General Report on the application by the United Kingdom on the European Code of Social Security, 2023

THE UNITED KINGDOM HAS RATIFIED PARTS II, III, IV, V AND VII

Contents

I. General

A. Administration/Organisation

a) Changes made during the reference period

The administrative and organisational set up remains broadly as previously described in the report submitted in 2022.

The Department for Work and Pensions' website is here: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions

HM Revenue and Customs' website is here: https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-revenue-customs

The Department of Health and Social Care's website is here: Department of Health and Social Care - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Cost of Living Payments

On 17 November the Chancellor announced further Cost of Living Payments to support those on the lowest income with the rising cost of living. This was made law through the Social Security (Additional Payments) Act in March 2023.

Means-tested, £900 Cost of Living Payments to be made in three payments of

- £301 – First Cost of Living Payment – during Spring 2023
- £300 – Second Cost of Living Payment – during Autumn 2023
- £299 – Third Cost of Living Payment – during Spring 2024

Additionally, we will provide the following support for certain vulnerable groups:

- £300 – Pensioner Payment – during Winter 2023/4
- £150 – Disability Payment – during Summer 2023

To be entitled to receive a Cost of Living Payment the individual must be entitled to payment of a qualifying means-tested benefit during the qualifying periods, or a payment for an assessment period ending within the qualifying periods.

This comes on top of the **2022 support package**, which included:

- A £650 Cost of Living payment for means-tested benefit claimants, split into two payments, each of which supported over eight million households
- Further £300 and £150 payments, which reached over eight million pensioners and over six million disabled people respectively
- A £150 Council Tax rebate for all households in Council Tax bands A-D
- A £400 energy bill discount for all households, which will continue to run through March

The Health and Care Act 2022

The Health and Care Act 2022 contains a number provisions related to the organisational reform of the NHS: on 1 July 2022, the functions of NHS

Improvement (Monitor and the Trust Development Authority) – with the exception of its competition functions - were transferred to NHS England by the Health and Care Act 2022 and instruments made under it. On 1 February 2023, NHS Digital (the Health and Social Care Information Centre) was reorganised and its functions were transferred to NHS England under The Health and Social Care Information Centre (Transfer of Functions, Abolition and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2023, giving NHS England the responsibility to develop and operate national IT and data services that support clinicians at work, help patients get the best care, and use data to improve treatment. On 1 April 2023, Health Education England was reorganised and its functions were transferred to NHS England under the Health Education England (Transfer of Functions, Abolition and Transitional Provisions) Regulations 2023. NHS England assumed responsibility for the planning and delivery of the recruitment, education and training of the health workforce and, ensuring that the healthcare workforce has the right numbers, skills, values and behaviours in place to support the delivery of excellent healthcare and health improvement to patients and the public.

The Health and Care Act 2022 established Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) and Integrated Care Partnerships (ICPs). ICBs and ICPs work together with organisations such as local authorities to commission and plan joined up health and care services, and to improve the lives of people who live and work in their area. This approach was developed in collaboration with the NHS and local government and provides more flexibility for systems to manage health and care in the interests of their populations. One of the key benefits has been that for many areas different organisations and agencies have come together on a local basis to set up local integrated care teams. We have been told by local leaders that the current approach has allowed for more widespread cooperation and joint working between local organisations.

Additional Covid funding

Health and care services have spent £42.9 billion on additional revenue costs related to COVID-19 in 2020-21, with a further £38.7 billion spent in 2021-22.

This included £15.7 billion to support the ongoing NHS response to the pandemic throughout 2021-22 – including the Hospital Discharge Programme, infection control measures, additional support for Primary Care services, delivery of the COVID-19 vaccination programme, support for the Test and Trace programme carried out in NHS settings, and Elective Recovery.

Spending Review 2021 provided £9.6 billion over the period 2022-23 to 2024-25 for key COVID-19 programmes and related health spending and set out plans to spend over £8 billion during the same period for the elective backlog.

Long Term Workforce Plan

The NHS Long Term Workforce Plan (LTWP) published on the 30 June 2023, sets out the steps the NHS and its partners need to take to deliver an NHS workforce that meets the changing needs of the population over the next 15 years. It will put the workforce on a sustainable footing for the long term. NHS England » NHS Long Term Workforce Plan

The government is backing the plan with over **£2.4 billion over the next five years** to fund additional education and training places. This is on top of increases to education and training investment, reaching **a record £6.1 billion** over the next two years.

By significantly expanding domestic education, training and recruitment, we will have more healthcare professionals working in the NHS. This will include more doctors and nurses alongside an expansion in a range of other professions, including more staff working in new roles.

Although the LTWP was published within the reference period for this general report, there are actions which will be delivered in the short, medium and long term. Together we the NHS we are developing a comprehensive approach to delivery, that ensures the plan puts the NHS workforce on a sustainable footing for the long term. The UK government will keep the Committee updated on delivery plans in future reports.

Scotland

Workforce Planning

A Ministerial Taskforce on Nursing and Midwifery has been established, with a broad remit to consider recruitment, retention, workforce practice, leadership and culture, within the nursing and midwifery professions. The taskforce will take forward a national conversation, 'listening project', engaging with current staff, schools/colleges and universities before providing recommendations on a range of matters later in the year. Ministers have not confirmed the duration of the Taskforce, but it is anticipated that it should substantially conclude its business over the course of this financial year (2023/24).

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Workforce Action Plan is due to publish in Autumn 2023. The Workforce Action Plan will be aligned to the National Health and Social Care Workforce Strategy. Using this framework the action plan will look at the whole workforce journey and how we can plan, attract, train, employ and nurture our mental health and wellbeing workforce.

b) Changes decided, planned or proposed for the following year

No administrational or organisational changes planned for the following year, other than what has been described above.

c) Research (including evaluation, completed or initiated)

DWP research reports published from 2016 onwards can be viewed via the following link: https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/research-reports.

