to something that should be weighed against ‘benefits of employment’.

What: DWP issues updated guidance to healthcare professionals working for Maximus, the contractor that has taken over the WCA contract from Atos. The changes mean that assessors are far less likely to place a claimant with a mental health condition in the ESA support group because of the risk to their health if forced into work-related activity. The previous version of DWP’s Work

Capability Assessment Handbook named thoughts of suicide as a “definitive” “substantial risk” that meant the person should be placed in the support group. The new guidance tells Maximus assessors that they should weigh “the benefits of employment...against any potential risk”. The handbook explains that “the main change is that the focus on suicide has been reduced and the question of substantial risk placed in the context of work-related activity (WRA). The Department’s approach is that tailored WRA may be appropriate for most people with mental health conditions, including for people with suicidal thoughts” [See 21 September 2016].

Why significant: DWP takes steps to make it harder for claimants at significant risk of harm because of mental distress to avoid work-related activity, therefore putting many more people at risk of death.

Link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/esa-outcomes-of-work-capability-assessments-including-mandatory-reconsiderations-and-appeals-september-2016> and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-issued-guidance-that-made-suicides-more-likely-then-lied-to-cover-its-tracks/> and

DWP’s Work Capability Assessment Handbook:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/work-capability-assessment-handbook-for-healthcare-professionals>

**11 December 2015**

Title: Mental health experts describe how “ruthless” DWP forced through Work Capability Assessments despite knowing of harm.  
What: Three mental health experts describe their experiences on the mental health technical working group that was used by DWP to help design the WCA in 2006 and 2007. Geoff Shepherd, Sue Godby and Jed Boardman tell Disability News Service about how the WCA was a “deeply flawed” and damaging process, something that could and should have been predicted at the time of its introduction under the Labour government in September 2008.

Why significant: Evidence that ministers and senior civil servants under the Labour government were told repeatedly that the WCA was not fit-for-purpose and would damage claimants’ mental health, and were also told that it was vital to obtain a wider range of information about people with mental health problems before deciding on their claims.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/ruthless-dwp-forced-through-wca-despite-knowing-of-harm/> and ‘Professor Geoff Shepherd transcript’ Word doc [make available on website]

## **8 January 2016**

Title: National Audit Office (NAO) publishes report on disability assessments and private contractors.

What: The NAO’s report shows that private contractors “have struggled to meet performance targets for both ESA and PIP”. The report also finds that DWP “has continued to set high targets

and use assumptions without evidence of sufficient testing and challenge” and that spending on assessments is set to double in just two years

Why significant: Findings show the high costs of contracting out disability assessments and the failure of contractors to meet performance targets.

Link:

<https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Contracted-out-health-and-disability-assessments.pdf> and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/taxpayers-left-to-foot-bill-for-dwps-assessment-failures-as-costs-set-to-double/>

## **20 January 2016**

Title: Coroner publishes prevention of future deaths (PFD) report into death of Sophie/Faiza (see 7 November 2014), calling for DWP to take action to prevent further deaths.

What: An eight-day inquest had been carried out by Mary Hassell (the same coroner who wrote a PFD report following the death of Michael O’Sullivan). The PFD report calls on DWP to take action to prevent further deaths. She attaches the jury’s narrative determination, which finds issues with the jobcentre. However, DWP says processes were followed.

Why significant: A jury’s conclusion, supported by a coroner after a lengthy inquest, again shows DWP failing to safeguard the lives of disabled claimants in vulnerable situations, although the PFD report and the DWP response will not be reported on for four years (see 9 July 2020).

Links: PDFs Faiza 1, 2 and 3 [make available on website]

## **28 January 2016**

Title: Ministry of Justice refuses to investigate DWP's failure to respond to Stephen Carré prevention of future deaths (PFD) report.

What: The Ministry of Justice refuses to investigate why DWP appears to have failed to fulfil its legal duty to respond to the coroner's prevention of future deaths report following the death of Stephen Carré. The report was written in late March 2010 by coroner Tom Osborne and sent to DWP's permanent secretary. Legislation updated in 2008 makes it clear that DWP had a legal duty to respond to the report within 56 days and send a copy to the Lord Chancellor. MoJ refuses to answer questions about the missing response.

The chief coroner's office also later refuses to investigate DWP's failure to respond to the report. The Judicial Office claims that the coroner received no further communication from DWP after an initial letter of 4 May 2010 seeking further information, despite being shown letters that were sent by Osborne to DWP that prove otherwise.

Why significant: Shows wider government collusion in DWP's attempted cover-up of evidence linking the WCA with the deaths of claimants.

Link:

[https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2008/1652/pdfs/ukxi\\_20081652\\_en.pdf](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2008/1652/pdfs/ukxi_20081652_en.pdf)

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/justice-ministry-refuses-to-probe-dwps-wca-suicide-report-cover-up/>

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/government-departments-and-judiciary-in-fit-for-work-suicide-cover-up/>

### **16 March 2016**

Title: Welfare Reform and Work Act receives royal assent.

What: Among the measures contained in the act are cuts to the benefit cap; freezing certain benefits for four years; and cuts of almost £30 a week for disabled people placed in the work-related activity group of ESA.

Why significant: The reforms will have a significant and harmful impact on disabled people and others in low-income households over the next five years, driving many into poverty and exacerbating the pressures that could lead to claimants taking their own lives.

Link:

<https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2018-0072/>

and <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/7/contents/enacted>

### **3 March 2016**

Title: Information Rights Tribunal hears Disability news Service case against the information commissioner over its finding that DWP did not need to release peer reviews into the deaths of benefit claimants.

What: The Information Rights Tribunal hears the case brought against the information commissioner over its finding that DWP did not need to release any part of the secret peer reviews carried out into the deaths of benefit claimants. DWP is the second respondent in the tribunal case. Judge Andrew Bartlett QC, who chairs a three-person tribunal panel, hints that he may order DWP to release some of the information from the peer reviews.

Why significant: The latest stage in the long process of securing publication of the peer reviews.

Link: 'DWP response', 'DWP skeleton', 'Information commissioner response', 'Pring skeleton argument' PDFs are all in 'Information rights tribunal' folder [make available online], and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/tribunal-could-order-dwp-to-release-key-benefit-deaths-details/>

## **17 March 2016**

Title: Labour former work and pensions secretary says she "never saw" Stephen Carré PFD report.

What: Yvette Cooper, who was work and pensions secretary when the Stephen Carré PFD report arrived from coroner Tom Osborne, tells Disability News Service that she never saw the report. She says: "When a coroner makes a serious assessment like this, it needs to be acted upon as swiftly as possible". She criticises the "appalling" failure of Conservative ministers to act on the report.

Why significant: Cooper was the minister who would have had responsibility for acting on the Stephen Carré PFD report if Labour had not lost the May 2010 general election.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/yvette-cooper-slams-appalling-failure-of-ministers-to-act-over-coroners-letter/>

## **20 March 2016**

Title: Iain Duncan Smith accuses government of deliberately attacking disabled people through “indefensible” cuts because “they don’t vote for us”.

What: Following his resignation as secretary of state for work and pensions, Iain Duncan Smith appears on the Andrew Marr show on the BBC. He claims that he resigned over planned cuts to disability benefits. He criticises “indefensible” cuts and “deeply unfair” budget measures.

Why significant: Surprising criticisms from the Conservative politician that many disabled activists blame for much of the harm caused by the post-2010 reforms, including the failure to act on the Stephen Carré PFD. The fact Iain Duncan Smith chose this angle to attack the government suggests there is public support for this position – a position that the government refuses to acknowledge.

Links: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-politics-35855004>

## **23 March 2016**

Title: Disabled activists ask Scottish police to investigate ministers over work capability assessment (WCA) deaths.

What: Scottish police receive an allegation and a dossier of evidence relating to the failure of Iain Duncan Smith and Chris Grayling to address a coroner's concerns about the safety of the WCA, a failure which may have caused many other deaths. The complaint is lodged by disabled activist John McArdle, co-founder of the disabled people's campaign network Black Triangle. He believes the two politicians are guilty of the Scottish criminal offence of wilful neglect of duty by a public official, because they failed to take steps to improve the WCA in 2010 after being warned by coroner Tom Osborne in his PFD report – following the death of Stephen Carré – that its flaws risked causing future deaths. The dossier highlights the deaths of Ms DE (31 December 2011), David Barr (23 August 2013) and Paul Donnachie (November, 2015), and provides evidence that all three could have been avoided if Duncan Smith and Grayling had taken the necessary action in 2010.

Why significant: This is believed to be the first serious attempt to persuade the criminal justice system to hold senior DWP figures to account for their WCA failures.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/scottish-police-assessing-possible-investigation-into-ids-and-grayling/>

**April 2016**

Title: DWP sends out reminder to staff about six-point suicide prevention plan

What: DWP sends out a reminder to its staff about its six-point plan, which explains to them how to deal with statements by claimants that they intend to self-harm or take their own lives.

Why significant: DWP reveals this reminder when it responds to the information rights tribunal findings the following month (see 3 March 2016). It is possible it sent out the reminder because of that legal case, or in response to another suicide.

Link:

[http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2017-0556/102\\_Suicide\\_DWP\\_Six\\_Point\\_Plan\\_Framework\\_v1.0.pdf](http://data.parliament.uk/DepositedPapers/Files/DEP2017-0556/102_Suicide_DWP_Six_Point_Plan_Framework_v1.0.pdf) '4551 \_Appeal DWP response' in 'Information rights tribunal' folder [make available on website]

## **April 2016**

Title: Capita faces fresh calls to be stripped of personal independence payment (PIP) contracts after release of Channel 4 undercover footage.

What: Undercover filming for Channel 4's Dispatches about PIP assessments shows Capita's chief medical officer telling a trainee assessor that the company needs its assessors "to be doing as many assessments a day as you can possibly manage", and to "forget your mental health background and park it to one side" when carrying out assessments. Undercover footage also shows one experienced assessor, Alan Barham, admitting that he

sometimes completes his assessment reports before even meeting the claimants, which he says is standard practice.

Why significant: Fresh evidence of serious concerns about the outsourced PIP assessment programme.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/capita-faces-fresh-calls-to-be-stripped-of-pip-contracts-after-documentary/> and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/pip-investigation-capita-made-me-a-scapegoat-says-disgraced-assessor/>

## **11 April 2016**

Title: The Information Rights Tribunal rules DWP must release redacted versions of peer reviews.

What: The Information Rights Tribunal issues its decision in the appeal cases taken by Disability News Service, with pro bono legal support from barrister Elizabeth Kelsey, of Monckton Chambers, finding that the Information Commissioner's Office was wrong in its finding that no part of the peer reviews should be released.

Why significant: The decision will lead for the first time to publication of parts of the previously-secret peer reviews into deaths linked to DWP's policies and practices.

Link: 'Tribunal decision' in 'Information rights tribunal' folder [make available on website]

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/tribunal-rules-dwp-must-release-information-from-secret-benefit-deaths-reviews/>

**12 May 2016**

Title: DWP releases redacted versions of 49 peer reviews, showing that ministers were repeatedly warned that policies were putting the lives of “vulnerable” claimants at risk.

What: DWP finally releases redacted versions of the 49 peer reviews on its website. In at least 13 peer reviews the author explicitly raises concerns in their recommendations about the way that vulnerable claimants – this is likely to be mostly people with mental health conditions or learning difficulties – are treated. The documents make it clear that ministers were repeatedly warned by their own civil servants that their policies to assess people for out-of-work disability benefits were putting the lives of “vulnerable” claimants at risk. In a letter emailed to DNS, DWP says it has established “a nationally available ‘vulnerability hub’”.

Why significant: This is the first time that any parts of the secret peer reviews had been published, and the documents show where DWP’s own investigations have concluded that improvements needed to be paid locally or nationally (and sometimes both) to policies or practices.

Link: ‘4551 \_Appeal DWP response’ in ‘Information Rights Tribunal’ folder, and the 49 peer reviews are in the ‘49 peer reviews’ folder. Particularly interesting are the following peer reviews: 1, 6, 10, 11, 14, 17, 19, 20, 22, 26, 27, 30, 31, 32, 33, 36, 37, 38, 44, 46, 47, 48. Also: FOI

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/523083/foi-4551-IR566.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/523083/foi-4551-IR566.pdf) and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/comment-long-awaited-pe>

[er-reviews-suggest-ministers-failed-to-act-after-deaths-of-vulnerable-claimants/](#)

## **18 May 2016**

Title: Scottish National Party (SNP) MP Deidre Brock backs calls to prosecute Iain Duncan Smith and Chris Grayling for their failure to make the work capability assessment (WCA) safe.

What: Deidre Brock tells the House of Commons that she supports efforts by the disabled-led grassroots group Black Triangle to persuade Police Scotland to prosecute Duncan Smith and Grayling for neglect of their public duty over their failure to act to make the WCA process safe, following the PFD report they received after the death of Stephen Carré.

Why significant: High-profile approval of the efforts to hold ministers and civil servants accountable in a criminal court for their failure to make the WCA safe, despite being told that it risked causing further deaths of disabled people.

Link:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2016-05-18/debates/16051856000002/DebateOnTheAddress#contribution-15F5C135-62E7-485E-8902-E11A63765179>

## **19 May 2016**

Title: The death of Susan Roberts, after being told she had lost a benefit appeal.

What: Susan Roberts takes her own life after being told she had lost a benefit appeal. DWP took just six days to decide her initial

appeal, not long enough for her to submit any evidence that could have backed up her claim for personal independence payment (PIP). A DWP civil servant even told her – in a letter dismissing her mandatory reconsideration – that there was no evidence that she could have submitted that would have changed her mind. Two months later, she received another letter, this time telling her a tribunal had also rejected her appeal. Her body was discovered the following day by a care worker at her warden-assisted flat, surrounded by letters telling her that she would not be entitled to PIP. She had also placed a note by her side that informed healthcare professionals that she did not want them to attempt to resuscitate her. An inquest did not record a verdict of suicide, but her daughter is convinced that she took her own life, because of the way she died, and because her body was discovered surrounded by her PIP paperwork and the “do not resuscitate” notice.

Why significant: Further evidence of the impact of the reassessment process for the new PIP benefit, introduced in 2013 and slowly rolled out to claimants of DLA, like Susan Roberts. Mounting evidence over the following years will suggest the impact of the reassessment process on existing DLA claimants is similar to that of the ESA reassessment process (through the WCA) on IB claimants.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/pip-claimant-who-took-her-own-life-had-written-about-unfair-assessment-report/>

## **19 May 2016**

Title: John McDonnell supports calls to prosecute Iain Duncan Smith.

What: John McDonnell, Labour's shadow chancellor, tells the TUC disabled workers' conference that he supports efforts by the disabled-led grassroots group Black Triangle to prosecute Iain Duncan Smith for failing to act on the PFD report issued by coroner Tom Osborne after the suicide of Stephen Carré.

Why significant: McDonnell was the most senior public figure to back calls to prosecute Duncan Smith.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/shadow-chancellor-backs-calls-to-prosecute-iain-duncan-smith-over-wca-deaths/>

## **22 May 2016**

Title: The film "I, Daniel Blake" (about the unfairness of the work capability assessment) wins the Cannes Palme d'Or.

What: The Cannes film festival jury awards its Palme d'Or award for best film to Ken Loach's I, Daniel Blake, which follows a man who is found fit for work through a WCA after a heart attack, but faces destitution because he is too ill to work.

Why significant: The film helped raise awareness of the unfairness of the WCA and its potentially fatal risk of harm to claimants.

Link:

<https://www.festival-cannes.com/en/72-editions/retrospective/201>

[6/actualites/articles/i-daniel-blake-by-ken-loach-takes-the-palme-d-or](#)

## **June 2016**

Title: Recovery in The Bin runs Benefits Defence workshops – upskilling disabled people to defend themselves from the welfare system.

What: Recovery in The Bin runs Benefits Defence workshops via a crowdfunding campaign. Experts upskill disabled people and service users to better defend themselves and others from the DWP system.

Why significant: Disability and Mad activism again acting on the harm caused by the benefits system. Similar workshops will also be run in 2018 by [Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People \(GMCDP\)](#), Manchester DPAC and GM Law Centre.

Link:

<https://recoveryinthebin.org/2016/06/12/ritb-welfare-training-june-2016-part-1/>

## **5 June 2016**

Title: DWP figures shows that of the 49 peer reviews into deaths of people claiming benefits, 18 of the people who had died by suicide had been claiming employment support allowance (ESA).

What: Following a complaint to the information commissioner by journalist and campaigner Natalie Leal, DWP released figures which showed that, of the 40 cases where claimants had died from suicide or apparent suicide [out of the 49 deaths that had

been subject to peer review between February 2012 and October 2014], 18 had been claiming ESA in the six months preceding their death. And 13 of these ESA claimants fell under the classification of “mental and behavioural disorders” as a primary or secondary condition.

Why significant: Further evidence of suicides linked to ESA and the WCA system.

Link: ‘Natalie Leal deaths #2’ PDF [make available online]

#### **4 August 2016**

Title: Jobcentre Plus (JCP) worker caught making racist comments on the phone.

What: A single mother receives a voicemail message from a JCP worker that makes racist comments after the DWP civil servant failed to hang up the phone properly. The message captures a conversation between staff members who were unaware they were being recorded. The staff are heard criticising claimants with “foreign sounding” names and saying “I don’t, I just don’t, why are we running around for these people...some scrounging b\*\*\*\*\*d that’s popping out kids like pigs.”

Why significant: Evidence of hostility and racism as part of the dehumanisation of benefit claimants within jobcentres.

Link:

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3723363/Furious-single-mother-three-gets-voicemail-Job-Centre-worker-calling-scrounging-b-d-s-popping-children-like-pigs.html>

## **30 August 2016**

Title: New reviews into deaths of people claiming benefits show DWP staff keep failing to follow suicide guidelines.

What: DWP finally releases redacted versions of nine peer reviews and internal process reviews carried out between August 2014 and April 2016 (peer reviews were renamed internal process reviews at some point in 2015). Staff failure to follow DWP's six-point plan suicide guidance was "a recurring theme" across the reviews.

Why significant: The number of peer reviews and internal process reviews appears to have fallen since the first batch of peer reviews was released to Disability News Service in 2014, but it is not clear why (the number will rise sharply in future years). The need to repeatedly warn staff about the six-point plan is also a recurring theme that will re-emerge in future years.

Link: VTR 2633 (PDF) and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/benefit-claimants-die-as-dwp-staff-keep-failing-to-follow-suicide-guidelines/>

## **September 2016**

Title: Changes to DWP guidance (including regulation 35) on safety and risk lead to sharp fall in claimants placed in employment and support allowance (ESA) support group, and increase in number of people found 'fit for work'.

What: DWP data shows the proportion of ESA claimants being placed in the support group has plunged by 42 per cent (24

percentage points) in just three months. In the same period, the proportion of applicants found fit for work rose from 35 to 49 per cent. DPAC's Anita Bellows suggests the figures are the result of DWP changing the criteria to make it harder for disabled people to be placed in the support group under the "substantial risk" regulation 35 [see November 2014 and December 2015]. She says this has made it "almost impossible for a claimant to be placed into the support group" under regulation 35. In a blog analysing the data, academic and researcher Ben Baumberg Geiger says changes to DWP guidance between 2015 and 2016, including changes to Regulation 35, show that assessors are now "discouraged from saying that there is a substantial risk to the claimant's health if they are found capable of work (or work-related activity)".

Why significant: Disabled activists have been campaigning since 2014 for wider awareness of regulation 35, which they believe could save lives if used more often.

Link:

<https://research.kent.ac.uk/rethinkingincapacity/2016/09/21/return-stricter-wca/>

and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/esa-figures-show-very-disturbing-drop-in-number-placed-in-support-group/>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/esa-outcomes-of-work-capability-assessments-including-mandatory-reconsiderations-and-appeals-september-2016>

## **13 September 2016**

Title: Freedom of information battle with DWP finds Maximus memo on suicide guidance and medical evidence was sent a few days after the existence of the Michael O'Sullivan prevention of future deaths report was first revealed.

