Dear Thérèse,

Evidence given on 16 October

Huge thanks for giving evidence to the Committee on 16 October. You undertook to provide further information to the Committee on a number of areas; I would be very grateful indeed if you would answer the questions set out below.

Child poverty

You told us that one of your priorities was to tackle “aspects of child poverty”.\(^1\)

1. Might you please let us know in more detail what action you plan to take to tackle child poverty, and which aspects you are planning to focus on?

DWP staff claiming Universal Credit

The Permanent Secretary was not able to tell me in the session how many of the Department’s staff are claiming Universal Credit in order to raise their income to an acceptable standard.

I should make clear, since some confusion arose in the session, that I am not seeking any personal information about members of staff. If you consider that the Department cannot lawfully answer the questions below, it would be helpful to have an explanation of why that might be the case.

2. How many of the Department’s staff, in total and by pay band, are claiming Universal Credit?
   a. If the Department does not collect this data, might you please explain why not?

Managed migration pilot

I was very grateful for your undertaking to provide the Committee with updates on the progress of the managed migration pilot in due course. I appreciate that the pilot is at an early stage and moving slowly—as the Committee, along with many others, has encouraged the Department to do. That being said, you will understand that the Committee takes a very keen interest in the progress of the pilot, in the light of our extensive work on Universal Credit.

\(^1\) Q245
3. How many claimants have moved onto Universal Credit as part of the pilot so far?
4. At what point do you expect to be able to update the Committee on the progress of managed migration?

You said that you were keen to extend the pilot to areas other than Harrogate.\(^2\) That is very welcome indeed; in a report earlier this year, the Committee expressed concern about the fact that, as an area with relatively low levels of deprivation, the circumstances of claimants in Harrogate will not be representative of the UK as a whole.\(^3\)

5. Might you please tell us more about how you hope to develop the pilot?

**Universal Credit fraud**

Several Members of the Committee raised the topic of Universal Credit fraud, of which their constituents had been the victims.

6. Might you please let us know how many claimants have been returned to legacy benefits from Universal Credit after having been victims of fraud?
   a. In how many cases has someone been left worse off by a fraud of this kind, but not returned from UC to legacy benefits?

7. The Department has now made changes to prevent this type of fraud. What lessons have been learned, so that in future claimants might be protected from becoming victims of fraud in the first place?

**Timeliness of Universal Credit payments**

The most recent published data shows that 84% of new claims for Universal Credit are paid in full and on time.

8. Might you please provide further details of the work that the Department is doing to improve the proportion of claims paid in full and on time?

9. What percentage of first payments of UC does the Department expect to be made in full and on time at the end of 2019?

   10. Might you please let us know the percentage of first payments of UC made in full and on time in the area covered by the Universal Credit pilot in May, June, July, August and September 2019?

**PIP and ESA assessments**

We welcomed your willingness, together with your officials, to seek to improve the experience of claimants who are applying for both PIP and ESA.

11. Might you please let us have further detail about the changes that you are planning in this area?
   a. When do you expect these changes to be in place?

You told us that the Department has made changes to the Mandatory Reconsideration process, intended to help reduce the number of PIP and ESA decisions that are taken to

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\(^2\) Q 300
\(^3\) Universal Credit: tests for managed migration
appeal by claimants. You officials said that this involved a new “holistic decision making process”.

12. Might you please set out what this process is, and how it differs from the previous Mandatory Reconsideration process?
   a. Has this process had any impact on the length of time it takes for claimants to get decisions at Mandatory Reconsideration?

13. Might you please supply data on the proportions of Mandatory Reconsiderations submitted, accepted and rejected, for each month in 2019 to date?

14. What does the Department consider to be acceptable levels of overturned and upheld MR requests?

**Universal Credit and support for disabled people**

Following a High Court judgment, the Department is now paying compensation to former claimants of legacy benefits who were entitled to Severe Disability Premium and who lost income when they moved to Universal Credit. However, some of those claimants have found that the level of compensation is less that their loss in income.

15. What assessment has the Department made of the number of disabled people who will be worse off when they move to Universal Credit?
   a. Might you provide a breakdown of this number by benefit claimed?

**Special rules for terminal illness**

Your predecessor announced a review of the special rules for terminal illness (SRTI). You will know that this Committee recommended that the Department should adopt the approach set out in the Access to Welfare (Terminal Illness Definition) Bill, presented by Madeleine Moon MP.

16. Might you please let us know what stage the review has reached, when its report is likely to be published, and when its recommendations might be implemented?

**Pensions guidance**

As you will know, the Financial Guidance and Claims Act 2018 requires the Financial Conduct Authority to ensure that consumers have received appropriate pensions guidance or have opted out of guidance before accessing or transferring their pension savings.

As I write, we are awaiting the Government’s response to our report on *Pensions costs and transparency*, which recommended that “individuals should only be able to opt-out of guidance through an active decision communicated to an impartial body, such as the Money and Pensions Service.”

17. Have you had, or do you plan to have, any discussions with the Financial Conduct Authority about the progress of its work on implementing the guidance guarantee?

18. The FCA has been working with the Money and Pensions Service to test approaches to implementing the guarantee. Are you satisfied with the pace of that work, or would you like to see it move more quickly?

19. When will the 2018 to 2019 Pension Wise service evaluation be published?

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