



BRIEFING PAPER

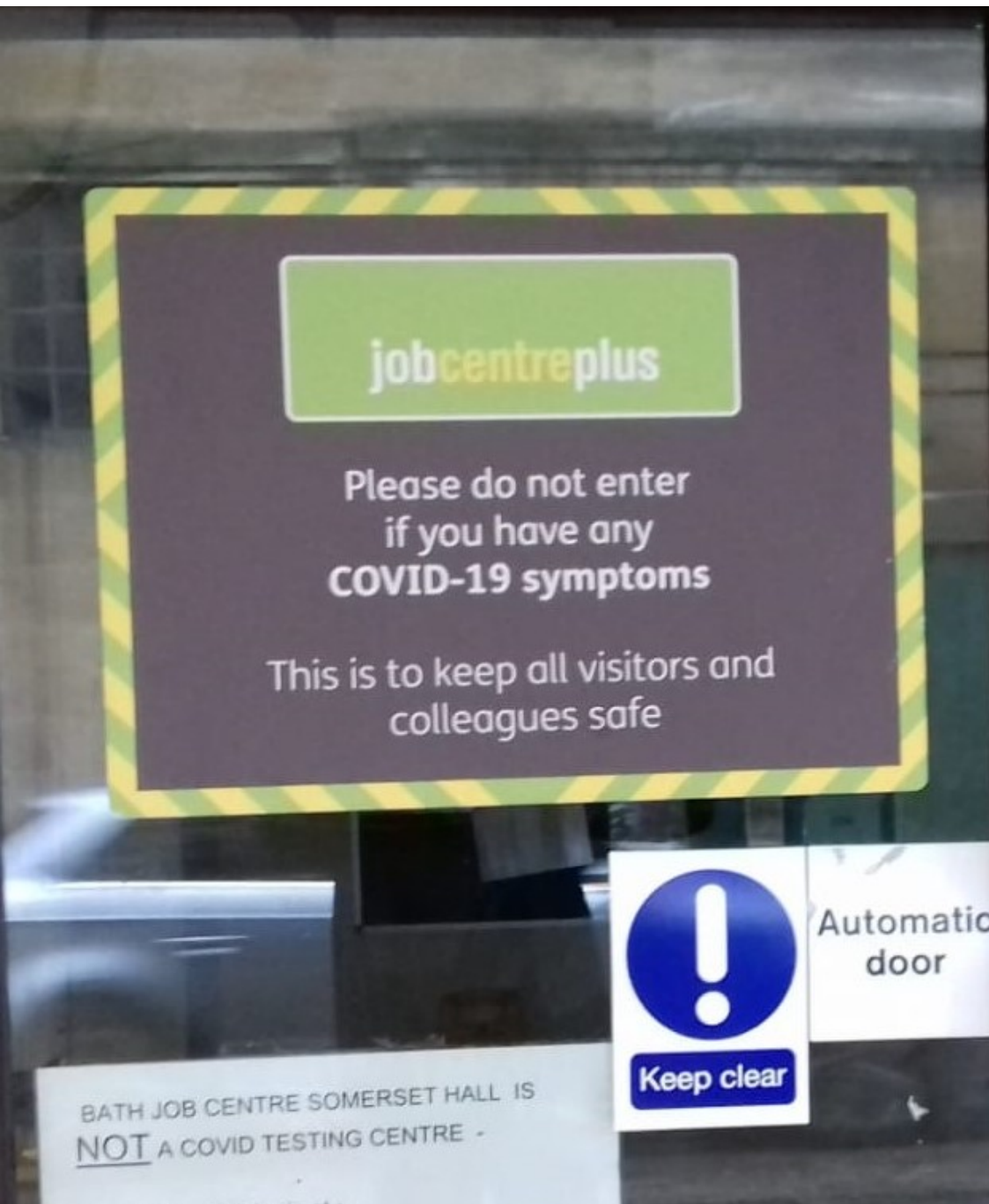
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Coronavirus: Withdrawing crisis social security measures

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Summary

This Commons Library Briefing Paper outlines the social security changes made by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), and other Government departments, in response to the coronavirus crisis, as well as expectations for their withdrawal and plans for the economic recovery.

Many policy issues touched upon in this paper are fast-moving areas which are subject to change. **This paper should therefore be read as correct at the date of publication (8 December).**

The coronavirus outbreak, alongside the public health response to it, has had a dramatic effect on the UK economy, and will continue to do so. The consequences for household finances prompted the Government to make a series of changes to the rules and operation of the benefits system, among many other measures such as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.

Most of these changes, such as increases to benefit levels and the suspensions of work-related conditionality, face-to-face meetings at Jobcentres and disability benefit reassessments, are intended to be temporary. Some measures were withdrawn over the Summer of 2020, but others have been extended or remain under review.

Looking ahead, the DWP is responding to the additional public health measures announced in the Autumn of 2020. The Treasury-run Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and the Self Employment Income Support Scheme have been extended to the end of March 2021. During this time, the Department will be adapting to the ongoing health crisis, managing a significantly higher number of benefit claimants than it anticipated at the beginning of the year, and attempting to meet the challenge of helping people back into work.

This paper is a resource to help understand the expected process of withdrawing crisis social security measures and is split into two parts.

Part 1: Changes to social security during the crisis, which summarises changes and discusses publicly available information concerning DWP plans for recovery from the crisis.

Part 2: Details of changes and expected withdrawal dates, which provides two resources, designed to be regularly updated:

- An up-to-date table outlining major changes to social security made during the crisis, their expected withdrawal dates, and current status.
- A rolling timeline of announcements relating to the withdrawal of social security measures, recovery planning, and related measures.

We cover developing policy, so the contents of this paper will be updated periodically and should be considered current as of the date on the title page.

1. Changes to social security during the crisis

A fuller discussion of changes to the social security system made in response to the coronavirus crisis up to the early summer of 2020 can be found in part 4 of [Coronavirus: Support for household finances, Commons Library Briefing Paper CBP-8894, 22 June 2020](#).

1.1 Summary of changes

The coronavirus crisis has created multiple challenges for the social security system. Benefits have been expected to support people to isolate, shield, and to facilitate social distancing. Lockdowns throughout the UK, and the general reduction in economic activity, have had huge effects, resulting in some sectors of the economy closing altogether. The Treasury's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) and Self Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) attracted a peak of more than 10 million claims, but significant new demand also fell on the existing benefits system.¹

In the early stages of the crisis, the need to keep staff and clients safe through social distancing combined with increased demand from mid-March to place huge operational pressures on the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

In response, the Government made a number of changes, both through new regulations and operational decisions. Many of these are outlined in the table in [section 2](#), and are discussed in more detail in section 4 of our previous briefing, along with calls made by campaigning groups and opposition politicians for further action.² Broadly speaking, these changes fell under the following categories:

- **Increases to the level of some benefits** - claimants of Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit now receive around £20 more a week and the amount available to support private renters has increased.
- **Measures to facilitate social distancing and support those who need to isolate or shield** – changes were made to Statutory Sick Pay, sickness and carer benefits in order to help people follow public health guidelines.
- **Temporary expansions of eligibility** – rules were relaxed for some groups such as prisoners on temporary release and claimants of tax credits whose employment was affected.
- **Changes to assessments and Jobcentre appointments to allow social distancing** – nearly all face-to-face interactions with

¹ See [Coronavirus: Support for household finances](#), Commons Library Briefing Paper CBP-8894, 22 June 2020, pp8-10 and [Coronavirus: Impact on the labour market](#), Commons Library Briefing Paper CBP-8898, 26 November 2020

² [Coronavirus: Support for household finances](#), Commons Library Briefing Paper CBP-8894, 22 June 2020

Jobcentre staff and assessors were suspended, and disability benefit reassessments were paused.

- **Suspending some features of the system in order to redeploy staff into claim processing** – features of the system requiring significant staffing resource, such as applying deductions to benefits for certain kinds of debt, were suspended.
- **Suspending conditionality** – conditions such as meeting work-search requirements and attending regular interviews at jobcentres were switched off.