What: After a freedom of information battle with DWP, the Benefits and Work website secures a memo sent out by Maximus just a few days after the existence of the Michael O'Sullivan prevention of future deaths report was first revealed by Disability News Service. It reminds staff dealing with the early "filework" stage of an ESA claim, that if there is evidence of a previous suicide attempt, suicidal ideation or self-harm expressed in the claimant's ESA50 capability for work questionnaire, the healthcare professional must ask for further medical evidence. The memo suggests this "clear and unequivocal" point has been in guidance since 6 December 2010. The memo says: "We have had two historical cases recently brought to our attention where we have been challenged regarding a decision not to request FME at the filework stage. In both of these cases there has ultimately been a tragic outcome. Whilst the outcome may or may not have occurred in any case, the facts remain, that at filework the practitioner has not followed guidance." Although it is not clear, this appears to refer to the deaths of Stephen Carré and Michael O'Sullivan. Neither of these claims were dealt with by Maximus, so it is not clear why they suggest they had been challenged about their own failings in these cases. DWP had told the coroner after the Michael O'Sullivan PFD that it would issue a reminder to

staff about the guidance related to suicidal ideation that has been described in this report. It was not able to provide a copy of this reminder to Benefits and Work, but instead sent the memo sent out a year later, apparently by Maximus.

Why significant: The memo appears to confirm that DWP did change its guidance in December 2010, presumably as a result of the Stephen Carré PFD. But the change, although likely to have made the WCA system slightly safer, did not go as far as many campaigners said was needed, which was to ensure that further medical evidence was sought early on for all claimants with experience of mental distress or learning difficulties. As Benefits and Work pointed out, DWP's failure to produce the memo sent out in 2014 raises questions over whether it was ever sent out.

Link:

<https://www.benefitsandwork.co.uk/news/3549-dwp-panic-and-cover-up-after-claimant-death-publicity-wca-medics-warned-we-cannot-defend-you>

## **October 2016**

Title: Iain Duncan Smith denies responsibility for WCA deaths.

What: In an impromptu interview with Disability News Service at the Conservative party conference, Duncan Smith denies responsibility for the deaths of people with mental health conditions who took their own lives after being unfairly found fit for work. He repeatedly attempts to avoid answering questions about Tom Osborne's prevention of future deaths letter, but eventually admits that he remembers the Stephen Carré case – saying that

reviews of the WCA [by Malcolm Harrington and Paul Litchfield] were carried out and changes made to the WCA process.

Why significant: This was the first time Iain Duncan Smith had been questioned in detail by a journalist about deaths linked to the WCA and his failure to act on the Stephen Carré PFD report.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/duncan-smith-tells-dns-im-not-going-to-be-accused-by-you-over-mental-health-deaths/>

## **October 2016**

Title: DWP publishes Improving Lives: The Work, Health and Disability Green Paper.

What: DWP and the Department of Health publish Improving Lives: The Work, Health and Disability Green Paper. Ill health is largely talked about in relation to absence from work and its cost to the economy. The green paper acknowledges that when ESA was introduced in 2008 it was assumed that less than 10 per cent of those having a WCA would go into the support group and that, as a result “1 million fewer people would be on incapacity benefits (Employment and Support Allowance, Incapacity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance) by 2015”. But instead “over the last 12 months we have seen on average [50% of people going into the Support Group](#)”.

Why significant: The figure of 10-11 per cent was found to be incorrect through FOIs (see 23 February 2013), yet is seemingly still being used as a reference point by DWP.

Link:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/564038/work-and-health-green-paper-improving-lives.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/564038/work-and-health-green-paper-improving-lives.pdf) and  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/558953/esa-wca-summary-september-2016.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/558953/esa-wca-summary-september-2016.pdf)

## **November 2016**

Title: Disabled activists declare war on Mind after links exposed to DWP.

What: Disabled activists protest outside the headquarters of mental health charity Mind to declare “war” on the charity because of its support for DWP policies that they say have damaged people in mental distress. This came about after Tom Pollard, Mind’s policy and campaigns manager, joins DWP on secondment as a senior policy adviser. Paul Farmer (Mind’s chief executive) denies links with DWP but after the protest details were leaked by Mind staff, showing that the charity was applying to join a DWP framework that would allow it to bid for employment and health-related contracts, each of which could be worth between £2 million and £30 million a year.

Why significant: Raises concerns that a mental health charity would be linked to DWP, given the mental distress found to be caused by the benefits system.

Links:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/mind-boss-lies-to-protesters-over-dwp-contracts/> and <https://www.mind.org.uk/news-campaigns/mind-and-back-to-work-support/dwp-secondment/>

## **6 November 2016**

Title: Government leaks UN committee on the rights of persons with disabilities report to Mail on Sunday in attempt to discredit its findings.

What: The article describes the UN committee on the rights of persons with disabilities as “controversial” and questions “the credibility of the authors, one of whom has called for state funding for disabled people to visit prostitutes”. It says that “Ministers are planning to fight back by arguing that the findings are out of date”. The leak from the UK government and personal attack on one of its members shocks the disability committee. The government later dismisses the report’s findings, with work and pensions secretary Damian Green describing the report as outdated and patronising.

Why significant: Reflects the determination with which the government opposes any criticism of its treatment of disabled people.

Links:

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3909276/Controversial-task-force-slams-Britain-s-welfare-cuts-says-disabled-people-unfairly-bearing-brunt.html>

And

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/nov/08/damian-green-dismisses-offensive-un-report-on-uk-disability-rights>

7 November 2016

Title: UN report concludes DWP is guilty of “grave” and “systematic” violations of disabled people.

What: The UN’s committee on the rights of persons with disabilities publishes a report into allegations that the UK government – particularly DWP – has violated disabled people’s rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It concludes that the government’s social security reforms have “disproportionately affected persons with disabilities and hindered various aspects of their right to live independently and be included in the community”. It says that evidence it has collected “points to significant hardship, including financial, material and psychological”, experienced by disabled people undergoing benefits assessments. There are eleven recommendations, including that the UK government should carry out a cumulative impact assessment to ascertain how badly disabled people have been affected by cuts and changes since 2010, and that they should carry out positive mass media campaigns to promote the rights of benefit claimants.

Why significant: This was the first such high-level inquiry to be carried out by the committee, and its findings were internationally embarrassing for the UK government, particularly DWP and its ministers. The findings vindicated the efforts of disabled activists,

led by DPAC's co-founder Debbie Jolly, who had called on the UN to investigate.

Link:

<https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/campaigns-and-policy/facts-and-information/equality-and-human-rights/grave-systematic-violations-un-inquiry-briefing-responses/>

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

### **30 November 2016**

Title: The National Audit Office says DWP is not doing enough to understand how sanctions affect people on benefits.

What: The National Audit Office says that DWP is not doing enough to find out how sanctions affect people on benefits and finds that “sanctions for disabled people claiming ESA were not effective as they ‘reduced claimants time in work’ and ‘may have discouraged some claimants from working’. There was also limited evidence regarding the effectiveness of Jobseekers Allowance (JSA) sanctions”.

Why Significant: On the strength of the evidence pertaining to the negative effects of sanctions, the NAO recommended that disabled people are exempt.

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

### **30 November 2016**

Title: Psychotherapy organisations express concern about the impact of sanctions on mental health.

What: Five British psychotherapy organisations publish a statement expressing their concern that “the sanctions process is undermining mental health and wellbeing”. The statement is signed by the UK Council for Psychotherapy, the British Psychoanalytic Council, the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, the British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies and the British Psychological Society. The statement says: “The links between the sanctions regime and the mental health and wellbeing of individuals should be subject to an independent review...[there has been] no commitment from the Government to investigate how the jobcentre systems and requirements may themselves be exacerbating mental health problems. We continue to call on the Government to address these concerns and suspend the use of sanctions subject to the outcomes of an independent review.”

Why significant: Demonstrates professional awareness, and attempts to warn the government, of the dangers of the sanctioning regime.

Link:

<https://beta.bps.org.uk/news-and-policy/british-psychological-society-signs-statement-opposing-welfare-sanctions>

**December 2016**

Title: Scottish criminal justice agencies reject request to launch criminal investigation into links between DWP and the death of David Barr.

What: Police Scotland says that it will “no longer be pursuing enquiry on this matter” over the dossier it had been handed by Black Triangle suggesting links between DWP and the death of David Barr. The Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal says it has decided to take no further action on links between DWP and the suicide of Paul Donnachie. Police Scotland had previously said it would only look at the Ms DE case – the third death included in the dossier of evidence – if Black Triangle or Disability News Service was able to pass on her personal details. But these details have never been made publicly available.

Why significant: The first attempt to hold ministers and senior civil servants accountable in a criminal court for their actions ends in failure.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/criminal-justice-agencies-reject-call-to-investigate-duncan-smiths-wca-failings/>

## **16 December 2016**

Title: DWP admits it carried out seven peer reviews while Harrington was investigating the work capability assessment (WCA).

What: In a freedom of information response, DWP admits that there were seven peer reviews that mentioned the WCA in the period from February 2012 until Professor Harrington submitted

his final review of the WCA later that year. It adds: “The Department does not hold any information to confirm or deny whether these Peer Reviews were shared with Professor Harrington.”

Why significant: The existence of peer reviews into deaths linked to the WCA was not mentioned in any of Harrington’s three independent reviews of the WCA.

Link: ‘Harrington peer reviews’ PDF [make available on website]

## **19 December 2016**

Title: Professor Harrington believes he was never shown work capability assessment (WCA) related peer reviews into claimants’ deaths.

What: Following the DWP freedom of information response received on 16 December, Professor Harrington tells Disability News Service that he has no recollection of being shown the peer reviews into deaths and he is convinced that he would remember being shown “such damning indictments of the system”.

Harrington had already told DNS – in 2015 – that he believes he was not shown the Stephen Carré PFD, which would have been available for his first WCA review.

Why significant: His comments appear to show that DWP failed to share with him either the relevant peer reviews in 2012 or the PFD report, despite these documents being clearly crucial to whether the WCA was fit for purpose.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/ministers-hid-secret-death-reports-from-their-fitness-for-work-test-reviewer/>

## **12 January 2017**

Title: The death of Lawrence Bond, hours after visiting jobcentre.

What: Lawrence Bond collapses and dies in the street, hours after visiting Kentish Town jobcentre in north London. He had been found fit for work the previous autumn and had been awaiting the result of an appeal against being found fit for work. He had been ill with conditions including heart disease, the lung condition sarcoidosis, diabetes, cirrhosis, depression, anxiety, agoraphobia and high blood pressure, and had been referred to a respiratory clinic. He also had Asperger's syndrome. His sister, Iris, said her brother had been desperately unwell, which would have been obvious to anyone who saw him, including the healthcare professional from Maximus who assessed his fitness for work the previous autumn. Her brother had visited the jobcentre on the day he died, and had been asked to climb some stairs. She believes he told a member of staff that he would have a heart attack if he did so, and when told he could use the lift he asked if someone could accompany him because of his claustrophobia. He was told this was not possible, but it was agreed that someone would come down to speak to him. His sister said: "He was so distressed by then that [after leaving the jobcentre] he went to see a friend, who calmed him down, because he was very anxious and frightened." He collapsed later that day at a bus stop. She

says the stress of what happened at the jobcentre “definitely” contributed to his death.

Why significant: Lawrence’s death is one of many which were not satisfactorily examined at an inquest. The similarities between Lawrence Bond’s death and the Ken Loach film I, Daniel Blake were striking (see 22 May 2016) and led to Loach – and shadow chancellor John McDonnell – speaking at a protest and vigil that was held outside the jobcentre days after he died.

Links:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/shock-after-inquest-ignore-s-fitness-for-work-and-jobcentre-concerns/> and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/coroner-orders-inquest-into-fit-for-work-man-who-collapsed-after-leaving-jobcentre/>

## **February 2017**

Title: Green party sends dossier of 50 deaths of benefit claimants to DWP, calling for an inquiry.

What: The Green party, backed by Jill Gant, the mother of Mark Wood (who starved to death in 2013 after being found ineligible for ESA [see 9 August 2013], and DPAC, sends a dossier of 50 deaths of benefit claimants to work and pensions secretary Damian Green, and calls for an inquiry into these and other deaths linked to DWP’s actions. In the letter, it says there is “good reason to believe their treatment at the hands of your department has been a factor in their deaths” and that an inquiry should examine “the methods used to assess claimants and their entitlements” and “determine whether these procedures are fair

and proper or if they are, in fact, contributing to the deaths of some of the claimants”. The dossier includes the deaths of Stephen Carré, Michael O’Sullivan, David Clapson, David Barr, Ms DE, Stephanie Bottrill, Luke Alexander Loy, Alan McArdle, Sheila Holt, Moira Drury and Karen Sherlock.

Why significant: The Green party (and, to a lesser extent the SNP) remain the only opposition parties to have made concerted efforts to seek justice and further investigation into the links between DWP and the deaths of claimants.

Links:

<https://www.greenparty.org.uk/news/2017/02/10/greens,-disabled-people-against-cuts-and-bereaved-mother-call-for-inquiry-into-deaths-of-benefit-claimants/>

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/green-party-calls-on-government-to-launch-benefit-deaths-inquiry/>

## **February 2017**

Title: Report by Mental Health and Unemployment in Scotland finds that the work capability assessment (WCA) has a negative impact on mental health.

What: Report by Mental Health and Unemployment in Scotland, based on interviews with 30 ESA claimants in Scotland, concludes: “The WCA experience for many, caused a deterioration in people’s mental health which individuals did not recover from. In the worst cases, the WCA experience led to thoughts of suicide.”

Why significant: Further evidence of the negative impact of the WCA process on claimants.

Link:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315121701\\_Mental\\_Health\\_and\\_Unemployment\\_in\\_Scotland](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315121701_Mental_Health_and_Unemployment_in_Scotland)

## **21 February 2017**

Title: The death of Jodey Whiting, after being found fit for work, despite telling the DWP about her suicidal thoughts.

What: Jodey Whiting had been a long-time claimant of incapacity benefit, and then ESA, and DWP and its assessors had previously noted the severity of her mental health condition, and the risk that would be posed if she was found fit for work. When she was approached again for another assessment in the autumn of 2016, she told DWP about her suicidal thoughts and requested a home assessment as she said she rarely left the house. But even though a “flag” was placed on DWP’s ESA system to alert staff that she was a “vulnerable” claimant because of her mental health condition, DWP failed to refer her request for a home visit to Maximus. Maximus also failed to act on her request, even though it had been included in the ESA50 form she had filled out. Jodey, who had nine children, missed a WCA appointment on 16 January 2017. She had received treatment in hospital for a cyst on her brain and had been housebound with pneumonia. It later emerged that she had not opened the 15 December letter telling her about the appointment. Despite the evidence she provided, DWP refused to give her another appointment and confirmed that

she had been found fit for work and would lose her ESA. She visited Citizens Advice, and an advisor wrote to DWP on 15 February 2017 to ask for another WCA appointment, but she took her own life six days later, just four days after her final ESA payment. Six weeks after her death, DWP overturned the decision to terminate her ESA.

Why significant: Jodey Whiting's case will become one of the most prominent to be linked to DWP failings, through the exhaustive campaigning efforts of her mother, Joy Dove.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/mother-of-esa-suicide-woman-pledges-to-continue-fight-for-justice/>

## **21 February 2017**

Title: Public accounts committee report urges DWP to review the use of sanctions.

What: In the report, the committee urges the Department for Work and Pensions to review the use of sanctions, which it finds "have increased in severity in recent years and can have serious consequences". It says it is also concerned that the department does not know whether "vulnerable" claimants, some of whom can be excused from having to meet benefit conditions, receive the protection to which they are entitled.

Why significant: Further pressure on government to act over the serious adverse impact of sanctions on benefit claimants.

Link:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmpublic/775/775.pdf>

## **22 February 2017**

Title: DWP tells the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) that it does not keep track of peer review recommendations.

What: DWP tells the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) that it has destroyed records relating to how recommendations from peer/internal process reviews were passed to and from the relevant national "customer journey teams", and therefore has no record of whether recommendations were acted on. It also tells ICO there is "no requirement" for it to keep track of what action was taken after these recommendations were passed on, and that because the peer reviews were a "voluntary internal process", it had no legal duty to keep this information.

Why significant: Shows the DWP failing to keep track of whether recommendations made through its own peer reviews into the deaths of claimants were actually carried out.

Link: 'ICO FS50639052 22 Feb 2017' (PDF) [make available on website]

## **14 March 2017**

DPAC and Inclusion London respond to UN report, raising the connection between benefit changes, people's deaths and Government failures.

What: The report by DPAC and Inclusion London responds to the government's response to the report by the UN committee on the rights of persons with disabilities, which found "grave" and "systematic" violations of the UN disability convention. The report welcomes the committee's findings, which it says "present an accurate evaluation of the situation in the UK", and criticises the government's response. It warns that disabled people "are now facing a still worsening situation" and says that further evidence has come to light since the report was published "concerning the connection between benefit changes and deaths and of the Government's failure to act on it".

Why significant: Shows evidence that the situation since the November 2016 "grave and systematic violations" report by the UN committee on the rights of persons with disabilities is not improving and may be worsening, while drawing attention to the government's refusal to accept the committee's criticisms.

Link:

<https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/campaigns-and-policy/act-now/follow-submission-response-uncrpd-inquiry-report-uk-government-response/>

## **20 April 2017**

Title: DWP admits peer review process lacked "robust governance".

What: A letter from the information commissioner says that DWP has admitted that from February 2012 until September 2015 it

kept no records of what happened to recommendations made by its peer review process. DWP has told the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) that it accepts that the peer review process lacked "robust governance" during this period.

Why significant: DWP's admission casts further doubt on its resolve and willingness to learn from the deaths of claimants.

Link: 'ICO FS50639052' (PDF) [make available on website]

## **21 April 2017**

Title: The death of Diane Hullah, linked to anxiety caused by the personal independence payment (PIP) application process.

What: Diane had applied for personal independence payment (PIP) for the first time in 2014, and had also successfully applied for ESA, but her sister believes that the pressure of having to reapply for PIP overwhelmed her, and she took her own life.

Helen Young, her sister, says she believes the PIP system is a "national scandal" and that it was the anxiety caused by the PIP process and the 50-page application form Diane was confronted with that sent her sister "downhill". She says the pressure led her sister to start self-harming again, and twice try unsuccessfully to kill herself before she eventually took her own life. And she says it had left her confined to her bed for days at a time, and too ill to look after herself. Diane had told her that the DWP was "going to try and catch me out", and was convinced her claim would be rejected and that she would be left without the support she needed. She used part of her PIP to pay for psychotherapy. Helen says: "Somebody like my sister was incapable of doing it, given

her mental health. I feel very angry about it, I think it is completely barbaric, a national scandal. If Charles Dickens was alive, he would be writing about the social injustice of it. ESA was awful but PIP just seemed to take it to a new level. It all chips away, so the scar is opened up with ESA and PIP just comes along and pours a bit of salt on it to rub it in.” The irony, she says, is that her sister had in fact been found eligible for the enhanced rates of both the mobility and daily living components of PIP, but the decision letter only arrived after she died.

Why significant: A further tragic death linked to the PIP process.

Link:

<https://thanetwatch.wordpress.com/2017/05/04/how-pip-killed-my-sister/> and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/pip-suicide-womans-sister-blames-barbaric-system-for-her-death/>

## **10 May 2017**

Title: DWP “has gone back on promise” to address work capability assessment (WCA) further medical evidence flaw.

What: DWP releases its new guidance for Maximus assessors, drawn up following the Mental Health Resistance Network court case [see 22 May 2013 and 12 March 2015]. Previous guidelines for Maximus assessment staff stated that further medical evidence must be obtained if, for example, there was evidence of a previous suicide attempt, suicidal ideation or self-harm. DWP’s new guidance states that further medical evidence can now also be requested at the “filework” stage – the stage before any

face-to-face assessment is carried out – if it is felt that “further information would be helpful”. But it also says that if the Maximus healthcare professional decides there is no need to seek this further medical evidence, they will not need to justify that decision. This shows that DWP disregarded a recommendation made more than four years ago by Professor Malcolm Harrington in his third review of the WCA, which said that any decision not to seek further evidence “must be justified”. There are also concerns that DWP never carried out the large-scale pilot, as it said it would, but only a feasibility study involving less than 250 people. Rakesh Singh, a Public Law Project solicitor, says: the DWP is failing “to learn lessons from the tragic suicides of those who had been subjected to the WCA and follow the recommendations of the independent bodies who had investigated their deaths”.

