

Press release: Prime Minister hosts reception for the MS Society in Downing Street

The Prime Minister welcomed over 150 volunteers, ambassadors and supporters of the charity as well as its chair Nick Winser to the event at Downing Street.

The Prime Minister also presented one of the charity's volunteers, David Allen, with a Points of Light award. David has transformed his local branch of the MS Society into one that helps hundreds of people every year. He has also been instrumental in some of the charity's national campaigns including 'Treat Me Right', aiming to improve early access to treatment. This hard work earned David the charity's Volunteer of the Year award only a year after his own diagnosis with MS.

Prime Minister Theresa May said:

I know from my own family's experience how incredibly tough living with MS can be and how it changes lives profoundly. The work that the MS Society does not only improves the lives of those diagnosed with the condition through funding new research but also provides much needed support for them and their loved ones. They are only able to do this through the tireless dedication of their incredible volunteers such as David and I am delighted to be able to present him with a Points of Light award.

Points of Light winner, David Allen said:

When I started volunteering for the MS Society over 15 years ago I had no idea where the role would take me. I volunteer to help bring about vital change for people affected by MS and will continue to share my experience of the condition to help others. If I'm honest, I'm gobsmacked I've won an award. It is truly an honour and privilege to be recognised in this way and it is really humbling to know people notice.

Patricia Gordon, Acting Chief Executive at the MS Society, said:

David has made a huge contribution to the MS Society over the last five years, and his continued support and dedication is invaluable. It was fantastic to see him presented with a Points of Light Award by the Prime Minister at an event to celebrate our volunteers and advancements in MS research. It was a great way to thank him for

his work, and something we will all remember for a very long time.

We're driving research into more – and better – treatments, and David's unwavering dedication and passion will help us every step of the way. Together, we're strong enough to stop MS.

More than 5,000 people around the UK volunteer for the MS Society, and last year alone gave more than 700,000 hours of their valuable time to support people affected by MS.

The Points of Light awards honour outstanding volunteers across the UK. Every weekday, the Prime Minister recognises a different individual with the award as a tribute to the incredible impact they have had in their communities.

[Speech: PM speech at MS Society Reception: 5 November 2018](#)

It is wonderful to welcome you all to 10 Downing Street today to celebrate the MS Society and the amazing work that you do in so many different ways, as has just been outlined. The work you do to raise money to fund research into new treatments, to support people who are living with MS, raising public awareness of the condition. I think one of the key issues is people understanding what MS is about and the effect it has and campaigning to stop MS.

None of that would be possible without the tireless dedication of MS Society volunteers – and I am delighted that we have so many of you here today.

I also want to thank all those who raise money and provide care for those with MS.

I know just how vital that support can be because my own mother lived with MS.

Just the other day I received a touching letter from a nurse – Nicki Murray – who helped to support my mother when I was younger.

The way Nicki remembered my mother after all these years speaks volumes of the extraordinary care and compassion of our health workers.

I'd like to thank them all for everything that they do for us.

From my mother's experience, I know how incredibly tough living with MS can be.

You all know it changes lives profoundly.

The shock of a diagnosis. The fear of a relapse. The anxiety over what might be ahead – and how that might affect your family and loved ones.

And of course many volunteers and supporters first get involved with the Society precisely because they saw a loved one go through it.

Indeed, we've just heard that the first branch was founded 65 years ago by a husband who watched his wife live with MS, and was frustrated by the lack of treatment and support available.

The situation today is unrecognisable from where we were then, or even 25 years ago – not just in terms of care and support but in terms of treatment too.

We know infinitely more about how to manage symptoms. More treatment options are available than ever before, particularly for relapsing forms of the condition. And the pipeline of treatments has never been stronger.

I think we are now at a crucial point.

Your 'STOP MS' campaign reflects your ambition for us to make the next research breakthrough. And I want you to know that you have an ally in this government.

Earlier this year I announced the single largest cash commitment to our public services ever made by a peacetime Government – an £84 billion five year deal for our NHS.