The status of major social security changes at the time of the latest update can be found in section 2 below.

Most of these changes were explicitly designed to be temporary. As the number of Universal Credit declarations³ declined from a peak in late March⁴, the first measures to be reversed were those made in order to redeploy staff to process claims. For instance, conditionality and deductions to repay certain kinds of debt began to resume in July.

By Autumn 2020 many such measures had been withdrawn. At the same time, there was a significant increase in the number of new Covid-19 cases reported in the UK, bringing with it additional public health responses.

Other changes, such as those designed to help people to follow public health guidelines and to expand eligibility were first planned to continue into the Autumn and have largely been extended into the Spring of 2021.

On 24 September 2020, the Chancellor acknowledged that “for at least the next six months the virus and restrictions are going to be a fact of our lives.” He went on to outline a ‘Winter Economy Plan’ including a Job Support Scheme to succeed the CJRS.⁵ This new scheme was originally planned to open in November, covering a proportion of wage costs where employees are working reduced hours.⁶

With the announcement of new national restrictions from 5 November, the CJRS was extended until December. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care also announced increased generosity to the ongoing SEISS on 2 November.⁷ Very soon thereafter, the schemes were extended again, this time until to the end of March 2021,⁸ delaying any potential introduction of the Job Support Scheme.⁹

However, unlike the 20 March announcement of the CJRS, which included increases to certain benefits,¹⁰ the ‘Winter Economy Plan’ of 24

³ The first step in making a claim

⁴ See [Coronavirus: Support for household finances](#), Commons Library Briefing Paper CBP-8894, 22 June 2020, p.10

⁵ [HC Deb 24 May 2020 c1153](#)

⁶ HM Treasury, [Job Support Scheme policy paper](#), 24 September 2020

⁷ [HCWS549](#) 2 November 2020

⁸ HM Treasury, [Government extends Furlough to March and increases self-employed support](#), 5 November 2020

⁹ HM Treasury, [Furlough Scheme Extended and Further Economic Support announced](#), 31 October 2020

¹⁰ HM Treasury, [The Chancellor Rishi Sunak provides an updated statement on coronavirus](#), 20 March 2020

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September and subsequent announcements extending Treasury-run schemes did not include any new changes to the pre-existing social security system.

The DWP has, however, been extending a number of the measures it introduced in the Spring.

Extensions considered to certain measures

Since September, parliamentarians and campaigning groups have pushed to extend certain social security measures. At the time of publication, the Government is considering some extensions, and has already extended others. For example:

- New regulations were made on 9 October extending the suspension of waiting days in Employment and Support Allowance.¹¹
- The Treasury-run CJRS and SEISS have been extended to the end of March 2021.¹²
- The suspension of the Minimum Income Floor has been extended to the end of April 2021.¹³

Measures to speed up and expand access to benefits, such as the removal of waiting days in ESA and the extension of eligibility for UC to prisoners on temporary release, which had both been due to expire in November, were extended to May 2021.

A more extensive list of the changes and their current status can be found in [section 2](#) below.

Along with the imposition of additional public health restrictions, there has been some additional funding for particular coronavirus-related financial support measures, such as [Test and Trace Support Payments](#), which are administered in England by local authorities on behalf of the Department of Health and Social Care.¹⁴ The DWP also announced a £170 million package of support for Children and Families to provide services such as holiday activities and food.¹⁵

However, the future of other social security measures remains unclear.

Campaigning groups and parliamentarians have asked the Government to think again about the reintroduction of work-related conditionality.¹⁶ Others have argued for further measures to be taken, such as an

¹¹ [The Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit \(Coronavirus Disease\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2020 \(SI 2020/1097\)](#)

¹² HM Treasury, [Government extends Furlough to March and increases self-employed support](#), 5 November 2020

¹³ [HCWS552](#) 3 November 2020

¹⁴ See [Coronavirus: Test and Trace Support Payments](#), Commons Library Briefing Paper CBP-9015, 27 November 2020

¹⁵ DWP, [New winter package to provide further support for children and families](#), 8 November 2020

¹⁶ All Party Parliamentary Group on Universal Credit, [Cross-party coalition of MPs call for reforms to Universal Credit in wake of Covid pandemic](#), 10 September 2020

increase to Child Benefit and contributory benefits, and abolishing the benefit cap.^{17,18}

One issue that has gained particular attention during this time is the status of the “temporary” increases to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit in 2020-21.

Parliamentarians from across the House such as former Conservative Work and Pensions Secretary Stephen Crabb,¹⁹ Labour’s Neil Coyle²⁰ and the SNP’s David Linden²¹ raised the issue in September. The Treasury Committee, in its 11 September report on the ‘Economic impact of coronavirus: the challenges of recovery’, argued:

The Government has raised Universal Credit and made it easier to access. However these changes are time-limited for a year. The Government should consider extending the measures increasing the generosity and accessibility of Universal Credit put in place in March 2020.²²

The Work and Pensions Committee also recommended that the Department:

...should commit to maintaining the increases in support that have been provided during the pandemic. This should include keeping Local Housing Allowance at the 30th percentile and conducting an annual review of rates to ensure they remain appropriate for each area. It should maintain the £20 a week increase in standard allowance for Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit, with annual inflation-based increases thereafter.²³

In the run up to the uprating decisions made this Autumn,²⁴ many campaigning organisations also made a case for retaining the increases and extending them to other benefits which were not included in the original uplift. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation coordinated an open letter calling on the Chancellor to “keep the lifeline”, signed by dozens of charities, campaigning organisations and religious figures.²⁵

Several organisations have published analysis focusing on the impact on households of retaining or reversing the benefit increases. The Institute for Fiscal Studies used its tax-benefit microsimulation model to estimate

¹⁷ Child Poverty Action Group, [Poverty in the pandemic: The impact of coronavirus on low-income families and children](#), 25 August 2020

¹⁸ Resolution Foundation, [Safe harbour? Six key welfare policy decisions to navigate this winter](#), 7 October

¹⁹ See for example [HC Deb 24 September 2020 c1163](#), [HC Deb 15 September 2020 c173](#) and Huffington Post, [Exclusive: PM Warned Not To Cut Furlough Scheme By Ex-Work And Pensions Secretary](#), 31 August 2020

²⁰ [PO 85056 10 September 2020](#)

²¹ [HC Deb 15 September 2020 c159](#)

²² Treasury Committee, [Eighth Report: Economic impact of coronavirus: the challenges of recovery](#), 11 September 2020, HC 271, para 80

²³ [Work and Pensions Committee, Universal Credit: the wait for a first payment, 14 October 2020, HC 204](#), p43

²⁴ Uprating decisions generally have to be made by late November in order to meet IT delivery deadlines. See [explanatory notes to the Social Security \(Up-rating of Benefits\) Bill 2019-21](#), p4

²⁵ Joseph Rowntree Foundation, [Joint open letter to The Chancellor - Keep the lifeline](#), 30 September 2020 and [Coalition warns it would be a terrible mistake to cut the £20 uplift to Universal Credit](#), 29 November 2020

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impact on household types and income deciles.²⁶ Citizens Advice explored the impact which the withdrawal of the temporary increases might have on the people with debt problems who rely on benefits for some or all of their income.²⁷

The Resolution Foundation argued against what it characterised as “Death by £1,000 cuts”, comparing the reductions in household income that would result from removing the temporary increases with cuts to Tax Credits proposed in 2015:

Back in 2015, 3.3 million working families were on track to lose an average of over £1,000 a year from the following April [...] today, the income of roughly twice as many families is at risk, with 6 million households (containing 12 million adults and 6 million children) set to have their income reduced by £20 a week from April 2021. This is principally because this time the cut will affect all recipients of Universal Credit or tax credits, whether they are working or not. Today’s planned cut, at around £8 billion, is therefore over twice as big as the £3.4 billion George Osborne intended (£3.7 billion in 2021-22 money).²⁸

Reporting in The Times on 7 November suggested that “Rishi Sunak is expected to bow to pressure to extend a £20-a-week increase in universal credit for six million people”.²⁹ At the time of writing, however, no official statement had been made to this effect.