Why significant: This shows DWP again resisting the need to seek further medical evidence, and the advice of its own independent reviewer.

Link: ‘FOI 1384’ (PDF) and ‘Maximus training’ (PDF) and ‘IR 163’ (PDF) [make available on website] and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-pilot-failure-on-wca-calls-into-question-willingness-to-learn-from-suicides/>

**24 May 2017**

Title: Inquest into the death of Jodey Whiting fails to investigate DWP’s potential role in her death.

What: The inquest lasts less than an hour, and fails to investigate DWP's potential role in Jodey Whiting's death. Her family had no legal representative at the inquest and were unaware that they could have been entitled to public funding to pay for this. The coroner turned down the family's request to examine the actions of DWP and their role in Jodey's death.

Why significant: Jodey's mother will in future years campaign for a proper inquest into her daughter's death

Link: None

## **26 July 2017**

Title: The death of Mark Barber, shortly after learning his disability benefits would be cut. Coroner mentions stress linked to reassessment for disability benefits.

What: Mark Barber takes his own life shortly after learning his disability benefits would be cut by £20 a week after a reassessment. Notes found inside his housing association flat after his death demonstrate the problems he was facing with his finances. One says his washing machine was being held together by Sellotape. Another that he had had to spend £12 on a phone call to the Department for Work and Pensions to try to sort out the cut to his disability benefits. Mark's neighbour Lorraine Barry, who found him following his death, told HuffPost UK: "He was left with no money at all. I just think it's heartbreaking and I don't know how anyone could be expected to live on that amount of money and function. He was living to the bare minimum."

Why significant: A coroner said he had been “under stress due to reassessment for disability benefits”, and returned a verdict of suicide.

Link:

[https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/austerity-disability-mark-barber\\_uk\\_5b88f4ace4b0511db3d6b768](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/austerity-disability-mark-barber_uk_5b88f4ace4b0511db3d6b768)

## **August 2017**

Title: UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities committee says government cuts caused “human catastrophe”.

What: Following a two-day public examination of the UK’s progress in implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the committee’s chair, Theresia Degener, tells the UK government’s delegation that its cuts to social security and other support for disabled people had caused “a human catastrophe”, which was “totally neglecting the vulnerable situation people with disabilities find themselves in”.

Why significant: Harsh words about the UK government’s failure to address concerns about the impact of its social security reforms on disabled people, from a UN committee of disabled human rights experts.

Link:

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRPD/Pages/ConventionRightsPersonsWithDisabilities.aspx>.

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/uk-faces-un-examination-government-cuts-caused-human-catastrophe/>

## **August 2017**

Title: DWP data shows some groups are at substantially higher risk of experiencing a jobseekers allowance (JSA) sanction.

What: Research using DWP data, shows that some groups of unemployed claimants (younger people, men, and people from ethnic minorities) are at substantially higher risk of experiencing a jobseekers allowance (JSA) sanction. Findings include that “independent of age and gender, White claimants were less likely to be referred for a sanction, and less likely to ultimately receive a sanction, than were claimants from other ethnic groups. Black claimants and claimants of Mixed ethnicity were generally more likely than claimants from other groups to be referred and sanctioned. These ethnic differences were largest for the group most at risk of sanctions overall: 18-24 year old men” (p.19).

Why significant: Evidence suggesting different forms of discrimination within the sanctions regime, including anti-black racism.

Link:

[http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/101853/1/de\\_Vries\\_Reeves\\_Geiger\\_inequalities\\_in\\_the\\_application\\_of\\_welfare\\_wp15.pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/101853/1/de_Vries_Reeves_Geiger_inequalities_in_the_application_of_welfare_wp15.pdf)

## **3 August 2017**

Title: Disability News Service investigates allegations of professionals' dishonesty in benefits assessments outsourced to Capita and Atos.

What: Disability News Service collects more than 200 cases into healthcare professionals working for Capita and Atos lying in PIP assessment reports they had written for DWP. But DWP, Atos and Capita all refuse to launch an investigation into the claims of widespread dishonesty.

Why significant: Shows continuing systemic problems within the outsourced assessment system

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/pip-investigation-200-cases-of-dishonesty-and-still-dwp-atos-and-capita-refuse-to-act/>

### **31 August 2017**

Title: UN demands UK government provide an annual UK progress report on correcting “grave and systematic violations”.

What: The UN committee on the rights of persons with disabilities tells the UK government to produce an annual progress report on how it is implementing the recommendations of an inquiry that found it guilty of “grave and systematic violations” of key parts of the disability convention [see November 2016]. Stig Langvad, the committee member who led the UK examination, says he and his colleagues are “deeply concerned” about the government’s refusal to recognise the findings and recommendations of the committee’s earlier inquiry.

Why significant: Highlights not only the violations committed by the UK government but also its refusal to take appropriate action.

Link:

[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=1158&Lang=en](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/SessionDetails1.aspx?SessionID=1158&Lang=en)

### **31 August 2017**

Title: Portraying UK disabled people as “parasites” could lead to “violence and killings”, says UN chair.

What: Theresia Degener, who chairs the UN committee on the rights of persons with disabilities, says in a BBC interview that disabled people in the UK could be at risk of violence, and even “killings and euthanasia”, because of their portrayal by the UK government and media as “parasites” who live on benefits.

Why significant: Degener’s comments endorse many of the concerns raised by disabled people about the so-called “scrounger rhetoric” of politicians and the media.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/portraying-disabled-people-as-parasites-could-lead-to-violence-and-killings-says-un-chair/>  
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-09-13/debates/6C56012C-93A3-4D4F-8507-6AA0973B2F63/Engagements#contribution-EE7E7CFC-4E7D-4732-990B-0769B07CDC09>

### **October 2017**

Title: Work and pensions secretary David Gauke admits sanctions can harm claimants with mental health issues.

What: Work and pensions secretary David Gauke admits that the system of benefit sanctions often fails to work and can instead

cause harm to claimants, particularly those with mental health conditions. Yet he insists that any “successful” welfare system has to be dependent on conditionality and that this “does ultimately have to be backed up by a system of sanctions”.

Why significant: A rare admission by a minister of the potential harm caused by DWP policy.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/tory-conference-gauke-admits-sanctions-can-harm-mental-health-claimants/>

## **12 October 2017**

Title: Government downplays UN disability committee concerns about the UK.

What: A parliamentary debate on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is secured by SNP MP and disabled people’s spokesperson Deirdre Brock. Brock says the government’s austerity policies are responsible for causing disabled people “a river of human misery”. But Penny Mordaunt, the minister for disabled people, fails to deal with any of the substantive concerns and instead says she wants to “promote” its disability policies so that they could be a “catalyst for change elsewhere in the world”. She adds: “Our work promotes change elsewhere in the world, which is why we would like the UN to recognise what we have been doing.”

Why significant: Shows the ongoing failure of the UK government to acknowledge the most serious concerns about its domestic record on disability.

Link:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2017-10-12/debates/A20CF46E-116A-47B2-BA33-11CAA47B3FC0/UNConventionOnTheRightsOfPersonsWithDisabilities>

## **10 November 2017**

Title: WinVisible submits evidence to the Commons work and pensions select committee about how assessment regime causes disabled women “terrifying insecurity”, including links to deaths, including suicides.

What: WinVisible submits evidence to the Commons work and pensions select committee about the impact of disability benefit assessments on disabled women. The evidence shows ESA and PIP assessments are leading to “suicides or admissions to NHS psychiatric institutions”, and causing “enormous suffering, destitution and [are] hastening deaths of sick and disabled people”.

Why significant: Further direct grassroots evidence of the damage caused by both the WCA and the PIP assessments on claimants, and their links to people’s deaths.

Link:

<https://winvisibleblog.files.wordpress.com/2017/11/winvisible-submission-on-assessments-with-quotes-updated.pdf>

## **16 November 2017**

Title: Government inquiry into benefits assessment processes receives unprecedented number of submissions.

What: An inquiry into the government's assessment processes for both PIP and ESA produces more online evidence from the public than any other investigation ever held by a House of Commons select committee, with more than 4,000 submissions.

Why significant: This is direct evidence about the impact of the two assessments from disabled people.

Link:

<https://old.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/work-and-pensions-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/pip-esa-assessments-17-19/>

## **December 2017**

Title: Mental health charity Rethink publishes report on how the work capability assessment (WCA) discriminates against people with mental illness.

What: The mental health charity Rethink publishes a report that includes the results of interviews and a survey with people with personal experience of the WCA and of mental distress. The findings show that WCAs can be “traumatising and anxiety-inducing”, and the report concludes that the current PIP and ESA assessment procedures “inherently discriminate against people with mental illnesses”. They recommend that “where clear medical evidence exists that they have severe forms of mental illness”, claimants should be exempt from face-to-face assessments, and that all assessors and DWP decision-makers should be appropriately trained in mental health.

Why significant: Shows further evidence of the harm of assessment procedures for those with mental health issues.

Link:

<https://www.rethink.org/media/2585/its-broken-her-pip-report.pdf>

## **14 December 2017**

Title: Department of Health's national suicide prevention strategy fails to warn NHS of the suicide risk associated with employment and support allowance (ESA).

What: It emerges that the latest version of the Department of Health's national suicide prevention strategy, published in January 2017, failed to warn NHS bodies and other local services that ESA claimants were at a hugely-increased risk of attempting to take their own lives. The strategy was published four months after NHS Digital produced the results of its Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey, which showed that more than 43 per cent of ESA claimants had said (when asked in 2014) that they had attempted suicide at some point in their lives. But the suicide prevention strategy fails to mention these figures or to highlight ESA claimants as a high-risk group, even though it briefly mentions DWP guidance for dealing with ESA claimants who may be at risk of suicide or self-harm.

Why significant: Shows again the government's failure to protect ESA claimants at risk of suicide.

Link:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/adult-psychiatric-morbidity-survey/adult-psychiatric-morbidity-surve>

[y-survey-of-mental-health-and-wellbeing-england-2014](#) and [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/582117/Suicide\\_report\\_2016\\_A.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/582117/Suicide_report_2016_A.pdf) (PDF)

## **14 December 2017**

Title: NHS statistics on the link between employment support allowance and suicide prompt calls for inquiry and prosecution of ministers.

What: New analysis of NHS statistics shows that in 2007 – a year before the introduction of the WCA – 21 per cent of incapacity benefit (IB) claimants told researchers they had attempted suicide at some point in their lives. The following year, IB began to be replaced by ESA, with eligibility tested by the WCA. By 2014, more than 43 per cent of claimants were saying they had attempted suicide. One leading psychologist described the figures as showing “the greatest increase in suicide rates for any population that I can recall in the literature”. Over the same period, the number of adults who were questioned for the Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey (APMS) who were not claiming IB (in 2007) or ESA (in 2014) and reported a suicide attempt remained statistically stable (6.0 per cent in 2007 against 6.7 per cent in 2014). The figures were calculated for DNS by Sally McManus, who leads research on the survey for the independent social research institute NatCen, on behalf of NHS Digital.

Why significant: The figures do not prove that the introduction of WCA and ESA caused a doubling of suicide attempts among

claimants as the two populations (IB claimants and ESA claimants) may have been different. But they certainly raised further and serious concerns about the impact of the introduction of ESA and the WCA.

Link: 'Updated suicide stats from NatCen' (Excel worksheet, to be made available on website) and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/staggering-esa-suicide-figures-prompt-calls-for-inquiry-and-prosecution-of-ministers/>

## **20 December 2017**

Title: MPs refuse to question minister for disabled people over statistics showing link between employment and support allowance and suicide.

What: Disabled campaigners attack MPs on the Commons work and pensions committee for refusing to ask the minister for disabled people about figures showing attempted suicides among people claiming out-of-work disability benefits had doubled between 2007 and 2014. The new figures, showing how suicide attempts rose sharply after the introduction of the WCA, had emerged the previous week and were passed to the committee, as well as at least one member of the committee, in advance of the evidence session. The session was part of the committee's inquiry into DWP's assessments for personal independence payment (PIP) and ESA. Among those speaking out, Dr Jay Watts, a consultant clinical psychologist and disabled activist, says: "How is it possible that the minister for disabled people was not asked about the doubling of attempted suicide rates so clearly

linked to the policies of her department? How was she not asked to justify government policies in the wake of the thousands who have died as a result of the brutality of the ESA system?”

Why significant: Further evidence of the reluctance of MPs on all sides of the House of Commons to investigate thoroughly the links between the WCA and the deaths of claimants.

Link:

<https://parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/a6d24fc1-207c-49b2-8bd8-6f73807ff9d7>

## **21 December 2017**

Title: The high court rules that changes to personal independence payment (PIP) regulations were unlawful and discriminate against disabled people.

What: The high court rules that changes to PIP regulations in March 2017 were unlawful and discriminate against disabled people. The case was taken by the Public Law Project and its client RF. The most significant change made by the regulations was to tighten the rules on access to the PIP mobility component for people unable to undertake journeys due to “overwhelming psychological distress”. The judge found that the decision to introduce the regulations was “manifestly without reasonable foundation” and that the wish to save money could not justify such an unreasonable measure. The challenge was supported by The National Autistic Society, Inclusion London, Revolving Doors, Disability Rights UK, Mind and the Equality and Human Rights Commission. The judge left no room to appeal.

Why significant: RF said that “this judgment is important for a community of people with mental health problems fighting for their lives against discrimination”.

Link: <http://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2017/3375.html>  
and

<https://publiclawproject.org.uk/latest/high-court-finds-2017-personal-independence-payment-pip-regulations-unlawful/>

### **14 March 2018**

Title: The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) research shows cumulative impact of tax and welfare reforms on disabled people.

What: The Equality and Human Rights Commission publishes a report showing that the more disabled a person is, the harder they are likely to have been hit by the cuts and reforms that have been introduced by the government since 2010. The analysis shows disproportionately negative impacts on several protected groups, including disabled people, certain ethnic minorities, and women, as well as lone parents. The analysis looks at all the tax, national insurance, social security and minimum wage reforms made between May 2010 and January 2018. The report says that, on average, disabled lone parents with at least one disabled child will have lost almost 30 per cent of their net income, almost £10,000 per year, by the time the reforms and cuts are fully implemented in 2021-22.

Why significant: Shows it is feasible to carry out cumulative impact assessments in relation to the impact of the cuts and

reforms on disabled people– something the government has consistently refused to do.

Links:

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/cumulative-impact-tax-and-welfare-reforms> and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/eight-years-of-benefit-cuts-will-cost-some-disabled-lone-parents-11000-a-year/>

## **25 January 2018**

Title: DWP decides not to trial softer sanctions regime, despite this being recommended by the Commons public accounts committee.

What: A report shows that ministers have decided to go back on their promise to trial handing out warnings instead of benefit sanctions when claimants breach the conditions imposed on them for the first time. It was one of five recommendations made in a report on benefit sanctions by the Commons public accounts committee in February 2017. But DWP now says it will not carry out the trial after all, because of “competing priorities in the Parliamentary timetable”.

Why significant: The DWP sanctions regime has been closely associated with the deaths of many claimants such as David Clapson [see 20 July 2013].

Link:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/651448/Treasury\\_minute\\_12\\_Oct](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/651448/Treasury_minute_12_Oct)

[ober\\_Cm\\_9505\\_Web.pdf](#) and [https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmpubacc/775/77505.htm#\\_idTextAnchor007](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmpubacc/775/77505.htm#_idTextAnchor007) and [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/676345/CCS207\\_CCS0118804018-1\\_TM\\_2010-12\\_to\\_2016-17\\_Jan18\\_Accessible.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/676345/CCS207_CCS0118804018-1_TM_2010-12_to_2016-17_Jan18_Accessible.pdf) (page 139)

## **14 February 2018**

Title: The Commons work and pensions committee finds assessment system is undermined by “pervasive culture of mistrust”.

What: The Commons work and pensions committee publishes report into personal independent payment (PIP) and employment and support allowance (ESA) assessments, which finds that the assessment system is being undermined by a “pervasive culture of mistrust”. Findings show the application process is “unfriendly” and can be a significant source of confusion and distress; question the effectiveness and rigour of mandatory reconsideration; and raise issues with accessibility and with claimants’ understanding of what they are being assessed on. The report says: “It is impossible to draw a causal link from application to claimant health. The Department should demonstrate, however, that it is alert to the risk to mental health posed by parts of the application processes and seek to offset this.” [see 16 November 2017]). [A separate report published earlier in the week](#) includes examples from the “unprecedented” response from claimants who had submitted evidence to the

committee, with nearly 4,000 submissions. The committee says this response was “remarkable” in the “consistency of the themes that emerged”, including claims that assessment reports “bore little or no relation to their circumstances or what had occurred during the assessment”.

Why significant: Many deaths of claimants have been linked to assessment reports that were subsequently found to be inaccurate or dishonest.

Link:

<https://old.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/work-and-pensions-committee/news-parliament-2017/pip-esa-full-report-17-19/> and

<https://old.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/work-and-pensions-committee/news-parliament-2017/pip-esa-claimant-experiences-report-17-19/>

<https://old.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/work-and-pensions-committee/publications/?type=&session=29&sort=false&inquiry=3502>

## **20 February 2018**

Title: Research shows that benefit sanctions regime discriminates against disabled people claiming jobseeker’s allowance (JSA).

What: Research shows that disabled people claiming jobseeker’s allowance (JSA) were between 26 and 53 per cent more likely to be sanctioned than non-disabled claimants between 2010 and 2014. Academic Ben Baumberg Geiger says that more than one million disabled people on JSA and employment and support

allowance have been sanctioned since 2010, along with a further 200,000 in the two years before that, under the Labour government.

Why significant: The sanctions regime has been closely associated with the deaths of many claimants such as David Clapson [see 20 July 2013].

Link:

<https://demos.co.uk/project/a-better-work-capability-assessment/>

## **16 April 2018**

Title: Pensions secretary Esther McVey heckled over death of Jodey Whiting.

What: Jodey Whiting's name was mentioned by a disabled activist as he heckled work and pensions secretary Esther McVey, while she gave evidence to the Scottish parliament's social security committee. The activist told McVey: "What about Jodey Whiting, mother of nine, who committed suicide after her ESA was stopped?"

Why significant: Jodey Whiting's death would become one of the highest-profile tragedies to be linked to the actions of DWP, and again raised concerns about the ESA/WCA system.

Link:

<https://www.scottishparliament.tv/meeting/social-security-committee-april-16-2018> (listen from 52 minutes) and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/mother-of-esa-suicide-woman-pledges-to-continue-fight-for-justice/>

## **18 April 2018**

Title: Government responds to work and pensions committee's report on assessments process.

What: Government responds to work and pensions committee's report on PIP and ESA assessments [see 14 February 2018], saying it will commission research from external contractors to examine whether any aspects of ESA and PIP claim forms had the potential to cause distress, to identify what changes should be made, and to test the revised forms with applicants. But they rejected the recommendation that DWP should provide written copies of their assessment report to all claimants of PIP and ESA. They also rejected the recommendation that they should consider ditching Atos, Capita and Maximus and move the assessments back "in house". Of 11 recommendations made by the committee in its February report, DWP appeared to have rejected five, accepted four and partially accepted two more.

Why significant: Further resistance to improve the assessment process from DWP, despite some of the committee's recommendations being accepted.

Link:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmworkp/986/986.pdf> and

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/772184/national-suicide-prevention-strategy-4th-progress-report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/772184/national-suicide-prevention-strategy-4th-progress-report.pdf) (paragraphs 2.48-2.51)

## **21 May 2018**

Title: DWP “has no record” of whether it showed documents about deaths related to work capability assessments to reviewer.

What: DWP claims in a freedom of information response that it has no record of whether it showed vital documents linking the WCA with the deaths of benefit claimants to Dr Paul Litchfield, who published the final two independent reviews of the WCA in December 2013 and November 2014. The documents include at least seven peer reviews that mention the WCA, and two PFD reports, written by coroners following the deaths of Stephen Carré and Michael O’Sullivan. The existence of the documents was only revealed publicly in the years after Litchfield’s final report was published.

