

Public experiences of Universal Credit: briefing for MPs

- **There are high levels of concern among the public about Universal Credit.**
- In the past week 110,000 people have signed a petition to Esther McVey calling for the roll-out to be paused. 20,000 people have emailed or tweeted their MPs and more than **63,000 people have now signed an emergency petition calling on the Treasury to give Universal Credit additional money in the budget** so that no one is left worse off.
- **This briefing is a snapshot of the experiences of 15,000 38 Degrees members who have been, or will be, affected by Universal Credit.** This is a small selection of the hundreds of stories they have shared with their MPs this week. Whilst shocking, **these stories are in no way unique.** They are taking place in every constituency across the country.
- Please speak to the Chancellor ahead of the budget and ask him to give Universal Credit additional money so that no one is left worse off. Please also do everything in your power during the passage of the Finance Bill and any other future opportunities to make sure Universal Credit is rolled out only if and when it is fixed.

"I claim Universal Credit. I am a working person but on minimum pay and only working 20 hours per week. I haven't had a Universal Credit payment since mid-September and I'm in debt and arrears with my rent. I'm not a greedy person I just want to keep a roof over my head and be able to eat. There will be no heating in my house this winter, I can't afford to turn my heating on. This is appalling in England 2018. It's more like England in 1618."

Kevin Griffiths, Skipton and Ripon

*"I will be one of the millions of people that [the roll-out of Universal Credit] will affect. I am seriously concerned that I will be having my credits cut. I am already struggling to make ends meet and to pay all my bills. I only get £48 a week in tax credits. But these go a long way to helping pay for vital things for my two children. Oliver, 6 and Jessica, 3. **If the proposed cuts go ahead, the only people who will suffer is my children.** This doesn't seem fair in a country like ours."*

Colin Mason, Portsmouth North

*"I have a friend who has been in hospital for several months with a chronic condition. **The benefits they receive have been reduced to £9 per week.** They have to pay £37 per week rent for one room after housing benefit, so currently the landlord is applying for an eviction order for rent arrears, which he will get. So by December this person will be homeless and on the streets. How in God's name can you support Universal Credit?"*

Steve Sunderland, Suffolk West

*"I have worked my entire life. I have always been a civil servant in some form. **Early this year I was diagnosed with breast cancer** and have recently had to apply for employment support allowance (now Universal Credit). My experience was degrading, complicated and simply disgraceful. I had to attend the job centre in Upton, which is inaccessible by public transport, the office itself is open plan so there was no privacy and to top it all off **there is no way I can find out if my application is successful until the payment is due!** This is no way to treat anyone. I am truly ashamed to call myself British! We must change the way we treat those in need. I'm lucky, I will return to my job once my treatment is complete but many more won't."*

Shelley Wright, Wirral West

*"Many are suffering on this benefit and sometimes it starts with something as simple as a change of circumstance. I for one know the worry it causes. My landlord has just put my flat on the market and wants to sell it... **As soon as I move my JSA stops and I have to wait for my Universal Credit to come through.** If I manage to find somewhere **I will be thrown straight away into debt due to no fault of my own.** I am sure many like me have found themselves in this position and I am sure quite a number have ended up homeless. Please highlight this to other members of parliament, there is a big hole which many fall through here and end up no-longer able to claim because they are homeless."*

Jez Owen, Plymouth Sutton and Devonport

*"I am terrified of [Universal Credit] coming to our area ... seriously terrified. **One false move and I shall be penalised ... I fear they won't pay my rent and I shall be evicted.** A friend recently applied in June for UC and to date has received nothing ... this is in Chorlton."*

Janet Cox, Manchester Withington

*"I have a disability and cannot work. My partner and I have lost out on free prescriptions, dental treatment & eye tests, and also a disability premium under Universal Credit. Under the tax credit system, we would have qualified for these. It's not acceptable. **My partner cares for me and works full time (self employed), on a low wage. There is not enough money to make ends meet** and we have five prescriptions a month between us. Please tell parliament to help Universal Credit users like us, to get benefits equal to what we would have had under tax credits. Universal Credit is heavily penalising those who are self-employed. It's discrimination and it's very unfair."*

Emma Austin, Cornwall North

*"[It] is a complete nightmare. With [my daughter Emily's] mental and physical health she simply cannot do or get her head round this system. This system takes nothing into account. **We are not a family of scroungers just one that lives decent lives but has lots of problems.**"*

Geoff Vernau, Maldon

For more information about 38 Degrees' campaign or if you would like to be put in contact with someone in your constituency affected by Universal Credit please contact:

Charlotte Woodworth
Campaigns Director
charlotte.w@38degrees.org.uk

Campaign links:

38 Degrees petition: Philip Hammond: use the budget to help struggling families:

<https://speakout.38degrees.org.uk/campaigns/emergency-cash-universal-credit>

38 Degrees petition: Esther McVey pause the roll out of Universal Credit:

<https://speakout.38degrees.org.uk/campaigns/4432>

About 38 Degrees:

38 Degrees is a campaign organisation representing two million people in the UK: from all backgrounds, ages and political outlooks. We campaign to support our NHS, to protect our countryside, to make sure people's voices are heard throughout the Brexit process - and on many other issues, local and national. We sign petitions and email our representatives, we crowdfund important research projects and meet our elected politicians face-to-face. We are a politically independent, not-for-profit organisation, funded by thousands of donations.