

Additional Reading Booklet

Social Policy and Family – Ms Agnihotri

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**SOCIAL
POLICY**

Cut to disability benefits may make return to work harder, claim MPs

This article is more than **3 years old**

Government warned cutting benefits by almost £30 a week may push many disabled people into poverty, instead of incentivising them back into work

Patrick Butler *Social policy editor*

Fri 3 Feb 2017 00.01 GMT Last modified on Wed 31 May 2017 23.01 BST



Ministers justified the cuts by claiming the reduction would supposedly remove ‘perverse incentives’ that discourage people from returning to work Photograph: Maskot/Getty Images/Maskot

Government plans to cut disability unemployment benefit for new claimants could make it harder for them to find work and push many into poverty, an all-party group of MPs has said.

Ministers justified plans to cut £29 a week from employment and support allowance (ESA) payments on the grounds that the reduction would supposedly remove “perverse incentives” that discourage people from returning to work.

But MPs on the work and pensions select committee questioned whether cutting benefit rates would incentivise ill and disabled claimants to get a job, concluding that the evidence was “at best, ambiguous”.

The MPs’ report said that while the cut would generate estimated savings of £450m a year by 2021 there was a risk that it “will affect disabled people’s quality of life and likelihood of moving into work”.

The cut, due to come into force in April, will affect an estimated 500,000 new claimants in the ESA work related activity group over the next four years. This cohort, who have been found unfit to work, will receive £73.10 a week, in line with Jobseeker’s Allowance (JSA) – a reduction of £29.05 on the current rate.

The committee said for many new ESA claimants the impact would be compounded because they face higher living costs than JSA claimants, and typically had to get by on benefits for longer. Although ministers promised to provide extra support with living costs, MPs said it was not clear how this would be provided.

The committee welcomed the government's target of getting over a million disabled people into employment by 2025, it warned there were no quick solutions, citing an estimate by the Learning and Work Institute thinktank that on current rates of progress, it would take over 200 years to achieve.

It welcomed the government's intention to reform the much-criticised fit-for-work test known as the work capability assessment. It said it had "for too long been a source of stress and anxiety for disabled people".

Ministers should overhaul advice on the use of sanctions, whereby benefit claimants receive financial penalties for apparent breaches of job centre rules, it said. Inappropriate sanctions caused significant hardship, affected individuals' health, and made a return to work less likely.

A DWP spokesman said: "Our welfare reforms are increasing the support and incentives for people to move into work, while keeping an important safety net in place for those who need it."

Liz Sayce, the chief executive of Disability Rights UK, said: "The select committee is right to highlight the forthcoming cuts to employment support allowance as wrong in principle and ineffective in practice. We're not aware of one single disability employment or benefits expert who thinks this particular cut will be an incentive for disabled people to get a job."

Mark Atkinson, chief executive at disability charity Scope, said: "We know that reducing disabled people's incomes won't incentivise them to find a job and won't help halve the disability employment gap. It will just make life harder."

Debbie Abrahams, the shadow work and pensions secretary, described the report as "a clear indictment that the Tories are failing to support disabled people".

Rob Holland, of learning disability charity Mencap, said: "This report shows yet again that the government has presented no robust evidence that cutting disabled people's benefits will 'incentivise' them to find work. Instead the evidence suggests that this £30-a-week cut will push disabled people further from work, closer to or into poverty as well as affecting their health."

The ESA cut, announced by the former chancellor George Osborne in 2015, came into law last year despite a Lords' defeat in which peers warned that it would push claimants into poverty.

Reference: <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/feb/03/cut-to-disability-benefits-may-make-return-to-work-harder-claim-mps>

What is universal credit - and what's the problem?

By Rachel SchraerBBC Reality Check

22 January 2020

Labour leadership hopeful Lisa Nandy has said the principle of universal credit - the major reform to simplify the benefits system - was "the right one", but criticised cuts and a lack of support for claimants.

Universal credit was introduced by the Conservative-led coalition government in 2010, but has proved controversial almost from the beginning.

So what is universal credit?

Universal credit is a benefit for working-age people, replacing six benefits and merging them into one payment:

- income support
- income-based jobseeker's allowance
- income-related employment and support allowance
- housing benefit
- child tax credit
- working tax credit

It was designed to make claiming benefits simpler.

