



# Work and Pensions Committee

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Rt Hon Thérèse Coffey MP  
Secretary of State  
Department for Work and Pensions

From the Chair

15 June 2022

Dear Thérèse,

## Publication of DWP research and reports

A number of organisations and individuals have been in touch with the Committee concerning further research and information that has not been published by the Department, despite expectations or previous commitments to do so.

Earlier this year, as you will be aware, the Committee used its powers [to order NatCen Social Research](#) to provide a copy of the report commissioned by DWP into *The Uses of Health and Disability Benefits*, after the Department refused to publish the research. We would have preferred this research to have been published by the Department, as was originally envisaged when it was commissioned, and we did not accept your response that the research was kept privately to allow Ministers space to develop policies.

The Committee is concerned that the Department's lack of transparency could undermine the trust the public, Parliament and the Department. The Committee has asked me to write to you about the following examples of this:

### 1. Evaluation of lowered benefit cap

In March 2019, the previous Work and Pensions Committee reported on [The benefit cap](#). As part of that inquiry, the Committee learned that [the Department conducted an evaluation of the impact of the introduction of the benefit cap](#) – which was £500 a week for a family and £350 a week for a single person with no children. This was published in December 2014. In November 2016, the benefit cap was lowered to £23,000 for a family in Greater London, £20,000 outside of London and £15,410 in for a single person in Greater London and £13,400 elsewhere.

As part of the previous Committee's work, it wrote to the Minister for Family Support asking to be updated on when the review of the benefit cap limits was next due to take place, as the Secretary of State must review the level of the benefit cap in each Parliament. The [Minister responded in March 2019](#) that:

The Department expects the evaluation of the lower cap to be published in spring 2019. The level of the cap will be reviewed in due course following that publication and in the fullness of this Parliament.

We understand that publication was delayed in 2019 and potentially further delayed by the pandemic. However, the Department is yet to provide any clarity on when it will be published, despite promising this to the previous Committee over three years ago.

**a) When will the Department publish the evaluation of the lowered benefit cap completed in Spring 2019?**

**b) Given that the Secretary of State must review the level of the benefit cap in each Parliament, when will the next review take place?**

## **2. Report on unpaid carers**

We understand that the Department commissioned a report on the effect that Carer's Allowance has on people's ability to work. In paragraph 13 of the [Government response to the previous Committee's report into Overpayments of Carer's Allowance](#), it said that

The Department will commission and publish new research with CA claimants. The research will examine the facilitators and barriers to engaging in the labour market that claiming entails. In-depth qualitative interviews will be carried out with CA recipients as well as a quantitative survey of claimants. The research will examine the recent lived experience of CA claimants, including knowledge and awareness of obligations regarding the reporting of changes of circumstances, and the effects of the repayment of overpayments. The research is expected to report in the summer of 2020.

We understand that this research may have been impacted by the pandemic. However, we have been informed by our stakeholders that this work has been completed but has not yet been published, as promised to the previous Committee.

In March 2021, the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work said [in response to a PQ](#) that

The department is currently undertaking research which will touch on carers employment and potential barriers to them working.

**c) Has the research on the barriers to carers employment been completed? If not, when will it be completed?**

**d) Once the research has been completed, will the Department publish this research, as previously promised to the Committee? If not, why not?**

## **3. Internal reports on inaccessible digital services**

The Committee has learned that the Department has received requests under the Freedom of Information Act to access monthly reports about the compliance of DWP's digital services with web accessibility guidelines. We share the view that websites and

other digital services run by the Department must be accessible to everyone who needs to use them, in compliance with regulations.

We understand that even though this information is held by the Department, it was not released under the Freedom of Information Act due to a Section 35 exemption. The Department's responses to other FOI requests acknowledge that there is a strong public interest in being transparent and releasing information wherever possible however Section 35 was invoked to protect the private space within which Ministers can develop policies.

**e) What policies is the Department exploring in connection with the accessibility of the Department's digital services that prevents publishing monthly reports on their accessibility?**

The Committee acknowledges that the [DWP sent a summary of information on the accessibility of their digital services](#) as a result of an FOI request. This showed that 24 of 56 digital services (43%) used by members of the public are considered by DWP to be compliant with the [Public Sector Bodies Accessibility Regulations 2018](#).

**f) We are pleased that some information relating to the accessibility of DWP's digital services is in the public domain. If the Department is unable to publish monthly reports, would the Department consider publishing quarterly information on this?**

#### **4. Internal Process Reports (IPRs) on deaths of benefit claimants**

The Committee understands that the Department is not publishing, or releasing under FOI requests, recommendations from Internal Process Reviews into, amongst other matters, the deaths of benefit claimants, under Section 35 of the Freedom of Information Act. We understand that the Information Commissioner's Office is considering this case.

