



Minutes

Title of meeting:	Universal Credit Programme Board
Date:	21 st February 2019, 15:00 to 17:00
Location:	London Caxton House, Room 6.24
Attendees:	Sir Robert Walmsley (Chair), Neil Couling (Director General UC), Ian Wright (UC Programme Director), Lindsey Whyte (Director HM Treasury), JP Marks (UC Operations Director General), Lesley Seary (Chief Executive LB Islington), Shelagh Brown (UC Programme Manager, HMRC), Susan Park (Operations Director General), Pete Searle (Strategy Director, Working Age), Steve Buckingham (Business Finance & Housing Delivery Director), Sarah Hartland (Deputy Director Human Resources), s40 (Cabinet Office Operations Lead), s40 (UC Programme Director DFC Northern Ireland), Paul Francis (Director Digital), s40 (Senior Advisor, LGA - Observer)
Presenters:	Pauline Crellin, Paul Francis
Apologies:	Gareth Young (Cabinet Office Operations Lead), Nick Joicey (Director General Finance), Simon McKinnon (Director Digital), Colom Boyle Deputy Secretary for Work and Inclusion DFC Northern Ireland), Debbie Alder (Director General Human Resources)

1. Welcome, Introductions and Actions

The Chair welcomed members to the meeting and acknowledged apologies from Colum Boyle, Nick Joicey, Debbie Alder, Gareth Young and Simon McKinnon. He welcomed their deputies – s40, Steve Buckingham, Sarah Hartland, s40 and Paul Francis, who was also presenting a paper. He also welcomed back Pauline Crellin who was presenting a paper at the meeting.

The minutes of the Programme Board of 17th January were approved with one amendment on page 3, in the 3rd paragraph of the Operations update, where it should read “22 million payments.”

2. Programme Update

The UC Programme Director provided an update:

The status of the Programme remains Amber.

The Tax Credit Gateway was closed on 1st February for most claimants.

Transfers from Live to Full Service are going well. There are just under 8,000 cases left on Live Service, with only a small number of these in payment.

The new appointment booking system is now live in 200 Jobcentres. It is slightly behind schedule due to some slow running performance issues, which have now been fixed. The plan is still to deliver by the end of March, thereby providing a month's contingency before the Booking Bug contract runs out in April.

Migration – Awaiting dates to debate regulations in Parliament. Harrogate Jobcentre has been agreed as the first site for the July pilot. There will be an announcement at the Secretary of State's evidence session at the select Committee on 11th March.

There will be an IPA review of the operational delivery plan in March and external interest in UC continues.

Milestones:

- UCFS GDPR compliance is Red. Dates for moving the DataWorks platform to AWS have been missed a few times so this will remain Red until a plan is in place. The plan is due at UC PDE at the end of February.
- Further changes are needed to DataWorks to avoid capacity issues in September.
- Appointment Booking is Amber.

Risks remain as they were last month.

Finance is stable with very little change for this financial year. There will be an update next month once we get agreement to the winter planning budget for next year.

Contingency options will be discussed next month.

Unit costs continue to track below forecast.

The separate red line representing mature sites that was put in the dashboard to track for caseload per case manager, will be removed from the Dashboard from next month.

Programme Board members:

a) The Chair asked whether the Select Committee session will identify planned dates for the migration debate. The UC SRO stated that the Secretary of State will just announce the location. He confirmed that the Programme would feel uncomfortable if the date for debating migration regulations went beyond June. The Strategy Director, Working Age noted that his concern over securing approval of the regulations has lessened as the mitigations being applied will help to get the regulations through.

b) The UC Programme Director answered in the negative to the Director HM Treasury's question as to whether it is intended to announce how the rest of the pilot phase will roll out, at the announcement. The UC SRO stated the intention is to gain Ministerial approval so that discussions can begin with stakeholders and partnership managers.

c) The Chief Executive LB Islington asked whether local elections are due to be held in Harrogate in May as this might provide an opportunity for negative publicity.

