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Rt Hon George Howarth MP  
House of Commons

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30<sup>th</sup> November 2018

Dear George,

Thank you for your letter of 25 October to my predecessor on behalf of constituents who contacted you regarding Universal Credit and those diagnosed with cancer.

I was sorry to read of the circumstances described in your constituents' letters. I can assure you that we are committed to ensuring that terminally ill patients are treated with the utmost sensitivity and care, and receive the support they need to make a claim to Universal Credit. As we continue to deliver the full Universal Credit service, with its expanded claimant base, we are continuing to review and further develop the application process for claimants with complex needs, including how we support terminally ill claimants to engage in the process.

We knew that people would require digital support with the transition to Universal Credit. This is why all jobcentres across the country have free Wi-Fi, and there are more than 8,000 computers available to support claimants who need help with making their claim digitally and applying for jobs online. Work coaches will also be able to help anyone who needs assistance and we have a free phone helpline available for those that cannot get online.

If a claimant is unable to make or maintain their claim online independently, they can seek help to do so from family/friends, from other third parties, at the jobcentre or Universal Support which is delivered locally. If none of these options are suitable then a claim can be made and maintained by telephone. In exceptional circumstances, a claimant can receive support to make or maintain their claim by telephone via a home visit from an official.

We aim to further enhance the support claimants receive through our new partnership with Citizens Advice, which will deliver a number of support options to new and existing claimants, with a strong focus on digital and budgeting support. This demonstrates our commitment to constantly improve the service we offer to claimants.

We know that this system of explicit consent is working, and that welfare rights advisers have welcomed the clarity and extra advice we have provided. We accept information directly from claimant representatives, such as claimant appointees, third party organisations representing the claimant, as well as details supplied to the

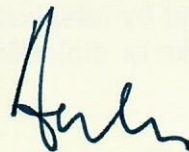
Department for Work and Pensions Universal Credit partnership managers or external engagement officials. We also continue to ensure that our work coaches have the flexibility to tailor support for individuals in difficult circumstances. A digital account allows individuals access to their personal, medical and financial data and using a process involving implied consent runs the risk of undermining the security of the system.

In line with our commitment to continuous improvement, we have listened to concerns about Universal Credit and have now implemented a number of further improvements. This package of measures, which is set out below, not only addresses concerns raised around the first assessment period and the budgeting issues faced by some claimants at the start of their claim, but also supports the vast majority of claimants transitioning onto Universal Credit.

- From 3 January, the repayment period of Universal Credit advances has been increased to 12 months and claimants can now get up to 100 per cent of their estimated monthly entitlement upfront. These advances are available to claimants interest-free.
- From 14 February, the seven-day waiting period that some claimants had at the start of their Universal Credit claim was removed.
- From 11 April, the Department has provided an additional payment for claimants already receiving support towards their housing costs of two weeks of their Housing Benefit to support them as they transfer onto Universal Credit. Claimants will not be required to repay this money.

Finally, if a claimant has been diagnosed as terminally ill with a prognosis of six months or less and been provided with a DS1500 or they have already provided one with their Personal Independence Payment claim, Universal Credit will automatically award the Limited Capability for Work Related Activities (LCWRA) element without the requirement to refer the claim for a Work Capability Assessment (WCA) decision. If the claimant does not have a DS1500 but is deemed as terminally ill for Departmental purposes, we will fast track the WCA process so that the assessment report is provided within 48 hours. A terminally ill claimant who is treated as having LCWRA is entitled to the element from the first day of the claim.

Best wishes,



**Rt Hon Amber Rudd MP**

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WORK AND PENSIONS