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Ms Daphne Hall
Vice Chair
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Our Ref: TO2019/23182

12 July 2019

Dear Ms Hall

Thank you for your further letter of 20 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.

I am sorry that you were disappointed with the Department's response on 13th June to the letter you sent to the Secretary of State on 8th May. You have asked that the Department reconsider the approach to the 'Date of Claim' for those people seeking support from Citizens Advice and set out a number of reasons why you consider this to be necessary. I address your points below.

Careful consideration was given to whether Help to Claim should be delivered under a contract or a grant, as there are a number of important differences between the two. The result of that analysis was that our arrangement with Citizens Advice comprised, and was suited to, grant funding: just as the preceding Universal Support grant funding for local authorities. The power to enter into the grant is found in the Employment and Training Act 1973. The funding was provided for activities that are aligned with departmental policy and are for the public good and the Department does not obtain a direct benefit from the grant arrangements. The Department acted in accordance with the cross-governmental guidance in Managing Public Money and the Government Functional Standard for General Grants.

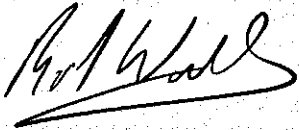
I note that the evidence given to the Scottish Parliament that you refer to was not given by the Department's officials. I cannot therefore comment on the circumstances in which claims are said to have been backdated. There are, as mentioned previously, circumstances in which backdating is, and always has been, available (for example where a claimant has been ill). However, regulation 10(1)(b) does not permit backdating based on grant arrangements and there has been no policy change in that regard.

The Department is piloting Help to Claim to help improve access to personalised support. There should be no need for a claimant to have their claim backdated to the point of contact, because instead they will be able to access immediate support to make their claim in a timely manner. Support will also continue to be available to all claimants from their local jobcentre alongside this offer.

The Department and Citizens Advice are working together during the pilot period to continuously improve immediate delivery of support to claimants, from new claim right up until their full correct Universal Credit payments are in place.

The Department keeps Help to Claim's impact under review as part of the test and learn approach and formal evaluations will also be conducted. We will consider all of the evidence, including representations made from stakeholders, to inform our next steps.

Yours sincerely



Robert Watling
Head of the Ministerial Correspondence Team