A single universal credit payment is paid directly into claimants' bank accounts to cover the benefits for which they are eligible.

Claimants then have to pay costs such as rent out of their universal credit payment - though there is a provision for people who are in rent arrears or have difficulty managing their money to have their rent paid directly to their landlord.

The latest available figures show that there were 2.6 million universal credit claimants as of October 2019. Just over a third of claimants were in employment.

How does it work?

The idea of universal credit is that it can be claimed whether you are in or out of work.

There's no limit to the number of hours you can work per week if you receive it, but your payment reduces gradually as you earn more.



It is designed to mean that no-one faces a situation where they would be better off claiming benefits than working.

Under the old system many faced a "cliff edge", where people on a low income would lose a big chunk of their benefits in one go as soon as they started working more than 16 hours.

In the new system, benefit payments are reduced at a consistent rate as income and earnings increase - for every extra £1 you earn after tax, you will lose 63p in benefits.

How much you can receive in universal credit payments in the first place depends on things like whether you have children and if you qualify for housing or disability payments.

Payments are then reduced from this maximum amount the more you earn - although each household can earn a certain amount, called a work allowance, before they lose anything.

What are the concerns?

Cuts to universal credit since it was announced have made the overall system significantly less generous.

For example, the work allowance has been cut so people can earn a smaller amount of money before their benefit payments start to reduce.

Low pay charity the Resolution Foundation warned that these kind of cuts may weaken the benefit's main purpose - to make sure people always feel it's worthwhile to work more hours.

There have also been concerns over how long new claimants have to wait before receiving the benefit.

Universal credit is paid in arrears. For example, if you sign on on 1 January, you'll receive your first payment on 5 February, based on what you earned in the previous month.

So four weeks of earnings are assessed, plus a further week to process the payment.

Those who don't have enough money saved to wait 35 days from claim to payment can get an advance on their first instalment of the benefit. But this is treated as a loan that is then taken off future benefits payments for the following year.

The fact that it is assessed monthly has also proved difficult for some people who are paid weekly and whose pay fluctuates throughout the month.

- **Why some people on universal credit struggle to budget monthly**

In a written statement to Parliament, Work and Pensions Secretary Theresa Coffey said. "we provide alternative payment arrangements such as more frequent payment options and managed payments to landlords."

Will some people lose money?

Transferring onto universal credit from the old system will mean a loss of at least £1,000 a year for 1.9 million adults, and a gain of at least £1,000 a year for 1.6 million adults, according to an April 2019 **report by independent think tank the Institute for Fiscal Studies**.

Those with the lowest incomes stand to lose the most.

The government has set aside £3bn in total to ease this process, designed to ensure that no-one moving from the old to the new system will lose out initially.

But new claimants won't benefit from the protection and if people's circumstances change or if they come off benefits and then go back on them, they will lose this transitional protection.

Think tank the **Resolution Foundation** in 2017 said that, "the long list of conditions that are deemed to reflect a change in circumstance, bringing such support to an end, is likely to mean relatively short durations of protection".

The independent **Office for Budget Responsibility** said in 2018 that around **400,000 claimants** would receive the protection.

Reference: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-41487126>

MPs oppose 'bedroom tax' being applied to domestic abuse survivors

By Anna Collinson & Jamilla MalikBBC Victoria Derbyshire programme
10 March 2020

The government must stop applying the so-called "bedroom tax" to domestic abuse survivors fleeing their partners, 44 MPs have written in a letter seen by the BBC's Victoria Derbyshire show.

One rape survivor, living in a home adapted for her safety, had her housing benefits cut because of her spare room.

The European Court of Human Rights said her case was discriminatory. A government bid to appeal was refused.

The government said it was "carefully considering" the court's decision.

The MPs - from all the major political parties in Westminster - said vulnerable women "must not be forced out" of the safe houses, provided by the UK's Sanctuary Scheme, by the policy.



The letter said 281 households in the scheme were currently subject to such "penalties".

Six-year battle

The woman - who is preserving her right to anonymity - is a victim of rape, assault, harassment and stalking at the hands of an ex-partner, her lawyers said.

