



## DEBATE PACK

Number CDP-2018-0008, 12 January 2018

# Food poverty in Merseyside

## Summary

A Westminster Hall debate on Food poverty in Merseyside is scheduled for Tuesday 16 January 2018 at 2.30pm. The Member leading the debate is Stephen Twigg MP.

The House of Commons Library prepares a briefing in hard copy and/or online for most non-legislative debates in the Chamber and Westminster Hall other than half-hour debates. Debate Packs are produced quickly after the announcement of parliamentary business. They are intended to provide a summary or overview of the issue being debated and identify relevant briefings and useful documents, including press and parliamentary material. More detailed briefing can be prepared for Members on request to the Library.

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# 1. Food poverty and use of food banks

## 1.1 What is food poverty?

**Food poverty**, has previously been defined by the Department of Health as “the inability to afford, or to have access to, food to make up a healthy diet”.<sup>1</sup>

Food poverty is also often understood in terms of people’s use of food aid. This includes use of food banks, discussed in section 1.3.<sup>2</sup>

An Evidence Review for the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Hunger repeated a more “all-encompassing” definition of food poverty, as used by the Public Health Nutrition Team at the Central London Community Healthcare NHS Trust in its evidence to the APPG inquiry.

This built on the above definition from the Department of Health:

Food poverty can be defined as the inability to afford, or to have access to, foods which make up a healthy diet. Those experiencing food poverty may have limited money for food after paying for other household expenses; live in areas where food choice is restricted by local availability and lack of transport to large supermarkets; or be lacking in the knowledge, skills or cooking equipment necessary to prepare healthy meals.<sup>3</sup>

A related concept is **food insecurity** (although this term is also sometimes used in the context of a country’s total food supply, rather than individuals’ ability to access food for themselves and their families). Food insecurity was defined in the Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey, commissioned by the Food Standards Agency and conducted across the UK between 2003 and 2005, as:

Limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways.<sup>4</sup>

“Socially acceptable ways” includes “without resorting to emergency food supplies, scavenging, stealing, or other coping strategies”. This definition for food insecurity was taken from previous research in the United States and has more recently been adopted by the Food Foundation, a UK think tank.<sup>5</sup> However, the Government has suggested

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Health, *Choosing a Better Diet: a food and health action plan*, 2005  
<sup>2</sup> For example, a 2014 report by Oxfam GB, Church Action on Poverty and the Trussell Trust discusses food poverty in the context of people using food aid: Niall Cooper, Sarah Purcell and Ruth Jackson, [Below the Breadline: The relentless rise of food poverty in Britain](#), June 2014  
<sup>3</sup> Andrew Forsey, [An Evidence Review for the All-Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom](#), December 2014  
<sup>4</sup> Food Standards Agency, *Low Income Diet and Nutrition Survey*, 2007, Volume 3, Chapter 20, p202  
<sup>5</sup> For example, see the Food Foundation’s report, [Too Poor to Eat: Food insecurity in the UK](#), May 2016

trying to come up with a single definition of food insecurity is not useful:

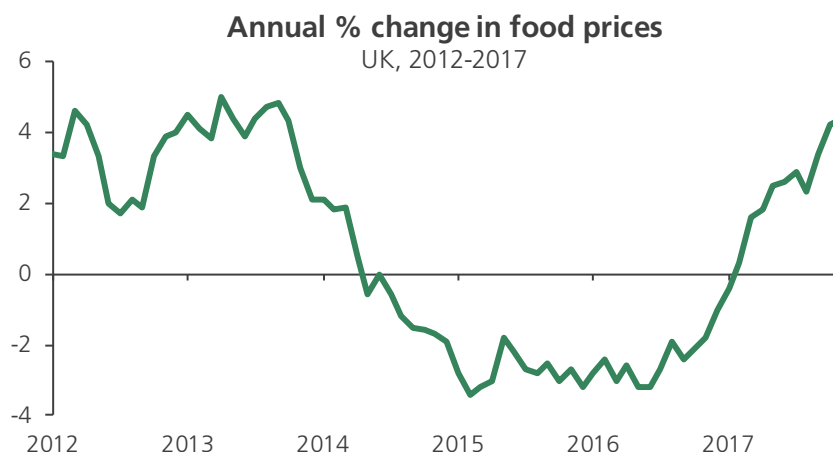
There is no single definition of food insecurity. The factors that impact on household food security are complex. There are multiple indicators such as quality, variety and desirability of diet as well as total intake, not all of which are measured consistently. It is, therefore, very difficult and potentially misleading to attempt to develop a single classification of food insecurity.<sup>6</sup>

Measurement of food insecurity is discussed in more detail in a Library debate pack, [Household food insecurity measurement in the UK](#) (December 2016).

## 1.2 Food prices in the UK

The price of food, as measured in the Consumer Prices Index (CPI), was 4.4% higher in November 2017 than it was the year before. This was the highest rate of food price inflation in four years (since September 2013). Overall CPI inflation, including other items, was 3.1% in November 2017.<sup>7</sup>

Food prices were generally falling from early 2014 to summer 2016. Prices started increasing again around October 2016.



Source: ONS series D7GK

New data on [prices at December 2017](#) will be published by the Office for National Statistics at 9.30 on Tuesday 16 January.

Trends in the price of food and non-alcoholic drinks and household spending on these items are discussed in detail in the annual [Food Statistics Pocketbook](#) published by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. [Chapter 2](#) looks in detail at prices and expenditure.

## 1.3 Food bank statistics

### Number of people using food banks

<sup>6</sup> [PO HL8165, 3 May 2016](#)

<sup>7</sup> ONS, [UK Consumer Price Inflation, November 2017](#), series D7BU and D7BT

The Government does not collect statistics on the number of or use of food banks, suggesting that this would place “unnecessary burdens on volunteers trying to help their communities”.<sup>8</sup> However, the Trussell Trust – the largest UK food bank provider – publishes statistics on food bank users at the UK and regional level on [its website](#).

In the financial year 2016/17, Trussell Trust food banks provided three days’ emergency food to:

- 1.18 million people **across the UK**, comprising 746,000 adults and 437,000 children
- 174,000 people in the **North West**, comprising 108,000 adults and 67,000 children.<sup>9</sup>

**This is not the same as the number of unique users** – someone who used a food bank twice in the year will be counted twice. (The Trussell Trust estimates that on average, users need two foodbank referrals in one year.) Individuals must be referred by a care professional or benefits advisor in order to qualify for assistance from a Trussell Trust food bank. Of course, these figures only cover food banks operated by the Trussell Trust, so underestimate the total scale of food bank provision in the UK.

Generally, statistics on food bank use are not published below the regional level. [Individual food banks](#) may report their own statistics.

The Trussell Trust has [published](#) annual totals for the number of food parcels given out in each region since 2011/12. However, these figures will clearly depend on changes in the number and reach of Trussell Trust food banks from year to year, as well as awareness of food banks both among food bank users and among those referring people to food banks. Therefore the figures should not be interpreted as showing the change in need for food banks over this period:

<b>Food bank use in the North West and UK</b>		
Number of three day emergency food supplies provided by Trussell Trust food banks, 2011/12 to 2016/17		
	North West	United Kingdom
2011/12	7	129
2012/13	41	347
2013/14	139	913
2014/15	157	1,085
2015/16	160	1,109
2016/17	174	1,183
2017/18 (Apr-Sep)	87	587
<i>% change on year before:<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>12%</i>	<i>13%</i>

(a) % change between April-September 2016 and April-September 2017.  
Source: Trussell Trust

<sup>8</sup> [PQ 119087, 18 December 2017](#)

<sup>9</sup> Trussell Trust, [End of year stats for 2016-17](#)

## Food bank demand increased in 2017/18

The Trussell Trust has reported an increase in demand for food banks in the first half of 2017/18 compared to the same period last year. There is a sharper increase in areas operating Universal Credit “Full Service”, where rollout of Universal Credit is more advanced (an overview of Universal Credit and the rollout schedule for Merseyside is provided in section 2 of this paper).