**g) Would the Department share the recommendations from the Internal Process Reviews relating to the death or serious injury of benefit claimants with the Committee?**

**h) What work is the Department currently undertaking to safeguard vulnerable claimants?**

#### **5. UC Programme Board papers**

On 26 April 2022, the Department deposited the [Universal Credit Programme Board papers](#) for November and December 2019 as well as January, February, March and April 2020 in the House libraries. One of these papers appears to refer to findings of user research on the [Move to Universal Credit pilot](#).

The entirety of the paper, aside from the words 'Move to UC' and 'User Research' have been redacted, largely under Section 35 of the Freedom of Information Act.

When the Department published the policy paper on [Completing the move to Universal Credit](#), the Committee sought an unredacted version of this paper, in order to learn more on the user research, but our request was rejected.

**i) Now that the Completing the move to Universal Credit has been published, are you able to provide us with an unredacted, or less redacted version of this document, to enable improved scrutiny, particularly in relation to the restart of managed migration?**

It is particularly disappointing that the user research remains redacted given that the [2019 Decision notice from the Information Commissioner's Office](#) states that:

DWP explained that on 3 August 2018, in relation to a different complaint under the Act, it had advised the Commissioner of its intention to introduce a publication schedule where it will commit to publishing Universal Credit Programme Board meeting paper pack two years after the date of that Programme Board Meeting. DWP explained that this will ensure that a reasonable period of time will have elapsed for discussions to be concluded prior to publication. [...] DWP explained that it is satisfied that in this instance DWP has made sensible arrangements to routinely publish Programme Board paper to contribute to the transparency of the Universal Credit Programme.

**j) Are you satisfied, in this instance, that the DWP has contributed to the transparency of the Universal Credit Programme?**

## **6. Cabinet Office Research on Universal Credit**

In earlier UC Programme Board Papers, deposited on 28 October 2021, the Department published a paper showing that the Prime Minister's Implementation Unit carried out research entitled *How effective is the support for vulnerable claimants of UC?* This research took place in June 2019, however, both the [cover note of the report](#) and [the report](#) itself is redacted under Section 36 of the Freedom of Information Act, citing prejudice to the effective conduct of public affairs.

The Committee understands that this research has been conducted internally. However, as above, with the restart of managed migration to Universal Credit, particularly for claimants migrating from ESA, it is our view that it is in the interest of the public and Parliament that this report is published.

**k) Will the Department publish the report on *How effective is support for vulnerable Universal Credit claimants?***

## **7. Benefit sanctions**

The previous Committee's report on [Benefit Sanctions](#) recommended that the Department 'urgently evaluate the effectiveness of reforms to welfare conditionality'. The [Government accepted this recommendation](#) and said it would focus its evaluation on 'whether the sanctions regime within Universal Credit is effective at supporting claimants to search for work'. This was to be completed internally and the Department said it would 'look to publish the results in late Spring 2019.

Neil Couling later told the [House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee](#) in June 2020 that the Department still had ‘every intention of fulfilling’ the commitment to provide the research to the Committee. Earlier this year it was reported that an FOI request for this report had been rejected by the Department and a spokesperson told [the press](#) that ‘the Department could not publish the report because it did not present a comprehensive picture of sanctions.’

**l) Will the Department provide the Committee with a copy of the evaluation of benefit sanctions, as it previously committed to doing?**

**m) On what grounds was this evaluation exempted from being released under the Freedom of Information Act?**

## **8. Work Capability Assessments**

The Committee is currently inquiring into [Health assessments for benefits](#) and is concerned that unlike for PIP and ESA, there are no statistics for claimants who have had a WCA through Universal Credit.

The Government has been promising UC WCA statistics since 2017 and we understand that [the Office for Statistics Regulation](#) has also written to the Department on this matter.

**n) Why hasn't the Department published statistics on WCA decisions in Universal Credit?**

## **9. Universal Credit research**

Lastly, the Committee [wrote to the Minister for Welfare Delivery](#) in January 2022 concerning research published in 2018 on the impact of Universal Credit on labour market participation and the Minister responded that the Department plans to publish new analysis on the employment impact of UC for a 2018 cohort of single people claiming Jobseekers' Allowance (JSA) as well as the employment impact of Universal Credit for lone parents.

We noted that some of the analysis on employment outcomes between single JSA claimants and UC claimants was published in [Completing the Move to Universal Credit](#).

**o) When does the Department expect to publish the above two reports?**

We look forward to discussing the Department's approach to publishing documents and research at your appearance in front of the Committee on Wednesday 29 June. We would be grateful for a reply to this letter by **Friday 15 July**.

Yours sincerely,



**Rt Hon Sir Stephen Timms MP**  
**Chair**