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Liz Sayce OBE
Chairmen, SSAC

15th May 2020

Dear Liz,

First, sincere apologies for the delay sending this response to you. As you are aware, we have seen a huge increase in demand for DWP services and I want to personally thank you for your patience at this time.

Thank you for your letter and for the summary of the feedback received at your stakeholder event on October 22nd. The event was very constructive and I share your hopes for a less polarised dialogue in future. In particular, I look forward to continuing to work with you and key stakeholders to explore ways in which we can balance the interests of both separated parents in the development of social security policy.

Below I have set out the existing position on the issues we discussed.

With regard to childcare, the legal position is that both separated parents cannot claim for childcare costs for the same child. Regulation 4 of the Universal Credit Regulations determines when a claimant is responsible for a child and that a child can only be included in one UC claim at a time. That means only one parent should be eligible to claim childcare costs and the definition of who is responsible in Regulation 4 applies to Regulation 33, which sets out the conditions to be met for the childcare costs condition.

In regard to the specific recommendations in the report, I shall respond to each one in turn.

In regard to developing a ***clear strategy for separated parents with respect to the social security system and setting up a cross-departmental working group*** we recognise the importance of working with other departments and across boundaries to tackle cross-cutting issues, and my department often leads engagement on particular issues and policy areas. For example, we currently lead a cross-government delivery group which works with a range of government departments and

external partners to coordinate work on reducing parental conflict, which aims to improve outcomes for children by supporting parents to improve their relationship.

There is a general principle, across the benefit system, of the need to determine the primary carer for children. Subsequent decisions concerning entitlement to benefits – whether Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit, Universal Credit or Child Maintenance – then flow from that determination. However, as you know, individual circumstances for separated parents are often very complex. We are committed to providing the practical help and financial support – via the benefits system – for those that need it. This will include support for separated parents who are bringing up children, unemployed and looking for work, have low earnings, have disabilities, as well as those who are carers.

I suggest that my officials and I discuss this recommendation with you to explore what you had in mind a bit further and to help inform our thinking.

I fully support SSAC's recommendation on improving the **quality and availability of data on parents without the main responsibility of care, and the need for data to help define evidence-based policy solutions.**

There are always likely to be limitations on the data that the Department can hold on non-resident parents. This is primarily because members of this group are much less likely to identify themselves in voluntary household surveys. This is a limitation that is widely recognised within government as well as the wider academic community.

However, analysts within my Department are currently taking steps to address the quality and availability of data on non-resident parents. In particular, my officials are examining ways in which existing large-scale surveys can be better accessed in order to improve the overall quality of data on all types of separated parents. In addition, my officials continue to engage with cross-government analysts and academic stakeholders to review data sources and explore options for improving data collection on non-resident parents specifically.

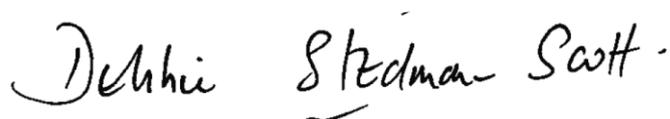
In regard to **SSAC's proposals for policy changes for housing support in the social security system to amend barriers to shared care** – specifically with regard to reforming the housing element in UC and options to support shared care arrangements for all non-resident parents - for a person to be treated as responsible for a child or young person, the child or young person must normally be living with that person. If a child or young person spends equal amounts of time in different households, or there is a question as to whom they normally live with, they will be treated as living with the person who is receiving Child Benefit for them. There is no provision within the Housing Benefit Regulations that will allow extra help for absent parents to take on larger premises to accommodate visiting children. This is because Housing Benefit is intended to meet the

reasonable housing costs of a claimant and his/her household. Where an absent parent has visiting children, they are not included as members of that household for benefit purposes.

Finally, in regard to SSAC's call for us to ***examine ways of improving the child maintenance formula and its link with earning thresholds***, we are grateful to the Committee for raising these issues and we've had the opportunity to discuss them with concerned stakeholders. The views expressed will be used to inform future policy development. Such thinking would need to consider the potential impacts on both the paying and receiving parents, as well as the impact on wider issues such as child poverty and the benefits system as a whole.

I look forward to continuing our discussion on ways in which we can respond to issues facing separated parents within the social security system.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Debbie Stedman-Scott". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line under the name "Stedman-Scott".

**BARONESS STEDMAN-SCOTT
MINISTER FOR WORK AND PENSIONS (LORDS)**