d) The Chair stated that he currently has external criticism as a hard fact, but that this criticism is not always as valid as critics believe. He stated that his research has shown

that there are jobs available in Hartlepool in sufficient numbers to overturn a central premise of the Channel 4 programme on UC claimants (Skint Britain), that these claimants cannot reasonably be expected to spend 35 hours a week looking for jobs there. He noted that reactions to the programme from neighbours of the individuals shown have been helpful to UC. The UC SRO stated that the choice of colourful characters might make for interesting television, but what is lost in all this is that the voices of gainers from UC are not being heard. The Business Finance & Housing Delivery Director shared an anecdote about Citizens Advice (CA) in the Greater Manchester area receiving a request from the media for their bad news stories, but as CA only had good news stories to tell, the news outlet was not interested.

e) The Chair noted that the security section of the Dashboard is now easier to understand. He noted that even with the falling number of High risks, there is a need to remain alert as the Very High risk associated to Role Based Access Control (RBAC) remains.

3. Operations Update

The UC Operations DG provided an update:

Payment timeliness – last week a record outcome was achieved with more people paid in the 1st Assessment Period than ever before, and timeliness being maintained. Operations are continuing to focus on performance variation and are looking at a couple of sites in particular (Bristol and Derby), while also seeing some really good performance. The current worry is about sustainability and keeping control of caseloads, however the team are confident as there has been a narrowing of variation across the country as sites and work coaches come up to speed. There will always be new joiners requiring time to up-skill.

Telephony performance – calls per agent had been increasing in the approach to the end of roll-out, but has started to steady again. Current experience shows that most calls are now for reasons other than payment issues.

Concerns:

- Contact levels remain a concern and the Contact Strategy Team are driving forward activity to understand reason for contact, including discovery into emerging Next Generation Contact Centre (NGCC) technologies; contact routing and handling efficiency including future technologies to optimise channels, and understanding how digital we are by claimant type and the contact this drives.
- Case load continues to increase and is driving out cost, accompanied by continual progression so any shock from additional demand could have a significant impact. Not yet in a steady state so the proposed industrial action in Walsall and Wolverhampton could cause issues. Support from HR has been good and more people are being recruited into Wolverhampton which will help.
- Contingency - cuts or higher demand are both potential causes for concern.

Quality and accuracy – now achieving 93% to 94% and the minimum expected level has been set at 95%.

Labour market – great results have been achieved this month, with record employment, and increases in employment for disadvantaged groups such as BAME and the disabled.

Programme Board members:

a) The Chief Executive LB Islington noted the problems people face moving into work where they need to pay childcare upfront but do not receive the child element of UC beforehand. She noted that although claimants affected by this can apply for discretionary payments, these are only available for a few weeks, and although they can access advances, this can act as a disincentive as it means taking on debt to begin work. She expressed concern that this is becoming a difficulty for parents, especially lone parents. The UC Operations DG stated he had discussed this issue with the Secretary of State and she asked that more be done to ensure discretionary funding is always made available in such instances. Uptake is being monitored monthly and Jobcentre staff have been instructed to facilitate access to this funding, but there is a need to ensure it is consistently made available everywhere. The Chair asked why the childcare element can't be catered for in advances. The UC SRO stated that while the discretionary fund is additional money, an advance reduces later payments of UC. The Chair queried why someone who has been offered a good job would not ask for an advance in order to seize the opportunity. The UC SRO explained that a claimant cannot get a further budgeting advance if they are still in the middle of paying off a previous one. The UC Operations DG noted that work coaches can however agree another advance via the flexible support fund and that more information about this will be put in the Operations newsletter to ensure more work coaches are aware of this and to remove as much of the child care disincentive as possible.

b) The Chief Executive LB Islington stated that people with learning disabilities found completing the online form to make a claim for UC highly stressful, and suggested that perhaps such people could manually complete a printed off version which could then be scanned by jobcentre staff. She also noted that the automated messages sent by the system are not always understood by such claimants, or the content of messages cause them stress, and asked whether a work around could be created to ameliorate this. The UC Operations DG stated that the people are able to walk into a Jobcentre and make an assisted claim, and that text messages are sent to claimants to remind them when to carry out certain activities. He noted that the Complex Needs Steering Group looks into issues like these, and said he would take an action to look into alternative access and bring the outcome back as a below the line paper. The UC SRO stated that there is no such thing as a UC form which can be printed off for completion as the application tailors itself according to what is input, as it is being completed.

