



Department
for Work &
Pensions

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December 2025

Dear Gingerbread,

Thank you for inviting me to meet with you on the 4 November 2025 and for your thoughtful follow-up letter. I very much appreciated the opportunity to understand more about the real-life challenges single parents face whilst navigating the Universal Credit system.

It is very important that the social security system is there to support those who need it, and we have to make sure the system helps people start, move into and progress in work. To this end, we're delivering a step-change in employment and skills support for parents, enabling them to balance work and caring responsibilities through high quality, flexible jobs, and improving access to childcare so parents are better able to work.

Reviewing Universal Credit

The Universal Credit review is focused on the policy design and structure of Universal Credit and is focused on three main areas:

- Tackling poverty and helping people manage their money
- Making work pay and improving work incentives
- Maximising UC's potential and its impact on customers

Since the review started, we have engaged with over 60 stakeholder organisations, including organisations like yourself, focused on parents, carers and children like Save the Children and the Child Action Poverty Group. Alongside this we have sought views from those with direct experience of claiming Universal Credit through working with Changing Realities.

Conditionality and sanctions are not, however, in scope of the review. We do continuously review both the policy of conditionality and sanctions and how they are applied, as well as how they affect customers and their outcomes. The points you raised have been passed on to the relevant officials in the Department.

The Government recognises that high childcare costs can affect parents' decisions to take up paid work or increase their working hours. This is why we offer financial help to parents to move into work or increase their working hours.

Access to childcare support is essential in enabling parents to move into or progress in employment.

In Universal Credit, working families can claim up to 85% of eligible childcare costs each month compared to 70% in legacy benefits. Currently, the amount of UC childcare that families with two or more children could claim back is capped at £1768.94 a month. We recognise that childcare costs apply to each individual child and it is not right that we have a system that doesn't reflect this. We will support larger families to enter and stay in employment by increasing the Universal Credit childcare cost caps for families with more than two children.

Eligible parents with more than two children will be reimbursed up to £737.06 in UC childcare support for each additional child in childcare, as part of their Universal Credit childcare claim. We are also extending eligibility for Upfront Childcare Costs to parents returning to work following parental leave, reducing financial barriers to work and supporting smooth transitions back into employment.

The Government should address the inadequate levels of social security. Once payment levels have increased, the value of social security must be maintained in the longer term through regular uprating.

The Government recognises the critical role Universal Credit has to play in tackling poverty and making work pay and we continue to make important steps to ensure people receive the financial support they need.

The Universal Credit Act delivers the first sustained, above inflation rise in the basic rate of Universal Credit since it was introduced. This means a little under four million households will benefit overall from government's decision to increase the Universal Credit standard allowance, estimated to be worth around £760 annually in cash terms for a single parent aged 25 or over (£250 above inflation) or £1195 (£400 above inflation) for a couple where one is aged 25 or over with children by 2029/30.

As the Secretary of State set out in the Written Statement on 26 November, we will also be uprating most working age benefits across Great Britain in 2026/27 in line with the Consumer Price Index for the year to September 2025 – an increase of 3.8%, subject to parliamentary approvals. For child element, this means a customer will be entitled to £351.88 for their first child born before 6 April 2017 and £303.94 for all other children from April 2026.

The Government must publish clear guidance and information so that work coaches, single parents, and those providing advice and support services all understand the detail of the UC regime and are very clear about the expectations the system places on claimants.

The Department is committed to providing transparent and accessible guidance on UC requirements. We have published detailed operational models and continue to update customer-facing materials to ensure clarity on expectations. Work coaches receive structured training on UC regimes, including Light Touch and Intensive Work Search, and guidance is reinforced through learning and development programmes. We also offer voluntary progression support for customers, focusing on skills gaps and training opportunities to help individuals progress in work.

The Government should set a more positive tone in its leadership of the system to help create a less hostile environment and ensure this translates to training of and expectations of staff.

As part of their induction and onboarding, new starters to DWP receive mandatory learning on DWP's purpose, priorities and values, and the standards of behaviour. This also covers the importance of treating every customer with respect and empathy, ensuring we understand and respond individual needs.

