



Stephen Timms MP
Chair, Work and Pensions Select Committee

17 May 2022

UNIVERSAL CREDIT MIGRATION

Thank you for your letter of 27 April 2022. Before I address the specific points raised, I want to make two contextual points that frame our more detailed responses.

First, as the published impact analyses have shown, UC is more generous than the system it is replacing (and indeed this version of UC is more generous than the one debated in 2018-19). We estimate 55% of claimants will be better off on UC, yet only one in ten existing legacy claimants believe they will be better off on UC.

Second, we do not need to re-run the pilot. Early lessons and observations from Harrogate were captured and have been fed into our strategy for completing the rollout of UC, along with our experience from how UC stood up to the test during the pandemic. We would not gain from re-doing this. Therefore, we should reset how we think about this task in the light of today's circumstances, not those of 2018/19. That is why our approach will be through a discovery phase, focusing on learning how we can help people to move and how to ensure the processes and systems for doing so support our claimants as effectively as possible.

With those broader points in mind, I will now turn to the specific questions raised in your letter.

1) Is the Department taking steps to ensure no one subject to managed migration will have their existing benefit stopped until they have established a Universal Credit claim and, if so, what are they?

a) If a claimant receives their migration notice, but does not apply for Universal Credit within the three-month period, how will the Department proceed? What safeguarding concerns have you identified?

b) Will the Department record the number of people who do not apply for Universal Credit in the three months following their migration notice and have their benefits stopped? Could this be shared with the Committee?

I expect our system will be effective to ensure it provides a smooth transition from existing legacy benefits to UC. There will be a wide range of support available, and the discovery phase will enable us to learn how best to support new claimants to universal credit. Support available includes:

- a dedicated phonenumber, delivered by a dedicated Service Centre which has been over-staffed compared to typical Service Centres to provide more intensive support;
- guidance on GOV.UK which will also signpost to further independent support from Citizens Advice Help to Claim service; and
- specially trained staff in JCP's and service centres.

For the first groups of claimants in this initial phase of discovery, I have decided the department will not terminate any benefits if the claimant fails to claim within the three-month period given. Instead, if these claimants have failed to engage with the department, DWP will make a minimum of a 1-month extension to the deadline outlined in their notice. In this time, we will undertake proactive engagement with the claimant to understand why they have not claimed.

It is important to remember that the discovery phase is a learning process, and our clear priority is to maximise the number of claimants completing their claim. We do of course recognise that not all claimants may want to claim Universal Credit and others will need support to do so.

Plans on the recording of information gathered are currently being developed, any data obtained will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis to see its suitability to share with the Committee.

2) What steps will the Department take to identify people who will need more support or reasonable adjustments for their disability during managed migration from legacy benefits to Universal Credit?

As part of our learning during the Discovery phase, we are keen to understand what additional support is required for people to make their claim to UC and what this means for the scaled-up process. The current support is outlined in my response to Question 1 above.

We will also be excluding some particularly vulnerable and/or complex groups from the managed migration process initially, including claimants who are terminally ill.

3) This Committee, the Social Security Advisory Committee and many other organisations are concerned that removing the 10,000 limit before passing new regulations limits scrutiny, and could complicate the Department's efforts to roll out managed migration. Why has the 10,000 limit been removed?

a) How will the process be regularly reviewed in lieu of the 10,000 limit?

b) What risks has the Department identified to claimants and DWP staff in removing the 10,000 limit?

The Department previously advised the Social Security Advisory Committee in December 2021 that the 10,000 limit is a threshold chosen previously, based on the concept of a pilot. Given the experience of the last two years, we are now taking a different approach, we do not think it right to maintain the threshold in this way as the point of the Discovery phase is to gain insight and develop our approach.

To mitigate risk, we have developed scaling criteria that we will assess prior to increasing the numbers of claimants issued with migration notices. This assessment goes through the appropriate ministerial and senior governance approvals and there is a clear commitment to only proceed when it is safe and secure to do so – both for claimants and the Department.

You also note the analysis regarding transitional protection. The [annex](#) sets out the methodology and assumptions underlying these numbers.

4) What work has the Department undertaken to communicate with households who will have a lower entitlement under Universal Credit or those who will leave benefits all together?

Everyone notified to move to UC will have their entitlement assessed against their current claims for legacy benefits and tax credits. Until such point that they move to UC, we will not know their entitlement and whether or not they will be better off.

Our overarching analysis does however show that at the point of migration, the vast majority will either be better off, or retain the same entitlement, thanks to transitional protection. How we support and communicate with the small groups who are not in this situation will form part of our learning process.

5) Will the Department publish the findings of the Department's Universal Credit managed migration pilot in Harrogate, before continuing managed migration, as previously committed?

a) Given that the pilot was paused, does the Department have a sufficient understanding of managed migration to foresee any problems? What risks has the Department identified?

We recently set out the key lessons from the Harrogate pilot in a written statement and in our publication. As outlined, we have learnt from how UC operated during the pandemic and drawn on early lessons and observations gained from the Harrogate pilot to revise our strategy for completing the rollout of UC.

As outlined above in my response to Question 4, we have developed scaling criteria that will be assessed prior to increasing the numbers of claimants issued with migration notices. Only once safe to do so will we proceed.

6) What further work will the Department be undertaking to learn more on managed migration? Which parts of the country will this take place in?

The Department will be taking a phased approach, initially asking 500 households to make a claim to UC, split equally between Bolton and Medway. As part of our test and learn approach to discovery, we expect to run further tests with more small groups of claimants in the coming months.

7) Will the Department publish an Equality Impact Assessment on the managed migration of people receiving legacy benefits to Universal Credit, before continuing managed migration?

We are committed to fully complying with the Public Sector Equality Duty as we proceed with managed migration. We do not plan to publish our Equality Analysis documents as these will be living documents and subject to revision as the Discovery phase progresses and we learn and iterate the process.

8) Would yourself or the Minister for Welfare Delivery meet with the Committee to discuss the process of restarting managed migration before amending the UC Transitional Provisions Regulations?

Yes, I would be happy to meet the committee.