In return, the NHS will produce a long-term plan to ensure that investment makes a difference on the front-line, including to people living with MS.

But of course the real breakthroughs will come in the laboratory.

We are already putting £7 billion of new public funding into science, research and innovation – the largest increase for 40 years.

And more broadly, across our whole economy, we have set the most ambitious goal for total research and development investment in our history – making it up to 2.4% of our economy – with government and the private sector working together to meet it.

Those investments will pay real dividends in the years ahead. I know that the MS Society is working closely with the National Institute for Health Research on a number of promising treatments – I want that close partnership to continue.

You've achieved a huge amount as a Society and as a wider MS community over many years.

Thank you all for that you have done.

Now you rightly have your eyes set on the greatest prize – stopping MS and bringing an end to the pain and suffering it causes to so many people.

So thank you for all that you have done and let's work together to make that, stopping MS, a reality.

Statement to Parliament: The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has made a statement to the House today.

Mr Speaker, I'd like to make a statement on the changes announced to Universal Credit in the Budget last week and on the Managed Migration regulations, which we are laying in the house today.

The Chancellor announced a substantial package at the Budget to ensure that millions keep more of what they earn, and vulnerable claimants are supported when they move to Universal Credit.

In total, Mr Speaker, this package will be worth an extra £4.5 billion across the next 5 years.

I want to pay a special thank you to all the colleagues, charities, third-sector organisations, Jobcentre Plus staff and claimants who fed back to me to build this package of support to ensure Universal Credit is a fair system – supporting thousands who can't work as well as thousands who can.

And I'd like to also thank my Right Honourable Friend the Prime Minister and my Right Honourable Friend the Chancellor for their support to deliver these measures.

Because make no mistake, Mr Speaker: this is a department that listens. And a department that will continue to listen, adapt, change and deliver.

We will put an extra £1.7 billion a year into work allowances, increasing the amount that hardworking families can earn by £1,000 before Universal Credit is tapered away – providing extra support for 2.4 million working families.

Which is why it was welcomed not only in this House, but amongst charities.

Like the Child Poverty Action Group, which said: "The work allowance increase is unequivocally good news for families receiving Universal Credit".

And the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, which said this extra investment "will help make Universal Credit a tool for tackling poverty".

And, we have gone further – recognising the genuine concerns raised about the support we were offering people, especially to the most vulnerable, when they move to Universal Credit.

So we have made a further £1 billion package of changes, providing 2 additional weeks of DWP legacy benefits for those moved onto Universal Credit – a one-off non-repayable sum that will provide claimants with extra money during the period before they receive their first Universal Credit payment.

And this is on top of the 2 additional weeks of Housing Benefit announced at Autumn Budget 2017, and put into place this year.

And we will support the self-employed moving to Universal Credit.

We will open up a 12-month grace period before the Minimum Income Floor is applied, supporting 130,000 self-employed claimants.

Because we are the party of business, we are the party of aspiration.

We will support those in debt by reducing the normal maximum rate at which debts are deducted from Universal Credit awards, from 40% to 30% of Standard Allowances.

This will help over 600,000 families to manage their debts at any one point when roll out is complete – providing them with, on average, £295 extra a year as their debts are repaid over a longer period.

Mr Speaker, this is targeted support to help work pay and support the vulnerable.

Which is why today I lay regulations to deliver the next phase of Universal Credit – Managed Migration.

Through which people will be moved onto Universal Credit.

A move from a system that trapped people on benefits and creating cliff edges at 16, 24 and 30 hours with punitive effective tax rates of over 90 per cent for some.

Between 1997 and 2010, benefit spend went up by 65%.

In 1997, households were paying £5,500 in taxes to fund the benefits system – and by 2010 it had risen to £8,350.

[Political content]

Under this Government 3.4 million more people are in work – the vast majority of which are full-time and permanent roles.

