From the Chair

Gareth Davies
Comptroller and Auditor General
National Audit Office
157-197 Buckingham Palace Road
Victoria
SW1W 9SP

11 July 2019

Dear Gareth,

You will have seen the reports this week about fraud in Universal Credit Advances. I have written already to the Permanent Secretary about this, and I enclose a copy of that letter.

The National Audit Office published a masterful and comprehensive report on Universal Credit last year, which noted that at that time “The Department’s research found some individuals have made multiple claims, including one individual who has received 18 advances without following through to a fully completed Universal Credit claim.” There were, therefore, some early signs that Universal Credit advances might be vulnerable to fraud, albeit of a different type than that reported this week by the BBC.

I know that the National Audit Office has embarked on a study of fraud and error in the benefits system¹, and I very much hope that this issue will feature in your investigation.

In the light of the relevance to your work, might I please ask you:

1. Did the risk of this type of fraud feature in any of the DWP’s risk assessments, or its risk register?

2. If it did, what action did the Department take to mitigate the risk?

3. If not, what might the Department do in future to make sure that it anticipates risks of this kind?

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¹ Oral evidence taken by the Work and Pensions Committee on Overpayments of Carer’s Allowance, 15 May 2019, Q81
With best wishes and I look forward to hearing from you,

Rt Hon Frank Field MP
Chair