
NEXT STEPS FOR UNIVERSAL SUPPORT IN UNIVERSAL CREDIT

Roundtable Report

December 2016

CSJ The Centre for
Social Justice

Attendees

- Lord Freud, Minister of State for Welfare Reform
- Baroness Philippa Stroud
- Alice Buckley
- Ruth Calladine
- Libby Cooklin
- Jerry During
- Liz Dunscombe
- Helena Forsythe
- Malcolm Gardener
- Deven Ghelani
- Kayleigh Hignell
- Frank Hobson
- Claire Horton
- Ian Hossack
- Laura Hulme
- Virraj Jatania
- Charlene Lea
- Maeve McGoldrick
- Iain McMath
- Sam Mazloum
- Adam Moy
- Neil Munslow
- Alan Nichols
- Carl Packman
- Nicoya Palastanga
- Clare Payne
- Dr Sylvia Tijnstra
- Tony Wilson

The roundtable took place on Wednesday 13th July, 2016. Please note that, while the points made in our report draw upon some of the major themes discussed at this roundtable, each point should not be construed as representative of all the parties outlined in this list.



Introduction

Universal Credit (UC) is revolutionising welfare in the UK. Rolling a number of benefits into a single payment, accessible online, UC provides better support for individuals to find, sustain and progress in employment and become more independent.

To complement the change in benefit payments, the Government has created the Universal Support delivered locally (USdl) programme. USdl was developed from the framework approach laid out in the Local Support Services Framework 2013 (published on GOV.UK). The framework approach aims to bring together Jobcentres with local authority services and voluntary partners to provide support to claimants to help tackle the root causes that are keeping many out of work or dependent on welfare.

The aim of USdl is to support individuals with the transition to UC, as well as help them access other local services that meet their complex (and often multiple) needs. UC has provided funding specifically to help with the transition to digital and financial support. As the DWP said to local authorities in October 2014:

“we recognise that some people will need support with the transition, by helping them adjust to some new aspects of the way Universal Credit is designed. So, for those who are new to monthly budgeting or getting online, they will get the help they need to manage that transition process”.¹

¹ Department for Work and Pensions, *Universal Support delivered locally for local authorities* (October 2014) [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-support-delivered-locally-information-for-local-authorities/universal-support-delivered-locally-information-for-local-authorities]

USdl trials were carried out across the UK from September 2014 to September 2015. Trial participants focused on supporting claimants predominantly in the two funded areas; digital skills and financial inclusion. The aim of the trials was also to inform policy making. The trials provided evidence to support assumptions around the complexity of problems faced by many UC claimants, the importance of providing joined-up services, and the potential success of addressing claimants' multiple needs in the long term. They also provided some good practice and opportunities to inform strategy for a wider Universal Support programme.

The Centre for Social Justice held a roundtable in July 2016 with a variety of trial participants to look at what lessons could be learned from the trials, and what changes could be made to support the roll out of UC.

Background

UC is the most transformative change to the UK welfare system in a generation. By combining Jobseekers Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support, Child Tax Credits, Working Tax Credits and Housing Benefit, it has achieved the dual-goals of simplifying the welfare system and ensuring that work always pays more than welfare. Since 2011 it has been rolled out to new single claimant jobseekers across the country and is now being claimed by over a quarter of a million individuals. UC has proven to be successful at getting individuals back into work: DWP analysis shows UC claimants are 13 per cent more likely to have been employed in the first nine months of their claim (compared to Job Seekers Allowance claimants), 50 per cent more likely to try and earn more and twice as likely to try to work more hours.²

Both Prime Minister Theresa May and new Secretary of State for Work and Pensions Damian Green have committed to UC remaining a key policy in the welfare space. The full roll out of UC is predicted to be completed in March 2022.³

USdl was introduced in anticipation of the changes that claimants will have to go through to claim UC. Minister for Welfare Reform Lord Freud said "*the introduction of Universal Credit and Universal Jobmatch provides us with an opportunity to look again at the*

2 Department for Work and Pensions, *Universal Credit at Work* (2015) [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-at-work]

3 Lord Freud, House of Lords Written Statement, 20 July 2016 [accessed via: www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Lords/2016-07-20/HLWS98/]

support households may need in this new environment”.⁴ The aims of USdl are to ensure that those who need support to make and manage a UC claim receive it (and funding is provided by UC for digital and budgeting support to help with the transition), and to connect individuals to the services they need in order to overcome many of the challenges that UC claimants face.

