

Social Justice and Social Security Committee

Pensioner Poverty and Digital Exclusion

Department and Work and Pensions Response

Could you please confirm the measures that DWP has in place to ensure that people have a choice in how to access applications to benefits, such as Universal Credit? It would also be helpful to understand the technical support that is provided to people who have difficulty in accessing online information.

- The Department takes its role in pursuing a fair and inclusive society seriously and seeks to ensure its interactions with tens of millions of customers, who may be vulnerable or have complex needs, meet their needs appropriately.
- Much of the information on how we do this is in the public domain, for example, the recent letter from DWP's Permanent Secretary Sir Peter Schofield KCB to the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee: [Letter from the Permanent Secretary of the Department for Work and Pensions relating to DWP Customer Service oral evidence session held on 05 December 2024](#)
- The Department produces communications in a range of alternative formats which include Braille, large print, audio, coloured paper, email, and screen-readable formats such as word and web-accessible PDF. We have several communication methods and options available for customers to make a new claim to benefit including:
 - Telephone
 - Online
 - Clerical
 - Textphone
 - Relay UK
 - British Sign Language interpreting
 - Home visits
- The DWP Visiting Service provides additional face-to-face support across all service lines to customers who cannot access DWP services in any other way. A visit can be arranged for a customer if they need extra help to claim benefits, for example because they have complex needs, are disabled, are a vulnerable young person making a claim for the first time, have nobody else to support them or cannot claim benefits in any other way.
- The Department recognises that some people may need additional support to make a Universal Credit claim, and has invested up to £53million in Help to Claim for two years from 1 April 2024.
- Anyone who requires support to make a new claim to Universal Credit, whether that is a new customer or someone moving to Universal Credit from legacy benefits, including tax credit, will be able to access the free,

independent and confidential Help to Claim support provided by Citizens Advice and Citizens Advice Scotland.

- Help to Claim provides support through telephony and digital channels (including webchat). Jobcentres will continue to provide face to face support as business as usual for those who can't access support through telephony and digital channels. The jobcentre will also consider whether the individual should be referred to specialist support within their geographical area (for example, debt advice).
- We have also created an enhanced Move to UC support journey for potentially vulnerable Employment and Support Allowance and Income Support customers. This support contacts customers by phone and (where necessary) through a home visit, where a customer does not make a claim to Universal Credit. The 'Complex Case Coach' is a new role introduced as part of the Enhanced Support Journey. This specialist role will provide a Case Management approach to support our most vulnerable customers through enhanced system checks and more frequent interactions in line with our Visiting colleagues.
- The Department continues to protect and improve non-digital channels for those customers who need to interact with us by phone, post, or in person. It matters that our frontline colleagues can spend the time required with customers to provide the support that they need.
- DWP is using Artificial Intelligence technology to digitally identify whether a customer may need support from what they have written and how they have written it. This vulnerability solution has been recognised across government, winning the 'Excellence in Delivery Award' at the Civil Service Awards.

How the Department for Work and Pensions took account of digital exclusion in their recent campaign to promote Pension Credit take-up?

- As set out in our previous answer, Pension Credit can be claimed through a variety of channels, including online at: www.gov.uk/pension-credit/how-to-claim. The service is available to use 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and provides those who may struggle to make their claim alone the flexibility to have a friend or family member to support them when making their claim at a time that is most convenient to them. Claims can also be made through the Freephone Pension Credit claim line: 0800 99 1234, where an agent can guide a person through the application and claim process. Customers can also print the claim form or request one via the Freephone telephone number 0800 99 1234. Paper forms can be returned to: Freepost DWP Pensions Service 3.

Whether the complexity of phone line services is being considered as part of the consultation on the Digital Inclusion Action Plan?

- DWP continues to work with the Department for Science Innovation and Technology and the Department for Education to address digital inclusion to

enable ways that low-income households can get online and gain the Essential Digital Skills (EDS) that 92% of employers want employees to have.

- When a work coach becomes aware a claimant lacks digital skills, they refer to provision for Foundation Digital Skills, and then on to Essential Digital Skills. In England, this is paid for by the DfE adult skills budget. In the rest of the UK, access to similar digital skills provision is available through the Devolved Government skills offers.
- For customers who need to interact with us by phone, post or in person, DWP remains committed to protecting and improving non-digital channels.