Response to the Universal Credit experimental statistics: future developments open consultation

October 2017

Overarching GLA comments

The Greater London Authority (GLA) welcomes the Government's plans to further expand the range of data on Universal Credit that is made available and this opportunity to shape those plans. Our response begins by setting out some overarching comments for context, before responding to the questionnaire questions from the consultation document.

The GLA is the strategic authority for London. It comprises of the Mayor and London Assembly and has responsibility over areas such as strategic planning, housing, and economic development – this often requires working closely with local authorities in London. Comprehensive data on benefits claimants, including Universal Credit data, is important to the effective discharge of these responsibilities.

Notably, limited data on Universal Credit claims, awards and claimants available in the early stages of the benefit has constituted a barrier for us in assessing the housing needs of Londoners and understanding trends in the labour market. This is of increasing significance as Universal Credit is rolled out to a growing number and range of claimants. We look forward to having access to fuller information, not least because we anticipate that this would mean we are again able to chart long-term trends in (different groups of) Londoners' needs for help to cover the cost of different types of housing.

We would also like to be able to generate consistent time series. This raises a significant concern about changes in definition to headline series such as the Claimant Count or children in out-of-work benefit households. The coverage of the Claimant Count has changed significantly with the introduction of Universal Credit, which has had a significant impact on the numbers, see, for example, The impact of the roll-out of Universal Credit on the Claimant Count – London Datastore (which provides an examination of this issue). Trends in the series are no longer clear because of the size of the discontinuity, and GLA would like to be able to continue to monitor trends in series on the old definitions.

We welcome the regular publication of clear reports on Universal Credit, but our foremost concern is to see the range of data on Universal Credit claims and awards available on Stat-Xplore significantly expanded. Having access to raw data is essential to our capacity to assess the changing situation of groups of Londoners. Benefit data has the capability to do this at low level geographies, which we value, and it is important to have the capability to generate series consistent with definitions reported for legacy benefits. We would therefore encourage the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to prioritise the addition of Universal Credit data to the published statistical tables and to Stat-Xplore over and above the development of its regular print publications, valuable and important though those are.

Given the concerns we have highlighted above, we have listed below the information and requirements for it that are of greatest value to us, as well as completing the questionnaire questions set out in the consultation – in ways that reflect these preferences:

- **Consistency with JSA-based definition of Claimant Count**
  The roll-out of Universal Credit full service has brought about a significant discontinuity in the Claimant Count series, so it is no longer possible to measure trends. This issue is compounded as there will be a period of years where individuals counted by both measures will feature in the overall estimate of the Claimant Count.

- **Consistency with Housing Benefit Caseload data**
  Information on the number of claimants of Housing Benefit who reside in London is integral to our work, and has become more difficult during this transition period between Housing Benefit and Universal Credit. Facilitating simple linking of the Housing Benefit caseload data and Universal Credit claims data would be a key requirement to monitor the number of claimants over time.

  To facilitate the construction of an accurate timeseries, it may be simpler for the DWP to publish a historic timeseries which covers part of the period prior to Universal Credit, in order that the correct figure regarding claimant numbers for housing costs (either Housing Benefit or the housing support component of Universal Credit) can be used.

- **Housing tenure**
  Information on the housing tenure of Universal Credit claimants is valuable to understanding housing need. In order for us to more accurately understand the need of some of the most vulnerable groups, who may place particular demands on the public purse, it would be useful for the regular published statistical tables to follow the precedent of the [Housing Benefit Caseload](#) statistical release, and to include similar categories. The inclusion of information on Universal Credit claims by tenure would be a key requirement.

  With regard to additional information on Stat-Xplore, it would be useful to include information to identify the following:

  o   homeless households in temporary accommodation
  o   those living in supported accommodation (subject to decisions about the extension of Universal Credit to this group).

- **Geography**
  It is vital that information is available at local authority and government office regional level by where claimants reside, additional to where they claim. This is essential, given the statutory duties incumbent on both the GLA (as a strategic regional authority) and local authorities, including London boroughs, to assess and plan for housing needs in their areas.