The Government decided to apply the same trialling framework for USdl as they had used with UC; “*we will apply that same test, learn and implement approach as we move forward with the development of the [USdl]*”.⁵ As mentioned previously, trials for USdl programmes were set to take place over a 12-month period from 1st September 2014. Local partners were tasked with trialling programmes that focused on three areas:

- Triage and explaining the new services, particularly while people are being introduced in incremental stages;
- Assistance with making claims online and managing people UC account online;
- Advice to help them manage their money under UC’s monthly payment arrangements and ensure that rent and cash flow is well managed.

4 Department for Work and Pensions, *Universal Credit: Local Support Services Framework* (2013) [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/181395/uc-local-service-support-framework.pdf]

5 Department for Work and Pensions, *Universal Credit: Local Support Update and Trialling Plan* (2013) [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/263490/universal-credit-local-support-services-update-trialling-plan.pdf]

Trial sites⁶ were established in:

- Derby City
- Islington
- South Staffordshire
- Argyll and Bute
- Dundee City
- Blaenau Gwent
- Carmarthenshire
- Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark
- Northumberland and South Tyneside
- West Lincolnshire including West Lindsey, Lincoln City, North Kesteven and Lincolnshire
- Westminster and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

6 Department for Work and Pensions, *Universal Support delivered locally for local authorities* (2014) [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-support-delivered-locally-information-for-local-authorities/universal-support-delivered-locally-information-for-local-authorities]

What are the key lessons that can be drawn from the Universal Support delivered locally (USdl) Trials?

Knowledge, communication and data sharing

On several occasions participants in trials raised the issues of knowledge, communication and teamwork between services as a block to effective provision of USdl. USdl requires co-ordination between local authorities, Jobcentre Plus (JCP) and partner organisations to be quality. Roundtable participants often found that a lack of knowledge and joined-up provision prevented claimants from utilising the benefits of USdl. This exposed one of the surprising facts regarding USdl: claimants who were most in need of support were often not the most disadvantaged (such as people with addictions and those who were homeless).

One roundtable participant stated in a written submission:

“General feedback from our staff suggests that the framework for support was not sufficiently linked to all of the actual needs of clients... in future, programmes could be more effective if they use co-design to plan the types of services required, bringing in partners from the start”.

The DWP published consultation findings into USdI in August 2013 that concurred with this sentiment: *"Many respondents considered it important that partnerships include a wide range of organisations to ensure good local knowledge and make the most of existing services"*.⁷

Another area of poor knowledge, teamwork and communication included the use of data. There is a consensus view that claimant data is an essential component in the provision of USdI, as it provides information on each claimant's needs. However, trial participants found access to data was difficult to obtain. In many cases the lack of a homogenous system of sharing data was problematic. One participant stated that they used 13 different types of data system during the trial. USdI providers were also not aware of what was legally permissible, what needed client consent, and what was considered 'safe sharing'. Access to client data is not a mandatory requirement in the USdI programme, however roundtable participants stated that most clients agree for services to access their data. Other problems included weak data agreements and too many different types of data system.

One recommendation was that an encrypted data system across all services was needed to help different providers access important claimant information. Recommendations were made by roundtable participants for USdI partner organisations to access relevant DWP claimant data.