HMRC research reports published from 2016 onwards, and research commissioned for 2022-2023 can be viewed via the following link: https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-revenue-customs/about/research

The Department of Health and Social Care in England continues to fund research (including evaluation) through the National Institute for Health and Care Research - http://www.nihr.ac.uk Published information on what the Government is doing about research and innovation in health and social care is available also via the following link: https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/research-and-innovation-in-health-and-social-care

In January 2023 the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) updated their Areas of Research Interest (ARIs) focusing on areas of strategic policy importance. The three ARIs cover: Early action to prevent poor health outcomes; Reduction of compound pressures on the NHS and social care; Shaping and supporting the health and social care workforce of the future. Further information at: https://www.nihr.ac.uk/documents/dhsc-areas-of-research-interest/32536

In addition, information on the priorities and direction of NHS England can be found via the following link https://www.england.nhs.uk/. Further to this, NHS Long Term Plan for Primary Care can be found via the following link https://www.longtermplan.nhs.uk/areas-of-work/primary-care/. Information on Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) can be found here https://www.england.nhs.uk/integratedcare/.

Scotland

Research reports published by Social Security Scotland since 2016 can be accessed on the website here https://www.gov.scot/collections/social-security-policy-research-and-evaluation-publications/ and information from and Experience Panel publications can be accessed here: https://www.gov.scot/collections/social-security-experience-panels-publications/

The Scottish Government ran a consultation “Scotland’s social security system: enhanced administration and compensation recovery” from August 2022 to October 2022. The consultation sought views on a number of proposed changes to Scotland's social security system which have been identified as desirable. The consultation information can be accessed here: Scotland's social security system: enhanced administration and compensation recovery - consultation - gov.scot (www.gov.scot).

Independent analysis of the responses was undertaken by external contractors. Their consultation analysis report was published on 31 March 2023 and can be accessed here: Social security system - enhanced administration and compensation recovery: consultation analysis - gov.scot (www.gov.scot).

The Social Security Experience and Client Panels teams undertook supplementary research with their members on four key topics included within the consultation. Their published research can be accessed here: Social Security Experience Panels - re-determinations and appeals, fraud and special measures for COVID-19: main report - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

Within the reference period, Social Security Scotland social researchers published the following reports:

- Social Security Scotland – Charter Research 2021-22 (November 2022);
- Social Security Scotland - Client Survey 2021-2022 (November 2022);

- Social Security Scotland - Measuring Our Charter 2021-22 (November 2022);
- Social Security Scotland - Insights Research Findings – April 2021 to March 2022 (November 2022); and
- Social Security Scotland - Members Feedback Survey (November 2022).

The Scottish Government published the first of a new annual publication updating estimates of the take-up of Scottish benefits in October 2022 which can be found here: Estimates of Take-Up - Take-up rates of Scottish benefits: October 2022 - gov.scot (www.gov.scot).

B. Benefits;

Background on Universal Credit

Universal Credit (UC) is a universal social assistance measure that supports those who can work into work, and cares for those who cannot work by providing a minimum level of income, in line with the UK's view that work is the most effective route out of poverty. There are five basic conditions of entitlement to Universal Credit: to be 18 years or over (with some exceptions); to be under Pension Credit age (with some exceptions); to be a resident of the United Kingdom; to not be in full-time education (with some exceptions); and to have accepted a claimant commitment.

Benefit Up-rating 2022

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is required to undertake an annual statutory review of benefits and pensions. The Secretary of State has a mandatory requirement to up-rate some benefits and pensions by at least the increase in earnings or prices. Other benefits, mainly for those below State Pension age, are subject to his discretion.

For the purposes of the Up-rating review, the Department uses the September figure for the annual rise in prices (CPI) and the May-July average figure for the annual rise in earnings (AWE) to underpin its uprating rules. These indices are released by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in October.

Following the reopening of the economy and businesses after the COVID-19 pandemic, the labour market surged causing a distorting effect on earnings which for the period May to July 2021 represented an increase of 8.3%. Therefore the Social Security (Up-rating of Benefits) Act 2021 made technical amendments to the Social Security Administration Act 1992 and for one year set aside the requirement for the Secretary of State to conduct an assessment of earnings growth. Instead it was replaced by a double lock allowing the Secretary of State to up-rate the relevant State Pension rates (basic State Pension and the full rate of the new State Pension, the Pension Credit Standard Minimum Guarantee and survivors' benefits in Industrial Death Benefit) at least in line with the increase in the general level of prices or by 2.5%, whichever was the higher for the year 2022/23. Consequently, benefits and pensions increased in April 2022 by CPI for the year to September 2021, which stood at 3.1%.

From 11 April 2022, the following factors were used to increase benefits:

- The benefits where the Secretary of State has discretion (all components of Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Housing Benefit, and Universal Credit) were increased in line with CPI (3.1%)
- The mandatory benefits which must be up-rated at least in line with prices (ie those linked to the additional costs of disability and caring for example Attendance Allowance, Carer's Allowance, Disability Living Allowance, Personal Independence Payment and Severe Disablement Allowance) were increased in line with CPI, resulting in a 3.1% increase.
- The basic and new State Pension and Pension Credit Standard Minimum Guarantee (SMG) were increased in line with CPI (3.1%) as legislated for in the Social Security (Up-rating of Benefits) Act 2021.

Great Britain

The Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 2022 increased the weekly benefit rates (£GB) applicable in respect of the accepted Parts of the Code from April 2022.

The Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 2022 (legislation.gov.uk)
Benefit and pension rates 2022 to 2023 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Scotland

The Social Security Up-rating (Scotland) Order 2022 outlines the rates of the Social Security benefits for which Scottish Ministers have responsibility.