- **Benefit Cap**
  Data on Universal Credit should indicate where claimants are subject to the Benefit Cap and data on the Benefit Cap should indicate where claimants are receiving Universal Credit. Where claimants are subject to the Benefit Cap, Universal Credit data should show the size of the deduction to which they are subject (probably by bands, for practical reasons). The extent to which the Benefit Cap impacts households is a major consideration in meeting housing needs in London – both in broad terms and for specific groups, such as homeless households whom London boroughs have a statutory duty to

provide accommodation. This information should be available by tenure, including the breakdowns highlighted above, and household type.

- **Payment arrangements**
  It would be helpful to have full information, broken down by geography (to local authority level), landlord and household type, on both requests for direct payment arrangements and the number of these requests that are granted. This is an important consideration in terms of work to limit and appropriately handle arrears and thus to prevent homelessness.

- **Time from claim to payment**
  Local authorities and charities with whom we work report that the time taken to process Universal Credit claims is a key barrier to securing private rented accommodation for (formerly) homeless households, including those to whom they have statutory duties. This can result in individuals becoming stuck in assessment centres, emergency accommodation or other precarious situations – something that can have detrimental impacts on the households involved and prove expensive for local authorities and charities. Having a clear picture of the time taken for awards to be made (and variations in this) may help tackle difficulties that these households seem to experience in accessing accommodation. For example, accurately identifying problems in the administration of Universal Credit is essential to tackling them; while being able to demonstrate timely processing of claims might also help provide reassurance to landlords who are reluctant to let to Universal Credit claimants.

- **Duration of award**
  As Universal Credit is rolled out, information on the periods for which claimants have been receiving Universal Credit will help identify the impacts of the benefit and, in particular, patterns of longer term benefit dependency. These may have implications for Londoners' ability to access and afford particular types of housing.

- **Information on protected characteristics**
  Having information on claimants' protected characteristics is important because of public sector bodies' duties under the Equality Act 2010, but it could also help with planning for meeting the housing needs of claimants with particular characteristics that may present specific considerations in terms of access to housing. For example:
  o   In relation to age, those aged 18 to 21 who have different entitlements to the housing support element of Universal Credit.
  o   In relation to disability, those with long term conditions are more likely to need particular types of support and/or housing in order to live independently.

- **Ad hoc publications and interactive map**
  Ad hoc publications such as Universal Credit: Statistics on Alternative Payment Arrangements (2016) have been useful resources. The formalisation of the publication of the information relayed by these released documents would be useful. However, most useful would be the inclusion of this data on Stat-Xplore, as this would greatly assist our work with boroughs and charities.

  The interactive map is also a useful tool. However, it could be improved by covering London as a region on its own (rather than grouping it with a selection of the Home Counties), and also by providing an option to observe the numbers of those resident in London claiming from London job centres. Providing extra variables, notably information on tenure, would also be desirable.

Questions

The Code of Practice on Access to Government Information means we would have to make available individual responses if we are asked to.

The closing date for completing this questionnaire is 24th October 2017.

You and Your Organisation

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Please tell us which of the following best describes you as a respondent:

Academic	
Business representative organisation/trade body	
Central Government	
Charity or social enterprise	
Individual	
Legal representative	
Local Government	X
Large business (over 250 staff)	
Medium business (50 to 250 staff)	

Small business (10 to 49 staff) ☐

Micro business (up to 9 staff) ☐

Other, please describe: ☐

_____

Universal Credit Experimental Statistics

Your use of Universal Credit Experimental Statistics

To help us understand your needs, please tell us a bit about what you use Universal Credit Official Statistics for, including any decisions the statistics will inform and questions you are looking to answer.

The GLA is the strategic authority for London and supports the Mayor and London Assembly in delivering their respective responsibilities and functions. This includes responsibility over areas such as strategic planning, housing, and economic development.

We use both published and experimental statistics on Universal Credit (UC), as well as those available through Stat-Xplore, to understand and monitor the economic situation of Londoners. We use many other statistics alongside this, including (but not limited to) data on other benefits, official statistics, and data from private sources. This is used in the development of policies and programmes in areas including skills and employment, poverty and inclusion, and housing and housing affordability.