⁷ Department for Work and Pensions, *Universal Credit: Local Support Services Framework* (2013) [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/181395/uc-local-service-support-framework.pdf]

Trust

Several trial participants raised the issues of trust and inter-personal relationships as being important ingredients in the success of USdl. A roundtable participant provided survey evidence showing ‘35 per cent of claimants did not claim all their benefits for numerous reasons including failure to engage even when support was offered’. The survey found that a major reason for a lack of engagement was “a lack of trust between claimants, the relevant institutions, DWP, local authorities and voluntary sector organisations”.

This was especially true when providing services related to money management. The Centre for Social Justice⁸ has found in previous research that trust is one of the most relevant factors in helping people become more financially independent, helping people use software and digital applications to access financial services.

There was mutual consensus across roundtable participants that personal one-to-one mentoring was the best way to achieve trust with a claimant, and the most effective way of providing USdl services. One-to-one mentoring was the most effective way of achieving triage for many participants. One participant stated: “There should be a lead caseworker who can guide the client through referrals and identify priority needs”. This however raised a common issue of resources and funding.

⁸ Centre for Social Justice, *The Use of Digital Technologies To Tackle Digital Exclusion*, (London: 2016)

DWP training

The DWP training programme was complimented for being ‘effective’ and having a ‘high level of relevance’. The close timing between training and the USdI trial’s beginning meant training information was ‘fresh in the minds of those impacted’. One roundtable participant raised two improvements that could be made for future DWP training:

- There were no opportunities for trainees to submit questions prior to training to ensure their needs were met.
- There was no follow-up mechanism to address questions that remained unanswered.

What worked?

- **Personalised services** – There was a consensus amongst roundtable participants that services related to financial and digital support, claimants “*want a bespoke service that meets their individual needs... one-to-one support when they need it*”. The importance of a case manager/personal mentor was most noticeable with regard to diagnostic work on each claimant. Without a personal case manager, triage and signposting other services was likely to be very difficult to do efficiently.
- **Co-location** – Participants also agreed that co-location was successful. On many occasions the diverse needs of claimants were emphasised, and often the failure to connect a claimant with multiple services was a recurring issue. Co-location was considered the best means to prevent this. It should be noted that co-location is more feasible for local authorities in densely populated areas, and less feasible for local authorities in more rural areas.

What did not work?

- **Homogeneity of services** – Participants noted that different trial locations managed USdl programmes differently. This increased the complexity of service delivery for voluntary sector organisations working with multiple local authorities on multiple USdl trials.

How might a future Universal Support programme be complemented by other national-level programmes around financial capability and education?

USdl is designed to support claimants of UC; however other types of benefit claimant can be brought under the same system. Personal Independence Payments and Attendance Allowance require similar information as UC and claimants will often benefit from the same services provided under USdl. One roundtable participant stated, *“By using the same portal to access benefits, savings and loans you will make users immediately aware of all aspects available to them from the state”*.

Another national level programme that could sit within USdl would be an extended financial capability programme. UC claimants could reach 10 million in number, with only one common feature being low income and financial difficulties. With such a large demographic likely to display low capabilities of financial management, USdl is well placed to provide financial education/support at a national level.

One respondent used their own organisation as an example of joined-up services at a national level:

“Both within our government-contracted welfare-to-work provision and our community-based employment services we offer a range of other forms of support, including basic skills, digital inclusion courses, access to computers and practical assistance ranging from help with travel costs... [to] interview clothes”.

There was some concern raised with regard to both cost and whether operating such a diverse programme at the national level was effective. Estimated costs ran from £2–3 million at a national level, and £605,000 for just London. One roundtable participant stated:

“National provision always favours urban areas where large numbers can be seen as more cost-effective. We have seen issues over black holes where there is no provision due to lack of numbers. But the [claimants] in these areas still need support”.

Does the evidence from the Universal Support delivered locally (USdl) trials show the need for support to identify and tackle complex personal barriers?

