Dear Frank,

Thank you for your letter dated 27 June 2019, it was a pleasure to provide evidence to you and other members of the Work and Pensions Select Committee. I have noted the points in your letter and I will address your concerns in turn.

Prison Leavers

1. Might you please provide some more detail on this pilot: where did it take place, who were the participants, and what were the key findings?
   a. How does the Department plan to take these findings forward?

2. You told us that prison leavers cannot apply for Universal Credit until they have left prison. Might you please explain why this is not possible?
   a. Are there any plans to allow prisoners who are approaching release to apply for benefits from within prison?
   b. What additional support does the Department offer to prisoners prior to release to help them claim benefits on release? For example, is the "Help to Claim" service offered to them?
   c. Does the Department plan to offer prison leavers any support-other than repayable Advances-during the five week wait for their first Universal Credit payment?

Thank you for your interest in the support we provide for prisoners, I would like to assure you that the Department is committed to providing personalised support for all claimants. I am delighted to announce the new joint MoJ, DWP and HMPPS National Partnership Agreement to boost offender rehabilitation has been published today, 23 July 2019. This agreement sets out how
prisons, Community Rehabilitation Companies, DWP prison work coaches and the New Futures Network will work together to drive rehabilitation and reduce reoffending.

The Proof of Concept (POC) regarding computers in prisons. This POC took place in April 2018 to March 2019 in three prisons; namely HMP Norwich, Belmarsh and Wayland. The POC tested three components, engagement, digital access and identity. Approximately 1000 male prisoners across the three prisons were involved in the wider UC orientation and information sharing elements of the Proof of Concept. A further 26 claimants went through to the second stage of online claim preparation. The participants represented a different range of age groups and IT ability and experience.

The results of the POC gave us cause for optimism and that is why we have moved on to this next stage in Scotland. We have seen an increase in the volumes of prisoner engagement with prison work coaches and this is important as we know prisoners that engage with a prison work coach on average get a payment three times as fast.

As you will know the Secretary of State made an announcement regarding the prison leaver journey at the end of June 2019. We will be testing the prison leaver journey further in two Scottish prisons, namely HMP Cornton Vale and Perth. The scope of the test will be worked through with the Scottish Prison Service during July 2019, and will examine ways to build that relationship over a longer period of time.

To ensure rehabilitation is as seamless as possible upon release, the Department has Prison Work Coaches who are based in resettlement prisons across the country.

Prisoners serving short sentences are able to retain the housing element for up to 6 months to prevent them from being homeless on release. For those prisoners serving longer sentences the Prison Work Coach will engage with the prisoner 2-3 weeks prior to release and will identify any accommodation issues at this point.

All discharged prisoners (sentenced to 2 days or more) are supported on release by a MoJ contracted provider – a Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC), the CRC should consider any accommodation issues and support in signposting/engaging with the any appropriate support.
If a Prison Work Coach has identified any accommodation issues during their intervention with the prisoner, they would use the District Provision Tool to identify any suitable support that might be available locally and refer or signpost the prisoner to that provision.

For those engaging with the Prison Work Coach an advanced appointment will be made on the day of release or as soon as possible following release, taking into account the claimants circumstances. Once the claim to UC is made by the prisoner, they would be able to apply for an advance of their first payment straightaway, meaning that money could be made available, within 1 – 3 hours, on the same day as the claim is made.

Managed Payments to Landlords are also available to support claimants, including prison leavers, who may struggle to manage their monthly payments.

As Universal Credit is a digital benefit, prison leavers are not able to make a claim in advance of their release. This is due to restrictions on the use of computers in prisons, which is why the Proof of Concept took place. A short-term solution has been designed to ensure that prison leavers have a claim from day one of their release. Prison Work Coaches will support prison leavers to make a claim on release by:

- giving advice on what evidence is required to make a claim, for example - verifiable ID, bank account and email address;
- ensuring prison leavers are aware that they must complete an online claim as soon as possible on release and before the date of the initial appointment; and
- book an initial appointment at the relevant Jobcentre within 7 days of release.

**Digital by Default**

As you’ll be aware Universal Credit is a 24 hour, seven days a week, digital service that allows claimants to manage their own data and account online at a time which is convenient for them. Through their account claimants can check their Universal Credit benefit payments, notify us of changes and record notes via an online journal facility.

