



25th March 2020

Dear Sophie,

Thank you for the evidence session today during which I said I would write to you on one or two points which are addressed below.

The Committee asked for further information on our approach to sanctions.

Given the rapidly changing situation, we have taken the decision to temporarily suspend the requirement for face-to-face Jobcentre Plus appointments from 19 March for all claimants in UC, JSA, ESA and IS. This means that claimants are not expected to contact Jobcentre Plus while this temporary suspension is in place. They will continue to receive benefits as normal and they will not be sanctioned for not taking part in interviews with Jobcentres.

Recognising the need for DWP civil servants to focus on the processing of claims, we will not be checking conditionality compliance regarding looking for and being available for work for the next three months. This means no sanctions should be applied for that reason for the next three months, and regulations will be introduced to bring that to effect.

We do, however, want claimants to continue to look for work. These are difficult times, however, new jobs are being created. Retailers have announced tens of thousands of new jobs in response to the coronavirus outbreak and I would urge claimants to explore these opportunities and others, where able to do so. Where possible, we will continue to offer support to our claimants through their online journal or by phone.

The Committee asked whether increases in LHA will result in more people being subject to the housing support cap.

In response to the current situation, we will be increasing the national maximum caps significantly for 2020/21, alongside our announcement to increase Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates to the 30th percentile of market rents. From April, the national caps will be linked to local rental markets by setting the caps at the maximum outer London LHA rates, plus an additional 20%. This ensures that claimants in inner and central London where the caps apply will also see an increase in their housing support during this period.

You have also requested more detail on Universal Credit wait times and advance payments from the Permanent Secretary through a letter sent today (25 March). He will respond in due course.

*Yours sincerely,
Thérèse*

The Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WORK AND PENSIONS