For example:

GLA's Housing and Land directorate uses UC data to support the Mayor in his statutory duty to assess housing conditions in and the housing needs of Greater London, as outlined in the Greater London Authority Act 2007. It is also an important consideration in framing the London element of national affordable housing investment programmes, responsibility for which was devolved from Government to the Mayor through the 2011 Localism Act.

Understanding the number and profile of households receiving assistance with their housing costs through the welfare system is vital for understanding the affordability of different types on housing in London and thus the city's overall housing needs. The same applies to London boroughs, who hold statutory responsibilities for assessing and planning for housing need at local level.

We also use information on Londoners who receive assistance with housing costs through the benefit system to help us plan for the needs of particular groups, often in conjunction with London boroughs. This includes, for example, work to help London local authorities meet their obligations to homeless households and to ensure that London plays its part in resettling Syrian refugees.

From our work with housing association and local authority partners, we understand the importance to them of robust information on tenure-specific information on welfare claimants. With this, they are better placed to allocate social housing and to support tenants to sustain accommodation (or, where necessary, to move) as their benefits entitlements change.

GLA Economics has used Claimant Count data (including UC claimants) to analyse and report on conditions in the London labour market. This has been used to track conditions in the London labour market and understand changes in trends. Alongside other out-of-work benefits data, UC provides a timely indication of unemployment and allows for detailed analysis to be produced.

GLA Economics frequently develops time series of data, so it is important to be able to construct consistent series for the out-of-work benefit population including prior to the introduction of UC, during its roll-out, and subsequently. GLA Economics would like to have this capability in Stat-Xplore.

Question 1

What additional information would be useful to include in the monthly publication providing information about **People on Universal Credit**?

(1 – Essential, and top priority, 2 – Highly desirable 3 – Might be useful, but a lower priority)

Type of information	Ranking 1, 2 or 3	Why would you find this useful?
Further breakdowns by duration on Universal Credit, to include a 6-12m category, and a 12m+ category	1	Particularly essential as UC becomes the standard benefit, this will help to provide a picture of the relative proportions of claimants who receive UC over an extended period of time and those who need it on a short-term basis. This could help identify areas where or groups for whom interventions are needed to tackle longer term benefit dependency. From a housing perspective, it is also an important indicator of what type(s) of housing people might be able to afford over time – and therefore useful to the GLA's assessment of and planning for housing needs, as well as to boroughs' own assessment and planning. It would also be helpful to have this split by work status/conditionality regime.
Health condition	2	This could be helpful for understanding the profile of claimants - and thus to framing interventions to help people back into work. It may also provide a proxy for claimants who might have specific housing needs. Finally, it could help public bodies (including the GLA and local authorities) comply with their duties under the Equality Act 2010.
An indicator, or indicators, of vulnerability (e.g. homelessness)	1	There is widespread concern about the link between welfare reform (and UC specifically) and homelessness. Having this information could help to gauge how well-founded this concern is and to inform adjustments in the administration of UC and/or work to prevent homelessness. Please see general comments on housing tenure and the importance of identifying temporary

		accommodation and supported accommodation within this.
Ethnicity	1	This could help public bodies comply with their duties under the Equality Act 2010.
Flow of claimants between conditionality groups	1	A large proportion of people on UC are in employment, so this is important to understanding movements in the client group in/out of employment, and to understand the demand for/performance of in-work support.
Other…		
Information of what proportion of claimants are receiving housing support…	1	This is key in understanding housing need. It also seems to neatly complement the data on those in work or searching for it, in terms of providing an overview of the key components of UC.
…and, from that group, what proportion are subject to the Benefit Cap…	1	This is key in understanding housing need and, in particular, understanding the risk of homelessness.
… in addition: • Other benefits claimed • Household type • Elements of benefit claimed (e.g. disability, severe disability, childcare)	 2 2 1	All of these need to be published by geographic area (at least at a London level). These are essential in understanding the characteristics of the population claiming UC, thus enabling the GLA to develop programmes and policies to support claimants into work or with other needs.