We do understand that some claimants may experience difficulties with this approach and, as mentioned in your letter, we have always ensured support
and alternative options are available for these claimants. This support is available at any stage, throughout the life of their claim, as we know that circumstances can change.

3. For each of telephony, face-to-face in Jobcentres and home visits, for UC applications, might you please tell us:
   a) How many requests the Department received in 2016/17, 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20 to date;
   b) How many of those were accepted;
   c) A summary of the reasons why requests were rejected.

We are currently maintaining 17,000 claims through a telephony service. We do not centrally collate information regarding the number of claimants who have made a request for telephone, face-to-face and home visit support for UC applications. Claimants can ask for this support, be given the support and advised in a number of ways. Not all of these requests will be recorded. This information could be held across a number of different systems and in a number of different formats which means we are unable to collate the data without looking into each individual claimant account.

4. We heard that, after the initial claim is set up, many claimants experience ongoing difficulties using the Universal Credit online journal. Might you please clarify in what circumstances it is possible for claimants to have the entirety of their claim managed by telephone or face-to-face (including home visits)?
   a) If so, what criteria is used to decide whether claimants can access this provision?
   b) In each of the years in Q3a, how many requests were made for non-digital claim management, and how many were accepted?

As Universal Credit is tailored to the individual, there is not a set of circumstances whereby the claimant may have their claim entirely managed by telephony or face to face as the Department acknowledges that individuals may move in and out of situations where they do or do not require support. Where support is required and identified, they may be put in place once, for as long as it’s needed.
The Universal Credit full service survey.¹, found that 98 per cent of claimants did claim online. Over half (54 per cent) of all claimants were able to register their claim online unassisted, with a further fifth (21 per cent) completing it online but with help. Three in ten (30 per cent) of those who registered a claim online found this difficult, and the process of verifying their identity online was seen as particularly difficult. Overall, more than four in ten (43 per cent) claimants said they needed more support registering their claim for UC. Three in ten (31 per cent) said they need more ongoing support with using their UC digital account.

The Department is committed to providing the best possible support for all our claimants, including the most vulnerable in society. We are continuously reviewing and improving the service for vulnerable people to ensure that it is accessible and responsive to their needs. An example of how we have improved our service for vulnerable people is the Citizens Advice Help to Claim offer which provides tailored, practical support to help people make a UC claim. It is available online, through web-chat, through a Freephone number and face to face through local Citizens Advice services. I am personally committed to looking at new ways of working to support all vulnerable groups and to ensure the service is working well for them.

I have attached in Annex 1, the guidance for Work Coaches advising claimants on alternative ways of claiming Universal Credit.

Identity and Bank Accounts

5. How many Universal Credit awards are currently being paid into bank accounts that do not belong to Universal Credit claimants?

We do not hold that level of information.

6. We asked whether the Department does any checks at all on the identities of non-claimants who are nominated to receive Universal Credit payments. Neil Couling asked in response: “what would you like me to check there—that that person exists?”.

   a) What training do Work Coaches receive on identifying whether someone in this situation is a victim of either coercive control or fraud in this particular circumstance?

b) Are claimants required to provide any identification at all for the person they would like their Universal Credit to go to? If so, what does the Department do with this information?

I share your concerns regarding coercive control and fraud. This is something that the Department takes very seriously and training and safeguards are in place to support claimants.

The Department verification processes can bring claimants into the Jobcentre to verify their bank account. If a claimant is using a bank account that is not their own, we would request the owner of the bank account to attend with them and note the system with the bank details and discuss bank account options with the claimant. However, the problem in this instance is coercive partners. If someone is experiencing financial abuse, they can tell their work coach as soon as they feel able to disclose this personal and sensitive information, a discussion should take place about their circumstances, to enable their work coach to tailor the support they provide to the claimant’s needs. We do not require their partner or the perpetrator of any abuse to be involved.

The Department is sensitive to the fact that it can be difficult for any victim of domestic abuse to come forward and disclose this. Universal Credit claimants are assigned to a single Work Coach; with whom they can build a trusting relationship.

