



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Ministerial
Correspondence
Caxton House
Tothill Street
LONDON
SW1H 9DA

0207 340 4000

www.gov.uk

ministers@dwp.gov.uk

Pam Cox MP
pam.cox.mp@parliament.uk

Your ref: PC01522

Our ref: MC2025/39043

22 July 2025

Dear Pam,

Thank you for your letter of 16 April on behalf of Mr Philip George about Universal Credit and Employment Support Allowance (ESA) for terminally ill students.

Most full-time students do not qualify for Universal Credit because one of the conditions of entitlement is that a person must not be in education.

Students who are ill will automatically continue to receive living costs support for the first sixty days of absence from their course. They can then apply to Student Finance England, or equivalents in Scotland and Wales, for their living costs support to be continued for a period of absence exceeding 60 days if the student has agreed with their provider to suspend their studies. The level of that support is a matter for the Department for Education, and Student Finance will consider each case on its own merits including the prospect of the student returning to the course.

Students who have longer-term illness can be treated as undertaking their course from the first until the last day of their course (which would be the last day of the last year of the course if a multi-year course) unless they have already abandoned it or have been dismissed from it.

The only exception to this is where the person has

- (i) suspended from the course (with the agreement of the course provider) due to either illness or caring responsibilities and
- (ii) has already recovered from that illness or ceased caring responsibilities within the past year and not yet gone back to their course and
- (iii) is not currently eligible for student finance.

A person who meets these requirements is not treated as undertaking a course and subsequently cannot be excluded from Universal Credit on the grounds of 'receiving education'. These requirements recognise that such a person may have applied for extended student finance when they suspended their course, and this will have ceased when they recovered from their illness/ceased caring but may not be able to re-join their course and be eligible for student finance again until the beginning of the next academic year. Following this time, to be eligible for Universal Credit beyond this, a student must have withdrawn from their course.

Students can apply for student finance while they are away from their course, if they suspend their course due to illness, bereavement, or another serious personal reason. The level of that support is a matter for the Department for Education and the Devolved Governments.

With all best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Timms', with a horizontal line above the name.

Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms MP
Minister of State for Social Security and Disability