



Department for Work & Pensions

Sir Peter Schofield KCB
Permanent Secretary
Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House, Tothill Street
London
SW1H 9DA
psa@dwf.gov.uk

Sir Geoffrey Clifton-Brown MP
Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts
House of Commons
Palace of Westminster
Westminster
SW1A 0AA

Sent electronically

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Dear Sir Geoffrey

PENSION CREDIT PROCESSING

Thank you for your letter of 10 December about Pension Credit and Winter Fuel Payments.

I want to reassure you and the Committee that pensioners who are eligible will not miss out on Winter Fuel Payments even if their Pension Credit claim takes longer to process than usual provided their claim covers the qualifying period (week of 16-22 September). That's why we are encouraging eligible households to claim by 21 December, which is the last date for making a successful backdated claim and to still receive a Winter Fuel Payment. Successful claims made after 21 December will not be eligible for a Winter Fuel Payment this year but will have their Pension Credit backdated by three months.

The Department has received around 150,000 Pension Credit claims in the 16 weeks since the Chancellor's statement of 29 July, equating to a 145% increase in comparison to the previous 16 weeks.

To ensure we have the capacity to assess all claims received in reasonable timescales, we have deployed over 500 additional colleagues to support with Winter Fuel and Pension Credit work. Pension Credit is a complex benefit which requires specialist skills so while we have deployed additional resource, we are still completing training and consolidation and expect to see throughput improve further in the next quarter.

We are aware that some people who have submitted claims are waiting longer than we, or they, would like for a decision on their claim. We are continuing to see high levels of claims but the level of outstanding claims has stabilised and we expect to see that

reduce in the New Year. Our focus is on clearing claims in the order of date received although some cases require additional information from customers before a decision can be made. We do attempt to obtain this information by telephone wherever possible but where this is not possible, we are reliant upon requesting and receiving information by post which can add delay to the decision-making timescales. Our average clearance times have increased in the last month, reflecting clearance of older cases but we also expect to see this improve as we clear more cases.

I am copying this letter to Debbie Abrahams MP.

Yours sincerely
for Inshore

Sir Peter Schofield KCB
Permanent Secretary