



Mr David Rutley MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

19 April 2022

Dear Mr Rutley

Help to Claim service from April 2022

Thank you for your letter of 11 April 2022.

We have two principal points of concern -

- Who is to provide independent advice to people - particularly those who are vulnerable - who may be considering a move to universal credit as a result of the DWP's voluntary move to UC campaign?
- How will you ensure that someone coming into the jobcentre to ask about universal credit will not be channelled straight into making a claim?

Who is to provide independent advice to people - particularly those who are vulnerable - who may be considering a move to universal credit as a result of the DWP's 'voluntary move' to UC campaign?

We note your comments that DWP/HMRC do not give advice. While NAWRA agrees that this should be the case, we are concerned this is not what happens in practice - see below.

We also note your point that the Help to Claim service is not intended to provide potential claimants with advice on whether universal credit is right for them.

However, you have failed to explain how or where such advice will be provided. You say that you signpost claimants to benefit calculators. While these can be a useful tool, they are only accurate if all information is input correctly and it is very easy to make a mistake. They are not a substitute for advice and can be misleading if an error is made.

You also say 'independent welfare advice is available' - NAWRA will represent most of those agencies - but you do not address how those advice agencies are going to meet the increased need without additional resources and funding. Full advice entails looking at the current situation, what changes could possibly be made before a move to universal credit and potential changes in the future – it is not just a financial snapshot on the day.

1. Does the government plan to provide funding to increase advice provision, particularly face to face?

How will you ensure that someone coming into the jobcentre to ask about universal credit will not be channelled straight into making a claim?

You state in your letter that individuals who are unable to access Help to Claim -

‘... will be able to access support at their local jobcentre for help to make or manage their UC claim. Work Coaches already support individuals who approach the jobcentre directly rather than choosing to access independent support.’

This is what NAWRA members see happening and is, in effect, the work coaches advising the person to claim universal credit without checking what other options may be available. It is disingenuous for you to suggest otherwise.

2. What safeguards does the Department have in place, or will be putting in place, to ensure that no person is directed to claim universal credit without having an opportunity to receive a full benefit check and be advised of their options and the implications of those options?

Finally, you mention in your letter that DWP is working closely with the external stakeholder network. NAWRA is part of that network and, alongside many others, has raised the above points on many occasions yet DWP continually fails to address them. As you say, the point of engaging with stakeholders is -

‘... to ensure the right information is available to claimants in order to support them in making an informed decision about whether a voluntary move to UC is right for them.’

3. Can you please clarify what the Department is doing to achieve this objective?

We look forward to your prompt response to our numbered questions.

Yours sincerely,

Alan Markey, Chair NAWRA
Daphne Hall, Vice-Chair NAWRA

cc Stephen Timms MP, Chair Work and Pensions Committee