Which means that we have created more new jobs in the UK since 2010, than France, Spain, Ireland, Netherlands, Austria and Norway combined.

Alongside creating a welfare system that supports those who need it.

Through Universal Credit, around 1 million disabled households will receive around an extra £100 on average per month through more generous support.

The managed migration regulations will, in addition:

- protect 500,000 people's Severe Disability Premium at the point of migration
- deliver Transitional Protection for those we move, to ensure that at the point of moving, those manage migrated have their entitlements protected

We will take a measured approach to delivering Managed Migration, taking our time to get it right and working with claimants to co-design it.

We have and will continue to take on board the advice of experts and charities.

Such as the Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC) – whose [report on the regulations we have published, along with our response today](#).

And we have accepted in full or part all but one of their recommendations.

And the one we didn't is because we want to be more generous!

I pay tribute to the hard work of SSAC in scrutinising our regulations.

And we have changed a key part of the regulations, which charities have raised with me, my department and MPs.

Which relates to the minimum statutory notice period for people moving from their legacy award to Universal Credit.

We have extended this period from a minimum of 1 month to a minimum of 3 months – to allow claimants maximum time to prepare and make their claim before their legacy award expires.

Alongside this, we have unlimited flexibility to extend claim periods for people who need it.

We will also backdate any claimant who has missed the deadline date, but has made a claim within a month of the deadline day passing.

And we will test a variety of communications methods, including advertising campaigns, face to face communication, letters, texts, telephone calls and home visits.

Mr Speaker, this will provide support for claimants during managed migration.

And we will constantly review our approaches, engage fully with charities, experts, claimants and all members of this House.

Mr Speaker, I commend this statement to the House.

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Statement to Parliament: Announcement on probate fees

I have today laid before Parliament new legislation to implement a new, banded structure of fees for a grant of representation, commonly known as a

grant of probate.

Fees are an essential element of funding an effective, modern courts and tribunals service, thereby ensuring and protecting access to justice.

The Government is investing £1 billion to modernise and upgrade the courts system so that it works even better for everyone, including victims, witnesses, litigants, judges and legal professionals. This includes introducing changes to our Probate Service, who offer an important service to those who are bereaved.

The reform of the service allows people to apply for a grant of probate online, access assisted digital support for those who may not necessarily have the skills or access to engage digitally and empowers individuals to make applications themselves instead of needing to instruct and pay for solicitors. This aims to reduce the burden on applicants, by providing a more efficient and simpler application process.

But such a courts system is simply not possible without proper funding. Since the previous Government set out its intentions to introduce a banded fee structure for grants of probate in February 2017, a number of concerns were raised. We have listened to these very carefully, and under today's proposal we have revised fees so they will never be more than 0.5% of the value of the estate.

Moreover, by raising the estate value threshold from £5,000 to £50,000, we will be lifting around 25,000 estates annually out of fees altogether. For those who do pay, around 80% of estates will pay £750 or less, and all income raised will be spent on running the courts and tribunal service.

It has long been the case that the users of our courts make a contribution to its costs, and we believe this remains both relevant and reasonable – minimising the burden on other taxpayers. Crucially, by asking those who use the courts to pay more, where they can afford to do so, we are able to fund areas where we charge no fees to vulnerable victims and users, including for example domestic violence and non-molestation orders, and for cases before the First-tier Tribunal concerning mental health.

This new banded fee model represents a fair and more progressive way to pay for probate services compared to the current flat fee and reflects our commitment to protecting access to justice by ensuring we have a properly funded and resourced courts system. We are also confident these fees will never be unaffordable. The cost of the fee is recoverable from the estate and executors have several options to fund it. Moreover, the Lord Chancellor retains a power to remit a fee if he considers there are exceptional circumstances.

We will also publish a guidance document before the Statutory Instrument comes into force, entitled Guidance on Ways to Pay for Probate Fees. This will benefit from external stakeholder input, and will help applicants to choose the option to pay which most suits their circumstances, providing reassurance at a difficult time.