She was given specially-adapted social housing designed to enable women and children at serious risk of domestic violence to live safely.

The property included a panic space and extra security measures, her lawyers added.

But because the house - occupied by the woman and her young son - was three-bedroomed, it led to a 14% cut in housing benefits - as she was only entitled to receive housing benefit for a two-bedroom property.

After a six-year legal battle, the UK government was ordered by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) to pay the woman 10,000 euros (£8,600) in compensation. The court found the policy had unlawfully discriminated against her.

The woman told the Victoria Derbyshire programme: "The constant worry about whether we would be made to leave our home... has been truly awful.

"It's made me anxious not only about money, but also has reminded me of the terrible violence I experienced and had thought I was safe from.

"I am so relieved to know that hopefully my battle is nearly over."

The Department for Work and Pensions sought to appeal against the decision, but had its application rejected.

'Life and death matter'

Now 44 MPs have written to Work and Pensions Secretary Therese Coffey urging her "to take immediate action on this life and death matter".

"The government has committed to improving protection and support for survivors through the new domestic abuse bill," the open letter - coordinated by Labour MP Stella Creasy and supported by charity Women's Aid - said.

"The application of the 'bedroom tax' to Sanctuary Schemes clearly undermines this aim.

"So too, seeking to encourage people to leave their homes for smaller ones as this policy does, is also in conflict with the aim of Sanctuary Schemes - which are designed to enable those at risk of domestic violence to remain in their homes safely.

"We call on the government to act now and create an exemption for this very vulnerable group."

It added that exemptions were already in place for other groups, including disabled siblings who need their own bedrooms, foster carers and households with overnight carers for disabled people.

The government said there were no plans to abolish its policy on the removal of the spare room subsidy.

It said the policy helped contain "growing housing benefit expenditure", strengthens work incentives and makes better use of available social housing.

Reference: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-51805684>

‘It was seen as weird’: why are so few men taking shared parental leave?

Only 2% of new parents split their entitlement. Fathers tell us what’s stopping them

Simon Usborne

Sat 5 Oct 2019 06.00 BST Last modified on Wed 11 Dec 2019 14.21 GMT



David Freed, with his son: ‘I got the message I was doing something that might affect my career.’ Photograph: Anna Schori/The Guardian

When Paul and Caroline Roberts had their first child almost two years ago, Paul was determined to do more at home than his own father, who had worked 18-hour days, seven days a week. “I never saw him, and I didn’t want it to be like that for my son,” Paul says. “As soon as he arrived, I knew I wanted to be with him every moment I could.”

Paul works in a factory in the north of England, where he lives with his wife Caroline, an accountant for a large organisation. They don’t want to be more specific for fear of jeopardising their careers (they have also protected their real names).

The Roberts had heard about shared parental leave (SPL), the policy, introduced in 2015, that allows eligible parents to split maternity leave. Caroline was keen, because she worried about taking too much time away from her career; but the family’s wish to share her leave soon hit bureaucratic, financial and cultural brick walls.

“Why would you want to stay at home?” Paul remembers incredulous male colleagues asking. Application forms for SPL were not circulated alongside those for maternity or paternity leave, and the human resources department was unhelpful. Sharing the leave would also have made the family poorer; Caroline earns more than Paul, and her employer’s maternity package is relatively generous. Had she transferred a chunk of it to Paul under SPL, it would have dropped to the statutory minimum of £148.68 a week.

Two weeks after the birth of his son, Paul went back to the factory. “It was bad. I felt really down,” he says. “I missed my boy.” Caroline resented it, too. As well as

managing life-changing new circumstances at home alone, she later had to pass up a promotion that would have clashed with the end of her maternity leave.

SPL, which seemed so progressive at its launch, has turned out to be messier than a toddler's dinner. It began as an alternative to maternity leave, which, at the statutory minimum, entitles a mother to 52 weeks off work, 39 of which are paid (90% of earnings for six weeks, then £148.68 for 33 weeks), and paternity leave (two weeks at £148.68 per week). Under SPL, a mother must take two weeks of maternity leave after the birth, but can move to SPL for the remaining 50 weeks, 37 of which are paid. A couple can share those 50 weeks, either taking half in turn – alternating blocks, or, say, 25 weeks together.

