



Department for
Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy

Catherine McKinnell MP
Chair, Petitions Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Department for Business,
Energy & Industrial Strategy
1 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0ET

T +44 (0) 20 7215 5000
E enquiries@beis.gov.uk
W www.gov.uk

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Dear Catherine,

PETITION TO EXTEND MATERNITY LEAVE

Thank you for inviting me to give evidence to the Petitions Committee on 11 June 2020 on the petition to extend Maternity Leave in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. I very much appreciate the time the Committee has taken to consider this issue. I am grateful to the individuals who have raised this issue with Government and particularly the parents who have shared their stories with the Committee and my Department.

As you know, a number of Government Departments have an interest in the issues discussed at the evidence session, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) does not have responsibility for all relevant policies and legislation. Nonetheless we are working across government to support parents to balance work with childcare responsibilities at this difficult time.

I said I would write to the Committee on the matter of earnings calculations under the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme. Under the scheme, self-employed people can receive a taxable grant based on their average trading profits over 3 tax years which run from 2016 to 2017, 2017 to 2018, and 2018 to 2019. The issue you referred to is that, where an individual has taken time off work to start or add to their family, this may have affected their trading profits in one or more of these years.

HMT have confirmed that they are amending the SEISS eligibility conditions to enable those with parental responsibilities for a child, whose care for that child within the first 12 months of birth or an adoption placement affected their 2018-19 trading profits, to make a claim for a grant. Parents, including fathers and adopters, who took time out from their work to care for children within 12 months of the birth of the child or within 12 months of an adoption placement, and who as a result are currently ineligible, will be able to use either their 2017-18 or both their 2016-17 and 2017-18 self-assessment returns as the basis for their eligibility for the SEISS.

Individuals who meet the revised criteria and who are able to provide supporting evidence will need to self-identify and proactively approach HMRC to complete an online certification process. This will include certifying that they are eligible and

providing evidence of the existence of a child and to confirm that their 2018-19 trading profits were impacted due to provision of care for that child. They will also need to have already filed their self-assessment return for 2017-18.

I would also like to clarify that, as announced in the Queen's Speech and in the Budget in March, we intend to introduce a new entitlement to Neonatal Leave and Pay for parents of babies who are admitted to neonatal care in the first 28 days of life. This will enable parents who are in this extremely difficult position to spend more time with their child or children whilst they are in hospital and/or once they come home. We will introduce this entitlement as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Separately we have consulted on high-level options for reforming parental leave and pay. The consultation considered the costs and benefits of different options for reforming parental leave to achieve greater equality in parenting and at work. We are also currently evaluating the Shared-Parental Leave and Pay scheme which allows parents to share childcare in the first year of their baby's life. We will consider the information obtained through the evaluation alongside responses to the consultation and respond in due course.

I would lastly like to thank the committee for the research they have carried out and the comprehensive report they have published. We will respond to your report in due course.



PAUL SCULLY MP

Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Labour Markets
Minister for London