Iain Stewart MP
House of Commons

Our ref: MC2023/99820

29 January 2024

Dear Iain,

Your email of 19 December 2023 to HM Treasury has been forwarded to this Department for a response. You wrote on behalf of a number of your constituents about benefit sanctions. I am replying as the Minister for Employment.

Conditionality has been a key feature of the benefit system since the formation of the welfare state. It is only right that those who can work are expected to take steps to find employment.

People on work-related benefits, such as Universal Credit, are expected to take responsibility for meeting the conditionality requirements they have agreed with their Work Coach. They will only be sanctioned if they fail to meet these requirements without demonstrating good reason. Where a person on a work-related benefit has a health condition or disability, Work Coaches have the discretion to tailor their requirements to what is reasonable and achievable, taking into consideration the individual's condition. If an individual disagrees with a sanction decision, they can ask for this to be looked at again by way of a mandatory reconsideration.

If an individual further disagrees with the mandatory reconsideration decision, they can raise an appeal with an independent tribunal.

The conditionality and sanctions regime does not apply to those with Limited Capability for Work and Work-Related Activity.

We have a well-established system of hardship payments which is available as a safeguard where an individual demonstrates that they cannot meet their immediate and most essential needs as a result of a sanction. These needs

can include accommodation, heating, food and hygiene. Universal Credit recipients can enquire about hardship payments with their Work Coach via their online journal.

I hope this helps to explain the position to your constituents.

JO CHURCHILL MP
MINISTER FOR EMPLOYMENT