The Social Security Up-rating (Scotland) Order 2022 (legislation.gov.uk)

The Social Security (Miscellaneous Amendment and Transitional Provision) (Scotland) Regulations 2022 makes changes to the Best Start Foods Regulations, Best Start Grant Regulations and Scottish Child Payment Regulations. The main changes are:

- Extending eligibility for Scottish Child Payment to low-income families with children under the age of 16 years;
- Increasing the value of Scottish Child Payment to £25 per week per child;
- Allowing Social Security Scotland to automatically pay Best Start Grant Early Years Payment and Best Start Grant School Age Payment to eligible people who are in receipt of Scottish Child Payment;
- Other smaller changes around eligibility across the Best Start Foods, Best Start Grant and Scottish Child Payment regulations;
- Correct an administrative oversight identified in the Ukraine Regulations, required to ensure parity of access to benefits upon arrival in Scotland and the rest of the UK specific to people who hold Irish citizenship.

The Scottish Child Payment (Saving Provisions) Regulations 2022 ensure that the Social Security (Miscellaneous Amendment and Transitional Provision) (Scotland) Regulations 2022 operate correctly when a decision is made in relation to an individual's application or redetermination or following an appeal.

The Scottish Child Payment (Ancillary Provision) Regulations 2022 make savings provisions in connection with the amendments made by the Social

Security (Miscellaneous Amendment and Transitional Provision) (Scotland) Regulations 2022 which came into force on 14 November 2022.

These savings provisions came into force on the same day as the amending Regulations to ensure that the higher weekly rate of £25 only applies to periods of entitlement which fall on or after 14th November 2022, and an individual's entitlement to a double payment of Scottish Child Payment where a child dies does not apply where the child in question dies before 14th November 2022.

Northern Ireland

The rates that apply in Northern Ireland are set out in the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2022 S.R. 2022 No. 143. The rates correspond to those of DWP as Northern Ireland has no power to set different rates in the annual Up-rating Order.

[The Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2022 (revoked) (legislation.gov.uk)]

BENEFITS RATES (2022-23)	**(£GB)**
Universal Credit (monthly)	
Universal Credit provides payments for Sickness benefit (Part III) and Unemployment benefit (Part IV)	
Minimum amount	
Universal Credit minimum amount	0.01
Standard allowance	
Single under 25	265.31
Single 25 or over	334.91
Couple allowance	
Joint claimants both under 25	416.45
Joint claimants, one or both 25 or over	525.72
Child amount	
First child (born prior to 6 April 2017)	290.00
First child (born on or after 6 April 2017) or second child and subsequent child (where an exception or transitional provision applies)	244.58
Disabled child additions	
Lower rate addition	132.89
Higher rate addition	414.88

Limited capability for work

Limited capability for work amount	132.89
Limited capability for work and work-related activity amount	354.28

Carer

Carer amount	168.81

Childcare costs amount

Maximum for one child	646.35
Maximum for two or more children	1108.04

Non-dependants' Housing cost contributions

Non-dependants' housing cost contributions	77.87

Work allowance

Higher work allowance (no housing amount) one or more dependent children or limited capability for work	573.00
Lower work allowance one or more dependent children or limited capability for work	344.00

SICKNESS BENEFIT (PART III)

Statutory Sick Pay

Earnings threshold	123.00
Standard rate	99.35

Incapacity Benefit

Long-term Incapacity Benefit	118.25

Employment and Support Allowance

Personal allowances

Single	
Under 25	61.05
25 or over	77.00
Lone parent	
Under 18	61.05
18 or over	77.00

Work-related activity component (WRAC)	30.60
Support component	40.60

Premiums

Enhanced disability	
Single	17.75
Couple	25.35
Severe disability	
Single	69.40
Couple (lower rate)	69.40
Couple (higher rate)	138.80
Carer	38.85
Pensioner	
Single with WRAC	75.00
Single with support component	65.00
Single with no component	105.60
Couple with WRAC	127.05
Couple with support component	117.05
Couple with no component	157.65

UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT (PART IV)

Contribution based JSA – personal rates

18 to 24	61.05
25 or over	77.00

OLD AGE BENEFIT (PART V)

State Pension

New State Pension (full rate)	185.15
Old State Pension	
Basic State Pension (full rate)	141.85
Spouse or civil partner's pension	85.00

The following were increased by 3.1% -

Additional pension:

Increments to:-

i. Basic pension
ii. Additional pension
iii. Graduated Retirement Benefit (GRB)
iv. Inheritable lump sum

Age addition (over 80) – no change	0.25

Pension Credit

Standard minimum guarantee

Single	182.60
Couple	278.70
Additional amount for severe disability	
Single	69.40
Couple (one qualifies)	69.40
Couple (both qualify)	138.80
Additional amount for carers	38.85
Children	
First child born before 6 April 2017	66.85
Subsequent children	56.35
Disabled child – lower rate	30.58
Disabled child – higher rate	95.48

FAMILY BENEFIT (PART VII)

Child Tax Credit (£GB **yearly** rates)	
Family element	545.00
Child element	2,935
Disabled child element	3,545
Severely disabled child element	4,975

Child Benefit (£GB **weekly** rates)	
Eldest child	21.80
Each subsequent child	14.45

a) Changes decided, planned or proposed for the following year

Benefit Up-rating 2023

Please see Part I – Benefits for further background on how benefit uprating is calculated.

In April 2023, benefits and pensions were increased by the growth in prices in the year to September 2022. Therefore, pensions and benefits were increased by 10.1%.

The Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 2023 (legislation.gov.uk)

Following the reviews of tax credits, Child Benefit and Guardian's Allowance, for the tax year 2023/24 the majority of elements and thresholds have increased by 10.1% in line with the overall level of prices as measured by the change in CPI from September 2021 to September 2022.

