
Rob Kent-Smith, Deputy Head of the Office for Statistics Regulation

Sir Peter Schofield
Permanent Secretary
Department for Work and Pensions
(by email)

31 March 2025

Dear Sir Peter

Increase in the number of people on Universal Credit

We have received a number of complaints relating to a [press release](#) published by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) on 13 March entitled 'Almost two million people on Universal Credit not supported to look for work'.

The original version of the press release stated that: "The number [of people on Universal Credit health with no requirement to look for work] has almost quadrupled since the start of the pandemic when 360,000 people were considered too sick to look for work – a 383% rise in less than five years."

The statement that the number of people claiming disability elements of Universal Credit has increased by 383% presents an entirely misleading picture to the public. The figure does not recognise that the majority of this increase is due to the process of migrating people from legacy benefits, such as Employment and Support Allowance, to Universal Credit over the last few years. When these people are accounted for, the actual increase in the number of people claiming disability elements of Universal Credit is 50%.

After we raised concerns with DWP, the press release was amended on 27th March. The updated version of the press release includes some references to people moving from other benefits and acknowledges that the number of people with no requirement to look for work across Universal Credit health and other benefits since the pandemic has increased by 50%.

However, we consider that these additions do not go far enough. The press release still places considerable emphasis on the misleading 383% figure and does not

provide the necessary context in a way that members of the general public would understand. We also note that the press release does not state that it is been updated which we would encourage as a matter of transparency.

It is vital that statisticians are included in the drafting process for communications using official statistics, including press releases, to ensure that such an issue is not repeated in the future. As the Head of Profession for Statistics, Steve Ellerd-Elliott (copied), should be supported by the department in upholding his responsibility to ensure statistics are used appropriately.

We request that the press release is updated by Friday 4th April to remove reference to the 383% figure and that this figure is not used going forward.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rob Kent-Smith', with a horizontal line drawn through the middle of the signature.

Rob Kent-Smith
Deputy Head of the Office for Statistics Regulation