In total, the number of emergency food parcels supplied by Trussell Trust food banks increased by 13% in April-September 2017 compared to the year before. In areas which have been operating Universal Credit Full Service for more than six months, the number of emergency food parcels supplied increased by 30% on average (compared to an average increase of 12% in areas not operating Full Service).

## 1.4 Who uses food banks?

### Profile of people using food banks

[Research](#) commissioned by the Trussell Trust and conducted by academics at Oxford University looked at the demographic characteristics and economic situation of people using food banks, based on a survey of 413 food bank users over October to December 2016:

- Lone parents and their children constitute the largest number of people receiving help from food banks, though single male households are the most common household type.
- Half of households included someone with a disability. Compared to national population survey data, households using food banks are less likely to be in work, but are three times more likely to contain someone with a disability when compared to other low-income households.<sup>10</sup>

The authors note that the people using food banks are those who have been most affected by recent welfare reforms: people with disabilities, lone parents and large family households. They also found that, in the previous month, all food bank users had an income well below the poverty (relative low income) threshold for the whole population, while over 40% reported unsteady incomes. Users were also likely to be “severely food insecure” or experience other forms of destitution:

- Households using food banks face extreme financial vulnerability. All food bank users had, in the last month, an income well-below the threshold of low income in the whole population. More than a third of households experienced an income shock in the past three months and over two-thirds reported unexpected and rising expenses during the same period. Most often these rising expenses were for food and household bills.

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<sup>10</sup> Rachel Loopstra and Doireann Lalor, [Financial insecurity, food insecurity, and disability: The profile of people receiving emergency food assistance from The Trussell Trust Foodbank Network in Britain](#), June 2017, page viii

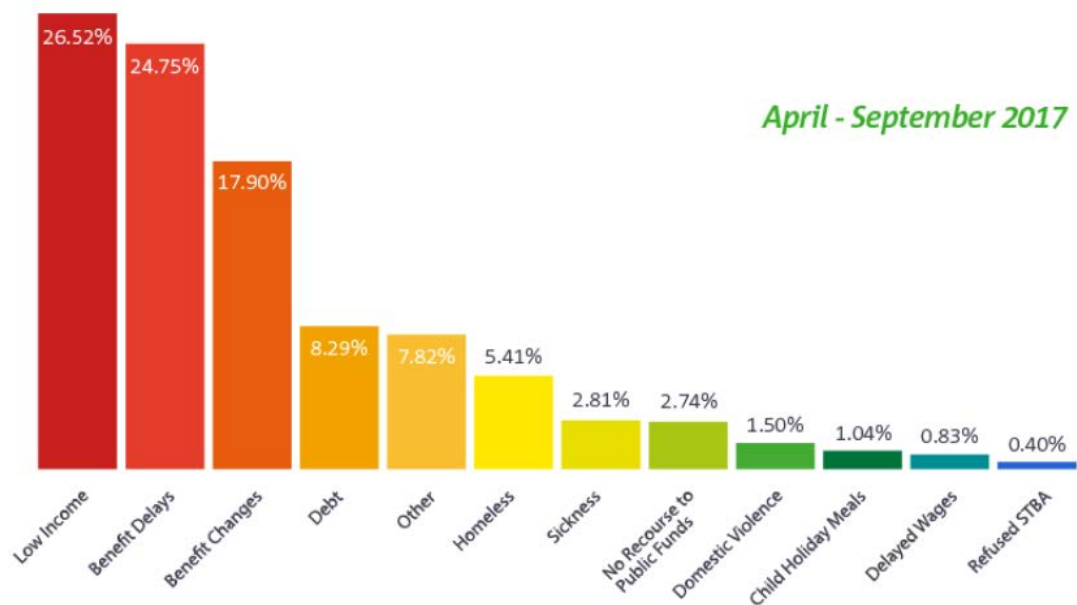
- Almost half of households reported their incomes were unsteady from week to week and month to month. Both people on benefits and people in work had unsteady incomes, with one-third of the sample awaiting a benefit payment.
- Over 78% of households were severely food insecure, meaning that they had skipped meals, gone without eating, or even gone days without eating in the past 12 months. For a majority of households, this was a chronic experience, happening every month or almost every month over the past 12 months.
- Food bank users experience multiple forms of destitution – 50% had gone without heating for over more than four days in the past 12 months, and 1 in 5 had slept rough in the last 12 months.

### Reasons for food bank referral

In the six months from April to September 2017, the primary reasons for referral to Trussell Trust food banks were low income (27%), benefit delays (25%) and benefit changes (18%).

The proportion of users referred for other reasons is shown in the chart below, [published](#) by the Trussell Trust.

### PRIMARY REASONS FOR REFERRAL TO TRUSSELL TRUST FOODBANKS



In response to Parliamentary Questions, the Government has said that there is no simple explanation why people use food banks and this use not be attributed to any one cause:

...It is widely acknowledged that the reasons why people use food banks are complex and overlapping, and therefore it would be misleading to link this to any particular cause.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> [PQ 3662 \[Food Banks: Employment and Support Allowance\], 12 July 2017](#)

Existing empirical literature on food bank use was previously analysed in a DWP and Defra commissioned study, published in February 2014. Given the limited amount of evidence relating to the UK, this was supplemented with research from the United States, Canada and Germany. The authors found that while systematic UK evidence on the drivers of food aid use was lacking, food aid providers reported their own research and experiences of why people used food aid:

Critical factors driving these actions are described (by many food aid providers) in terms of 'crises' in a range of circumstances, but particularly household income, and often underpinned by on-going problems of low income, rising food (and other) costs and increasing indebtedness.<sup>12</sup>

The study also observed that turning to food aid appears to be "a strategy of last resort".

These findings chime with a separate research report jointly commissioned by the Child Poverty Action Group, Oxfam, the Church of England and the Trussell Trust in 2014, based on interviews with food bank users and administrative data on referrals at certain food banks. Interviewees used food banks as a last resort, "when other coping strategies had failed or were overstretched", and most food bank users were facing a crisis in income:

- Most food bank users were facing an immediate, acute financial crisis – either a complete loss of income or a very significant reduction in their income had left them at crisis point, with little or no money to put food on the table.
- The acute crises people faced could be prompted by a sudden loss of earnings, or a change in family circumstances such as bereavement or homelessness. However, for between half and two-thirds of the people included in this research, the immediate income crisis was linked to the operation of the benefits system (with problems including waiting for benefit payments, sanctions, or reduction in disability benefits) or tax credit payments.
- The emergency support available to people at a time of crisis was not sufficient to prevent them having to turn to a food bank. Many participants were not aware of the various emergency payments available in different circumstances, and even fewer were receiving them. Only half (or less) of the users we spoke to knew they could seek support from the Local Welfare Assistance Scheme; very few of those potentially eligible had been awarded short-term benefit advances or hardship payments.<sup>13</sup>

