



# Work and Pensions Committee

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6 December 2017

Rt Hon David Gauke MP  
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions  
Department for Work and Pensions  
Caxton House  
Tothill Street  
London SW1H 9DA

## **Universal Credit project assessment reports**

Thank you for finding the time yesterday to discuss privately before the debate how the DWP might provide the Committee with the project assessment reviews (PARs) of Universal Credit (UC) conducted since 2012. I reiterate my regret that neither I nor any other member of the Committee was consulted before the motion was tabled.

You told the House that the reports would be provided to the Committee before the House rises for Christmas. They are discrete documents and require none of the collation or cross-Government co-operation necessary to respond to the recent resolution on Brexit impact assessments. We hope to consider the reports at our meeting on Wednesday 13 December and so I am requesting that you provide them in time for us to do so.

In the debate, you mentioned that you may seek to redact the names of junior officials that appear in the reports. I note that this is in accordance with the Information Commissioner's decision notice of 30 August 2017. I further note that the November 2011 PAR, published after the DWP's appeal to the First Tier Tribunal was not upheld, sets a bar for the seniority of staff to be covered by such redactions. Those were the only redactions to that report and they are the only ones I would expect to see in the documents you provide to the Committee.

Once the documents have been provided I would be pleased to discuss any further concerns you have about their content, so that the Committee can take these into account when considering its possible next steps. As we discussed, the Committee is mindful that the Department contested the publication of the reports on the grounds that it could, through precedent, compromise the effective operation of government, including the free and frank provision of advice to ministers and the free and frank exchange of views. I very much share this concern.



Without planning this move we are changing an important part of how our constitution works. Civil servants being able to tell their Ministers openly and truthfully the problems with the strategy a Government or Minister wishes to pursue is immensely important. But we are now in a different constitutional ballgame, where I would assume that an increasing number of requests for papers will be made to the Government in each of its major areas of policy.

With that in mind, the Committee agreed this morning that just as soon as you've sent over the documents, a couple of copies would be made. These copies will be kept securely and members would be invited to come to the Committee office to read them. No-one else, other than the Committee members, will be invited to make this journey to our Committee office and members will not be able to make copies, or take notes, about the documents.

Once we have read the documents we will talk with our Clerks on both the scope and nature of a short report that we would wish to make to the House.

I'd be happy to discuss this procedure if you are unhappy with it and bring Adam Mellows-Facer with me for any such discussion.

I am copying this letter to Mr Speaker and to Committee members and will publish it on the Committee's website.

With best wishes and I look forward to hearing from you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Frank Field', with a long, sweeping line extending from the end of the signature back up to the text 'hearing from you,'.

**Rt Hon Frank Field MP**  
**Chair**