



Work and Pensions Committee

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA
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From the Chair

January 2019

Rt Hon Amber Rudd MP
Secretary of State
Department for Work and Pensions

Dear Amber

Universal Credit and mixed age couples

Currently “mixed age” couples—where one partner is below, and one is above the Pension Credit qualifying age—can choose to claim either Universal Credit or Pension Credit. The Welfare Reform Act (2012) changed these rules so that both partners need to be above Pension Credit qualifying age in order to claim that benefit. Your Department announced on 14 January that this change will be implemented from May 2019.

The current rules allow mixed age couples to claim Pension Credit by making eligibility dependent on the age of the oldest person in the couple—so the younger partner is included in their claim. The new rules mean eligibility is determined by the younger partner’s age. Mixed age couples will, therefore, need to claim Universal Credit instead. In practice, mixed aged couples will nearly always be better off claiming Pension Credit. For example, in 2018/19, the standard minimum rate for a couple claiming Pension Credit is £248.80 per week, or £1078.13 per month. The comparable couple rate in Universal Credit is £489.89 per month.¹

I am concerned that this change could see some couples lose a substantial proportion of their income simply because they are different ages. I would be grateful if you would please address the following queries.

The Department published an impact assessment of Universal Credit in 2011, and an equality impact assessment in 2012. The former noted that mixed age couples will suffer “some of the larger notional losses” to household income as a result of Universal Credit.²

1. Do these impact assessments fully reflect the changes to the state pension age planned up to 2028?
 - a. If not, might you please share any further impact assessment or equality impact assessment the Department has conducted of this change?
2. Of “mixed aged” couples in DWP’s caseload, what proportion and number currently claim:
 - a. Universal Credit;
 - b. legacy benefits; or
 - c. Pension credit?
3. How many couples does the Department estimate will be affected by this change once Universal Credit is fully rolled out?

¹ <https://www.entitledto.co.uk/help/Universal-Credit-And-Pension-Age>

² [Universal Credit: impact assessment](#), p.12

4. Might you please share any modelling the Department has carried out on:
 - a. Levels of notional financial loss to mixed age couples as a result of this policy, taking into account only the shift from Pension Credit to Universal Credit;
 - b. Levels of notional financial loss once Pension Credit passported benefits are taken into account?

5. What assessment has the Department made of the impact of this change on:
 - a. Working age poverty; and
 - b. pensioner poverty?

With best wishes and I look forward to hearing from you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Frank', is positioned above the typed name.

Rt Hon Frank Field MP
Chair, Work and Pensions Committee