



Minutes

Title of meeting:	Universal Credit Programme Board
Date:	21 st September 2021 15.00 to 17:00
Location:	MS Teams Meeting
Attendees:	Neil Couling (Change DG & SRO for UC), Deb Walton (Director People and Capability), Simon McKinnon (Director General, Digital) Chris Drane (Director HM Treasury), Sophie Ingram (Director, Finance), Paddy Rooney (Deputy Secretary for Work and Inclusion DFC Northern Ireland), S40 , (Senior Advisor, LGA - Observer), Paul Francis (Director, Digital), Deb Boore (Director, Universal Credit Programme), Myrtle Lloyd (Director General, HMRC), S40 (SPAD to Secretary of State), S40 (Observer),
Presenters:	Will Garner (Universal Credit Product Director), Stuart Ison (External Affairs, Strategic Design and Planning Director)
Apologies:	Ian Wright (UC Programme Director), Nick Joicey (Director General Finance), Lindsey Whyte (Director HM Treasury), JP Marks (Director General Work and Health), Fran Beasley (Chief Executive LB Hillingdon), Ani Vithlani (Cabinet Office, Operations Lead),

1. Welcome and Introductions

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised that had just come from a meeting with Secretary of State around Move to UC. Two questions from this were:

- How quickly can we move resources to MtUC, and
- What more detail can we give to give confidence

He then introduced the papers to be discussed: Programme Director update, an update on the removal of the £20 uplift and an update on Move to UC. Papers are for information and there are no decisions to be made.

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed without amendment and there were no matters arising.

2. Programme Update

The Director Universal Credit Programme provided an update:

The current status of the Programme is Amber.

There is currently nothing alarming, but it is a good opportunity to flag a number of risks. We are currently in a year of recovery after the crisis of last year and preparing for Move to UC next year.

There are a number of amber milestones.

AWS. There is some claimant history still to be migrated, which will be completed by the end of September. Agreed not to move milestone to green until next Board.

Transaction Risking milestone is now green. Clearance was needed from the Transaction Board for a change to testing timescales (to 9th November); this has been agreed.

NINo correction is on track, but remains amber as dependent on HMRC activity. DWP is able to archive and store data, we now HMRC to receive and retrieve successfully - this is to be tested later this month.

Future Support Offer: the competition closes 15th October; from that point, deadlines are very tight and there is no room for slippage.

Programme Board discussion:

- a) The Change DG & SRO for UC expressed concerns that excessive Ministerial input could make timescales hard to meet
- b) The Change DG & SRO for UC is nervous that Ministers have not yet announced plans for Move to UC: and if we cannot make sufficient progress soon on the voluntary phase, then mandatory phase will take longer to complete.
- c) Director Universal Credit Programme advised that there will be potentially be an impact on Work Coach caseloads and unit cost, as when furlough ends some claimants will move from 'working enough' into Intensive Work Search. And as remaining easements are removed: this will mean there may be a slight increase in unit cost but the underlying trend was downward.
- d) Finance: not a lot of movement from 2023 onwards, but rework required following Spending Review. Currently commissioning period 6 review.
- e) Director Universal Credit Programme said that performance in Operations is very good, but are currently moving 550 people from UC into Retirement Services, the effects, however, are containable, assuming minimal furlough impacts.
- f) The UC ET risk is currently amber, but this is predicated on not taking on any work other than that currently planned: some of the SR proposals will require design and build support and haven't been fully impacted. The Director, Digital advised that Plan for Jobs, version 2 if accepted could have significant impact. The Chair gave the view that this is now an issue, not a risk. Director Universal Credit Programme said that recruitment and retention of digital specialists remains a key risk, as it is across government and the tech industry. The Change DG & SRO for UC confirmed that ET are well aware of the risk and discuss it regularly, as do cross-government Digital and HR fora. The Universal Credit Product Director said that we have identified the key priorities, including Move to UC, fraud and error, paying off technical debt and ensuring our systems are resilient and secure: we have the appropriate governance mechanisms to manage this, but it does create noise. The Chair advised that we need to incorporate into plans leadership capability, training and governance.

