Thank you for your letter of 3 August 2018 in which you ask for further detail of the managed migration process for Universal Credit (UC), and of Universal Support. I have provided a response to each of your questions below, but collating responses together where it makes sense to do so.

Q1. How does the Department plan to monitor the progress of managed migration?

and,

Q2. How will you measure whether the safety net is maintained during the migration process for vulnerable claimants specifically?

Two key principles underpin our planning on managed migration: test and learn and engagement with organisations and stakeholders. We plan to test the approach over a year with small volumes before going to scale. We also want to work in partnership with organisations to ensure the approach is as effective as possible.

We are now moving towards the detailed design and testing stages for the managed migration phase of Universal Credit and we do not underestimate the challenge that we face. We want to do all that we can to ensure we test our processes thoroughly, create solutions where we identify issues, and move people on to Universal Credit as seamlessly as possible. As we are in this design phase, we are currently reviewing options of how best to monitor the progression of the migration and no decision has been made at this time. However, we intend to build safeguards into the process to ensure that claimants will not have a break in benefit entitlement.

Resources within DWP, in both the Jobcentres and our newly created UC service centre network, will be ready and available to support claimants, but we have been thinking about how we can work better in partnership with other organisations to create the conditions to make this a success, including engaging with hard to reach audiences in the most appropriate ways, and supporting individuals to make their new claims quickly and smoothly.
Our engagement across organisations and stakeholders this autumn will a key part of that process of discussion and design. We will continue that dialogue with organisations throughout the testing phases for migration, sharing what we learn before we reach final conclusions about how we will deliver the best possible service to make the migration process a success.

Q3. Will claimants in the "preparation period" be eligible for Universal Support provision?

We are looking at how Universal Support is working, which includes how best we might use it to support claimants during migration. It is clear that the services provided by Universal Support will be part of the overall support package provided to claimants during managed migration.

Q4. What safeguards are in place to ensure vulnerable claimants migrate safely to UC? and,
Q4a. Might you please give some illustrative examples of the different approaches to migration that the Department is considering for vulnerable groups?

As I have said above, we will be testing approaches to the migration process, including how best to support vulnerable claimants in their transition to Universal Credit. We might approach the task by phasing it geographically (as we have done for roll-out) or nationally taking a set number of cases each week to manage the workloads – but at this stage we want to ensure we keep the design options open and don’t inadvertently constrain our ability to respond to what we find in the tests.

We are designing (and will be testing) safeguards for vulnerable claimants who will be migrating to Universal Credit. Our current high level planning includes a structure that would ensure that work coaches check for evidence of complex needs or vulnerability. If it is considered that a claimant has complex needs or is vulnerable, the work coach has the option either to suggest an extension of the deadline day for transition, arrange a home visit, or remove the claimant from the managed migration process by cancelling the notification and re-issuing it at a later date.

On top of any provisions of the managed migration programme, claimants will also have access to the UC Transitional Housing payment, advances and Universal Support to aid their transition.

Q5. What process will the Department follow for identifying legacy benefit claimants who have not made a UC claim by the specified date and following up with them?

The high-level design for managed migration includes a comprehensive preparation period for claimants, which will last about four to six months. During this period, claimants will receive initial communications to alert them to the fact that their existing benefits will be ending and that they will have to make a claim for UC. These communications will also outline any additional support that claimants can access during their migration to help them make a UC claim.
When this period has ended we will issue a formal notification to each claimant informing them that they will need to make a new UC claim and giving them a specific day, referred to as their deadline day, by which this must be done. We have made a commitment that as well as sending this initial notification we will contact claimants twice before the final day by which they can claim to remind them of this need.

All claimants will be given at least one month in which to make their UC claim, but once a notification has been issued our draft provisions will allow for us to extend the deadline day where appropriate. This could be because the claimant is having trouble completing the UC claim; or for example cannot make a UC claim by the deadline day, e.g. because they have to go or have gone into hospital. Our staff will also be able to extend the deadline day if they also feel that there is a good reason to do so. Circumstances that may be treated as good reason may include the claimant having a mental health condition or disability or being homeless. This list is not exhaustive and each case will be considered on its individual circumstances and merits.

We believe that these proposals will allow us to tailor the move from existing benefits to Universal Credit most effectively for claimants, and in particular will enable us to respond to the requirements of those who may have complex needs or fall into a vulnerable group.

Q6. What steps the Department is taking prior to the commencement of managed migration to ensure good communication between JCP and local support services?

I have written separately following the Work and Pension Select Committee review of Universal Support in June to provide some positive examples of Jobcentre Plus and local organisations working closely together. Service Leaders and work coaches in Jobcentres work very closely with organisations and local authorities in their areas to understand and sign-post to local services and this will continue as we start to migrate existing legacy claimants onto Universal Credit.

We will also gather insight from our stakeholders and continue to engage with organisations at a local level on our approach, as we commence the transition of legacy claimants on to UC.

Q7. Whether there are any standards local authorities will be expected to meet with respect to Universal Support provision, before managed migration begins in their area?

As you are aware, Local authorities currently work in partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions to support Universal Credit claimants either by delivering Universal Support themselves or through agreed partners such as Citizens Advice, Credit Unions, Registered Social Landlords or Registered Charities. We will be considering how best we can ensure that the Universal Support offer supports claimants before, during and after migration, and are consulting staff from Jobcentres, service centres, local authorities and providers, as well as claimants to understand their views on how Universal Support is working and what can be done to improve this service.
I hope you find this information helpful.

Kind regards

The Rt Hon Esther McVey MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WORK AND PENSIONS