## Reducing use of food banks

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<sup>12</sup> Hannah Lambie-Mumford et al, [Household Food Security in the UK: A Review of Food Aid](#), University of Warwick and Food Ethics Council, 20 February 2014

<sup>13</sup> Jane Perry, Martin Williams, Tom Sefton and Moussa Haddad, [Emergency Use Only: Understanding and reducing the use of food banks in the UK](#), Child Poverty Action Group, Church of England, Oxfam GB and the Trussell Trust, November 2014

In response to a September 2017 Parliamentary Question on what steps DWP was taking to reduce food poverty and the use of food banks, the then Minister for Employment, Damian Hinds, said:

We know the most effective route out of poverty is work. That is why we are determined to make work pay and to support people into work whilst protecting the most vulnerable in society. During 2017/18 we will spend £95 billion on children and working age benefits. As a safeguard for people needing more support we also have a well-established system of hardship payments, benefit advances and budgeting loans.<sup>14</sup>

There is an ongoing debate regarding how far changes to the benefits system and benefits sanctions have contributed to the rise in use of food banks. At present, these debates are focusing on the impact of Universal Credit. In its October 2017 report, the Work and Pensions Committee observed that the rollout of Universal Credit Full Service “has been associated with increases in rent arrears, problem debt and food bank use”.<sup>15</sup>

An April 2017 report by the Trussell Trust, [\*Early Warnings: Universal Credit and Foodbanks\*](#) stated that although rollout of Universal Credit was still in relatively early stages, food banks in areas of partial or full roll-out are reporting significant problems with its impact. The Trust highlighted that:

1. Foodbanks in areas of full Universal Credit rollout to single people, couples and families, have seen a 16.85% average increase in referrals for emergency food, more than double the national average of 6.64%.
2. The effect of a six-plus week waiting period for a first Universal Credit payment can be serious, leading to foodbank referrals, debt, mental health issues, rent arrears and eviction. These effects can last even after people receive their Universal Credit payments, as bills and debts pile up.
3. People in insecure or seasonal work are particularly affected, suggesting the work incentives in Universal Credit are not yet helping everyone.
4. Navigating the online system can be difficult for people struggling with computers or unable to afford telephone helplines. In some cases, the system does not register people’s claims correctly, invalidating it.
5. Foodbanks are working hard to stop people going hungry in areas of rollout, by providing food and support for more than two visits to the foodbank and working closely with other charities to provide holistic support. However, foodbanks have concerns about the extra pressure this puts on food donation stocks and volunteers’ time and emotional welfare.<sup>16</sup>

The Trussell Trust welcomed the changes to Universal Credit announced in the November 2017 Budget (described in section 2.4 of this paper) but warned Universal Credit “is not fixed”. It also noted that the cost of

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<sup>14</sup> [PO 7602, 11 September 2017](#)

<sup>15</sup> Work and Pensions Committee, [Universal Credit: the six week wait](#), HC 336, 26 October 2017, para 6

<sup>16</sup> Trussell Trust, [Early Warnings: Universal Credit and Foodbanks](#), April 2017, p3



changes announced in the Budget was “dwarfed by the scale of cuts to the welfare safety net in recent years”.<sup>17</sup>

A [December 2017 report](#) by the Child Poverty Action Group and Trussell Trust highlighted “existing examples of interventions that help tackle the problems that lead people to use food banks” at a range of levels, from food banks and community groups to national governments. It suggested that many local initiatives could be scaled up nationally.<sup>18</sup> The report assessed what progress has been made on challenges identified in an earlier study from 2014, *Emergency Use Only*. While the report found that the predominant reason given for food bank referrals was still problems with benefits, it welcomed a drop in the number and proportion of benefit claimants being sanctioned. It suggested that “some relatively simple changes – to the social security system in particular – could make a huge difference, and help drive down food bank use”. Recommendations included:

- Improved communication about, and access to, short-term benefit advances, in order to support people placed in urgent financial need as a consequence of benefit delays. In particular, the report called for explicit mention of short-term benefit advances as part of mandatory jobcentre scripts.
- Benefit sanctions should be a last resort and a ‘yellow card’ system should allow claimants the opportunity to change their behaviour before sanctions are imposed. Claimants who incur a sanction should be automatically considered for a hardship payment at the same time.
- Guarantee the future of local welfare provision by introducing a clearer framework for delivery and introducing similar ringfencing and reporting duties for local councils as currently apply to discretionary housing payments.
- The Department for Work and Pensions should work with local authorities and charities to facilitate more widespread co-operation between food banks and local jobcentres.
- Jobcentre advisers should be provided with high quality training to enable them to better understand and support clients with mental health difficulties.

There have been a range of other reports from various organisations in the past few years looking at the reasons behind food bank use and making related recommendations. These are listed in section 3 below.

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<sup>17</sup> Trussell Trust blog, *We welcomed changes in the Budget but now is not a time for celebration*, 7 December 2017

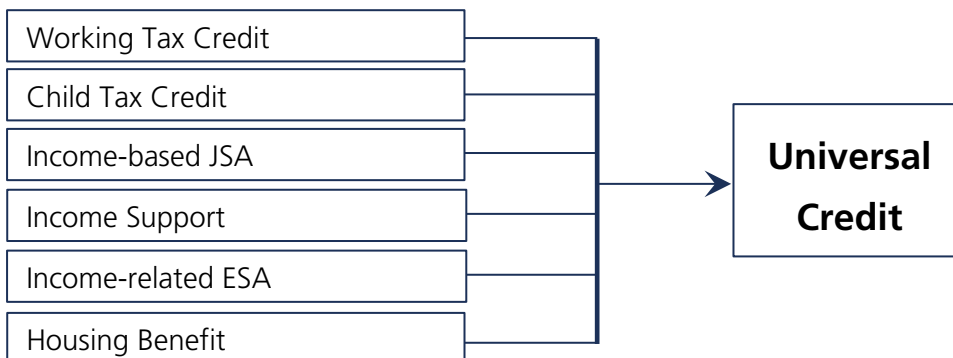
<sup>18</sup> Moussa Haddad, Jane Perry and Mia Hadfield-Spoor, [Emergency Use Only: Update 2017](#), Child Poverty Action Group and The Trussell Trust, December 2017

## 2. Impact of Universal Credit

### 2.1 Background

Universal Credit (UC) is a new benefit for low income individuals and families, both in and out of work. It is replacing means-tested social security benefits and tax credits (“legacy benefits”) for people of working age. Around 7 million individuals and families are expected to receive UC when it is fully introduced.

#### ‘Legacy’ benefits and tax credits replaced by Universal Credit



In “**Full Service**” areas – where the final, digital version of UC operates – claimants will normally be expected to make a claim for Universal Credit online and to manage their claim, including reporting changes in circumstances, via an online account.

UC is paid monthly in arrears and, unless exceptional circumstances apply, as a single payment covering all the household’s needs. Couples can choose which partner receives the payment, or nominate a joint bank account.

The aim of Universal Credit was to simplify and streamline the benefits system, improve work incentives, tackle poverty among low income families, and reduce the scope for error and fraud.