Alongside the Spending Review on 25 November, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions made a Written Statement on the statutory annual review of benefits and State Pensions rates, which contained the following announcements:

- An increase in working age benefits in line with CPI – 0.5% in the relevant reference period.
- Maintaining in cash terms the 2020/21 increase to the Local Housing Allowance, though not uprating this or permanently re-establishing a link with market rents.

The Statement noted further that a separate assessment of the temporary £20 uplift to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit, looking “at the economic and health context,” will be made in the new year.³⁰

Stephen Timms, the Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee, expressed concern that leaving the decision on the future of the uplift until 2021 would result in people “facing the Christmas period in agonising uncertainty, not knowing whether the Government will cut their income by £20 a week next April.”³¹ This was echoed by over 60

²⁶ Institute for Fiscal Studies, [IFS Green Budget 2020: Chapter 8: The temporary benefit increases beyond 2020–21](#), 9 October 2020

²⁷ Citizens Advice, [life on less than zero](#), 13 October 2020

²⁸ Resolution Foundation, [Death by £1,000 cuts](#), 2 October 2020

²⁹ [Sunak and Johnson agree to extend universal credit boost](#), The Times [online], 7 November 2020 (accessed 9 November 2020)

³⁰ [HCWS600](#) 25 November 2020

³¹ Stephen Timms MP, [Chair comments on Spending Review](#), 25 November 2020

charities, campaigning groups and religious figures, who were signatories to another Joseph Rowntree Foundation letter.³²

For discussion of how Universal Credit has fared during the crisis, and the debate around its future, see [Coronavirus: Universal Credit during the crisis](#), Commons Library Briefing Paper CBP-8999, 4 September 2020.

1.2 Plans for recovery

Looking forward, the DWP is preparing for a period of dramatically higher benefit caseload, which will create medium-term challenges even if the health situation improves.

The total number of people on Universal Credit in Great Britain rose from around 3 million in March to over 5.7 million in October.³³ The claimant count for other unemployment-related benefits has also risen sharply since the crisis began.³⁴

The Treasury's CJRS and SEISS were extended until the end of March 2021 but are still planned come to an end. At this point, more may make claims on the benefits system. The Office for Budget Responsibility's "central scenario" assumes the unemployment rate will peak at 7.5% in the second quarter of 2021.³⁵ This is more optimistic than an earlier estimate in the fiscal sustainability report,³⁶ but still predicts a significant increase after the Treasury-run schemes end.

Staffing changes and getting people back into work

In the initial weeks of the crisis, plans were made for 10,000 staff to be redeployed within the DWP and from other departments in order to process the unprecedented numbers of claims³⁷. Given the considerably higher predicted caseloads and difficult economic conditions, the Department also began to hire new staff.³⁸

As the rate of new claims slowed, the planned focus returned to 'business as usual', redeploying staff to their previous jobs and helping new claimants back into work. All of this is made more challenging by social distancing requirements and the public health situation.

Discussing these issues at the Work and Pensions Committee on 23 April, Neil Couling, Change Director General at the DWP, said:

The complicating factor from a normal recession plan—and I have led various bits of the Department through a couple of

³² Joseph Rowntree Foundation, [Coalition warns it would be a terrible mistake to cut the £20 uplift to Universal Credit](#), 29 November 2020

³³ Source: DWP Stat-xplore People on UC and Starts to UC datasets (accessed November 2020)

³⁴ See Figure 3 of DWP, [Alternative claimant count statistics January 2013 to August 2020](#), 13 October 2020

³⁵ Office for Budget Responsibility, [Economic and fiscal outlook - November 2020](#), 25 November 2020, p.13

³⁶ Office for Budget Responsibility, [Fiscal sustainability report – July 2020](#), 14 July 2020, p.8

³⁷ [HC Deb 4 May 2020 c421](#) and Q118 in the Work and Pensions Committee oral session, [DWP's response to the coronavirus outbreak](#), 23 April 2020

³⁸ See Q72 in the Work and Pensions Committee oral session, [DWP's response to the coronavirus outbreak](#), 23 April 2020

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recessions—is the social distancing. It constrains our ability to deploy recruits. We are going to have to use in the short term more digital means to help people into work and reach out across the sector to our colleagues who also provide help in this place to try to put some provision in place for individuals.

The task now is to disengage the emergency support we have put in and replace that with recruited staff and get the people who were doing important jobs before the pandemic back to doing those important jobs. The Minister for Disabled People was talking about the fewer numbers he has currently administering disability benefits. They have to go back to administering disability benefits.³⁹

As plans for recovery developed, Thérèse Coffey, the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, told the Lords Economic Affairs Committee on 2 June that the Department was looking at doubling the number of Work Coaches.

We have not quite got to that level of detail. I think we have about 13,500 now. There are different scenarios. I am not going to reveal all the different details, but we would probably be looking, in a worse-than-OBR-type scenario, at doubling that number. We still need to understand how the economy is going to reshape and bounce back, hopefully, or whether it is a slightly gentler glide back.

We anticipate that the interactions with universal credit claimants may be somewhat different from an era where we have had very low unemployment. Although vacancies are down, there are still vacancies.⁴⁰

On 8 July, The Treasury published its 'Plan for Jobs', confirming £895 million in additional funding to double the number of Work Coaches in order to deal with increased caseloads and 'enhance work search support.'⁴¹ A target of recruiting 4,500 new Work Coaches was met by 30 October,⁴² and the Minister for Employment told the House on 30 November that 5,468 have been recruited since July.⁴³

The 'Plan for Jobs' also included a wider set of DWP measures designed to tackle unemployment during and after the pandemic. Describing the DWP's 'Getting Britain Back to Work' plan, Mims Davies, the Minister for Employment, outlined the other key elements of the package:

Kickstart Scheme – a £2b fund to create hundreds of thousands of high quality 6-month work placements aimed at those aged 16-24 who are on Universal Credit and at risk of long term unemployment.

Expanded Youth Offer – increasing the intensive support offered to those 18-24⁴⁴ in the Intensive Work Search group in Universal

³⁹ Neil Couling speaking in the Work and Pensions Committee oral session, [DWP's response to the coronavirus outbreak](#), 23 April 2020

⁴⁰ Therese Coffey speaking in the Lords Economic Affairs Committee, [The economics of Universal credit](#), 2 June 2020

⁴¹ MH Treasury, [A Plan for Jobs](#), 8 July 2020, p.9

⁴² DWP, 4,500 new Work Coaches to join the frontline to help Britain build back better, 30 October 2020

⁴³ [HC Deb 30 November 2020](#) c12

⁴⁴ This is now open to a wider age group (18-24 year olds rather than 18-21 year olds)

Credit. Further support will be available through Youth Hubs with specialist Youth Employment Coaches.

Expansion of the Work and Health Programme – to introduce additional voluntary support for those on benefits in England and Wales that have been unemployed for more than 3 months.

Flexible Support Fund (FSF) – increase the funding for the FSF by £150m to increase the capacity of the Rapid Response Service (RRS), supporting those facing redundancy.⁴⁵

Expanding sector based work academies [SWAPs] – increase participation in our sector-based work academy programmes, offering training, work experience and a guaranteed interview. We will establish bespoke opportunities, working with employers and training providers to support claimants to fill job vacancies and pivot into new careers, including in priority sectors such as construction and social care.

Job finding support service – £40 million to fund additional capacity to introduce an online, one-to-one service to help those who have been recently unemployed.⁴⁶

In October 2020, the Government launched '[Job Entry Targeted Support](#)' (JETS), which provides support for people who have been out of work for three or more months. Describing the scheme in the House on 19 October, the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work said:

The scheme has £238 million of funding that is dedicated to helping people who have been out of work for three or more months and may be at risk of long-term unemployment. JETS will see a variety of providers work at our local jobcentre networks to offer a range of bespoke services, including important advice on how people can move into new, growing sectors, as well as help with CV building and interview coaching.

[...]