All of our work coaches have received mandatory training, developed with input from domestic abuse charities, to help them recognise the signs of abuse. If it becomes apparent that a claimant has been or is a victim of domestic abuse, as soon as they feel able to disclose this personal and sensitive information, a discussion should take place about their circumstances, to enable their work coach to tailor the support they provide to the claimant’s needs. This includes signposting the claimant to expert organisations. Almost all Jobcentres have private rooms available so that individuals can discuss these sensitive issues in private.

We are also implementing other improvements across our service for victims and survivors of domestic abuse and in response to one of the Joint Committee’s recommendations on the Domestic Abuse Bill, we have committed to review and evaluate the effectiveness of a new feature to
encourage payments of UC to the main carer and the introduction of domestic abuse specialists in every Jobcentre.

I have attached in Annex 2, the guidance for Work Coaches advising claimants experiencing Domestic Abuse.

7. Claimants who do not have their own bank account can ask that payment be made to them via the Payment Exception Service (PES). Might you please tell us:
   a) How many requests the Department received in 2016/17, 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20 to date for Universal Credit to be paid via PES;
   b) How many of those were accepted;
   c) A summary of the reasons why requests were rejected.

Universal Credit should ideally be paid into a bank, building society, or credit union account that is in the claimant's or partner's own name. This is because most employers will pay their employees into one of these accounts and ensuring our claimants have this available moves them closer to being ready for employment.

For claimants who cannot open one of these accounts, or provide the details for their own account to access their payment, 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.

The Department has been contacting claimants using Post Office Card Accounts since September 2015 offering information to move to standard payment methods.

As per my letter following the Work and Pensions Select Committee, the Payment Exception Service has been operating since September 2017, with the first customers using the service in February 2018. Since the start of the service, 1,404 Universal Credit claims have been paid via the Payment Exception Service and as of May 2019 403 Universal Credit claims were paid via the Payment Exception Service.

We do not hold the information on how many people requested the use of the Payment Exception Service, as claimants can ask for this support in a number...
of ways: In person; over the phone; on their online journal. If a claimant does not have access to any other means of receiving payment, we would use the Payment Exception Service to ensure they receive their Universal Credit payment.

8. Might you please outline the process that Work Coaches are advised to follow when a claimant tells them that they do not have their own bank account? For example, are they advised to recommend the PES or a Post Office Account at this stage, or to ask claimants whether there is another account that UC can be paid into?

I have attached, in Annex 3, the guidance for Work Coaches if a claimant does not have their own bank account.

**Work Coaches**

9. Your letter of 27 June set out the findings but did not provide any sense of how frequently this is happening, or how common the reasons cited were. Might you please provide this information?

In the letter of the 27 June I stated that ‘approximately four out of every five meetings’ were held with the same work coach.

The reasons outlined in the letter account for around 90% of the changes in Work Coaches we observed in our study, and were listed in order of how common those reasons were. Our study was small scale and not representative of all Jobcentre Plus sites or other periods of time. The information provided was to show that, where a change in Work Coach does happen it is nearly always for a legitimate reason and not because Jobcentre Plus did not try to maintain continuity of support.

10. What assessment has the Department made of the effect of not consistently seeing the same Work Coach on Universal Credit’s effectiveness at helping people into work?

The Department has not made an assessment of the effect of not consistently seeing the same Work Coach on Universal Credits effectiveness at helping
people into work. However, our most recent clamant survey\textsuperscript{2} found that more than eight in ten claimants found their individual interventions were helpful in meeting the objectives of their Claimant Commitment and that six in ten said they felt that Universal Credit was supporting them to find work. It also identified high levels of motivation among claimants to find work and that the majority agreed that getting and keeping a job was their number one priority, around half were confident that they would find a job or increase their hours or income within the following three months.

I hope you find this response helpful.

Kind regards,

Will Quince MP
Minister for Family Support, Housing and Child Maintenance

Annex 1 - The guidance for Work Coaches advising claimants on alternative ways of claiming Universal Credit.