The criteria for claiming include a minimum length of employment with the same company and an eight-week notice period. (Agency, contract workers or the self-employed are not eligible.) Employers are required to grant shared leave to eligible staff who apply for it, and pay them, reclaiming it from the government by way of reduced national insurance contributions. Got it?

Dads are still expected to see work as the priority. Many are given grunt jobs for daring to challenge the norms

As the Roberts found, the complexity of SPL has been part of the reason parents aren't rushing to take it – and employers aren't racing to offer it. Earlier this year, the government launched a £1.5m “[share the joy](#)” campaign in an attempt to boost uptake of as little as 2%. Meanwhile, research published in August by the law firm EMW, based on claims filed by businesses with HMRC, suggests that [less than a third](#) of fathers take statutory two-week paid paternity leave, a figure that is in decline.

“For the modern generation, fatherhood is being expressed in totally different ways from before,” says Han-Son Lee, a digital marketer whose experience (he struggled to get decent leave when he became a father) partly inspired him to launch the parenting website [DaddiLife](#). “But the vast majority of workplaces haven't caught up, and dads are still expected to follow the stereotype of being at work is the priority.”

Campaigners describe a vicious cycle; even well-intentioned couples submit to a deterrent climate, unwittingly perpetuating low expectations and poor policy. In workplaces, men are too often tacitly or explicitly discouraged from taking leave. “And so many dads are given grunt work for daring to challenge norms,” Lee adds. One anonymous father recalls the macho congratulations his colleague at a bank received on returning to his desk the day after leaving the labour ward.

When David Freed was an economist in the public sector in London, he had no problem arranging shared leave when he and his wife, Charlotte, had a son in 2016. Charlotte took five months off her job in finance, after which David took seven months. He felt lucky, but noticed a change when he got back. “I got the message I was doing something a bit weird, that might affect my career,” Freed says. “They'd say: ‘When you became a dad, your priorities seemed to lie elsewhere.’ Well, yeah, but when I was at work, I was at work. Nothing had changed.”

Bad policy has far-reaching implications. Earlier this year, researchers from Georgetown University in Washington DC [studied](#) the way having children “traditionalised” couples’ division of labour, delaying the “second half” of the gender revolution – in the home – long after women have made huge advances in education and the workforce. Even in countries with SPL, women still do more in the home when children arrive. Only one policy appeared to nudge the balance: a form of enhanced paternity leave known as “a father’s quota” – a chunk of leave that a couple loses unless the father takes it. Among the couples in the study of 35 countries, 28% practised a modern division of labour without the father’s quota, and 34% with it.



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Freed with his wife, Charlotte, and their son: ‘In Sweden, there are probably more dads out with babies than mums.’ Photograph: Anna Schori/The Guardian

Just over a year ago, Freed and his family left the UK after Charlotte got a job in Sweden, a father’s quota trailblazer. Today, couples in Sweden have one leave policy. They are entitled to a total of [480 days of leave](#), 390 days of which are paid at 80% of salary. Within that total, each parent has a use-or-lose quota of 90 days. The remaining 300 days of the 480-day total can be shared. As a result, fathers have been taking steadily bigger chunks of the total leave period – [up to 27.9%](#) in 2017.

Quotas, versions of which exist in Norway and Iceland, [have critics](#), and gender gaps persist in these countries; but they have transformed family life, from the playground up. “During the week, there are probably more dads out with babies than mums,” Freed says. In workplaces, it is assumed that new fathers will disappear for months, not days. Freed was amazed to observe parents routinely dashing from meetings to nursery pick-ups at 3.30pm – without judgment. If there is a culture of presenteeism in Sweden, it exists at home, not work.

Freed, whose experience in England inspired him to write [Dads Don’t Babysit: Towards Equal Parenting](#), alongside fellow frustrated father James Millar, has noticed Swedish dads are better at sharing child-rearing responsibilities as well as day-to-day duties. If a father invites him to a playdate, he’ll get straight back. “In the UK, we’d be like: ‘Yeah, let me just ask my wife.’ It’s a huge cultural difference, and it takes pressure off mums to be responsible for everything,” he says.

