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From the Minister of State
for Work and Pensions

Your ref: 01093527

POS(8)10220/265

Rt Hon Tessa Jowell MP

DWP

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26th November 2009

Dear Tessa

Thank you for your letter of 9 November to the Secretary of State on behalf of your constituent concerning the National Autistic Society's campaign *Don't Write Me Off*. I have been asked to reply as the Minister of State for Welfare Reform.

As you may be aware, the Minister for Disabled People, Jonathan Shaw attended the launch of the campaign on 13 October, where he met and spoke with several people involved in the campaign. He also recently visited the National Autistic Society's Prospects site in London and saw some of the excellent work being done to support people with autism in employment.

The Department for Work and Pensions is working with a wide range of organisations to identify how its services can be improved for people with autism. In particular, this Department is working with the Department of Health and the National Autistic Society following the recent consultation, *A better future: a consultation on a future strategy for adults with autistic spectrum conditions*, led by the Department of Health and also the publication on 15 October of the Public Accounts Committee report *Supporting people with autism through adulthood*.

Jobcentre Plus, an Executive Agency of this Department, delivers services to a wide range of customers, including those with autism. Disability Employment Advisers within Jobcentres have received formal training which includes autism interview skills practices. All Jobcentres have access to Disability Employment Adviser services and in turn, these advisers can seek help from work psychologists to assist them in supporting customers where appropriate. Work psychologists also receive training and mentoring to enable them to work with individuals to establish appropriate employment goals and work-related needs.

Your constituent also made specific reference to the Employment and Support Allowance. Employment and Support Allowance was introduced to replace Incapacity Benefit in October 2008. A new assessment was introduced to accompany the new benefit - the Work Capability Assessment.

The changes introduced in the Work Capability Assessment deal more effectively with the types of conditions that are prevalent today. In particular, the assessment better accounts for the functional effects of autism. I am pleased that the National Autistic Society was closely involved in helping this Department develop the Work Capability Assessment.

The Department for Work and Pensions continues to identify how services can be improved to meet the employment needs of people with autism. We will continue to work closely with colleagues in other Departments, the National Autistic Society and others to further improve the services available to customers with autism.

Yours

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Jim Knight', written in a cursive style.

Rt Hon Jim Knight MP