Why significant: Consistent DWP failure to retain and pass on evidence of links between its policies and claimant deaths

Link: [FOI 2110 Reply \(PDF\)](#) [make available on website]

## **June 2018**

Title: Research published from five-year study into welfare conditionality, findings include link between sanctions and deaths, including suicide.

What: A five-year project by researchers from six UK universities in England and Scotland found that sanctions “routinely trigger profoundly negative personal, financial, health and behavioural outcomes” and push some people away from claiming the benefits they are entitled to and are linked to deaths, including suicides.

Why significant: The findings from this study have been used as evidence at various inquiries, and as written evidence to the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights.

Link:

[http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/40475\\_Welfare-Conditionality\\_Report\\_complete-v3.pdf](http://www.welfareconditionality.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/40475_Welfare-Conditionality_Report_complete-v3.pdf)

## **20 June 2018**

Title: The death of Errol Graham, months after DWP wrongly stopped his employment support allowance (ESA), and failed to seek further medical evidence.

What: Errol Graham's body is discovered by bailiffs sent to evict him. He had starved to death, months after DWP wrongly stopped his ESA. He weighs just four-and-a-half stone. DWP had stopped his ESA after making two unsuccessful visits to his home to ask why he had not attended a face-to-face WCA. Deprived of all financial support, experiencing significant mental distress and unable or unwilling to seek help, he slowly starved to death. His benefits had been stopped even though he had been receiving incapacity benefit, and then ESA, for many years due to enduring mental distress that had led to him being sectioned. The coroner at his inquest decided not to write a prevention of future deaths report demanding changes to DWP's safeguarding procedures because the department insisted that it was already completing a review of its safeguarding. DWP promised her it would "listen to

clients and to those representing them, and... ensure that the DWP were focused on support and safety for vulnerable people". Why significant: Another person's death caused by safeguarding failures within DWP, but also another failure by DWP to seek further medical evidence when it was needed, with DWP promising yet again to learn from its errors.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/the-death-of-errol-graham-man-starved-to-death-after-dwp-wrongly-stopped-his-benefits/>

## **19 July 2018**

Title: Four opposition parties demand DWP answers over work capability assessment deaths "cover-up".

What: Opposition parties say they will write urgent letters to work and pensions secretary Esther McVey about why documents linking the WCA with the deaths of benefit claimants were not shared with Dr Paul Litchfield, the independent expert commissioned by government to review the WCA in 2013 and 2014. The Green party's co-leader, Jonathan Bartley, says the failure to be clear about what happened with the documents had "all the hallmarks of a deliberate cover-up".

Why significant: Political pressure on DWP ministers to explain why the documents do not appear to have been shared with Litchfield.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/four-opposition-parties-demand-dwp-answers-over-wca-deaths-cover-up/> and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwps-fitness-for-work-review-handed-cbe-after-refusing-to-speak-out-on-benefit-deaths-evidence/>

## **September 2018**

Title: Production of A Very Queer Nazi Faust by disabled artist Vince Laws, highlights deaths linked to disability benefits cuts.

What: A Very Queer Nazi Faust, a theatre piece created by disabled artist Vince Laws to highlight issues around cuts to disability benefits, is performed in various venues across Norwich, including at Norwich Arts Centre. Law says he wrote the work “to protest the slaughter of sick and disabled people”.

Why significant: One of the many ways that disabled artists have used the arts to protest DWP’s treatment of disabled people.

Links:

<https://thetheatretimes.com/vince-laws-a-very-queer-nazi-faust-participatory-experimental-transmedia-performance/> and <https://weareunlimited.org.uk/commission/vince-laws-a-very-queer-nazi-faust/>

## **17 September 2018**

Title: Number of DWP investigations (internal process reviews) into deaths of people claiming benefits double in two years.

What: The latest release of redacted internal process reviews – which was only released after pressure from the information commissioner on DWP – shows that the number of internal

process reviews into the deaths of claimants appears to have doubled in the last two years.

The figures (which are only approximate) seem to show that, from April 2016 to June 2018, DWP panels carried out 50 IPRs, including 33 involving the death of a benefit claimant (approximately 1.27 death-related IPRs a month). Previous DWP figures showed that, between October 2014 and January 2016, there were nine IPRs involving a death, or about 0.6 a month. The new figures also show that 19 of the deaths in the last two years involved a claimant viewed as “vulnerable”.

Why significant: The increased number of reviews may be due to changes in policy or procedure within DWP but might also represent a rise in the number of deaths linked to benefit cuts and reforms, particularly in the wake of the harsh measures included in the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016, which received royal assent on 16 March 2016.

Link: [FOI 2897 \(PDF\)](#) and [FOI2018 04816](#) [make available on website]

## **26 September 2018**

Title: Scottish government sets out plans to bring benefit assessments in-house.

What: Scotland's new social security agency is to take responsibility for a range of benefits, including PIP. Ministers set out plans for how assessments will be run in-house by the agency, rather than by external firms.

Why significant: Scottish government taking action to improve assessments through reducing outsourcing.

Links:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-45653249>

## **27 September 2018**

Title: Joy Dove, Jodey Whiting's mother, vows to fight on for Justice for Jodey.

What: The mother of Jodey Whiting vows to continue her fight for justice after her daughter's death [see 21 February 2017], despite the prime minister's office denying her request for a meeting with then prime minister Theresa May.

Why significant: This was another step in Joy Dove's battle to secure justice for her daughter, Jodey.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/wca-tragedy-womans-mum-vows-to-fight-on-for-justice-despite-no-10-letter-snub/>

## **October 2018**

Title: Research shows that sanctions system has a "significantly detrimental" effect on mental health.

What: Research by academics in partnership with disabled people's organisation Inclusion London shows the government's "perverse and punitive" ESA system has a "significantly detrimental" effect on claimants' mental health. The report says

the impact of sanctions has been “life-threatening” for some of those in the ESA work related activity group (WRAG). At the launch event, Andy Mitchell talks about how a sanction led him to try to take his own life and to ongoing mental distress and trauma. Why significant: Further evidence of the life-threatening risk posed by the sanctions system and the ESA/WCA process.

Link:

<https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/ESA-WRAG-Report.pdf> and

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09687599.2020.1766422> [request a free copy from

<http://repository.essex.ac.uk/27589/> ] and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/account-of-sanctions-desperation-leaves-disabled-peer-in-tears-at-wrag-research-launch/>

## **October 2018**

Title: Citizens Advice signs £51 million contract with DWP.

What: While other organisations refuse similar contracts on a point of principle, Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland sign contracts with DWP worth a total of £51 million in total to provide support to universal credit claimants

Why significant: Just hours after the announcement at the Conservative conference, Citizens Advice’s head of policy on families, welfare and work, Kayley Hignell, speaking at a conference fringe event on universal credit and its impact on mental health, failed to raise concerns, criticise the government or call for urgent action after being asked about [secret DWP](#)

[reviews](#) that have linked the deaths of four universal credit claimants with the department's activity, and whether she thought DWP had taken those deaths seriously enough. It will later emerge that both Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland signed gagging clauses that meant they could not take "any actions which unfairly bring or are likely to unfairly bring [DWP's] name or reputation and/or [DWP] into disrepute".

Links:

<https://www.benefitsandwork.co.uk/news/3808-dwp-to-pay-citizens-advice-51-million-to-help-with-universal-credit> and

<https://www.gmlaw.org.uk/2017/10/12/our-statement-on-universal-credit-we-will-not-be-complicit/>

and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/tory-conference-charitys-silence-on-universal-credit-deaths-hours-after-minister-announces-51m-funding/> and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/citizens-advice-signed-gagging-clause-in-return-for-share-of-51m-from-dwp/>

## **18 October 2018**

Title: The new "minister for suicide prevention" evades questions on statistics showing links between employment and support allowance (ESA) and suicide.

What: The new "minister for suicide prevention", Jackie Doyle-Price, refuses to say if she will alert agencies across the

country to NHS figures that show the high risk of suicide faced by ESA claimants.

Why significant: Shows again the government's resistance to highlighting the risk of suicide faced by ESA claimants, despite claiming that they want to prevent suicides and identify those most at risk.

Link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-pledges-action-on-suicide-to-mark-world-mental-health-day>

## **25 October 2018**

Title: Disabled people's organisations (DPOs) submit report to UN, finding government failings in upholding the rights of disabled people.

What: A highly-critical report finds that government ministers are failing to uphold the rights of disabled people, ignoring the need to engage with disabled people's organisations, and do not understand the UN's disability convention. The report was compiled by disabled people's organisations across the UK and submitted to the UN's committee on the rights of persons with disabilities. Among its concerns, it highlights the continuing rollout of universal credit (UC) and says DPOs are "gravely concerned" at the failure to assess the access needs of disabled people due to be moved onto UC and the lack of the necessary data to monitor its impact.

Why significant: Raises further concerns about the impact of the government's welfare reforms on disabled people, including the impact of the new universal credit.

Link:

<https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/campaigns-and-policy/facts-and-equality-and-human-rights/uk-ddpos-publish-latest-report-to-the-un/>

<https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/DPO-UNCRPD-Alternative-Report-from-Civil-Society-Oct-2018.doc>

<https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/campaigns-and-policy/facts-and-information/equality-and-human-rights/evidence-for-the-alternative-report-from-civil-society/> and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/ministers-failing-to-uphold-a-un-disability-convention-they-do-not-understand/>

## **November 2018**

Title: The sister of a man with learning difficulties says his death was caused by his move onto the government's "chaotic" universal credit system.

What: A man with learning difficulties died a month after attempting to take his own life, following a move onto the government's "chaotic" universal credit benefit system that left him hundreds of pounds in debt. An account of the tragedy, written by the man's sister, Maggie, is just one of scores of pieces of written evidence submitted to the inquiry being carried out by

Professor Philip Alston, the UN's special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights (see 16 November 2018). Maggie, from London, describes what had happened to her brother, John, who had cerebral palsy and learning difficulties. Maggie told how John, who lived in sheltered housing, had previously been "a positive happy person" before he was found fit for work and forced onto universal credit and the government's Work Programme. She says the job he had been found through the Work Programme had proved unsuitable and he fell back out of work, causing severe problems with his universal credit. Maggie tells the inquiry: "He had been told by all the authorities such as the Job Centre and Housing not to worry about his benefits and then he was very shocked to receive bills of £1,000 and £500 [from DWP and the local authority's housing department]." She says her brother had been one of the first to be placed on the "chaotic" universal credit benefit system, and that his rights as a disabled person "had not been considered by the DWP and other authorities". She says John had been hospitalised after trying to take his own life. He died a month later, in April this year. She says: "John was a very law abiding person and did everything that DWP, etc, told him to do but was seriously let down by this department. His benefits had been in chaos for several years but no one cared from the various departments that John and myself contacted."

Why significant: Further evidence of the harm being caused by the new universal credit benefit system, on top of years of other reforms and cuts to social security.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/chaotic-universal-credit-led-to-disabled-mans-death-sister-tells-un-poverty-expert/>

## **6 November 2018**

Title: Commons work and pensions committee calls for an end to sanctioning disabled people.

What: In a report on the government's "harmful and counterproductive" benefit sanctions regime, the Commons work and pensions committee concludes: "Of all the evidence we received, none was more compelling than that against the imposition of conditionality and sanctions on people with a disability or health condition. It does not work. Worse, it is harmful and counterproductive."

Why significant: Shows cross-party support from the committee for ending the use of sanctions against disabled people. Yet employment minister Alok Sharma had told the committee in correspondence that the government would be doing a "great disservice" to disabled people if it stopped sanctioning their out-of-work benefits.

Link:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmworkpen/955/955.pdf> and [https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/minister-says-stopping-benefit-sanctions-would-do-disabled-people-a-great-disservice\[JP1\] /](https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/minister-says-stopping-benefit-sanctions-would-do-disabled-people-a-great-disservice[JP1]/)

## **16 November 2018**

Title: UN rapporteur says government has 'inflicted great misery' on disabled people.

What: Professor Philip Alston, the UN's special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, says that disabled people in the UK have faced "endless problems" as a result of the government's social security reforms, and that the government has inflicted "great misery" on disabled people and other marginalised groups, with ministers in a state of "denial" about the impact of their policies. He also says it is clear that there needs to be a better assessment of the impact of the government's social security cuts and reforms, including any links to the deaths of people found unfairly fit for work. His comments were made at the end of a 12-day factfinding visit to the UK as part of his investigation into the government's record on eradicating poverty. He says: "I also heard story after story from people who considered and even attempted suicide, and spoke with multiple organizations that have instituted suicide prevention training for frontline staff in recent years. One person said, 'The cumulative impact of successive cuts has been devastating. People are coming to me because they are suicidal, they have turned to sex work, they can't live with themselves.'"

Why significant: Although Alston's conclusions are angrily dismissed by ministers, they put further public pressure on the government to address the impact of its policies on disabled people and other marginalized groups.

Link:

<https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=23881>

## **18 November 2018**

Title: The death of Roy Curtis, six days after being asked to attend a face-to-face work capability assessment (WCA).

What: Roy Curtis (previously Ayman Habayeb) takes his own life, six days after being asked to attend a face-to-face WCA. DWP had been repeatedly warned that its efforts to force him into work were making him suicidal, and had years of evidence of the impact of the WCA process on his mental health. In August, he had been told his ESA was being removed because he had failed to turn up to a WCA. He drew up a lengthy suicide note in which he said he would end his own life on 19 September because DWP had decided to terminate his benefits, which meant he was “no longer able to pay rent or afford to eat”. Police were alerted by an online friend and he was admitted as a voluntary inpatient to a mental health unit. A support worker wrote to DWP asking for the ESA decision to be reviewed, including a letter from a consultant psychiatrist explaining that the thought of work made him feel suicidal. His benefits were reinstated and backdated the following day, 5 October. But just a few days later, having now returned home, he received another DWP letter, telling him he had been placed back in the ESA work-related activity group and would need to attend regular appointments. A month later, on 12 November, he was sent a letter by DWP telling him he needed to

attend another WCA. It is believed he took his own life six days later.

Why significant: The safeguarding failures were strikingly similar to those that led to the death of Errol Graham several months earlier [see 20 June 2018], showing the importance of not looking at deaths in isolation, in order to see patterns and recurring issues.

Link:

[https://www.mktogether.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/fv\\_-\\_Adult-D-Overview-report\\_Nov2020.pdf](https://www.mktogether.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/fv_-_Adult-D-Overview-report_Nov2020.pdf) and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/roy-curtis-autistic-man-killed-himself-six-days-after-latest-fitness-for-work-demand/>

## **19 December 2018**

Title: Second backbench WOW campaign debate hears of “hostile” and “dehumanising” benefits assessment system.

What: MPs take part in a debate on the impact of eight years of cuts to disability support, the second such debate secured by the WOW campaign of disabled campaigners. The backbench debate was the result of months of lobbying of cross-party MPs by the disabled-led WOW campaign, which has been pushing for six years for the government to carry out an assessment of the impact of all of its cuts to disabled people’s support. It is the follow-up to a high-profile debate that took place in the Commons in February 2014, after nearly 105,000 people had signed a petition calling on the government to carry out a cumulative impact assessment. Labour’s Debbie Abrahams tells the debate

how one disabled person, someone with significant mental distress, had told her how he had been forced through seven benefit assessments in six years. She says that more and more disabled people are becoming isolated in their own homes and are facing the “relentless stress and anxiety resulting from a social security system that is hostile, unsupportive and even dehumanising”.

Why significant: Shows the continuing impact of austerity on disabled people, five years after the first WOW debate.

Link:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2018-12-19/debates/785092AB-6594-423B-A48E-41714F822FED/DisabilitySupport> and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/mps-hear-of-despair-of-austeritys-victims-in-second-wow-debate/>

## **15 January 2019**

Title: Watchdog report shows introduction of personal independence payment (PIP) led to spending rise rather than intended fall.

What: In its annual Welfare Trends Report, the Office for Budget Responsibility says the government’s introduction of personal independence payment led to a sharp rise in spending on disability benefits rather than the fall intended by ministers.

Chancellor George Osborne had announced in 2010 that the coalition planned to cut spending and the number of claimants on disability living allowance (DLA) by 20 per cent by introducing a new working-age benefit -PIP.

Why significant: Figures perhaps show self-defeating nature of high-profile benefit reforms.

Link: <https://obr.uk/wtr/welfare-trends-report-january-2019/>  
<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/surprise-pip-report-raises-concerns-over-ministers-spending-plans/>

## **22 January 2019**

Title: Ministers fail to include DWP in cross-government suicide prevention plan, despite evidence linking suicides with disability benefits assessment system.

What: The Department of Health and Social Care's first Cross-Government Suicide Prevention Workplan fails to include DWP in a plan aimed at reducing suicides, despite years of evidence linking such deaths with the disability benefits system and social security reforms. ESA and universal credit claimants are not included among the high-risk groups mentioned in the work plan.

Significant: Shows wider government overlooking of evidence of links between DWP and suicides.

Link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/first-ever-cross-government-suicide-prevention-plan-published>

## **1 February 2019**

Title: DWP figures show thousands died after having personal independence payment (PIP) claims rejected.

What: DWP figures reveal that about 1,600 working-age disabled people are dying every year after having their claim for disability benefits rejected. The figures show that 7,990 disabled people who lodged a claim for PIP in the five years after the new benefit was launched in April 2013 had died within six months of registering their claim, while also having that claim rejected (before any mandatory reconsideration or appeal). Another set of figures released by DWP shows 3,680 disabled people – or more than 60 a month – died within three months of their initial PIP applications being rejected by DWP

Why significant: Further evidence to suggest that thousands of seriously-ill claimants are being wrongly denied PIP and that this is killing people.

Link:

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2019-01-17/209778> and

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2019-01-17/209780>

## **21 February 2019**

Title: DWP failed five times to follow safeguarding rules before Jodey Whiting's suicide.

What: The Independent Case Examiner finds that DWP failed five times to follow its own safeguarding rules in the weeks leading up to the suicide of Jodey Whiting, concluding that DWP was guilty of “multiple” and “significant” failings. Jodey Whiting's mother, Joy

Dove, calls for DWP and those staff responsible to face a criminal investigation for the failures that led to the death of her daughter. Significant: Further evidence of safeguarding failings within DWP. Failings highlighted in the report mirror many of those in past deaths. Joy Dove will continue to campaign for Justice for Jodey in the following years.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/jodey-whiting-dwp-ignored-five-safeguarding-chances-before-wca-suicide/>

## **March 2019**

Title: Work and pensions secretary Amber Rudd launches Health Transformation Programme – to reform assessment processes. What: Work and pensions secretary Amber Rudd launches the Health Transformation Programme, Rudd says DWP plans to test if it can assess eligibility for both PIP and ESA through a single face-to-face assessment, at least for those disabled people who apply for the two benefits at the same time. It plans to do this through an “integrated” service, supported by a new digital system, which will deal with both PIP and ESA (and universal credit) assessments, and will begin to go live from 2021. It hopes this DWP-owned system will allow a greater number of assessment providers than the current three companies – Atos, Capita and Maximus – to come into the market and “compete” to provide assessments. (The COVID-19 pandemic will interrupt these plans).

Why significant: Disabled activists say the plans amount to “minor tinkering” when the system was instead in need of a radical overhaul, and raise fears (which developments in 2021 will suggest were justified) that the reforms could be a “Trojan horse” for cuts.

Link:

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2019-03-05/HCWS1376/>

## **11 March 2019**

Title: DWP figures suggest deaths linked to the work capability assessment (WCA) may have fallen.

What: A first set of figures released by the DWP, due to an FOI from campaigner Frank Zola, suggest that the proportion of disabled people dying soon after being found fit for work may have fallen since the early years of the WCA. The figures appear to show a difference between the proportion of people dying after being found fit for work in the first five-and-a-half years of the test, and those dying after being found fit for work between 2014 and 2017.

A second set of DWP figures, this time released under the FOIA to independent researcher Mo Stewart, say that 548,620 people were found fit for work between 1 March 2014 and 28 February 2017, with 1,560 (or 0.284 per cent) of them dying within six months of this decision. This suggests that the proportion of

people dying within six months of being found fit for work reduced when comparing the period October 2008 to March 2014 with March 2014 to February 2017.

