



Work and Pensions Committee

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

Peter Schofield
Permanent Secretary
Department for Work and Pensions

25 March 2020

Dear Peter,

Very many thanks indeed for giving evidence to the Committee this morning, especially in such difficult circumstances.

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to ask you to pass on our thanks to all of your colleagues who are working so hard to ensure that people get the support they need from DWP in this unprecedented crisis, and in particular to the people working on the front line who are dealing with an enormous increase in their workload.

As we discussed this morning, the increased volume of applications, especially for Universal Credit, has left many people unable to contact the Department and waiting on the phone for many hours, often unsuccessfully. We were grateful for your commitment to keep the Committee updated about the progress that you are making in bringing in extra staff to cope with the surge in demand.

Might you please let us know:

- what proportion of people who have applied for Universal Credit and asked for an Advance payment since Monday 16 March have now received a payment;
- the average time taken for a person making a new claim for Universal Credit to receive an Advance payment, and the longest waiting times;
- your current performance figures for answering calls, including average and longest waiting times, and what proportion of calls are cut off without a caller being able to speak to anyone;
- the average and longest waiting times for people seeking to register an account online;
- whether you anticipate any delays in new claimants receiving their first Universal Credit payment, which would usually be expected 5 weeks after the start of their claim; and
- whether, in the current circumstances, you have made any separate arrangements for support organisations working with vulnerable claimants to have any form of fast track access to speak to your staff.

Of course, any additional management information that you are able to share with us would also be very welcome.

We recognise that the situation is changing quickly. That being the case, we would appreciate it if you could send us weekly updates from now onwards.

The Secretary of State told us this morning that a smaller proportion of new claimants than usual are asking for an Advance payment. Given that new claimants are no longer going to Jobcentres for face-to-face meetings with Work Coaches, might you please let us know what you are doing to ensure that new claimants know that an Advance is available if they need it?

I look forward to hearing from you.

With best wishes,

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

Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP
Chair, Work and Pensions Committee