Non-digital relationships

Introduction
Reasons for not using the digital service
Communicating with non-digital claimants
Tailoring support for non-digital claimants
Labour market flexibilities
Examples of dealing with non-digital claimants
Useful links and products

Introduction
The majority of claimants will be able to make and maintain their claim for Universal Credit online. For more information on the support available for claimants who need help to do this, see assisted digital guidance. However, not everyone will be able to make and maintain their claim online, for a variety of good reasons. As a claimant may not have family or friends they can trust to help them manage their claim, Universal Credit staff may be the only help they have.

Reasons for not using the digital service
There are a number of reasons why a claimant may not be able to make and maintain their claim online including:
- Physical or mental ill health or disability
- visual impairments
- lack of basic literacy
- lack of skills and training
- legal limitations such as MAPPA - Multi-agency Public Protection Arrangements or TPIM - Terrorism Prevention Investigation Measures

The claims by phone process is in place to enable non-digital claimants to make and maintain their claim, and to ensure they receive the right support while claiming Universal Credit. For more information, see the spotlight on claims by phone

Communicating with non-digital claimants
Claimants who have made their claim by phone do not have an online account, so will not have access to important information, such as:
• appointment dates and times
• requests for further information, for example Statements of Fitness for Work/Fit Notes
• suspensions
• sanctions
• requests for further information
• payment details/statement

This information needs to be communicated to claimants by alternative forms of contact
For claimants who are not able to access their Journal, methods of contact could include:
• SMS messaging to prompt the claimant to make contact (ensure claimant has a mobile, and that the preference is set to SMS instead of e-mail)
• via mobile or landline:
  • do they have credit on their phone?
  • do they need us to call them back?
  • if a call back is required ensure they can access their phone
  • is there a good time to call them?
  • face to face contact
  • home visit – in exceptional circumstances and after all other options have been considered

Alternatively consider if an appointee or corporate appointee is appropriate. It is important to remember that if a claimant cannot interact online, a call back must be offered anytime they call us.
When claimants do agree to a call back Universal Credit staff must be proactive in returning those calls.
Method of contact should be reviewed with the claimant regularly to ensure it remains the most appropriate option.

Tailoring support for non-digital claimants
Staff flexibilities
Staff flexibilities could include:
• attempting to contact the claimant if they miss a face to face appointment before referring for a decision
• offering an alternative to the online channel
• accepting that telephony contact could take longer
• allowing the claimant to use the jobcentre as a care of address if they are unable to provide an alternative (agreed locally and reviewed regularly)
• more than one attempt may be needed when making outbound calls to the claimant

Labour Market Flexibilities
Labour Market flexibilities could include:

Conditionality
If a claimant has characteristics that means they could fall into more than one regime, the lowest conditionality intensity should be applied.

Alternative Work Search Activities
Universal Credit staff should identify any restrictions a claimant may have and record these in a profile note in the claimant history. For claimants who can’t use computers don’t make online job search part of the claimant commitment. Alternative work search activities can be agreed such as searching in the newspapers, contacting employers directly, registering with agencies who will search for vacancies on their behalf, use computers under supervision from Jobcentre/probation staff, obtain support from support agencies (Local Authority, charities etc.).

Remote Management
Staff can remotely manage those who live in remote areas and have difficulty attending appointments. The way this is undertaken will be agreed with the claimant and can include contact via telephone interventions.

Accepting Claimant Commitment
For claimants who can’t access the to-do on their journal they are able to accept their claimant commitment clerically either during face to face or telephone interventions.

Providing Work Related Evidence
Regulations provide flexibility in regards to how claimants can provide evidence of meeting their work related requirements. Alternative options include providing evidence face to face via clerical records or through telephony channels.
Examples of dealing with non-digital claimants
A claimant, who cannot read or write English and so cannot use a computer to make a claim on-line, wishes to make a claim for Universal Credit. The claimant should phone Universal Credit and ask to make their claim by phone. Their suitability will be assessed, the first part of their claim will be completed and an appointment booked for them to be contacted for completion of the gather.

Once the claim has been completed, an appointment will be booked for them at the jobcentre for their Initial Evidence Interview.

As the claimant cannot access their journal, they will need to be contacted by phone about any important messages.

When the claimant attends appointments, future appointments will need to be made at this time so that the claimant is aware of when they next need to attend.

The claimant should also be placed in a regime according to their circumstances. Any restrictions to employment and training should be taken into account when setting requirements on the claimant’s tailored commitment.