Shared leave – or lack of it – has also been linked to gender pay gaps, which [widen drastically](#) when women have children. The gaps never close, partly because mothers are much more likely to work part-time, while families grapple with domestic logistics, childcare costs and the self-perpetuating pay gap itself – which means it tends to make financial sense for fathers to work more.

The UK government at least recognises there is a problem, while also challenging its purported scale. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy said in a statement that SPL uptake is in the range it estimated when it launched (2% to 8%). “We are consulting on options for how we may better balance the gender division of parental leave and pay,” the statement added. That consultation, launched in July by Theresa May, envisages longer leave for dads. “We’re not sending fathers the correct message when our current leave allowances give women 26 times more leave than men,” the former prime minister [wrote in the Guardian](#) at the time.

Any improvements will need to catch up with a changing workforce. Dozens of companies are already acting. Just a year after the insurance company Aviva offered parents of either gender 52 weeks of leave, 26 on full pay, 95% of eligible fathers were taking more than two weeks and [67% took six months](#). Average paternity leave leapt from two to 21 weeks. Netflix, IBM and Twitter also have packages that wouldn’t look out of place in Stockholm. But these are corporate giants who can cover empty desks, and for whom progressive benefits are as much recruitment and marketing tools as they are ethical advances.

William's wife needed a long recovery. His boss said, 'Get someone else to help. Haven't you got a mother-in-law?'

“If you’re a startup and lose your only salesperson for three months, you have a much bigger problem,” says Matt Bradburn, co-founder of London-based [People Collective](#), which advises startups on human resources. Founders, while typically socially progressive, are often childless young men who “continue to see statutory leave as the standard”, Bradburn adds. When companies grow and age they now tend to enhance paternity leave to avoid the complexities of SPL, another criticism of the policy. Campaigners want the government to better support smaller companies who want to offer enhanced leave.

For the self-employed – now a record [15% of the workforce](#) – having children costs the most. Self-employed mothers can apply for £148.68 a week of maternity allowance for 39 weeks (equivalent to £7,731 a year). Fathers get nothing. The government consultation excludes self-employed parents, because of the “flexibility and autonomy [they have] over the time they take off”. But flexibility doesn’t pay the bills.

Sometimes bad policy can trigger horrific chains of events – and unexpected solutions. William, not his real name, had to fight for two weeks off after the birth of his first child. He told his boss that a complication in pregnancy would require a caesarean and a long recovery for his wife and son. “Well, get someone else to help,” my boss said. ‘Haven’t you got a mother-in-law?’ We didn’t.”

Recovery for mothers after a particularly tough labour has often barely begun after two weeks. William had to go back to work. “My wife phoned me every half hour, crying,” he says. Two years later, even in the face of another complex caesarean, nothing had shifted in his company’s stance. The stress this caused led to severe mental health problems and suicidal thoughts. “I went down a very dark path,” he says.

William got therapy and quit his job. He stayed at home to care for his family for as long as his finances allowed. Then he retrained as a nursery worker. His income has plummeted and, as a rare man in childcare, he’s battling the stereotypes and stigma that imbalanced parenting can perpetuate. “I’ve had everything from ‘paedo’ to ‘what do you know about children?’,” he says, while trying to be positive about progress, if not the speed of it. “It’s still always mums dropping off children and dealing with everything,” he adds. “I don’t see many dads. But that has to change.”

Reference: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/oct/05/shared-parental-leave-seen-as-weird-paternity-leave-in-decline>

Government pushes for more 'family-friendly' work policies

POLICY & SECTORS 29TH AUG 2019

The government recently announced that it is seeking feedback on a series of 'family-friendly' policy proposals designed to support parents and carers in the workplace. The consultations are part of the government's [Good Work Plan](#) to improve the quality of work in the UK.

The first big question explores whether employers with more than 250 employees should be required to make the details of their parental leave and flexible working policies public. The government believes that making companies publish their parental leave and flexible working policies online would help candidates make more informed decisions on whether they can combine the role with caring for their family.