The annual rates of Child Tax Credit elements increased from 6 April 2023 as follows:

- the child element increased from £2,935 to £3,235;
- the disabled child rate increased from £3,545 to £3,905;
- the severely disabled child rate increased from £4,975 to £5,480.

The income threshold for those entitled to Child Tax Credit only increased from £17,005 to £18,725.

The increase in the weekly rate of Child Benefit was 10.1%, rounded to the nearest 5 pence. This means that, from 10 April 2023, the weekly rate for the eldest child increased from £21.80 to £24.00, and the rate for any subsequent children increased from £14.45 to £15.90.

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/benefit-and-pension-rates-2023-to-2024

Scotland

The Social Security Up-rating (Scotland) Order 2023 provided for the uprating of benefits administered in Scotland by the Department of Work and Pensions, which were all increased by 10.1% on 1 April 2023. The new rates for each benefit covered by this Order can be viewed here.

The draft Social Security (Up-rating) (Miscellaneous Amendments) (Scotland) Regulations 2023 provided for the uprating of devolved benefits administered by the Scottish Government, which were increased by 10.1% on 10 April 2023. Scottish Child Payment was not included within the Regulations, as it was increased by 25% in November 2022 as an early uprating exercise. The new rates of devolved benefits can be viewed here.

Information on specific rates can be accessed here: Social Security Scotland - Social security payment rates increased.

Northern Ireland

The rates that apply in Northern Ireland are set out in the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2023.

The Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2023 (legislation.gov.uk)

BENEFITS RATES (2023-24)	**(£GB)**
Universal Credit (monthly)	
Universal Credit provides payments for Sickness benefit (Part III) and Unemployment benefit (Part IV)	
Minimum amount	
Universal Credit minimum amount	0.01
Standard allowance	

Single under 25	292.11
Single 25 or over	368.74

Couple allowance

Joint claimants both under 25	458.51
Joint claimants, one or both 25 or over	578.82

Child amount

First child (born prior to 6 April 2017)	315.00
First child (born on or after 6 April 2017) or second child and subsequent child (where an exception or transitional provision applies)	269.58

Disabled child additions

Lower rate addition	146.31
Higher rate addition	456.89

Limited capability for work

Limited capability for work amount	146.31
Limited capability for work and work-related activity amount	390.06

Carer

Carer amount	185.86

Childcare costs amount

Maximum for one child	950.92 from 28/6/23 (previously 646.35)
Maximum for two or more children	1630.15 from 28/6/23 (previously 1108.04)

Non-dependants' Housing cost contributions

Non-dependants' housing cost contributions	85.73

Work allowance

Higher work allowance (no housing amount) one or more dependent children or limited capability for work	631.00
Lower work allowance one or more dependent children or limited capability for work	379.00

SICKNESS BENEFIT (PART III)

Statutory Sick Pay

Earnings threshold	123.00
Standard rate	109.40

Incapacity Benefit

Long-term Incapacity Benefit	130.20

Employment and Support Allowance

Personal allowances

Single	
Under 25	67.20
25 or over	84.80
Lone parent	
Under 18	67.20
18 or over	84.80
Work-related activity component (WRAC)	33.70
Support component	44.70

Premiums

Enhanced disability	
Single	19.55
Couple	27.90
Severe disability	
Single	76.40
Couple (lower rate)	76.40
Couple (higher rate)	152.80
Carer	42.75
Pensioner	
Single with WRAC	82.55
Single with support component	71.55
Single with no component	116.25
Couple with WRAC	139.85
Couple with support component	128.85
Couple with no component	173.55

UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFIT (PART IV)

Contribution based JSA – personal rates

18 to 24	67.20
25 or over	84.80

OLD AGE BENEFIT (PART V)

State Pension

New State Pension (full rate)	203.85
Old State Pension	
Basic State Pension (full rate)	156.20
Spouse or civil partner's pension	93.60

The following were increased by 10.1% -

Additional pension:

Increments to:-

i. Basic pension
ii. Additional pension
iii. Graduated Retirement Benefit (GRB)
iv. Inheritable lump sum

Age addition (over 80) – no change	0.25

Pension Credit

Standard minimum guarantee	
Single	201.05
Couple	306.85
Additional amount for severe disability	
Single	76.40
Couple (one qualifies)	76.40
Couple (both qualify)	152.80
Additional amount for carers	42.75
Children	
First child born before 6 April 2017	72.31
Subsequent children	61.88
Disabled child – lower rate	33.67
Disabled child – higher rate	104.86

FAMILY BENEFIT (PART VII)

Child Tax Credit (£GB **yearly** rates)	
Family element	545
Child element	3,235
Disabled child element	3,905
Severely disabled child element	1,575

Child Benefit (£GB **weekly** rates)	
Eldest child	24.00
Each subsequent child	15.90

c) Research (including evaluation, completed or initiated

DWP has published official statistics detailing the estimated number and type of GB families and individuals in families benefitting from the uprating of benefits in 2023 to 2024.

We estimate that:

- In 2023/4 around 19 million families will benefit from the uprating of DWP and HMRC benefits in Great Britain.
- This will include over 7 million pensioner and over 10 million working age families and around 1 million mixed age couples
- Around 40 million people in Great Britain will benefit from the uprating of DWP and HMRC benefits in 2023/4
- Over 16 million working age adults in Great Britain will benefit from the uprating of DWP and HMRC benefits in 2023/4
- Over 11 million children in Great Britain will benefit from the uprating of DWP and HMRC benefits in 2023/4
- Nearly 12 million pensioners in Great Britain will benefit from the uprating of DWP and HMRC benefits in 2023/4

Full statistics are available at: Estimated number and type of GB families and individuals in families benefitting from the up-rating of benefits in 2023 to 2024 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Scotland

The Scottish Government undertook an evaluation of the Scottish Child Payment: interim evaluation - gov.scot (www.gov.scot)

Social Security Scotland social researchers also published the following reports:

- Social Security Scotland - Social Security Research: Child Disability Payment - Early experiences of applicants, staff and partners (September 2022);
- Social Security Scotland - Client Survey: Five Family Payments (December 2022); and
- Social Security Scotland – Client Survey: Child Disability Payment (March 2023).