There was a consensus amongst roundtable participants that as well as digital and financial needs, USdl should address health, skills training, debt and housing needs as well. For many housing needs remain a barrier to finding and sustaining work. If housing needs are met, claimants will be able to more easily pursue job vacancies and in time sustain long term employment. Crisis figures also show that 30 per cent of clients in 2012/13 had experience of poor mental health, while 27 per cent had a history of drug and alcohol misuse. Working with the homeless, individuals living in hostels, temporary accommodation, supported housing projects, shelters and refuges, allows a USdl programme access to individuals in need of help to overcome addiction, debt, family instability or poor skills. A first step towards adopting housing into a holistic USdl programme would be incorporating homelessness into an official framework, used by Jobcentre Plus on day one of an individual's claim, so that housing needs are addressed as quickly as possible. In the long term, support would focus on a range of issues including support with rent deposits, bond guarantees, help finding accommodation, pre-tenancy training and wrap-around support to maintain a tenancy.

What does success look like?

Both roundtable participants and publicly available trial evaluations have concluded that *“a successful Universal Support service needs to ensure that there are clear and common success measures”*.⁹

Claimant numbers and getting claimants off welfare is only half the story. Many participants in the roundtable noted that long term independence can be identified through claimants developing pro-social and functional behaviour. The risk of measuring success through claimant numbers is that case workers will often help individuals who are least in need of help and most likely to transition away from assistance after a short period of time. Employment consultants must be assessed on their ability to get claimants into long term and high satisfaction employment. Outcome based funding has been a popular concept within the USdl programme since early consultations. The DWP framework responses paper detailed how:

“A significant number of respondents were broadly in support of an outcome based approach in principle but needed more detail around how it would work in practice with many keen to be involved in the development of appropriate and proportionate outcome measures... A number of respondents shared concerns about perverse incentives created by outcome based funding, and the risk of ‘parking and creaming’”.¹⁰

9 Learning and Work Institute, BMG Research and Policy in Practice, *Findings from the Evaluation of the Universal Support delivered locally trials* [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/534940/ad-hoc-report-33-evaluation-of-the-universal-support-delivered-locally-trials-summary.pdf]

10 Department for Work and Pensions, *Universal Credit: Local Support Services Framework* (2013) [accessed via: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/181395/uc-local-service-support-framework.pdf]

Some participants supported the use of surveys to measure claimant confidence, behaviour and outlook as a means of judging progress through a USdI system.

Levels of sustained housing could be an easier and more reliable method to measure long term success. Individuals who move into accommodation and tenancy sustainment are considered a successful case study.

Conclusion

The roundtable supported the view that a Universal Support programme is an important service to provide alongside Universal Credit. The Centre for Social Justice has long supported the need for such a service because by taking advantage of the moment when people enter the welfare system to assess their real needs, local partners can provide proper support for those most at risk of poverty. This is true whether these real needs come in the form of addiction, debt problems, housing, or mental health. For the first time, welfare provision can be an intelligent process by joining up different service providers and helping claimants access services that they previously had not been aware of or did not have access to.

The roundtable participants were generally in agreement that the service would benefit from developments being made to the specific aspects of the programme. Areas for clarity and reform include:

- **Coverage of services** – Universal Support should look to identify and redirect claimants with complex needs to local partners providing support services in areas of mental health, debt, housing and skills training.
- **Data sharing** – Data sharing remained a key problem preventing claimants from accessing different services. The DWP must clarify the rights of local partners in accessing claimant data for their benefit.
- **Service standardisation** – Different administration and services available across different locations made the process confusing for claimants and administrators. The DWP must work to smooth and standardise the Universal Support.

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- **Personalised services** – The success of Universal Support rests on the utilisation of personal bespoke mentors/key workers who work with claimants on areas of need. This is particularly relevant when helping claimants with digital skills and financial literacy, but participants agreed that it is also true in other areas of support.
 - **Success metrics** – DWP must outline success metrics clearly. Claimant behaviour was pinpointed as the best indicator of whether support was being successfully received.



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