



Department
for Work &
Pensions

From the Permanent Secretary

Peter Schofield CB
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9DA

Rt Hon Stephen Timms MP

Chair, Work and Pensions Select
Committee

|

May 2020

Dear Stephen

I'm writing in response to the discussion at the oral evidence session on 23 April on the use and publication of statistics.

I would like to reassure you that the information I have committed to sharing with the Committee has or will be published. On 21 April, alongside our regular statistics we published information on the number of UC claims and the number of UC advances paid between 1 March and 12 April. At this time none of the increased claims had reached payment and therefore information on awards was not included, but this will be published in due course as part of the regular official statistics. In my letter of the same day I set out information around our telephony service and the changes we had made to the service in response to the demand.

In the oral evidence session, you highlighted the letter that the Department has received from the UKSA regarding the release of further information referenced in a pre-announcement. I have attached my letter to the UKSA responding to those concerns.

We will continue to review the information available on Universal Credit and other benefits, and aim to provide informative statistics that are trustworthy, high quality and represent good value.

Yours sincerely

Peter Schofield

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Department
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From the Permanent Secretary

Peter Schofield CB
Caxton House
Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9DA

Ed Humpherson

Director General for Regulation, UK
Statistics Authority

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May 2020

Dear Ed

UNIVERSAL CREDIT MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

Thank you for your letter of 22 April. I was pleased to read your positive comments about the supplementary information we have published alongside our Official Statistics but I equally recognise your concerns around the use of unpublished information and that the release did not include all of the information that we had pre-announced.

I take the matter of handling and using statistics very seriously and I am sorry that on this occasion there were issues in the way in which we have handled this release. This is an exceptional release which sees us publish more timely information than we ever have before on Universal Credit to meet the needs of users and our duty of equality of access at this challenging time.

The release was developed at speed and, whilst we were working with the best intentions, it was a mistake that the pre-announcement was made whilst internal discussions were ongoing and before agreement had been reached on what additional data we would be able to release. I recognise that on this occasion it was not accurate on the information that would be published.

Our Chief Statistician, Steve Ellerd-Elliott, has reviewed what happened and is updating our guidance and processes to ensure appropriate approval and sign-off is in place for this type of release in future.

We will continue to provide the full Universal Credit breakdown in our monthly Official Statistics but during this unprecedented time when Universal Credit claims are at an exceptionally high level we also want to provide more timely information. I am

mindful of the need to do this in a way which ensures that any public statements are supported by information which is equally available to all.

The management information we have published around claims for Universal Credit and advances are matters that have been raised by the Work and Pensions Committee and that have been used in the public updates we have given on the Department's performance. We will now be increasing the frequency to publish this on a weekly basis. The first release will be published on 5 May and then weekly until at least the end of June.

We will continue to review the information available on Universal Credit and other benefits, and aim to provide informative statistics that are trustworthy, high quality and represent good value.

I welcome your organisation's continuing positive work with the Department and I am happy to discuss ways in which the Department can continue to improve its release of statistics.

I have copied this letter to Steve Ellerd-Elliott, DWP Chief Statistician.

Yours sincerely
Peter Schofield

I will also send a copy to the
WPSC.

Peter Schofield CB