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The Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick
House of Lords

9th July 2020

Dear Baroness Ritchie of Downpatrick,

Following the Urgent Question that was repeated in the House of Lords on 29th June, I promised that I would write to you to clarify the question that you raised on social security policy.

We continue to look for ways of building on the success of Universal Credit. The system has proved remarkably resilient in the face of pressures created by COVID-19. The Department for Work and Pensions received 3.2 million claims between 16th March and 16th June, providing 1.2 million advances to claimants – the vast majority of which received money within 72 hours.

We increased the standard allowance in Universal Credit by £86.67 per month (equivalent to £20 per week) on top of our planned annual uprating. This means that many claimants (depending on their circumstances) may be better off by £1040 per year.

We increased the local housing allowance rates for Universal Credit and housing benefit claimants, so they now cover the lowest 30% of local rents. We increased the national maximum caps, so claimants in inner and central London should also see an increase in their housing support payments. Furthermore, across England we had already increased the discretionary housing payment by an extra £40 million for this financial year.

The 1.7% benefit up-rating was implemented in April, ending the benefits freeze, and the state pension rose by 3.9%, as per the triple lock, reflecting last year's substantial rise in average earnings.

We have introduced regulations to ease access to benefits. We legislated to allow access to Employment and Support Allowance from day one of a claim for COVID-19 related cases. We relaxed the minimum income floor so that the self-employed can access Universal Credit more readily and we legislated to ensure that statutory sick pay was available for employees from day one of sickness or self-isolation due to COVID-19.

I hope that this information is helpful. The Government is committed to and will continue to work to protect vulnerable people during these unprecedented times.

A copy of this letter will be placed in the House Library.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Debbie Stedman-Scott". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line under the name "Stedman".

**BARONESS STEDMAN-SCOTT
MINISTER FOR WORK AND PENSIONS (LORDS)**