The claimant’s ability to read and write in English and digital capability should be reviewed regularly as part of their ongoing interaction with DWP. If their language and digital skills reach an appropriate standard, their account should be converted from a phone claim to an online claim.

Useful links
You can find more information by visiting the Complex Needs section
View for further information:
- Assisted Digital
- Complex Needs Overview
- Spotlight on Complex Needs
- Consent and Disclosure
- Health and Disabilities
- Home Visits
- Appointees
- MAPPA
- Spotlight on claims by phone
• Annex 2 - The guidance for Work Coaches advising claimants experiencing Domestic Abuse.

Domestic Violence or abuse

Content
Introduction
What is domestic violence and abuse?
When a claimant is identified as having issues with domestic violence or abuse
Criteria for switching off work-related requirements
Relevant evidence
Supporting victims of domestic violence or abuse
Domestic abuse or violence awareness video (8 min 44secs)

Introduction
A change in a claimant's circumstances could mean work-related requirements need to be temporarily switched off. There is a specific list of circumstances for when the switch-off can apply. This includes when the claimant is or has been a victim of domestic violence or abuse.

What is domestic violence and abuse?
The government definition of domestic violence and abuse is "any incident or pattern of incidents of controlling, coercive, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged 16 or over who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality". This can encompass, but is not limited to, the following types of abuse:

• Physical: this can include shaking, smacking, punching, kicking, presence of finger or bite marks, bruising, starving, tying up, stabbing, suffocation, throwing things, using objects as weapons, genital mutilation or 'honour violence'. Physical effects are often in areas of the body that are covered and hidden (for example, breasts, legs and stomach)

• Sexual: this can include forced sex, forced prostitution, ignoring religious prohibitions about sex, refusal to practise safe sex, sexual insults, passing on sexually transmitted diseases or preventing breastfeeding

• Psychological: this can include intimidation, insulting, isolating the person from friends and family, criticising, denying the abuse, treating the person
as an inferior, threatening to harm children or take them away or forced marriage

- Financial: for example, not letting the person work, undermining efforts to find work or study, refusing to give money, asking for an explanation of how every penny is spent, making the person beg for money, gambling or not paying bills

- Emotional: this can include swearing, undermining confidence, making racist, sexist or other derogatory remarks, making the person feel unattractive, calling the person stupid or useless or eroding the person's independence

- Controlling behaviour: a range of acts designed to make a person subordinate and/or dependent by isolating them from sources of support, exploiting their resources and capacities for personal gain, depriving them of the means needed for independence, resistance and escape and regulating their everyday behaviour

- Coercive behaviour: an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation and intimidation or other abuse that is used to harm, punish or frighten their victim

This definition, which is not a legal definition, includes so called 'honour' based violence, female genital mutilation (FGM) and forced marriage. It is clear that victims are not confined to one gender or ethnic group. The switch-off of work-related requirements applies in relation to domestic violence and abuse (actual or the threat of) by the claimant's current or former partner(s), or by certain family members of the claimant, their partner or former partner. Step relatives are also included as family members.

**When a claimant is identified as having issues with domestic violence or abuse**

If it becomes apparent that a claimant has been or is a victim of domestic violence or abuse, as soon as they feel able a discussion about their circumstances should take place. A claimant may feel more comfortable talking in a private room and given this option if appropriate. The discussion is also to:

- explain what assistance can be given for example:
• Universal Support
• Personal Budgeting Support and Alternative Payment Arrangements
• Advances

• establish if the claimant meets the criteria to have their work-related requirements switched off

Criteria for switching off work-related requirements
Any claimant, in any conditionality regime, who states that they have been a victim of actual or threatened domestic violence and/or abuse is eligible to have their work-related requirements switched off as long as:

• the incident of domestic violence and abuse occurred within the previous six months
• the incident meets the definition of domestic violence and abuse
• they are not living at the same address as the abuser
• they have not had a previous domestic violence and abuse switch off within the last 12 months
• they provide written evidence within one month of notifying Universal Credit

If the claimant remains in the same household as the person who inflicted or threatened the domestic violence or abuse they are not eligible for the Domestic Violence switching off requirements (Easements). In this circumstance, if relevant evidence is provided the Domestic Emergency switching off requirements (Easements) can be used where it is appropriate to switch off all requirements for a period of time.
The switching off requirements period starts on the date the claimant notifies us. A claimant may notify an incident of domestic violence or abuse within 6 months but may not be seen by an agent until after the time limit has expired. In these circumstances the switching off requirements period will start from the date they first made contact.