II. Medical care

a) Changes made during the reference period

Please see Part I – Administration/Organisation.

Scotland

National Treatment Centres

In 2022, a mobile operating theatre (£2.3 million) was opened to enable almost 350 planned care surgeries to go ahead for patients in Orkney and Shetland. An urology hub at Forth Valley Royal Hospital was also opened, providing a one-stop diagnostic and treatment service for patients. 7 mobile MRI and 5 mobile CT scanners will help people get diagnostic tests they need and additional activity throughout the week including weekends, such as weekend Endoscopy sessions, will help reduce diagnostic waits.

National Treatment Centres (NTCs) at Fife and Highland began treating patients in March and April 2023. The Forth Valley National Treatment Centre will open this summer (2023) and the second phase of the NTC Golden Jubilee will open in winter. More information on NTCs can be accessed here: National Treatment Centres - Healthcare standards - gov.scot (www.gov.scot).

Optical

The Scottish Government laid secondary legislation – The National Health Service (Optical Charges and Payments) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2023 – before the Scottish Parliament which increases NHS optical voucher values by 4.5% from 1 June 2023.

Maternity Care

The Scottish Government continue to implement the recommendations in The Best Start: A Five Year Forward Plan for Maternity and Neonatal Care in Scotland, including rolling out continuity of midwife and obstetric care, developing guidelines, improving data collection, standardising reviews of adverse events and improving bereavement care. The timeline for implementing these recommendations is June 2024 with the exception of the continuity of carer which has until June 2026.

Cancer support

The Scottish Government has directed £10 million of funding to support Cancer Waiting Times improvements in our NHS across 2022/23. Funds are largely being directed towards colorectal and urology specialties, two of the most challenged 62-day pathways. Significant funds are going towards up-skilling nurses and investment to support extended working days and weekend working to increase capacity.

Scotland's first Rapid Cancer Diagnostic Services (RCDSs) – established within existing NHS infrastructure – are operational in NHS Ayrshire and Arran, NHS Dumfries and Galloway and NHS Fife. The Services provide primary care with access to a new referral pathway for patients with non-specific symptoms suspicious of cancer.

A new Detect Cancer Earlier campaign – Be The Early Bird – launched on 06 March 2023 and ran for four weeks, aiming to reduce fear of cancer and empower those with possible symptoms to act early. The campaign has been developed with primary and secondary care clinical input and will be independently evaluated.

On 10 October 2022, the former First Minister announced that two new Rapid Cancer Diagnostic Services will be established in NHS Lanarkshire and NHS Borders, supported by more than £600,000 investment. NHS Lanarkshire and NHS Borders services went live at the end of April 2023 and will both be fully operational by June 2023.

Reduced drug deaths

Scotland has changed its approach from tackling drugs as a criminal justice issue and has located the challenge firmly in the space of public health and human rights. In August 2022 the Scottish Government published the National Mission on Drugs plan 2022-2026 which sets out in further detail how it plans to deliver the National Mission over the duration of this parliament.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

In September 2022, the Scottish Government and COSLA published 'Creating Hope Together' a new highly ambitious ten year Suicide Prevention Strategy, and our first 3 year action plan. This approach goes further than ever before with a clear focus on tackling the inequalities which drive suicide, such as poverty, homelessness and social isolation. One key part of tackling inequalities is taking a whole of Government policy approach. This ensures suicide prevention is embedded into all relevant policies.

Since publishing the strategy and action plan new arrangements have been put in place to strengthen leadership and accountability, and to drive forward our new partnership approach to suicide prevention. Priorities for the first year of the action plan will be announced shortly.

b) Changes decided, planned or proposed for the following year

Additional Covid funding

The NHS resource budget will increase in cash terms to £165.8 billion in 2024-25, up from £123.4 billion in 2019-20. This includes funding to support the NHS in managing the ongoing impact of COVID, while also tackling the elective waiting list. This includes more than £8 billion to support the NHS in managing the ongoing impact of COVID-19 and recover routine services affected by the pandemic, delivering millions more, checks, scans and procedures.

Scotland

National Treatment Centre

The National Treatment Centre (NTC) Forth Valley and the second phase of the NTC Golden Jubilee will open later this year (2023). NTC Fife will increase the number of orthopaedic procedures which our NHS can carry out by around 500 this year, rising to more than 700 by 2025/2026. NTC Highland will create additional capacity for over 1,500 orthopaedic procedures this year for patients in Highland and Grampian, including hip and knee replacements. The centre will also host NHS Highland's eye care service, and will increase capacity for ophthalmic procedures, including cataract surgery.

Reduced drug deaths

Scotland has engaged in a paradigm shift away from tackling drugs as a criminal justice issue and located the challenge firmly in the space of public health and human rights. This involves improving the treatment and support we provide for people affected by substance use, addressing the wider complex needs that people experience and addressing the underlying social determinants of health. Funding to tackle substance use totals £160.1 million in the 2023-24

Health Budget and this is inclusive of £56.5 million baseline funding for Alcohol and Drugs Partnerships (ADPs); £4.6 million for mental health workers and £99 million for the alcohol and drugs budget, including £12 million to deliver the Cross Government Action Plan.

The Scottish Government has committed to making an additional £250 million available to deliver the national mission on drugs over the duration of this parliament.

The Scottish Government is committed to implementation of the Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) standards. These standards define what is needed for the consistent delivery of safe and accessible drug treatment and support in Scotland and emphasise the importance of allowing people to make informed choices about the type of treatment and help available to them. The timeline set for implementation would see full implementation of standards 1 – 5 in communities by April 2023 and full implementation of standards 1 – 10 by April 2025.