The JETS scheme started two weeks ago and is now live right across England and Wales, and we are contracting anew in Scotland. We anticipate that as JETS continues to roll out across Great Britain, it will help 280,000 of our claimants to find work and build the skills to pivot into new sectors if required.⁴⁷

The Chancellor provided detail on the spending on new DWP staff and schemes in the 25 November 2020 Spending Review. He also announced £2.9 billion over the next three years for a "Restart Programme that will provide intensive and tailored support to over 1 million unemployed people and help them find work, with approximately £0.4 billion of funding in 2021-22."⁴⁸

Reopening Jobcentres and reintroducing conditionality

At the end of June, Thérèse Coffey announced that from July the Department would begin the process of reopening Jobcentres and "starting to return to normal" in order to "help people to get ready again for the world of work."⁴⁹ The first 4,500 new Work Coaches

⁴⁵ The increased funding was not only to increase RRS support

⁴⁶ [PO 69565 9 July 2020](#)

⁴⁷ [HC Deb 19 October 2020 c735](#)

⁴⁸ HM Treasury, [Spending Review 2020](#), CP 330, 25 November 2020

⁴⁹ [HC Deb 29 June 2020 c17](#)

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would work in existing Jobcentres, but accommodating further new Work Coaches may involve opening new Jobcentres⁵⁰ and reopening some that have closed in recent years.⁵¹

As fresh public health restrictions were announced across the UK in the Autumn, the Department remained committed to keeping Jobcentres open. However, on 9 November it outlined new guidance on how Jobcentres were adapting to meet public health restrictions across the UK, putting in place social distancing measures and making use of online and telephone-based support.⁵²

As the November restrictions in England were replaced with local tiers in early December 2020, the DWP outlined rules allowing Jobcentres to remain open, but operating differently depending on local restrictions across the UK.⁵³

Along with the reopening of Jobcentres, conditionality and sanctions are also being reintroduced. The Government has been careful to stress that it will take a 'phased approach' and that it will empower local staff to make appropriate decisions on work-related conditionality and sanctions.

To support our re-implementation of Claimant Commitments in July, we are issuing guidance to Work Coaches and Case Managers. We are managing this in a phased approach to deliver a tailored and effective service for our customers, recognising the individual and prevailing circumstances including COVID restrictions. We have not needed to issue new guidance on benefit sanctions. We trust and empower our job centre managers and Work Coaches to work with their customers appropriately.⁵⁴

While conditionality was suspended, people who made Universal Credit claims did not go through the normal process of drawing up a [claimant commitment](#). On 9 July Mims Davies said that the DWP would therefore be "contacting claimants to introduce a personalised claimant commitment."⁵⁵ The initial approach would involve conducting "interviews by phone and testing a 30-minute commitment appointment."⁵⁶

A 'coronavirus special' edition of DWP's Touchbase magazine for advisers – issued on 3 July – stated:

We are working with local managers to start expanding our service offer in jobcentres to help get Britain back into work. Work Coaches are calling claimants – no one needs to contact us.

We don't want to sanction anyone. These are difficult, uncertain times for many people and we want to do everything we can to help them find work or increase hours, where that is possible for them. No sanction will be used until the claimant has an up-to-

⁵⁰ [PQ 74611 29 July 2020](#)

⁵¹ Neil Couling speaking in the Work and Pensions Committee oral session, [Universal Credit: the wait for first payment](#), 15 July 2020, Q232

⁵² DWP, [Jobcentre guidance on new national Covid restrictions](#), 9 November 2020

⁵³ DWP, [Jobcentre guidance on COVID-19 Local Restriction Tiers](#), 27 November 2020

⁵⁴ [PQ 68348 \[on reintroducing conditionality\] 7 July 2020](#)

⁵⁵ [PQ 69562 9 July 2020](#)

⁵⁶ [PQ 69561 13 July 2020](#)

date Claimant Commitment in place. After that, a sanction will only be used where a claimant has not provided good reason for meeting the agreed requirements in the Claimant Commitment. Claimants who are shielding, have childcare responsibilities because of COVID restrictions, etc. will have their Claimant Commitment tailored to reflect their circumstances and will not be asked to do anything unreasonable.⁵⁷

Expressing disappointment that they had not been able to influence the decision to reimpose conditionality, The Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS), which represents many DWP staff, disclosed some additional detail about the proposed timetable:

DWP have advised PCS that they will manage the reinstating of conditionality using a phased approach to ensure that they have the capacity to deliver an effective service to customers. Universal Credit will test the process for new claims from 1 July 2020 in three Jobcentres and from 8 July 2020 they will roll-out for all new claims. This means that the department will agree a Claimant Commitment for all appropriate new claims from that date and then deliver fortnightly interventions with them. They also advised that once implemented they will then design a process for current claims made during COVID-19 and implement, and then review existing claims made pre-COVID-19. They will then move to New Style JSA new claims from 22 July 2020 with all stock claimants following after that.⁵⁸

As of early December 2020, not all claimants have a new or updated claimant commitment, and “will not be subject to conditionality until they have agreed [one].” The Minister for Employment also said that any sanction decisions will consider wider circumstances:

sanctions are only used when claimants fail to meet their conditionality requirements without good reason [...] work coaches will work to ensure that any requirements set are reasonable, taking into account the claimant’s circumstances and, crucially, the situation in the local labour market, while allowing them to adhere also to public health advice.⁵⁹

The Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC), in its review of the coronavirus social security measures, has emphasised how important it will be for conditionality to be flexible in response to individual and local circumstances. It has recommended that this should include further support for work coaches, and that the DWP “publish strategic policy guidance on what the appropriate flexibilities should be that work coaches can then implement through local discretion.”⁶⁰

Disability benefit assessments, reviews and reassessments

The crisis prompted significant changes to assessments and reassessments for health and disability benefits. These have been suspended or, where necessary, carried out without face-to-face contact. The Department gradually resumed reassessment activity from

⁵⁷ [Expanding our service offer in jobcentres](#), Touchbase magazine, 3 July 2020

⁵⁸ Public and Commercial Services Union statement on [Reinstating Labour Market conditionality](#), 29 June 2020

⁵⁹ [HC Deb 19 November c741](#)

⁶⁰ Social Security Advisory Committee, [A review of the COVID-19 temporary measures](#), 18 November 2020

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July 2020, and is also looking to learn lessons from “forced changes” in its forthcoming Green Paper on health and disability support.

Face-to-face assessments for health and disability benefits such as Personal Independence Payment and for the Limited Capability for Work-Related Activity (LCWRA) element in Universal Credit were [suspended for three months](#) on 17 March. A [6 July press release](#) stated that “face-to-face assessments [are] to remain suspended, but [will be] kept under review.”

Assessments continued, at a reduced pace, from March.⁶¹ During this period anyone with an assessment appointment has been contacted to discuss next steps and alternative arrangements, which might involve telephone or paper-based assessments.

DWP also [announced on 23 March](#) that reviews and reassessments for all disability benefits were suspended for at least three months. Where benefit awards are due to expire, the DWP will extend end-dates so that people continue to receive their existing level of financial support. A [6 July press release](#) stated that “Some review and reassessment activity [is] to gradually resume from July 2020 for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and Disability Living Allowance (DLA).”

Speaking in Committee on 23 April Justin Tomlinson, the Minister for Disabled People, Work and Health clarified how the DWP was handling assessments and reassessments during suspension:

For those who would be due for reassessment in the next three months, we have automatically extended their benefit by six months. If their condition has deteriorated and they feel they would be entitled to more money, they can still request a reassessment but otherwise they are automatically extended.

For new claimants, the terminally ill and for those who ask for it, we are seeking to do it by telephone and by paper-based reviews, adopting a very sympathetic, claimant-supportive view of this because we recognise that there are increasing challenges to being able to get adequate medical evidence, so we are relying very much on the claimants’ cases as they explain them.⁶²

As telephone and paper-based assessments have been in operation, the DWP has adapted its practice. The 6 November edition of the Department’s Touchbase magazine explained the evolving approach to attendance in Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit assessments, which tightens the rules around attendance.