However, changes to key parameters of Universal Credit since its introduction – including the freezing of UC elements, reductions in the “work allowances” for most claimants<sup>19</sup>, and limits to support for children<sup>20</sup> and for adults with “limited capability for work”<sup>21</sup> – cast doubt on the extent to which some of the original aims will be met. Although working families will benefit from the reduction in the taper

<sup>19</sup> See Commons Library briefing CBP-7446, [Universal Credit changes from April 2016](#), 16 November 2016

<sup>20</sup> Commons Library briefing CBP-7935, [The two child limit in tax credits and Universal Credit](#), 10 April 2017

<sup>21</sup> Commons Library briefing CBP-7649, [Abolition of the ESA work-related activity component](#), 9 March 2017

rate from 65% to 63% (from April 2017), for most, the gain will be more than outweighed by losses as a result of the other changes.<sup>22</sup>

Universal Credit is now expected to be less generous overall than existing “legacy” benefits and tax credits, and according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) will reduce government spending by around £5 billion a year in the long-run.<sup>23</sup> The IFS estimates that, together with related tax and benefit measures to be introduced over the next few years, the long-term impact of Universal Credit will be a significant reduction in support for low income working age families.<sup>24</sup> The DWP has not published an update of its December 2012 Impact Assessment for Universal Credit.

Concerns about the impact of Universal Credit have led to calls on the Government to reconsider various elements of the system before pushing ahead with roll-out, to restore the original policy intent and to ensure that families and vulnerable groups do not face serious financial risk.<sup>25</sup> Charities, pressure groups and think tanks have called not only for cuts to Universal Credit (the work allowance reductions and the two-child limit in particular) to be reversed, but also for the Government to look again at key aspects of the policy design and implementation. Recommendations made include measures to ensure that work incentives are not blunted for lone parents and second earners, reviewing the UC rules for self-employed people, reducing the taper rate to 55% (as the architects of UC originally envisaged), integrating Council Tax support with UC, and reviewing how passported benefits (such as free school meals) interact with UC.

Other recurring concerns include:

- difficulties with monthly assessment periods and payments;
- inflexible rules on access to Alternative Payment Arrangements;<sup>26</sup>
- complex and bureaucratic rules for those seeking help with childcare costs;
- how to provide practical support to help claimants to progress in work;

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<sup>22</sup> See Richard Keen and Steven Kennedy, [Universal Credit: jam tomorrow?](#), Commons Library Second Reading blog, 25 November 2016

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Hood and Tom Waters, [The impact of tax and benefit reforms on household incomes](#), IFS Briefing Note BN196, 27 April 2017

<sup>24</sup> Tom Waters, [Budget 2017: Distributional analysis](#), IFS, 9 March 2017

<sup>25</sup> For a range of views on the issues that should be addressed see Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission, [State of the nation 2015](#), December 2015; David Finch, [Universal Challenge: making a success of Universal Credit](#), Resolution Foundation, May 2016; Centre for Social Justice, [The Case for Strengthening Universal Credit Work Allowances](#), October 2016; Katie Schmuecker, [Universal Credit: A Joseph Rowntree Foundation briefing](#), April 2017; [Broken promises: What has happened to support for low income working families under universal credit?](#), March 2017; Beth Foley, [Delivering on Universal Credit](#), July 2017; and Geoff Fimister, [Universal Credit – Top Ten Project 2017](#), IRRV, August 2017; Low Incomes Tax Reform Group, [Self-employed claimants of universal credit – lifting the burdens](#), 30 October 2017; Gingerbread, [An impossible bind: requirements to work under Universal Credit](#), 1 November 2017

<sup>26</sup> In [Scotland](#) and in [Northern Ireland](#) payment flexibilities allow UC claimants to receive payments twice-monthly, and for the housing element to be paid direct to landlords. There have been calls to introduce similar flexibilities for claimants in England and Wales.

- doubts about the accuracy of “Real Time Information” earnings data;
- whether there will be the necessary support for claimants in relation to budgeting and managing online claims; and
- major concerns about the UC claims process, delays before people receive their first payment, and rent arrears.

## 2.2 UC roll-out

Universal Credit is being introduced in stages over a number of years. When and how it will affect people depends on where they live and their individual circumstances. The situation is further complicated by the fact that two different versions of Universal Credit exist: the “**Live Service**” which uses IT systems developed prior to the programme’s Spring 2013 “reset”; and the “**Full service**” – the final, digital version of UC where claims are made and managed via an online account.

The Live Service was extended to all parts of Great Britain by Spring 2016, but it is limited to new claims from (mainly single) people with straightforward circumstances. **Roll-out of the Full Service** began in 2016 and it is expected to be operational in all parts of the United Kingdom by December 2018. When the Full Service is introduced in an area, new claims are taken from **all claimant types** and existing Live Service claimants are moved over to the new system. Existing benefit and tax credit claimants in the area may also be migrated to the Full Service if they have a change in circumstances. The number of people on UC in a particular area will therefore grow significantly following the introduction of the Full Service.

When national roll-out of the Full Service is complete, new claims for “**legacy benefits**” – the benefits and tax credits UC is replacing – will no longer be possible anywhere in the UK. The Government plans to transfer the remaining legacy benefit and tax credit claimants to Universal Credit between July 2019 and March 2022. This final stage is referred to as the “**managed migration**” stage.

Further information on how UC is being rolled out and what happens when the Full Service is introduced in an areas can be found in Commons Library briefing CBP-8096, [Universal Credit roll-out: Autumn/Winter 2017](#).

## Full Service roll-out Merseyside

The Universal Credit Full Service is gradually being extended to more Jobcentre plus areas. The table below gives the latest roll-out schedule for the Full Service roll-out in Merseyside.<sup>27</sup>

Month	Jobcentre area
July 2016	Widnes
February 2017	Warrington
October 2017	Bootle Crosby Southport
November 2017	Birkenhead (incorporating former Hoylake JCP) Bromborough Upton
December 2017	Ellesmere Port Neston
January 2018	Aintree (merged with Bootle 17 November 2017)
April 2018	Ashton-in-Makerfield Leigh Wigan
May 2018	Huyton Kirkby
July 2018	St Helens (including former Newton-Le-Willows JCP)
September 2018	Belle Vale Garston
November 2018	Toxteth (including former Edge Hill and Wavertree JCPs) Williamson Square
December 2018	Everton West Derby (each incorporating parts of former Norris Green JCP)

## 2.3 Impact of the UC Full service

Following what it described as “compelling evidence of the problems in the rollout of Universal Credit”, the Work and Pensions Committee re-launched its inquiry into UC in February 2017.<sup>28</sup> The inquiry was interrupted by the announcement of the General Election, but the new Work and Pensions Committee relaunched the inquiry in September 2017.

Oral and written evidence submitted to the Committee pointed to a number of problems being experienced by claimants in Full Service areas, including:

<sup>27</sup> For the latest national roll-out schedule see DWP, [Universal Credit transition to full service](#), updated 5 December 2017

<sup>28</sup> [Universal Credit roll-out: inquiry relaunched](#), 21 February 2017

- financial hardship and distress caused by lengthy waits before the first payment of UC is received, compounded by the 7-day “waiting period” for which no benefit is paid;
- some, particularly vulnerable claimants, struggling to adapt to single, monthly payments in arrears;
- inflexible rules governing Alternative Payment Arrangements such as direct payment of rent to landlords;
- increases in rent arrears, with serious consequences not only for claimants but also for local authorities and housing providers, as a result of exposure to greater financial risk;
- homeless claimants unable to get help with the full costs of emergency temporary accommodation;
- issues with registering and processing claims – e.g. online claims being rejected or “disappearing”, awards not including the housing element due to problems verifying rent payments;
- a lack of support from jobcentres for claimants without ready access to a computer or with limited digital skills/capabilities;
- lengthy, repeated and expensive calls to the UC helpline to resolve problems;
- increasing demands on support and advice services from local authorities, housing associations and charities as a result of having to assist UC claimants;
- insufficient funding from the DWP for local authorities and partner organisations providing “Universal Support”, such as budgeting advice;
- third parties facing difficulties resolving claimants’ problems due to the DWP’s insistence that the claimant must give “explicit consent” for an adviser to act on their behalf.

