



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions

The Rt Hon DAVID GAUKE MP  
Secretary of State for Work & Pensions

7 December 2017

Rt Hon Frank Field MP  
Chair  
Work and Pensions Select Committee  
14 Tothill Street  
London  
SW1H 9NB

Dear Frank

Thank you for your letter dated 6 December 2017 regarding the Universal Credit project assessment reports.

I would like to welcome your shared concern around how the publication of these reports could compromise the effective operation of government. As I said in the House on Tuesday, these assessments by their very nature are only useful if they are not written with a view to publication – so that all involved feel safe in the knowledge that they can be entirely candid and clear about any issues that they see. It is a long-held principle, agreed with the Public Accounts Committee, that the Government does not release project assessment reports produced by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority.

However, given the exceptional public debate around Universal Credit I recognise that, on this occasion, there is a public interest in sharing the project assessment reports with the Committee, on a confidential basis. This will enable the Committee to see that the decision to expand in October was based on evidence and external scrutiny.

My officials will prepare hard copies of the reports. You proposed in your letter that once shared with you, the reports will be kept securely and members of the

Committee will be invited to the Committee office to read them. No-one else will be allowed to view them. Members will not be able to make copies, nor take notes about the documents. I welcome this approach, which seems sensible and reasonable.

Similarly, I agree to share the reports in advance of your meeting on Wednesday 13 December 2017. My officials are reviewing the documents over the next few days and redacting where it is appropriate. I expect this to be minimal; it will cover the names of officials below the level of Senior Civil Service.

If it would be helpful, Neil Couling and a member of the Infrastructure Projects Authority would be happy to provide an informal briefing to the Committee to explain the Project Assessment Review process and how the reports are conducted.

In terms of the most recent report, work is underway against each of the recommendations and my officials will continue to work closely with the Infrastructure and Projects Authority as Universal Credit continues to roll out.

Thank you for your offer of a face-to-face meeting to discuss the handling of these documents. I would be very happy to arrange this before the House rises if that is helpful for you and the Committee. Please liaise with my office if you would like to set up a meeting.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'David Gauke'.

**The Rt Hon David Gauke MP**  
**SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WORK AND PENSIONS**