



# Work and Pensions Committee

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From the Chair

13 June 2018

Neil Couling CBE  
Director General, Universal Credit  
Department for Work and Pensions, Caxton House  
Tothill Street, SW1H 9NA

Dear Neil

## Universal Credit Claimant Survey

Last week the Department published its survey of Universal Credit full service claimants. The survey covers several issues about which the Committee has ongoing concerns.

I would be very grateful if you would answer the following questions. For ease of understanding, I would appreciate if you would number your responses, so it is clear which questions they relate to.

### **Arrears**

When you gave evidence to the Committee in October 2017, we asked you about the accumulation of arrears by UC claimants. You assured us that:

*Arrears build while we are in the take-on phase but the key question to ask here is, "What is happening on the individual cases? Are the arrears building on those individual cases or are they falling?" because our research evidence shows that it is falling.<sup>1</sup>*

And:

*Our evidence data shows that by the time of the third assessment period, people in England are used to—and indeed, Scotland—a monthly cycle of payments.<sup>2</sup>*

The Claimant Survey found, however:

*Slightly more than one third of claimants receiving UC payments towards their housing costs were in arrears in both surveys (36 per cent in Wave 1 and 35 per cent in Wave 2). Among those who were in arrears, two thirds (65 per cent) said they fell into debt after they made their claim for UC. [...]*

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<sup>1</sup> Q93 (Transcript enclosed)

<sup>2</sup> Q84 (Transcript enclosed)

Seven out of ten (71 per cent) of those in arrears at three months into their claim were still in arrears at the eight to nine month point and 44 per cent said the amount they owed had become larger.<sup>3</sup>

**1. Do you consider this to be satisfactory evidence that Universal Credit increases arrears after the initial “take on” period?**

**Experience of sanctioning**

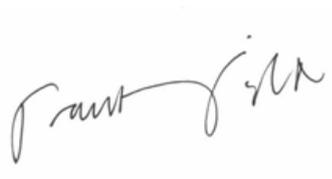
Throughout the survey, claimant experiences are helpfully broken down in a variety of ways, including by conditionality and presence/absence of a long-term health condition. The survey notes, for example, that “certain groups are faring less well under UC, particularly older claimants and claimants with health conditions [...] There will be crossover between these groups as older claimants are more likely to have health conditions.”

The section on “experiences of sanctioning”, however, does not contain this breakdown:<sup>4</sup>

*In the Wave 2 survey, one in ten (11 per cent) claimants whose UC claim had continued into the three months prior to the survey, reported having been sanctioned during their UC claim. Most of these claimants (nine per cent) had been sanctioned once, although a minority (two per cent of all claimants) had been sanctioned more than once as shown in Figure 6.5 below. Those in the intensive work search conditionality group (14 per cent) and those working fewer than 30 hours (14 per cent) were more likely to report that they had been sanctioned. Men were more likely to have been sanctioned than women (15 per cent compared with nine per cent). Sanctioning was also more frequently reported by younger claimants than older claimants (13 per cent of those aged 16 to 34, decreasing to six per cent of those aged 55 or over).*

- 2. Might you please tell me what proportion of claimants with a long-term health condition have been sanctioned a) once and b) more than once?**
- 3. Might you tell us whether, after controlling for age, claimants with a long-term health condition are more likely to be sanctioned than those without?**

Best wishes,



**Rt Hon Frank Field MP  
Chair**

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<sup>3</sup> Universal Credit claimant survey, p.16

<sup>4</sup> P.51