

Dear Stephen Toy,

Thank you for your Freedom of Information request of 7 February 2017. You asked:

Based on the patent falsehood that most applicants for Universal Credit will be in receipt of one month of wages paid to them in arrears from a former employer, immediately prior to applying for Universal Credit, said benefit is paid one month in arrears but has a much longer waiting period of at least five weeks to several months, during which applicants receive no state support whatsoever.*

My understanding is that the only help people without the means to support themselves during this preposterously long waiting period is an "advance" by way of a loan from the DWP, which has to be paid back later, possibly via deductions from meagre benefits themselves. Thus, unless I am mistaken, Universal Credit will inevitably drive the poorest and most hard pressed applicants into rent arrears and/or debt deliberately by design.

My questions therefore are:

(1)

Does any mechanism exist in Universal Credit to prevent the poorest and most vulnerable applicants from falling into rent arrears and/or debt, e.g., expediting delivery of entitlements so that the most desperate cases receive support much more quickly appropriate to their situation, or will legions of the poorest and most hard pressed citizens be driven into rent arrears and/or debt by Universal Credit itself?

(2)

It is my contention that the number of people not in possession of one month of wages forced to apply for Universal Credit will be much greater than amongst the general population. To assess the danger Universal Credit represents in respect to plummeting the poor and vulnerable into rent arrears and/or debt could you please tell me:

What percentage of Universal Credit applicants are not in receipt of one month of wages from former paid employment immediately prior to making application for Universal Credit?

(3)

When people are migrated from legacy benefits to Universal Credit (and so definitely cannot possibly be in possession of one month of wages from a former employer) will they be forced

to suffer an extended “waiting period” without income, for five weeks to several months, before receiving their entitlements under the flaky new system?

The design of Universal Credit seems extraordinarily pernicious to me since the people who suffer most under the new system and are affected the most adversely are the poorest, most hard pressed and the most vulnerable citizens which seems wholly unjust and irresponsible in respect to the provision of social security in twenty-first century Great Britain.

1. Universal Credit is the biggest welfare reform in a generation, which is designed to mirror the world of work and give people control over their own lives and finances.

The best way to support people is to help them into work, and under Universal Credit people are moving into work faster and staying in work longer than under the old system. People can ask for an advance at the new claim stage. Claimants can apply for an advance immediately and can receive up to 50 per cent of their award (including housing costs) shortly afterwards.

Jobcentre Plus work coaches discuss financial capability and budgeting support with all claimants in their very first work search interview. If appropriate, we will refer the claimant for money advice. All channels for Personal Budgeting Support (Money Advice) will be offered immediately to help claimants manage their money to pay their rent and other priority bills on time as they move on to a single payment.

If claimants are experiencing problems managing a monthly budget, alternative payment arrangements are available. This includes direct payment of housing costs to the landlord.

2. The information requested is not available.

3. Claimants who migrate onto Universal Credit will not have to serve the 7 waiting day period and will receive their UC award within the normal payment schedule.

The migration process will not start until July 2019 at the earliest. We will tell claimants when they need to claim UC as part of the managed migration process. We will also inform them of the steps to take and the support available.

We will offer Transitional Protection to claimants migrating to UC from legacy benefits where their circumstances have otherwise remained the same, ensuring they receive the same or more income under Universal Credit.

If you have any queries about this letter please contact me quoting the reference number above.

Yours sincerely,

DWP Strategy Fol Team

Your right to complain under the Freedom of Information Act

If you are not happy with this response you may request an internal review by e-mailing freedom-of-information-request@dwpgsi.gov.uk or by writing to DWP, Central FoI Team, Caxton House, Tothill Street, SW1H 9NA. Any review request should be submitted within two months of the date of this letter.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review you may apply directly to the Information Commissioner's Office for a decision. Generally the Commissioner cannot make a decision unless you have exhausted our own complaints procedure. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5AF www.ico.gov.uk