c) The Chair stated that he had read in a newspaper that jobcentres and service centres use a deflection script to discourage people from trying to make an assisted claim and asked whether this was true. The UC Operations DG responded that there was no truth in the allegation and that operational guidance has been re-written to be clear. He confirmed that UC is a digital service so customers are informed of what they can do online and via all the other available channels, but agents are always available to talk on the phone if that is preferred by a claimant. The UC SRO stated that an update on channel shift would be brought back to the Board as the benefits of welfare reform will not be achieved without it. He stated that while claimants will not be left without a means of access, there is the

need to encourage the online route. The Chair stated that more workable solutions are a welcome thing.

d) The UC SRO noted that not surprisingly those who oppose UC focus on the groups that are hardest to help, but these are not typical of the majority of people using the service. Criticisms are based on the experiences of a minority of vulnerable people. A course correction will be carried out to help such claimants, but fundamentally UC is about changing the way benefits are claimed and encouraging people to come off benefits through work.

AP01-210219 – Look into the possibility of an alternative access route for vulnerable people to make a UC claim and provide PB with a below the line update – JP Marks

4. Remote Identity Verification

Paul Francis provided an update:

Background - In September 2018 PB was informed that Verify would go into private sector ownership, noted the potential risks beyond 2020 of a lack of improvement in Verify performance, and the need to mitigate these risks.

Progress since September 2018 –

- Gov.UK continues to provide remote ID verification for UCFS. Success rates remain stable at 25%, with 37% of the 70% of claimants who attempt the online ID service successfully verifying their identity. This is despite losing two ID verification providers.
- The difficult to deliver 80% success rate is still a target, however it is now clear that Verify is unable to deliver at this level.
- In order to ensure the greatest degree of confidence in 20/21 planning assumptions a 25% success rate is currently being assumed.

Current position –

- Verify (LOA2) is no longer the only solution that provides the optimum level of assurance of identity to pay benefits.
- It is now confirmed that the requirement to have a level of confidence equivalent to that provided by LOA2 that we are paying the right person can be achieved by other means than originally envisaged.
- Solutions from OGDs are being explored in order to reduce reliance on Verify over time.

Standards and levels of assurance -

- There are 3 standard levels – LOA1, LOA2 and LOA3. The Programme chose LOA2 as the bar for UC and this had been approved by the Programme Board.
- A more holistic approach will be taken, focusing on identity verification, plus other capabilities to provide the right level of assurance for the service. The language of LOA2 will cease to exist and will be replaced by a 'probability scale'. It will still provide the equivalent of LOA2, but we will have greater choices of how we achieve this in line with customer needs and demographics.

- As the outcome aimed at has not changed there is no requirement for the Programme Board to revisit the decisions made in 2013 regarding levels of assurance.

UC and Tax Credit Migration – The aim is to use the HMRC Identity Verification (IV) solution, to migrate existing Tax credit recipients onto UC. Work is on-going with HMRC to implement the proposed technical solution, and to look into how HMRC IV may be used as ID verification for other UC claimant types over time.

Longer term strategy – The Dynamic Trust Platform (DTP) will be created to ensure we are not reliant on a single solution in the future. It is being developed by the Department as a one stop shop to identify clients and will have a number of identity platforms / providers siting behind it. It will more easily enable the re-use of capabilities that have been built and deployed elsewhere in Government.

Risks: There is a need to undertake a large amount of work in a short space of time.

Governance and reporting – To ensure ID verification remains on track, important milestones have been built into the plan, and these will report in to the Programme Delivery Executive. ID verification will report back to Programme Board in September 2019 on the DTP procurement and the Discovery outcomes, and in January 2020 following integration with DTP and testing of HMRC IV solutions.

