



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

The Rt Hon Esther McVey MP
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions
Department for Work and Pensions
Caxton House
Tothill Street London
SW1H 9NA

Our Ref: JG / ZA25787

23 October 2018

Dear Secretary of State

I write to urge you to take note of all the voices and reports that show Universal Credit simply isn't working.

It is causing greater poverty and anxiety wherever it is rolled out and according to the National Audit Office the universal credit programme was "driven by an ambitious timescale, and that it had suffered from "weak management, ineffective control and poor governance".

I am extremely concerned about the real hardship for my constituents who are likely to be directly impacted by UC. The change you are imposing on claimants and my constituents is not of their making and I support the Child Poverty Action Group who said "it is incumbent on the Government to do everything in its power to make the process as easy and seamless as possible for claimants, to minimise disruption to their lives and to prevent any financial disadvantage or hardship to them.

Unfortunately your proposed "managed migration" falls far short of this principle. Evidence from the House of Commons Library indicate that nearly 13,000 people in February 2018 were not paid Universal Credit (UC) on time and 113,000 were not paid in full on time last year - representing a quarter of new claims. These delays are particularly distressing for people on low incomes who often do not have savings to rely on in such circumstances.

In the London Borough of Brent 25,000 working age Housing Benefit (HB) claimants will transfer, as well as between 10-15,000 other benefit claimants who do not claim HB from the Council because they have no rental liability.

My constituents are anxious about what it will mean for them and whether the system will recognise the needs of the many families in high-rent accommodation.



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Universal Credit will be rolled out at Wembley Jobcentre Plus from December 2018 for new claimants. Those with certain changes in circumstances (CICS) to any of the legacy benefits will be moved onto UC and in this initial intake it is estimated 1500 people per month will transfer. Out of this 1500, approximately 678 have dependant children (45%) and 362 are lone parent families. Once fully rolled out there are 10,100 families in Brent North claiming tax credits (that includes 18,900 children) so a similar number of families are likely to be claiming universal credit eventually.

in Brent North 10,166 or 32% of all children are living in poverty and we now know the reality is that universal credit will deliver real cash cuts:

- Cuts in support for families with a disabled child for whom the basic rate of support is half what it is in tax credits.
- Cuts in support for disabled people in work
- Cuts in support for lone parents bringing up children who will lose on average £20 per week with many losing far more.

The Department for Work and Pensions' own survey of claimants published in June showed that nearly half of new universal credit claimants are falling behind with bills and even 6 months later they are still struggling to cope financially. This will affect my constituents because over 30 per cent of Brent residents work in "low paid" jobs. This is the 2nd worst situation in London.

It also punishes those with disabilities, the vulnerable and cancer patients and I call on you to consider the human cost of these cuts, pause the programme and call for more money from the Chancellor.

The Chancellor should be listening to the Child Poverty Action Group, The National Association of Welfare Rights Advisers, Mencap, Mind, Scope and the National Housing Federation, to name but a few, who have been monitoring the effect of universal credit roll-out on families and tell us that cuts to the funding of universal credit, since it was first designed, mean that most families will now be worse off after they transfer to the new benefit and some families will see lower rewards from work.

Your department has consistently dismissed evidence from these Organisation that universal credit is causing hardship for claimants and additional burdens for local organisations.

However, to focus only on the cuts to the original scheme, and the practical administrative problems, is to ignore universal credit's design flaws.

The government needs to look at areas, such as the digital-only approach, introducing split payments, fixing the problems with the assessment period and rethinking the way people with mental health problems interact with the system.



In all of your meetings with charities and stakeholders can you refer me to any changes you have made to universal credit that respond to the innumerable criticisms they have made, since the small changes announced in the November 2017 budget.

Specifically can you advise me:

- **What communication preferences are available for those with specific medical conditions?**
- **What steps are the government taking to prevent single household payments encouraging economic abuse where a person is deprived of financial independence?**
- **Why your department now insists all claimants must submit a new claim form online to migrate:** claimants were not required to make a new claim when they migrated from Incapacity Benefit, Income Support or Severe Disablement Allowance to Employment Support Allowance because they were known to either the Department for Work and Pensions, HMRC or their local authority.
- **Why is "transitional protection" not available to people making claims for universal credit because of a change in circumstances?** I understand from 2019 people who move onto universal credit under "managed migrations" will be eligible for "transitional protection".
- **How do upfront payments and the structure of reimbursements under universal credit affect low-income parents, including in their decision to access childcare and take up work?**
- **Are existing sources of support – including the Flexible Support Fund and budgeting advances available to low income parents faced with upfront childcare costs adequate?** If not, why not? because paying for childcare is one of the biggest barriers parents face when thinking about returning to work or looking for a better paid job.

The government have been repeatedly warned about the chronic problems endemic to universal credit and I am concerned you are ignoring this evidence. My constituents, many with young families are worried about both the payments system and the amount of money they will be given to live on under the new system.

I would ask you to take a balanced judgement, based on all the evidence, taking account of the impact the roll-out of universal credit will have on your own operational costs and the impact on claimants, my constituents and third parties. If the current problems are not addressed and the funding required is not forthcoming the hardship is likely to continue.

Yours sincerely,


Barry Gardiner
Member of Parliament for Brent North