



Written Questions on Work and Pensions

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what alternative arrangements will be made available for benefit claimants who are unable to attend face to face meetings. (30017)

Tabled on: 16 March 2020

Answer:

Mims Davies:

As both the Prime Minister and Chancellor have made clear, the Government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID 19 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.

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether her Department plans to limit (a) Statutory Sick Pay and (b) other benefits in the event that people are required to self-isolate repeatedly. (30013)

Tabled on: 16 March 2020

Answer:

Justin Tomlinson:

As both the Prime Minister and Chancellor have made clear, the Government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID 19 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.

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will change the period of time for calculating maternity pay based on a person's income to the eight weeks period prior to the outbreak of covid-19. (31596)

Tabled on: 18 March 2020

Answer:

Mims Davies:

As both the Prime Minister and Chancellor have made clear, the Government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID 19 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.

The answer was submitted on 23 Mar 2020 at 16:46.

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what plans the Government has to provide emergency supplies to food banks facing shortages during the covid-19 outbreak. (30794)

Tabled on: 17 March 2020

This question was grouped with the following question(s) for answer:

1. To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, whether she has plans to allocate emergency funding to food banks to provide support for claimants of social security benefits that need additional support. (32716)
Tabled on: 20 March 2020
2. To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what plans the Government has to allocate funding to foodbanks to help them support people affected by covid-19. (31524)
Tabled on: 18 March 2020
3. To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will produce a national strategy to ensure that existing and new users of foodbanks will be fed by the food bank networks during the covid-19 pandemic. (32717)
Tabled on: 20 March 2020

Answer:**Will Quince:**

Food banks are independent charitable organisations and, as such, are best placed to decide on the most appropriate arrangements for supporting people who use them. As both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have made clear, the Government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID 19 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.

I also refer the honourable member to the response given by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in response to an oral question made on 19 March:

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2020-03-19/debates/EBB8F3D7-F9F4-4C5C-B913-86FD27851B5D/VulnerablePeopleFoodSupplies>”

Additionally announcements were made at the Prime Minister’s daily briefings on 21 and 22 March in relation to food supply.

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Written Questions on Education

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the effect of the spread of covid-19 on (a) colleges and independent training providers and (b) subcontractors delivering courses under the Adult Education Budget; and what financial support will be offered to providers by his Department to safeguard provision for adult learners for the remainder of the academic year 2019-20. (30100)

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what contractual and financial flexibilities he will put in place for training providers and colleges to ensure that the apprenticeship provider base is sustained during the covid-19 outbreak. (30001)

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to introduce flexibility into the process of apprenticeship observations during the covid-19 outbreak. (30006)

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he will take to allow flexibility for apprenticeship training providers and colleges in the event of employers restricting access to their workforce in response to the covid-19 outbreak. (29999)

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to introduce flexibility into the process of apprenticeship observations during the covid-19 outbreak. (30006)

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the covid-19 outbreak, what steps he will take to support the income of apprenticeship training providers and colleges in the event that contracts can't be fulfilled as a result of a reduction in participation. (30004)

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what flexibility there will be for post-sixteen training providers and colleges from Ofsted inspections during the covid-19 outbreak. (30005)

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate he has made of the amount of emergency funding that further education and sixth form colleges will require to prevent them from having to close during the covid-19 outbreak. (31546)

Tabled on: 18 March 2020

The Department for Education has indicated that it will not be possible to answer this question within the usual time period. An answer is being prepared and will be provided as soon as it is available.