The issues highlighted by local authorities, housing providers, charities and pressure groups which have attracted most attention include claimants experiencing hardship and falling into debt as a result of the wait before the first payment of UC, and significant increases in rent arrears.

Concerns about the impact of the Full Service have led to calls on the Government to pause the further roll-out of UC to allow problems to be addressed. On 18 September, the Work and Pensions Committee Chair, Frank Field, called on the Government to heed the “unanimous call we are hearing from front line providers” to pause the Full Service roll-out, to prevent a “human and political catastrophe.”

In October, the Government insisted that UC was working and that roll-out would proceed according to the planned timetable, but a number of measures were announced in response to concerns including:

- Moving the UC helpline to a freephone number (with all other DWP helplines to follow suit by the end of the year; and
- Greater availability of UC advances (interim payments made pending the first payment of UC, recovered from the ongoing award) by-
  - “refreshing” the internal DWP guidance;
  - Making payments within 5 working days (or same day if in “immediate need”); and
  - Ensuring DWP Work Coaches offer advances proactively.

On 26 October the [Work and Pensions Committee published a report](#) on the “baked-in” 6 week wait for UC, which it described as a “major obstacle to the success of the policy.” It noted compelling evidence linking it to an increase in acute financial difficulty, adding that most low-income families do not have the savings to see them through the period. While welcoming the increased availability of advance payments, the Committee did not believe these were a solution to a fundamental flaw in the benefit’s design. The Committee recommended that the Government reduce the standard waiting time for a first UC payment to one month.

Further information can be found in the following Library briefings:

- CBP-8096, [Universal Credit roll-out: Autumn/Winter 2017](#), 15 November 2017
- CBP-6547, [Housing costs in Universal Credit](#), 1 January 2018
- CDP-2017-0267, [The effect of Universal Credit on the private rented sector](#), 1 January 2018

## 2.4 Budget announcements

In the November Budget the Government announced a further package of changes worth £1.5 billion in total over the next few years. It comprises:

- From January 2018, allowing people to receive UC advances worth 100% of their estimated award, and extending the repayment period from 6 to 12 months
- From February 2018, abolishing the 7 “waiting days” at the beginning of a new claim, so that the minimum wait before first payment of UC should now be 5 weeks rather than 6 weeks, after the claim is registered
- From April 2018, introducing a 2 week Housing Benefit “run-on” for people moving to UC
- From Spring 2018, a new facility allowing online applications for UC advances
- Making it easier for claimants to have their housing element paid to the landlord
- A short-term measure to continue support for temporary accommodation through Housing Benefit
- Partnership working with Citizens Advice to provide more face to face support for UC claimants

Further information can be found in the DWP press release, [More detail on £1.5 billion package of support for Universal Credit](#).

A [letter dated 23 November from the DWP’s Director General of Universal Credit, Neil Couling, to Chief Executives of local authorities](#) gives further details of the policy changes to UC outlined in the Budget.

Alongside the measures listed above, the Secretary of State also announced that the Government had “carefully revised the UC roll-out plan to ensure that we continue to safely and gradually roll out this

important welfare reform.”<sup>29</sup> Instead of rolling out the Full Service to 186 new jobcentre areas between February and April 2018, the Government now plans to roll out the Full Service to only 30 new jobcentre areas over this period. The completion of the Full Service roll-out has been pushed back from September 2018 to December 2018. The latest plan does not however change the final point at which full roll-out of UC will be completed – the Government’s target is still to complete the “managed migration” to UC by March 2022.

## Responses

Links to selected responses to the Budget announcements are given below:

- Child Poverty Action Group, [BUDGET 2017: RESCUE PACKAGE FOR UNIVERSAL CREDIT BUT NO STRUCTURAL REFORM TO KEEP THE PROMISE OF GREATER REWARDS FROM WORK](#), 22 November 2017
- Citizens Advice, [Citizens Advice responds to Autumn Budget 2017 announcements on Universal Credit](#), 23 November 2017
- Gingerbread, [Budget announcements on Universal Credit welcome but not enough to make work pay](#), 22 November 2017
- Low Incomes Tax Reform Group press release, [Changes to universal credit announced – but do they go far enough?](#), 22 November 2017
- Local Government Association, [Budget 2017: LGA responds to Universal Credit announcement](#), 22 November 2017
- Trussell Trust, [The Trussell Trust responds to The Budget](#), 22 November 2017

The Work and Pensions Committee held an [evidence session on 29 November](#) at which experts from the Resolution Foundation, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, the Low Incomes Tax Reform Group, and Policy in Practice gave their views on the Budget announcements on wider issues concerning Universal Credit they believe should be addressed.

Following on from this, the Work and Pensions Committee [announced a further call for evidence](#) to help inform its rolling programme of work on UC. It requested submissions on a number of areas, namely-

### Self-employment

- In addition to new submissions, the Committee would welcome updates on submissions made to its earlier inquiry on Self-employment and the gig economy.
- What effect has UC had on self-employed people?
- How can the Department best balance protecting public funds with supporting self-employed people in UC? Does the Minimum Income Floor (MIF) achieve this balance?
- Are any groups of self-employed people particularly likely to be affected by the MIF?

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<sup>29</sup> HC Deb 23 November 2017 c1201



- What are the options for reforming the MIF, and what are their cost implications?
- Is the existing Start-up Period for newly self-employed UC claimants appropriate? If not, what changes should be made and how much would these cost?
- To what extent will UC Surplus Earnings Rules offset the impact of the MIF?
- How should “gainful self-employment” be defined under UC? For example, should “gig economy” workers be eligible to claim UC as self-employed?
- What is the relationship between the MIF and National Living Wage/National Minimum Wage? Is there a risk that removing or reforming the MIF would undermine the NLW/NMW?

### **Free School Meals and passported benefits**

- How should eligibility for Free School Meals in UC be determined?
- How can eligibility criteria for passported benefits balance UC work incentives with achieving value for money? Is this balance currently being achieved?
- Are current eligibility criteria for other passported benefits (eg. help with health costs and the Healthy Start Scheme) appropriate? If not, how should they be reformed?

### **Work incentives**

- What would be the impact of adjusting a) the taper rate or b) UC work allowances on employment incentives in UC? Which option for reform would be most cost-effective?
- Should UC have different taper rates and/or work allowances for different claimant groups?
- How can the Department help UC claimants better understand the impact on their incomes of moving into work or taking on more hours?

### **Universal Support**

- How important is Universal Support to the success of UC?
- Is Universal Support working well, and how could it be improved?
- Are there local variations in the quality of Universal Support? If so, how should these be addressed?

### **Childcare support**

- Are UC systems for reporting childcare costs easy for claimants to use? How might they be improved?

## 3. Policy papers and research

### 3.1 Research on food banks and food poverty

#### House of Commons Library briefing papers

[Food banks and food poverty](#), April 2014

This briefing paper explains how food banks work, examines their growth and discusses possible contributing factors and policy developments.

See also a briefing from the Scottish Parliament Information Centre (SPICe), [The increasing demand for emergency food aid in the UK](#), June 2014.

