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Kamran Mallick

Irrelevant & Sensitive

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Dear Kamran Mallick

Thank you for your letter of 16 March to the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work about the position of disabled people during the current pandemic. Government Ministers receive a large volume of correspondence and they are unable to reply personally on every occasion. I have been asked to respond.

As both the Prime Minister and Chancellor have made clear, the Government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by coronavirus and we have been clear in our intention that no one should be penalised for doing the right thing. These are rapidly developing circumstances, we continue to keep the situation under review and will keep Parliament updated accordingly.

Government officials continue to work closely to understand the potential impacts of coronavirus on employment and benefits.

The Department has introduced new guidance about claiming benefits which can be found on the government website at:

<https://www.understandinguniversalcredit.gov.uk/coronavirus/>

On 12 March, The Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 were laid to give effect to the measures outlined in the Budget, designed to help delay the spread of coronavirus and ensure people are not penalised for doing the right thing. A boost of almost £500 million has been given to the welfare system in response to the coronavirus outbreak. The Department will ensure that work search and work availability requirements within Universal Credit are switched off. Affected self-employed claimants will also not have a Minimum Income Floor applied for a period of time within Universal Credit.

To avoid increasing the burden on health care professionals and the risk of further infection, the Department is removing the requirement for fit notes in relation to both Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) and Universal Credit claims relating to coronavirus only. Everyone that claims who is infected with coronavirus or who is

required to self-isolate will be treated as having Limited Capability for Work in ESA and Universal Credit without the requirement for medical evidence or undergoing a Work Capability Assessment. To better support the needs of people (particularly the self-employed and those not eligible for SSP) and/or those not entitled to Universal Credit, we are removing the seven waiting days that currently apply to ESA. This means that everyone who makes a new claim for ESA; is entitled to the benefit and is infected with coronavirus or required to self-isolate, will be paid from day one of their claim.

We have a safety-net that helps people facing hardship if they cannot work and need to self-isolate for two weeks. Those who are not eligible for SSP, including those who are self-employed, are able to claim Universal Credit and/or new style ESA. In addition, for anybody affected by Coronavirus, arrangements will be made so they will be able to claim an advance to bridge the gap up to their first Universal Credit payments.

The Chancellor also announced on 20 March 2020 that we are increasing the standard allowance in Universal Credit and the basic element in Working Tax Credit for one year (from 6 April). Both will increase by £20.00 per week on top of planned annual uprating, for all new and existing Universal Credit and existing Working Tax Credit claimants.

Finally, the Chancellor also announced further measures to support the self-employed on 26 March 2020. One such measure includes the Self-Employed Income Support Scheme. More information can be found on the Government website at: www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-a-grant-through-the-coronavirus-covid-19-self-employment-income-support-scheme

Yours sincerely

Personal Data

Name Redacted

Head of the Ministerial Correspondence Team