The practice would also remove the fear some female candidates have about asking prospective employers about their maternity packages and policies. A [survey by Glassdoor](#) revealed that 51 per cent of female candidates do not ask about maternity packages for fear that their prospective employer might think they are pregnant, while 31 per cent said they feared it would hinder their future career progression

within the organisation. It may also increase the attractiveness of certain roles: a similar survey found that 25 per cent of women give parental leave heavy consideration when considering whether to accept a role.

Furthermore, pushing large employers to publish their parental leave and flexible working policies online will bring large employers under pressure to provide attractive parental leave packages that match or exceed those of their competitors. As always we will be highlighting the impact of using a broad definition of employee in bringing temporary workers into scope.

The government is also considering creating "a duty for employers to consider whether a job can be done flexibly, and make that clear when advertising". It is unclear how this legislation could work or be enforced in practice.

However, the government's aim to increase the number of adverts which mention flexibility is to be welcomed. We sit on the Flexible Working Taskforce, a coordinating group of government and experts who try and think of ways to promote this. As the REC's previous report on gender diversity, [Increasing Opportunity, Supporting Growth](#), revealed, there is a strong, positive correlation between flexible work and diversity in the workplace.

Being open to flexible working and making it clear in the job advert can significantly increase a company's talent pool and attract applications from diverse candidates. At senior levels, the Lord Davies Review on women on boards found that one of the key barriers to improving board diversity in gender terms was a lack of flexibility around work-life balance, particularly with regard to maternity leave and young families. Making flexibility the norm helps level the playing field between men and women when it comes to recruitment, employment and the unconscious bias of employers.

Reference: <https://www.rec.uk.com/news-and-policy/corporate-blog/government-pushes-for-more-family-friendly-work-policies>

Press release

Multi-million support for vulnerable children during COVID-19

Extra support to keep children at risk of neglect or abuse safe during the Coronavirus outbreak

Published 24 April 2020

From:

[Department for Education](#) and [Vicky Ford MP](#)



Vulnerable children most at risk of neglect, violence or exploitation will benefit from extra support to keep them safe during the Coronavirus outbreak.

More than £12 million will be spent on 14 projects across the country to tackle the increased risk some children and young people are facing as they stay at home to reduce the spread of Coronavirus. This will include money to pay for individual support for families at risk of domestic abuse, community volunteers to work with families, and continued support for teenagers at risk of exploitation.

The money will benefit children in care and care leavers, and will be used to also support vulnerable children's mental health and to provide practical and emotional help. This includes a package of funding to give young people in some project areas unlimited data on their phones for three months so they can stay connected and prevent them suffering from isolation.

The funding builds on the Government's work to protect vulnerable children and young people's wellbeing, that includes working with schools, social workers and local authorities to encourage them to continue attending school wherever appropriate.

Children and Families Minister Vicky Ford said:

I will always put the care and safety of vulnerable children first, especially at this time as they face unique challenges due to COVID-19. For many of these children, social distancing measures may present additional risks, whether from neglect or abuse at home or from strangers online.

We are working hand in hand with all the professionals supporting these children to prioritise their wellbeing during these unprecedented times. These new projects will prevent children suffering from isolation or exploitation as the country continues to respond to COVID-19.

The £12 million package includes work on:

- **Adolescent exploitation:**
For teenagers across North London who experience multiple risks, bringing together NHS, social care, police, criminal justice and third sector services under one roof – a “child house” to support children and families affected by child sexual abuse and exploitation
- **Domestic abuse support:**
Through a domestic abuse programme in Newham that works with whole families, to reduce the chances of it from happening in the first place through early intervention, and where a designated social worker will work intensively with families if risks escalate
- **Children in care:**
Various programmes around the country to build lasting support networks for children and families in the care system including foster parents, to prevent social isolation at this time, as well as finding homes for young people leaving care;
- **Mental health support:**
Families in Camden will receive a range of services from which families choose the ones they want to rely on, including mediation, mentoring, family therapy and youth support

Chief Social Worker for Children and Families Isabelle Trowler said:

It's never been more important for children and their families to receive the support they need. In the true spirit of dedicated public service it is so heartening to see these projects adapting and continuing to deliver services in times of unprecedented challenge.

Education is a strong protective factor for many vulnerable children and young people, which is why the Government is also ensuring there is a place in nursery, school or college for them.

