



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

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Rt Hon Frank Field MP  
Chair  
Work and Pensions Select Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

*Dear Mr Field*

I made a commitment previously to the Committee to provide regular updates on our progress in commencing the Move to UC Pilot. This update relates to the period up to and including 31 May 2019.

### ***Stakeholder Collaboration***

Stakeholder engagement has been and continues to be a vital part of the work we are doing on Universal Credit. Since last October we have been working closely with a diverse group of stakeholders including charities, campaign groups, Local Authorities and Housing Associations to listen to their views and to better understand their concerns about moving claimants from legacy benefits onto Universal Credit.

An initial series of workshops and webinars have been focused on four different themes: Service Design, Delivery Model, Vulnerable Claimants and Communications. Our stakeholders have used these sessions to inform us of the issues, concerns and opportunities they saw as a result of moving claimants onto Universal Credit. Stakeholders and officials have worked to plot this information onto a map of the Universal Credit service and formulate the concerns into a series of "problem statements" so that we can together design solutions that meet the challenges. Overall thirty problem statements were created which have been grouped broadly into the following nine themes:

- Barriers experienced by people who are 'hard to reach';
- The risks of people not receiving information or not understanding what is asked of them;

- Issues around the ability to act on behalf of claimants;
- Issues claimants have getting access to the correct appropriate channels;
- Knowledge of the needs of people they are supporting held by third parties;
- Risks of termination of benefits, debts and arrears experienced by claimants;
- Critical evidence and easements from legacy benefits that may be lost;
- Landlords time and resources spent on the service;
- The needs of vulnerable people and those with complex needs.

In the aftermath of each workshop we have provided feedback to our stakeholders and have discussed further how we will go about tackling these problem statements to ensure that we can provide the support necessary for claimants to be moved safely onto Universal Credit. I will be holding another stakeholder event on 13 June with these organisations to set out progress to date and continuing our engagement and discussion on the "Move to UC".

### ***Who Knows Me***

As you can see from the themes that arose as a result of our stakeholder workshops, a common thread is a concern that, in moving people over from legacy benefits, claimants may fall between the cracks and suffer hardship as a result. This appears to stem from two primary worries:

- A concern that DWP will send letters that claimants will ignore or not understand and that no-one will be ready to support them and;
- A concern that when claimants fail to act on a 'notification' from DWP, their benefits will be stopped and they will be made vulnerable or more vulnerable as a result.

The Department appreciates these concerns which are reflected in research and our own experiences of previous migrations from which we have learned. Feedback from our stakeholders supports our understanding that many claimants will need support to manage the move successfully and that many of those organisations who were involved in these workshops already have strong relationships with the claimants we need to move which could be used to provide that support.

As such, the Department has reconsidered how to approach the pilot and has agreed to test an approach based on using the existing relationships that claimants already have with relevant organisations. We have called this approach "Who Knows Me", and we intend to test the idea that, by working closely with our partners, we will more successfully be able to move claimants onto Universal Credit without having to send multiple communications or to stop benefit payments. We estimate that around 50 per cent of claimants have an existing close relationship with a partner organisation. This approach could include partners delivering or supporting any stage of the journey, from identifying readiness to move, through to managing the process (or parts of the process) on behalf of the Department. We first shared this approach with our stakeholders at our event on 6 March 2019.

Our current plan is to begin the pilot in Harrogate with those claimants who attend the Jobcentre currently for face-to-face interventions, as they are well known to the Department and have an existing relationship with a Work Coach. We believe we can use these interventions as a starting point for learning how to successfully move people onto Universal Credit. We have also identified three core areas of the service that we want to test and assure ourselves of as part of the pilot. They are:

- That we are able to calculate, explain, pay and erode Transitional Protection;
- That we are able to engage and persuade claimants to act; and
- That we are able to support claimants through the process (including receiving their first and subsequent payments).

