



Public Accounts Committee

**Peter Schofield CB
Permanent Secretary
Department for Work and Pensions**

By email

15 May 2024

Dear Permanent Secretary,

Announcement of the acceleration of Universal Credit Rollout

Thank you for your letter of 1 May in relation to the accelerated migration of income-related Employment and Support Allowance (IR-ESA) claimants to Universal Credit (UC).

In your letter, you stated that the Prime Minister had “made an announcement on 19 April to accelerate the Move to Universal Credit by bringing forward the final migration notices from 2028 to December 2025”. However, neither the Prime Minister’s announcement nor the accompanying press release specified the date when IR-ESA claimants would be moved to UC, despite this being a crucial piece of information for stakeholders. The Prime Minister’s announcement said only that the Government would “accelerate moving people from legacy benefits onto UC”, and the accompanying press release similarly did not set out the new timetable.

Given we agree that this accelerated migration of IR-ESA claimants represented a “significant policy change”, it is disappointing that the opportunity was missed through official Government communications to properly inform the public. Instead, as I previously noted, it was left to the personal X (formerly Twitter) account of the senior civil servant leading the UC programme to share this key piece of information.

It remains the case, at the time of writing, that no official announcement has yet been made by either your Department or Number 10 setting out the details of this new policy, nor has a DWP Minister informed Parliament of it. This is despite the new policy affecting some 600,000 households, many of whom include vulnerable individuals, while reversing around £1 billion of savings announced in the 2022 Autumn Statement.

My Committee therefore requests that you provide an update including:

- clarification of the new policy, including the timetable and in particular whether particular IR-ESA claimant groups will be migrated first, and when all IR-ESA claimants will be migrated to Universal Credit;
- the timeframe for the development of an implementation plan;

- what, if any, discussions were held before 19 April with stakeholder groups regarding the new policy;
- the cost to the Exchequer – both the total cost and the cost for each financial year 2024/25 to 2027/28 inclusive – so as to update the figures provided in the Autumn Statement 2022 report;
- whether, and if applicable when, the Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) was informed.

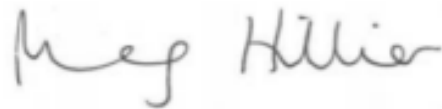
Please could you provide a detailed response by Thursday 30 May.

The Department should also provide information on its website on the details of this policy change, and keep this information updated to ensure that affected members of the public are informed in an accessible and timely manner of the forthcoming changes, including the timetable.

The Committee will continue to keep this matter under review and may wish to schedule a public recall hearing.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Work and Pensions Committee, the Treasury Officer of Accounts and to the Comptroller and Auditor General.

Yours Sincerely



Dame Meg Hillier MP
Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts