



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Peter Schofield CB
Permanent Secretary
Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street
LONDON
SW1H 9DA
ps@dw.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/dwp

Dame Meg Hillier MP
Chair
Public Accounts Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Sent electronically

29 September 2021

Dear Meg

TM15 – DWP Employment Support – Recommendation 2

In the recent Committee report into DWP Employment Support (HC177), you asked me to outline our contingency plans for ensuring we can continue to provide employment support alongside administering new claims in the event of a second surge.

During the pandemic we saw an unprecedented increase in new claims, with 4.7 million new claims to Universal Credit during 2020/21, compared to 2.3 million during 2019/20.

We successfully managed this through the introduction of easements, including changes to our verification processes, the temporary suspension of mandatory labour market interventions, and relaxing the requirements for claimants to accept commitments between mid-March and July 2020. The Minimum Income Floor (MIF) was suspended for self-employed claimants and is now being reintroduced. To support the increased numbers of claimants, the department doubled the number of work coaches, hiring 13,500 to bring our capacity to 27,000, and significantly expanded our Jobcentre estate.

In addition, over the years we have invested and designed a resilient and digital service that incorporates automation to allow for surges in claims. We have made improvements to our caseload management system to enable work coaches to filter their caseload and provide more targeted support based on health conditions, age and employment status. This allows work coaches to identify people quickly and refer claimants to targeted support within the Plan for Jobs programmes, such as Kickstart, Restart, the Youth Offer, Sector-based Work Academy Programmes (SWAPs) and Job Entry Targeted Support (JETS).

Where face-to-face contact has been unavailable, we have utilised alternative channels including telephone appointments, digital interventions and developed and rolled out the capability to conduct interventions by video call. Our work coaches are now conducting more appointments face-to-face in jobcentres and in our new Youth Hubs as capacity in our buildings increases. In the event of another increase in claimants, the flexibility we

have built through using telephony and video, our expanded estate and additional work coaches will all be used to ensure we continue to provide support to claimants. As well as encouraging claimants to undertake independent work search, through signposting to services such as JobHelp, we are also currently exploring further ways of using technology to help people switch sectors via a Job Matching pilot.

We will, of course, continue to monitor the situation closely as furlough comes to an end. We are satisfied with our level of preparedness, having assessed the risk to service delivery based on the OBR's March Budget prediction of 2 million people being on furlough at the end of September 2021. The number of people on furlough has reduced much more and at a faster rate than the OBR predicted, with the latest data showing around 1.6 million people on furlough at the end of July.

Yours sincerely

Peter Schofield

Peter Schofield CB
Permanent Secretary