



Department
for Work &
Pensions

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Our ref: MC2021/85025

16 November 2021

Dear Councillor Rouane,

Thank you for your letter of 18 October to the Secretary of State about the Universal Credit uplift. I am replying as the Minister with responsibility for this policy area.

Since the start of the pandemic, the Government's priority has been to protect lives and people's livelihoods. This includes continually supporting individuals and businesses. Universal Credit has provided a vital safety net for six million people during the pandemic, and we announced the temporary uplift as part of a COVID support package worth a total of £407 billion in 2020/21 and 2021/22. As part of the Spring Budget, the Chancellor announced that the temporary £20 a week increase in Universal Credit was to be extended for a further six months, until October. Eligible Working Tax Credit claimants received an equivalent one-off payment of £500.

The Government has always been clear that the £20 increase was a temporary measure to support households affected by the economic shock of Covid-19. As a result, Universal Credit Claimants Assessment Periods that ended on or after 6 October 2021 have not included the additional £20 per week.

There have been significant positive developments in the public health situation since the uplift was first introduced with the success of the vaccine roll-out. Now the economy is reopening and as we continue to progress with our recovery, our focus is on helping people to prepare for, get into and progress in work.

I would like to reassure you that food insecurity is an issue we take seriously, which is why we added food security questions to the Family Resources Survey. This will include questions specifically on foodbanks use in subsequent editions of the survey. With this information, we will have a better understanding of the lived experiences of families.

We have made important changes to the Healthy Start Scheme, such as increasing the value of Healthy Start Vouchers from £3.10 to £4.25 in April and digitalising the scheme to make it more accessible. These vouchers are available to parents with young children who are in receipt of eligible benefits, to help them buy basic foods like milk or fruit.

We understand that school holidays can be particular pressure points for some families because of increased costs. The Holiday Activities and Food programme will continue to run over the Christmas holidays, having already provided enriching activities and healthy meals to children across the country over Easter and the summer. From 2022 we are investing over £200 million a year to continue our Holiday Activities and Food programme, providing free school holiday club places with enriching activities and healthy meals for children who receive benefits-related free school meals. All 151 local authorities in England are delivering this programme.

However, we recognise that some people may require extra support over the winter as we enter the final stages of recovery, which is why vulnerable households across the country will now be able to access a new £500 million support fund to help them with essentials. The Household Support Fund will provide £421 million to help vulnerable people in England through local authorities. The fund is principally intended to be used to support households with food, energy and water costs, although support with wider essentials can also be considered under the scope of the scheme. The Barnett Formula will apply in the usual way, with devolved administrations receiving almost £80 million (£41 million for the Scottish Government, £25 million for the Welsh Government and £14 million for the NI Executive), for a total of £500 million.

I hope you will find this reply helpful.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David Rutley', with a horizontal line underneath.

David Rutley MP

Minister for Welfare Delivery