

The Rt Hon Philip Hammond MP, Chancellor of the Exchequer

HM Treasury  
1 Horse Guards Road  
London  
SW1A 2HQ

14 November 2017

Dear Chancellor,

We write as the independent Children's Commissioners for the four UK nations with a direct plea to you to make full use of the opportunity afforded by the forthcoming budget to take steps to reverse a projected rise in child poverty caused primarily by changes to the benefits and tax credits system. We specifically ask you to reconsider the current benefits framework and implementation plans that reliably forecast to negatively affect children more than any other group.

We request as follows:

1. An urgent review of the freeze on benefits, with a particular focus on the impact on families with children

This month's report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies<sup>1</sup> forecasts a rise of 4 percentage points in absolute child poverty (after the deduction from income of housing costs) by 2021-22. Three-quarters of this projected rise will be caused by benefit changes, affecting 400,000 children. Relative poverty rates for children are forecast to rise by seven percentage points by 2021-22. The rise in child poverty will hit more working than non-working households and will be felt in each UK nation.

2. The government should reconsider the decision to restrict entitlements to Universal Credit to only two children per family.

A significant factor in the projected rise in child poverty is the restriction of benefits to only two children. It is our view that this measure constitutes a breach of children's rights to an adequate standard of living under the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child. Giving all children, no matter their family circumstances, the same entitlements to state support would be a significant step in protecting our most vulnerable children and reducing the projected impact on child poverty.

3. An immediate pause in the roll out of Universal Credit to families with children, pending a review of the impact of the six-week gap in income when transitioning to Universal Credit.

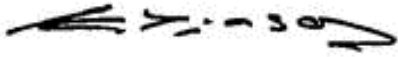
The piloting of Universal Credit in some areas has provided the opportunity to assess the potential impact of its implementation on individuals' lives. It has become clear that the absence of income for a number of weeks while Universal Credit payments are authorised and implemented presents an almost impossible challenge to the ability of families to provide basics such as food and heating to themselves and their children. In our view, amelioration measures must be put in place before there is further roll out of Universal Credit.

We believe that these steps are essential to prevent hundreds of thousands more children experiencing poverty and the consequential impact on their future life chances. We would also welcome all other investments in the budget that would make a proven difference to children and young people, including investment in early intervention and preventative services, children's mental health services and education, with subsequent consequential funding for the devolved nations.



We urge you to take the opportunity of this budget to provide a brighter future for our children.

Yours sincerely,



Koulla Yiasouma, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People



Sally Holland, Children's Commissioner for Wales



Bruce Adamson, Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland



Anne Longfield OBE, Children's Commissioner for England

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/10029>