Alcohol and smoking

Smoking remains a leading cause of preventable disease and premature death. The Scottish Government's refreshed Tobacco Action plan will be published in autumn in this year (2023). It reiterates the commitment to meeting the 5% 2034 target.

Minimum unit price (MUP) has been found to save more than 150 lives a year and result in 411 fewer hospital admissions. Work on reviewing the level of MUP has started as part of our overall evaluation and the conclusion of the review will be completed in late 2023. If our overall evaluation supports a continuation of MUP, we will lay Orders in the Scottish Parliament in late 2023 to continue MUP beyond the initial six year period and if the evidence supports a change in price, to set a new unit price.

Mental health and wellbeing

The Scottish Government Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy was published in June 2023 sets out our vision for improving mental health needs at all levels of need. A Delivery Plan and Workforce Action Plan will follow in Autumn 2023. We will continue to expand Local Mental Health and Wellbeing support for children and young people aged 5 to 24+ and have allocated a further £15 million in 2023-24.

Standards for adult secondary mental health services and a national specification of psychological therapies and services will be published in Summer 2023. Implementation of these standards and specification will then be pursued over the course of 2023 and 2024, working in partnership to ensure that this approach supports the workforce. This will include the introduction of a self-assessment and national measures. In September 2023 the Scottish Government will publish our first dedicated self-harm strategy and action plan.

A New Dementia Strategy for Scotland was published in May 2023. It sets out a new story for dementia policy in Scotland, with a series of ambitions to be delivered across the strategy's 10-year life span.

In June 2023, Scottish Government published an initial response to the Scottish Mental Health Law Review, which made over 200 recommendations for changes to the law and policy and practice.

c) Research (including evaluation, completed or initiated)

Please see Part I – Administration/Organisation.

Scotland

The following research has been – or is expected to be published – during the reference period:

- An evaluation of the Minimum Unit Price: Evaluation of minimum unit pricing (MUP) - Alcohol - Health topics - Public Health Scotland;
- An analysis of 'vaping products - tightening rules on advertising and promotion' consultation;
- Analysis on Understanding prevalence and trends in vaping among adults and children - gov.scot (www.gov.scot); and
- an evaluation on the effectiveness of the Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for Adults was published on 19 July 2023.

Northern Ireland

The following research has been – or is expected to be published – during the reference period:

- Revised Modelling on the Impact of Minimum Unit Pricing for Alcohol in Northern Ireland: https://www.health-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/health/doh-mup-revised-modelling.PDF

Optical

- The Department of Health made Statutory Rule - The Optical Charges and Payments (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2023 (S.R. 2023 No. 40). The regulations increased the voucher values by 2% from 1 April 2023 in order to maintain provision of affordable appliances for the public.

III. Sickness Benefit

a) Changes made during the reference period

Please see Part I – Benefits for information relating to benefit uprating during and for the reference period.

On 1 July 2022 The Social Security (Medical Evidence) and Statutory Sick Pay (Medical Evidence) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations 2022 were laid. This widened the range of healthcare professionals able to certify a statement of fitness for work form (a 'fit note') to include nurses, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and pharmacists as well as those previously in scope within the regulations, registered medical practitioners.

[The Social Security (Medical Evidence) and Statutory Sick Pay (Medical Evidence) (Amendment) (No. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022 (legislation.gov.uk)]

Northern Ireland

In March 2022 on the formal request of Northern Ireland, regulations were laid to extend section 43 of the Coronavirus Act 2020 which meant that eligible employees were still able to receive SSP for absences related to COVID-19 from day one of their absence. This power applied to Northern Ireland only. The equivalent power in Great Britain expired as planned on 24 March 2022.

[Coronavirus Act 2020 (Extension of Provisions Relating to Statutory Sick Pay) No. 2) (Order) (Northern Ireland) 2022]

b) Changes decided, planned or proposed for the following year

Please see Part I – Benefits for changes to amounts payable for sickness benefits for the following year.

c) Research (including evaluation, completed or initiated

Please see Part I – Administration/Organisation – DWP entry.

IV. Unemployment Benefit

a) Changes made during the reference period

Please see Part I – Benefits for information relating to benefit uprating during and for the reference period.

Consumption Payments (energy suppliers)

From 1 April 2023, energy suppliers have resumed making new requests for Fuel Direct ongoing consumption, or requests to increase existing payment arrangements. However for all new requests and requests for an increase in existing deductions for ongoing consumption, the energy suppliers must gain consent from claimants. The changes to Fuel Direct ongoing consumption will ensure claimants have the opportunity to discuss energy bills and potential support available with their suppliers before giving consent and agreeing repayments.

This change will impact anyone already in receipt of Employment Support Allowance, Income Support, Job seekers Allowance and Pensions Credit.

Also see the UK response to the Committees requests.

b) Changes decided, planned or proposed for the following year

Please see Part I – Benefits for information relating to benefit uprating during and for the following year.

Also see the UK response to the Committees requests.

c) Research (including evaluation, completed or initiated

Please see Part I – Administration/Organisation.

