The Rt Hon AMBER RUDD MP  
Secretary of State for Work & Pensions  

30th April 2019

Rt Hon Frank Field MP  
Chair  
Work and Pensions Select Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA


Dear Frank,

UCTC Research

Thank you for your letter of 15 April and your subsequent letters to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor on the same subject. I am responding on behalf of the Government as the Secretary of State responsible for Universal Credit. I can appreciate the concerns about the slow publication of this report, and I would like to apologise for the delay. I am very happy to answer your questions about what happened in this case, and our wider approach to research.

Turning first to your questions 1 – 4. As you say, this report was completed in November 2017. It was originally scheduled for publication alongside the much larger claimant survey in June 2018. This was to allow sufficient time for clearance across two departments and two sets of ministers. Where appropriate, Departments tend to group similar reports and publish them in batches. Unfortunately, staff and ministerial changes meant the two Departments did not sign off the report sooner alongside wanting to avoid the report being published during the tax credit renewal period which could have potentially caused confusion for claimants. It was recently drawn to our attention that in fact this report had not been published; and we subsequently took immediate action to rectify the mistake and publish it. To be very clear: there was no intentional decision to delay publication.

DWP Ministers were briefed on the report in early 2018. The report itself was part of a much wider program of research, which collectively informed Ministerial decisions at the time.

In this particular report (Transition from Tax Credits to Universal Credit: qualitative and quantitative research with claimants) the sample sizes were small and the findings
mirrored the findings of both our own much bigger customer survey which was published in 2018, and the 2012 welfare report (Work and the welfare system: a survey of benefits and tax credits recipients).

The specific finding that some people on low incomes struggle to manage their finances is consistent across all reports, both in the legacy benefit and tax credits environment and in UC. You will know that in 1948, when social security was established, Beveridge and the then Labour Government were concerned to balance the need to support claimants with sufficient resources whilst not damaging incentives to work. All subsequent Governments have tried to maintain this careful balance. Universal Credit is no different in that and it would be wrong to portray this as otherwise or a new development associated with the implementation of UC.

It is my understanding that the collective findings did, as you would expect, feature in the consideration of the measures adopted in subsequent fiscal events to improve the administration of advances, increase the maximum level from 50% to 100%, abolish waiting days and the introduction of the two week run on.

The decision to expand the roll out of Universal Credit in September 2017 was taken after rigorous self-assessment was conducted with input from across Government. Moreover an independent review by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority (IPA) was also conducted which recommended an expansion. I understand the Committee have had access to that independent review of readiness, I do not believe that an earlier publication of this specific report would have changed that decision.

SSAC did not have access to this report as part of their consideration of the managed migration regulations but they did of course have access to the 2012 study and 2018 claimant survey.

It is, of course, regrettable that the report was not published before now, and I have asked the Department to consider how we can ensure that such a mistake does not occur again.

You asked about our wider approach to research. To date we have published 29 reports on UC, they can be found at https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/research-reports.

We have a large and rolling program of research. We are not in a position to publish definitive list of future publications. As you would expect we try to ensure our program is responsive and therefore need to maintain the flexibility to adapt our work, responding to new issues as they arise. We do announce pre-publication dates to give notice when reports are completed but we do not commit in advance to those.

I hope that this letter provides some reassurance to the Committee, and again I apologise for the error that occurred in this case.

Best wishes,

The Rt Hon Amber Rudd MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WORK AND PENSIONS