



Minutes

Meeting:	Universal Credit Programme Board
Date:	18.04.23
Location:	Microsoft Teams & Caxton House
Attendees:	John McGlynn (Chair), Neil Couling (SRO), Ian Wright (UC Programme Director), Stuart Ison (External Affairs, Strategic Design and Planning Director), Louise Skelton OBO Catherine Vaughan (Finance Director), Paul Francis (UC Digital Director), Simon McKinnon (Digital DG), [REDACTED] OBO Myrtle Lloyd (HMRC Director), [REDACTED] OBO Helen Pickles (Director PC&P), [REDACTED] OBO David Magee (Cabinet Office Operations), Paddy Rooney (Work and Health DFC NI), Graeme Connor OBO Angus Gray (Policy Deputy Director), Marcus Mason (HMT Director), Mari Roberts-Wood (District Council Chief Executive for Reigate & Banstead), Will Garner (UC Product Director), Lesley Woodruff (MtUC Operations Director)
Presenters:	Ian Wright (UC Programme Director), Lesley Woodruff (MtUC Operations Director), [REDACTED] (HMRC Director), Stuart Ison (External Affairs, Strategic Design and Planning Director)
Apologies:	Barbara Bradley (Work & Health DG), Helen Pickles (PC&P Director), Myrtle Lloyd (HMRC Director)

Welcome, Minutes & Matters Arising

The Chair welcomed attendees to the meeting and noted he welcomes input and questions from both those in the room and those joining digitally.

The Minutes of the March UCPB were cleared with no amendments requested.

Action point "2103AP01" closed.

The Chair highlighted that the meeting is Simon McKinnon's (Digital DG) last UCPB, further acknowledging and thanking Simon for his hard work and input given to the Programme.

Matters Arising:

- The SRO and the IPA have agreed for a light touch review to take place at the end of April and will be led by [REDACTED].
- BTL04 provides an update on UC assurance recommendations, noting good progress has been made.

Paper 1 – Programme Director & MtUC Update – UC Programme Director

The Presenter introduced the paper and highlighted the following:

- Following the SRO accepting PB's recommendation, scaling commenced as planned at the beginning of April.
- Automation is working well to date on migration stop notices and populating transitional protection (TP) data from HMRC.

- The automation of case selection from HMRC was tested as planned with implementation to commence in May. Contingency arrangements are in place if required.
- Stakeholder events continue to take place, including a collaborative workshop on couples.
- The Help to Claim service started at the beginning of April. Subsequent services to be decided by an open grant competition which is currently on track.
- Highlighted concerns around challenges to TCR recruitment, specifically:
 - That 842 FTE was obtained out of a 930 FTE target by March. The 930 has now been met however was 2 weeks late.
 - Obtaining 2k agents in September and 2830 in December is a big challenge and is rated amber/red. Estate is available for 2k FTE.
- The NAO will review MTUC from June with reporting expected in Spring 2024.
- The automation of stop notices is noted as TBC as a date has yet to be agreed, although this is likely to be in May.
- Finances came within 1% of forecast for 2022/23.
- More detail is expected on whole life Programme costs and a paper will be brought to the next UCPB providing more detail and clarity.
 - The SRO emphasised that changes to the forecast must come through UCPB to be formally agreed.
- The tracking of digital resource is trending to forecast which is good news. The Programme remains heavily reliant on contractors however.

Member Discussion:

- TCR recruitment:
 - The challenges for TCR recruitment are a result of multiple elements, e.g. Department wide recruitment, internal worries on the movement of EO roles and estates. Further highlighting that recruiting such a large number requires time to complete the process.
 - From a HR perspective, TCR recruitment is a high priority, however noted there are other significant priorities elsewhere in the Department.
 - Suggestions raised to potentially contract out some TCR agent roles in the future.
- The Move to UC Operating Model milestone can be changed to green, further noting teams are being identified to transition new claims to BAU prior to rolling out geographically.
- Digital recruitment:
 - The Chair praised Digital colleagues for the positive recruitment updates.
 - Although some large competitors are letting developers go, the market remains challenging.
 - The Programme/DWP are trying to remain competitive.
 - Work is underway to grow DWP's own strategy and improve recruitment processes (e.g. remove one of the required two tests at the interview/application stage).

AP01: Ian Wright to provide a paper at the July UCPB to provide an update on TCR recruitment.

AP02: Ian Wright and [REDACTED] to produce a paper at the next UCPB to provide clarity and more information on the Programme whole life costs.

Paper 2 – MtUC Operations Update – MtUC Operations Director & HMRC Director

The MtUC Operations Director introduced the paper, highlighting the following key points:

- This paper has been brought to the Board to provide an update from the previous 3 months.
- The target to send 1k migrations per month from January to March was achieved with a 47% claim rate. Approximately 30 claims have been made per day.
- Inbound contact was consistent until April when it spiked. The reasons for this spike are not yet known however will be included in the next month's update.