V. Old Age Benefit

a) Changes made during the reference period

Please see Part I – Benefits for information relating to benefit uprating during and for the reference period.

b) **Changes decided, planned or proposed for the following year**

Please see Part I – Benefits for information relating to benefit uprating during and for the following year.

c) **Research (including evaluation, completed or initiated)**

Please see Part I – Administration/Organisation.

d) Rates of Payment during the reference period

Please see Part I – Benefits for rates of payment during the reference period

VII. Family Benefit

a) **Changes made during the reference period**

Please see Part I – Benefits for information relating to benefit uprating during and for the reference period.

b) **Changes decided, planned or proposed for the following year**

Please see Part I – Benefits for information relating to benefit uprating during and for the following year.

c) Research (including evaluation, completed or initiated)

HMRC research completed in the period 2022-2023:

Tax credits communications campaign tracking 2021 - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) September 2022

Understanding customer notification of qualifying disability benefits in tax credits - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk) January 2023

Child Benefit - quantitative research to develop an understanding of Child Benefit customers' current attitudes and expectations of a digital Child Benefit service. May 2023 Digital Child Benefit Customer Survey - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

HMRC research commissioned for period 2022-2023

HMRC research commissioned for 2022-2023 can be viewed via the following link: https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-revenue-customs/about/research

HMRC has commissioned external research to look at Child Benefit take up rates and help identify how best to support customers to apply for Child Benefit

Scotland

The Scottish Government undertook an evaluation of two key measures which intend to reduce child poverty in Scotland, as outlined in the Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan, and the reports can be accessed here:

- Best Start Foods Evaluation published July 2022: Best Start Foods: evaluation - gov.scot (www.gov.scot); and
- Scottish Child Payment Interim Evaluation published July 2022: Scottish Child Payment: interim evaluation - gov.scot (www.gov.scot).

XI. Financing

a) **Changes made during the reference period**

National Insurance Contributions

The basis of indexation of all National Insurance Contributions (NICs) rates, limits and thresholds has been by reference to at least Consumer Price Index (CPI) since 2011, except where the government has made specific policy decisions. Following the announcement made at Autumn Statement 2022, NICs rates, limits and thresholds were fixed at their 2022/23 levels for the 2023/24 tax year, except for the flat cash rate of Class 2 and Class 3 NICs which increased in line with September CPI (10.1%) to £3.45 per week (Class 2) and £17.45 (Class 3). These changes came into effect from 6 April 2023.

Health and Social Care Levy

The Health and Social Care Levy was announced on 7 September 2021. It was legislated for through the Health and Social Care Levy Act 2021, which received Royal Assent on 20 October 2021. It was implemented from 6 April 2022 through a temporary 1.25 percentage point increase to Class 1, Class 1A, Class 1B, and Class 4 NICs rates in the 2022 to 2023 tax year, the proceeds of which were payable towards the cost of health and social care in the United Kingdom. The Levy was then intended to be formally separated from NICs from 6 April 2023 and would have been payable as a separate tax by employers, employees, and the self-employed, including those working above State Pension age. The proceeds of the separate Levy were intended to be payable towards the cost of health and social care in the United Kingdom.

On 22 September 2022, following a change in administration, the government announced that the temporary 1.25 percentage point increase to Class 1, Class 1A, Class 1B and Class 4 NICs would be removed from 6 November 2022 for the remainder of the 2022-23 tax year; and that it would stop the Health and Social Care Levy from coming into force from 6 April 2023. The Health and Social Care Levy Act (Repeal) Bill Act received Royal Assent on 25 October 2022.

Further information on the NICs rates, limits and thresholds for 2023-24, including previous tax years can be found at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rates-and-allowances-national-insurance-contributions/rates-and-allowances-national-insurance-contributions.

Spring Statement 2022 – National Insurance contributions (Increase of Thresholds) Act 2022

Following the announcement at Spring Statement 2022, legislation was introduced to increase the Primary Threshold (PT) for Class 1 NICs and Lower Profits Limit (LPL) for Class 4 NICs from 6 July 2022, aligning them with the personal allowance for income tax which is set at £12,570 per annum. These thresholds will remain aligned.

From April 2022, this measure also reduced Class 2 NICs liabilities to nil on profits between the Small Profits Threshold (SPT) and LPL. This ensured that no one earning between the SPT and LPL will pay any Class 2 NICs, while allowing individuals to be able to continue to build up National Insurance credits.
As the SPT was the threshold at which the self-employed became liable to pay Class 2 NICs, the government were required to introduce a new threshold to replace the SPT as being the point at which the self-employed become liable to Class 2 NICs. This threshold was introduced through regulations in November 2022 and is known as the Lower Profits Threshold and is set at the same level as the LPL for Class 4 NICs. The SPT continues to be the threshold at which self-employed individuals start to accrue entitlement to certain contributory benefits without paying Class 2 NICs.

Further information on the announcements made at Spring Statement 2022 can be found at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spring-statement-2022-documents.

In addition to the NICs threshold announcements, at Autumn Statement 2022 the government also announced that it was going to refocus on their Investment Zones programme to catalyse a limited number of high potential clusters, which for NICs meant an employer's NICs relief for those businesses operating in the Investment Zones. Further information on the announcements made at Autumn Statement 2022 can be found at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/autumn-statement-2022-documents.

Table on earnings-related contribution rates

Table – 2023/24

WEEKLY EARNINGS	EMPLOYEE CLASS 1 NICs		EMPLOYER CLASS 1 NICs
	STANDARD	MARRIED WOMAN REDUCED RATE	
Nil - £123	Nil	Nil	Nil
£123.01 - £242	0%	0%	0%
£242.01 - £967	12% of that part of earnings which exceeds £242 but does not exceed £967	5.85% of earnings between £242 and £967	13.8% of all earnings which exceed £175
Above £967	3.25% of that part of earnings which exceed £967	3.25% of that part of earnings which exceed £967	

Government Actuary's Report 2023

The Report of the Government Actuary on the potential impact on the National Insurance Fund of the draft Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order 2023, and the draft Social Security (Contributions) (Rates, Limits and Thresholds Amendments and National Insurance Funds Payments) Regulations 2023 that were made to introduce the 2023 annual rates of Contributions and Benefits as set out in the table above and can be viewed via the following link: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/report-to-parliament-on-the-2023-re-rating-and-up-rating-orders

b) Changes decided, planned or proposed for the following year

At Spring Budget 2023, the government confirmed their announcement made at Autumn Statement 2022 to introduce Investment Zones across the UK which will match the tax offer provided by Freeports. For NICs, this means that eligible businesses within Investment Zones will be able to claim an Employer NICs relief of up to £25,000 per eligible employee. Further information on the Investment Zones programme can be found at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spring-budget-2023/spring-budget-2023-html.

c) Research (including evaluation, completed or initiated)

There was research conducted and during the reference period regarding understanding the self-employed customers experience of bringing payment of Class 2 NICs into Self-Assessment. A link to the published report can be found on gov.uk at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/understanding-self-employed-customer-experiences-of-bringing-payment-of-class-2-national-insurance-contributions-into-self-assessment.