Question 2

What additional information would be useful to include in the monthly publication providing information about **Starts to Universal Credit**?

Type of information	Ranking 1, 2 or 3	Why would you find this useful?
Breakdowns by Local Authority	1 (although depends – see comment)	It is essential to have this information, but if it is on Stat-Xplore, it does not necessarily need to be included in this monthly publication.
Other… • Information on the age of claimants should identify 18 to 21 year olds • Transition from other benefits where relevant (including legacy benefits) • Conditionality regime and work status • Reason for start (i.e. change in employment status, change of address, change in family status) • Short-term benefit advance requested/recommended/received	1 1 1 2 2	This is useful because it will help to chart the impact of the removal of automatic entitlement to housing support from this group. UC is extending significantly the Claimant Count population, and so it is important to better understand how this is happening. It is important that links to conditionality regime and work status should provide consistency of reporting with the JSA-based definition of Claimant Count in Stat-Xplore if not in published statistics.

Question 3

What additional information would be useful to include in the six-monthly publication providing information about **Households on Universal Credit**?

Type of information	Ranking 1, 2 or 3	Why would you find this useful?
Number of children	1	It determines the size of home that a household needs and is therefore helpful in the assessment of and planning for household needs. It also gives an indication of possible barriers to employment. It is useful to specify whether or not they are dependent children and/or the age (band) of the youngest child. This would give a sense of whether claimants would be expected to engage in full work search activity and the potential barriers to work-related activity.
Number of child elements the household is entitled to	3	
Households whose income includes earnings	1	This is useful for similar reasons to data on claimants who are in work. It forms useful data on housing affordability, particularly in combination with data on households receiving housing support. It would need to be clear what period of time would be considered in identifying whether a household's income included earnings.
Tenure Type	1	For London, this is an important indicator of the likelihood of claimants experiencing difficulties with the affordability of housing.
Average eligible rent level / Value of housing cost element	1	It is important to know both the eligible rent and the housing support award of households subject to the Benefit Cap. This data is key to understanding housing affordability and need in London. Please see the general comments on the importance of UC data identifying claimants affected by

		the Benefit Cap and vice versa for further information on this point.
Households affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy	1	This is important to local authorities and housing associations for framing interventions to support tenants affected by this measure in their local area.
		The number of households affected by this measure may also impact on demand for homes of a particular size in a given area, so knowing this can help inform housing delivery plans...
Number of spare rooms for those households affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy	2	… provided that the data includes information on the size of accommodation occupied and the size to which households are entitled.
Average spare room reduction amount for those households affected by the Removal of the Spare Room Subsidy	3	
Alternative Payment Arrangements - Payment to landlords	3	
Alternative Payment Arrangements – Split Payments	2	Please see the general comments.
Households with a payment deduction, due to a sanction	1	It is important to develop an understanding of the characteristics of those under a benefit sanction to trace the impact, particularly when children or vulnerable adults are concerned.
Average payment deduction amount due to a sanction	2	While this is useful, it would also be useful to know the residual payment level after deductions (bands)
Households with a payment reduction, due to recovery of rent arrears	1	Debt is an important issue for many Londoners and gaining a better understanding of the characteristics of those in debt (and the nature of that debt) is key to providing appropriate support.

Average payment reduction, due to recovery of rent arrears	3	
Other… • Change in household composition (i.e. family type, number of children) • Change in household address (within area, into/out of area) • Residual payment level after deductions (bands)	2 2 2	This type of information would help us to understand movement and change within London's population. This would help the GLA, and local authorities in London, to plan services better.

Question 4

What additional information would be useful to include in the quarterly publication on **Benefit Cap Statistics**?

