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for Work &
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Ms Daphne Hall
Vice Chair
NAWRA, c/o CPAG
30 Micawber Street, London
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Our Ref: TO2019/21652

13 June 2019

Dear Ms Hall

Thank you for your emails of 13 May and 10 June to the Secretary of State about Universal Credit. Government Ministers receive a large volume of correspondence and they are unable to reply personally on every occasion. I have been asked to respond and I apologise for the delay.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has not contracted but rather grant funded Citizens Advice to provide Help to Claim on a one year pilot basis in order to understand how best to support people making a Universal Credit claim.

It has always been the case that claims begin when a completed claim is submitted. Regulation 10(1)(b) applies to assistance with claims from people providing services to the Secretary of State. The provision of services generally requires a contractual relationship, therefore any grant arrangements, whether provided by Citizens Advice or any other such organisation, do not fall within the definition of regulation 10(1)(b). Although, in some designated circumstances, the DWP already have the ability to backdate a claim (for example if a claimant is taken ill), it is difficult to understand what a potentially unverifiable and more widespread system of backdating to first contact through third parties might look like.

However, the DWP does everything it possibly can to make sure that everyone can complete and submit their claim as quickly as possible. As you know Citizens Advice are now delivering Help to Claim, which runs alongside our national Jobcentre Plus offer, and provides additional and alternative support for claimants who need help making their first claim, through to getting their first payment. This service operates on a face-to-face, online and telephony basis. Both Jobcentre and Citizens Advice routes are specifically designed to provide support to the most vulnerable, and can be accessed either directly or additionally through referrals from other partners. This personalised support helps to ensure that there is no need for a claimant to have their claim backdated to the point of contact, because instead they are able to access immediate support to make their claim in a timely manner.

Citizens Advice are currently grant funded for the delivery of Help to Claim for 12 months from April 2019. Within this 12-month pilot period, Citizens Advice Scotland will be developing its approaches to tailor service delivery to those who need it most, and we are working to support them in that. The DWP will be beginning an evaluation of the pilot towards the end of this year which will inform the future design of the service.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Watling', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Robert Watling
Head of the Ministerial Correspondence Team