Dear Frank,

Thank you for your letter dated 3 September 2019 to the former Secretary of State concerning the use of Kofax Capture software. I am responding on behalf of the new Secretary of State. Please find the answers to your questions below.

Might you please explain to us, in layman’s terms, the purpose of using this software and the tasks it performs? It would be particularly helpful to understand the role it may play in the process of deciding on an individual’s entitlement to benefits.

Kofax Capture Software is used by the departments service supplier to capture the images/text from documents sent into the mail opening unit and is used during the scanning process.

As the document is scanned, Kofax Capture extracts the image/text into a digital format (usually PDF file) to go onto the next stage for indexing. It only extracts an exact like for like digital image for indexing and does not alter the original content at all.

The Scanning/indexing (and therefore any of our suppliers in the process) play no part in entitlement decisions or classification of ephemeral/non ephemeral documents, and the software is used solely to turn the original documents into digital format to be sent to the correct part of the department in order for DWP to process.

What impact might an indexing error have on an individual claim for benefits? What systems does the Department have in place to detect such errors?

If an indexing error has occurred and the documents have been sent from the supplier to the departments digital repository system (DRS), the documents could be routed to an incorrect part of the department and/or team. However, each
document, once received into the departments system, creates a task that is notified to the end user and/or team. The classification of the document also attributes a timeframe within which to action the document. If it has been indexed incorrectly, the task will be picked up and seen to be incorrect and can then be re-indexed correctly. DRS also has an advanced search facility, so if a customer contacts the department and a claim has been indexed incorrectly but not yet re-indexed, the system can also be searched and then the documents re-indexed correctly.

Indexing errors are also reported to the supplier to ensure either automated or manual indexing issues do not re-occur and the supplier has a series of quality checks in place to detect issues as documents go through the indexing phase of the process. All documents that are scanned are then indexed. The average percentage of indexing incidents for 2016, 17, 18 against all post received in the mail opening unit was less than 0.005%.

Is the Department aware of specific cases in which benefits have wrongly been stopped because of indexing errors or other errors made by the software? If so, how have those cases been resolved?

No specific records are kept of cases that may have been impacted by incorrect indexing. Each case in each part of the business would be investigated if a customer has stated they took the correct action but the department did not get their documents at all or in time. These investigations would be through the service management team and with the supplier. We would look into each case to ensure we can understand exactly what went on. If the department or its suppliers were in error, the specific part of the business that the case relates to would take the necessary action to ensure customer was not disadvantaged through no fault of their own.

What happens to documents classified as “ephemeral”? Are they retained by the Department, and if so for what period of time?

Documents scanned and indexed are then digitally sent through to the department. The supplier stores the hardcopy document for 4 weeks, then it is securely destroyed in line with GDPR. Any digital documents classified as Ephemeral are deleted from the system in a set timeframe. The timeframe depends on the part of the business the document relates to and what they have set as a deletion period.

I hope you find this response helpful.

Yours Sincerely

Debora Stedman-Scott

BARONESS STEDMAN-SCOTT

MINISTER FOR WORK AND PENSIONS (LORDS)