Alongside this, the Government has also set out significant support for services benefitting these young people and their families, including:

- Additional funding of £3.2 billion for local authorities, helping them meet additional demands including within children's social care services at this time;
- £1.6 million to expand and promote the NSPCC's helpline, offering advice and support on how to raise concerns about children at risk;
- £8 million from the [Adoption Support Fund](#) to help families under pressure as a result of the outbreak;
- Better data sharing between all safeguarding partners, making sure the NHS, police, social workers, school nurses and health workers have the information they need to protect children at risk of abuse;
- New teams of Department for Education and Ofsted staff leading work around the country to gather data on vulnerable children's attendance at school or other settings, providing a overall picture of the risks facing these children so that councils can follow best practice;
- Tackling the barriers that many of them face, providing laptops and tablets for children with social workers and care leavers to help them keep in touch with the services they need;
- Providing continued funding for free school meals, so that eligible children benefit from this even if they are not in school; and
- More than £33 million for the Staying Put programme, supporting young people leaving care to continue living with their foster parents past age 18 and preventing the risk of becoming homeless, and a further £9 million to provide personal adviser support for care leavers through to 25, helping them into employment, education and training.

This comes after the Education Secretary asked local authorities to ensure that no one has to leave care during this difficult time.

Part of the Department for Education's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme, the funding announced today builds on investment worth almost £270 million since 2014, driving innovation and sharing best practice to improve outcomes for children by increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of children's social care services.

Reference: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/multi-million-support-for-vulnerable-children-during-covid-19>

Social policy academics say raise Child Benefit to help families in crisis

TUE 31 MAR 2020

Our advice to Government, as social security experts, is that a rise in Child Benefit offers an immediate way forward.

- *Professor Sir John Hills*

With millions of families facing a catastrophic loss of income due to the coronavirus, 85 leading social policy academics from LSE and universities across the UK, have signed a letter calling on the Chancellor to raise Child Benefit to £50 per child per week. They say it is a simple, efficient and cost-effective way to provide urgently needed help.

Increasing Child Benefit would immediately get money to families, with no waits, no complex claim forms and no new administration. It just needs a stroke of the Chancellor's pen and a change to a computer code.

The signatories, including Professor Sir John Hills of LSE and Loughborough University's Professor Baroness Lister of Burtsett, say in the letter that raising Child Benefit "crucially requires no changes to systems and will offer instant impact".

They add: "There continues to be frenzied debate about what income support measures are most urgently needed over the next few months, in addition to those already put in place. Our advice to Government, as social security experts who have analysed in detail the relevant data and urgent needs of families, is not to fail to see the wood for the trees. A rise in Child Benefit offers an immediate way forward".

Reference: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/News/Latest-news-from-LSE/2020/c-March-20/Helping-families-facing-Covid-19-crisis>

Free education and childcare for 2-year-olds

Your 2-year-old can get free childcare if you live in England and get one of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Universal Credit, and your household income is £15,400 a year or less after tax, not including benefit payments
- tax credits, and your household income is £16,190 a year or less before tax
- the guaranteed element of Pension Credit
- the Working Tax Credit 4-week run on (the payment you get when you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit)

2-year-olds can also get free childcare if they:

- are looked after by a local authority
- have a statement of [special education needs \(SEN\)](#) or an education, health and care (EHC) plan
- get [Disability Living Allowance](#)
- have left care under an adoption order, special guardianship order or a child arrangements order

You may have to pay for extra costs like meals, nappies or trips.

Contact your childcare provider or [local council](#) to find out more.

If you're a non-EEA citizen who cannot claim benefits

Your 2-year-old may get free childcare if you are getting [support under the Immigration and Asylum Act](#) and have either:

- [claimed asylum](#) in the UK and are waiting for a decision (known as 'part 6')
- been refused asylum in the UK (known as 'section 4')

A 2-year-old you care for may also get free childcare if your household income is £15,400 a year or less after tax, and you have either:

- leave to remain with 'no recourse to public funds' on [family or private life grounds](#)
- the right to live in the UK because you're the main carer of a British citizen (known as a ['Zambrano Carer'](#))