Programme Board members:

a) The Chair stated that the level of assurance is key. Programme Board agreed in 2013 that the appropriate level was LOA2. He stated that it was important to note that the language has disappeared but the new system will provide the same level of assurance, and that the Programme is not changing what it is seeking. He asked what happens to a UC claimant if the trust we have in them is based on Verify, when Verify disappears. The UC SRO stated that a very small number of people (167), are attached to the two providers who are departing. GDS cancelled contracts earlier than expected and it is not yet known what this will mean for those affected.

b) The UC SRO stated that the NAO report on Verify is due to be published on 5th March, and noted that as UC is the biggest user of verify it may get pulled into any debates on the report. He emphasised that a plan is in place, but that it is a challenge and a close eye needs to be kept on progress.

c) The Chair asked whether help will be provided to the 167 people affected by the departure of the two providers. The UC SRO stated that UC is in discussion with GDS to find out who they are and see what can be done to support them. The Operations DG asked whether it was worth explaining to those affected that Verify grants them access to the system, but once they are in they are given a 16-digit number which they are able to then use to access their UCFS account, with no need to go back through verify.

d) The Business Finance & Housing Delivery Director asked whether funding for the trust platform was contained in the forecast. Paul Francis responded that it was. The Business Finance & Housing Delivery Director also asked with regards to the increment of 10% on Verify, whether there was a cost analysis and return on investment, as such a narrative is

needed for PAC. The UC SRO stated that the benefits of Verify are around 90% off what was stated a few years ago.

e) The Chair noted that the presentation was well explained. He stated that there is not a lot of time for the amount of work that needs to be done and because of that there is a need to ensure related milestones are carefully chosen. He requested for the UC Programme Director to include a few ID verification milestones on the Dashboard.

f) The UC Programme Manager, HMRC asked for a trial to test ID verification particularly for Tax Credit customers, to see whether it provides them with a smoother journey. Paul Francis responded, saying that the numbers of Tax Credit customers is small but that he would take that point away for investigation.

AP02-210219 – Investigate the possibility of testing ID verification for Tax Credit customers, to see whether it provides them with a smoother journey – Paul Francis

5. Universal Support – Help to Claim Update

Pauline Crellin provided an update:

From 1st April 2019 a new service will be delivered by Citizen's Advice (CA) and Citizen's Advice Scotland (CAS) to support vulnerable claimants to make a UC claim. Local Authorities (LAs) are currently still delivering the old Universal Support offer until the new arrangements are introduced. CA and CAS had been given funding to prepare to be ready to go on 1st April.

The Help to Claim service:

- Complements the principles of UC design and is claimant focussed, providing support tailored to claimant need.
- Is multi-channel, and uses an initial triage to assess individual needs to ensure the right level of support for claimants.
- Provides support to a UC claimant from the start of a claim through completion in readiness for full first UC payment, including help with identity verification, claim evidence, identifying sources of support for additional financial support.
- Is different from the previous Universal Support Offer delivered by Local Authorities.

Progress –

- The service is in a double running period until the end of this financial year.
- Local CA offices and DWP are engaging with LAs to discuss the new partnership arrangement to work through local concerns. Feedback from CA has been almost universally positive.
- 99% of all Local CA & CAS will deliver the new service. However, there are some issues with coverage in Ealing where there is no CA office, and Flintshire where there are ongoing discussions over volumes.

- The 3 CA areas in Scotland that do not have a local CA office will have coverage provided from adjacent bureaux and may have an enhanced online and telephony offer.
- Operations colleagues are providing feedback as to how this is landing locally.
- Sites are reviewing their Claimants with Complex needs plans to align with conversations with their local CAs.

Completed activity –

- Group and District Partnership managers have been updated on activities, progress and alignment. There are still some questions but these are being worked through, with mechanisms for updates agreed.
- CA have held stakeholder events for their partners to explain the new service.
- CA offices have now received a full briefing of the service and a mobilisation pack to help them prepare for delivery. They have also gone through a training programme, and have been given access to the Department's UC training system to enhance familiarisation with the look and feel of the product they are advising on.
- Governance structures between DWP and CA have been established.
- A staff awareness pack for DWP Operations has been developed and is set for delivery to sites in trial format on 22nd February.