Work coaches complete a comprehensive learning journey to build the skills and knowledge needed to offer meaningful, tailored customer support. This includes communication skills and how to treat customers with respect, tailoring commitments to individual circumstances, and ensuring work-related requirements are adjusted or switched off when required.

Additionally, Work Coach Team Leaders learn coaching techniques, effective leadership behaviours and undertake skills-practice, ensuring team leaders can apply these approaches confidently in their role in supporting Work Coaches.

As part of the Jobs and Careers Service, we are developing a new Get Britain Working Coaching Academy that will focus on professionalising the support we offer to customers empowering service delivery colleagues to deliver transformational, person-centred support, equipping colleagues with adaptable, evidence-based coaching skills. Learning will encourage personalisation, empathy, and trust-building through outcome focused practice. We are in the early stages of designing the Coaching Academy, including its audience, structure and learning packages, and started testing it earlier this year through our Jobs and Careers Service Pathfinder in Wakefield.

We recognise the impacts that potentially traumatic events can have on an individual and their families, including bereavement and traumatic separation. This is why the DWP has committed to becoming a more trauma informed organisation. We have a dedicated programme which will integrate the six key pillars of the approach as defined by the Office for Health Improvements and Disparities (December, 2022) which are safety, trustworthiness, choice, empowerment, collaboration and cultural consideration. Our programme looks at these six pillars within the contexts of application to our colleagues, our customers, our culture, and the context of our interaction- whether that is a physical, telephony, digital or postal interaction. Co-production is a critical element of the programme, and we would welcome the opportunity to discuss our commitment with Gingerbread.

A Trauma Informed Approach is also being weaved throughout the delivery of our new coaching academy to influence the learning journey of our operational frontline colleagues. The academy focusses on person centred tailoring and a strengths based approach informed by the six core pillars.

The Government should introduce specialist single parent work coaches as part of the major overhaul of Jobcentre Plus.

DWP currently deploys around 300 Family Community Work Coaches (FCWCs) in England only. FCWCs:

- support the most vulnerable families in society with multiple, complex needs to make significant, positive changes in their lives that move them towards employment.
- take a holistic, 'whole family' approach to supporting customers and regularly work in community settings.
- contribute to the drive for growth and reduction in child poverty by providing holistic support to families to secure and sustain employment.
- They also address barriers such as non-payment of child maintenance, parental conflict and can support children who are Not in Employment, Education or Training (NEET).

The new and enhanced digital model should free up work coach time and expertise to support more people and provide more tailored support for those who are more disadvantaged in the labour market.

The Government should abolish the two-child limit and the household benefit cap.

I know that you and other organisations have long campaigned for the removal of the two child limit in Universal Credit, and so I am delighted that this Government is investing in the future of our children by reinstating support for all children.

The removal of the two child limit will lift 450,000 children out of poverty, rising to around 550,000 alongside other measures announced this year, such as the expansion of free school meals. These interventions will lead to the largest expected reduction in child poverty over a Parliament since comparable records began.

However, we want to preserve the fundamental principle that work is the best way out of poverty. Leaving the overall benefit cap in place encourages personal responsibility while maintaining incentives to work as, where possible, it is in the best interest of children to be in working households. Being in work substantially reduces the chance of poverty: the poverty rate of children living in households where all adults work is 17% compared to 65% for children who live in households where no adults work.

Through our Get Britain Working reforms, we will strengthen our employment support so that people can unlock and fulfil their potential.

People who are working and earning at least £846 each month are exempt from the benefit cap. There is also protection for the most vulnerable as those who are caring or are severely disabled are exempt from the benefit cap.

I want to thank you once again for the opportunity to meet with you, and for your letter. I would be very grateful if we could arrange to meet again to continue our discussion about the topics you raised during the roundtable event.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen Timms". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line above the "m" and "s" in "Timms".

Rt Hon. Sir Stephen Timms MP
Minister for Social Security and Disability