



Work and Pensions Committee

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From the Chair

11 January 2019

Rt Hon Amber Rudd MP
Secretary of State
Department for Work and Pensions

Dear Amber

Re: Universal Credit announcements

I was very pleased to learn from your speech today that the Department has listened to concerns expressed by this Committee and many others, and will be making substantial changes to Universal Credit and the two-child limit policy. I hope that we can continue to engage in this constructive vein.

I wondered whether you might please provide some further detail on the announcements made this morning?

Access to Alternative Payment Arrangements

You announced that the Department accepts it must do more to help claimants who find monthly payments hard to manage. You said the Department will “shortly” begin pilots for better identifying vulnerable claimants and helping them access to more frequent payments.

1. Might you expand on what “shortly” means in this context: when do you expect the pilots to start and finish?
2. Will you please commit to publishing the results of the pilot evaluations—and if so, when?

You also announced that the Department will create “an online system for private landlords [through which] they can request (where necessary) their tenants’ rent be paid direct to them”.

3. Might you please tell us when the Department expects this system to be in place?
4. How does the Department intend to define “necessity” in whether a claimant’s rent should be paid direct to their landlord? Will claimants be consulted, and will they be able to challenge this decision?

Single household payments

Our report on *Universal Credit and domestic abuse* highlighted concerns about the impact of single household payments of Universal Credit on domestic abuse survivors in particular, and on gender equality more widely.

In light of these very serious concerns, I was pleased to hear that you will be “looking at what more we can do to enable the main carer to receive the UC payment”, and “will begin to make those changes later this year”.

5. Might you please provide the Committee with a summary of the Department’s work to date on this issue?
6. Might you also commit to provide a monthly update thereafter?

Additional support: childcare

Your speech acknowledged a point made clearly in our recent report on *Universal Credit: childcare*: that the upfront costs of childcare can be a barrier to work. You stated that “if the initial month’s childcare costs prevent a claimant from starting work, the Flexible Support Fund should be used to help smooth the transition for this priority group”.

This is already an approved use of the Flexible Support Fund. As our report identified, however, take up and claimant and Work Coach awareness of the FSF for this purpose is low.

7. Might you please confirm whether this is a change of policy?
8. What steps will the Department be taking to promote the FSF for these purposes to:
 - a. claimants;
 - b. Work Coaches?
9. How will the Department evaluate whether this measure is being implemented effectively and consistently?

Finally, you stated that you believe “we should be flexible when parents are unable to report their childcare costs immediately, so that these costs will be reimbursed”.

10. Might you please provide further detail on what this will mean in practice for claimants?

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



Rt Hon Frank Field MP
Chair, Work and Pensions Committee