From Monday 2 November, ESA and UC telephone assessment appointment letters will make it clear that claimants must attend their telephone appointment. [Failure To Attend] and [Failure To Participate] action will apply, e.g. benefit may be stopped (ESA) or entitlement change (UC), for those who have been issued with this letter and fail to attend or participate in their appointments without good reason.

No one will have their support stopped without being contacted first. People will be contacted to ask them to explain why they did

⁶¹ [PO 58015 17 July 2020](#)

⁶² Justin Tomlinson speaking in the Work and Pensions Committee oral session, [DWP’s response to the coronavirus outbreak](#), 23 April 2020

not, or could not attend or participate in the assessment and where good cause is provided and accepted, support will continue.⁶³

Mr Tomlinson confirmed the ongoing suspension of face-to-face assessments on 16 November:

During the Covid-19 period, all assessments are currently being progressed on the basis of the paper based evidence alone or that evidence together with a telephone assessment to ensure decisions on Personal Independence Payment can be made without delay.

The health and safety of our claimants and our staff are our key priority. Face to face assessments for health and disability benefits remain suspended at present; this is being kept under review in line with the latest public health guidance.⁶⁴

In its review of temporary measures, SSAC identified making “determinations in an environment of social distancing” as one of the key challenges for the DWP. Whilst it noted that changes such as providing telephone assessments have worked well for some claimants, it also identified problems in dealing with complex cases and delays to decision making.⁶⁵

These temporary changes to disability assessments have coincided with the Government’s ‘Health Transformation Programme’ through which it aims to develop a new, integrated service, supported by a single digital system, for Personal Independence Payment and Work Capability Assessments, from 2021. The integrated service is intended to provide “a more joined up experience” for claimants.⁶⁶

In the weeks before lockdown, on 2 March 2020, Justin Tomlinson provided a further update on progress in creating a single assessment service with a single digital platform developed by the DWP. He noted that the Department would initially develop the new service on a small scale “in a defined part of the country, a Transformation Area.”⁶⁷

The pandemic has interrupted these plans, but has also imposed “forced changes” to the assessment process from which the Department is planning to learn. Mr Tomlinson told the Work and Pensions Committee on 23 April:

As a side issue, this is beneficial for us because we were due to publish the Green Paper that was looking at the assessment process and claimant experience, recognising there is anxiety among claimants, and what more we could do to reduce that. Through the forced changes we have had to do to handle the Covid-19 emergency, we are testing those. When we return to a normal state, there will be some valuable lessons about how we can better use medical evidence and oral evidence from claimants

⁶³ Touchbase, [Update - Claimants must attend telephone health assessments](#), 6 November 2020

⁶⁴ [PO 113467 16 November 2020](#)

⁶⁵ Social Security Advisory Committee, [A review of the COVID-19 temporary measures](#), 18 November 2020

⁶⁶ [HCWS1376 5 March 2020](#)

⁶⁷ [HCWS138 2 March 2020](#)

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and increase the proportion of cases that are done as paper-based reviews.⁶⁸

In a further update on these plans on 9 July 2020, Mr Tomlinson issued a Written Statement which noted that while there had been no change to the Government's ambition to create a single, integrated health assessment service underpinned by a single digital platform developed by the DWP, and to create a "Transformation Area" to test ideas and processes, the Department had to review its commercial approach. The statement continued:

We had previously announced that we would be undertaking a procurement exercise to establish contracts for conducting Work and Capability Assessments (WCA) and PIP health assessments from 1 August 2021. The impact of Covid-19 means it is not possible to launch that procurement at this time.

We recognise that it is vital for our claimants to have a safe and stable service. Consequently, my Department intends to explore options to extend the current contracts for up to two years, which will ensure continuity of services when the current contracts end on 31 July 2021. We will continue to review these extensions to ensure we only extend for the time we need to effectively respond to the consequences of Covid-19.

The extension period will provide time to fully understand and evaluate the impacts of Covid-19 on these critical services, ahead of future procurements.

We recognise that there are positive lessons to be learned from our experience of delivering our services during Covid-19, and the changes we introduced. We are reviewing these and they will inform future delivery, where appropriate. We expect these to be reflected in our wider transformation plans, including the forthcoming Green Paper and subsequent policy decisions regarding the delivery of health assessments.⁶⁹

The impact of the coronavirus crisis on assessments and decision making is not yet fully understood. SSAC has argued that in order to learn from experiences during the pandemic, "a better understanding of the impact of removing face-to-face assessments [and of] telephone assessment[s] on ESA and PIP case outcomes is required." It recommended the following:

DWP and DfC should produce – and publish – an evaluation of decision making in ESA, UC and PIP to include a comparative analysis of case outcomes for telephone, paper-based and face to face assessments. This is vital, given that face to face assessments are not likely to be resumed for all claimants in the immediate future. We see this as also contributing towards the lessons that the Department has said it hopes to learn that could be further explored in its forthcoming Green Paper on health and disability. An evaluation of recent decision making, including assessment outcomes and award recommendations, should also be conducted to ensure consistency and accuracy are maintained.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Justin Tomlinson speaking in the Work and Pensions Committee oral session, [DWP's response to the coronavirus outbreak](#), 23 April 2020

⁶⁹ [HCWS353 9 July 2020](#)

⁷⁰ *Social Security Advisory Committee*, [A review of the COVID-19 temporary measures](#), 18 November 2020

2. Details of changes and proposed withdrawal dates

2.1 Table of social security changes, expected withdrawal dates and current status

This table contains a list of major changes to the UK social security system made in response to the coronavirus crisis. It also outlines when they are expected to be withdrawn and notes their current status as of the date this briefing was published. Many of these changes have been implemented through new statutory instruments (secondary legislation), although others were operational changes announced by ministers.

Most of these changes relate to ‘reserved benefits’ and therefore apply across Great Britain (GB). Where changes were made by legislation, we have indicated their **territorial extent**. Where this is Great Britain-wide, it should be noted that corresponding and generally equivalent regulations have usually been made for Northern Ireland. Where applicable, we have also included specific changes relating to devolved benefits in Scotland.

We have not included one-off payments to local authorities such as the £170 million funding for the [Covid Winter Grant Scheme](#) in England.

Change made and territorial extent	Announcement or rule change	Expected withdrawal dates	Current status
Benefit increases			
GB: Universal Credit standard allowances and (UK) Working Tax Credit basic element: increased by £1,040 per year.	Universal Credit standard allowances: The Social Security (Coronavirus) (Further Measures) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/371) Working Tax Credit basic element: Coronavirus Act 2020 section 77(1)	April 2021. The Coronavirus Act 2020 states that these increases are to be disregarded for the purposes of the statutory annual review of benefit rates relative to price inflation. 25 November written statement (HCWS600) promises that the Government will “assess how best to support low-income families, which is why we will look at the economic and health context in the new year.”	Current
GB: Local Housing Allowance rates: reset to the 30th percentile	Rent Officers Order, Regulation 4 of The Social Security (Coronavirus) (Further Measures) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/371)	None. Secretary of State told the Lords Economic Affairs Committee on 2 June that the increase was a “permanent uplift.”	Current

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of market rent in each broad rental market area.		25 November written statement (HCWS600) promises that 2020/21 LHA rates will be maintained in cash terms, though they will not be uprated and no link with rental prices will be re-established.	
GB: Suspending the Minimum Income Floor (MIF).	Regulation 2 of The Social Security (Coronavirus) (Further Measures) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/371)	End of April 2021. Original regulations state regulation 2 will “cease to have effect at the end of the period of eight months beginning on 13th March 2020.” Written statement (HCWS552) on 3 November 2020 announced the extension of the suspension of the MIF until the end of April 2021. Given effect by The Social Security (Coronavirus) (Further Measures) (Amendment) and Miscellaneous Amendment Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/1201) .	Current
Scotland: Additional payment of £230.10 made in Carer’s Allowance Supplement from April to September 2020.	Schedule 1(6) of Coronavirus (Scotland) (No. 2) Act 2020	30 September 2020. MyGov.scot website explains (updated 3 November) that backdated awards may get the additional payment in December 2020.	Expired
Scotland: Increase in the Council Tax Reduction earnings disregard to take account of the temporary increase in the Working Tax Credit basic element.	Regulation 2 of The Council Tax Reduction (Scotland) Amendment (No. 3) (Coronavirus) Regulations 2020 (SSI.No.2020/108)	4 April 2021 (matching the timescale for ending the WTC increase).	Current