Why significant: The figures suggest that something has changed and add weight to the argument that government policy on the WCA did cause deaths. Although there is no suggestion that the WCA and DWP policy stopped causing deaths post-2014.

Link:

[https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/510980/response/1326448/attach/3/FOI%202018%203511%20Response.pdf?cookie\\_passsthrough=1](https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/510980/response/1326448/attach/3/FOI%202018%203511%20Response.pdf?cookie_passsthrough=1)

<https://www.mostewartresearch.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/FOI-2018-9859-Response.pdf>

## **8 March 2019**

Title: NHS call for government action on link between mental distress and benefit cuts.

What: NHS Providers publishes research showing that more than nine out of ten (92 per cent) mental health trusts that took part in a survey said changes to benefits were increasing demand for mental health services.

Why significant: The report adds to evidence that ESA recipients are at particularly high risk of suicide attempts, and that cuts and reforms to social security are impacting on mental distress.

Link:

<https://nhsproviders.org/news-blogs/news/benefit-changes-and-loneliness-behind-the-growing-deficit-of-mental-health-care>

### **13 March 2019**

Title: Prime minister Theresa May questioned about death of Jodey Whiting.

What: Asked about the death of Jodey Whiting in prime minister's questions, Theresa May says: "It has been identified that there were mistakes in the handling of her case. The department has apologised for its failings, and is providing compensation for the family. That, of course, can never bring Ms Whiting back. The point that the honourable gentleman made is that we need to learn from this case, and that is why the department is looking at it to ensure that we never see such failings happening again and leading to such a tragic consequence."

Why significant: The government again claims that it will learn lessons from a tragedy linked to DWP, suggesting again that Jodey's death was a one-off rather than one of many deaths linked to welfare reform.

Link:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2019-03-13/debates/5F2B8816-2B09-4EDB-9AC6-0A5C6CFE3876/Engagementshighlight=jodey+whiting#contribution-1F54FBA7-5F42-4DB8-91E7-FAD6308BD7EA>

### **15 March 2019**

Title: Six families back petition to MPs calling for inquiry into DWP benefit deaths.

What: Relatives of six disabled people who died due to DWP failings back the Justice for Jodey Whiting petition that calls for an independent inquiry into deaths linked to the department's actions. The petition is set up on parliament's petitions website and if it reaches 100,000 signatures, it will be considered for debate by MPs in the House of Commons. The petition was launched following the death of Jodey Whiting and is set up in her name, with the backing of Black Triangle, Disabled People Against Cuts, Mental Health Resistance Network, WOWcampaign and Disability News Service (and later WinVisible - a multi-racial community group of women with visible and invisible disabilities). Running since 1984).

Why significant: Families and grassroots groups of disabled people uniting to highlight the links between DWP and the deaths of claimants.

Link: <https://petition.parliament.uk/archived/petitions/243337> and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/six-families-back-petition-to-mps-calling-for-inquiry-into-dwp-benefit-deaths/>

## **21 March 2019**

Title: DWP admits it keeps no record of complaints linked to deaths submitted to the Independent Case Examiner.

What: DWP admits (in response to a freedom of information request from Disability News Service) that it keeps no records of how many of the complaints submitted to the Independent Case Examiner involve a claimant of disability benefits who had died before the complaint was submitted.

Why significant: Further evidence of negligence and a lack of transparency around deaths linked to DWP policies.

Link: FoI 09877 (PDF) [make available on website] and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwps-latest-confession-on-safety-we-keep-no-record-of-complaints-linked-to-deaths/>

## **25 March 2019**

Title: DWP withholds documents on benefits-related deaths from work capability assessment (WCA) review team.

What: Following intervention from the Information Commissioner's Office, DWP admits that two PFD letters written by coroners, and a series of peer reviews into the deaths of claimants, were hidden from the team set up to review the WCA, under Dr Paul Litchfield. ICO gives Disability News Service a summary of its discussions with DWP, which prove that neither the peer reviews nor the coroners' letters were sent to Litchfield. DWP later says: "DWP co-operated fully with the Litchfield reviews, and shared all relevant information which was requested by Dr Litchfield and his team. DWP was not asked by Dr Litchfield or his review for information on the specific cases you refer to. The issues investigated and evidence sought is at the discretion of the independent reviewer, and according to the terms of reference of their review." But she was unable to explain how Litchfield's team could have requested information – the secret peer reviews and coroners' letters – if they did not know they existed.

Why significant: Strongly suggests that evidence linking DWP policies to claimant deaths was intentionally withheld from the

WCA review team. Evidence from the previous WCA reviewer, Professor Malcolm Harrington, had already suggested that similar evidence had been withheld from his team.

Link: FS50776575 (Word doc) [make available on website]

## **28 March 2019**

Title: Secret recording of face-to-face benefits assessment shows Capita assessor lying about woman's thoughts of suicide.

What: A woman (Diane, not her real name) secretly records her face-to-face benefits assessment carried out by Capita. Despite repeatedly talking about her thoughts of suicide, her disability benefits were later removed after the assessor lied in an assessment report, stating: "They deny any current thoughts of suicide and/or self-harm." A month after the assessment, Diane attempts to take her own life. Three weeks later, on 6 January, as a result of the assessment report, DWP removes Diane's eligibility for PIP.

Why significant: Shows continuing concerns about the honesty of assessors, and links between the assessment process and suicidal thoughts and actions of claimants.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/capita-assessor-lied-about-womans-thoughts-of-suicide-recording-shows/>

## **April 2019**

Title: The death of James Oliver, a few months after DWP's refusal to grant him personal independence payment (PIP).

What: James Oliver dies in hospital, after spending the last few months of his life in despair over the refusal of DWP to grant him PIP. Shortly before he died in hospital, in April this year, he had told his brother, Dave Smith: “I can’t believe it. I am dying, I am going to be dead, and I’m still not sick enough to get PIP.” Oliver, who had chronic liver disease caused by alcohol dependency, as well as other health conditions including scoliosis, hypertension and depression, had twice tried to claim PIP, but both times was found ineligible. His brother believes that the months of anxiety, depression and distress caused by this refusal to award him PIP last year hastened his death. Like many other campaigners, Smith believes ministers and senior civil servants should be held accountable in the courts for their failure to make the system safe for people in vulnerable situations. His brother believes James was twice turned down for PIP, on both occasions being awarded zero points by an Atos assessor. At the time of the first assessment, in 2016, he says of his brother: “His liver is failing, his other organs are giving up, he has scoliosis, he has a backside red raw from the incontinence, he has open sores all over his body, his stomach is permanently swollen and he holds it when trying to walk because of the pain, he has pain in his arms and legs, he is regularly coughing up blood and bleeding internally, he has piles and he has pain in both hands, he is wheezing and exhausted after a few steps and constantly needing an inhaler and he needs a stick or support of house furniture to walk.” By the time of the 2018 PIP assessment, his health had

deteriorated even further and yet it is believed he was still awarded zero points by an assessor.

Why significant: Provides fresh evidence of links between the PIP assessment process – and not just the WCA – and the deaths of claimants.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/months-of-pip-distress-has-tened-my-brothers-death/>

#### **4 April 2019**

Title: DWP admits destroying report on safety failures in jobcentres.

What: DWP admits that it destroyed a damaging internal report into safeguarding failures in south London jobcentres (written by three disabled people recruited under its Community Partners initiative). This prevented the report being released under freedom of information laws. The report highlighted the DWP's failure to ensure the safety of benefit claimants in jobcentres. Disability News Service had submitted a freedom of information request asking DWP to release all reports written by Community Partners while working for DWP in London in 2017 and 2018. But DWP continually delayed answering the request, breaching freedom of information laws in the process. Eventually, in a letter to the information commissioner, DWP admits that the safeguarding report did exist but that it was destroyed after 12 months because its "Information Management policy only requires us to keep a corporate document of an internal briefing for a

period of 12 months”. That 12 months period ended at least four months after DNS first asked for this and other Community Partner reports to be released. This suggests that DWP destroyed the safeguarding report to prevent it being released to DNS.

Why significant: Further evidence of DWP attempting to cover-up concerns about safeguarding.

Link: ICO 28 Feb (PDF) [make available on website]

## **8 April 2019**

Title: DWP responds to Justice for Jodey Whiting petition, saying it has “no plans” to hold an independent inquiry into deaths linked to its actions.

What: In its response to the parliamentary petition, DWP says it has “no plans” to hold an independent inquiry into deaths linked to its actions, and that the Independent Case Examiner “did not find any evidence of misconduct by Civil Servants or Ministers” in the lead-up to Jodey Whiting’s death. DWP apologises for its failings in her case and says: “Unfortunately, in this instance the expected standard of customer service was not achieved.” The response ignores the petition’s reference to the many other deaths that have been closely linked to DWP policy.

Why significant: DWP denying systemic problems within the department and again treating deaths linked to benefits as one-off mistakes.

Link: <https://petition.parliament.uk/archived/petitions/243337>

## **15 April 2019**

Title: The death of Stephen Smith, following an 18-month battle with DWP over being found fit for work.

What: Stephen Smith dies, following an 18-month battle with DWP, which had insisted he was fit for work, despite weighing just six stone. In January, he was forced to secure a pass to leave hospital so he could attend a tribunal that was hearing his appeal against an ESA decision. He spent 12 months on jobseeker's allowance before winning his appeal. DWP had continued to insist he was fit for work despite being sent two letters from doctors describing the seriousness of his health conditions. The Liverpool Echo reported how readers were horrified when they saw photographs of his emaciated condition in hospital. He had a number of serious long-term health conditions and had told the Echo: "I could only make it to the kitchen to make food once a day. I had no muscles in the back of my leg which meant I couldn't stand up at all – and had to lean or sit down all the time – but they were telling me I was fit for work." He eventually secured support from a welfare rights officer at a local community centre. His death came just three months after he won his appeal hearing. Work and pensions secretary Amer Rudd later told Frank Field, chair of the work and pensions committee, that they had reviewed his case (probably through an internal process review). She told him: "This review has now concluded and shows that whilst the policy guidance was followed in Mr Smith's case, there were crucial safeguarding opportunities which were missed by the Department. The review has identified areas where we need to

change our policy and we will be implementing these changes to ensure our most vulnerable claimants are protected.”

Why significant: Stephen Smith’s death highlights the continuing flaws in DWP’s safeguarding system and the cruelty of its flawed assessment processes.

Link:

<https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/dwp-probe-tragic-six-stone-16453633>

## **May 2019**

Title: DPAC report on severe impact of universal credit, including links to suicide.

What: Disabled People Against Cuts (DPAC) and Scrap Universal Credit Alliance publish a report that lists hundreds of media articles, published between January and May 2019, which show the impact of universal credit on claimants, including “harrowing stories of people forced into debt, rent arrears, homelessness, crime, prostitution, hunger, people unable to afford fares to get to food banks, parents unable to get essentials for their babies, child poverty, worsening mental health, ex-service people considering suicide and even cases of actual suicide”.

Why significant: Shows mounting evidence of the distress caused by UC, including links to suicide.

Link:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/12XXQDqzVm2UVexcO2Gli1DItuN0mzHbp/view>

## **2 May 2019**

Title: Responses to freedom of information requests show DWP and assessors fail to refer claimants at risk of harm to social services.

What: Responses to freedom of information requests submitted by disabled campaigner Mike Owen show that DWP and its private sector contractors have been failing for years to alert local authorities to concerns about benefit claimants whose safety was at risk. Maximus – which carries out WCAs – failed to make a single safeguarding referral to any social services departments, and Atos and Capita – which both assess claimants for PIP – made just two referrals each over three years.

Why significant: Further evidence of safeguarding failures within DWP.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-and-assessors-fail-to-refer-claimants-at-risk-of-harm-to-social-services-research-finds/>

## **6 June 2019**

Title: MP Debbie Abrahams asks the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to investigate why evidence about deaths linked to the work capability assessment (WCA) was withheld from independent reviews.

What: Labour MP Debbie Abrahams (a former shadow work and pensions secretary) writes to the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) to ask it to investigate why ministers failed

to send crucial evidence about deaths linked to the WCA to Dr Paul Litchfield (who led the fourth and fifth independent reviews into WCAs). Abrahams also asks EHRC to launch an investigation into deaths linked to the WCA and PIP assessment processes.

Why significant: Abrahams is one of the few MPs to push for an inquiry into deaths linked to DWP's failures.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/abrahams-asks-watchdog-to-investigate-dwp-benefit-deaths-cover-up/>

## **10 May 2019**

Title: Senior judges rule to lower the standard of proof in determining suicide.

What: A ruling by three appeal court judges means that more coroners are likely to lower the standard of proof needed to conclude that a suicide has taken place. Previously they had to be sure that someone had taken their own life, but the ruling means they will now only have to be satisfied that it was "more probable than not" that someone deliberately took their own life.

Why significant: The ruling is likely to mean more inquests in England and Wales will conclude a suicide has taken place. This may make it more likely that coroners will link the deaths of claimants to the actions of public bodies, such as DWP.

Link:

<https://www.theguardian.com/law/2019/may/10/judges-reduce-benchmark-for-inquest-decisions-on-suicide>

## **4 July 2019**

Title: Minister questioned over failure to pass evidence about deaths linked to the work capability assessment (WCA) to independent reviewer.

What: Labour's Debbie Abrahams is granted an urgent question in the House of Commons to ask work and pensions minister Will Quince why DWP failed to pass crucial evidence linking the WCA to claimant deaths to Dr Paul Litchfield for his reviews of the WCA. Quince tells Abrahams that recorded information to show what documents were shared with Litchfield "no longer exists, in line with the department's document retention policy". But he fails to tell MPs about the DWP's admission to the information commissioner that members of Litchfield's team who still work for DWP have said in statements that the coroner's letters and peer reviews were never shared with Litchfield.

Why significant: Further pressure on DWP over its failure to pass evidence to Litchfield and Harrington.

Link:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-07-04/debates/D41E2749-7CBC-4A83-AA95-F6516CCED517/SocialSecurityClaimantDeaths>

## **22 July 2019**

Title: Mother of Jodey Whiting takes part in protest about benefits-related deaths outside DWP with Dolly Sen.

What: Jodey Whiting's mother, Joy Dove, takes part in an action led by disabled artist-activist Dolly Sen outside DWP's headquarters in Whitehall. Joy Dove and others hold up heart-shaped boards, on which Sen has written the names of four disabled men and women who lost their lives because of DWP's benefit assessment regimes: Jodey Whiting [see 21 February 2017], Stephen Carré [see January 2010], Mark Wood [see 9 August 2013] and Susan Roberts [see 19 May 2016]. The action aims to highlight how DWP policies have caused distress and deaths.

Why significant: Shows the disability arts movement working with the families of those who have died to highlight the tragic impact of DWP's actions.

Link:

<https://disabilityarts.online/blog/dolly-sen/what-did-you-think-i-was-going-to-do/> and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/mother-of-jodey-whiting-displays-her-broken-heart-outside-dwp-hq/> and

<https://section136.co.uk/broken-hearts-for-the-dwp/>

### **September 2019 (to November 2019)**

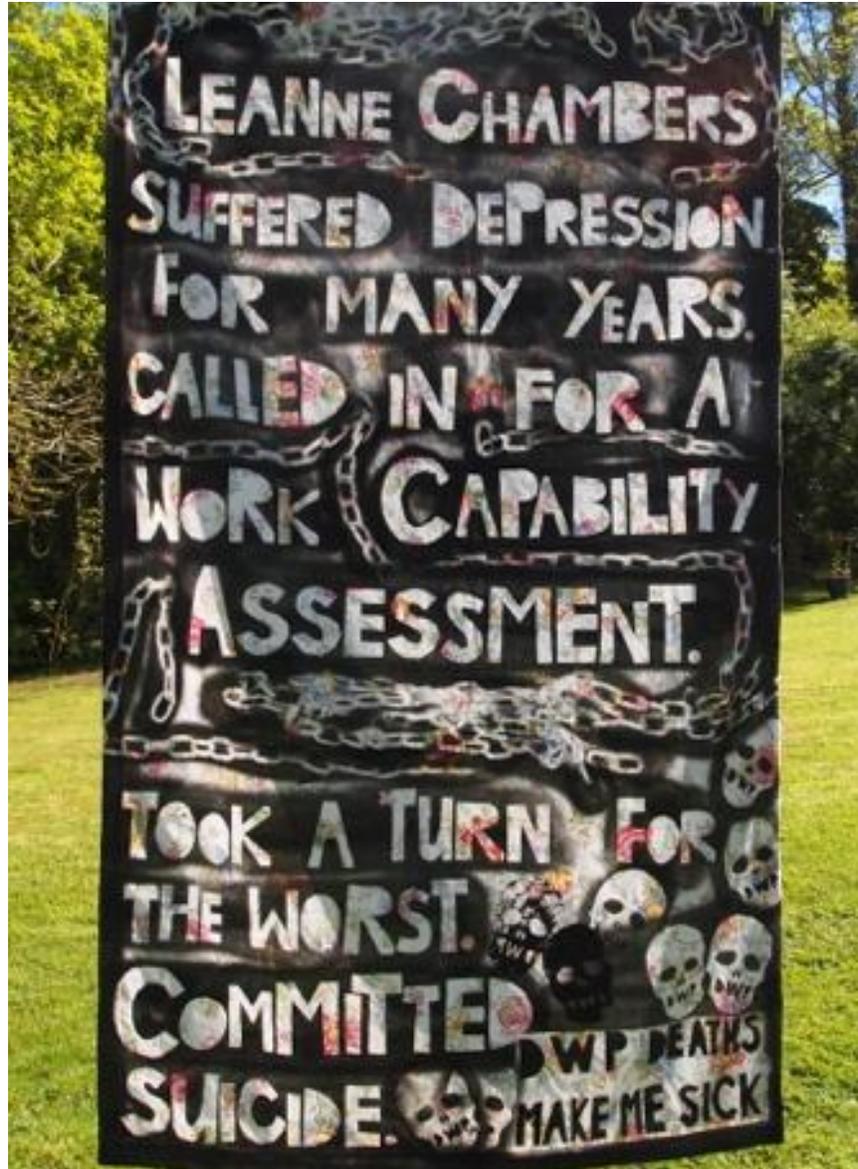
Title: Art and Protest exhibition includes works about benefit cuts and deaths.

What: Launch of Art & Protest: What's there to be mad about? is launched at Bethlem Gallery. The exhibition is curated by artist-activist Dolly Sen and profiles art used as protest, including

many works about benefit cuts and the distress and loss of life it produces. Some of the artworks include:



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© VINCE LAWS – DWP DEATHS MAKE ME SICK

Why significant: Showcases an enormous amount of artwork on how DWP treats people, and how the benefits system is experienced as a painful and grief-worthy spectre that haunts most disabled people's lives (Dolly Sen).

Links:

<https://bethlemgallery.com/event/art-protest-whats-there-to-be-mad-about/> and

<https://www.gscene.com/news/preview-art-protest-whats-there-to-be-mad-about/>

#### **4 September 2019**

Title: DWP secures funding to set up an independent panel to examine cases where its own failings have led to the deaths of benefit claimants.

What: DWP secures funding from the Treasury to set up an independent panel to examine cases where its own failings have led to the deaths of benefit claimants. The Treasury says it will provide funding of £36 million for 2020-21 to fund both the panel and ensure that decision-making on benefit claims is “accurate” and that benefit application processes are “straightforward and accessible”. Justin Tomlinson, the minister for disabled people, refuses to provide any details about the panel when questioned the following month by Labour shadow minister for disabled people, Marsha de Cordova.

Why significant: High-profile action in response to mounting concerns, but with a lack of information about the panel’s terms of reference and its independence, it is impossible to say what the aim is and why it was set up.

Link:

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system>

[m/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/829177/Spending\\_Round\\_2019\\_web.pdf](https://www.parliament.uk/uploads/attachment_data/file/829177/Spending_Round_2019_web.pdf)

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2019-10-07/debates/A54FE999-F053-47E0-BF45-94B0E77E4A1E/OralAnswersToQuestions#contribution-9392EEFC-F3EC-46FE-850D-00A6604689B4>

## **12 September 2019**

Title: Independent Case Examiner raises concerns about DWP not following safeguarding procedures aimed at protecting “vulnerable” claimants.

