

Incoming New Management above The Monster Factory

We described the DWP UC system as a monster factory, it makes monsters of everyone involved in it. A system is what it produces, and just as the Home Office produced the Windrush mess, and the Fujitsu produced the Post Office victims, Government is obliged to see the world in black and white and to produce monsters. Removing the humanity from every process will do that to people, as the State assumes everyone it touches is trying to cheat it.

Good intentions may want to sing kumbaya and do “service design”, but the users of the service end up in jail as a result of using it honestly.

The Post Office Scandal is the biggest miscarriage of justice in British legal history; the Cabinet Office and Government Digital Service appear to see that scale as a challenge to beat.

The Post Office refused to share accounting information with postmasters it was accusing and prosecuting for theft/fraud; DWP has a similar refusal in UC – there is no breakdown of the statement. When DWP tells a claimant that they don’t qualify for something, or how much their UC payment is this month, they should see the same information they saw to make the decision. “Computer says no” started as a comic relief skit in no 10, which Sunak thought was a governing philosophy.

For months after we intervened, HMG still required a *UK* phone number to sign up to hear whether/how you will be able to leave a war zone to come to the UK as a refugee, it is untenable to argue requiring a *UK* phone number for that as anything other than the output of a monster factory. When we raised this topic, HMG fixed it for Ukraine, but not Afghanistan; maybe that’s a monster, maybe it’s just racism. But digital services will always be used to achieve the aims of the state.

What should GDS do under the new government:¹

1. GDS should convene a meeting of CO, DWP, HMRC, HMT, MoJ to see who should lead on a [Who Owes What](#) under One Login.²
2. Ahead of the spending review, assess what legacy IT can be entirely decommissioned with all outstanding debts either exported to be easily readable in Who Owes What, or written off if the calculation is not a good use of public funds.
3. Commission and publish a legal/service design analysis of the A/B testing and consequences for the safety (or otherwise) of prosecutions by government.
4. Produce a comprehensive assessment of where people are being prosecuted or imprisoned where a digital service was involved in their user journey to jail, how focusing on “government needs” have contributed, and amend the [Service assessment](#) to protect users*.

¹ UC recommendations are in the [UC documents](#), but if there’s only one thing: The monthly statement in UC should show how it was calculated, including what was zero rated. When a new statement is issued, the old statement should be archived but remain visible to the claimant.

² If they can’t agree then MoJ should run it, as MoJ supposedly has some sense of justice.