Dear Secretary of State,

Back-to-work programme contracts

I am writing following today’s Times article, *Charities gagged by ministers*, to seek clarification around the use of ‘publicity’ clauses in back-to-work programmes run by the Department for Work and Pensions.

The article suggests that these clauses may inadvertently prevent charities, and other providers, from speaking out about the experience of the people they work with, thereby preventing the provision of vital insights and expertise which improve policy-making, both through their conversations with government as well informing wider public policy.

The government has long recognised that voluntary organisations play a much-needed role in policy development and shaping regulatory reform. Thanks in part to the open policy-making approach you have championed, voluntary organisations bring the real-world experience and evidence-based expertise into public policy debate.

I would be grateful if you could confirm that it is not your intention that this clause should in any way prevent or deter charities or other providers from publicly expressing concerns about a particular policy, in this case the rollout of universal credit. I wonder if in the spirit of open government, you might consider how the original intention might best be achieved through a different form of words and whether the clause itself is necessary.

We support your ambition to open up supply chains to a wider variety of providers, involving both small and large charities where their expertise can help people back to work. Giving greater clarity about this issue will be important for both current providers and other future participants in back to work programmes.

Yours sincerely,

Sir Stuart Etherington
Chief Executive