Tabled on: 16 March 2020

These questions were grouped with the following question(s) for answer:

1. To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he will take to allow flexibility for apprenticeship training providers and colleges in the event of employers restricting access to their workforce in response to the covid-19 outbreak. (29999)
Tabled on: 16 March 2020
2. To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what contractual and financial flexibilities he will put in place for training providers and colleges to ensure that the apprenticeship provider

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base is sustained during the covid-19 outbreak. (30001)

Tabled on: 16 March 2020

3. To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the covid-19 outbreak, what steps he will take to support the income of apprenticeship training providers and colleges in the event that contracts can't be fulfilled as a result of a reduction in participation. (30004)

Tabled on: 16 March 2020

4. To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what flexibility there will be for post-sixteen training providers and colleges from Ofsted inspections during the covid-19 outbreak. (30005)

Tabled on: 16 March 2020

5. To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to introduce flexibility into the process of apprenticeship observations during the covid-19 outbreak. (30006)

Tabled on: 16 March 2020

6. To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what estimate he has made of the amount of emergency funding that further education and sixth form colleges will require to prevent them from having to close during the covid-19 outbreak. (31546)

Tabled on: 18 March 2020

Answer:

Gillian Keegan:

The department is very grateful to education providers who are responding to the unique challenge of COVID-19, including making provision to continue support for vulnerable children and key workers following the announcement of 18 March. Clearly, there will be a substantial financial impact on the sector, which requires a strong response.

Firstly, where there are current planned payment profiles, we are seeking to provide stability. The Education and Skills Funding Agency will continue to pay grant-funded providers their scheduled monthly payments for the remainder of the year. Allocations for 2020/21 will have been confirmed by the end of March and payments will be made as profiled. We are also looking to put in place a process for providing reimbursement for additional costs imposed by responding to COVID-19.

Secondly, we want to ensure that apprentices can continue and complete their apprenticeship, wherever possible, despite any break that they have to take as a result of COVID-19. We are committed to working with training providers, end-point assessment organisations and external quality assurance organisations to mitigate the operational and financial impacts of this disruption and maintain the integrity of apprenticeships. We have published apprenticeship guidance and this is available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-apprenticeship-programme-response. For other funding streams, we will be making decisions on where existing rules and models may need to be modified in relation to any planned reconciliation and future year allocations.

For colleges in significant financial difficulties, the existing support arrangements remain in place including through short-term solvency support through emergency funding.

My right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, has also announced a series of wider measures to support employers and employees, recognising the significant impacts caused by COVID-19. Education, training and assessment providers who operate as businesses or charities are able to access the package of measures to support businesses. Details of this support are available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses>. We are working closely with HM Treasury to monitor how the support packages are benefitting organisations and to consider any further action which may be required.

To provide more detailed information for further education providers, we have published operational guidance available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision.

The answer was submitted on 30 Mar 2020 at 19:37.

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Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of freezing the interest on student loans while university education is disrupted by the covid-19 pandemic. (30814)

Tabled on: 17 March 2020

Answer:**Michelle Donelan:**

The system for setting interest rates on student loans is set out in The Education (Student Loans) (Repayment) Regulations 2009, as amended.

The current system protects borrowers if they see a reduction in their income. Repayments are made based on a borrower's monthly or weekly income, not the interest rate or amount borrowed, and no repayments are made for earnings below the repayment thresholds. Repayments are calculated as a fixed percentage of earnings above the relevant repayment threshold. Any outstanding debt is written off at the end of the loan term with no detriment to the borrower. If, at the end of the year, the borrower's total income is below the annual threshold, they may reclaim any repayments from the Student Loans Company made during that year.

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that teacher assessments that will potentially replace exams are fair and impartial. (32727)

Tabled on: 20 March 2020

Answer:**Nick Gibb:**

On 18 March, the Government announced the cancellation of all exams and assessments due to take place in schools and colleges in England this summer, as part of the fight to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Our priority is to ensure that students can move on as planned to the next stage of their lives, including starting university, college or sixth form, a job or an apprenticeship in the autumn. For GCSE, AS and A-level students, we will make sure they are awarded a grade which reflects their work. A calculated grade will be awarded this summer based on a range of the best available evidence, including any non-exam assessment that students have already completed. The independent qualifications regulator, Ofqual, is working urgently with the exam boards and teacher representatives to set out proposals for how these arrangements will work and will be talking to teachers' representatives before finalising an approach, to ensure that the approach taken is as fair as possible.

