Dear Frank,

Following my recent appearance at the Select Committee's oral evidence session on 12 June, we agreed to provide further information the following areas.

**Work Coach Continuity**

Question 206 - Following the Work and Pension Select Committee oral evidence session on 27 June 2018, in relation to the Committee's Inquiry on Benefit Sanctions, the Department agreed to examine the extent to which a claimant saw the same Work Coach, throughout the duration of their Universal Credit Claim.

We know that in general, the majority of meetings are held with the same Work Coach, approximately four out of every five meetings. We don't routinely record why changes do happen. To get some idea of the main reasons we asked two sites to record those reasons. The most common reasons given for this were:

- A Work Coach may have changed duties; and are now in other roles;
- There had been some re-allocation of work to new members or existing members of staff; this may be due to operational changes;
- Annual leave or sickness;
- The Claimant needed specialist advice, for example from a Disability Employment Advisor;
- The Service Centre (making the appointment) referring to a different Work Coach; this could be due to availability of Work Coaches on the day, particularly short notice requests.

This is not expected to be representative of all jobcentres, but it does provide some reassurance that where changes do happen there is a clear reason. Changes in Work Coach do not generally happen for arbitrary reasons. Furthermore, where a new Work Coach does take over, we know that sometimes the existing Work Coach will discuss the claimant's circumstances with their replacement, to ensure as much continuity of support as possible.
So, in attempting to understand why the Committee receive reports that claimants do not see the same Work Coach, we believe this to be a consequence of how the question is asked. If claimants and witnesses understand the question as “Do you always see the same Work Coach”, they are most likely to say “no”. However, what the study demonstrates is that for the majority of their visits to the Jobcentre, Universal Credit claimants will see the same Work Coach.

Payment Exception Service

Question 203 - I promised to write to the Committee with the figure for the number of claimants currently in receipt of a Payment Exception arrangement.

While the Department’s standard method of payment for benefits is into a bank, building society or credit union account, we are aware that some claimants may not be able to open or manage one of these accounts. In these circumstances, the Department can offer two alternatives: the Post Office Card Account and HM Government Payment Exception Service, both of which guarantee access to their payment of pension and or benefit.

In May 2019, 403 claimants were paid their Universal Credit via the HM Government Payment Exception Service. Since the introduction of the Payment Exception Service for paying claimants in February 2018, there have been 1,404 Universal Credit claims which have been paid via this method.

Claimants who do not have a bank account can also receive their Universal Credit award via a Post Office Card Account. In May 2019, 15,724 Universal Credit payments were made to Post Office Card Accounts. However, it should be noted that this does not reflect the number of claimants using this method of payment, only the number of payments made in one month. It is possible that more than one payment could have been made into a single account during this period.

Rent Arrears

Finally, at question 113, Neil Couling makes reference to the research undertaken by the Arm’s-length management organisations (ALMOs) when discussing rent arrears with the Committee.

Their research shows that:

- When looking at the cohort group for UC households, there has been a decrease of the percentage of households in arrears from 76% in 2017 to 72% in 2018.
- About 76% of UC claimants in arrears were recorded as having arrears before they moved onto UC;

This data can be found in their ‘Carrying the debt’ report. I have included the link to their page for ease of reference:
I hope that you find this information helpful.

Kind regards,

Will Quince MP

Minister for Family Support, Housing and Child Maintenance