



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Office of Nadia Whittome MP
Houses of Commons
London
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The Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
HM Treasury
The Correspondence & Enquiry unit
1 Horse Guards Road
London
SW1A 2HQ

Dear Chancellor,

Re: Gaps in financial provisions available during the Covid-19 pandemic

I welcome the measures announced on 20th March and 26th March, but many of my constituents are excluded from these provisions and, as a consequence, are unsupported.

Several constituents are unable to access furlough pay through the Job Retention Scheme because they commenced new jobs after 28th February, many having to identify new employment due to uncertainty surrounding Covid-19. One constituent ended his employment on 28th February and started his new job on 2nd March, experiencing only a week-end gap in employment, and yet is ineligible for assistance. Jobseekers who have recently taken employment are finding themselves back on Universal Credit only weeks after ceasing their claims.

Small businesses in my constituency are unable to commit to placing their staff on furlough as government funding is not guaranteed. At present, government guidance is vague and a system to apply for this has not yet been established. Other businesses are concerned that they are not in a financial position to cover the cost of wages in the interim period prior to receiving government funding.

As you acknowledge, constituents who have been self-employed for under one year, and do not have a tax return for the tax year 2018/19, are ineligible for support. I urge you to include this category of self-employed in the scheme. One constituent is due to submit his first accounts this week and cannot access the scheme; another, also ineligible for support, is defined as extremely vulnerable from COVID-19 and tells me that he feels he has no choice but to work. Others who are the directors of limited

companies, earning a nominal salary topped up by dividends may receive less than Universal Credit rates from the scheme.

Many households have been reduced to a single income and Universal Credit is unavailable to reconcile some of the lost income because a partner works. Constituents also report being unable to book appointments at the Job Centre, necessary for them to progress their Universal Credit claims, because it is overwhelmed.

As I am sure you appreciate, these issues are causing enormous distress to many constituents who are financially unable to support themselves without taking on debt. The problems are widespread and not only pertain to financial hardship, but also impact public health as people are forced to work when they ought to stay at home.

You will recall that I, along with over 170 MPs and Peers, called for an emergency Universal Basic Income earlier this month as a more straightforward way to ensure that everyone receives sufficient funds to live, instead of the current mixture of measures which result in many falling through the gaps in what should be a 'safety net'.

The indiscriminate threat of Covid-19 to all highlights the inextricable link between individual finances and the health of every member of society. I look forward to your response to the points raised and trust that further measures and improvements are introduced to ensure that every individual is properly supported and, as the Prime Minister promised, no one is penalised for doing the right thing.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Nadia Whittome".

Nadia Whittome

Member of Parliament for Nottingham East