Action – resourcing/capacity is no longer a risk, but an issue and the Programme will continue to manage and escalate progress against recruitment plans

3. Update on Removal of £20 uplift

The Change DG & SRO introduced the item explaining that the risks here are being shared around government. He said he'd welcome thoughts from PB on anything we might have missed.

Director Universal Credit Programme said that the purpose of the paper was to ensure people understand the potential risk to service delivery. If all six million customers affected call DWP, we will simply not manage our telephony services. The combined impacts of removal of the uplift, furlough ending, a potential energy crisis and rising costs could result in increased contact and a greater need to identify and support customers in need. We hope that the proactive direct communication with customers will mitigate an unmanageable volume of inbound contacts but we cannot assume that it will not happen.

The paper sets out what we have done, with communications activity flagging that the uplift was temporary in statements in July, two rounds of journal messages and text follow ups. Daily bronze calls are now in place, planning for additional telephony resource. Additional resource has been brought in and there is more on the way, however this cannot directly support debt management as their work cannot be completed by outsourced providers. Case Managers and Work Coaches are directly communicating with claimants. Fridays will be a challenge, as there will be three days' worth of claimants with reduced payments, so planning on pulling in more resource from within DWP.

Programme Board members:

- a) The Director, Digital asked whether there was any confirmation that the Journal messages have been read. He was advised that we need to access the system from the back-end to find out. Sampling was done in August and September and was fairly consistent at 58% - 60%.
- b) Director Universal Credit Programme said that from social media there is a feeling that the uplift may not be removed.
- c) Deputy Secretary for Work and Inclusion DFC Northern Ireland said that they were following the same process in Northern Ireland. There is a Northern Irish political party campaigning to support retention and if not retained will call on the mitigations package in NI. Ministers are already involved.
- d) The Change DG & SRO advised that the code that removes the £20 was dropped on 7th September and confirmed that assessment periods ending on or after 6th October will not contain the £20 uplift.
- e) The Chair stated we should look into using social media to proactively communicate with customers as it's a platform that millions use; UC Programme colleagues advised that Ministers have requested a reactive response only.
- f) Director General, HMRC asked what we were expecting from the calls and whether we could divert calls using an automated pre-recorded message and was advised that we have clear inline messaging and an option to terminate calls with an automated message if the telephony platform is at risk of being over stretched.
- g) The Change DG & SRO noted that potentially 40% of 5 million households could be in touch via phone or journal, and reminded the board that 60% of claimants have made claims since the uplift so have never known rates without it.

4. Move to UC – Update

External Affairs, Strategic Design and Planning Director introduced the paper. The paper aims to present

- Move to UC overview
- Dive into voluntary phase
- Dive into discovery phase

The approach of agile test and learn is set out in paper: the lessons learned from the successful roll-out 2014–18 will be applied.

The overall plan is in four phases

- Voluntary
- Discovery
- Scaling (beginning 2023)
- Completion (ending 2024)

The paper identifies the risks at high level: none of the risks none should come as a surprise. The approach has been informed by lessons learned from 2014-18 and Ipsos-Mori research.

There are three strands in the approach to the voluntary phase.

- A comprehensive communications and media campaign
- Working with stakeholders and partners and
- Direct engagement with claimants.

Given the situation around the removal of the £20 uplift, there will only be a light push until end of year, however the second part will be more assertive with a more media focussed campaign.

We have range of Stakeholders and partners in local government and charities and NGOs who we think can be good advocates for providing information to their customers and we have three main objectives when communicating with them

- Providing documents to explain cases when UC would be better off in objective way
- providing detail on overall plan
- direct engagement with claimants. We are working with HMRC and LA to start communicating when claimants leave other benefits

It is anticipated that the voluntary phase will be difficult: Ipsos Mori have identified a number of perceived barriers. The campaign for the first phase has started, but there is no feedback as yet: a critical part is the proposed publication (annex to the paper) as stakeholders need information. The proposed publication identifies circumstances where people are more likely to be better off with caveats to ensure no legal risk to DWP if

claimants are not better off. Due to that risk, our strategy is about providing information for customer to make decision.

We will not know if a person is better off: communications will say about half of claimants will be better off and direct people to one of the calculators and advise that if they gain, to make claim. The average gain is around £40 per week.