Rule changes to support social distancing, isolating and shielding			
<p>GB: Statutory Sick Pay made payable from the first day of illness if you cannot work due to coronavirus.</p>	<p>Regulation 2 of <i>The Statutory Sick Pay (Coronavirus) (Suspension of Waiting Days and General Amendment) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/374)</i></p> <p>Earlier, time limited, regulations were superseded.</p>	<p>Unknown. Explanatory note states: ‘The Secretary of State will keep the provisions under review in line with corresponding provision in the Coronavirus Act 2020.’</p>	<p>Current</p>
<p>GB: Statutory Sick Pay extended to cover those self-isolating through the provision of ‘isolation notes’ instead of fit notes.</p>	<p>Regulation 3 of <i>The Statutory Sick Pay (Coronavirus) (Suspension of Waiting Days and General Amendment) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/374)</i></p> <p>Earlier, time limited, regulations were superseded.</p>	<p>Unknown. Explanatory note states: ‘The Secretary of State will keep the provisions under review in line with corresponding provision in the Coronavirus Act 2020.’</p>	<p>Current</p>
<p>GB: Statutory Sick Pay extended to people who are shielding.</p>	<p><i>The Statutory Sick Pay (General) (Coronavirus Amendment) (No. 3) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/427)</i></p>	<p>Shielding was “paused” in England and in Scotland from 1 August, and from 16 August in Wales.</p> <p>In England, following the end of a period of national restrictions from 2 December, new tiered local restrictions apply in each area.</p> <p>Guidance for clinically extremely vulnerable people linked to these tiers (updated 2 December) now states:</p> <p>There are 2 ways you may be identified as clinically extremely vulnerable:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have one or more of the conditions [included in the guidance], or 	<p>Current</p>

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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your hospital clinician or GP has added you to the Shielded patients list because, based on their clinical judgement, they deem you to be at higher risk of serious illness if you catch the virus. <p>If people are unable to work because of new shielding guidance, they may be eligible for Statutory Sick Pay, Employment Support Allowance or Universal Credit.</p> <p>Guidance on shielding may differ in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.</p>	
GB: Removing the 'waiting days' rule for New Style ESA.	Regulation 2 of The Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit (Coronavirus Disease) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/289)	13 May 2021. Regulation 5 of SI 2020/289 stipulated that the regulations would expire eight months after they came into force. This was amended to 14 months by The Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit (Coronavirus Disease) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/1097) .	Current
GB: For ESA and UC, anyone affected by coronavirus can be treated as having a limited capability for work.	Regulation 3 of The Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit (Coronavirus Disease) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/289)	For ESA - 13 May 2021. Regulation 5 of SI 2020/289 stipulated that the regulations would expire eight months after they came into force. This was amended to 14 months by The Employment and Support Allowance and Universal Credit (Coronavirus Disease) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/1097) .	Current (no longer applies for UC)

		<p>For UC - 30 March 2020. Regulation 10(3) of The Social Security (Coronavirus) (Further Measures) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/371) provided that these changes no longer had effect from that date so far as they applied to UC.</p>	
<p>England and Wales: Jobseeker's Allowance - continued entitlement if a claimant, or child they are caring for, has covid-19 or is self-isolating because of symptoms.</p>	<p>Regulation 8 of The Social Security (Coronavirus) (Further Measures) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/371)</p>	<p>13 May 2021. Regulation 10 originally stated that regulation 8 would "cease to have effect at the end of the period of eight months beginning on 13th March 2020."</p> <p>This was later extended by The Social Security (Coronavirus) (Further Measures) (Amendment) and Miscellaneous Amendment Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/1201).</p>	Current
<p>England and Wales: Carer's Allowance – continued entitlement during breaks in caring if carer or disabled person has covid-19 or is self-isolating because of symptoms.</p>	<p>Regulation 9 of The Social Security (Coronavirus) (Further Measures) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/371)</p>	<p>13 May 2021. Regulation 10 originally stated that regulation 9 would 'cease to have effect at the end of the period of eight months beginning on 13th March 2020.'</p> <p>This was later extended by The Social Security (Coronavirus) (Further Measures) (Amendment) and Miscellaneous Amendment Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/1201).</p>	Current

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<p>Scotland: Carer's Allowance – continued entitlement during breaks in caring if carer or disabled person has covid-19 or self-isolating because of symptoms.</p>	<p>Regulation 2 of The Carer's Allowance (Coronavirus) (Breaks in Care) (Scotland) Regulations 2020 (SSI 2020/117)</p>	<p>13 May 2021. Regulation 3 states that this will “cease to have effect at the end of the period of 8 months” following 3 April (when the regulations came into force).</p> <p>This was later extended by The Carer's Allowance (Coronavirus) (Breaks in Care) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2020 (SSI 2020/350)</p>	<p>Current</p>
<p>Temporary expansions of eligibility</p>			
<p>GB: Extending entitlement to means-tested benefits, such as Universal Credit, to prisoners on temporary release.</p>	<p>The Social Security (Coronavirus) (Prisoners) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/409)</p> <p>In Scotland, justice policy is devolved, and prisoners are released under different powers. Therefore, means-tested benefits can be paid to them as they no longer count as a ‘prisoner’ for benefit purposes and should be able to claim the appropriate benefit if they need to do so. See Child Poverty Action Group guidance.</p>	<p>13 May 2021. Regulation 6 originally stipulated that the regulations would “cease to have effect at the end of the period of eight months beginning on 13th March 2020.”</p> <p>This was later extended to 14 months by The Social Security (Coronavirus) (Prisoners) Amendment Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/1156).</p>	<p>Current</p>
<p>GB: Furloughed workers given entitlement to Maternity Allowance and other statutory family-related benefits.</p>	<p>The Maternity Allowance, Statutory Maternity Pay, Statutory Paternity Pay, Statutory Adoption Pay, Statutory Shared Parental Pay and Statutory Parental Bereavement Pay (Normal Weekly Earnings</p>	<p>End of March 2021. Amendments “apply where a person is a furloughed employee for the purposes of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme.”</p>	<p>Current</p>

	etc.) (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/ 450)	CJRS extended to the end of March 2021 on 5 November.	
UK: Working Tax Credit will not be affected if a claimant's working hours have been reduced.	<p>Regulation 2 of The Tax Credits (Coronavirus, Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/534)</p> <p>Announced in 4 May press release.</p> <p>Gov.uk guidance (accessed 7 December) states:</p> <p>"If you're currently getting tax credits and you cannot work or you're working fewer hours because of coronavirus, you do not need to tell HMRC about this change as long as you're still employed or self-employed."</p>	<p>End of March 2021. The 4 May press release states:</p> <p>"We will treat customers as working their normal hours until the Job Retention Scheme closes, even if they are not using the scheme."</p> <p>CJRS extended to the end of March 2021 on 5 November.</p>	Current
UK: Time limit for critical workers to report changes of circumstances for tax credit purposes extended from one month to three.	<p>Regulation 4 of The Tax Credits (Coronavirus, Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/534)</p>	<p>End of March 2021. Explanatory note for the regulations states:</p> <p>"The extension of time only applies to claimants who are critical workers... and only for the duration of the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme."</p> <p>On 5 November, the CJRS was extended to the end of March 2021.</p>	Current