#### Government

Hannah Lambie-Mumford et al, [Household Food Security in the UK: A Review of Food Aid](#), University of Warwick and Food Ethics Council, 20 February 2014

This research report was commissioned by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs. It looked at available evidence on what 'food aid' is available to households in the UK, who takes it up and why. 'Food aid' covers a range of different types of support, including short term help available from food banks and soup runs, as well as food provided as part of community care such as 'Meals on Wheels'.

#### Reports of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Hunger

[Feeding Britain: A strategy for zero hunger in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland](#), December 2014

[Six Months On: A progress report on the work of the All Party Parliamentary Inquiry into Hunger in the United Kingdom](#), July 2014

[A route map to ending hunger as we know it in the United Kingdom](#), December 2015

[Britain's not-so hidden hunger: A progress report](#), April 2016

[Ending Hunger in the holidays](#), December 2017

This APPG is chaired by Frank Field MP who introduced the [School Holidays \(Meals and Activities\) Bill 2017-19](#) to Parliament on the 5 September 2017. The Bill would require local authorities to provide free meals and activities for children during school holidays.

#### Advocacy groups

Rachel Loopstra and Doireann Lalor, [Financial insecurity, food insecurity, and disability: The profile of people receiving emergency food assistance from The Trussell Trust Foodbank Network in Britain](#), Report for the Trussell Trust, June 2017

The Trussell Trust commissioned an 18-month research project from the University of Oxford, led by Dr Rachel Loopstra. It is the single biggest

nationwide study on foodbank use to date. Involving more than 400 households referred to foodbanks, the data collected on demographics, income levels, living conditions, health, and food insecurity provides detail about both the circumstances of people referred to foodbanks and the key drivers of foodbank use.

Jane Perry, Martin Williams, Tom Sefton and Moussa Haddad, [Emergency Use Only: Understanding and reducing the use of food banks in the UK](#), Report commissioned by the Child Poverty Action Group, Church of England, Oxfam GB and the Trussell Trust, November 2014

This paper examines why people are turning to food banks, how food bank use fits with their wider coping strategies, and what might be done to reduce the need that leads to food bank use.

YMCA England, [Food for thought: An insight into why young people in England access food banks](#), November 2014.

In 2013, YMCAs in England referred in the region of 5,000 young people to food banks. Research conducted for YMCAs in England in 2014 found that 79% of the YMCAs making these referrals had to do so as a direct result of delays in receiving benefit payments and punitive sanctions.

Niall Cooper, Sarah Purcell and Ruth Jackson, [Below the Breadline: The relentless rise of food poverty in Britain](#), Oxfam, June 2014

This joint paper by Oxfam GB, Church Action on Poverty and The Trussell Trust is a follow up to the 2013 research report [Walking the Breadline](#). It shows that a combination of changes to the social security system, including a more punitive sanctions regime, a lack of decent work and rising living costs are contributing significantly to food poverty. More and more people are being forced to turn to food banks to put food on their table.

## **Academia**

[Benefit changes will entrench the poor in 'food bank Britain'](#), April 2017  
Grover, C (Social Policy- Lancaster University)

Grover argues that changes to child tax credits and disability benefits have entrenched foodbank use in the UK.

[The rise in foodbanks in Germany is increasing the commodification of poverty without addressing its structural causes](#), July 2013

Selke, S (Sociology and social change, London School of Economics)

Selke notes that the rise in the number of foodbanks is often linked to Germany's welfare reforms. He cites that over 50,000 volunteers across

Germany are now involved with the collection of surplus food from supermarkets which is then offered to the poor by local organisations. In the past 20 years, foodbanks in Germany have been able to extend the range of their users considerably and now provide more than 1.5 million people (including children) with food.

## 3.2 Universal Credit and food banks

### Library briefing papers on Universal Credit

[Opposition Day Debate – Universal Credit](#), December 2017

This Commons Library landing page contains recent Library briefings, parliamentary material, press releases, and Government material designed to help Members prepare for the Opposition Day Debate on Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2017.

[Universal Credit roll-out: Autumn/Winter 2017](#), November 2017

This briefing paper explains the roll out process of Universal Credit over the Autumn/ Winter of 2017. It explains what Universal Credit is and how it is being rolled out. It includes some key statistics and a summary of work by the Work and Pensions Committee on waiting times under Universal Credit (detailed below).

House of Lords Library, [Impact of Universal Credit on Claimants](#), November 2017

This House of Lords Library briefing was prepared in advance of the debate on the impact of Universal Credit on claimants in the House of Lords on 16 November 2017.

### Government

Department for Work and Pensions, [More detail on £1.5 billion package of support for Universal Credit](#), November 2017

This press release gives more details of the changes to Universal Credit announced in the 2017 Autumn Budget.

### Advocacy groups

Moussa Haddad, Jane Perry and Mia Hadfield-Spoor, [Emergency Use Only: Update 2017](#), Child Poverty Action Group and The Trussell Trust, December 2017

This report highlighted existing examples of interventions that help tackle the problems that lead people to use food banks, currently going on at a range of different levels from local food banks and community groups to national governments. The report assessed what progress has been made on challenges identified in an earlier study from 2014, [Emergency Use Only](#).

Citizens Advice, [Delivering Universal Credit](#), July 2017

This report sets out the main problems that can occur at each stage of a claim to Universal Credit and proposes solutions.

The Trussell Trust, [Early Warnings: Universal Credit and Foodbanks](#), April 2017

This report looked at the impact of the transition to Universal Credit on use of food banks and suggested some ways in which adverse side effects of the transition could be mitigated.

### **Think Tanks**

Resolution Foundation, [Universal Remedy: ensuring Universal Credit is fit for purpose](#), October 2017

This report builds on the work of Resolution Foundation's 2015 expert panel-led review of UC, chaired by Nick Timmins. It uses analysis to make recommendations on adjustments to Universal Credit.

## **3.3 Measuring food insecurity**

House of Commons Library debate pack, [Household food insecurity measurement in the UK](#), December 2016

Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, [Food Statistics Pocketbook 2017](#), October 2017

This annual publication contains information on UK food expenditure and discusses the affordability of food for those on low incomes.

The Food Foundation, [Household food insecurity: the missing data](#), November 2016

This short briefing sets out what data is currently available on food insecurity and argues for more specific data collection in future.

## **3.4 Merseyside**

House of Commons Library debate pack, [Poverty in the Liverpool City Region](#), February 2017

Includes statistics on poverty rates in the North West region and child poverty in the City Region.

Liverpool City Region, [Child Poverty and Life Chances Strategy](#), January 2016

Liverpool John Moores University and the University of Liverpool, [The State of Liverpool City Region Report: Making the most of devolution](#), January 2016

A report conducted jointly on behalf of the Vice-Chancellors of Liverpool John Moores University and the University of Liverpool. The report assesses where the city region now stands, where it should go next, how it should get there and how devolution might help. The report argues for the city region to create an organisation to generate better intelligence, analysis and arguments in part to tackle food insecurity (see page 78). A detailed summary of deprivation statistics for the city region begins on page 48.

Liverpool City Council: Mayoral Action Group on Fairness and Poverty, [Welfare Reform Cumulative Impact Analysis 2016](#), March 2017

The report highlights impacts of benefit policy changes on key groups of Liverpool residents. The report is intended to help the Council and partners further develop its approach to supporting those particular by benefits changes.