Type of information	Ranking 1, 2 or 3	Why would you find this useful?
Number of households on Universal Credit that are capped (point-in-time caseload)	1	The extent to which the Benefit Cap impacts households is a major consideration in meeting housing need in London – both in broad terms and for specific groups, such as homeless households whom London local authorities have a statutory duty to accommodate.
Total number of households on Universal Credit that have been capped (cumulative caseload)	1	For the reason outlined above. Having a picture of the cumulative caseload would be helpful to charting changes over time.
Number of households on Universal Credit that have been capped but are no longer capped (off-flows)	2	
Breakdown of off-flow outcomes to include category for households on Universal Credit working enough so the benefit cap no longer applies	1	Understanding the frequency with which capped households secure (an increase in) employment that means they that are no longer subject to the Benefit Cap is an important element of understanding capacity of lower income Londoners to cover particular housing costs and thus to planning affordable housing. It would also help to understand the impact of the benefit cap more broadly.
Breakdown of off-flow outcomes to include category for households on Universal Credit who become exempt from the cap because of the Universal Credit elements to which they are entitled	1	It would enhance the picture provided by the information above.
Breakdown by region and Local Authority	1	The extent to which the Benefit Cap impacts households is a major consideration in meeting housing need in London – both in broad terms and for specific groups, such as

		homeless households whom London local authorities have a statutory duty to accommodation. Because responsibilities for assessing and planning for housing need sits with local authorities and with the GLA as a strategic regional authority, having this information at those geographical levels is essential.
Family type	1	The extent to which the Benefit Cap impacts households is a major consideration in meeting housing need in London – both in broad terms and for specific groups, such as homeless households whom local authorities have a statutory duty to accommodation. Understanding the type of households subject to the cap is important to understanding the type of housing they are likely to need to support.
Number of children	1	See comments above for family type. Numbers of children matters to the size of accommodation needed.
Age of youngest child	2	This would enhance the picture provided by the two previous items of information. It would also give a sense of whether claimants would be expected to engage in full work search activity.
Amount of Universal Credit capped	2	Understanding the sizes of deductions resulting from capping is vital to assessing the extent to which deductions hampers households' capacity to cover housing costs and the types of accommodation they may be able to afford. It would also be useful to know the residual payment level after deductions and cap applied (by bands).
Combined number of households that have had their Housing Benefit or Universal Credit capped	1	To understand housing needs and affordability, it is necessary to know the number and profile of all households who are subject to the Benefit Cap, irrespective

		of the benefit from which the deduction has been made.
Other… • Housing tenure • Residual payment level after deductions and cap applied (bands).	1	This information would enable us to understand the extent to which the impact of capping on ability to cover housing costs varies by tenure.

Question 5

We intend to develop statistics on Work Capability Assessments (WCAs) for UC claimants. Which of these areas would be most useful to prioritise for inclusion in the quarterly publication on **Outcomes of Work Capability Assessments (WCA)**?

Type of information	Ranking 1, 2 or 3	Why would you find this useful?
Universal Credit Work Capability Assessments (volumes and outcomes) over time	2	Publishing this data by region of residence would be helpful to understand labour market context in London
Universal Credit Work Capability Assessments (volumes and outcomes) by low level geography	3	
Universal Credit Work Capability Assessments (volumes and outcomes) by condition	3	
Universal Credit Work Capability Assessments (volumes and outcomes) by initial or repeat assessment	3	
Universal Credit Work Capability Assessments (volumes and outcomes) by new claim or migrated from ESA status.	3	
Reason for assignment to Limited Capability for Work or Limited Capability for Work Related Activity	3	
Universal Credit Work Capability Assessments Mandatory Reconsideration numbers and outcomes	3	
Universal Credit Work Capability Assessments appeal outcomes	3	

Customer journey times through the Universal Credit Work Capability Assessment process	2	It would be useful to know the work conditionality requirements for customers awaiting WCA. A backlog in assessments means claimants can remain on full conditionality for an extended period (and thus remain in the Claimant Count statistics). This means the Claimant Count series is higher than it would otherwise be, and potentially provides a distorting impression of the underlying trend. See response below for more details.
Other… • Number of households awaiting Work Capability Assessments and their conditionality requirements	1	There are reports that claimants who, under the legacy system, would previously have claimed ESA are initially subject to work-related requirements upon starting a new claim to UC, pending their WCA. A backlog in assessments means claimants can remain on full conditionality for an extended period (and thus remain in the Claimant Count statistics).