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<p>Scotland: Application time limits extended for devolved benefits where a delay in applying is due to Covid-19. Applies to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pregnancy and Baby Payment • Early Learning Payment • School Age Payment • Young Carer Grant • Funeral Support Payment 	<p>Schedule 7(4) of the Coronavirus (Scotland) Act 2020.</p> <p>The announcement on the devolved benefits to which this measure applies was made by Social Security Scotland on 14 April 2020: ‘Making sure people impacted by Covid-19 get our support’.</p>	<p>30 September 2020</p> <p>The Act also provides the power for Scottish Ministers to alter this date by regulations, including in Section 12(3) to extend it to 31 March 2021 or 30 September 2021.</p> <p>Other provisions in the Act were proposed for extension on 28 August, but this did not include Schedule 7(4).</p> <p>Regulation 2 of The Coronavirus (Scotland) Acts (Early Expiry of Provisions) Regulations 2020 (SSI 2020/249) specified the expiry of these provisions.</p>	<p>Expired</p>
<p>Social distancing in benefit assessments and Jobcentre appointments</p>			
<p>Suspending all face-to-face assessments for sickness and disability benefits.</p>	<p>Announced in a 16 March press release. 21 July Parliamentary written answer (PQ 75473) states:</p> <p>“Face-to-face assessments for health and disability related benefits continue to be suspended since 17 March [...] We are regularly reviewing this position in line with public health advice, and will also review our estates requirements as part of this work.”</p>	<p>Unknown, but under review. Initially for a three-month period.</p> <p>Gov.uk guidance for New Style Employment and Support Allowance was updated on 10 August to say:</p> <p>“[...] Work Capability Assessments are currently taking place over the phone because of coronavirus (COVID-19).”</p> <p>Speaking in the House on 23 September, the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work spoke about “bringing in telephone assessments” for Work Capability Assessments, a measure already taken for PIP assessments.</p>	<p>Current</p>

		<p>The Minister confirmed on 16 November 2020 (PQ 113467) that:</p> <p>“The health and safety of our claimants and our staff are our key priority. Face to face assessments for health and disability benefits remain suspended at present; this is being kept under review in line with the latest public health guidance.”</p> <p>On 23 November, The Minister for Disabled People, Work and Health wrote to the Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee to confirm that after a DWP trial, paper-based assessments for Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit had begun.</p>	
<p>Reviews and reassessments for all disability benefits were suspended.</p>	<p>Announced in 23 March press release</p>	<p>Initially for a three-month period. Gradual resumption from July.</p> <p>6 July press release states that “Some review and reassessment activity to gradually resume from July 2020 for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and Disability Living Allowance (DLA).”</p> <p>3 September written answer (PQ 82089) explains that reassessments for Industrial Injuries Disablement Benefit remained suspended. This suspension remains in place as of 4 November (PQ 109340).</p>	<p>Resuming</p>

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<p>No-one should visit a Jobcentre “unless directed to do so for an exceptional purpose.”</p>	<p>Guidance on the Gov.uk understanding Universal Credit website.</p> <p>This was later amended (accessed 3 December) to read:</p> <p>“You do not need to attend the jobcentre unless we ask you to do so. If you need to contact us the quickest way to do this is online or by phone.</p> <p>If you need to attend a jobcentre, they are open and one of our colleagues will be able to assist you. You will be required to wear a face covering when entering a jobcentre, unless you are in an exempt category. Please also follow the latest government guidance on meeting with others safely and local restrictions.”</p>	<p>From July 2020. As explained in section 1.2, the Department began reopening Jobcentres from July 2020.</p> <p>A 27 November press release outlines the rules which allow Jobcentres to remain open, but operating differently depending on local restrictions across the UK.</p>	<p>Resuming</p>
<p>Conditionality and sanctions</p>			
<p>GB: All work-related requirements were suspended for Universal Credit and ‘New Style’ Jobseekers Allowance.</p>	<p>Regulation 6 of The Social Security (Coronavirus) (Further Measures) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/371)</p>	<p>Resuming from 1 July. Explored in section 1.2 above.</p>	<p>Resuming</p>
<p>Other operational changes</p>			
<p>‘Move to Universal Credit’ pilot in Harrogate suspended.</p>	<p>Following the coronavirus outbreak, the DWP’s Universal Credit Engagement Team</p>	<p>Unknown. The Secretary of State told the Work and Pensions Committee on 30 September that:</p>	<p>Current</p>

	wrote to stakeholders announcing that the pilot had been temporarily suspended.	"We have not set a date for the resumption of managed migration [Move to UC]. We are conscious that quite a lot of people will have moved during the pandemic, so analysis is happening on that and a way forward will be presented to Ministers."	
Pausing the recovery of legacy benefit overpayments, Social Fund loans, and Tax Credit debts from UC.	Announced in 3 April press release . 'Deductions for the recovery of Universal Credit and legacy benefit overpayments, Social Fund loans and Tax Credit debts will be paused.'	June 2020. Press release paused recoveries for three months. 6 July email from the Communications Directorate at the Department for Work and Pensions, published on Rightsnet , confirm the debt recoveries were recommencing. Asked in the House whether the Government would consider extending the pause, the Minister for Welfare Reform stated that "are currently no plans to extend the suspension of benefit deductions." (HC Deb 19 October 2020 c744)	Resuming
GB: From 21 May, people not entitled to UC because of income from the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme don't need to reapply to get it.	Regulation 3 of The Universal Credit (Coronavirus) (Self-employed Claimants and Reclaims) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 (SI 2020/532)	None.	Current
Child Benefit – parents can claim without having to register their child's birth.	Announced in 7 April press release	Unknown. At 3 December the Gov.uk website states :	Current

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		"If you're not able to register the birth of your child because of coronavirus (COVID-19), you can still make a claim to receive Child Benefit."	
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2.2 Timeline of announcements on the status of temporary changes since June

This table provides a rolling timeline of major announcements relating to the withdrawal of social security changes (outlined in section 2.1) since June when several of them were due to expire. It should be noted that the first of these temporary measures to reach the end of its period as originally announced was the suspension of face-to-face disability and sickness benefit assessments, which was set to expire on 17 June – although it was later confirmed on 25 June that this had been extended. This table can be read as current at the date of publication.

Date and summary	Announcement
25 June. Extended suspension of face-to-face assessments.	Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work stated (PQ 61450, 25 June 2020) : Face to face assessments remain suspended while we review what activity we can gradually start reintroducing in line with the latest public health advice. We will confirm next steps as soon as possible.
29 June: Reintroduction of conditionality.	Secretary of State for Work and Pensions told the House (HC 29 June 2020 c3) : It is important that as the jobcentres fully reopen this week we reinstate the need for a claimant commitment. It is an essential part of the contract to help people start to reconsider what vacancies there are, but I know that I can trust the work coaches and jobcentre managers, who are empowered to act proactively with people.
6 July: Recovery of certain debts owed to the Government were to resume.	Email from the DWP Communications Directorate at the Department for Work and Pensions, published on Rightsnet , confirmed that debt recoveries were recommencing.
6 July: Face-to-face disability and sickness benefit assessments to remain suspended.	DWP press release stated: Face-to-face assessments to remain suspended, but kept under review.
6 July: Gradual resumption of reassessments for disability benefit assessments.	DWP press release stated: Some review and reassessment activity to gradually resume from July 2020 for Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and Disability Living Allowance (DLA).

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<p>7 July: £895 million announced to double the number of Work Coaches.</p>	<p>Detail available on page 9 of HM Treasury, A 'Plan for Jobs,' published on 8 July 2020.</p>
<p>9 July: Update on Health Transformation Programme and forthcoming Green Paper.</p>	<p>Minster for Disabled People, Health and Work provides written statement (HCWS353) explored above in part 1.2.</p>
<p>13 July: Claimants to be contacted by telephone to draw up claimant commitments.</p>	<p>Minister for Employment stated (PQ 69561, 13 July 2020):</p> <p>As we re-introduce claimant commitments we are initially conducting these interviews by phone and testing a 30-minute commitment appointment.</p>
<p>15 July: DWP considering re-opening previously closed Jobcentres.</p>	<p>Neil Couling told the Work and Pensions Committee:</p> <p>We are looking, certainly, at one of the closed [Jobcentres] that I know of at the moment to try to set up a demonstration of how we do this. We are going to adopt probably a different design than we have in existing jobcentres, partly because we need to make them Covid-compliant quickly. Some of our old estate will not be very good; the jobcentres we closed were quite small.</p>
<p>15 July: Plans to hire 4,500 new Work Coaches by end of October.</p>	<p>Neil Couling told the Work and Pensions Committee that the DWP plans to hire 4,500 of the 13,500 planned new Work Coaches by the end of October.</p>
<p>21 July: Minister for Disabled People, Work and Health provides update on reopening PIP assessment centres.</p>	<p>Parliamentary written answer (PQ 75473) states:</p> <p>Face-to-face assessments for health and disability related benefits continue to be suspended since 17 March. This temporary suspension was brought in to protect vulnerable people (and assessment centre staff) from unnecessary risk of exposure to COVID-19. We are regularly reviewing this position in line with public health advice, and will also review our estates requirements as part of this work.</p>
<p>28 July: Secretary of State responds to Social Security Advisory Committee</p>	<p>Therese Coffey wrote to SSAC and outlined the Government's position on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Levels of benefit payments and recommended increases to "legacy benefits".