Liverpool City Council Director of Public Health, [Annual Report of the Director of Public Health 2016/17: The Impact of Austerity on Health and Wellbeing](#)

This report includes a section on food poverty in Liverpool (beginning on page 28), it concludes:

The increasing rates of hospital admissions for malnutrition are a concern. There is no doubting the difficulties for families in managing their food budgets in difficult times, is compounded by the high concentration of fast food outlets. In Liverpool, as in other parts of the country many people and groups are already acting to support those in food poverty and tackle its root causes. The Mayoral Action Group on Fairness and Poverty have recognised the rising levels of food poverty in the city as a priority issue and under its auspices, a Food Insecurity Strategy Group has been formed to bring together partners across the city to coordinate action to address food insecurity. As it formulates its strategy one of its first steps is to understand more about the extent of food poverty in the city and to use that evidence to press for further action at a national level and support a local joined up response.

Wirral Council, [The Wirral Plan. A 2020 Vision: Wirral residents live healthier lives](#)

A report detailing Wirral Council's plan to promote healthy lifestyles which includes a policy aim to reduce the number of foodbanks in the council area (see page 22).

## 4. Parliamentary material

### 4.1 Committee inquiries

#### **House of Commons Work and Pensions Committee: Universal Credit inquiries**

[Benefit delivery, Fourth Report of Session 2015-16](#), December 2015

Report in which the Committee raised concerns regarding delays in benefit payments and underpayment of benefits.

[Benefit delivery: Government response to the Committee's fourth report of session 2015-16](#), July 2016

Government response to the above report.

[Universal Credit rollout inquiry](#)

This inquiry is currently open and the Committee are seeking written submissions. The Committee has published a report [Universal Credit: the six week wait](#) as part of this inquiry.

Recent oral evidence sessions took place on the [29<sup>th</sup> November 2017](#) and the [18<sup>th</sup> October 2017](#).

#### **Scottish Parliament Welfare Reform Committee (June 2014)**

[Food Banks and Welfare Reform](#), June 2014

The Committee reported that it was "convinced by the volume and strength of the evidence" received that there is a direct correlation between welfare reform and the increase in the use of food banks. It therefore urged the UK Government to acknowledge this link and said it "could no longer ignore the evidence".

### 4.2 Debates

[Liverpool City Region \(Poverty\)](#)

Motion that this House has considered poverty in the Liverpool city region. Motion lapsed.

01 Mar 2017 | Debates | House of Commons | 622 cc103-127WH

[Universal Credit Roll-out](#)

Second opposition day debate. Closure motion. Agreed to on question. Main question agreed to on division (299 to 0).

18 Oct 2017 | Opposition days | House of Commons | 629 cc859-959

[Universal Credit Roll-out](#)

Motion that this House has considered the Government's response to the decision of the House on pausing the Universal Credit full service

roll-out. Emergency debate following a Standing Order No. 24 application. Agreed to on Question.

24 Oct 2017 | Emergency debates | House of Commons | 630 cc181-235

#### [Universal Credit](#)

Lords motion to take note of the impact of Universal Credit on claimants. Agreed to on question.

16 Nov 2017 | Debates | House of Lords | 785 cc2127-2172

#### [Household Food Insecurity](#)

Motion that this House has considered household food insecurity measurement in the UK. Agreed

06 Dec 2016 | Debates | House of Commons | 618 cc1-16WH

## 4.3 Parliamentary Questions

### Tackling food poverty

Many Members have asked the Government what steps they are taking to tackle food poverty or provide for those who are in need of emergency food aid (see questions: [HC109568](#), [HC7602](#), [HC63784](#)).

The Government has stated:

We have a well-established system of hardship payments, benefit advances and budgeting loans. During 2017/18 we will spend £95 billion on working age benefits. We are determined to make work pay and to support people into work whilst protecting the most vulnerable in society.<sup>30</sup>

Martin Day asked the Government if they would bring forward legislative proposals to ensure that more surplus food is redistributed by retailers to charities supporting those experiencing hunger and food poverty ([HC063](#)). The Department for Work and Pensions said that:

The Government is working with food businesses through a voluntary approach to reduce food waste, including through redistribution when surplus food cannot be avoided. Business signatories to the Courtauld 2025 Commitment are aiming to double the amount of food surplus they send for redistribution between 2015 and 2020. We do not have plans to legislate.

### Food poverty and data collection

A number of Members of both Houses have asked the Government about its plans to monitor food poverty (see questions: [HL2934](#), [HL1284](#), [HL1163](#), [HC69890](#)). The Government has stated that they...

...have recently commenced a review of the UK Food Security Assessment, to update and refresh the suite of indicators within it. It is a comprehensive analysis of all aspects of food security, including household food security.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) continue to monitor household spending on food through its Living Costs and Food

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<sup>30</sup> Dan Jarvis, Department for Work and Pensions, HC 109568, 25 October 2017



Survey. The ONS does not conduct a survey recording experiences of household food security.<sup>31</sup>

Lord Kennedy of Southwark also asked the Government what assessment they had made of findings “by the Food and Agriculture Organization showing that 4.2 per cent of households in the UK have experienced severe food insecurity, the second highest rate in Europe” (see question [HL1662](#)). The Government stated that the...

... The measure provides a partial picture of a broader issue.

The ONS Living Costs and Food Survey (LCFS) contains questions about household spend on food, including that of the lowest 20% income households, which has remained stable between 16% and 16.5% for a number of years.

This Government is committed to tackling poverty and disadvantage and delivering real social reform, and we believe that economic growth and employment offer the best route to give people a better future. There are now 954,000 fewer workless households; and 608,000 fewer children in workless households compared with 2010. The employment rate is also at a record high of 75.3%. The number of people in work has risen 379,000 over the last year bringing the total employment level to a record high of 32.14 million. We also provide a strong safety net through the welfare system for those who need extra support.

## Universal Credit and food banks

During Oral Questions to the Department for Work and Pensions on 13 November 2017 and again on 18 December 2017, a series of questions were asked about Universal Credit and food poverty. These centred on the issue of long wait times for Universal Credit increasing the need for food banks. The exchanges are reproduced in full below. As noted above, the Government announced at the Budget on 22 November 2017 that it will abolish the seven day waiting period at the start of claims from February 2018, so that new claimants wait five weeks for their first payment rather than six weeks.

### [Universal Credit: Food Bank Usage](#)

18 December 2017 | Volume 633

#### **Ms Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab)**

6. If he will make an assessment of the effect of the length of waiting time to receive universal credit on levels of food bank usage. [902983]

#### **Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab)**

15. If he will make an assessment of the effect of the length of waiting time to receive universal credit on levels of food bank usage. [902992]

#### **The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr David Gauke)**

There is no reason for people to go without support while they wait for their first UC payment. New benefit claimants starting on UC today will be able to access an advance. This is normally paid within five working days, but can be delivered in a day if needed. Changes

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<sup>31</sup> Lord Gardiner of Kimble, Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, HL2934, 20 November 2017

announced in the Budget will allow claimants to receive larger advances and for advances to be recovered over a longer period.

**Ms Lee**

Given the waiting period for universal credit, people face a choice: they can have no money to buy food, so either use a food bank or starve, or they can get a loan, as the Secretary of State says. Does he agree that pushing people who are already on a low income because they are on a benefit into debt in this way is totally unacceptable?

**Mr Gauke**

I do not accept the hon. Lady's categorisation at all. The complaint that has been made about universal credit is about the cash-flow point—that people have to wait a period of time before they get their first payment. To address the cash-flow point there is a system of advances in the universal credit system so that people have the flexibility to receive the money earlier. It is an advance, they get it paid earlier—they do not get it paid twice, I accept that, but they get it paid earlier—and it is a perfectly sensible way to address a cash-flow issue.

