

**Social Security Advisory Committee  
Minutes of the meeting held on 4 November 2020  
Caxton House, Tothill Street, London, SW1H 9NA**

Chair: Dr Stephen Brien

Members: Bruce Calderwood  
Carl Emmerson  
Phil Jones  
Grainne McKeever  
Dominic Morris  
Seyi Obakin  
Liz Sayce

Apologies: Chris Goulden  
Kayley Hignell<sup>1</sup>  
Charlotte Pickles

**1 - 4. Private sessions**

*[PARTIALLY RESERVED]*

***Postal clearance of Regulations***

1.4 The Committee noted that the following regulations<sup>2</sup> had been cleared by correspondence in the period following its last meeting:

- *The Universal Credit (Persons who have attained state pension credit qualifying age) Amendment (Amendment) Regulations 2020*
- *The Social Security (Coronavirus) (Further Measures) (short periods of JSA claimant's sickness extension) Regulations 2020*
- *The Social Security (Coronavirus) (Further Measures) (Carer's Allowance Extension) Regulations 2020*
- *The Social Security (Coronavirus) (Further Measures) (Minimum Income Floor Extension) Regulations 2020*

***The Universal Credit (Exceptions to the Requirement not to be receiving Education) (Amendment) 2020***

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<sup>1</sup> On maternity leave

<sup>2</sup> These were subsequently consolidated into a single package of regulations: *The Social Security (Coronavirus) (Further Measures) (Amendment) and Miscellaneous Amendment Regulations 2020*

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1.5 The Chair noted that, while the Department had invoked the urgency provision and laid *The Universal Credit (Exceptions to the Requirement not to be receiving Education) (Amendment) 2020* before presenting them to SSAC the previous month, the Committee needed to reach a view on whether or not to take the regulations on formal reference. In an attempt to make progress, he and Grainne McKeever had met Katie Farrington, (Director for Universal Credit), Kirsten Parker, (Deputy Director for Universal Credit) and Mark Vidic, (HEO, Universal Credit cross-cutting strategy) to seek further clarity on the policy intent of the regulations.

1.6 Following the meeting, the Department had provided a further iteration of the policy intent, which had been circulated to the Committee. Following further consideration, it was agreed that the regulations would not be taken on formal reference, but that there should be some engagement with the Department about the need for them to provide a clear and concise articulation of the policy intent of each set of regulations presented to SSAC for statutory scrutiny. The Chair said that he would engage Jonathan Mills on this point.

### **5. *HMRC presentation: Update on changes to the administration to Child Benefit***

5.1 The Chair thanked Shelagh Brown (HMRC, Customer Services Transformation Manager) and Melissa Burgess (HMRC, Delivery of Projects) for offering to update the Committee on the new IT service being implemented for Child Benefit.

5.2 Introducing the item, Shelagh Brown informed the Committee that the existing IT system used to administer Child Benefit system is 40-plus years old and would soon be decommissioned. The current service was sited on the DWP estate, and HMRC was building a replacement in-house service. The new service would be a more modern system which would:

- be available from February 2021;
- be seamless for customers who would not notice the change;
- continue to make payments as now.

5.3 HMRC reported that they had conducted thorough testing of: migrating the data, payment processing, and the end to end service. Three dress rehearsals had taken place to test the data migration, the third rehearsal met the quality criteria. Although the new service would improve the time taken to process new claims to child benefit, there would be a short period where HMRC would be unable to update live child benefit records with changes, or process new claims. HMRC would communicate with its customers on what the change would mean for them, and would have processes in place to support customers in financial hardship.

5.4 The following main questions were raised by Committee members in discussion:

- (a) **HMRC were of the view that most customers would not notice the change. Was that an objective for HMRC?**

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The objective was to replace the current service whilst minimising any customer impact. Customers would notice a different reference number on their bank statement. Some new claimants who reported a change of circumstances might be aware, and some who claim over the phone might also experience a slight delay. HMRC would be clear with customers what any delay would mean for them.

**(b) In terms of understanding the context; what had prompted the change?**

The existing platform used by HMRC to administer Child Benefit was located on DWP estate. The system would soon be decommissioned and, unless HMRC entered into a negotiation to extend that or appoint a new one, a change was required.

**(c) How far was the third rehearsal from the first and second one?**

The first rehearsal exposed a number of issues to be addressed. The second rehearsal worked much better, and the third met the quality criteria. HMRC engaged internal and external reviewers to test the data migration approach. Their feedback was that HMRC was taking the right approach to minimise risks.

**(d) The implementation of a replacement IT platform to support the child benefit system will result in reduced processing times. What other opportunities for strengthening the system have been considered?**

HMRC's initial business case was to replace and transform the existing platform, but constraints limited the scope to build a like for like service. Nonetheless the replacement system would provide greater validation preventing errors entering the system (for example it will prevent multiple claims being made for the same children).

**(e) What additional features would HMRC have liked to introduce to improve the administration of child benefit?**

The introduction of digital claims, to improve the way HMRC was able to engage with high income customers, and to have a more automated process in communicating with parents of children who were about to turn age 16 to establish whether they would continue to be in full time education (for customers in England and Scotland).

The new system would provide a platform to make such improvements at a later date, funding permitting.

**(f) What sort of anomaly issues was HMRC checking?**

The main batch of checks was around data and current validation; and cross checking with the payments for the children. HMRC had invested in work to be undertaken to correct data. There were issues around separate family units that come together. Each family may have more than one child where

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the first child receives the higher amount of CHB, and this may not be paid appropriately. In other cases, the first child may have left education, and so the second child would now be eligible for the higher payment. Anomalies usually happened in such cases.

**(g) Were checks undertaken on 100 per cent of the customers making a claim?**

HRMC would match payments to what it was expecting to pay. HMRC was aware of the issues and what was needed to correct the process.

5.5 The Chair thanked Shelagh Brown and Melissa Burgess for attending the meeting and updating Committee member on developments.

**6. Private session: AOB/Current issues**

*Date of next meeting*

6.1 The Committee's next meeting was scheduled to take place on 9 December.

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**Annex A**

Secretariat: Denise Whitehead (Committee Secretary)  
Nishan Jeyasingam (Assistant Secretary)  
Jaishree Patel (Assistant Secretary)  
George Watley (Assistant Secretary)

Item 6: Shelagh Brown (HMRC, Customer Services Transformation  
Manager)  
Melissa Burgess (HMRC, Delivery of Projects)