

Cabinet Secretary for Social Security and Older People

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Pete Wishart MP
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Dear Chair

I am writing to bring to your attention the publication on 4 March of the first evaluation of the Universal Credit (UC) Scottish choices.

As you know, since their introduction in October 2017 the UC Scottish choices have given people in Scotland the opportunity to receive their UC award on a twice monthly basis and to have the housing element of their award paid directly to their landlord. The policy's main intent is to provide more control of household budgets for UC recipients in Scotland, whilst also aiming to drive down rent arrears. I am pleased to note that the number of people making use of the UC Scottish choices remains high. The most recent figures provided by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) show that as of August 2020 nearly a quarter of a million people across Scotland had taken up either one or both options.

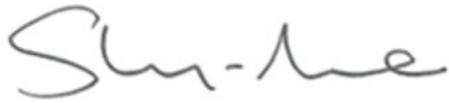
In April 2020, the Scottish Government appointed Ipsos-MORI as a contractor to undertake qualitative research on how the UC Scottish choices were received by UC recipients and landlords. I am pleased to say that the evaluation finds that the UC Scottish choices are considered an important flexibility by UC recipients, who see the choices as an important contributor to budgetary control and peace of mind. This underscores the value of the UC Scottish choices.

The evaluation also suggests that both UC recipients and landlords would benefit from improved awareness and understanding of the choices. The Scottish Government is working to improve the quality and quantity of information available about the Universal Credit Scottish choices, and will ensure that all of the people who are eligible for them are able to make an informed decision as to whether they are right for them. In the coming months Scottish Government officials will liaise with counterparts from the DWP and key stakeholders to ensure that information on the availability and utility of the UC Scottish choices is accessible and effective.

It is worth noting that the interviews with UC recipients also highlighted that the fundamental issue they faced was the inadequacy of payment level of this benefit. The UC Scottish choices do not address the fundamental flaws with the Universal Credit system – only full devolution of social security powers would achieve that.

I hope that this letter, and the [evaluation](#) and [research](#), is helpful to you.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shirley-Anne". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

SHIRLEY-ANNE SOMERVILLE