- Inbound calls relating to case management are expected to reduce as work transitions to the new operating model in May.
- Progress is on track to issue 5k migration notices in April with 2262 having been sent as of UCPB.
- Planning is underway to transition to the new operating model. From Mid-May, MtUC dedicated agents will be 100% focused on migration notices, reminders, contact and to support customers. From this point on all new claims will go direct to their dedicated Service Centre to be processed.
- Work is underway with Service Centres to ensure they can balance MtUC cases alongside a small BAU caseload. MtUC cases will be prioritised.
- Bolton and Bristol teams are in place, Nottingham recruitment is underway and on track and Stockport recruitment closed on the 6 April (161 interviews with 84 vacancies available. Interviews starting the WC 24/04).
- Recruitment will continue to remain a big focus, especially in Q1.
- Highlighted the importance to plan the induction of new starters, further emphasising that 30% of agents would be new to the business.
- Without automation scaling will be limited, further noting the team are collaborating with the UC Product Director's team to ensure automation is available as required.
- Data mismatches have reduced to 18% with phone numbers the most common mismatch.

From a HMRC perspective:

- Customer contact remains largely unaffected as expansion commences.
- HMRC are focusing on fixing forward for compliance, utilising a new approach to ensure TP data is as accurate as possible when transferred to UC.
- There are no IT concerns, further contingency scans have been delivered with a further scan of 1,000 couple cases in train.
- TP checks are underway using a risk-based approach (initial results show risking at 10% with 50% of those identified requiring correction).

Member Discussion:

- The SRO pointed out that the no claim figure (18.5%) has been steady with a higher TP figure, adding this is likely to create public expenditure savings. He questioned at what point can forecasters begin to map this as a trend, further noting the benefit to begin this before the next fiscal event.
 - In response it was noted that plans are in place to include something for the Autumn Statement. There will be a level of uncertainty however forecasters will discuss this in more detail with HMT.
 - Work is already underway from the previous fiscal event to warn the OBR up on MtUC scaling.
 - The SRO emphasised the important to give the OBR early sight of how evidence is likely to develop, and that more analysis will be provided further down the line. The HMT representative was supportive of this.
- UC is a more intensive regime when compared to TC whereby claimants need to agree a claimant commitment and have ID re-checked. This could deter previously non-complaint TC claimants.
- Noted the need to identify why some people are not claiming, adding IPSOS MORI are struggling to get former TC claimants to take part in research.
- The SRO noted his thanks to both the MtUC Operations Director and HMRC Director, additionally noting his gratitude to HMRC for their support.

Paper 3 – Update on The Tax Credit Expansion Approach and Communications Plans - External Affairs, Strategic Design and Planning Director

The Presenter introduced the paper and highlighted the following key points:

- The approach to implementation is to use a capacity-based approach by District. Expansion is initially geographically led, using specific areas as pivot points to reach a national approach.

- This approach provides an ongoing opportunity to test and learn.
- The approach allows for Operations to build capacity incrementally instead of a big bang national approach.
- There is no plan to launch additional national communications over and above the substantial work done so far. However, this will be revisited as the programme moves to different cohorts.
- Local communications will include, for example, Partnership Managers engaging with local MPs.

Member Discussion:

- The SRO sought clarification on whether the approach being taken is geographical or not, further noting the importance of clarity on this. Additionally noting:
 - The importance that this plan is the UC Programme Director and MTUC Operations Directors own it.
 - If the MTUC Operations Director, UC Programme Director and HMRC Director feel a geographical approach is appropriate, then he is content.
 - But given the 2017-18 experience at a political level there was a risk that a too geographically based plan may create pressure to pause implementation in certain locations irrespective of the actual delivery reality (as happened back then and he'd like to avoid repeating that experience).
- In response to the SRO's query, it was noted:
 - The approach is indeed geographical initially with a view to reaching national coverage as soon as possible and was agreed at Work & Health ET and UC PDE.
 - The roll out approach will begin with 1 district per area. Move to UC will be in all parts of GB by September and will have reached national coverage by the end of the Financial Year.
- The MTUC Operations Director and the Work and Health DFC NI representative will pick up discussions outside of the Board to share learning.

Paper 4 – Benefits Realisation - External Affairs, Strategic Design and Planning Director

The Presenter introduced the paper and highlighted three key pillars:

- Labour Market Impacts:
 - Analysis on single type JSA claimants has been completed which shows these claimants are 2% points more likely to be in work for 6 months after claiming.
 - Noted plans to bring future analysis to the Board when available.
- DEL efficiency
 - Highlighted a positive story in terms of comparative efficiency between the UC and legacy systems.
 - Unit cost reduction continues to remain positive.
- Fraud & Error
 - Highlighted a positive story in terms of reducing fraud and error in the UC system.
 - Fraud & error is mitigated by TCR, gateway work and transaction risking.

Member Discussion:

- The SRO highlighted there is a plan to reduce fraud and error and noted the need to execute this plan which will take a few years; however, improvements are expected in the May statistics. Additionally emphasising the importance to not underestimate the level of fraud which remain very high.

AP03: Stuart Ison to inform the SRO and Board of the timetable in respect of further analysis. Additionally, to assign this into a milestone.

AOB

The Programme has begun to receive many PQs and FOIs for MtUC data, further noting the need to release information regularly through statistics on gov.uk. Noted the aim to release statistics on a set day each quarter.

An update was provided on Northern Ireland:

- The budget position hasn't changed since the previous UCPB. Indications of what the budget may look like have been seen but it is not yet finalised.
- Once the budget has been finalised decisions can be made on ways forward. UCPB will be informed of these decisions.
- Work is continuing despite the uncertainty and the MtUC discovery exercise commenced on the 17 April.
- Regional communications are ongoing, further noting positive news of no negative publicity.
- Operational MtUC teams have been set up.
- UCPB will continue to receive updates on the situation in Northern Ireland.

Contact:

[REDACTED]