

19/02/2018

## BACKGROUND NOTE FOR S5W-14364

1. Mark Griffin is a Labour MSP who was elected to the Scottish Parliament in May 2011 and re-elected in May 2016. He represents the Central Scotland region and is a member of the Social Security Committee.
2. We believe all of the questions asked are as a result of an article which appeared in the Daily Record on 24 January, in which it was reported that the Minister outlined her ideas that a single assessment may be possible for PIP and for ESA. We understand that this was based on an interview the Minister gave on 23 January and it is not clear whether the article has reflected the Minister's comments accurately. The text of the article is included at **Annex A**.
3. The previous question referred to by Mr Griffin (S5O-01753) was "To ask the Scottish Government what steps it is taking to use existing medical and other evidence to determine entitlement to devolved disability benefits and reduce the need for in-person assessments." The answer to this question was: *"We have made it clear from the start that we will make use of existing health and social care evidence to support better decision making. We will gather the right information at the initial stage of the process, utilising existing data to aid quality decision making and, consequently, reduce the need for face to face assessments. A face-to-face assessment should only be required upon individual request or where evidence gathered is conflicting – and no-one will ever be forced in the Scottish system to undergo an assessment with a private company."*
4. ESA is currently the responsibility of the UK Government and is administered by the DWP on their behalf. ESA is not one of the benefits being devolved to Scotland. Stakeholders and individuals have raised significant concerns over the existing ESA assessment process. [redacted exemption 30(b)(i)]
5. On 2 February, we received a Freedom of Information request from [redacted], Researcher, Scottish Labour. In his request, [redacted] has asked for "...the briefing material or other papers and documentation the Minister took to the meeting [the Joint Ministerial Working Group] and provided other attendees, relevant to this "once-for-Scotland approach" as referred to in the Daily Record. Please also provide any prior or subsequent correspondence the Minister and her staff supplied to other attendees". **We understand from officials who attended the Joint Ministerial Working Group that this wasn't discussed at that meeting, and the Minister has confirmed that this issue was raised at her meeting with Sarah Newton MP.**

[Redacted ]

[Redacted ]

**DAILY RECORD 24/1/18**

**HEADLINE: BONFIRE OF THE BENEFIT FORMS**

Minister suggests single assessment for all claims. Vulnerable Scots will only have to fill in one form for a range of social security benefits under plans being put forward by the Scottish Government. Jeane Freeman, Minister for Social Security has proposed that claimants go through 'a once for Scotland' approach to form filling and information is shared with different agencies for eligible benefits. Freeman put forward the plan at a Joint Ministerial Council meeting on welfare. [As a result of the 11 benefits being devolved]...this will leave some Scots claiming under the SG and DWP. Freeman said 'One of the possibilities might is how it might be possible to use our assessments as a starting point for a DWP assessment for Employment Support Allowance. Rather than have people do two assessments, they could use all of the information we have as their core assessment for ESA, with maybe some additional elements they need'. She added 'we have some local authorities who have reconfigured services so that an application for housing support can then be used for free school meals and school clothing grants. I want to slot social security into that system so that if you come to us for a Best Start Grant, you can be told you are eligible for all of those other things. With the agreement of the claimant, the information can be handed to another agency for other benefits'.