There is a very wide range of different vocational and technical qualifications as well as other academic qualifications for which students were expecting to sit exams this summer. These are offered by a large number of awarding organisations, and have differing assessment approaches – in many cases students will already have completed modules or non-exam assessment which could provide evidence to award a grade. We are encouraging these organisations to show flexibility and pragmatism to ensure students are not disadvantaged. Ofqual is working urgently with the sector to explore options and we will work with them to provide more details shortly.

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Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent discussions he has had with Ofqual on provision of updated guidance to educational institutions on the summer 2020 (a) examinations and (b) final assessments. (31553)

Tabled on: 18 March 2020

The Department for Education has indicated that it will not be possible to answer this question within the usual time period. An answer is being prepared and will be provided as soon as it is available.

The holding answer was submitted on 23 Mar 2020 at 17:57.

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to allow awarding organisations to enable work from apprentices to be accepted as evidence by video capture and witness testimonials for the next six months during the covid-19 outbreak. (32150)

Tabled on: 19 March 2020

The Department for Education has indicated that it will not be possible to answer this question within the usual time period. An answer is being prepared and will be provided as soon as it is available.

The holding answer was submitted on 24 Mar 2020 at 18:42.

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of the potential merits of providing staff and children in schools with personal protective equipment. (33722)

Tabled on: 23 March 2020

Answer:**Nick Gibb:**

It is important to underline that schools, all childcare settings (including early years settings, childminders and providers of childcare for school-age children), colleges and other educational establishments, remain safe places for children and staff. The fewer children making the journey to school and the fewer children in educational settings, the lower the risk that the virus can spread and infect vulnerable individuals in wider society.

We have published guidance on social distancing in educational settings to limit the risk of the virus spreading. It can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-implementing-social-distancing-in-education-and-childcare-settings>.

We will work with schools, childcare settings and local authorities to ensure that adequate supplies of personal and domestic cleaning products are available to schools. We will issue further detailed guidance regarding the supply and use of personal protective equipment to settings that require it.

The answer was submitted on 31 Mar 2020 at 11:38.

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Written Question to the Chancellor of the Exchequer

Question:

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what financial support from the public purse is available for care providers employing over 250 employees to help those employers cover the cost of statutory sick pay as a result of the covid-19 outbreak for the next six months. (31651)

Tabled on: 18 March 2020

Answer:

Jesse Norman:

At Budget, the Government announced a package of measures to support businesses more widely, including increasing the amount businesses can borrow through the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme from £1.2m to £5m, and ensuring businesses can access the first 12 months of that finance interest free, as Government will cover the first 12 months of interest payments out of public funds. For more information on the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, please go to: www.British-business-bank.co.uk/CBILS.

The Coronavirus Act includes new legal powers enabling the Government to offer further financial support considered necessary to businesses.

All businesses facing short-term cash flow difficulties, of whatever size, are encouraged to engage with their existing finance providers in the first instance to see what assistance they might be able to provide.

Question:

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether he has plans to defer the payment of (a) National Insurance, (b) PAYE and (c) VAT for 12 months for charities, such as The Deep, that rely on visitor income to fund their costs and activities. (32287)

Tabled on: 19 March 2020

This question was grouped with the following question(s) for answer:

1. To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make it his policy to introduce an Immediate deferment of HMRC payments for a period of six months in order to support cash flow for businesses and households during the covid-19 outbreak. (30831)
Tabled on: 17 March 2020
2. To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will reduce employer national insurance contribution rates for businesses that can demonstrate loss of trade as a result of covid-19. (30678)
Tabled on: 17 March 2020
3. To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what plans he has to provide financial support to businesses and households whose incomes will be adversely affected by restrictions in place as a result of covid-19. (30719)
Tabled on: 17 March 2020
4. To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether (a) tax breaks and (b) financial support have been implemented for the self-employed during the coronavirus outbreak. (30744)
Tabled on: 17 March 2020
5. To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will make an assessment of the potential merits of introducing a tax holiday to defer payments from self-employed people ahead of the July

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deadline. (30891)

Tabled on: 17 March 2020

Answer:

Jesse Norman:

The Government has announced an unprecedented package of support for businesses and individuals affected by Covid-19, and remains committed to doing whatever it takes to support the economy as necessary.

