Universal Fiction: Imagining Something Different

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The Digital Benefits and Disbenefits project explored e-government technology-generated remote self-service encounters in welfare benefit public services, from the point of view of claimants. The aim was to identify and mitigate the harms (negative effects on claimants) arising from digitisation design itself, separate to policy choices (e.g. legislation, regulations) or the inherent nature of digital channels (e.g. availability of devices, internet access, ability to use devices and software).

Thirteen imaginary citizen-focused technology ideas inspired by discussions with claimants who are using the remote self-service welfare benefit system, Universal Credit Online, and those who provide advice or assistance. The full descriptions are published on the project website (link below).

A fourteenth blank indicates how other harms can be identified and other concepts to address those could be added for exploration.

A piece of narrative fiction was also created which describes the future use of these thirteen concepts in a single story, published on the project website (link below).

Four of the concept ideas (Ad:Visor, Channel:Expander, Pre:Peer and You:See) were developed further as speculative scenarios to be used as prompts in subsequent interviews and surveys with Universal Credit claimants. The scenario documents described the harms being addressed, depicting claimants using the concept and identified some examples of what might go wrong.

This work contributed to creating knowledge about how harms, negative impacts which impact citizens, arise in the existing Universal Credit Online, and how introducing additional citizen-focused features using digital technologies would add, remove, amplify or attenuate harms. The knowledge was then used to contribute to the design and evaluation of two digital prototype interventions which aimed to reduce some harms.

KEY

Ad:Visor	Bene:Factor	Big:Bag
Channel:Expander	Claimant:Cam	Fraud:Guard
Interface:Arbiter	Message:Monitor	Mobile:MFP
Pre:Peer	Re:Solve	Work:Agent
You:See	Other:Idea	

Complete descriptions of all concepts

Narrative fiction short story

Speculative scenario documents

www.digitalbenefits.uk

UNIVERSAL FICTION — Pre:Peer

Series of guided physical and digital activities to prepare for making a subsequent claim for Universal Credit, including creating a UC account and undertaking identity verification.

UNIVERSAL FICTION — Fraud:Guard

Active monitoring to identify welfare benefit fraud against citizens, regardless of whether they currently claim or receive any state welfare benefits.

UNIVERSAL FICTION — Big:Bag

Secure cloud-based digital repository for facts, information and scanned documents, permitting sharing and receipt of documents from trusted third parties.

UNIVERSAL FICTION — Re:Solve

Conflict avoidance though assisted communication. Gathering and assembly of information to prepare and assist drafting and submission of disputes, complaints, mandatory reconsiderations and appeals.

UNIVERSAL FICTION — Ad:Visor

Camera and microphone-enabled glasses providing a collaborative and augmented view of a citizen's digital device and paperwork, and audio communication with, a remote welfare benefits advisor, wherever the citizen is located.

UNIVERSAL FICTION — Interface:Arbiter

Dynamic web interface overlay providing personalised layout and accessibility customisation, context-sensitive help, tips, language translation, text to speech and optional reminder prompts from auto-fill integration.

UNIVERSAL FICTION — Channel:Expander

Multi-modal bi-directional collection, format conversion and forwarding of communication messages between citizens and online welfare benefit systems.

UNIVERSAL FICTION — Work:Agent

Accelerated work vacancy search, employer research and job application submission; with activity record-keeping and evidence submission to support Universal Credit jobsearch commitments.

UNIVERSAL FICTION — Bene:Factor

Continuous monitoring and validation of benefit rule eligibility, entitlements, and accuracy of award payment amounts and timings, ensuring citizens' rights to benefits are taken up and accurately calculated, and possible changes are correctly reported.

UNIVERSAL FICTION — Message:Monitor

Benefit system message aggregation, analysis, triage, prioritisation, tracking, chasing, sharing and with some auto-response capabilities.

UNIVERSAL FICTION — Claimant:Cam

Video and audio record keeping and cloud storage, capturing face-to-face interactions; also with the ability to record screen interactions and / or voice when connected to a digital device being used for web browsing or making telephone calls.

UNIVERSAL FICTION — You:See

Providing citizen-controlled and limited delegated access to their online Universal Credit account, to facilitate getting advice, support and guidance.

UNIVERSAL FICTION — Mobile:MFP

Multi-function peripheral that physically travels along designated routes at scheduled times providing scanning, copying, faxing, mobile data and WiFi to people's own locations.

Design Attributes: UC specificity · Coupling with DWP · Benefit knowledge · Complexity