HMRC research commissioned for 2023/24 can be viewed via the following link, which includes a link to evaluations currently being undertaken on the Freeport, Veteran, Under 25 and Under 21 NICs reliefs, as well as the Employment Allowance and Salary Sacrifice:
https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/hm-revenue-customs/about/research.

Please also see Part I – Administration/Organisation.

Annex 1: Responses to requests for further information

1) **The Committee takes note of the information and requests the UK Government to continue providing information on the state of implementation of the UC.**

New regulations were introduced in July 2022 to support the strategy to complete the move of existing benefit claimants to Universal Credit announced in April 2022. The Universal Credit (Transitional Provision) Regulations 2022 amend existing regulations, which set out how existing claimants are required to claim Universal Credit and provided transitional financial support. The new regulations made these changes to clarify the policy intent and remove complexities that hindered the design and delivery of migrating existing claimants. This managed migration has been taking place in selected districts since May 2022 to 'test and learn' how to move claimants safely. Evidence from the first cohort of this 'Discovery phase' of managed migration was published in January 2023.

The Government announced revisions to the proposed timetable for migrating claimants in November 2022. The ambition remains to migrate all cases of existing claimants, except those on selected health benefits (Employment and Support allowance (ESA) only and ESA with Housing Benefit) by end of March 2025. We will continue to use these Discovery activity principles of learning and iterating our approach as we expand our volumes.

From 3 April 2023, we began increasing the numbers of Migration Notices issued; focussing on notifying households that receive tax credits only, and increasing volumes incrementally each month. We are expanding into additional areas, bringing in the whole of Great Britain during 2023/24. From 17 April 2023, the Department for Communities (DfC) in Northern Ireland commenced a discovery exercise, issuing Migration Notices to 500 people in receipt of tax credits only. We continue to take a responsible approach to moving households to Universal Credit. As we increase the numbers of Migration Notices, we will continue to build on our learning to ensure the service continues to meet the needs of those required to make the move to Universal Credit. We will incrementally increase the numbers of Migration Notices we issue, aiming to notify over 500,000 households by March 2024

As we move into 2024/25, remaining cases with tax credits (including those on both Employment and Support Allowance and tax credits), all cases on Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance (Income Based) and all Housing Benefit cases (including combinations of these benefits) will be required to move to Universal Credit.

2) **The Committee requests once again the UK Government to consider modifying the qualifying conditions for entitlement to UC with a view to ensuring that every person who qualifies in his/her own right has access to UC regardless of**

whether other adults in the same household qualify or not, and requests the Government to provide information on any measures taken or envisaged in this regard.

There are currently no plans to modify the qualifying conditions for Universal Credit in relation to Committees request.

Where individuals live in the same household yet are not defined as being in a couple, then their entitlement is calculated on an individual basis. This means that in the case of lodgers, for example, individuals are deemed to be living independently of each other with individual finances.

If a claimant is part of a couple then their partner's financial circumstances will be taken into account, whether they are eligible for Universal Credit or not. This is because the Government must assess the couple's financial situation as a whole. The Department has a duty to protect the public purse and must only give support to those who are proven to be in need.

This also does not prevent claimants living in a household that is not eligible for Universal Credit from claiming other benefits such as New Style Employment Support Allowance or New Style Jobseekers' Allowance which is based on an individual's national insurance contributions.

3) **The Committee urges once again the Government to extend the permitted period established in Regulation 97 of the Universal Credit Regulations of 2013 and Regulation 95 of the Universal Credit Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2016) to the first 26 weeks of benefit payment, in line with Part IV of the Code, in conjunction with Article 68 of the Code.**

The UK's focus is firmly on supporting claimants into and to progress in work. The approach is based on clear evidence about the importance of employment, particularly where it is full-time, in substantially reducing the risks of poverty and in improving long-term outcomes for claimants including their mental wellbeing.

The underlying intent of the UK provisions on permitted periods to find suitable employment is to support those claimants who can work to move into employment as quickly as possible.

The Universal Credit and Jobseeker's Allowance Regulation (as amended in 2022) require claimants to widen their job search at an earlier point in the claim, helping to reduce the time claimants spend out of work. In March 2021, the UK's Office for National Statistics found that between 2007 and 2020, more than two-fifths (41.4%) of people who had been out of work for up to 13 weeks returned to work within the next three months. This reduced to 28.5% of people who had been out of work for up to 21 weeks, and 23.3% of people who had been out of a job for 21 to 39 weeks. We know, therefore, that the more time someone spends out of work, the longer it can take to go back into employment.

Claimants without an easement in place are expected to take all reasonable steps to look for work. Once the permitted period is over, claimants will have a conversation with the work coach to identify suitable job goals to widen their job search activity. Conditionality means that we can work together with a claimant to generate a productive reciprocal relationship with the shared aim of supporting claimants into work or getting them more/better paid work.

Claimants who have completed a permitted period may be asked to broaden their job search activity to suitable jobs in any sector that they can do, but also remain able to carry on looking for the same type of work they were searching for during the permitted period. At no point will claimants be expected to take up unsuitable employment. The UK considers this to be in full alignment with the requirements of the provisions in the Code.