There have been no discussions around a further plan if the publication is delayed.

Universal Credit Product Director laid out what discovery has to answer: whether we can scale to the assumed volumes and what is required to deliver 100,000 managed moves per month in 2023/24. The Design service does not exist currently and we need to understand the needs of support & technology. Service design will be iterated with different approaches for different users, claimants and circumstances, will we want to run different hypotheses out of different locations? Testing and iterating before returning to Programme Board to confirm we can deliver managed move phase safely.

There will be a considerable amount of research and analysis with multiple tests, migrations, resource etc. with consequent knock on to other services to see what running Move at scale will look like: this is why the process is long and involved. We will start in January, taking from summer to January to mobilise. There is some risk around growing the team but we are in a good position to say we can start in January.

Director, Digital said that the approach was agreed in the Atkins report. The capacity we have at the moment focuses on three areas: service performance, Fraud & Error and labour market.

As people are on boarded, we are seeding new people into existing teams to free experienced people. We typically can absorb 3 people per month without impacting velocity: we are recruiting more than 3 people per month into Move to UC. As it stands we have 17 vacancies remaining (37 filled) of the original 54 so are on track to fill M2UC team needs by end of the calendar year. Of the total of 400 people, 50% are civil servants, and the remainder contractors. Some roles more difficult to recruit, especially in Manchester and London. Our position at the moment is good. Most roles will be user research and we are doing all we can with a dedicated person concentrating on capability.

Programme Board members:

- a) The Change DG & SRO said that Secretary of State agreed to the plan in March and then a publication of the document in July. Further delays will just make delivery by 2024 more difficult. The document has not yet been shared with HMT and No 10: it would have been better to publish in summer, but it is still good to announce in this way so stakeholders can see plan: we need to set out big picture, but there isn't a faster plan. Other things will fill the information vacuum, if we do not get the message out.
- b) The Chair asked about the attrition rate, and the Director, Digital advised that although we are good at keeping people, they tend to leave in batches. Contractors are naturally transient and the vast majority only stay for one to two years. IR35 employment rights can be problem. Director People and Capability said that there are lots people involved and it is looking like we are in a good place, but we are

continuing to look at things including reward. The Director, Digital confirmed that Birmingham is being considered as a new Hub.

- c) Director General, Digital said that this is a significant problem across Government but is supported through contingent labour. By mid-October we need to think about moving people from other projects and onto UC. Director, Digital said that a regular below the line paper to will be sent to PDE to track progress of how we are meeting the need to hire the 54 for M2UC.
- d) The Change DG & SRO said that we will be ready; we will reprioritise within the UC Programme, given the Secretary of State’s priorities. The best way to resolve this is to recruit and we are on the path to doing so. We will not let Move to UC suffer, but we may have to compromise in other areas. Spending Review will present additional challenges: we have options, but we will take decisions making clear to ministers what consequences are.
- e) The Chair understood the challenge. How to recruit is the main issue. UC is mission critical. The Department needs to recruit and retain for next decade: recruitment, retention and succession planning are key elements of making UC sustainable. The Change DG & SRO stated that we have been facing similar situations for years. Regarding practical recruitment, the Cabinet Office now have new sets of controls. Director General, Digital said that we are doing this: we know what we need but the difficulty is making happen.
- f) The Chair said that the challenge would be providing more detail at discovery phase. Universal Credit Product Director said that we will track contacts to claimants, and manage through. There is a big challenge around getting data out of legacy systems: the state of data, its matchability, the multiplicity of data, and understanding how to support managed move. We will take a value mapping approach and test iterative way and either build or buy in services as appropriate.

5. Any Other Business

- The Chair raised a discussion point to the PB regarding the information presented to the board for review. While the information in the current PB report provides an essential update on programme status did it inform the PB of all the material issues impacting the programme and in particular MtUC?

Action – The Chair took an action to discuss potential updates to the PB reporting dashboard with the Programme Executive

- There was no other AOB

Date of Next Meeting: Tuesday 16th November – 14.00-16.00

Contact:	S40
Email:	ChangeandResilience.Secretariat@dwp.gov.uk
Direct line:	07899 935 331