<p>recommendations for further changes in response to the crisis.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Shared Accommodation Rate. • The Benefit Cap. • Department for Work and Pensions communications.
<p>29 July: Minister of State for Employment provides update on opening new Jobcentres.</p>	<p>Parliamentary written answer (PO 74611) stated:</p> <p>DWP is currently evaluating the estates capacity needed to respond to the economic consequences of the pandemic, this is being done in line with recruitment, which is already underway. Whilst there may be a few exceptions, in general we expect that this will be new estate, rather than jobcentres where leases have been surrendered, as new estate will be easier to make Covid-secure. Further details will be provided to Parliament when our plans have been finalised.</p>
<p>6 August: Social Security Advisory Committee announces “Rapid review of post-lockdown changes to social security benefits.”</p>	<p>In a blog SSAC set out the areas of concern they will be focussing on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the reintroduction of conditionality will work. • The provisions for self-employment. • Changes to sickness and disability benefits.
<p>8 September: Minister for Employment provides update on DWP recruitment.</p>	<p>Parliamentary written answer (PO 83896) stated:</p> <p>Work Coach recruitment commenced in June with an initial cross government campaign and followed by a further 12 targeted external campaigns at the beginning of July. Additional external campaigns will be launched on Wednesday 9 September with further adverts launching on a weekly basis over the following 4 weeks.</p> <p>Over 300 new work coaches have now started and our plans will see over 4500 start by 31 October with a further 9000 starting by 31 March 2021.</p>
<p>24 September: Chancellor Rishi Sunak announces the Job Support Scheme and extension of Self Employment Income Support Scheme Grants.</p>	<p>In an oral statement to the House of Commons (HC Deb 24 September 2020 c1153), Mr Sunak explained the following:</p> <p>I am announcing today the new jobs support scheme. The Government will directly support the wages of people in work, giving businesses that face depressed demand the option of keeping employees in a job on shorter hours, rather than making them redundant.</p>

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	<p>The job support scheme is built on three principles. First, it will support viable jobs. To make sure of that, employees must work at least a third of their normal hours and be paid for that work as normal by their employer. The Government, together with employers, will then increase those people's wages, covering two thirds of the pay they have lost by reducing their working hours. The employee will keep their job.</p> <p>Secondly, we will target support at firms that need it most. All small and medium-sized businesses are eligible, but larger businesses only when their turnover has fallen through the crisis.</p> <p>Thirdly, it will be open to employers across the United Kingdom, even if they have not previously used the furlough scheme.</p> <p>The scheme will run for six months, starting in November. Employers retaining furloughed staff on shorter hours can claim both the job support scheme and the jobs retention bonus.</p>
<p>30 September: Secretary of State gives evidence to the Work and Pensions Committee.</p>	<p>As part of its inquiry into the DWP's response to the coronavirus outbreak, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Thérèse Coffey, and Director General, Work and Health Services, John Paul Marks, gave evidence to the Committee.</p>
<p>9 October: suspension of ESA waiting days extended.</p>	<p>Regulations were made to extend the suspension of Employment and Support Allowance waiting days for a further six months.</p>
<p>22 October: Increased financial support through the Job Support Scheme.</p>	<p>Chancellor Rishi Sunak announced increased financial support through the Job Support Scheme and Self Employment Income Support Scheme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • open businesses which are experiencing considerable difficulty will be given extra help to keep staff on as government significantly increases contribution to wage costs under the Job Support Scheme, and business contributions drop to 5% • business grants are expanded to cover businesses in particularly affected sectors in high-alert level areas, helping them stay afloat and protecting jobs • grants for the self-employed doubled to 40% of previous earnings
<p>30 October: DWP meets Work Coach recruitment targets.</p>	<p>Department for Work and Pensions announced that it had recruited 4,500 new Work Coaches to 'help Britain build back better.'</p>

<p>31 October: Extension of Furlough scheme.</p>	<p>Prime Minister announced that, along with national restrictions from 5 November, the Coronavirus Job Retention “furlough” Scheme would be extended until December. This delayed the introduction of the Job Support Scheme. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care also announced increased generosity to the ongoing Self-Employment Income Support Scheme on 2 November (HCWS549).</p>
<p>3 November: Suspension of Minimum Income Floor extended.</p>	<p>Secretary of State Thérèse Coffey published a written statement (HCWS552) extending the suspension of the Minimum Income Floor until the end of April 2021.</p> <p>After careful consideration of the ongoing public health situation and the national working environment, the current easement of the suspension of the Minimum Income Floor in Universal Credit that was due to expire on 12th November 2020 will be extended to the end of April 2021.</p> <p>Regulations will be laid and made prior to 12th November 2020.</p>
<p>5 November: Chancellor extends Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme and Self-Employment Income Support Scheme to the end of March 2021.</p>	<p>Chancellor Rishi Sunak announces that the Treasury-run CJRS and SEISS will provide certainty over the winter months:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • businesses and people across the UK given certainty over winter months with further support announced by Chancellor Rishi Sunak • the furlough scheme will now be extended until the end of March – protecting millions of jobs across all nations • the next self-employed income support grant will also increase from 55% to 80% of average profits - up to £7,500
<p>8 November: DWP announces a new “winter package” for children and families.</p>	<p>The Department for Work and Pensions summarised the scheme, which will be managed by local authorities in England, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £170m Covid Winter Grant Scheme to support children, families and the most vulnerable over winter • Holiday Activities and Food programme to be expanded, covering Easter, Summer and Christmas in 2021 • Healthy Start payments set to rise from £3.10 to £4.25 a week from April 2021

34 Coronavirus: Withdrawing crisis social security measures

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suite of measures represents long-term plan to help tackle poor health, hunger and education.
9 November: DWP issues new Jobcentre guidance on coronavirus restrictions.	Press release on 9 November outlined details of adaptations made across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.
18 November: Social Security Advisory Committee publishes a 'review of the COVID-19 temporary measures.'	<p>The review of coronavirus related social security measures and the potential challenges of unwinding them covers six themes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conditionality and the unwinding of the easements 2. Communication with claimants and stakeholders 3. Determinations in an environment of social distancing 4. Clarifications to rules and easements 5. Housing exemptions 6. Other issues, including eligibility and award values
25 November: Secretary of State provides update on Social Security Benefit and Pension Up-rating 2021/22.	<p>A Written Statement (HCWS600) on the statutory annual review of benefits and State Pensions rates included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing pensions by 2.5%. Increasing benefits in line with CPI – 0.5% in the relevant reference period. Maintaining in cash terms the 2020/21 increase to the Local Housing Allowance, though not uprating this or permanently establishing a link with market rents. <p>The Written Statement also promised that a separate assessment of the temporary £20 a week uplift to Universal Credit and Working Tax Credit will be made in the new year.</p>
25 November: Spending Review includes £2.9 billion over three	On top of measures previously announced in the 'Plan for Jobs,' £2.9 billion was announced to be spent over the next three years on a "Restart Programme that will provide intensive and tailored support to

years to support the long term unemployed.	over 1 million unemployed people and help them find work, with approximately £0.4 billion of funding in 2021-22.”
27 November: DWP rereleases new Jobcentre guidance on COVID-19 Local Restriction Tiers.	DWP press release outlined rules allowing Jobcentres to remain open, but operating differently depending on local restrictions across the UK.

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