Programme Board members:

a) The Chair invited comments from the Chief Executive LB Islington, who asked whether there was a difference between the 'at risk' and 'complete' parts of the help to claim integrated delivery plan, as they looked identical. Pauline Crellin said she would make it clearer and send PB members an updated version.

b) The Chief Executive LB Islington:

- Stated that Rose Doran (Senior Advisor, LGA), has been engaging with both CAs and LAs to ensure the new service can land successfully.
- Agreed that the risks involved were as identified by Pauline Crellin in her presentation. She stated that there is a risk of a lack of join up and soft handovers once CAs are no longer based in a one stop shop.
- Asked how long it will take CAs to work with each claimant and whether they will be able to deal with large volumes as some bureaux may not have a person dedicated to deal with telephone demand and appointments in relation to the service.
- Stated that in the spirit of cooperation a lot of LAs will continue to provide a service to claimants.
- Noted that CAs dual role of providing the new service for UC while also advocating for people in court against UC, could create a risk with regards to how this appears externally.

c) Pauline Crellin responded, and:

- Stated that the Programme has always been alive to the dual role point, and that CA made it clear that they have two separate arms and have kept discussions separate.

- Stated with regards to volumes, work is being done on settling on key performance indicators. CA has put forward three – quality, customer satisfaction, and demand. She emphasised the importance of quality, noting that some sites earmarked for the pilot did not go ahead as the service was not where it needed to be.
- Stated that regular stocktakes are being held to understand what it feels like at the front line, and requested LAs feed-back any intelligence they think could usefully be pulled into the process.
- Stated that CA presented their heat maps on readiness (which adapt and change regularly) to the Minister for Employment (MfE), and they have been encouraged to have very honest conversations with the UC Programme so that issues can be dealt with where possible. In a readiness meeting on 20th February 2019, the CEO of CA, Gillian Guy, expressed her confidence and comfort to the MfE in their ability to provide the service as required from 1st April.

d) Rose Doran of the LGA stated that she has worked closely with CA and agreed to stock take from LA and feedback to CA, and has noted that the issues involved are quite diverse in different locations. She further stated that in her view dual running may continue after April as the way the new service is landing in different areas depends on local arrangements. Her ambition is to work on how the Department wants to drive this through, and her main anxiety is that practically speaking, April is quite close. However, broadly speaking, conversations happening locally are quite constructive.

e) The Cabinet Office Operations Lead asked whether the benchmarks were the same or similar to those used by LAs. Pauline Crellin responded that these are different as this is a different service. The UC SRO confirmed that a different approach is being taken, and it is not a like for like switch over, which is why the benchmarks are different.

f) The Chair asked how the heat map looks. Pauline Crellin stated that it is mostly Green, with a few Ambers and Reds, but that these are the focal point for work in the coming couple of weeks. She confirmed that CA has given the Programme assurances about recruitment and up skilling, and they are ramping up in preparation. The UC SRO pointed out that despite the Green assessment that this was a big bang implementation, the risks remained high as a consequence so we will need to be ready to respond to issues as they emerge in live running.

g) The Chair asked who is accountable for the quality of advice given by CA. Pauline Crellin responded that section 24 of the original grant agreement states that this sits with CA. However, it is not their role to make decisions, but to give advice.

h) With regards to funding, Pauline Crellin stated that this is in stages and subject to certain conditions. There is an exit plan / strategy but this will need to be kept under review, because as the service evolves, it will need to change. The UC SRO stated that next year the Programme will move to migration in volume and will need to understand through the pilot some of the learning for supporting new claims to UC for that time.

6. Hard Facts

a) We need to understand the implications of scope change and how the PB best can contribute.

b) Ensure a safe start for Managed Migration Testing.

c) Be alert to external criticism.

7. AOB

a) The chair asked PB members to note that Programme Board is moving to Tuesday's from May, but will remain at the same time. The amended dates are:

14th May

25th June

16th July

24th September

22nd October

12th November

10th December

b) The Chair thanked Susan Park who will soon be retiring, for her support of the UC Programme Board, and said it had been a pleasure working with her.

c) The UC SRO informed PB members that he would shortly write to stakeholders to ensure they continue to be engaged and updated with the good work going on. This letter will inform stakeholders about what will happen between now and July, as well as what things will look like beyond that to the end of the pilot. He emphasised the need to do better at keeping stakeholders informed of what we are doing as a Programme.

Date of next meeting Thursday 21st March 15.00-17.00 Caxton House Room 6.24

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