

Disability and Carers Benefits Expert Advisory Group

To: Jeane Freeman, Minister for Social Security

By email

8 June 2018

Dear Jeane,

Universal Credit Split Payments

The Disability and Carers Benefits Expert Advisory Group has been asked to look at this issue which, whilst not in our remit, could have a significant impact on disabled people and carers. This is particularly relevant given the commitment to payment splitting within the final Social Security Bill.

The majority of Group members consider the split to be beneficial. The transition from Child Tax Credit to the child element within Universal Credit involves a switch in payments from women to men in many cases. We are aware of evidence from stakeholder engagement showing a significantly high percentage of women welcoming the new arrangement. They also viewed the split a necessary extension of the choices available via existing Scottish flexibilities in Universal Credit.

While we agree with the split in principle, members expressed some concerns over how this would be put into practice. Ensuring there is technical capability within Universal Credit payment systems is essential, and we recognise this involves negotiation with DWP, including over the timing. We are also keenly interested in how effective payment splitting would be in combatting financial abuse within relationships. We know that women living on low incomes are much more likely to experience abuse by a partner. This highlights the need for people in vulnerable circumstances to be sign-posted as early as possible to specialist support agencies. We considered these points with regard to disabled women in particular.

In essence though, Universal Credit does not fall within our remit. We note the advocacy work of Engender in coalition with other civil society organisations and the work of advice agencies in raising awareness about the payment splitting options. We would also encourage the Scottish Government to adopt a 'test and learn' approach to getting this right over time, for example by starting in a small number of full-service areas and ensuring a joint approach with the UK Government in making this happen and evaluating impact.

The Group looks forward to welcoming you to our next meeting on 30th August.

With best wishes,

Jim McCormick

Jim McCormick
Chair