**Helen Hayes**

The Peabody Trust estimates that 60,000 households will have made a new universal credit claim in the six weeks before Christmas and will not receive their first payment before the holiday period. The need is already being felt in my constituency, where last week Norwood food bank provided food for an extraordinary 128 people in a single session. What is the Secretary of State's advice to families who are trying to provide a happy Christmas for their children without the means to afford even basic necessities?

**Mr Gauke**

We should be clear: if people need cash before Christmas, they are able to get it under the universal credit system, which is designed so that they can do that. People trying to discourage claimants from taking an advance, which I am afraid is the tone that we hear too often from the Labour party, are causing unnecessary anxiety for claimants.

**Margaret Greenwood (Wirral West) (Lab)**

The chief executive of the Financial Conduct Authority has recently warned about high levels of debt among young people incurred just by their covering basic household bills such as rent. Young people aged 18 to 21 are not entitled to housing support under universal credit. Why did the Government ignore a Social Security Advisory Committee recommendation that young people on the edge of care should be exempted from that?

**Mr Gauke**

As the hon. Lady will be aware, there are a whole host of exemptions that do allow 18 to 21-year-olds to access housing benefit, if those exemptions apply to them. I have to come back to this point, which the Labour party does not seem to accept: the best way in which we can sustainably lift people out of poverty is to have a welfare system that encourages them to work and to progress in work. That is what

universal credit does and it is what the legacy system failed to do, which is why we are making these changes.

Food banks and Universal Credit were previously raised at Oral Questions on 13 November 2017, prior to the announcements in the Budget:

[Universal Credit: Food Poverty](#)

13 November 2017 | Volume 631

**Ms Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab)**

5. If he will make an assessment of the effect of the length of waiting time to receive universal credit on levels of food poverty. [901836]

**The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr David Gauke)**

The availability of advances at the start of a universal credit claim ensures that those who need money immediately can access it. Our data shows that around half of claimants are receiving advances, and we have recently undertaken an exercise to improve awareness and access to this support.

**Ms Lee**

The manager of a food bank in Lincoln has said that there is evidence of a clear correlation locally between the introduction of universal credit—in Lincoln, we have only had it partially so far; we are getting full roll-out in March—and an increase in the use of food banks. I ask for your comments on that, and do Government Members, including yourself, think it is acceptable that people in Lincoln and across this country are starving but for food banks because of waiting for universal credit payments.

**Mr Speaker**

I would not presume to say what is acceptable for the people of Lincoln—that is way above my pay grade—but the Secretary of State might wish to proffer an opinion on the matter, and we look forward to it with interest and anticipation.

**Mr Gauke**

This is why I repeatedly make the point that nobody needs to wait a long period of time for cash support under the universal credit system, and to suggest otherwise is causing unnecessary anxiety for those who are not on universal credit—and I think we should all discuss this in a slightly more responsible manner.

**Robert Jenrick (Newark) (Con)**

When I visited Newark's jobcentre a week or so ago, I found that 80% of the jobs on offer were paid either four-weekly or monthly. Does the Secretary of State agree that we have to be careful not to patronise working people and not to prevent them from entering the workplace with as much ease as possible? The vast majority of jobs in my constituency are paid monthly.

**Mr Gauke**

My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Part of the purpose of universal credit is to close the gap between being out of work and being in work. Most jobs are paid monthly, and getting people used to that monthly system is a sensible approach. I also very much welcome the fact that my hon. Friend has visited a jobcentre, and I recommend that other hon. Members do so, to hear how universal credit is operating on the ground. I know that many hon. Members have found the experience to be extremely positive.

**Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab)**

I will not ask Government Front Benchers for a fifth time whether I should believe the Secretary of State's statement that the roll-out of universal credit in Birkenhead will be hunky-dory, or the opinion of the food bank, which says that it will need an extra 10 tonnes of food to prevent people from going hungry—if he cannot abide the word “starving”. We will have a debate on this on Thursday, which Members across the House have signed up to. This will be the first time that Conservative Members will have an opportunity to vote on whether they want to reform universal credit. Will the Secretary of State open that debate, hear it and take the message directly back to Cabinet, please?

**Mr Gauke**

The position that we have made clear for a long time is that we want to ensure that universal credit works. This is a test-and-learn system, and we are always looking at ways in which we can improve it, particularly for that first period. I would say to the right hon. Gentleman and to the House as a whole that universal credit is helping us to address the best way to deal with poverty, which is to ensure that people can get into work. That is the argument that I and my right hon. and hon. Friends will continue to make.

**Bill Grant (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Con)**

I, too, have visited jobcentres, and I know that work coaches are an integral part of the universal credit system. Will my right hon. Friend tell me how the new work coaches will assist jobseekers in my constituency in their eager quest to find employment?

**Mr Gauke**

My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is why we are recruiting work coaches up and down the United Kingdom to provide the personalised support that people need to help them get into work. I come back to my experience of meeting work coaches in jobcentres up and down the country. They believe that they have a system in place that is helping them to do more to transform lives, and that is hugely important.

**Debbie Abrahams (Oldham East and Saddleworth) (Lab)**

One of the original objectives of universal credit was to reduce child poverty. In 2010, the Government said that UC would reduce child poverty by 350,000. That figure was revised to 150,000 in 2013, but last year, Ministers failed to produce a figure in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown). What is

the Government's current estimate of how many children will be lifted out of poverty as a result of universal credit?

**Mr Gauke**

Universal credit gives people a better opportunity to work, and it gives parents, including single parents, greater support with childcare. I come back to the example I gave the House a moment ago. Someone who had previously been on income support and unable to get help with childcare can now get that help and get on to the employment ladder, thanks to universal credit. That is what universal credit is delivering.

**Debbie Abrahams**

That was a really disappointing answer. As we have already heard, the Child Poverty Action Group published data last week predicting that 1 million more children will be pushed into poverty as a result of universal credit cuts, 300,000 of whom will be under the age of five. Another objective of universal credit was always to make work pay. Given that four out of 10 people on UC are in work and will be on average £2,600 a year worse off, when will the Government admit that UC is not fit for purpose or fit to meet the challenges of a new labour market and stop its roll-out?

**Mr Gauke**

May I just point out that child poverty is down since 2010? I think the hon. Lady has rather given the game away: she does not want to pause and fix universal credit; she wants to scrap it. She wants to rewind to a system under which claimants faced marginal deduction rates of over 90% and had to cope with a multitude of benefits. We had a benefits system that was not an aid but an impediment to working people and that trapped people in poverty and dependency. That is what universal credit will bring an end to.

## 5. Press Material

### 5.1 Local news in Merseyside

Liverpool Echo, [Everything you need to know about food banks this festive season](#), 6 December 2017

Liverpool Echo, [Liverpool pay tribute to supporters after food bank donations record ahead of Huddersfield win](#), 30 October 2017

Liverpool Echo, [North Liverpool foodbank gave out more than 2,600 emergency packages in six months](#), 8 November 2016

### 5.2 National news

The Guardian, [Corbyn criticises Esther McVey promotion but condemns online abuse](#), 10 January 2018

The Huffington Post, [Food banks in 2017: Change is possible](#), 22 December 2017

The Guardian, [Councils forced to fund emergency help for universal credit claimants](#), 29 December 2017

The Financial Times, [Britain's foodbanks prepare for difficult winter](#), 4 November 2017

The Telegraph, [UK food bank usage rises again with benefit delays the most common reason](#), 8 November 2017

The Times, [Number of Food banks to rise to 2,000](#), May 30 2017

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