Question 6

What additional information would be useful to include in the quarterly publication on **Benefit sanctions statistics**?

Type of information	Ranking 1, 2 or 3	Why would you find this useful?
Include information about sanctions for people on Universal Credit full service when information corresponding to that published for Universal Credit live service is available	2	This would help the GLA to understand the impact of sanctions, and the characteristics of those affected, in order to provide appropriate support for children and vulnerable adults.
Other… • Hardship payment requested/recomme nded/received	3	

Question 7a

What additional information would be useful to include in the annual publication about **Children in out-of-work benefit households**?

Type of information	Ranking 1, 2 or 3	Why would you find this useful?
Include further breakdowns of conditionality groups of Universal Credit claims in payment	2	This would help the GLA to build-up a consistent picture of UC and other benefits claims.
Include the number of adults in the Universal Credit Households which are searching for work and Universal Credit is in payment	2	It would be useful to have information on all adults in UC households who are out-of-work, as well as those searching for work.
Include different age breakdowns for children	1	Information on the age of the youngest child, in particular, would give a sense of potential barriers to work search activity.
Other… • Claimants of other benefits	2	This would help to understand the characteristics of claimants in these households and provide support where appropriate.
• Income of household (and whether it moves above or below a pre-defined level – to give an 'early indicator' of poverty.	3	This would help to track poverty, particularly among children.

Question 7b

We are currently defining an out-of-work benefit household on Universal Credit as:

> "Households where all claimants are in the working with requirements, planning for work, preparing for work or searching for work conditionality regimes."

Do you have any thoughts or comments on this definition?

This is a significant change from the current definition which is based on individual rather than household activity. The current definition also covers all out-of-work households, and not just those with work requirements. It is important to be able to produce consistent time series using both the old and new definitions, so it is possible to estimate the impacts of changes, and the scale of discontinuities in the series. It would be sufficient to be able to do this through data available on Stat-Xplore. The value of this definition may be limited as it is tighter than out-of-work benefit recipients, and because of the work requirement would appear to exclude certain groups such as lone parents with young children, and some disabled people.

Question 8

Are there any **other Universal Credit statistics** you would like to see produced on a regular basis which don't tie in with DWP's regular statistical outputs, listed above?

Type of information	Ranking 1, 2 or 3	Why would you find this useful?
More detailed information on the housing tenure of claimants, including a breakdown of those in temporary accommodation provided for homeless households by a local authority and, subject to decisions on covering the housing costs of those in this sector, people in supported accommodation.	1	It is vital in understanding the housing needs of claimants, including some of the most vulnerable groups, who may have quite specific housing needs.
Data on time taken to process claims.	1	Local authorities and charities with whom we work report that the time taken to process UC claims is a key barrier to securing private rented accommodation for (formerly) homeless households, including those to whom they have statutory duties. This can result in individuals becoming

		stuck in assessment centres, emergency accommodation or other precarious situations – something that can have detrimental impacts on the households involved and prove expensive for local authorities and charities. Having a clear picture of the time taken for awards to be made (and variations in this) may help tackle difficulties that these households seem to experience in accessing accommodation. For example, accurately identifying problems in the administration of UC is essential to tackling them; while being able to demonstrate timely processing of claims might also help provide reassurance to landlords who are reluctant to let to UC claimants.
Data on duration of award	2	As UC is rolled out, information on the periods for which claimants have been receiving UC will help identify the impacts of the benefit and, in particular, patterns of longer term benefit dependency. These may have implications for Londoners' ability to access and ability to afford particular types of housing.

Thank you for taking the time to give us your views. We do not intend to acknowledge receipt of individual responses unless you tick the box below.

Please acknowledge this reply | x |

We carry out our research on many different topics and consultations. As your views are valuable to us, do you agree to us contacting you again from time to time, either for research or to send through consultation documents?

Yes | X | No | |

Please send us your responses in an email (stephanie.sarwar@dwp.gsi.gov.uk) or in the post, to:

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