What: Writing in her annual report on DWP complaints, the Independent Case Examiner, Joanna Wallace, voices concern about the number of instances where DWP has not followed safeguarding procedures aimed at protecting “vulnerable” claimants. While acknowledging that many of the department’s policies and procedures recognise the need for safeguarding, she says: “Too often this year I have seen cases where those steps have not been followed. I don’t wait until my annual report to raise concerns and have been doing so during the year, particularly with regard to DWP’s services to working age people.” She says she is reassured that “real action” is being taken to make sure that safeguarding is working “effectively” and that her concerns “about meeting vulnerable customers’ needs are shared at the highest levels in DWP”. The report provides details of cases, including Mr E who successfully took DWP to a tribunal for its failure to take account of his mental health condition when arranging his WCA, and cases focused on disability benefits

Why significant: Shows that safeguarding concerns are being raised by the Independent Case Examiner, with some evidence that DWP is acting on these concerns.

Link:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/830935/ice-dwp-annual-report-2018-2019.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/830935/ice-dwp-annual-report-2018-2019.pdf)

## **22 September 2019**

Title: Mother of Jodey Whiting receives standing ovation at Labour fringe event.

What: Joy Dove, the mother of Jodey Whiting, receives a standing ovation at a packed fringe event at Labour's annual conference, after she pledges to continue her fight for justice. She was speaking after the Justice for Jodey Whiting petition secures more than 55,000 signatures by the time it closed earlier this month.

Dove tells the Real Britain fringe event, hosted by the Daily Mirror and the union Unite, how her daughter had taken her own life just 15 days after her benefits were wrongly stopped for missing a WCA. She also holds up pictures of her daughter, and the grave where she is buried, as well as a copy of her daughter's post-mortem report, and says: "What mother needs to see her daughter's post-mortem report?"

Why significant: Shows the ongoing fight for justice for Jodey Whiting.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/labour-conference-ovation->

[for-justice-for-jodey-mum/](#) and <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/brave-mum-moves-labour-audience-20144473>

## **24 October 2019**

Title: Police admit officers have no guidance about passing on information about protesters to DWP (after two police forces admitted passing information and video footage to DWP about disabled people taking part in protests).

What: Police forces across the country admit they have no policies or guidance that would tell officers when they should pass information about disabled protesters to the Department for Work and Pensions. Two police forces – Lancashire and Greater Manchester – have already admitted passing information and video footage to DWP about disabled people taking part in protests, including anti-fracking demonstrations. The human rights organisation Liberty warns that this is likely to have been unlawful. Disability News Service (DNS) had submitted requests under the Freedom of Information Act to 10 police forces, asking each of them for a copy of any guidance or policy documents that they use to assist their officers in deciding when information about disabled people taking part in protests can or should be shared with DWP. Of the eight forces to reply so far none of them has said it has any such document.

Why significant: Suggests arbitrary decisions are being made regarding information sharing between the police and the DWP,

with no framework or guidance, which raises questions about disabled people's legal right to protest.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/police-admit-officers-have-no-guidance-on-when-to-pass-protesters-info-to-dwp/>

## **16 October 2019**

Title: The death of Philippa Day, after she had been told she would need to attend an assessment centre for a face-to-face appointment to decide her claim for personal independence payment (PIP).

What: Philippa Day dies in hospital after two months in a coma. Her unconscious body had been found by her sister and father on 8 August 2019, days after she had been told she would need to attend an assessment centre for a face-to-face appointment to decide her claim for personal independence payment. Her sister and father found the 27-year-old mother lying on her bed at her home in Nottingham. On the pillow next to her was a letter from Capita telling her she would have to attend the appointment at the assessment centre in Nottingham or she would be likely to lose her benefits. She also left an apparent suicide note blaming the way the government had dealt with her benefits, and she had previously told her sister that she believed DWP was trying to kill her. She had experienced months of distress due to DWP's decisions to remove her disability benefits when it lost her claim form, and then to confirm that decision, as well as the length of time it took to reinstate her benefits, and deal with a new claim.

DWP errors had caused her severe financial hardship, and resulted in her taking out payday loans she could not pay back. Both DWP and Capita had been told of her history of significant mental distress and mental health inpatient admissions, that she was agoraphobic, and that she would be unable to cope with attending the assessment centre.

Why significant: A subsequent inquest into her death will reveal a catalogue of safeguarding failings by DWP and Capita, many of which will be familiar to the families of other claimants who have died in previous years.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/philippa-day-disabled-woman-left-note-implicating-dwp-and-its-pip-failings-in-her-death/>

## **Late November 2019**

Title: The death of Christian Wilcox, a few days before he is due to attend an appeal tribunal into DWP's decision to remove his personal independence payment (PIP).

What: Christian Wilcox dies from suicide, a few days before he is due to attend an appeal tribunal into DWP's decision to remove his PIP. He takes his own life after describing on social media how a paramedic had ignored the "sheer amount of pain" he was in during a face-to-face assessment, leading DWP to remove his benefits and plunge him into poverty. He had schizophrenia and a physical impairment, and he had written online over the course of several months about how the lengthy process of reassessing his

eligibility for PIP was causing him significant mental distress. He is believed to have died in late November, a few days before he was due to attend an appeal tribunal into DWP's decision to remove his PIP. His last Facebook post was on 22 November, five days before the tribunal hearing. His body was not discovered until about six weeks after he took his own life in his flat in Croydon, south London.

Why significant: Another death linked to the PIP assessment system and continuing concerns about the accuracy of PIP assessments.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/pip-claimant-took-his-own-life-after-paramedic-ignored-his-pain-and-dwp-cut-his-benefits/>

## **14 November 2019**

Title: Statistics show most disability benefit fraud allegations are false.

What: A response by DWP to a freedom of information request submitted by the Berkshire branch of Disabled People Against Cuts shows that nearly nine in 10 allegations of fraudulent claims passed to the department's website and hotline prove to be false and unfounded. In both 2017-18 and 2018-19, the percentage of cases of alleged disability benefit fraud that were found to be "non-fraudulent" after examination by DWP was 89 per cent.

Why significant: Shows evidence of the pervasiveness of the culture of suspicion crafted by politicians in relation to disabled benefits claimants.

Link:

<https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/615813/response/1468745/attach/html/2/reply%2039323.pdf.html>

## **2 December 2019**

Title: Disability News Service publishes five-year investigation into deaths linked to the work capability assessment (WCA).

What: DNS publishes a 12,000-word article that links the deaths of six disabled people between 2010 and 2015 with the WCA. The article argues that all six of those deaths – as well as many others – were linked to flaws in the WCA and that the DWP ignored concerns raised by coroners and others.

Why significant: This is the first time that the years of evidence compiled by DNS has been published together to make a case for a criminal prosecution of ministers and senior DWP civil servants for misconduct in public office.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-the-case-for-the-prosecution/>

## **5 December 2019**

Title: A doctor employed by Atos says DWP put “immense pressure” on Atos to find claimants fit for work.

What: A document found by the family of Michael O’Sullivan, who took his own life in September 2013 after being found unfairly fit for work, shows that an Atos doctor made it clear that DWP was partly to blame for the decision to find him ineligible. The claim

was contained in evidence provided to the General Medical Council in a complaint about the face-to-face assessment of Michael O’Sullivan in March 2013. It says: “Following the conversion of Incapacity Benefit to ESA, the DWP put immense pressure on ATOS disability analysts to deem claimants fit for work when they previously would have qualified for benefits.” Why significant: DWP has always denied placing pressure on the company and its assessors to find claimants fit for work.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/wca-death-doctor-dwp-put-immense-pressure-on-atos-to-find-claimants-fit-for-work/>

## **23 January 2020**

Title: The death of Errol Graham receives first publicity (he died in 2018).

What: Disability News Service publishes the first article on Errol’s death (despite Errol dying on 20 June 2018), after being approached by Alison Turner, the fiancée of Errol Graham’s son, who will lead the family’s fight for justice. The article is quickly followed up by regional and national media.

Why significant: Media coverage puts further pressure on ministers to explain their continuing safeguarding failures

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/the-death-of-errol-graham-man-starved-to-death-after-dwp-wrongly-stopped-his-benefits/>

And

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/jan/28/disabled-man-st>

[arved-to-death-after-dwp-stopped-his-benefits](#) and <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-nottinghamshire-51283186> and <https://news.sky.com/story/errol-graham-family-of-man-who-starved-to-death-say-benefits-system-cruel-and-flawed-11920904> and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/the-death-of-errol-graham-latest-tragedy-is-linked-to-10-years-of-dwp-deaths/>

### **23 January 2020**

Title: The case of Errol Graham's death is referred to DWP's new serious case panel.

What: DWP talks about its serious case panel for the first time, in responding to the media coverage of Errol Graham's death. It says: "We take this very seriously and have referred this to our Serious Case Panel, which includes independent members to help scrutinise and establish any lessons." But DWP gives no further information about the panel, including its purpose, aims and membership.

Why significant: Shows further lack of transparency in measures supposedly being taken to improve safeguarding of claimants.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/ministers-secretly-launch-panel-to-probe-links-between-dwp-and-claimant-deaths/>

### **27 January 2020**

Title: The deaths of Jodey Whiting and Errol Graham mentioned in the Commons.

What: Labour MP Debbie Abraham mentions the deaths of Jodey Whiting and Errol Graham, asking the Commons: “Will the secretary of state consider, as a matter of urgency, an independent inquiry into the deaths of claimants in these circumstances?” Justin Tomlinson, the minister for disabled people, responds by attempting to blame Labour for Errol’s death, saying: “I thank the honourable lady for that question; she has been a long-standing campaigner against Labour’s work capability assessment, introduced in 2008. We agree: that is why we commissioned five independent reviews and implemented more than 100 recommendations. Working with the Royal College of Psychiatrists, we are making sure that our frontline staff are fully trained to be in the best place to identify people at risk of suicide.”

Why significant: Evidence of benefits related deaths being discussed in the Commons, while a government minister attempts to blame Labour, despite having been in power for nearly 10 years.

Link:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2020-01-27/debates/278AA727-8F1D-4495-9D31-48287FBB7A0E/WorkCapabilityAssessmentsClaimantHealth#contribution-59351458-2AA2-4F06-BA59-26A91BF195F2>

**28 January 2020**

Title: DWP admits the serious case panel will not be independent.

What: DWP had originally claimed that the serious case panel (see 4 September 2019) would be “independent”. But following questions from journalist Steve Topple at The Canary, it admits instead that the panel “will be chaired by a director and members will be senior civil servants from across the department”.

Why significant: There had been hopes that the panel might represent an attempt to provide some independent oversight of DWP’s safeguarding performance and failings.

Link:

<https://www.thecanary.co/exclusive/2020/01/28/a-secret-dwp-claimant-deaths-inquiry-was-just-blown-open/> and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-lied-about-independence-of-new-deaths-panel/>

## **5 February 2020**

Title: Prime minister Boris Johnson questioned about death of Errol Graham.

What: Errol Graham’s MP, Lilian Greenwood, asks Boris Johnson: “How many more vulnerable benefit claimants will have to die before this government start to value their lives?” In his reply, Johnson mentions creating the “new independent serious case panel”, and improving guidance for staff, even though DWP has already admitted that the panel will not be independent

Why significant: Only a handful of deaths linked to DWP have been raised in prime minister’s questions, including those of Michael O’Sullivan [21 October 2015] and Jodey Whiting [see 13 March 2013].

Link:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2020-02-05/debates/9EAB35C6-1EF6-4A18-B345-56F34D5D4504/Engagements#contribution-481B7505-CB61-4538-BCEB-CBE7A83E3469> and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/errol-graham-vigil-will-push-for-change-and-justice-after-tragic-death/>

## **7 February 2020**

Title: Report by the National Audit Office (NAO) shows DWP misled two watchdogs over deaths and safeguarding.

What: A publication by the National Audit Office (NAO) reveals that DWP has carried out internal process reviews (IPRs) into 69 suicides of benefit claimants since April 2014 - although it says it is “highly unlikely” that this represents the number of cases it could have investigated. Between 1 April 2019 and 13 November 2019, it carried out 21 IPRs into suicides linked to the benefits system, compared with 13 in the whole of 2018-19. The document also reveals that: The DWP does not have robust records of all contact from coroners, and some contacts may not have resulted in an IPR being initiated; DWP guidance has not always been clear about when a case should be investigated, and not all staff are aware that the guidance exists; there has been no tracking or monitoring of the status of IPR recommendations, and as a result the DWP does not know whether suggested improvements have been implemented; the DWP does not seek to identify trends or themes from IPRs, and so “systematic issues which might have been brought to light through these reviews could be missed”.

This confession comes nearly three years after DWP made a similar admission to the information commissioner (see 22 February 2017). The document also highlights measures DWP is taking to improve its processes.

Why significant: Evidence that there is no monitoring of the main mechanism through which DWP claims to learn lessons to prevent future deaths related to benefits.

Link:

<https://www.nao.org.uk/report/information-held-by-the-department-for-work-pensions-on-deaths-by-suicide-of-benefit-claimants/>

## **20 February 2020**

Title: The coroner for Errol Graham says she will push DWP on promised safeguarding review (which persuaded her not to submit a prevention of future deaths (PFD) report).

What: Dr Elizabeth Didcock, Nottingham's assistant coroner, promises to press DWP on what has happened to a safeguarding review that the department told her it was carrying out during the inquest into Errol Graham's death. This promise had at the time persuaded her that she did not need to write a prevention of future deaths report to demand changes from DWP.

Why significant: Further evidence of DWP evading responsibility for deaths related to their policies and safeguarding issues.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/errol-graham-coroner-pled-ges-to-press-dwp-on-safeguarding-review-2/>

## **20 February 2020**

Title: DWP misled Errol Graham coroner over safeguarding review.

What: At the inquest into the death of Errol Graham, officials said that DWP was already carrying out a review of its safeguarding policy, persuading the coroner that she did not need to write a prevention of future deaths report. Yet evidence obtained by Disability News Service through the Freedom of Information Act shows the DWP will likely not publish any review, that there is no formal review team, and that no documents related to it can be made available.

Why significant: The DWP's claim to be carrying out a review led the coroner not to submit a prevention of future deaths report.

Link: FOI2020\_03269 Reply (PDF) [make available on website] and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/errol-graham-dwp-misled-c-oroner-over-safeguarding-review/>

## **21 February 2020**

Title: DWP admits destroying pre-2015 peer reviews into suicides and other deaths of benefit claimants.

What: DWP admits (in response to a freedom of information request) to destroying some or all of its pre-2015 peer reviews into suicides and other deaths of benefit claimants. It says: "Records prior to 2015-16 have been destroyed or are incomplete in line with GDPR/data retention policies." The response also reveals that, in 2019-20, DWP reviewed its approach to IPRs,

“broadening the range of cases that were considered, including reviewing cases from previous years”. And it shows that 131 IPRs have been commissioned in the four-and-a-half years since June 2015, although not all of these will have followed the death of a claimant.

Why significant: An admission that may be connected with DWP attempting again to ensure that as little incriminating evidence as possible is available to both families seeking justice and any inquiry into benefit-related deaths.

Link:

<https://www.whatdotheyknow.com/request/639398/response/1531333/attach/html/2/WDTK%20Template%203586.pdf.html>

## **5 March 2020**

Title: Chair of the work and pensions committee asks work and pensions secretary questions about NAO report.

What: Stephen Timms, chair of the work and pensions committee, writes to work and pensions secretary Therese Coffey for information following the NAO report (7 February 2020). The letter says the NAO report “exposes significant weaknesses in how the DWP learns lessons from some of the most tragic cases it sees – when the people it serves die by suicide. In the light of the gravity of the NAO’s findings, the Committee has asked me to write to you to seek further information about how the Department plans to respond.” The letter asks 17 questions about DWP’s 69 internal process reviews.

Why significant: MPs seeking further questions about DWP's safeguarding procedures.

Link:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/461/documents/1808/default/>

## **20 March 2020**

Title: Work and pensions secretary responds to questions from Chair of the work and pensions committee, telling him about DWP's new "Service Excellence Directorate", including funding for safeguarding and clarifying purpose of internal process reviews (IPRs).

What: In her response to Timm's letter (see 5 March 2020) Coffey tells him about DWP's new "Service Excellence Directorate" and £36 million funding for 2020-21 to "increase investment in safeguarding, decision making and how we learn from the most complex cases". The letter also talks about how the DWP is clarifying the purpose of IPRs, including improving the capability and capacity of the IPR team, and the visibility of the process, and establishing a tool to improve how DWP tracks recommendations and subsequent actions taken.

Why significant: DWP grudgingly releasing sparse details of its safeguarding improvements.

Link:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/461/documents/1808/default/>

## **25 June 2020**

Title: The Equality and Human Rights Commission says it will not carry out inquiry into links between DWP and the deaths of disabled claimants.

What: The Equality and Human Rights Commission admits that, “due to the pandemic”, it will not be able to carry out an inquiry into links between DWP and the deaths of disabled claimants. It was first approached by Labour’s Debbie Abrahams in April 2019. It later emerges that the commission failed to consult its own committee of disabled advisers before reaching this decision.

Why significant: This was another blow to the hopes of many for an independent inquiry into links between DWP and the deaths of claimants.

Links:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/watchdog-snubs-call-for-probe-into-dwp-deaths-after-delay-of-more-than-a-year/> and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/ehrc-failed-to-consult-its-own-disabled-advisers-before-snubbing-dwp-deaths-probe/>

## **16 July 2020**

Title: Coroner’s prevention of future deaths report into death of Faiza Ahmed is made public, showing jobcentre’s failings contributed to her death.

What: The prevention of future deaths report and DWP’s response following the death of Faiza Ahmed (7 November 2014) are released, showing the jobcentre’s failings had contributed to Faiza’s death and that DWP rejected a coroner’s call to take

action to prevent further benefit claimants taking their own lives. They were finally emailed to Disability News Service by the Ministry of Justice, following a four-month struggle to secure the two PFD reports mentioned in February's National Audit Office report (see 20 January 2016). Faiza's brother, Mohammed, says he is certain that racism lay at the heart of the way his sister was treated by DWP, even if it was "indirect" and not immediately obvious. This was because the harshness of austerity and DWP's welfare reforms had a disproportionate impact on people of colour, he says. It was only through the family's efforts, and the support of campaigners and lawyers, that they had secured a longer inquest in January 2016 to examine in front of a jury whether any public body had contributed to Faiza's death. Otherwise, there would have been a shorter inquest and the failings of DWP would probably never have been exposed. The Judicial Office said the PFD report had not been published until this week because of an "administrative oversight" by the chief coroner's office.

Why significant: The documents reveal yet again how resistant DWP has been to ensure a duty of care to benefit claimants.

Link: DWP response to Faiza Ahmed PFD (PDF) and Faiza Ahmed PFD (PDF) and Faiza Ahmed narrative (PFD) PFD-

<https://www.judiciary.uk/publications/faiza-ahmed/>

and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-ignored-coroners-call-to-take-action-to-save-claimants-from-suicide/>

## **16 July 2020**

Title: Family of Errol Graham win right to court challenge on DWP safeguarding.

What: The family of Errol Graham win the right to have DWP's safeguarding policies examined by the high court, through a judicial review of DWP's failure – dating back more than a decade – to ensure the safety of disabled people claiming ESA. Mr Justice Morris rules that a two-day hearing can go ahead.

Why significant: This will be a high-profile legal challenge of DWP and its historic safeguarding failings. (The hearing will be held on 13 January 2021).

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/errol-graham-family-win-right-to-court-challenge-of-dwp-safeguarding/>

## **22 July 2020**

Title: Work and pensions secretary speaks about serious case panel and safeguarding.

What: In oral evidence to the work and pensions committee, Therese Coffey, the work and pensions secretary, describes steps her department has taken to improve safeguarding, while also claiming that DWP does not have a legal safeguarding duty. She also says that the number of investigators that are part of the internal process review group has increased but she avoids questions about individual claimants who have died, saying that she cannot answer questions because of ongoing legal actions being taken by the families of claimants who have died.

Why significant: A rare discussion by a minister of safeguarding issues within the department, but also evasion about discussing specific claimant's deaths (see later letters and responses 30 July 2020, and September 2020).