We will extend our approach to work with trusted partners supporting or delivering the process once we are confident in our ability to deliver in these three areas.

If this approach is successful, the Department will consider how we can move more claimants through this approach. For some claimants, we will need to consider how we can make best use of HMRC or DWP remote channels. We intend to test how that will work later on, once we have tested the "Who Knows Me" approach, and begun the process of moving claimants across to Universal Credit and have understood the benefits and limits of this approach.

Of course, it is possible that the initial approach that we take may not work. We have been explicit with our stakeholders that this is a real test and that if "Who Knows Me" does not work we would work together to reconsider. This builds on the overall listen and adapt approach that we have used to help develop and implement Universal Credit to date.

### ***The focus of the pilot***

The purpose of the pilot is to work with individual claimants and delivery partners to understand their needs, identify what support successfully allows claimants to move onto Universal Credit and to build the service in response to these needs.

Initially this will mean that we focus on what works for claimants. At this point, it is more important to understand how to design a process that ensures that we move claimants safely and then work out how to make the process affordable, rather than to start with an affordability challenge. This is how the Department worked at the beginning of the Full Service, where the unit cost of handling each claim at the outset was substantial due to the very high staff/claimant ratio. By refining our design over time, we have progressively made the service more affordable. We will follow a similar process in the "Move to UC".

We will start this process with a very small number of DWP claimants. We have been communicating to our stakeholders that we are not testing a stable design with 10,000 claimants and at this point we are not looking for representative samples. Rather, we will be testing design concepts, such as "Who Knows Me" and specific solutions in order to successfully move claimants – not to prove that a single design works with all different claimant types. As such, we will be as

concerned to learn why people do not move over to Universal Credit as we are to learn what has been successful.

### ***Preparation of Harrogate Pilot Site***

Since the Secretary of State's announcement of Harrogate as the site for the pilot, significant progress has been made working with the Jobcentre and local community. Jobcentre staff have been brought in to help us develop the design of the process, and these staff have been training and preparing ahead of delivering the "Move to UC" service. To support this, we have secured a large working area in Harrogate Jobcentre so that our product development teams, local Jobcentre colleagues and other can work closely together, and to ensure that frontline experience is listened to as part of this process.

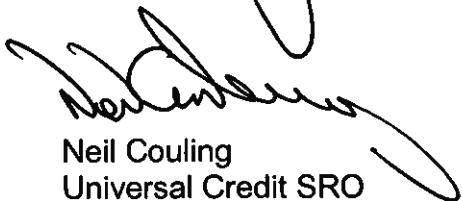
We have also had a positive initial meeting with senior executives from Harrogate Borough Council who were very supportive of the pilot. We are now building on this to secure the involvement and support of other local stakeholders in the run up to July.

### ***Managing the external environment***

As you will be aware from recent evidence sessions held by the Committee, claimants who are entitled to Universal Credit or who will be moved to Universal Credit can sometimes have a negative impression of Universal Credit, be nervous about the move, or uncertain about exactly what Universal Credit is and how it works. This can make the idea of moving onto Universal Credit seem daunting. We are working to develop a communications strategy for the Harrogate area to raise awareness of Universal Credit and to improve understanding. In this way we hope to improve the attitudes of legacy claimants towards Universal Credit to ensure they understand what will happen, and to support them to be receptive to the "Move to UC" process. We will be seeking to learn what works best in terms of our communications, so that we can be sure that our future communications, within and outside of the pilot, are effective.

We have a wider responsibility to communicate policy and essential information to claimants and other key audiences. Our initial work with claimants suggests widespread anxieties, confusion about the meaning and purpose of transitional protection and a lack of knowledge of what help, such as run-ons and advances, will be available. So we have much work to do, in partnership with local stakeholders, to counter these unfounded, negative perceptions and the damage they might cause to claimants' interests. I would welcome the help of the Committee with this as we support claimants on their "Move to UC".

*Yours Sincerely*



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