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Dear Jo,

Thank you for your email of 10 September to the Secretary of State on behalf of one of your constituents about Universal Credit. I am replying as the Minister of State for Employment.

We have listened to concerns about Universal Credit and have now implemented a number of further improvements.

This package of measures, which are set out below, not only addresses concerns raised around the first assessment period and the budgeting issues faced by some claimants at the start of their claim, but also supports the vast majority of claimants transitioning onto Universal Credit. They include:

- from 3 January, the repayment period of Universal Credit advances has been increased to 12 months and claimants can now get up to 100 per cent of their estimated monthly entitlement upfront. These advances are available to claimants interest-free;
- from 14 February, the seven-day waiting period that some claimants had at the start of their Universal Credit claim was removed; and,
- from 11 April, we have provided an additional payment for claimants already receiving support towards their housing costs of two weeks of their Housing Benefit to support them as they transfer onto Universal Credit. Claimants will not be required to repay this money.

Around 80 per cent of new claims to Universal Credit are paid in full and on time. In many cases, where full payment is not made on time by the end of the first assessment period, this is as a result of unresolved issues. Some claimants have not signed their Claimant Commitment or passed identity checks, and the others have outstanding verification issues, such as housing and self-employed earnings.

Whilst their verification is ongoing, many of these claimants receive a part payment for those elements of the claim that have been resolved. We know that, within five weeks of the payment due date, 95 per cent of the claims are paid in full.

The latest statistics on timeliness of payment for new claims to Universal Credit were published on 9 July and can be found on the Government website at gov.uk by using the search term 'length of payment delays for new claims to Universal Credit'.

We recognise that domestic abuse has far-reaching and devastating impacts on those who have been subjected to it. We will provide all the support we can when an individual discloses they are suffering from domestic abuse. Whilst there are no provisions within Universal Credit to provide faster processing of new claims in these circumstances, advance payments of up to 100 per cent of a claimant's indicative award are available, and if someone is in immediate need, then we will fast track the payment so they will receive it on the same day.

We understand that this is a difficult time for survivors of domestic abuse, so we also remove all work related requirements for three months to give them space and time to stabilise their life and focus on recovery. The length of this break can be extended, in extreme cases, and this will be decided by a Work Coach on a case by case basis.

All Universal Credit Work Coaches and Case Managers complete training on complex needs as part of their learning route into Universal Credit to help identify and support survivors of domestic abuse. Over the past months, we have worked with expert organisations such as Women's Aid and Mankind to develop products that raise awareness of domestic abuse for Work Coaches and improve our learning and development products.

I hope your constituent finds this information helpful.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Alok Sharma', with a stylized flourish below it.

Alok Sharma MP
Minister of State for Employment