Link: <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/759/default>

## **22 July 2020**

Title: DWP permanent secretary gives evidence to work and pensions committee on safeguarding and internal process reviews (IPRs).

What: Peter Schofield, DWP permanent secretary, tells the work and pensions select committee about the new serious case panel. He says: "The serious case panel sits at the top of a process, but the internal process reviews – the system for collecting and tracking and tracing and implementing the recommendations that come from those internal process reviews—is a new process we put in place as well." He also talks about the appointment of safeguarding leads.

Why significant: As with Coffey, a rare discussion by a senior DWP figure of safeguarding issues within the department.

Link: <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/759/default>

## **30 July 2020**

Title: Chair of the work and pensions committee writes to work and pensions secretary asking for further information about DWP plans to improve safeguarding.

What: Timms (chair of the work and pensions committee) writes to Coffey (work and pensions secretary) to ask for further information about her comments on 22 July 2020. The letter asks for information about the proportion of DWP staff trained in new policies on safeguarding and suicide and self-harm prevention; the operation of the serious case panel; whether the panel's work includes ensuring that IPR recommendations are implemented; the updating of IPR guidance since the NAO report; and DWP plans to talk to families through the serious case panel.

Why significant: Shows the lack of clarity in DWP's claims to be improving safeguarding

Link:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/2910/documents/28102/default/>

## **September 2020**

Title: Work and pensions secretary denies DWP has duty of care or statutory safeguarding responsibilities for people claiming benefits.

What: Work and pensions secretary Therese Coffey responds to the 30 July letter from Stephen Timms (chair of the work and pensions committee). Coffey insists that "DWP does not have a duty of care or statutory safeguarding duty" –and adds later that "DWP does not have any statutory safeguarding responsibilities". The letter includes the six-point plan used by the DWP with "customers" who are suicidal or where is a "threat of self-harm". This plan is part of a wider Keeping Safe training that all

“customer-facing” staff complete. In 2017, UC work coaches were also given mental health training, she says. She says that “the Serious Case Panel (SCP) will not directly track the recommendations that result from individual Internal Process Reviews (IPRs)”, but a new IPR group has been formed to “track and monitor recommendations arising from individual IPRs”. The letter also says that if families of those who have died are not happy with a part of the process then they can write to DWP or go through a formal complaints procedure.

Why significant: Shows Coffey repeating in writing her claim that DWP does not have a duty of care or statutory safeguarding responsibilities for clients in vulnerable situations. It also suggests flaws in the process for allowing bereaved families to engage with DWP.

Link:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/2910/documents/28102/default/>

## **8 September 2020**

Title: New DWP figures show that, in just two years, 1,700 disabled people died within three months of having their claim for personal independence payment (PIP) rejected.

What: New DWP figures show that, in just two years, 1,700 disabled people died within three months of having their claim for PIP rejected. All of them had their claims turned down between April 2018 and January 2020, and died between April 2018 and 30 April 2020. Comparing them with figures released in early

2019 suggests that the likelihood of someone having their PIP claim rejected and dying soon afterwards may even have increased in the last two years. The findings are tentative because the two sets of figures were not calculated in the same way by DWP. But other figures have showed a deteriorating performance across a similar time period by DWP contractors Atos and Capita, which carry out the assessments on the government's behalf. When taken as a proportion of about 1.461 million PIP registrations between April 2018 and January 2020, about 0.12 per cent of claimants went on to die within three months of having their claim rejected. The earlier figures, released in February 2019, showed 3,680 PIP claimants died within three months of their initial PIP application being rejected between April 2013 and April 2018, out of about 3.6 million registrations, a rate of about 0.10 per cent. These comparative rates are only approximate figures, and there may be unknown factors that explain the apparent increase in the likelihood of someone dying soon after having a PIP claim rejected.

Why significant: The figures do not prove that the rejections of the PIP claims caused the deaths – although it is possible that wrongful decisions may contribute to or cause some deaths – but instead suggest that hundreds of disabled people every year appear to be dying after having their claims wrongly rejected by DWP.

Link:

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2020-08-28/81702>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/personal-independence-payment-statistics>

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2019-01-17/209780>

## **23 September 2020**

Title: Dolly Sen “sections” DWP for being “a danger to benefit claimants” - driving many claimants to their deaths.

What: In an action designed to highlight DWP’s lack of compassion, artist-activist Dolly Sen stretches yellow and black tape across the front and rear entrances of its Westminster headquarters to demonstrate that it is being “sectioned” under the Mental Health Act. She says the department has driven many claimants to their deaths. Sen is joined in the action by Joy Dove, the mother of Jodey Whiting.

Why significant: The action is one of several being devised by Sen that will be included in a film about DWP.

Link:

<https://disabilityarts.online/blog/dolly-sen/section-136-applied-to-the-department-of-work-and-pensions/>

## **29 September 2020**

Title: Work and pensions secretary outlines DWP’s revised guidance on home visits procedures, while again saying the department has no duty of care.

What: In a letter to Stephen Timms (chair of the work and pensions committee), Therese Coffey provides DWP’s revised

guidance on its procedures when a claimant deemed to be vulnerable fails to comply with a requirement and, as a result, their benefit payments are at risk. Coffey tells Timms:

“...in cases of concern, a decision to stop a payment will only be made after we have tried every reasonable route – including the escalation process to Safeguarding Leads. Relevant staff have been made aware of the need to follow the updated guidance through an implementation update. While the Department does not have a duty of care or statutory safeguarding duty, escalating can help to direct our claimants to the most appropriate body to meet their needs”.

Why significant: The secretary of state provides further details of DWP’s safeguarding procedures, but again states that DWP has no duty of care.

Link:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/2910/documents/28102/default/>

### **30 September 2020**

Title: Work and pensions secretary again tells the Commons work and pensions select committee that DWP has no duty of care.

What: Therese Coffey tells the Commons work and pensions select committee again that DWP has no duty of care to benefit claimants and that that duty should be left to “the local councils, the social services, the doctors and other people”.

Why significant: DWP ministers arguing that they are not responsible for the impact of their policies and procedures on claimants in vulnerable situations.

Link: <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/963/default/>

## **11 November 2020**

Title: The family of Jodey Whiting are granted permission to ask the high court to order a second inquest into Jodey's death.

What: The solicitor general, Michael Ellis, grants Joy Dove permission to ask the high court to order a second inquest into Jodey's death. The original inquest in May 2017 (see 24 May 2017) lasted less than an hour and failed to investigate DWP's potential role in her daughter's death. Joy believes DWP's failings caused Jodey's death and has spent more than three years fighting for justice for her daughter, and for a safer social security system that will prevent other deaths.

Why significant: This is a high-profile legal battle that will put DWP's failings in the spotlight.

Link:

<https://www.leighday.co.uk/latest-updates/news/2020-news/jodey-whitings-family-given-permission-to-apply-for-second-inquest-into-her-death/> and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/legal-victory-is-step-towards-fresh-inquest-into-jodey-whitings-death/>

## **27 November 2020**

Title: Former work and pensions secretary admits harsh benefit cuts were responsible for rising poverty.

What: Stephen Crabb speaks out in an interview on BBC Radio 4, where he urges the current chancellor not to make the same mistake. He speaks out amid increasing criticisms of government plans to cut the £20 uplift to universal credit, planned for April 2021. He says: “We took too much money out of universal credit, we squeezed too hard. That's what gives you a lot of the reasons behind the increase in hardship in this country.”

Why significant: A rare admission from a Conservative MP (and former minister) that benefits cuts have contributed to rising poverty

Link:

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/benefit-cuts-conservatives-rishi-sunak-b1762725.html>

### **30 November 2020**

Title: DWP refuses to release recommendations made by its internal process reviews (from between April 2019 and November 2020) into the deaths of benefit claimants.

What: In a response to a freedom of information request, DWP refuses to release recommendations made by its internal process reviews into the deaths of benefit claimants completed between April 2019 and November 2020. It appears to argue in the response that it is exempt from its duty to release the documents because every one of those documents is linked to the development of new government policy. DWP does reveal in its

response that it completed 82 separate investigations into deaths and other serious incidents between January 2016 and March 2019, and provides these in a redacted format.

Why significant: Further attempts to delay or hide publication of documents linking its actions with the deaths of claimants.

Link: 49577 Response (PDF) and IPRs 2016 to 2019 (folder, make available on website) and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-refuses-to-publish-information-from-secret-reviews-into-benefit-related-deaths/>

### **30 November 2020**

Title: Newly-released internal process reviews show that a number of suicides between 2014 and 2019 were linked to DWP staff's failure to follow suicide guidance.

What: Newly-released internal process reviews show a series of suicides between 2014 and 2019 were linked to the failure of DWP staff to follow the six-point plan (guidance for staff in how to deal with statements by customers that they intend to self-harm or take their own lives), introduced in 2009. Another key recurring theme is the failure of DWP decision-makers "to take all evidence into account" when deciding a PIP claim.

Why significant: Demonstrates repeated failures by DWP staff to safeguard claimants

Link: 49577 Response (PDF) and IPRs 2016 to 2019 (folder) (same as above) and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/call-for-action-over-scandal-of-benefit-claimant-suicides-ignored-by-dwp/>

## **4 December 2020**

Title: Coroner Tom Osborne files a Prevention of Future Deaths report on the death of Roy Curtis, but the DWP is not mentioned.

What: The PRD report states ‘the procedure for allocating and responding to a referral for an urgent adult social care assessment is overly bureaucratic and they are not afforded the priority within social services that they so obviously require.’ Roy Curtis’ experiences with the DWP are not mentioned [see 18 November 2018].

Why significant: Opportunity missed to highlight the role of the DWP’s policies in leading to suicide.

Link: Roy Curtis PRD report (redacted)

<https://www.judiciary.uk/publications/roy-curtis/>

## **10 December 2020**

Title: Coroner’s silence over why DWP did not give evidence at Roy Curtis inquest.

What: Tom Osborne, the coroner at the inquest of Roy Curtis, refuses to explain why DWP failed to give evidence. The inquest had heard evidence from a series of witnesses who described how DWP’s actions appeared to contribute to causing the death of 27-year-old Roy Curtis [see 18 November 2018]. Osborne was also the coroner at the inquest into the death of Stephen Carré nearly 11 years earlier, where he ruled that the decision to find Carré wrongly fit for work had been the “trigger” that led him to

take his own life. Yet in the death of Roy Curtis, Osborne failed to ensure that any DWP civil servants gave evidence at the inquest. Why significant: Failure to ensure that DWP civil servants gave evidence, despite clear links between DWP's actions and the death of Roy Curtis.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/roy-curtis-autistic-man-killed-himself-six-days-after-latest-fitness-for-work-demand/> and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/coroners-silence-over-dwps-failure-to-give-evidence-to-wca-suicide-inquest/>

## **17 December 2020**

Title: New analysis of figures suggests DWP is failing to investigate hundreds of suicides of benefits claimants.

What: Analysis of Office for National Statistics (ONS) and DWP figures, by Disability News Service, suggests that there could have been as many as 750 suicides of working-age benefit claimants in 2018 alone. In more than five years, DWP has carried out internal process reviews (IPRs) into just 69 suicides of benefit claimants. DWP's own guidance says it should carry out an IPR every time it hears of a suicide of a benefit claimant, even if there are no allegations that its actions contributed to the death. Why significant: Reports stretching back over the last decade have shown how suicides of claimants have often exposed serious safeguarding failures by DWP, but the figures suggest that hundreds of other cases are never examined.

Link:

<https://www.nao.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Information-held-by-the-DWP-on-deaths-by-suicide-of-benefit-claimants.pdf>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/dwp-benefits-statistics-august-2019/dwp-benefits-statistical-summary-august-2019>

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/summaryoflabourmarketstatistics> and

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/suicideinenglandandwales> and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/call-for-action-over-scandal-of-benefit-claimant-suicides-ignored-by-dwp/>

## **21 December 2020**

Title: High court is asked to order second inquest into death of Jodey Whiting.

What: The mother of Jodey Whiting submits an application to the high court to seek a second inquest to consider DWP's role in her death. The first inquest into her death, in May 2017, lasted just 37 minutes.

Why significant: Further step towards a second inquest into the death of Jodey Whiting

Link:

<https://www.leighday.co.uk/latest-updates/news/2020-news/application-submitted-for-second-inquest-into-death-of-jodey-whiting/>

**13 January 2021**

Title: High court hears evidence from family of Errol Graham in judicial review hearing.

What: In a two-day judicial review hearing, the high court hears evidence from lawyers for the family of Errol Graham that the decision to stop his ESA in 2017 was unlawful because it breached the Equality Act and the government's own ESA regulations. The mental health charity Mind provides a witness statement in support of the family's judicial review claim, which includes testimony from benefit claimants with similar experience of mental distress – and the barriers within the system – to Errol Graham. The Equality and Human Rights Commission, which is intervening in the case, has made it clear that it agrees with the arguments put forward by the family's legal team. It also makes points of its own, including highlighting the importance of article three of the European Convention on Human Rights – which prohibits inhuman or degrading treatment – and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Judgement is reserved until a future date.

Why significant: The latest stage in another high-profile legal action related to DWP's safeguarding and policy failures.

Link:

<https://www.leighday.co.uk/latest-updates/news/2021-news/court-case-regarding-errol-graham-to-be-heard/> and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/high-court-hears-of-catastr-ophic-impact-of-fitness-for-work-system/>

## **14 January 2021**

Title: Disability News Service wins ground-breaking legal fight with DWP, over the draft internal process review that was drawn up by DWP following the death of Philippa Day.

What: A coroner rules that Disability News Service will be allowed to see the draft internal process review that was drawn up by DWP following the death of Philippa Day in October 2019 [see 16 October 2019]. Philippa Day's family had supported the legal bid by DNS. Addressing the inquest, DNS editor John Pring had told the coroner that the IPR should be released "because the issue relates to whether their actions and/or policies are causing or contributing to the deaths of disabled people claiming benefits", and that the draft IPR was an "important historical document that will help to cast a light" on the government's welfare reforms. When the IPR was released to DNS it exposed repeated failures of policy and procedure that contributed to her decision to take her own life.

Why significant: This is the first time that an internal process review has been released to the media.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/philippa-day-dns-wins-legal-fight-with-dwp-over-ground-breaking-release-of-secret-report-into-benefit-death/>

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/philippa-day-secret-dwp-report-reveals-errors-that-led-to-disabled-mums-death/>

## **27 January 2021**

Title: Coroner at Philippa Day's inquest finds flawed personal independence payment (PIP) system led to her death.

What: A coroner concludes that flaws in the PIP system were “the predominant factor and the only acute factor” that led to Philippa Day taking her own life. Gordon Clow, assistant coroner for Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, highlights 28 separate “problems” with the administration of the PIP system that helped cause her death. It takes more than two hours for the coroner to read out his conclusions and findings, after a nine-day inquest that uncovered multiple failings by both DWP and its private sector contractor Capita in the 11 months that led up to Philippa's death in October 2019. Clow ends by telling DWP and Capita that he had decided to issue them with prevention of future deaths reports, which will force them to consider how to make changes to the PIP system to prevent further deaths of claimants. He dismisses suggestions made by DWP and Capita during the inquest that only a few individual errors had been made in dealing with Philippa's claim, and concludes instead that there were significant, systemic flaws.

Why significant: Conclusion of the most in-depth examination yet of DWP failings to take place in an inquest show multiple systemic flaws. The coroner's actions have allowed an in-depth examination of DWP's systemic flaws, when other coroners, such as Tom Osborne, have declined to do so.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/philippa-day-young-mother-took-her-own-life-after-being-told-to-attend-pip-assessment/>

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/philippa-day-dwp-phone-agent-ignored-sobbing-claimant-who-later-took-her-own-life/>  
<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/philippa-day-dwp-civil-servant-denies-pip-culture-of-scepticism/>  
<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/philippa-day-capita-made-changes-to-pip-assessments-after-young-mums-death/>  
<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/philippa-day-flawed-pip-system-led-to-young-mums-death-says-coroner/> Prevention of Future Deaths report  
<https://www.judiciary.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Phillipa-Day-2021-0043.pdf>

### **3 February 2021**

Title: Work and pensions secretary avoids questions on Philippa Day death.

What: While giving evidence to the Commons work and pensions committee, Therese Coffey avoids answering questions about the death of Philippa Day, a week after the coroner delivered his conclusions that DWP failings led to her death.

Why significant: The latest attempt by DWP to avoid being held to public account.

Link: <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/1630/pdf/> and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/coffey-dodges-mps-questions-over-death-of-philippa-day/>

### **26 December 2020**

Title: The death of Philip Pakree, after distress caused by an upcoming work capability assessment (WCA).

What: Philip Pakree, who died on 26 December, had been told he probably needed a heart transplant, while he also had multiple mental health conditions, and had grown increasingly distressed as the date of his WCA approached. He was already claiming ESA, in recognition of the barriers he faced due to diagnoses of personality disorder, depression, anxiety, borderline schizophrenia, adjustment disorder, asthma, a serious heart condition, and a long history of self-harm and suicide attempts. When he was first told, in October 2020, that he would need to undergo a telephone WCA, he had to be admitted to Royal Derby Hospital several days later with breathing difficulties and heart failure, telling his partner: “They do this to me every time.” He was later told the assessment would take place on 4 December, but Maximus – which carries out WCAs on behalf of DWP – eventually agreed to cancel it after it was sent them a letter from his consultant cardiologist that detailed his multiple health conditions. Maximus had also been sent a note from his partner, in which she warned of her “grave concerns for his physical and mental health” and of his state of confusion due to low sodium levels and which said he was not currently well enough to be assessed. But just 19 days later, on 9 December, Maximus sent another letter to Pakree, telling him he would have to make himself available for a WCA, again by telephone because of the pandemic, on New Year’s Eve. It left him “nearly hysterical”, his partner said. “He said he would be better off dead. He wasn’t

sleeping. He was getting obsessed that people were talking about him and believed that DWP were part of the SS.” She called Maximus to beg the contractor to reconsider, but a call handler said he would have to take part in the assessment or it would “affect his benefits”, telling her: “It’s been delayed once, we are not delaying it again.” They moved into a bungalow on 23 December, because the mobility problems caused by his heart condition meant he could no longer cope with the stairs in their house. He told his partner on Christmas Day, the day before he died: “I hope I don’t wake up, because I don’t want this.” Early on Boxing Day, she found that he had died in his sleep. He was 49 years old. Although he is believed to have died of natural causes, she said: “As far as I am concerned, the DWP killed him.”

Why significant: Another death clearly and tragically linked to the actions of DWP and its contractors.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/partner-of-distraught-esa-claimant-says-dwp-drove-him-to-his-death/>

## **11 February 2021**

Title: Secret report (from 2014) casts doubt on DWP’s claim that it has no duty of care.

What: Work and pensions secretary Therese Coffey has repeatedly told MPs that her department does not have a legal duty to “safeguard” its claimants, and that such tasks are instead the responsibility of local agencies such as social services and doctors’ surgeries. But Disability News Service reveals that a

secret report, probably completed in 2014, had recommended a review of DWP's "ongoing Duty of Care in relation to the identification and support of claimants required to participate in the IBR [incapacity benefit reassessment] Process, who as a result of a [redacted] may be vulnerable and have different or additional support needs." Asked if Coffey could explain the discrepancy and say whether the position over whether the department has a duty of care had changed since 2012-14, a DWP spokesperson refuses to comment. DWP later responds to a freedom of information request to say: 'The Internal Process Review made a recommendation to review the Department's responsibilities which on further consideration was not progressed as the Department does not have a legal safeguarding duty to review, therefore can confirm that DWP does not hold the recorded information to respond to your request.'

Why significant: Therese Coffey has repeatedly claimed that DWP has no statutory duty of claim, but in this document a DWP civil servant states clearly that it does.

Link: Docpr06 in '49 peer reviews' folder + link to FOI in Duty of Care folder [make available on website]

## **22 February 2021**

Title: Report from the all-party parliamentary group on health in all policies, says 2016 welfare reforms had devastating impact on disabled people, and calls for inquiry into deaths of benefit claimants.

