Thank you for your letter dated 15 May 2019.

It is the responsibility of every Department to communicate its policies to as wide a range of people as possible using varying communications devices, including advertising. In the case of the Department for Work and Pensions we provide services to around 22 million people. Therefore, the Department decided to run an advertorial campaign in The Metro newspaper.

As the Committee will have seen, the activity is designed to increase understanding of Universal Credit, ensuring people have the information they need to make a claim and make them aware of what they are entitled to. This transparent and informative approach is one that we would hope the Committee would support.

I have responded to the questions detailed in your letter, in order:

You requested a copy of the DWP intranet article issued on 2 May, about a communications update on Universal Credit. I am happy to share this with you, which you will find attached to this response. I should also point out this was an internal DWP communication memo for our staff.

You asked whether the plans around the advertisement were submitted and approved by Ministers for consideration. Ministers agreed to the partnership with The Metro and were kept informed about the approach and creative execution. Detailed campaign and content planning was taken forward by Departmental officials.

In relation to the communications campaign cost, we have committed to publish final full spend on the partnership at the end of July once all activity has concluded.

Our advertising abides by the strict guidelines set by the Advertising Standards Authority. We consulted the Advertising Standards Authority prior to launching the partnership and our advertorials fully reflect their advice.

The information used for the Metro partnership advertorial features were sourced by DWP employees. The content features actual claimant case studies who were happy to share their experience of Universal Credit and interviews from Jobcentre work coaches, and the advertorials have been developed in partnership with the Metro. As you would expect, we sought the necessary agreements from all those featured to use this information.
In regards to the whether the Committee will have an opportunity to take part in the BBC documentary about Universal Credit, this is a matter for the BBC to decide.

I hope you find the above response helpful in answering your questions about our advertising campaign.

Best wishes,

The Rt Hon Amber Rudd MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WORK AND PENSIONS
Communications Update on Universal Credit

Colleagues,

You know better than anyone the great work we do to transform the lives of millions of people for the better. We support people in their times of greatest need and we do it with compassion and dedication, going above and beyond time and again. The work we do touches millions of lives around the country, every day.

We share your justified frustration when our hard work – in particular our work on Universal Credit (UC) – is portrayed incorrectly and/or negatively in the media. We recognise there is a huge disparity between what we do and how that is perceived, and most worrying, we know that negativity and scaremongering can discourage those in need from accessing the help they are entitled to. We’ve heard your feedback, we know it’s unfair and it is something we are now addressing in a different way.

We wanted to share with you some of the activity that’s coming up.

Towards the end of May, you’ll see a regular feature in The Metro newspaper called ‘Universal Credit Uncovered’. The series will launch with a wrap-around front page advertorial and a four-page feature which will myth-bust the common inaccuracies reported on UC, explain what UC is and how it works in reality and follow a day in the life of a Work Coach.

The approach is very different to anything we’ve done before. We are printing – and therefore acknowledging – the common ‘myths’ that are regularly reported on UC and then alongside these myths, the truth. The features won’t look or feel like DWP or UC – you won’t see our branding, and this is deliberate. We want to grab the readers’ attention and make them wonder who has done this ‘UC Uncovered’ investigation. The stories in the features over the subsequent nine weeks, will highlight the flexible nature of UC, demonstrate the personal service available for all customers, and promote recent improvements such as the increase in work allowances.

We hope this provides a timely rebuttal to some of the negativity we see, and it is part of our more confident, front-footed strategy to tackle misconceptions and improve the reputation of UC. In a very similar vein, you may have already seen the recent Twitter video tackling UC myths (link is external) (you might need to view this on a personal device) and this is part of the same proactive approach.

Alongside this, the Minister for Employment has written to every MP in England, Scotland and Wales inviting them to visit their local jobcentres. Secretary of State has made a similar invitation to a wide range of journalists at regional and national publications, asking them to come and see for themselves the great work we do. We know that when people experience first-hand the work that goes on inside a jobcentre, they come away with much more positive outlook on what we do and this can lead to stories such as ‘Behind the Scenes Look at Hull Jobcentre’, ‘The Truth about Universal Credit’ and The Times.pdf

We have also just signed a contract with the BBC to allow them to do more extensive filming inside some of our jobcentres around the country, for a documentary series on BBC2. Focusing on three locations (that are still being finalised), they’re looking to intelligently explore UC by spending time with our people who are instrumental in implementing it. This is a fantastic opportunity for us – we’ve been involved in the process from the outset and
we continue working closely with the BBC to ensure a balanced and insightful piece of television. Filming is starting this week in Liverpool.

The documentary gives us the chance to showcase how hard colleagues across all levels work to support people onto UC. We’re delighted that colleagues are already getting on board with the process – understanding the bigger picture and helping us explore different possibilities for the programme. Thank you for all your support and understanding with this process.

We hope this note gives you a better idea of how we are supporting you externally, and makes visible some of the work going on behind the scenes to make sure you get the recognition you deserve.

Many thanks
Lisa, Neil and JP

Lisa Hunter, Director of Communications
Neil Couling, Director General, Change
JP Marks, Director General, Work and Health Services