



From the Parliamentary
Under Secretary of State
for Work and Pensions

DWP Department for
Work and Pensions

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Kevin Pelan
Committee for Social Development
Northern Ireland Assembly
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12 July 2012

Dear Kevin,

Bereavement Benefits for the 21st Century: Government Response

Thank you for your detailed response on behalf of the Northern Ireland Assembly to the Government's public consultation on the future of bereavement benefits.

We have now published a command paper, *Bereavement Benefits for the 21st Century: Government Response*¹ which sets out the Government's strategy for providing effective support after the loss of a spouse or civil partner, and includes a summary of the responses to the public consultation on how to achieve this.

Our strategy reaffirms the Government's commitment to providing financial support after spousal bereavement as an important part of the state safety net, with our primary aim to improve an out of date system, targeting resources when they are needed most, and taking into account the realities of working-age widowhood in the 21st century.

So we are shifting the focus of bereavement benefits, to provide a short-term intervention, helping people deal with the more immediate costs caused by the death of a spouse or civil partner, and to provide some breathing space to start to come to terms with the emotional and practical upheaval caused by this loss.

¹ <http://dwp.gov.uk/consultations/2011/bereavement-benefit.shtml>

It will be paid as a lump sum and further instalments over the course of a year to avoid the risks associated with making a large lump sum payment. This period is not intended to reflect the time required for 'recovery', but instead to provide a buffer for the immediate financial impact of bereavement. Payments will be disregarded from Universal Credit and the Benefit Cap for a period of 12 months.

This refocusing will improve the targeting of bereavement benefits, providing greater support in the period that social research tells us is particularly challenging financially. The strategy also involves ongoing support being provided through other parts of the welfare system, such as Universal Credit, and contributory Jobseeker's Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance, depending on circumstances.

Recipients of the Bereavement Support Payment, who also receive Universal Credit, or contributory JSA or ESA, will be able to access Jobcentre Plus support on a voluntary basis from three months after bereavement. They will not be subject to conditionality for a further three months. This means that those who need to start work, or change their working patterns after bereavement receive the support they need to do so.

Payments made under the War Pensions Scheme or Armed Forces Compensation Scheme will not be affected. It will not impact those already in receipt of bereavement benefits at the point at which a new scheme is introduced.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial 'D'.

Lord Freud

Minister for Welfare Reform