What: A report by the all-party parliamentary group on health in all policies finds that welfare reforms introduced in the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016 have had a “devastating” impact on disabled people and others in low-income households over the last five years. Among its recommendations, the report calls for the Equality and Human Rights Commission to launch an inquiry into the deaths of benefit claimants between 2008 and 2020 that have been linked to DWP’s actions.

Why significant: Further evidence of the harmful impact of the government’s welfare reforms on disabled people.

Link:

[https://debbieabrahams.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/210221\\_HIAP-A4-Report-Debbie-Abrahams.pdf](https://debbieabrahams.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/210221_HIAP-A4-Report-Debbie-Abrahams.pdf) and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/governments-2016-welfare-reforms-had-devastating-impact-on-disabled-people/>

## **2021**

Title: Release of The Right to Record – artwork and political campaign on recording personal independence payment (PIP) assessments.

What: Studio 3 Arts commissioned sound artist Hannah Kemp-Welch to produce a piece of public art for Barking and Dagenham. Over six months, Hannah worked with a project group of five residents who have experienced long term ill health or disabilities. The artwork focuses on people’s right to record their PIP assessments and challenges the DWP ruling that assessments may only be recorded on CD or cassette tape, and

that the claimant must provide two devices for this purpose, and simultaneously record the assessment on both, giving one of the CDs or tapes to the assessor immediately after the appointment. The recording equipment for this costs £120, posing an insurmountable barrier to most claimants. The audio work contains personal testimonies of PIP assessments.

Why significant: The artwork led to the formation of an action group and political campaign - showing disabled people's efforts to effect a rule change at a national level.

Link: <https://www.sound-art-hannah.com/right-to-record>

### **3 March 2021**

Title: Errol Graham's family lose judicial review claim, with the high court rejecting claim that DWP acted unlawfully by not making further enquiries about Errol Graham's mental health before it cut off his employment and support allowance (ESA).

What: The high court rejects a claim that DWP acted unlawfully by not making further enquiries about Errol Graham's mental health before it cut off his ESA in October 2017. It also rejects the claim that DWP's safeguarding policy was unlawful. The judicial review claim was brought on behalf of the family by Alison Turner, the fiancée of Errol's son. Turner says they hope to appeal the court's "baffling" ruling that DWP's actions to remove his benefits were "reasonable".

Why significant: Family pledge to continue the fight for justice for Errol Graham, despite the ruling.

Link: <https://www.bailii.org/ew/cases/EWHC/Admin/2021/465.html>

## **9 March 2021**

Title: Minister for welfare delivery admits “deficit” in tracking “vulnerable claimants” through the universal credit (UC) system.

What: Giving evidence to a joint session of the Commons work and pensions committee and the Lords economic affairs committee, welfare delivery minister Will Quince concedes that the lack of a “marker” to track vulnerable claimants through the universal credit (UC) system is “a deficit”. Currently, DWP staff use “pinned notes” – in essence, electronic Post-It notes – to record claimants’ vulnerabilities or support needs on the UC system. Concerns about this approach were raised in a NAO report in 2020. Quince says that work is progressing “at pace” in DWP to develop a “claimant profiles” system to track vulnerable and disadvantaged people through the UC system.

Why significant: Shows acknowledgement by ministers of flaws in their current approach to tracking claimants who are vulnerable.

Link: <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/1859/pdf/>

## **26 March 2021**

Title: Research shows testimony from DWP staff admitting inflicting “psychological harm” on claimants to meet unofficial sanctioning targets during coalition years.

What: Interviews with civil servants who worked for DWP and its contractors under the coalition government between 2010 and 2015 reveal that staff and managers deliberately inflicted psychological harm on benefit claimants, engaged in unofficial

sanctioning targets, and pushed disabled people into work despite the risk to their health.

Why significant: The research by Dr Jamie Redman and Professor Del Roy Fletcher, from Sheffield Hallam University, provides direct evidence from people who worked for DWP and its contractors to show how the introduction of a more punitive social security system, with harsher benefit sanctions and conditionality, inflicted years of “institutional violence” on claimants.

Link: <http://shura.shu.ac.uk/28060/>

And

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-staff-admit-inflicting-psychological-harm-on-claimants-during-coalition-years/>

## **21 April 2021**

Title: House of Commons briefing paper on suicide prevention mentions benefits-related deaths.

What: The House of Commons Library publishes a briefing paper on suicide prevention, which includes a chapter on social security. The chapter provides a summary of key events in relation to benefit-related deaths, including a discussion of WCAs and “substantial risk”.

Why significant: Shows some recognition that government welfare policy negatively impacts claimants’ mental health and suicidality, and is thus an important issue for suicide prevention.

Link:

<https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8221/CBP-8221.pdf>

## **May 2021**

Title: Publication of The Brown Envelope Book, evidencing the brutal welfare system from those with lived experience.

What: Scores of disabled people who have been brutalised by DWP's bureaucracy contributed to a new anthology of poetry and prose that describes their ordeals in "graphic and heart-rending detail". The Brown Envelope Book is co-edited by two disabled writer-activists, and contains more than 200 poems, pieces of prose and short plays, the majority of them written by disabled people who claim of benefits.

Why significant: This is the disability arts movement combining with disabled activists to produce powerful art that exposes the "cold-hearted barbarism" of DWP.

Link:

<https://www.therecusant.org.uk/the-brown-envelope-book/4595276669>

## **20 May 2021**

Title: Pre-2016 internal guidance for DWP staff suggests DWP have duty of care to benefits claimants.

What: Lawyers for the family of Errol Graham unearth a second document that suggests that DWP does, or at least did in the past, have a duty of care to protect disabled benefit claimants. It is a copy of pre-2016 internal guidance for DWP staff, written to assist them in dealing with claimants who need support in using its services, and it states: "Where the claimant has a known

background of mental illness there are minimum requirements that Jobcentre Plus should be adopting to ensure that we are not found to be neglectful in our duty of care towards these claimants.” Work and pensions secretary Therese Coffey has repeatedly told MPs that her department does not have a legal duty to “safeguard” its claimants, and that such tasks are instead the responsibility of local agencies such as social services departments and doctors’ surgeries. It is the second DWP internal document, both dating from before 2016, that mention DWP’s ongoing duty of care to claimants. The other document was a DWP peer review.

Why significant: If DWP does have a legal duty of care, it would make it easier to force the department – through the courts or other means – to take measures to ensure the safety and well-being of benefit claimants.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-lied-about-duty-to-keep-benefit-claimants-safe-document-suggests/>

## **June 2021**

Title: Publication of DWP and Capita responses to Philippa Day prevention of future death (PFD) report.

What: The Courts and Tribunals Judiciary publishes the responses of DWP and its contractor Capita to the call from coroner Gordon Clow for them to take urgent action to prevent further deaths, following the inquest into the death of Philippa Day. In his PFD report, Clow had called for action to address

concerns around the training of DWP call handlers; how information from calls was recorded; the sending of a misleading letter to Philippa; and the flaws in the system which prevented incorrect decisions about the assessment process from being changed fairly and easily. In their response to his PFD, DWP and Capita announce a series of changes they have already made, and promise others that they will soon implement.

Why significant: One of the rare occasions that DWP and its contractors have been forced to take action following the death of a claimant.

Link: <https://www.judiciary.uk/publications/philippa-day/>

## **22 and 23 June 2021**

Title: High court hears bid for second inquest into death of Jodey Whiting.

What: The high court hears arguments from lawyers for DWP and for Joy Dove, the mother of Jodey Whiting, as she seeks a second inquest into the suicide of her daughter in February 2017. DWP tells the court that her death was not part of a widespread “systemic” problem, despite years of evidence to the contrary. Dove’s barrister tells the high court that fresh evidence has emerged since 2017 which “overwhelmingly leads to the conclusion that the substantial truth” about how she died had not been revealed at the first inquest.

Why significant: Joy Dove is convinced that another inquest into her daughter’s death would reveal evidence of systemic flaws in

DWP's benefit assessment system, as happened at the inquest into the death of Philippa Day.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/jodey-whiting-dwp-tells-high-court-her-death-was-isolated-case-and-not-sign-of-systemic-failure-despite-years-of-evidence/> and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/jodey-whiting-judge-asks-why-dwp-failed-to-pick-up-a-phone-before-claimants-suicide/> and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/jodey-whiting-fresh-evidence-shows-need-for-second-inquest-into-death-caused-by-dwp/>

## **July 2021**

Title: Bereaved families write to work and pensions secretary to demand a public inquiry into benefits-related deaths.

What: Families who lost loved ones in cases where the DWP has been implicated in their death, write to Therese Coffey to demand a public inquiry into deaths and serious harm linked to the benefits system. Three months later they will still not have received a response, and so will write again. The relatives are: Imogen Day, sister of Philippa Day (Philippa died in 2019) Leanne Dooley, daughter of Kevin Dooley (Kevin died in 2018) Joy Dove, mother of Jodey Whiting (Jodey died in 2017) Trudi Johnson, sister of Clive Johnson (Clive died in 2017) Alison Burton, wife of Errol Graham's son (Errol died in 2018).

Why significant: This campaign is a change of heart for Rethink, which in 2019 had refused to back the Justice for Jodey petition, which made similar demands but which was also critical of DWP

and described it as “not fit for purpose” and “institutionally disablist”, while calling for evidence of any criminal misconduct by civil servants and ministers to be passed to police and for the department to urgently change its policies and administration of social security benefits to make the safety of all claimants a priority.

Link:

<https://www.rethink.org/get-involved/campaign-with-us/a-fairer-benefits-system-and-financial-support/stop-benefit-deaths/follow-up-letter-to-secretary-of-state-for-work-pensions/> and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/disability-charities-reject-request-to-back-jodey-whiting-deaths-petition/>

## **1 July 2021**

Title: The mother of Ker Featherstone describes how he took his own life, just weeks after DWP cut his personal independence payment (PIP).

What: The mother of Ker Featherstone describes how he took his own life, just weeks after DWP cut his personal independence payment, despite being warned he was severely depressed, malnourished, could not face leaving his flat, and had made several suicide attempts. DWP had been told by his parents in January 2019 that Ker had barely left his flat in two years, that he would often pass out when he stood up because of malnutrition, and even that his teeth had started to crumble. It was also told that his anxiety and depression were so severe that he could not cope with visits from his own brothers and sisters, and that he had

not washed in nearly 18 months. His disabled mother Helen believes her son's suicide, like that of Jodey Whiting, showed there were serious and "systemic" problems in DWP's assessment system.

Why significant: Another death linked to the PIP assessment system. Helen Featherstone says she has spoken out publicly about her son's death partly because of the campaigning efforts of Joy Dove.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwps-excruciating-pip-assessment-torture-helped-cause-my-sons-suicide-says-disabled-mum/>

## **20 July 2021**

Title: DWP publishes Shaping Future Support - health and disability green paper - failing to mention the internal process reviews carried out by the DWP following deaths of claimants.

What: A new green paper, Shaping Future Support, suggests ministers are considering measures to cut future spending on disability benefits, and the possibility of merging personal independence payment with universal credit, but there is no mention of the deaths of disabled claimants that have been linked to DWP's actions and failings. Instead, the green paper refers to some claimants who "may feel afraid of having to use the benefits system", to claimants who "sometimes struggle to apply for benefits and can find health assessments difficult", and to how "a sizeable minority of people are not content" with the ESA and PIP

systems. There is no mention of the coroner's findings following the death of Philippa Day, even though the inquest took place just six months earlier, or the previous DWP safeguarding failures that led to the deaths of Roy Curtis, Errol Graham, Jodey Whiting, and many others. It also fails to mention the secret internal process reviews DWP has carried out following the deaths of claimants. Why significant: The green paper will be followed by a white paper in 2022, which should detail the government's plans for further reforms, including any measures on safeguarding. But its failure to even mention the deaths of claimants suggests it will not take the measures necessary to make the system fit for purpose, and safe.

Link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/shaping-future-support-the-health-and-disability-green-paper#history>

## **12 August 2021**

Title: DWP figures reveal sharp rise in internal process reviews into the deaths of benefit claimants.

What: DWP figures reveal that the number of internal process reviews into the deaths of benefit claimants has increased sharply in the last couple of years. The figures, secured through a freedom of information request, show how many IPRs were launched in each of the previous five six-month periods. They show DWP has been starting an average of 46 to 50 death-related IPRs a year since the start of 2019. This compares

with an annual average of about 21 IPRs completed in 2016, 2017 and 2018.

Why significant: The figures suggest a sudden change of DWP policy in late 2018, following the replacement of work and pensions secretary Esther McVey by Amber Rudd. This appears to have led to a rapid rise in the number of IPRs, with 18 completed in 2018 following the death of a benefit claimant, but 47 started in 2019.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/dwp-figures-reveal-sharp-rise-in-secret-benefit-death-reviews/> and PDF 'Response 54707'

## **16 September 2021**

Title: The Equality and Human Rights Commission says government has made no progress on improving the way its social security system protects the rights of disabled people, and that disability benefits assessment system have led to “the deaths of a number of benefit claimants”.

What: The Equality and Human Rights Commission concludes that the UK government has made no progress on improving the way its social security system protects the rights of disabled people and other groups. In its assessment of progress across 11 human rights areas, the commission concludes that several permanent welfare reforms introduced by the government have “adversely affected the enjoyment of human rights, in particular for women, disabled people, ethnic minority people and lone parents”, highlights how the process of assessing entitlement to

disability benefits has been found to disadvantage disabled people, and highlights concerns that methods used in the disability benefits assessment system have led to “the deaths of a number of benefit claimants”, pointing to the conclusions of the coroner who heard the inquest into the death of Philippa Day, who warned in February that further such deaths could occur if DWP and its contractor Capita failed to act.

Why significant: The UK’s human rights watchdog highlighting concerns about the link between DWP and the deaths of claimants and the ongoing failure to improve protection of disabled claimants.

Link: <https://humanrightstracker.com/en/overarching-progress/> and

<https://humanrightstracker.com/en/progress-assessment/social-security-welfare-benefits-uk-government-assessment/>

## **17 September 2021**

Title: Judges reject attempt by Joy Dove, the mother of Jodey Whiting, to secure a second inquest into her daughter’s death, saying that individual mistakes, not systemic failings, led to death.

What: Judges reject the attempt by Joy Dove, the mother of Jodey Whiting, to secure a second inquest into her daughter’s death, despite one of the judges criticising the “shocking” failures in the case. The judge says the decision to remove her employment and support allowance “should not have happened”, but she concludes that DWP’s errors “amounted to individual failings attributable to mistakes or bad judgment”, and were not

“systemic or structural in nature”, and that it would be “extremely difficult for a new inquest to conclude that the Department caused Ms Whiting’s death”. The three judges unanimously reject Dove’s application for a second inquest, despite the Independent Case Examiner concluding in February 2019 that DWP failed five times to follow its own safeguarding rules in the weeks leading up to her daughter’s suicide.

Why significant: A setback in the attempt to hold DWP to account for the death of Jodey Whiting.

Link:

<https://www.leighday.co.uk/latest-updates/news/2021-news/high-court-rejects-application-for-second-jodey-whiting-inquest/> and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/judges-reject-claim-that-systemic-dwp-failings-led-to-death-despite-years-of-evidence/> and court ruling PDF

### **3 October 2021**

Title: Work and pensions secretary signals new bid to try to push more disabled people with high support needs into work.

What: Work and pensions secretary Therese Coffey suggests that her department is to launch a new bid to try to push more disabled people with high support needs into work. Coffey, speaking at a fringe event at the Conservative party conference in Manchester, says she wants to focus on those people who are currently seen as not being able to do any work, and she refers to the need to cut spending on disability benefits.

Why significant: A signal that ministers are refusing to learn the lessons of the post-2010 years, in which DWP pressure to force disabled people into the workplace despite serious health conditions led to countless deaths.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/conservative-conference-coffey-signals-new-bid-to-push-support-group-towards-work/>

#### **4 October 2021**

Title: The new minister for disabled people says addressing DWP's legacy of distrust and distress "is a big priority".

What: The new minister for disabled people says it is a "big priority" for her to address the legacy of distress and distrust created by a decade of deaths of benefit claimants that have been linked to the actions of her new department. Chloe Smith makes the comments about DWP after being asked by Disability News Service how comfortable she felt stepping into a department that has been closely connected – including through reports from coroners and DWP's own secret internal reviews – with so many deaths.

Why significant: Although Smith was probably not prepared for the question and suggested afterwards that she may not have understood its significance, it was still the closest any DWP minister has come to an apology for the department's widespread failings over the last decade.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/disability-minister-says-addressing-dwps-legacy-of-distrust-and-distress-is-a-big-priority/>

## **7 October 2021**

Title: Mother of Jodey Whiting fights on for justice with appeal against a court's ruling that there should not be a second inquest into her daughter's death.

What: Joy Dove, the mother of Jodey Whiting, says she will appeal against a court's ruling that there should not be a second inquest into her daughter's death. She says she refuses to accept that the first inquest in May 2017 was a "thorough investigation" into the role played by DWP in her daughter's death. Her words come after the high court refused to quash the result of the first inquest and to order a second one. Dove says she has now applied for permission to appeal that decision.

Why significant: Another step in Joy Dove's search for justice for her daughter.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/mother-of-jodey-whiting-fights-on-for-justice-with-appeal-bid/>

## **8 October 2021**

Title: Bereaved families meet at launch of benefit deaths digital exhibition The Museum of Austerity.

What: Several of the families of disabled claimants whose deaths have been closely linked to DWP's actions meet for the first time

after visiting a pioneering digital exhibition. The Museum of Austerity has used the families' verbal testimony – and “volumetric capture” techniques that produce high-quality holograms – to recreate the circumstances that led to the deaths of eight claimants in the decade of austerity from 2010.

Why significant: The production – backed by the National Theatre and the English Touring Theatre – uses state-of-the-art technology to tell the stories of some of the disabled victims of austerity, and the launch brings together relatives of some of those who died, for the first time.

Link:

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/families-share-experiences-of-dwp-deaths-after-viewing-ground-breaking-exhibition/>

## **November 2021**

Title: Capita agrees to compensate Philippa Day's family for failings leading to her death.

What: The family of Philippa Day announce that Capita has agreed to compensate them for its failings. Both Capita and DWP were closely linked to her death by evidence that emerged at an inquest in January. The terms of the settlement include an agreement to withdraw the family's legal claims against DWP. Philippa's sister Imogen says she will continue to fight for a public inquiry into other deaths.

Why significant: A recognition that what Capita did was wrong, and a warning to DWP and its contractors that future such failings will be punished.

Link:

<https://www.leighday.co.uk/latest-updates/news/2021-news/philippa-day-family-secure-settlement-from-capita/> and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/fight-for-justice-goes-on-after-capita-agrees-philippa-day-compensation/>

#### **4 November 2021**

Title: Jodey Whiting legal fight continues with fresh request for permission to appeal against a high court ruling that there was no need for a second inquest.

What: The mother of Jodey Whiting lodges a fresh application for permission to appeal against a high court ruling that there was no need for a second inquest into the death of her daughter. The high court had refused her permission to appeal, but she now lodges a fresh application for permission to appeal with the Court of Appeal.

Why significant: Another step on the path to justice for Jodey Whiting.

Link:

<https://www.leighday.co.uk/latest-updates/news/2021-news/second-appeal-application-lodged-in-legal-challenge-for-new-jodey-whiting-inquest/> and <https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/justice-for-jodey-fight-continues-with-fresh-request-for-appeal/>

#### **11 November 2021**

Title: Families outraged after government hands award to DWP safeguarding team for “outstanding contribution”.

What: It emerges that the government handed DWP’s disability benefits safeguarding team an “outstanding contribution” award, just weeks after a coroner found that flaws in the disability benefits system helped cause the death of Philippa Day. The award was made by the cross-government Operational Delivery Profession, which is headed by Peter Schofield, DWP’s permanent secretary.

Why significant: Again shows deep-seated problems within the Civil Service over its refusal to accept that DWP has failed disabled benefit claimants.

Link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/operational-delivery-profession-awards-2021> (this post was removed by DWP after the DNS story was published) and

<https://www.disabilitynewsservice.com/families-outraged-after-government-hands-sickening-award-to-dwp-safeguarding-team/>

*The timeline stops here only for now. We welcome entries after this date, and our aim is for the timeline to be ongoing.*