

Oral Answers to Questions: Work and Pensions

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The oral questions session to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on 27 October 2025 covered a broad range of policy areas, including pensions, disability employment, skills, welfare reform, and child poverty. The session was led by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, **Pat McFadden**, alongside DWP Ministers **Sir Stephen Timms**, **Andrew Western**, and **Torsten Bell**. Questions came from across the House, including topics relating to the **state pension age**, **Access to Work**, **health and disability employment**, **child poverty**, **skills training**, and **benefits reform**.

The discussion opened with questions on the **state pension age** and the recent **Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS)** report. The Secretary of State confirmed that the pension age would rise to 67 by 2028 and emphasised ongoing work to support later-life planning, including work coaches for over-50s. **Mr Lee Dillon** (LD) pressed for justice for **WASPI women**, calling for compensation in light of the ombudsman's recommendations. McFadden declined to comment due to ongoing litigation but affirmed the Government would consider "all relevant factors". Further, **Chris Vince** (Lab/Co-op) raised delays in pension payments affecting homeless individuals, and the Secretary of State stressed the Department's commitment to ensuring a fast, seamless service.

Extensive questioning focused on the **Access to Work scheme**, which provides workplace support for disabled individuals. **Sir Stephen Timms**, Minister for Social Security and Disability, acknowledged existing delays and stated that reforms were underway following a consultation on the "Pathways to Work" Green Paper. MPs across parties raised concerns that claimants were experiencing reductions in support at review points, notably for blind and neurodivergent workers. The Minister maintained that while the policy had not changed, "more scrupulous application" of existing guidelines had led to greater consistency. Opposition Members challenged the Government's performance, citing that average processing times for Access to Work applications had doubled since Labour took office, rising from 43.9 to 93.6 days. Timms responded that the Department was expanding staffing and undertaking a review to improve efficiency.

Further exchanges examined **post-16 education and skills**, with McFadden emphasising that technical and vocational routes were "first-class" pathways to opportunity. He referenced the recently published **skills White Paper** and the creation of **Skills England** to align training with employer demand. MPs such as **Baggy Shanker**, **Helen Hayes**, and **Damian Hinds** sought assurances on collaboration with businesses and improved information for students. McFadden stated that UCAS could be expanded to include vocational routes and that employers' voices would remain central to standard-setting.

On **employment for people with health conditions**, **Sir Stephen Timms** announced the forthcoming **Keep Britain Working review**, supported by 1,000 work advisers. He cited the devolving of powers to local areas to tailor health and employment interventions. MPs highlighted

local initiatives such as **Pluss in Exeter** and raised concerns about Motability, mental health assessments, and learning disabilities. The Minister confirmed that the review of **Personal Independence Payment (PIP)** eligibility and assessment processes would be co-produced with disabled people and published in autumn 2026. He also stated that “appropriate checks are in place” to prevent fraudulent claims but that reform must balance rigour with fairness.

Discussion on **Carer’s Allowance** revealed that 975,000 people were receiving the benefit. **Dr Danny Chambers** (LD) criticised delays in publishing the long-awaited carer’s allowance report. Timms confirmed that it would be published with the Government’s response by year’s end, addressing the penalties faced by carers who inadvertently breach income thresholds.

A major segment focused on **child poverty** and the ongoing **two-child benefit cap**. **Andrew Western** (Lab) confirmed that the Government’s child poverty strategy would be published later in the year, led by the ministerial taskforce co-chaired by McFadden. The Government had already expanded free school meals for all universal credit recipients, capped uniform costs, and launched a crisis and resilience fund. **Seamus Logan** (SNP) and **Richard Burgon** (Lab) called for the immediate scrapping of the two-child cap, arguing it was “dragging thousands of children into poverty”. Western maintained that “all available levers” were under review but did not commit to policy change ahead of the Budget. In exchanges with **Rebecca Smith** (Con) and **Steve Darling** (LD), he defended the universal breakfast clubs and reaffirmed Labour’s commitment to tackling poverty through structural reforms rather than short-term fixes.

On **skills and apprenticeships**, McFadden announced measures to give small and medium enterprises (SMEs) greater flexibility in apprenticeship delivery and reduce bureaucracy. He confirmed that apprenticeships could be shortened and that more short courses would be launched. **Jessica Morden** (Lab) praised efforts by Welsh employers to support care-experienced youth, while McFadden pledged further collaboration with businesses and an additional £10 million investment for Welsh employment hubs.

Employment for young people was another key focus. McFadden highlighted that the Government’s **youth guarantee** ensures all 18–21-year-olds are “learning or earning”. He contrasted this with what he called the “high youth inactivity” inherited from the previous Government. The Opposition challenged Labour’s record, with **Helen Whately** (Con) arguing that unemployment had risen under Labour and warning that high taxes would stifle job creation. McFadden countered that there were now “358,000 more people in work than at the start of the year”, citing reductions in interest rates and improved business confidence.

Health and social care were indirectly referenced in questions about disabled employment, the Motability scheme, and the impact of apprenticeships on nurse training. There was also discussion about the interface between health conditions, work readiness, and benefit eligibility.

In topical questions, MPs raised issues including **benefit sanctions for neurodiverse claimants**, **transition from legacy benefits to universal credit**, **autism employment**, and **child maintenance enforcement**. Ministers repeatedly stressed that the system should “support, not punish” vulnerable claimants and that reviews were ongoing to improve fairness and efficiency. Questions also covered the **Employment Rights Bill**, **indexation of pre-1997 pensions**, and



food insecurity, with McFadden affirming the Government's focus on fairness, opportunity, and reducing dependency through work.