For example:
A claimant suffers domestic violence and abuse on 1 January 2017 and informs Universal Credit on 29 June 2017. An interview is booked for 4 July 2017 (more than six months since the incident). In this scenario, the claimant will be treated as having notified Universal Credit on 29 June 2017 and the switching off requirements will begin on this day.
**Relevant evidence**

Relevant evidence is written evidence from a person acting in an official capacity showing that:

- the claimant’s circumstances are consistent with those of a person who has had domestic violence and abuse inflicted upon them (or has received threats of violence or abuse) during the 6 months prior to the claimant notifying Universal Credit

- the claimant has made contact with the person acting in an official capacity in relation to such an incident, which occurred during that period

- A person acting in an official capacity means:
  - a healthcare professional
  - a police officer
  - a registered social worker / Social Care Wales
  - the claimant’s employer or a representative of their trade union
  - any public, voluntary or charitable body which has had direct contact with the claimant in connection with domestic violence and abuse

The claimant must provide their evidence as soon as possible but no later than one calendar month from notification of the domestic violence or abuse.

**Switching off requirements**

There are some differences in the length of time any switching off requirements will apply and which work-related requirements must be switched off depending on the claimant. These are as follows:

- all claimants
- in any conditionality regime, must not have work-related requirements imposed for up to 13 weeks
- a responsible carer of a child, in the Intensive Work Search regime:
- must not have work search and availability requirements imposed for a further 13 weeks (bringing the total up to 26 weeks)
- after the first 13 weeks, claimants should be offered voluntary review to see whether they want to take up the offer of work-related support on voluntary basis
- a responsible carer of a child, in any conditionality group:
- should not have any work-related requirements imposed for 26 weeks
• any requirements undertaken must be on a voluntary basis and no sanction should apply within this 26-week period if a claimant does not undertake any work-related requirement

If the claimant is not eligible to have their work-related requirements switched off because of domestic violence or abuse, they may still be eligible to have work search/availability requirements switched off under the ‘child distress’ provisions. For further information See Child in considerable distress.

Supporting victims of domestic violence or abuse
If the claimant has access to the Internet, they should be signposted to the GOV.UK website to enable them to get the expert help and advice they need. Details can be printed from the site and issued to the claimant as appropriate. The following is a list of organisations available that may be able to assist the claimant:

• The National Domestic Violence Helpline – is run jointly with Women’s Aid and Refuge and is a 24 hour, free phone national service (claimants can contact the National Domestic Violence Helpline on: 0808 2000 247 or http://www.nationaldomesticviolencehelpline.org.uk). Staff can also use the helpline to obtain guidance from professionals.

• Broken Rainbow – provides information, advice and support to gay men, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender populations who may also being affected by domestic violence and abuse (claimants can contact Broken Rainbow on 0303 999 5428

• The National Stalking Helpline – provides guidance and information to anybody who is currently or has previously been affected by harassment or stalking (claimants can contact the National Stalking Helpline on 0808 802 0300 or e-mail mailto:advice@stalkinghelpline.org).

• Male Advice (and Enquiry) Line – offers help to male victims of domestic violence and abuse and advice to perpetrators (claimants can contact the Men’s Advice and enquiry line on: 0808 801 0327 or at http://www.mensadviceline.org.uk/)

• RESPECT – offers information and advice to people who are abusive towards their partners and want help to stop (claimants can contact respect on: 0808 8024040 or http://www.respect.uk.net/)

This is not a complete list
Domestic abuse or violence awareness video
This domestic abuse and violence video contains sensitive subject matters which may affect some people, please ensure that you take time out after watching the video to reflect, discuss and debrief with your line manager, particularly if you are affected by its content.
Domestic abuse and violence (8min 44secs)
Domestic abuse or violence awareness video transcript
Annex 3 - the guidance for Work Coaches if a claimant does not have their own bank account.