UK VAT registered businesses, including charities, can defer VAT payments due with their VAT returns between now and the end of June. No UK VAT registered business will have to make a VAT payment alongside their VAT return to HMRC in that period. They will have until the end of the financial year to repay.

The Government will also give all eligible retail, hospitality and leisure businesses in England a 100% business rates holiday for the next 12 months. The Government also extended the support available to individuals and businesses, including a package of government-backed and guaranteed loans, which make available an initial £330 billion of guarantees – equivalent to 15% of GDP.

For Income Tax Self-Assessment, payments due on the 31st of July 2020 will be deferred until the 31st of January 2021.

Under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, employers (including charities) can put workers on temporary leave and the government will pay them cash grants of 80% of their wages up to a cap of £2,500 a month, providing they keep the worker employed. They will receive the grant from HMRC, covering the cost of wages backdated to 1 March 2020.

Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) will be available for those unable to work because they are self-isolating in line with government advice; this is on top of the Prime Minister's announcement that SSP will be payable from day 1 instead of day 4 for affected individuals. Support will be available through Universal Credit and Contributory Employment and Support Allowance for those not eligible for SSP. HMRC have scaled up their Time to Pay offer to all taxpayers, including charities, who are in temporary financial distress as a result of Covid-19 and have outstanding tax liabilities. Taxpayers can contact HMRC's dedicated Covid-19 helpline to get practical help and advice on 0800 0159 559. The Chancellor will continue to review and make further announcements as events unfold if required.

The answer was submitted on 23 Mar 2020 at 17:28.

Question:

To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the effect of the proposed three month mortgage holidays on individuals credit scores. (31542)

Tabled on: 18 March 2020

Answer:

John Glen:

With regards to personal credit ratings, payment holidays can be a feature of lending products or can be offered by lenders in exceptional circumstances outside of the customer's control. This covers a multitude of potential scenarios, illness being one of them. Where payment holidays as a result of COVID-19 are agreed with a lender, we would expect lenders to ensure that taking a payment holiday should not impact credit scores. Ministers and officials are working closely with industry to protect consumers from harm during these unprecedented times.

The answer was submitted on 23 Mar 2020 at 14:30.

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Written Questions for Health and Social Care

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, what additional mental health support is being provided to vulnerable people who have to self isolate for extended periods of time. (30802)

Tabled on: 17 March 2020

Answer:**Ms Nadine Dorries:**

The Government recognises that social distancing and self-isolation are likely to increase the risk of loneliness and mental health issues.

Public Health England (PHE) have published guidance on social distancing for everyone in the United Kingdom and guidance on self-isolation and staying at home. These include a section on Mental Health and Wellbeing and how to protect older adults and vulnerable people. We are expecting PHE to publish further guidance on how members of the public can look after their mental health and where to get further support. PHE will also be publishing additional advice for the public on the Every Mind Matters website.

We are working with the voluntary sector and across Government to improve mental health support, such as helplines and community volunteering efforts, for those in self isolation.

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, with reference to the Covid-19 Guidance NHS General Dental Services from the Chief Dental Officer, published by the Scottish Government on 17 March 2020, what recent discussions he has had with the Chief Dental Officer for England on updated (a) guidance and (b) support for dentists during the covid-19 outbreak. (31562)

Tabled on: 18 March 2020

The Department of Health and Social Care has indicated that it will not be possible to answer this question within the usual time period. An answer is being prepared and will be provided as soon as it is available.

Question:

To ask the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, whether high-risk people that are social distancing should still attend routine, non-urgent medical appointments. (32728)

Tabled on: 20 March 2020

The Department of Health and Social Care has indicated that it will not be possible to answer this question within the usual time period. An answer is being prepared and will be provided as soon as it is available.

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