Post Office Card Account and Payment Exception Service

Some claimants receive their Universal Credit payments into a Post Office card account (POca). This is a short-term way to pay people with no other kind of bank account.

Payment methods by exception
Some claimants may not be able to open or access traditional bank accounts or use standard banking products. In such cases, in order to make a first payment of Universal Credit, consider making a payment using a different method.

Payment methods by exception include:
- Post Office card accounts
- Payments into Third Party Accounts
- Hospital account
- Her Majesty's Government Payment Exception Service

All of the above methods of payment should only be considered when all other standard banking payments have been explored and options discounted. They should be used for first payments or for making payments for a limited duration. It is important to conduct a method of payment discussion at the earliest opportunity to ensure they don’t continue without review.

Claimants should be encouraged and supported to use an existing bank, building society or credit union account or open a bank account to have their Universal Credit payments paid into at every opportunity. These discussions should be recorded in claimant history and the outcomes noted.

Consideration should also be given to other support available. This may include signposting to the Universal Credit online ‘Money Manager’ Tool or making a referral to money guidance/debt advice.

Post Office card accounts (POca)
A Post Office card account (POca) is a basic account that can only accept benefit and pension payments. It cannot be used to accept wages/salaries, or to set up direct debits for housing costs and household bills.

POca should ONLY be used for those claimants who cannot manage a bank, basic bank account, building society or credit union account. Ask for confirmation that this is the case before agreeing to pay by POca.
If a claimant does have a POca account, their commitments should include a step within the voluntary section about the claimant taking steps to obtain a bank account or basic bank account. Claimants should be encouraged and supported to use an existing bank account, building society or credit union account at every intervention. These discussions should be recorded in claimant history and the outcomes noted. Once a claimant has opened a bank building society or credit union account it is important that work coaches highlight the need for the claimant to close the POca as soon as possible, by obtaining and completing a form via the Post Office.

**Payments into Third Party Accounts**
A Third Party Account is an account that is not held in the claimant’s name. This method of payment should be:
- paid by exception and only when all other bank options have been reviewed and discounted (this includes using Post Office card accounts)
- a one-off payment unless claimant circumstances indicate that they would never be able to assess standard banking products or have been refused a POca account - evidence can be requested (but cannot be demanded)
- subject to review to ensure (unless exceptional circumstances as indicated above) the payments into Third Party Account do not continue to be paid without evidence of a method of payment conversation recorded in claimant history and outcome noted.

**Hospital account**
Where a claimant is a hospital in-patient and it is expected they will be in hospital for some time they may ask for their Universal Credit to be paid into the hospital’s account. Notification from the hospital and the claimant is needed if they wish this to happen. If this is not possible the hospital can be made a corporate appointee.
For further information see Appointees, Personal Acting Bodies and

**Corporate Acting Bodies**
Her Majesty's Government Payment Exception Service
The Majesty’s Government Payment Exception Service (HMGPES) replaces the Simple Payment system and is the absolute last resort for payment. The work coach must have a robust conversation with the claimant to establish why they cannot use any of the other payment method options. Claimants are paid by a voucher service provided by i-movo.
Take the following actions:
- complete and email the HMGPES Voucher proforma to your team leader who will check it
- the team leader will email it to the Universal Credit HMGPES team
- this informs them the claimant wants payment by voucher (the voucher options are, card, SMS, email, they can be collected at the Jobcentre as a last resort)

If they collect the voucher in the Jobcentre, the site generic email inbox must be recorded in the claimant history.

If the claimant requests a same day payment, inform the Universal Credit HMGPES team by completing the HMGPES Voucher proforma to generate the voucher the same day. The vouchers are available in multiples of £100 and PayPoint outlets have limited amounts of cash on the premises. Therefore, claimants may have to cash the vouchers at a number of PayPoint outlets.

If the claimant pays rent, the conversation must include a discussion about whether an Alternative Payment Arrangement (Managed Payment to a Landlord) is appropriate as this may reduce the number of vouchers required. Where the claimant opts to collect the voucher from the Jobcentre they must sign a receipt to confirm they have received it. Complete the HMGPES Receipt pro-forma and secure locally.
See HMGPES guidance for information on the process and how to contact them.